

Adults Reading Plan The Prophets/Daniel

This final session of Generations of Faith focuses on The Prophetic Books. Most modern Bibles group the prophetic books at the end of the Hebrew Scriptures. They are divided into the *major prophets* and *minor prophets*. The major prophets (Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Daniel) are listed first; *major* not because their messages are more important, but simply because they are lengthier. From Hosea through Malachi, twelve minor prophets' writings, shorter in length, follow one by one.

The prophets in the two groups above are also known as the writing prophets. But Scripture also teems with prophets from whom we have not one written word: Elijah, Elisha, Nathan, and so on.

Called by God and filled with God's Spirit, the main role of the prophets was not to predict the future but to "speak for God" on the issues of the day. A prophet has the role of holding people accountable to the God of Israel. Some of their messages are more dramatic than others: some prophets (like Ezekiel and Zechariah) see elaborate visions, while other simply call the people to remember their allegiance to Israel's God and the Torah (like Haggai and Malachi).

When you encounter prophecy in the Bible, the messages come in many forms: dreams, poetry, sermons and even dramatic physical stunts – like when the prophet Isaiah went nude for three years to signify how the Assyrians would strip and shame the Egyptians (Isaiah 20:3). Although it is easy to think of prophecy as a message concerning the future, the prophets of the Bible speak of past, present and future.

Prophecies about the past - It is common for a prophet to reference past events in Israel's history, usually the stories in the Torah. These stories usually serve to remind Israel about their special pact with their God. If Israel remained loyal to God, they would enjoy his blessings and protection in the land he promised to Abraham in the book of Genesis. But if they betrayed him by serving other deities or oppressing vulnerable people, God would judge Israel, removing his protection and exiling them from their land. That's why the prophets often bring up both the acts of kindness that God showed Israel—along with examples of times God judged other nations.

Prophecies about the present - The prophets often contrast God's past kindness and provision for Israel to the nation's disloyalty to him and unkindness to each other in the present. The prophets often build a case on God's behalf, citing current issues of the time.

Prophecies about the future - The prophets often envision five types of future scenarios. Two of them are specific to Israel (God's judgement on Israel and God's restoration of Israel), two are specific to the nations of the world (God's judgement on and restoration of the nations), and one is often available to anyone listening (If you repent, then God will relent concerning his judgment and disasters can be avoided). The future scenarios that the prophets see are presented in long poems, dramatic displays, and vivid dreams. **They're not always direct, clear statements about what's going to happen.**

Often times the prophets will blend those future scenarios together. Because the Jews lived under the rule of foreign empires, prophecies about Israel's restoration often coincide with prophecies about judgment for the kingdoms oppressing them.

Furthermore, while a prophecy might be uttered all at once, prophecy isn't always fulfilled all at once. For example, God promises David a son, a descendant who will rule Jerusalem forever. Parts of this prophecy are fulfilled in David's literal immediate heir, Solomon. But other parts of this prophecy went unfulfilled for a long, long time—until Jesus Christ.

Prophets should be seen against a backdrop of the times and places in which they lived and worked. It is important, for instance, to read Jeremiah in relation to the events preceding the Exile described in 2 Kings 25 and 2 Chronicles 26. Every prophet was a product of his time. When

interpreting the prophetic books for our benefit, we should first learn what the initial intent of that message was: What problems of his time was a particular prophet addressing?

We have included a timeline of the Old Testament Kings and Prophets at the end of this packet for your use.

For this session, we have elected to read the Book of Daniel. The following information comes from A Catholic Introduction to the Bible, the Old Testament, by John Bergsma and Brant Pitre.

“The book of Daniel is one of the most influential—and controversial—of the Old Testament prophetic writings...(T)he influence of Daniel on the New Testament, the early Church, and Christian theology and especially eschatology is undeniable. From the time of Jesus himself, whose two most characteristic teachings—the coming of 'the kingdom of God' and the 'the Son of man'--are both strongly *Danielic* (see Dan 2:44-45; 7:13-14), The book of Daniel has exerted powerful influence on the shape of the Christian faith.” (Bergsma & Pitre pg. 875)

