

# We Believe in Jesus

Lesson 3

The Prophet

Forum



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# Contents

Question 1:	What was the primary job of biblical prophets?.....	1
Question 2:	How did the process of prophetic inspiration work?.....	3
Question 3:	What was the main purpose of biblical prophecy?.....	5
Question 4:	Why don't some prophecies in Scripture come to pass as predicted?.....	6
Question 5:	How can we be sure that Jesus will fulfill the prophecies about his return? .....	8
Question 6:	Is Jesus the prophet like Moses that was foretold in Deuteronomy chapter 18? .....	9
Question 7:	In the transfiguration, why did God only command the disciples to listen to Jesus?.....	10
Question 8:	How is God's revelation through Jesus superior to his revelation through other prophets? .....	11
Question 9:	Has Jesus made the Old Testament prophets irrelevant for Christians?....	13
Question 10:	Can we have a true appreciation for Jesus' teachings without also appreciating the rest of Scripture? .....	14
Question 11:	What is the relationship between the Old Testament and New Testament? .....	16
Question 12:	Why did Jesus' gospel message focus on repentance and the kingdom of God?.....	17
Question 13:	Should Christians regularly confess and repent of our sins?.....	18
Question 14:	How can believers stay motivated to be faithful to God and avoid sin? ...	19

# We Believe in Jesus

## Lesson Three: The Prophets

### Forum

With

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Dr. Stephen Chan  
Dr. Peter Chow  
Dr. Brandon Crowe  
Dr. Dan Doriani  
Dr. Mark Gignilliat  
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Dr. Peter Walker  
Dr. Guy Waters  
Dr. Stephen Wellum

### Question 1:

#### What was the primary job of biblical prophets?

As part of Jesus' role as Christ, he perfectly fulfilled the office of prophet. God had appointed prophets, along with kings and priests, as administrators of his kingdom. But what exactly was a prophet? How did prophets administer God's kingdom? Many people think of them primarily as seers that predicted the future — and prophets certainly did this at times. But what was the primary job of biblical prophets?

#### **Rev. Mike Glodo**

The main purpose of biblical prophecy can be understood if we have a sense of the prophets as, say, ambassadors or secretaries of state. They came as representatives of God, and they came to call God's people back to faithfulness to God's covenant with them. At times, it was to call them to repent and to turn away from sin, and at other times it was to give them hope in difficult circumstances. When the prophets came to call the people to turn back to God, it was to turn away from sin, from individual sin, but particularly, we see, to call people from sinning against one another, from gaining an advantage against others, from being unjust, from not being merciful, and those kinds of things. And also, to call them to turn back from serving other gods that they had begun to worship, sometimes alongside the God of the Bible, and sometimes to the exclusion of him. And so, often, we speak of the prophets as those who brought a covenant lawsuit, like a lawyer would bring, to bring God's people back, to give them an opportunity to repent and to turn to Him and be faithful to the covenant that he had given them at Sinai in the book of Exodus, or we see the fuller version of that in the book of Deuteronomy.

But there was not always this message of only woe. There was a message of hope often, or sometimes in alliteration we say, woe and weal. You know, good news. What was their hope? What could they look to for God to deliver them from their circumstances, or how they could persevere in them? So the prophets came to bring a message of warning at times and of hope at other times. But the important thing to remember is that he spoke to them in those circumstances, initially. And how we read those prophecies today has to start with what they meant to those people then. Occasionally God would predict things in the future that would confirm or seal his authority, his credibility, his faithfulness. Unfortunately, we tend to think of the Old Testament prophets as only predicting things, which is actually probably a lesser percentage of what they did than to speak words of warning and words of hope and blessing.

### **Dr. Greg Perry**

A lot of times people think about biblical prophecy mainly in terms of prediction and the fulfillment of predictions. Many of us have heard about how Jesus fulfills these predictions from the Old Testament, and that's certainly true, but it's not the primary purpose of biblical prophecy. The prophets really were representatives of the covenant to the king and to the people of God. And so over and over again we see the prophets in the Old Testament, not predicting something, but laying out in front of God's people that if they obey on the one hand, there will be blessing. If they disobey on the other hand, there will be curses; there will be sanctions to their disobedience. That represents the shape of the covenant that we see at the end of Deuteronomy for example of these blessings and curses. So again and again we see a prophet like Jeremiah, in chapter 18 of Jeremiah, lay out these possibilities. If you obey, blessing, if you disobey, curse. What's remarkable about that is that, through the prophets, God is reminding his people that he takes their covenant responsibilities seriously. So there's this sense of historical contingencies that is allowed for in biblical prophecy because God is taking seriously the actions of his people, either their obedience or their disobedience. So it's not just about predicting the future. Biblical prophecy, more importantly, is about God's people responding in faithfulness to the covenant and experiencing blessing or suffering curse because they have disobeyed God's covenant relationship.

