

The Post-exilic Prophets

In the Bible the prophetic books are divided into the categories of major and minor prophets. These labels refer to the length of the books rather than their importance. The Bible does not order the prophetic books chronologically in their historical context. Historically speaking, the prophetic books are divided into the categories of the pre-exilic and post-exilic prophets. These are the prophets who ministered before Israel and Judah's exile from the Promised Land and those who ministered after Israel's return to the Promised Land. The prophetic books will be covered in these notes in the chronological order of their historical ministry, not in the order they appear in the Bible.

The post-exilic prophets were **Obadiah, Haggai, Zechariah, Joel, and Malachi**. They ministered from 520 to 431 BC, confronted Israel's continued corruption, and called the Israelites to a life of holiness. There is no date attached to the prophets Obadiah and Joel, and so some prophets put them with the pre-exilic prophets because they are located in the Bible along with these prophets. However, the fact that they never mention the coming of the Assyrians and Babylonians to punish Israel or the exile of Israel points to the probability that the exile has already happened.

Introduction

The post-exilic prophets are all tied together with the same historical context, purpose, and themes that go throughout their books.

Setting

The Bible begins with Yahweh sovereignly creating and ordering the world into a good creation full of life. In this creation, He created the Garden of Eden as His temple for humanity to dwell with Him (Gen. 1-2) where He commanded them to rule and subdue creation as His representatives (Gen. 1:26-28). However, humanity chose autonomy and rebelled against Yahweh. As judgment for their sin, Yahweh removed them from the Garden of Eden and from His presence (Gen. 3). Humanity, in their selfishness and rebellion corrupted everything they created and built.

Yet Yahweh chose Abraham and called Him to exit Babylon and to follow Him as His image bearer (Josh. 24:2-3). Yahweh promised Abraham and his descendants that He would give them a land, make them the great nation of Israel, and bless them, so that they could be a blessing to the world by drawing the nations into themselves and restoring them into a right relationship with Yahweh (Gen. 12:1-3; 15). Eventually the people of Israel grew in numbers but became enslaved in Egypt. So Yahweh demonstrated His great power and love for them by delivering them from their bondage to Egypt. At Mount Sinai He adopted them as His chosen nation and made a covenant with them, declaring that if they obeyed Him, He would bless them as His special possession, make them into a unique and distinct nation, and use them to be a blessing to all the nations (Ex. 19:3-6). From Mount Sinai Yahweh led them to the Promised Land of Canaan so that He could dwell with them, bless them with the fruit of the land, and make them a beacon of blessing and reconciliation to the nations (Josh. 3-6).

Eventually they rejected the kingship of Yahweh by asking for a human king like all the other nations had (1 Sam. 8). So, Yahweh gave them the kings they wanted who then acted like the

corrupt kings of the pagan nations. As a judgment Yahweh divided the nation of Israel into two kingdoms—the kingdom of Israel containing the ten tribes in the north and the kingdom of Judah in the south (1 Kgs. 11:1-13). During the next three hundred years, these two kingdoms pursued idolatry and social injustice. Thus, Yahweh sent the pre-exilic prophets to rebuke Israel and Judah for their sins and warn them of the coming Assyrians and Babylonians, who would carry them out of the land and into captivity. Yet the prophets also promised Yahweh’s people that one day He would send his “Davidic servant” (Ps. 110) to destroy the pagan nations, restore the people back to the Promised Land, and reconcile them and the nations to Yahweh, and that Yahweh would cause them and the nations to prosper in the land of blessing.

Eventually the Babylonian empire fell to Cyrus II (559–530 BC) of the Persian empire. Cyrus II allowed the kingdoms of his empire to govern themselves and also granted freedom of religion and abolished slavery. In 539 BC Cyrus II issued a decree allowing all the people of his empire to return to their homelands from which they had been deported under the Assyrian and Babylonian empires. He also allowed them to take the images of their gods and sacred relics back with them and to freely worship their own gods.

For almost seventy years the people of the tribe of Judah had lived in exile under the rule of the Babylonian empire. Under the edict of Cyrus II, the Jewish people returned back to Israel in three different waves of migrations. The first return was under the leadership of Sheshbazzar in 538 BC. Eventually they finished building the temple under the leadership of Zerubbabel in 515 BC. The second return was 81 years later, in 458 BC, under the leadership of Ezra. The third return was under the leadership of Nehemiah in 445 BC. It is during this time period that Yahweh sent the post-exilic prophets to minister to His people.

Purpose

The purpose of the post-exilic prophets was to call Israel to faithfulness to Yahweh so that He could establish the New Jerusalem, where Yahweh could truly dwell with them. Yahweh had promised through the pre-exilic prophets that after the exile He would fulfill all of His promises to them by establishing a Jerusalem of abundance, where there would be no evil and everyone could dwell with Yahweh. But despite the exile, the people of Yahweh were still likely to go astray and fall into the same behaviors that had initially led to the exile. Yahweh called the people to turn to Him in faithful obedience so He could bless them in the way He had intended.

Themes

Three main themes run throughout the post-exilic prophets. First, Israel could not return to the way they had lived before the exile. Instead, they needed to turn to Him in faithfulness so He could bless them. The exile would not truly be over until they were faithful to Him.

Second, they needed to build the temple, where they could reestablish the sacrifices for the atonement of their sins and Yahweh could come and dwell with them. The whole point of choosing Israel was so that Yahweh could dwell with them, so the building of the house of Yahweh demonstrated their desire for Him to dwell with them.

Third, Yahweh anticipates the day He will establish the New Jerusalem, in which the covenant people of Yahweh will be faithful to Him and He will dwell with them in His fullness. This will be made possible by the king-priest known as the Branch, which Yahweh will lift up one day to rule over Israel.

Obadiah

Obadiah ministered sometime after 578 BC. A precise date is not possible with the evidence given in the book. Some put the date before the exile because of its placement with pre-exilic prophets, asserting also that the events of Obad. 10–14 fit the Edomite rebellion against Judah in 2 Kgs. 8:20-22 and 2 Chron. 21:8-10. However, these accounts make no reference to the Edomites looting the royal palace of Judah along with the Philistines and Arabian tribes.¹ Likewise, there is no mention of the coming of the Assyrians or of the exile. The main ideas of the book of Obadiah are announcing judgment on Edom and reminding Israel of the promises of Yahweh. The book of Obadiah is arranged in two divisions (Obad. 1–14 and 15–21).

The Destruction of Edom (1–14)

In this division Yahweh denounces Edom and announces their destruction for the way they treated Israel before they were attacked and taken into exile.

1 Yahweh declares that He has a message for Edom. The “we” most likely refers to Obadiah and the exiles who have received the message. The message they have heard is that an envoy has gone to the nations to call them to go to battle against Edom.