“The dominant theological concern of the book of Daniel is the (re) establishment of true worship of God...(A)lmost all the major conflicts of the first half of the book arise from the clash of two mutually exclusive liturgical empires or cultic kingdoms: the kingdom of man, embodied in the current monarch, and the kingdom of God, embodied in his chosen people.” (Bergsma & Pitre pg. 897)

April 26-May 2

Daniel and Companions

Read Daniel Chapters 1-3

The book of Daniel begins in the third year of the reign of Jehoiakim (ca. 605 B.C.). In this same year Nebuchadnezzar established control over a large part of the Eastern Mediterranean region and “subjected the king of Judah to vassalage, taking hostages from the aristocracy and royal house to ensure his obedience. Daniel and his three companions are among those taken hostage, but the sacred author also notes that Nebuchadnezzar took liturgical 'vessels' from the house of God in Jerusalem and deposited them in the temples of his idols. In Babylon (Dan 1:2). The author intends a parallelism between the young men and these liturgical objects: both are sacred vessels, consecrated to God's service but now brought into a profane and profaning environment” (Bergsma & Pitre pg. 878)

This is where the Daniel Fast originates. Daniel and three other young men from the family of King David “avoid 'defiling' themselves with the king's 'rich food' (Dan 1:8). Not only were these foods a violation of Mosaic food laws, but “the food of the king would have been ritually offered to his deities” (Bergsma & Pitre pg. 879) Thus, eating them would have constituted participating in the worship of those false gods.

These four worshippers of the Lord grapple with the problem of remaining faithful to God when there is no longer access to the Temple liturgy. “(I)t is notable that both Daniel and his companions serve the king of Babylon with great skill and fidelity; in fact, the text commends them for their loyal and valuable service and never suggests that such service is in conflict with their commitment to God (Dan 1-2)” (Bergsma & Pitre pg. 897)

In the second chapter of Daniel, Daniel is able to correctly tell and interpret King Nebuchadnezzar's dream. In this dream “(t)he metallic image is an idol, representing the false systems of pagan worship ...The stone 'cut out by no human hand' is clearly a sacred stone suitable for an altar or temple (see Ex 20:25; 1 Kings 6:7). It was common in the ancient Near East to view temples as mystical representations of the cosmic or primordial mountain of God...Therefore, the growth of the sacred stone into a 'great mountain' that fills 'the whole earth' (Dan 2:35) certainly refers to the building of a universal temple. But this universal temple is simultaneously the kingdom of God...(Dan 2:44)” (Bergsma & Pitre pg. 880)

In chapter 3 Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego are thrown into a furnace when they refuse to “violate their exclusive commitment to the one true God...Denied access to the true liturgy and

compelled to participate in a false one, the three young men refuse to comply and, instead, become willing human sacrifices to their own God. But happily God shows his sovereignty by sparing them this fate and vindicating his worshippers.” (Bergsma & Pitre pg. 881)

May 3-May 10

Nebuchadnezzar and Visions

Read Daniel Chapters 4-8

The writing on the wall in chapter 5 has word play in the original Aramaic language that it was written in. The message: “a mina, a mina, a shekel and half-shekel” seems to be a phrase about money. But, these words sound like an Aramaic word that means “to number” and one that means “to weigh” and the final part both means to “divide”, “but is also very close to Aramaic *paras*, 'Persia'” (Bergsma & Pitre pg. 882) And it is this phonetic understanding that Daniel interprets. “Belshazzar rewards Daniel by making him the third ruler of the kingdom...That same night, Daniel's oracle is fulfilled when Belshazzar is slain as the Medes and Persians capture Babylon and Darius the Mede becomes king (Dan 5:30-31)” (Bergsma & Pitre pg. 883)

After refusing to follow the law forbidding prayer to any god or man but Darius, Daniel is thrown into the lions den in chapter 6. This is similar to chapter 3 with Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego. Daniel “consents to *become* a sacrifice at the teeth of the lions. Yet once again God vindicates those who worship him against their enemies and through 'signs and wonders' shows that he is the true king and his the true kingdom.” (Bergsma & Pitre pg. 885)

The vision in “Daniel 7 runs largely parallel to the interpreted dream of Nebuchadnezzar in Daniel 2.” (Bergsma & Pitre pg. 885) Each beast represents a kingdom. Four kingdoms of earthly kings and a Heavenly kingdom to come. “This son of man will 'arise' during the time of the fourth kingdom on earth, different from the previous three. This kingdom will produce ten kings and then another who is particularly boastful and will persecute the 'saints of the Most High', but only until he is judged by God. Then the saints will receive the kingdom.” (Bergsma & Pitre pg. 887)