### **Dr. Mark Gignilliat**

God's prophets are the means by which he communicates to his people. And it's the way in which God's Word becomes effective within the midst of Israel's life. So, listening to the word of the Lord from the prophets is a means of grace within ancient Israel; this is how God spoke. And it wasn't always a happy word. When one thinks about Isaiah, for example, Isaiah was called to the ministry, and I call this the prophetic bait and switch, where he raises his hand and says, "I'll go for you, Lord," but then, you know, when he finds out what the fine print of the contract is, his ministry is really one of failure where the prophetic Word of the Lord is the means by which God hardens the people's ears and blinds their eyes. So, the Word of the Lord could go both ways. It could harden, but it could also be the means of their life when

they listened, and they heeded that word. And so, when you trace the history of Israel as it corresponds to God's prophets, what you see is when the people listen to God's prophets and follow their word, then there's life in that. But when they don't, there are huge repercussions. And you see this with the fall of the northern kingdom to Assyria, then eventually the southern kingdom to Babylon. And then the list goes on and on. So, all of that finds its root in hearing and taking heed to the prophetic word of the Lord.

## **Question 2:** **How did the process of prophetic inspiration work?**

**Prophets fulfilled their jobs as administrators of God's kingdom in a variety of ways. But one of the main things they did was to deliver divinely inspired prophecies to God's people. But how much control did the prophets have over these prophecies? Did God tell them precisely what to say? Did the prophets invent things to say based on their understanding of God's covenant and the actions of his people? How did the process of prophetic inspiration work?**

### **Dr. Riad Kassis**

Many would think that God was dictating to a secretary who was just typing what God was saying, and that was the prophet. But I think God who created our personalities and gave us brains and mind, and gave us a culture to live in, has directed the prophets in the Old Testament using their personalities, their understanding, their knowledge in a way, through the Holy Spirit, to convey his message to us. So I think God did not dictate word by word, but he used the knowledge, the personality of the prophets of the Old Testament.

### **Dr. Simon Vibert**

Well, biblical prophets clearly believed that God was guiding and directing and overruling what they wrote, but there is a sense in which — the prophet Isaiah, the prophet Jeremiah — they come through in their prophecies, so they were men moved by the Spirit, as Peter says. So, the humanity still comes through, but actually, God so overruled their message that what they said was both fully words of God, but actually fully human words as well.

### **Dr. Peter Chow, translation**

The book of Numbers discusses different levels of revelation. Sometimes it's through visions and dreams. But when God spoke to Moses it was face to face, or as the original wording put it, straight from the mouth. When the Bible was being written, we believe that the revelation was of the highest order, an infallible and inerrant revelation. Special revelation never contains error. When God inspired the prophets to

write the Bible, he also used their personalities, their experiences, and their previous training. They were not mechanical typewriters, writing down whatever words were being dictated. The revelation happened through their entire persons, by what is called “organic revelation” in traditional theology.

### **Rev. Jim Maples**

The question of dictation of Old Testament prophecies, or the means in which the Holy Spirit used the prophets to relay these prophecies — I think we have to look to the Scripture. The best answer is 2 Peter 1:20-21. He says, “Above all, you must understand that no prophecy of Scripture ... ever had its origin in the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit.” The words there that the NIV translates, “carried along,” the Greek *pheromenoi*, means, “to be borne,” not in the sense of giving birth, but to be carried. Thus, the NIV’s translation, “carried along.” The one who is carried, or who is borne on some means of transportation, has nothing to do with the actual transport. He is simply the object that is being carried. Now, this passivity, B.B. Warfield referred to in *The Biblical Idea of Revelation*. He said this passivity does not deny the use of the prophets’ intelligence in the reception of the revelation. What it does do is deny the use of the prophets’ intelligence in the production of the revelation. These are God’s words. This is the Word of God transmitted through the prophets. And when we say that, we do not mean that it was dictation that the prophets were mere secretaries who wrote down everything that God said. They are living, intelligent beings and, of course, it is in their language, in their words, in their vernacular. It is a reflection of who they are, but the words themselves are God’s. And the questions that arise in this regard are, how can the prophecies — how can Scripture be inerrant and infallible unless God actually dictates it to men?

The other question, on the other extreme, some of our liberal folks want to say, well, it’s impossible for God to send his word through men without that word being infected with error because of their personalities and their prejudices and their backgrounds. But both of these overlook one thing that Warfield also pointed out. He said, to assert that God does not control intelligent creatures, intelligent beings which he himself created, and to deny that God can, through those beings, put his word purely into them and have them transmit it without error, denies his sovereignty over that which he’s created. Also, he said that to assert that God does not have the ability to take a rational creature, a rational mind that he himself created, and put into that mind thoughts that they themselves did not produce or come up with, denies his power and his sovereignty. And I think if we look at these things in that light, we see that God really did use these men from all kinds of backgrounds and all kinds of education — from the Pharisee of the Pharisees, Paul, to, you know, a farmer like Amos. And when we see these writings, what we see is the language of the prophet. We see his expressions. We see his perspectives. We see his background. But what we see is the Word of God truly, infallibly, inerrantly preserved and transmitted to us just as Peter said.