2–4 Edom’s pride had deceived them into thinking they could not be conquered because they lived in the caves of clefts of the mountains southeast of the Dead Sea. Though they had made their home high in the mountains, among the stars like the eagle’s nest, Yahweh was going to bring them down and make them small.

5–9 If thieves came to steal from them, they would take only what they needed or could carry. But Yahweh was going to send an enemy who would take everything from Edom. All their allies would deceive and turn on them. In that day, all their wise men and their great warriors would be destroyed.

10–11 Edom would be destroyed because of their violence against their brother Jacob and their failure to protect Israel when foreign nations attacked Israel and carried them off into exile. Edom’s sin was especially reprehensible because they were descendants of Esau, the brother of Jacob (Israel). Both were descendants of Abraham and therefore part of the same promises Yahweh had made to Abraham (Gen. 12:1-3).

12–14 Yahweh denounced Edom for gloating over Israel’s destruction, marching into Jerusalem and taking their wealth, and killing the defenseless Israelites who had survived the attack on Jerusalem and were now refugees.

Revenge and Reversal (15–21)

In this division Obadiah sets the destruction of Edom against the backdrop of the future day of Yahweh. He [Obadiah or Yahweh?] then promises Israel that they would take their land back, along with the land of Edom.

15–16 On the day of Edom’s destruction, Yahweh would be with the nations that would attack Edom. As Edom had done to Israel, so it would be done to them. Just as those who are drunk on

¹ See Robert B. Chisholm. *Handbook on the Prophets*, p. 403.

alcohol stumble around in disorientation, so Yahweh would cause the people of Edom to stumble in confusion in the panic of their attack.

Previously Yahweh had referred to Edom in singular forms. Now Yahweh uses the second person (“you”), implying that another group is in mind. Whether it is the nations or Israel is hard to distinguish. It does not seem likely that it is the nations because they are referred to in the third person. If it is Israel, then the text would be saying that just as Israel drank the cup of Yahweh’s wrath so would Edom and all the nations (“you”) would drink the cup of Yahweh’s intoxicating wrath. However, Israel is not mentioned anywhere else in this prophecy, making this interpretation problematic.²

17–18 Yet the people of Zion, the temple mount in Jerusalem, would be delivered in the future and receive their inheritance from Yahweh. Jacob would once again burn as the light of Yahweh, but Esau would stumble and fall and would have no survivors.

19–21 Yahweh then listed many regions He had given the Israelites when they entered the Promised Land, referring to the many places Israel lived. He stated that the people of Israel would one day also occupy the land of Edom. Yahweh’s earthly kingdom would be expanded into Edom.

Historically speaking, Edom never experienced a defeat to this extent, though, as with many of the prophets, the language of their defeat is probably exaggerated for poetic stylization. In a cosmic sense, nevertheless, this will be fulfilled in the second coming of Jesus Christ.

² See Robert B. Chisholm. *Handbook on the Prophets*, pp. 405-406.

Haggai

Haggai ministered to Judah during 520–518 BC, the time of the first returnees to Judah after the exile under the leadership of Zerubbabel. The main idea of the book of Haggai is his motivating the Jews to build the temple and reminding them of the new Jerusalem. The book of Haggai contains five messages (Hag. 1:1-12; 1:13-15; 2:1-9; 2:10-19; 2:20-23).

Misplaced Priorities (1:1-15)

The first wave of Jews had returned to Judah in 539 BC and had started to rebuild the temple (Ezra 3:8-13; 5:16). But they stopped building the temple for sixteen years due to opposition from the surrounding nations. They then began to invest in their own houses instead of the temple. Haggai confronted them for their misplaced priorities.

1:1-6 The people of Judah decided it was not time to rebuild the temple because it was not easy. So they worked on making their own houses more impressive instead of the temple. At the same time, they had planted a lot and invested much into their homes, but they had harvested very little and had very little to eat. They could not expect Yahweh to bless their land when they were neglecting the things of Yahweh.

1:7-11 Yahweh then commanded them to go to the north, to get wood, and to build the temple so that He might bless them in the land. They had expected a great bounty of blessing now that they were back in the Promised Land, but they had not received it because Yahweh was not with them, since He had no house. There would be no rain until they returned to building the temple of Yahweh.

1:12-15 In this second message, Haggai encouraged the people that Yahweh was with them despite the rebuke He had just given them. Then He stirred the hearts of the leaders and the people, and they began to rebuild the temple in 520 BC, which was finished in 515 BC.

The Blessings of Yahweh to Come (2:1-23)

These final three messages were more positive, and in them Yahweh promised to return His glory and blessing to Judah one day.

2:1-9 The third message came about a month after the people returned to building the temple. Yahweh addressed the older people who remembered Solomon's temple and were now sad because this temple was nothing compared to the previous temple. Yahweh told them that how big the temple was or whether it looked impressive did not matter; all that mattered was that they were Yahweh's covenant people and that His Spirit was with them. Yahweh promised them that a day was coming when He would fill His temple with His glory in a far greater way than the glory that had been in the previous temple. Yahweh was referring to the fact that Jesus would be the temple and the glory of Yahweh (John 2:19-22; Lk. 9:28-36). At Pentecost His people would be filled with His Spirit as the new temple (Acts 2:1-21; 1 Pet. 2:4-10), as He promised through Jeremiah (Jer. 31:31-34).

2:10-19 The fourth message came three months after the people began to rebuild the temple. Yahweh gave an object lesson with consecrated meat and a dead body. According to Lev. 6:27, if consecrated meat from a sacrifice touched a garment, that garment became consecrated because it had come in contact with the atonement of a sacrifice. However, whatever that garment touched did not become holy because holiness does not transfer from object to object;

these objects were not offered on the altar for atonement. In contrast, if someone touched a ritually impure object, such as a corpse, then he became impure, and everything he touched became impure.

In the same way, the Jewish community, because of their misplaced priorities, had become impure; therefore, everything they did, including making their offerings to Yahweh, was impure as well. The proof was the fact that their fields were barely producing a crop. But this would change now that they had become pure through their commitment to obeying Yahweh. Now the land would produce an abundance.

2:20-23 The fifth message came the same day but for only Zerubbabel, the governor of Judah and a descendant of King David (1 Chron. 3:18-19; Matt. 1:12). Yahweh told Zerubbabel that He was going to overturn the world by bringing the nations down and lifting Zerubbabel up over the nations. He would make Zerubbabel his signet ring. The signet ring of the king was his official seal used to authorize edicts and royal documents (1 Kgs. 21:8). Zerubbabel would be Yahweh's representative on earth. This promise reversed the judgment against his grandfather, King Jehoiachin (Jer. 22:24-30).