“Unlike the visions of Daniel 2 and 7, the vision of Daniel 8 is transparent in its meaning, in part because much of it is interpreted within the chapter itself. The goat's large central horn is Alexander the Great (356-323 B.C.), who conquered the Persian Empire in a mere four years...and died as master of the known world. After his death, four of his successors...prevailed in the ensuing power struggle and set up independent kingdoms; Cassander in Macedonia and Greece, Lysimachus in Asia Minor and Thrace, Seleucus in the Levant to India, and Ptolemy in Egypt. These are the 'four horns' that replace the one great 'horn' (Dan 8:5-8). The small horn that grows from one of the four is almost certainly Antiochus IV Epiphanes (175-164 B.C.), a successor to the throne of the Seleucid Empire who desecrated the Jerusalem Temple and attempted to suppress Judaism within its native land (cf 1 Mac 1-2).” (Bergsma & Pitre pg. 888)

May 11-May 18

Chronology until the Messiah

Read Daniel Chapters 9-12

The vision in chapter 9 is different than the previous visions. This vision is important in understanding the Jewish expectation at the time that Jesus lived and walked the Earth. This vision came as Daniel was meditating on Scripture, in particular, the book of Jeremiah. (see Jer 25:11-12 and 29:10) “However, as the date reference to the 'first year of Darius...a Mede' makes clear (Dan 9:1), at the time that Daniel is reading this Scripture, the 'seventy years for Babylon' are already over (cf. Jer 29:10). Yet where is the promised 'visitation' of Israel and return of the Jews to their land? Apparently, Daniel 'understands' or 'perceives' (for the first time) that the prophecy of Jeremiah was *conditional upon the repentance of the people*...(Jer 29:12-14)...Daniel recognizes that the exiles have not yet sought the Lord with 'all' their 'heart'...(Dan 9:13)...Daniel prays an intense prayer of repentance and intercession (Dan 9:3-19) Very much like Moses before him (see Ex 32 11-13, 31-32; Num 14:13-19) Daniel repents *on behalf of* the people of Israel, pleading for God to have mercy on them and the 'holy

city'." (Bergsma & Pitre pgs. 888 & 889) Daniel's prayers have been heard and will be answered, but the time to fulfillment is delayed by a factor of seven. (Dan 9:24)

This prophecy of a coming messiah is unique in that it not only says what will "happen (the coming and death of the messiah) but when it would happen." (Bergsma & Pitre pg. 900) Please see the graph on the next page of this packet for details.

May 19-May 26

***A story of Susanna and
stories of Bel and the Dragons***

Read Daniel Chapters 13 & 14

The story of Susanna happens when Daniel is a young man.

Chapter 14, "commonly known as 'Bel and the Dragon' actually comprises two narratives. In the first, Daniel discusses idolatry with King Cyrus of Persia (Dan 14:1-22)...In the second story, Daniel slays a sacred Babylonian dragon by feeding it cakes of pitch, fat, and hair until it bursts (Dan 14:23-42)...These two stories of Daniel's struggle against the pagan cults of Babylon constitute a fitting final word to the canonical book, which, as we have seen, has been from the beginning to end an account of liturgical conflict between paganism and the cult of the Lord, between the pagan kingdoms of men and the everlasting kingdom of God." (Bergsma & Pitre pg. 892)

