

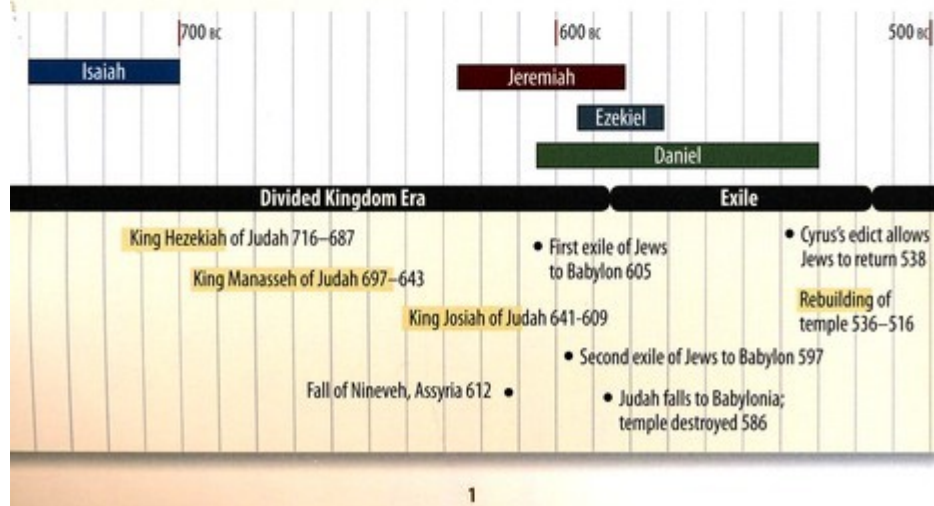


# IMPORTANCE OF THE MAJOR PROPHETS

THE FOUR LONGEST Old Testament prophetic books—Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and Daniel—are known as the Major Prophets.

Since Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and Daniel wrote so long ago and to an audience very different from us, why should Christians today read, study, meditate on, and be concerned with the message of each of these books?

- They anticipate the coming of the Messiah, who has saved us from evil, made a new relationship possible between God and us, and given us a new heart.
- They call God's people to trust in God's care and provision and remind us that he is able and willing to come through for us.
- They call God's people to repent from ignoring, challenging, and disobeying God.
- Their words and actions instruct us about the ways in which God deals with his people.
- By seeing the world from God's perspective and understanding the ways in which God deals with his people, we become better equipped to discern our times and understand God's will for the church today.





From studying and meditating on the prophets, we learn to see the world the way God sees it, and we become more sensitive to the ways in which God works in the world. The message of the prophets always requires a response. We also should be challenged—at a personal or church level—to make corrections where they are needed. Studying the prophets should be a transformative experience.

The books written by the major prophets are long and complex, but they are also important and worth reading. They are a collection of messages from God to and about God's people or other nations; they are songs and prayers, words to warn us and call us to repentance, words to comfort us and give us hope, words about God's plans for the immediate and distant future.

## THE TIME OF THE PROPHETS

The period between 740 BC and 530 BC was a terrifying and life-changing time in Israel's history. The people living in the northern kingdom of Israel and the southern kingdom of Judah were attacked and destroyed. The Assyrians conquered, destroyed, and exiled many people in the north. Later, the Babylonians conquered, destroyed, and exiled many people in the south, in Jerusalem. Terribly decimated, the Israelites who were exiled wondered if God still cared and if there was any hope left.

## MAJOR AND MINOR PROPHETS

*The division between Major and Minor Prophets is very old and was based strictly on the length of the books. Since biblical books were written on scrolls, they had a size limit. Because the writings of all twelve Minor Prophets fit well on one scroll, they became one unit. Apart from being shorter, the Minor Prophets are the same type of prophetic literature as the Major Prophets.*



## MINISTRIES OF THE MAJOR PROPHETS

PROPHET AND DATE OF MINISTRY BC	LOCATION/AUDIENCE	HISTORICAL CONTEXT
<b>ISAIAH</b> 740–700	Jerusalem / Israelites living in Judah	Isaiah wrote during the reigns of kings Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah. At the time, the cruel and powerful Assyrians were the dominant empire, having crushed the northern kingdom of Israel in 722 BC and conquered the Babylonians and Egyptians.
<b>JEREMIAH</b> 626–582	Jerusalem/ Israelites in exile in Babylon and those living in Judah	Jeremiah wrote during the reigns of kings Josiah, Jehoahaz, Jehoiakim, Jehoiachin, and Zedekiah. A time of political turmoil, the Babylonians became the dominant power and eventually conquered and destroyed Jerusalem and the temple. Hundreds were exiled to Babylon and other parts of the Babylonian empire.
<b>EZEKIEL</b> 593–571	Babylon/Israelites in exile in Babylon	Ezekiel was one of the people exiled in 597 BC to Babylon. From there, he ministered to the exiled community.
<b>DANIEL</b> 605–530	Babylon and Persia/Israelites living in exile in Babylon and Persia	Part of the first wave of exiles from Jerusalem in 605 BC, Daniel attained high office in the Babylonian administration. He ministered first to Babylonian kings and then to Persian rulers.

THE horrific event of the exile powerfully colored the ministry of each prophet. These people lost everything: God's people had lived in terror of the Assyrians and later the Babylonians. They had prayed for help, but they had still lost everything: their homes, loved ones, temple, and any sense that God was protecting them.

*What were some of the human consequences of the exile?*

*What sort of spiritual effects would the exile have produced on the people?*