This prophecy, however, was never fulfilled, for Yahweh did not overthrow the nations in that day and make Zerubbabel a great king over the nations. Thus, Zerubbabel was a typology of what Yahweh would do one day with the ideal messianic king.

Zechariah

Zechariah ministered to Judah during 520–518 BC, the time of the first returnees to Judah after the exile under the leadership of Zerubbabel. The main idea of the book of Zechariah is his informing Israel that the coming of the messianic kingdom was dependent upon their faithfulness.

The book of Zachariah is arranged into two divisions. The first division (Zech. 1–8) contains three messages (Zech. 1:1-6; 1:7–6:15; 7:1–8:23). The second division (Zech. 9–14) contains two oracles (Zech. 9–11; 12–14).

Call to Obedience, Not Ritual (1:1–8:23)

In this division Yahweh focuses on the rebuilding of the temple and the need for Israel to remain pure. This sets the stage for His prophecies of the future king-priest.

1:1-6 Shortly after the resumption of the building of the temple in 520 BC, Yahweh called His people to repent of their sins and to renew their commitment to Him. Yahweh warned them not to ignore the prophets and fall into evil practices as their ancestors had done before the exile. If they committed themselves, they would live forever like the prophets rather than perishing like their ancestors. As a result, many of the Jews did repent and recommit themselves to Yahweh.

1:7-17 The following year, in 519 BC, Yahweh sent a series of eight visions along with instructions concerning a symbolic object lesson Zechariah was to perform.

“The arrangement of the visions follows a chiasmic pattern [abbccbba]. The first and last bear a strong resemblance to one another, the second and third, sixth and seventh are pairs, and the fourth and fifth, with their assurance of God-given authoritative leaders, form the climax. All eight visions are meant to be interpreted as one whole, for each contributes to the total picture of the role of Israel in the new era about to dawn.”³

In the first vision Zechariah saw a man mounted on a red horse next to a myrtle tree. Behind him were other men mounted on red, brown, and white horses. They had just returned from scouting the whole earth and reported that the world was at rest and in peace. The peace was a result of the policies of the Persian empire. There are no clues as to the meaning of the tree or the colors of the horses.

An angel of Yahweh asked how long Yahweh would withhold His mercy from His people. Yahweh responded that He would punish the nations for what they had done to Israel and that He would have the temple rebuilt in Jerusalem and restore their blessings.

1:18-21 In the second vision Zechariah saw four horns, which represented the nations that scattered Israel and Judah in exile. The number four probably represents the four directions of the compass (Zech. 2:6). The nations are the Babylonians, Ammonites, Moabites, Edomites, and Philistines (2 Kgs. 24:2; Ezek. 25:1-17; Ob 1.). Then Zechariah saw four craftsmen, who had thrown down the horns. Most likely the craftsmen were the Persian empire, though the reason for an image of craftsmen is not clear. Maybe it is because they were forging weapons of war.

2:1-13 In the third vision Zechariah saw an angel with a measuring line, surveying Jerusalem to make preparations for the building of the city walls. However, another angel called out that there

³ Joyce G. Baldwin. *Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi: An Introduction and Commentary*, p. 93.

was no reason to build walls, for the population of Jerusalem would be far too great to be contained inside walls. Yahweh instead would be a wall of fire around His people.

Yahweh then encouraged all the exiles to return to Judah and promised that He would take up residence in the city. Yahweh announced that He would punish the nations for what they did to Israel, for they were His prized possession.

3:1-10 In the fourth vision Zechariah saw the high priest Joshua in filthy clothes standing before an angel. Standing next to Joshua was an accuser (Ps. 109:6), literally in the Hebrew called “the adversary.” The Hebrew word *the satan* means “adversary” and is always translated as “adversary” except in Job 1:6-12; 2:1-7; and Zech. 3:1-2 with no real contextual or theological evidence for it. All other times the Hebrew word *the satan* appears it is translated as the noun “adversary” (Num. 22:22, 32; 1 Sam. 29:4; 2 Sam. 19:22; 1 Kgs. 5:4; 1 Kgs. 11:14, 23; 1 Chr. 21:1; Ps. 109:6) or the verb “accuser” (Ps. 38:20; Ps. 71:13; Ps. 109:4; Ps. 109:20; Ps. 109:29; Zech. 3:1). Grammatically speaking, this instance cannot be translated as Satan because in Hebrew as well as in English, proper names are not preceded by a definite article. It is not grammatically correct to be “the David,” so this cannot be “the Satan.” But it can be the non-proper noun “the adversary.” Theologically it would not be likely that Satan, being a wicked and diabolical creature, could even enter the presence of Yahweh without dying, let alone be allowed to give input into the affairs of Yahweh. It required the death of Christ and the repentance of the covenant people of God just for them to be able to enter the presence of Yahweh. Nowhere in the First Testament, where it is clearly Satan being discussed, is Satan ever portrayed as being able to enter Yahweh’s presence.

We are not told what the accuser said, but from the context he might have opposed the fact that Joshua as a sinner did not have the right to serve as high priest. This is a legitimate point according to the requirements of the Mosaic Law, which required a high standard of righteousness for the priests and a severe penalty if they violated the holiness code. Yahweh rebuked the accuser, and he is heard of no more. Yahweh’s rebuke may be over his lack of understanding that Yahweh is a forgiving God, not that he wrongly attacked Joshua. Unlike the adversary here, Satan is always portrayed as a diabolic being who seeks to destroy us and Yahweh’s kingdom.

Yahweh then clothed Joshua in a white priestly robe, signifying that He had forgiven and cleansed him of his sins and would allow Joshua to serve as high priest. This is the amazing mercy of Yahweh despite the harsh penalties of the law. This foreshadowed the transformation of the entire Jewish community. Yahweh said that Joshua and his associates, which would include Zerubbabel, were symbolic of His promised Branch, the Davidic messiah (Jer. 23:5), whom He would lift up one day to lead His covenant community.

After this, Yahweh pointed out a stone set before Joshua. The stone had seven eyes and an unknown inscription on it. Most likely this was the foundation stone for the temple Yahweh would build. According to 1 Pet. 2:1-10, this foundation stone is Jesus as the new temple. According to Peter, Jesus would become a stumbling block for the future leaders of Israel. Alternatively, it could be the gold plate attached to the high priest’s turban, inscribed with “Holy to Yahweh” on the front (Ex. 28:36-37).⁴ This gold plate was also associated with the removal of sins (Ex. 28:38).

⁴ See Robert B. Chisholm. *Handbook on the Prophets*, p. 461.