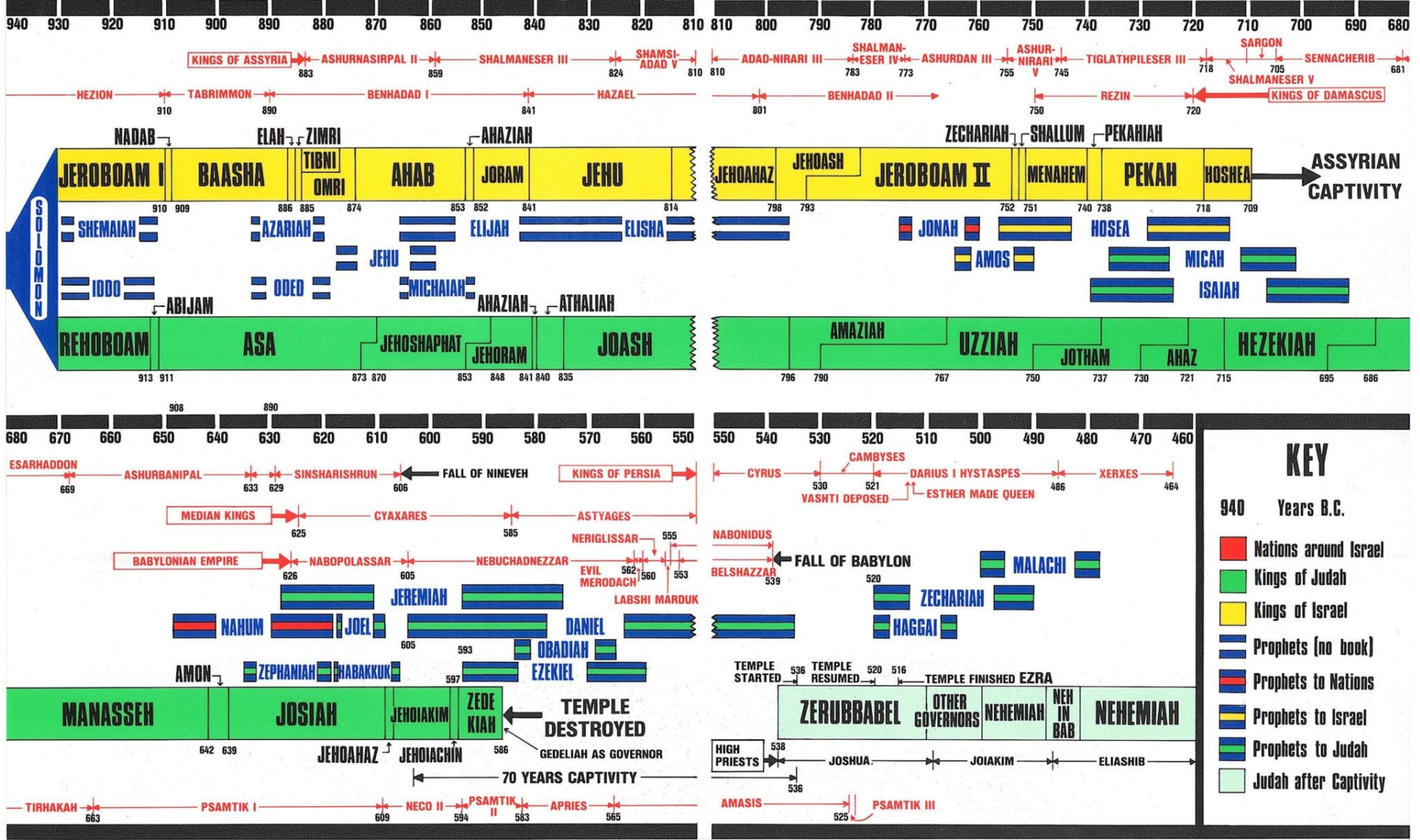
While this is the end of our study of the Old Testament for Generations of Faith, we urge you to continue reading the Bible. One option for doing this is listening to Father Mike Schmitz' Bible in a Year podcast to help you read through the complete Bible this year. It is never too late to join in at <https://media.ascensionpress.com/category/ascension-podcasts/bibleinayear/>

The Prophecy of the Messiah's Death (Daniel 9:25-27)

Daniel's Prophecy	Historical Events	Dates
Word to restore Jerusalem	Artaxerxes' decree: Rebuild the Temple	ca. 457 B.C.
Seventy weeks of years	70 x 7 Years = 490 Years	457 B.C. – 33 A.D.
“Messiah” will be “cut off”	Jesus is crucified	ca A.D. 33
“City and sanctuary” destroyed	Jerusalem & Temple destroyed	A.D. 70

THE KINGS AND PROPHETS

OF ISRAEL AND JUDAH



KEY

940 Years B.C.

- █ Nations around Israel
- █ Kings of Judah
- █ Kings of Israel
- █ Prophets (no book)
- █ Prophets to Nations
- █ Prophets to Israel
- █ Prophets to Judah
- █ Judah after Captivity