4:1-14 In the fifth vision Zechariah saw a golden lampstand with a bowl and seven other lamps. The end of verse 2 literally reads “seven and seven channels [or spouts] for the lamps which were on its top.” What this means is uncertain. Some see it as a golden stand with seven branches with lighted wicks on each, for a total of seven lights—like the menorah from the tabernacle. The “seven and seven” would be two pipes coming out of each branch, totaling fourteen pipes, which would then go to the bowl that sits above the lampstand and is filled with oil. Then there were two trees, one on each side of the lampstand, supplying the bowl with olive oil.

But the repetition of the “seven and seven” makes this unlikely. Most likely there was a golden stand with a bowl on its top, and around the edge of the bowl seven lampstands, each with seven branches with lighted wicks, for a total of forty-nine lights. Thus it would be seven menorahs on top of a bowl with a stand. Then there were two trees, one on each side of the lampstand, that were supplying the bowl with olive oil.⁵

Zechariah asked the angel twice, “What are these?” and the angel rebuked him twice, implying he should have known. The angel never explained the vision exactly, but he did explain that the vision was about Zerubbabel building the temple. The angel states that Zerubbabel was a level ground who would lay the “capstone,” “final stone,” or “foundation stone” of the temple and finish its building by the power of Yahweh’s Spirit. In addition, the fact that the menorah in the vision is, in the Bible, used only the lampstand in the temple shows that the temple is at the center of the vision. The lights of the menorah represent the all-knowingness of Yahweh that watches out for His people.

The angel then said that the two olive trees were the anointed ones who served Yahweh. Olive oil was used to anoint prophets, kings, and priests. The two leaders who are continually referred to in the book of Zechariah are Zerubbabel and Joshua (Zech. 3:1-10; 4:7-10; 6:9-15). Joshua, as the high priest in the line of Aaron, and Zerubbabel, as governor in the line of King David, would be the two anointed leaders of Israel. Both were tasked with the building of the temple, restoring a place for the sacrificial atonement of sins and Yahweh’s dwelling with his people.

The fact that Zech. 3:8 said these two leaders were symbolic of the Branch that would be sent one day connected this vision to the coming of the messiah as well. This vision foreshadows Jesus being the anointed Branch of Yahweh (Matt. 3:13-17; John 15:1-17), who was both king and high priest (Ps. 110; Matt. 1:1; Heb. 4:14-5:10; 7-8) of Israel, who was Himself the temple of Yahweh (John 2:19-22; 1 Pet. 2:4-10) and made atonement for sins (Heb. 9:11-28).

5:1-4 In the sixth vision Zechariah saw a fully unrolled scroll, which was called the curse of Yahweh. On one side was the phrase “every thief will be banished,” alluding to the eighth commandment, and on the other side was the phrase “everyone who swears falsely will be banished,” alluding to the third commandment. This curse would go out through all of Judah and destroy the homes of all the thieves and those who swear falsely. Yahweh was warning Judah to not repeat the sins of social injustice of which the pre-exilic Israel was guilty and for which they went into exile.

5:5-11 In the seventh vision Zechariah saw a woman in a basket, representing the wickedness of the sin of the land. The lid of the basket was secure, sealing in the wickedness. Then two women with the wings of storks carried the basket to Babylon to place it in a house built for it. Perhaps the women are compared to storks because these birds were unclean (Lev. 11:19; Deut. 14:18).

⁵ See Joyce G. Baldwin. *Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi: An Introduction and Commentary*, pp. 119-20.

Yahweh would not tolerate sin in His new community. Those who violated His law would be sent back to Babylon.

6:1-8 In the eighth vision Zechariah saw four chariots coming from between two bronze mountains. Bronze was symbolic of strength or judgment. The horses of each chariot were different colors. The different colors may have no symbolic meaning, simply distinguishing them from each other. The angel said they represented the four winds of Yahweh, which are associated with Yahweh's judgment (Jer. 49:36). The black and white horses' chariots went to the north, and the spotted horse's chariot went to the south. The red horse's chariot is not mentioned. They seem to be militaristic, implementing Yahweh's judgment on the earth. This could refer to Yahweh's using the Persian empire to execute His judgment since this vision parallels the first vision.

6:9-15 Yahweh then told Zechariah to gather silver and gold from three of the leading Jewish men and make a king's crown out of it. Then he was told to take the crown and set it on the head of the high priest Joshua. This is the first time that the idea in Ps. 110—of a figure being both king and high priest—has even been put together in a real-life scenario. Yahweh said this foreshadowed that the coming Branch would be a king and a high priest who would build the temple of Yahweh and rule on the throne of Israel. This makes it clear that the fourth and fifth visions definitely foreshadow the coming messiah as king and high priest. Zechariah was then to take the crown and put it in the temple as a memorial and reminder of Yahweh's promise.

7:1-14 The people of Bethel sent a delegation to Zechariah to ask Yahweh if they should continue to fast in the fifth month to commemorate the Babylonians' destruction of Jerusalem, which occurred in the fifth month of 586 BC. The question was a legitimate question, one that was essentially asking if the exile was over. Zech. 7-8 records Yahweh's response. Yahweh responded by questioning their motives for why they fasted and feasted—was it for Him or for themselves? Yahweh told them that social justice was more important than rituals, and He wanted this more from this community of people who had returned from exile. But the people did not want to hear that answer, and they walked away, ignoring the call of Yahweh.

8:1-8 Despite the people's reaction, Yahweh promised that one day He would return to Jerusalem and dwell with them because He loved them so much. Then Jerusalem would become His holy mountain and be called the Faithful City. The people would be amazed when that day came, but Yahweh would not be, for nothing is impossible for Him. On that day the people would be faithful.

8:9-17 Yahweh then called them to focus on the building of His house so that He could return to dwell with them. Though times had been hard, Yahweh would bless them and make them into a prosperous nation in a land abundant with crops. Though they had been a curse among the nations, Yahweh would make them a blessing to the nations. He would restore them, but they must also promise to live righteously and promote justice.

8:18-23 On that day Israel will have true feasting in every month, and people from all the nations would come to Jerusalem. They will want to be a part of Jerusalem because they will see the faithfulness of the Jews and the blessings of Yahweh. Essentially, Yahweh's answer was that their exile would be over when the people were faithful to Yahweh. This is why the Shekinah glory of Yahweh did not return to the temple when they finished it in 515 BC. They would not be able to be faithful to Yahweh until Jesus came and made atonement for sins, which would allow for the indwelling of the Spirit and a changing of their hearts.

Yahweh Establishes His Kingdom (9:1–14:21)

In this division Yahweh describes what the final battle against the surrounding nations will be like. He then describes the New Jerusalem, which He will establish in order to fulfill all His promises He has made to His covenant people.

9:1-8 Yahweh begins this section by pronouncing a future judgment on the nations of Aram, Phoenicia, and Philistia for what they had done to Israel. Yahweh would destroy them, but He would dwell among those who were left and encamp among them in His temple to protect His people from any other attack that may come from the nations.

9:9-17 Yahweh then pronounces the day that the messianic king would come riding into Jerusalem on a donkey, which represents kingship (Gen. 49:8-12; 1 Sam 23:3; Isa 9:5-6; 11:4; 16:5; Jer. 22:1-5; 23:5-6). He would be the legitimate king of Israel. Yahweh calling Him humble does not mean that He would not come with the authority and power of a king but that He would not arrogantly lord His power over His people and exploit them for His own gain. He would not come with chariots, war horses, and battle bows to oppress His people. His reign would be one of peace. This was fulfilled the day Jesus rode the donkey into Jerusalem, right before He was crucified (Matt. 21:1-11). Because His people rejected Him, however, the fulfillment of His ruling over the whole earth is yet to be fulfilled. Yahweh would free His people as promised in the blood of His covenant, and they would then defeat their enemies. “The blood of my covenant” most likely refers to His promise in Deuteronomy to restore Israel one day with a circumcised heart and to dwell within them (Deut. 30:1-10; Ezek. 16:8). Yahweh would destroy Israel’s enemies, and they would become His glory throughout the earth.

10:1–11:3 The people were to look to Yahweh as the source of blessing, not to the false idols and prophets. Because of their dependence on pagan practices, Israel was like a herd of lost sheep without a shepherd. Those who were supposed to be Israel’s shepherds had neglected their responsibilities and led Israel astray, and they would be punished for their wickedness. Thus, Yahweh would establish Himself as the people’s shepherd and would transform His people into a mighty military force. Yahweh’s power would give Judah stability, and the northern tribes of Israel would be reunited with the southern tribe of Judah. Yahweh would bring His people back from exile as He had done when He delivered His people out of Egypt and led them through the Red Sea. On that day He would bring down the pride of the nations that oppose His people.

11:4-17 Yahweh would destroy the shepherds who tried to slaughter His flock, and then He would rule over the sheep with the staff of favor and the staff of union. But then His own flock turned on Him, and He left them to their own devices to devour each other in their selfishness. He then broke His staves and threw away the meager amount of money they had paid Him to be their shepherd. Then Yahweh raised up a foolish shepherd who did not care for the people and would oppress them. It is difficult to say what this passage refers to. Many believe that it refers to Israel pre-exile and that the foolish shepherd represents the foreign nations that took Israel and Judah into exile. It may also refer to the time of Zechariah later, after the main events of Ezra-Nehemiah, to a socio-political period we are ignorant of. The foolish shepherd could have been a bad leader in David’s line who came after the rebuilding of the city wall.⁶

12:1-14 Yahweh, who created the earth and humans, declared that a day would come when all the nations would move against Jerusalem, which He would make an unmovable stone they

⁶ See Robert B. Chisholm. *Handbook on the Prophets*, p. 473.

cannot defeat. Yahweh would make Jerusalem a fire that would consume the surrounding nations, but Jerusalem would be left unsinged. Then Yahweh would pour out a spirit of grace and supplication that would cause them to mourn their sin against Yahweh—the sin that pierced Him deeply when they rejected Him as their shepherd.

13:1-6 On that day Yahweh would cleanse them of their sins with a river of water that is made available to the house of David and the city of Jerusalem. Devotion to Yahweh would be so great that they would remove their idols and kill their false prophets even if it were their own child (Deut. 13:6-11). All who were false prophets would hide what they used to be, for no one would accept their false teachings.

13:7-9 Yahweh would then kill the foolish prophet and unleash His judgment on His sheep who had followed the foolish shepherd. Jesus alluded to this passage when he was arrested in the garden the night before His crucifixion (Matt. 26:31; Mark 14:27). Jesus was not saying He was the foolish shepherd who was going to be killed or that He was fulfilling this prophecy; rather, He understood it as a proverb; when the people have no shepherd, they scatter, just as His death would lead to the scattering of His disciples.⁷

14:1-7 A day was coming when Yahweh would bring down His wrath on Jerusalem and they would be ravaged by the nations. These verses make it clear that Jerusalem would have to be judged before Yahweh could set them up as the unconquerable and blessed city of Zech. 12:1-9. When all hope seemed lost under the wrath of Yahweh, He would come with His angelic army and land on the Mount of Olives with such power that it would split in two, making a path of escape for the people of the city. This would disrupt all of the cosmos so that even the cycle of night and day would be altered.

14:8-11 Yahweh then paused to describe what Jerusalem would be like after the great battle. He described a river flowing out of Jerusalem and splitting in two—one branch going to the Dead Sea and the other to the Mediterranean Sea—bringing flourishing life to everything including the desert. On that day Yahweh would be king over the whole earth and never again would Jerusalem be destroyed (Zech. 12:1-9).

14:12-21 Yahweh then returned to describing the great battle. Yahweh would strike the invading nations with a plague that would kill many, and the others would turn on each other and start killing each other. Then the people of Judah would seize the plunder of the invading nations. Now that the nations were conquered, Yahweh would rule over them. The survivors would then be required to make a yearly pilgrimage to Jerusalem for the Feast of Tabernacles, a festival that looks forward to the coming of Yahweh's kingdom on earth. Those who refused were promised drought. All of Jerusalem would become a holy city, and all the ordinary things in the city would become holy items. The rebuilt temple would no longer be defiled with the wicked practices of foreigners.

⁷ See Robert B. Chisholm. *Handbook on the Prophets*, p. 475.

Joel

Joel ministered to Judah sometime after 515 BC. Some scholars believe that Joel was a pre-exilic prophet because the book is located in the Bible with the other pre-exilic prophets. However, the book of Joel does not foretell the coming of the Assyrians and Babylonians or the coming exile. Rather, in Joel 3:2-3 Yahweh condemns the nations for scattering His people, dividing up their land, and selling their children into slavery, which could refer only to an exile that occurred already. Though it is not clear when the book was written, the text refers several times to the temple (Joel 1:14, 16; 2:17), which was built in 515 BC. The main idea of the book of Joel is his calling the Jews to repentance and warning them about the coming “day of Yahweh,” which would both defeat evil and renew the remnant. The book is arranged into two major divisions (Joel 1:1–2:17; 2:18–3:21).

An Invasion of Locusts (1:1–2:17)

In this division Joel urged the people mourn over the devastation of the locust plague (Joel 1:1-20), warned that more locusts were coming (Joel 2:1-11), and called the community to repent (Joel 2:12-17).

1:1-7 Joel called the leaders and their people to attention, for the land had never before experienced such a disaster. This was so unprecedented that it would be the topic of conversation for years to come. Locusts had swept through the nation and destroyed all the crops of the land. In the Hebrew, four different terms are used for the locust, most likely being used synonymously to refer to the wave after wave of locusts.

Sarcastically, Joel told the drunkards to weep and wail because there were no more grapes to make their alcohol to drink. With the capacity of a lion to rip its prey apart, the locust had stripped the crops and trees of their fruit. All that was left were bare stalks and branches.

1:8-12 Joel called Israel to mourn like one mourns for the dead, for there would be no more grain or wine offerings in the temple of Yahweh. The farmers were also to wail in sorrow, for there was no more food for their families. The locust plague had robbed Israel of their joy.

1:13-20 Joel then called the priests to mourn and fast in repentance before the altar of Yahweh. They were to call all the people to mourn and fast with them in repentance, for the locust plague was a foreshadow of a greater destruction that would come on the day of Yahweh. “The day of Yahweh” is the day that Yahweh would come to deliver His people, judge the wicked, and establish His rule on earth. This first “day” on which Yahweh appeared, He delivered Israel from Egypt and dwelt with them in the Shekinah glory of Yahweh. This event looks forward to a future global deliverance and permanent kingdom of Yahweh on earth. Israel believed that this future day of Yahweh would once again deliver them from the evil nations and punish their wickedness. Yet Yahweh declared through Amos that this day would not bring light for Israel but darkness, for they were the wicked nation He was going to destroy. Yahweh would cut off all of Israel’s attempts to escape their judgment.

Joel then mourned the destruction of the fields and the starvation of the farm animals. He used the image of fire to describe the drought and famine that resulted from the locust plague. There was no more joy in the land.

2:1-5 Assuming the role of the watchman, Yahweh called for the trumpet to be blown, announcing the day of war as imminent. Yahweh Himself was coming in the storm clouds,

leading a mighty army against Israel. Like an uncontrollable fire, it would destroy everything before leaving scorched land in its wake. The army had the appearance of horses and sounded like chariots.

2:6-11 At the sight of them all the nations trembled in fear. The army was a well-oiled machine that marched without swerving from its course or being jostled. No defense could stop them as they moved through the cities like thieves through open windows. The army even caused the earth, sun, and moon to tremble in fear. Yahweh thundered as he led this mighty army that obeyed only His command.

Which army is being portrayed here? Some say it is another locust plague far greater than the previous, seen by its darkening the sky and devouring the vegetation. It is also compared to a human army, suggesting it was not a human army (Joel 2:4-5, 7). Also, it is never said to have killed anyone. Others say the army is a human army, depicted as locusts in the way that they devastate everything. They are said to come from the north, while locusts come from the south when invading Israel. The human armies that have attacked Israel most often came from the north (Isa. 14:31; Jer. 6:1; Ezek. 26:7; 38:15). The comparisons in Joel 2:4-5, 7 seem to preclude identifying the invader as a literal army. However, in the Hebrew a simile sometimes points to the reality underlying the metaphor.⁸ Thus, the simile *like* would carry the idea of “in every respect like...” For example, in Joel 1:15 the day of Yahweh is said to come *like* destruction from the Almighty, meaning that it would be in *every respect like* destruction from Yahweh.

2:12-17 Yahweh then urged His people to return to Him and repent with fasting and weeping. Yahweh is a gracious and compassionate God who may relent from the coming destruction that He had announced. Yahweh called the people to immediately cease from what they were doing in order to come to Him, to repent, and to call on Him for mercy.

Yahweh Relents and Restores (2:18–3:21)

In this division there is a turning point in which Yahweh did show mercy on His people and relented from the coming invasion. Yahweh then promised to restore His people and vindicate His humiliated people.

2:18-27 The people must have repented because Yahweh relented from the coming judgment. Instead of judging them, Yahweh would restore their land by sending them an abundance of grain, wine, and olive oil. He would drive the northern army into the desert, and so they would have nothing to fear. Yahweh had done many great things for His people and would continue to do so. He would send showers of rain on them so the land would begin to flourish again. The fruit of the land would be so abundant that Yahweh would repay them for all the years of loss that the locust plague had taken from them. They would praise Yahweh because they would know that He was with them in the land of abundance.

2:28-32 Yahweh moved beyond the immediate future and announced that sometime after the restoration of Israel in Joel 2:19-27 He would pour out His Spirit on His covenant people. The phrase “all peoples” (literally “all flesh”) makes it sound like it would be for everyone in the world, but the reference to sons and daughters makes it clear that it was only for those who were a part of the covenant community. In the past the Spirit of Yahweh rested only on a few,

⁸ See Robert B. Chisholm. *Handbook on the Prophets*, p. 371.

primarily prophets, but in this future day all people in the covenant community would become prophets, knowing the will of Yahweh (Num. 11:29; Jer. 31:31-34).

Following this there would be cosmic signs in the skies and on the earth that would signal the coming of Yahweh's judgment. Yahweh's judgment would not be poured out indiscriminately on all people—those who call on the name of Yahweh would be spared. Peter saw the fulfillment of Joel's prophecy in the outpouring of the Spirit at Pentecost (Acts 2:1-21). However, he never mentioned the cosmic signs of Yahweh's judgement. But he did call the Jews to repent so that they would not come under Yahweh's wrath and the promises would be fully realized (Acts 2:33, 38-39). The Jewish leadership rejected this offer (Acts 4), and Yahweh moved to the Gentiles (Acts 10:44-48). Thus this prophecy is gradually being fulfilled with each person who joins the covenant community and receives the Holy Spirit until Jesus comes back again to usher in the day of Yahweh.

3:1-3 When the day of Yahweh comes, Yahweh will restore His people and then bring all the nations that wronged His people to account. This cannot be a future judgment after the previous judgment, for then the nations that wronged Israel would not be around anymore. Rather, this too is a gradual judgment that unfolds against all the nations that have wronged or will wrong Yahweh's covenant people throughout history.

3:4-8 In the aftermath of Jerusalem's fall in 586 BC, some of the surrounding nations wronged the Jewish people as they were being carried off into exile. Yahweh said that He would do to them what they had done to His people. He would turn them over to the Greeks.

3:9-16 Joel called for both the nations and Yahweh to come out for battle. They were to beat their farm tools into weapons. But Yahweh would swing His sickle and trample them like grapes in a winepress. The cosmic signs here that were mentioned in Joel 2:31-32 suggest that this is also a continued judgment that unfolds throughout history.

3:17-21 In the final days, the blessing of Yahweh will be poured out on His people, but all the nations that opposed Yahweh as Egypt did will be left desolate. Yahweh would avenge the crimes committed against His people.

Malachi

Malachi ministered to Judah during 432–431 BC, during the time of second returnees to Judah from exile, under the leadership of Ezra. The main idea of the book of Malachi is his confrontation of Judah’s corruption and encouragement to them to pursue holiness.

The book of Malachi is divided into six disputations that Yahweh has against His people (Mal. 1:1-5; 1:6–2:9; 2:10-16; 2:17–3:5; 3:6-12; 3:13–4:3). Each of these disputations includes an affirmation by Yahweh or the prophet, the people’s response, and a conclusion.

Yahweh Loves Jacob (1:1-5)

1:1-5 Yahweh began by declaring that He loves Israel. Israel responded by questioning Yahweh’s love for them, probably thinking of their exile. Yahweh responded by contrasting their situation with that of Edom—the descendants of Esau, brother of their ancestor Jacob (Gen. 25:19-34). Yahweh had chosen Jacob rather than Esau to be His covenant people and had preserved them through the years and through the exile; He had not done the same for Esau even though Esau was a descendant of Abraham and Isaac, like they were. The language in “Esau I have hated” did not mean Yahweh emotionally hated Esau. Rather, it was covenantal language that communicated He had rejected Esau for the covenant in contrast to His choosing of Jacob. Edom had planned to rebuild, but Yahweh would oppose them in contrast to His promises and backing of Israel’s rebuilding.

Denouncing Defiled Sacrifices (1:6–2:9)

1:6-14 Yahweh now denounced the corrupt priesthood. It is expected that sons honor their fathers and servants honor their masters, yet the priests did not honor Him as their God. The priests responded by asking how they had shown contempt for Yahweh. Yahweh responded that they had offered defiled sacrifices on His altar. They then asked how they had done this. Yahweh stated that they offered blind, crippled, and diseased offerings to Yahweh, which was forbidden by the Mosaic Law (Lev. 22:17-25; Deut. 15:21). They did not offer their best to Yahweh; rather, they offered to Him what they did not want. This was not love. If they gave these to another person, that person would be offended. Yahweh told them that it would be better if they shut the doors of the temple and offered no sacrifices than to offer offensive sacrifices.

2:1-9 If they did not change their ways, then Yahweh would bring judgment upon them and their descendants. Using vulgar language, Yahweh declared that He would humiliate them by having dung smeared on their faces and having them carried outside the temple where dung was taken to be burned. Yahweh had made a lifetime covenant with the descendants of Aaron to let them be priests (Num. 3:12; Jer. 33:21) and expected them to honor it. The early priests before them took their responsibilities seriously and actually revered Yahweh and guided the people. This is what these priests were to be.

Denouncing Divorce (2:10-16)

2:10-16 Just as Yahweh was a faithful God who had created them, He expected them to demonstrate loyalty to each other. Yahweh condemned them for their marrying of foreign women who brought pagan gods into Judah. Another thing they did was that they annoyingly cried out to Yahweh at His altar asking why He would not accept their offerings, meanwhile they

had committed the sin of divorcing their earlier Jewish wives. Yahweh then declared that He hates divorce, for it is unfaithfulness to one's covenant, which does not reflect His character.

Affirming Divine Justice (2:17–3:5)

2:17 Yahweh declared that they had wearied Him with their words. They replied by asking how. Yahweh answered that they were denying His justice—some by saying Yahweh approved of evildoers, others by saying Yahweh did not care about human affairs. Yahweh would prove them wrong by bringing a judgment upon Israel.

3:1-5 Yahweh said a day was coming when He would send His messenger who would prepare the way for His coming. On that day Yahweh would enter His temple and the messenger of the covenant they were seeking would come. The first messenger and the messenger of the covenant who were to come are two different people—John the Baptist and Jesus.

Yahweh would refine the priests with fire, like one refines metals. Then the Jews would worship Yahweh in righteousness. Yahweh would then testify against all the wicked practices of the Jews so that they may be justly sentenced for their crimes.

Robbing Yahweh (3:6-12)

3:6-12 Yahweh declared that He does not change. This is not meant to be taken in a philosophical way; rather, the context shows He is talking about His faithfulness to His covenant promises. Once He makes a promise, He does not change His mind and go back on His word. Thus Yahweh would not destroy Jacob completely because He had made a promise to preserve them. Yahweh then accused them of robbing Him, and they questioned how they were robbing Him. Yahweh then stated they were robbing Him by bringing only a small and worthless tithe to Him, which did not show their love and trust in Him as their provider. If they gave sacrificially, then He would bless them with great abundance. He challenged them to bring their whole tithe, and He would respond by opening the floodgates of His blessings upon them. Even the nations would take notice of this abundance.

Vindicating the Godly (3:13–4:6)

3:13-4:3 Yahweh accused Israel of speaking arrogantly against Him, and they questioned how they doing this. Yahweh responded that they said obedience to Yahweh was useless and their sacrifices brought no blessings. This then led them to call the arrogant and evildoers blessed and let the evildoers prosper.

However, not all were like this, and the faithful rallied together and cried out to Yahweh. Yahweh responded by promising to preserve them in the coming judgment and to bless them. Yahweh's judgment would totally destroy the ungodly. But He would make a sharp distinction between the godly and the ungodly on that day.

4:4-6 Yahweh concluded with an exhortation to His people to obey the Mosaic Law. He then identified the messenger of Mal. 3:1, who would prepare the way, as the coming of Elijah before the great judgment of Yahweh. He would turn the hearts of the fathers, the older generation, and the hearts of their children, the younger generation, back to Yahweh in true covenant faithfulness. If there was no repentance from His people, then He would bring destruction to the land. Jesus said that this was fulfilled with John the Baptist, who resembled Elijah and his ministry (Matt. 3:4 with 2 Kgs. 1:8), who called for radical repentance from the Jews

(Matt. 11:10-14; 17:12-13). But Israel did not receive the messengers, and Yahweh struck the land with the Romans destroying the temple in 70 AD and removing the Jews from the land in 135 AD.

Conclusion

One would think that after being devastated by the Assyrians and the Babylonians and being taken into exile that the Israelites would be more faithful to Yahweh. Yet after Yahweh had brought them back to the Promised Land and began to bless them, the people returned to their familiar rebellious ways. No matter how many times Israel repented, they always went back to their sinful ways. Yahweh sent His prophets to warn them that He would judge them again if they did not repent of their sins.

This showed that what Israel truly needed was a changed heart, as the pre-exilic prophets had stated. In harmony with the pre-exilic prophets, Yahweh promised through the post-exilic prophets that He would establish a New Jerusalem, where he would pour out His Spirit on His covenant people and dwell with them after He had defeated their enemies (Joel 2:28-32; Hag. 2:6-9, 20-23; Zech. 3:8-9; 4:1-14; 6:9-15; 8:3, 20-23; 9:9-17; 12:1-9; 14:1-21; Mal. 3:1). Even so, although the physical exile was over, their spiritual exile would not be over until they repented and were faithful to Yahweh.

Yahweh will establish a New Jerusalem (Hag. 2:6-9; Zech. 8:3; 14:20-21).

Yahweh will establish His new temple in the city (Zech. 4:7-8; 6:12-13).

The New Jerusalem will also be Yahweh's holy cosmic mountain (Zech. 8:3).

Yahweh will dwell there with His covenant people (Zech. 8:3).

Yahweh will establish His righteous King/Branch to rule over the New Jerusalem (Hag. 2:20-23; Zech. 3:8; 6:12-13; 9:9-13; Mal. 3:1).

The Branch will be King and High Priest (Zech. 4:1-14; 6:9-15).

All the nations will come streaming to His holy city/mountain (Hag. 2:6-7; Zech. 8:20-23; 14:16-19).

Yahweh will make the New Jerusalem like the Garden of Eden (Zech. 14:9).

The New Jerusalem will cover the whole earth (Zech. 14:10-11).

Yahweh will defeat all the pagan nations (9:14-17; 12:1-9; 14:1-9, 12-15).

There will be no more sin in the land (Zech. 3:9).

Yahweh will pour out His Spirit on His covenant people (Joel 2:28-29).

The Decline of the Prophet

The prophet is the one who speaks the will of Yahweh to the people. He is the only one who has the right to speak the will of Yahweh to the people because he is the only human who sits on the divine council of Yahweh. Only the prophets were anointed by Yahweh to enter His presence, through visions of the divine council of Yahweh. Therefore, the prophets were the only ones who were connected to the will of Yahweh and could speak it to the king and the people. As one who knew the will of Yahweh, the prophet also had the authority to enforce the will of Yahweh and to punish its violations. Thus, the prophet was also the guardian of the covenant Law of Yahweh with the people.

By the exile, however, one begins to see a decline in the prophets' ability to enter the presence of Yahweh and know the will of Yahweh. This decline is seen in the following points.

First, the prophets were no longer brought into the divine council of Yahweh; rather, angels were sent to them. The pre-exilic prophets—like Micaiah (1 Kgs. 22:1-28), Amos (Amos 7-9), Isaiah (Isa. 6), and Jeremiah (Jer. 25:15-17)—were all brought into the divine council of Yahweh and spoke directly to Yahweh, whereas the exilic and post-exilic prophets were not brought into the full divine council of Yahweh. Ezekiel never entered heaven but did see Yahweh on His chariot throne in the temple and spoke with him. Later, in the post-exilic period, Zechariah only saw visions of Yahweh but mostly received visions of strange images. And it was mostly angels who spoke to him rather than Yahweh. Much later, John the Baptist was not taken into heaven and did not speak with Yahweh. In Revelation, John, the disciple of Jesus, received a brief vision of Yahweh in heaven but did not speak with Yahweh; rather, he spoke with angels.

Second, the prophets no longer were asked for their input on what was to happen but rather were told what was to come. Abraham was allowed to give input on whether Sodom and Gomorrah were to be destroyed (Gen. 18:16-33). Moses gained forgiveness for Israel's sin with the golden calf when Yahweh was going to destroy them (Ex. 32:7-14; 33:12-23). Yahweh took Amos's input on the fate of Israel (Amos 7:1-6). As mentioned in the previous point, the later post-exilic prophets were not even brought into the presence of Yahweh to give input. In Haggai and Malachi, Yahweh spends the entire book telling the prophet and the people what He would do with them. Zechariah is told through highly symbolic visions what will happen to the people and without being allowed to give any input into how the future would play out. The disciple John also is only given visions of what is to come and is never allowed to give input.

Third, the prophets understood less of what they saw, and the meaning of revelations had to be explained to them. Yahweh asked Amos on several occasions what he saw, and Amos pointed out the very thing Yahweh was communicating through the imagery, showing that Amos understood exactly what Yahweh was saying. For example, Amos was shown a hand holding a plumb line against a wall (Amos 7:7-8). Amos could have pointed out the hand or the wall or the scenery, but he focused in on the plumb line and not everything else, knowing that the Hebrew word for plumb (*'anak*) sounded the same as the Hebrew word for sorrow (*'anaq*), which showed he was tracking with Yahweh. Amos did the same thing when shown a basket of summer fruit (*qayis*), which sounded like *end* (*qes*)—for the end that Yahweh was bringing for Israel (Amos 8:1-2). Isaiah never asked for the meaning of the Seraph or the burning coal on his lips when in the throne room of Yahweh or in any metaphor that Yahweh gave him. Jeremiah was shown a branch (Jer. 1:11-12). He could have said it was a stick, branch, piece of wood, or staff, but he called it an almond (*saged*) branch, which sounds like *watching* (*soqed*), referring to

the Yahweh's watching over Israel. Each time Yahweh told Amos and Jeremiah that they had seen well when interpreting the imagery shown to them. However, when Yahweh asked the later prophet Zechariah what he saw, Zechariah responded by explaining every little detail he saw, showing that he did not get the specific point Yahweh was making (Zech. 4:2-6). And then he said he had no idea what any of it meant, which was his response on several other occasions (Zech. 1:9, 19, 21; 2:2; 5:2, 6, 10; 6:4). Yahweh never said Zechariah had seen well, as he had said of the earlier prophets, and even the angel was surprised that Zechariah did not know the answers (Zech. 4:11-14). Ezekiel also showed ignorance when Yahweh revealed things to him or asked him questions (Ezek. 4:14; 9:8; 11:13; 37:3-4). Daniel also did not understand what he was seeing in the visions Yahweh gave him (Dan. 7:15-23; 8:16-17, 27; 12:8-9). Likewise, John the disciple did not understand what he was seeing.

All of this shows that the abilities of the prophets were declining over time as the faithfulness and devotion of Yahweh's people was declining over time. Eventually they ceased to be prophets in the fullest definition of what a prophet is. After the prophet Malachi, Yahweh brought a complete end to the prophets. For four hundred years there was no prophet sent by Yahweh to speak on His behalf. When the silence was broken with John the Baptist, even he was nothing like the early prophets before him. Only Jesus stepped fully into the full meaning of what a prophet is and then was more and greater than any of the prophets before Him. In this way Jesus became the fulfillment of the prophets and even more. Therefore there is no need for the office of prophet anymore—since Jesus is greater than the prophets, being the divine council of Yahweh and the Word of Yahweh, and all believers have access to Him who lives in us.

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