### **Question 3:** **What was the main purpose of biblical prophecy?**

**Prophets were primarily responsible for administering God's kingdom by reminding the people of their covenant obligations to God, and of the consequences of their obedience and disobedience. But what does prophecy have to do with this? Wasn't prophecy mostly about seeing into the future? What was the main purpose of biblical prophecy?**

#### **Dr. Scott Redd**

Many people believe that the purpose of biblical prophecy is to tell something about the future. Well, of course, that's incredibly significant and important to biblical prophecy. As a matter of fact, a false prophet is one who mistells the future. It's not the main purpose of biblical prophecy. Rather, biblical prophecy was a way for God to communicate to his covenant people in a way that would either encourage them to continue on the path on which they're on, or to dissuade them and to encourage them towards repentance that they might return to a path that they should be on. So, biblical prophecy is not so much about prognostication of future events as it is about proclamation of God's words to his people, requiring them either to return to him from a path of disobedience, or to encourage them along their way in covenant faithfulness to continue seeking him and following him.

#### **Dr. Daniel Kim**

The main purpose of biblical prophecy, as far as I could tell from the books of the prophetic writings in the Old Testament, is actually not to prophesy about the future Messiah, but it is for the purpose of trying to bring God's covenant people back into the proper relationship with him. So, for example, the purpose of the prophets like Isaiah is to get the folks in Judah to come back into a right relationship with him, being faithful to their covenantal obligations. Of course they give messages of hope, and that hope is what points us to Christ. But ultimately, the main purpose is for God's prophets to speak to their own people in such a way that they would be drawn back into the proper relationship with God, turning back from their sins that they have committed over the centuries and instead living in a right, proper way, doing justice and loving God and walking alongside him.

#### **Dr. Gordon Johnston**

When we study prophecy, one of the major questions we have to ask is what's the main purpose of prophecy? In a lot of popular-level contemporary literature, it tends to focus on trying to tease out the mysterious details and get a timeline as far as this event versus that event, following next, and prophecy then becomes a study more for intellectual exercise, cognitive information. But biblical prophecy itself, when



Yahweh inspired the prophets, it was primarily to move the people to obedience, so it wasn't so much content and information oriented as much as functional. Yahweh was primarily calling the people to obedience, calling them to repentance, for those that are already obedient, to persevere in faith and obedience; to those that are disobedient to repent of their sins. So it's primarily to move the people. If you will, biblical prophecy — Yahweh would reveal to the people that judgment was coming, but for the purpose that this could be avoided if the people would repent. Or he would reveal to the people, this is the blessing that's in the offing. But that was with the assumption that, if they continued to persevere in faith and obedience. So it's almost if you could think of a highway with exit ramps where the prophet would tell the people that they're on a path of danger, and this is what's at the end of the road, but there's an off-ramp. And so it's not simply that this is set in stone, that there's a calendar that we have to fulfill in the future, but it's primarily giving the people a providential edge, if you will, that this is your fate, but this is fate that can be avoided if there's repentance.

#### **Question 4:**

#### **Why don't some prophecies in Scripture come to pass as predicted?**

**Sometimes, when Christians read the Bible, they're troubled by the fact that many prophecies don't seem to be fulfilled. But if prophecy is God's Word, and God's Word is always true, then how can prophecies fail to be fulfilled? Don't failed prophecies only come from false prophets? Why don't some prophecies in Scripture come to pass as predicted?**

#### **Dr. Richard L. Pratt, Jr.**

It's important to understand that, for the most part, faithful followers of Christ today don't understand exactly what the main focus of prophecy was in the days of the Bible. We often have this misconception: on the one side, when we read something that's negative, we think that the prophets are condemning people irrevocably to experiencing the curse of God, and when we read something positive, we think that the prophets are promising irrevocably that people are going to receive those promises from God. Now occasionally here and there in prophecy, especially when God takes an oath either to condemn or to give good blessings to people, we do have condemnations and promises, but for the most part, that's not the case. Rather than seeing prophecy as something that's absolute and cannot be varied in any way from the time it's predicted to the time it's fulfilled, what you find is, prophets are usually offering and they're threatening rather than promising and condemning.

#### **Dr. Scott Redd**

In Jeremiah 18 where the prophet articulates that when God proclaims a blessing on a nation and that nation turns away from the Lord, then that blessing will turn to a curse. Likewise, if God declares a curse on a nation and that nation repents and turns

back to him, that curse will turn to blessing. So you see, the purpose of prophecy is not so much to just tell something about the future, but it's really to change behavior, to call God's people to him, to call them to covenant faithfulness. We see this throughout the Old Testament. In the case of Jonah with the Ninevites, calling the Ninevites to repentance. Jonah is not a false prophet because his prophecy of destruction over Nineveh does not come true. Rather, he shows that he is a true prophet, because when the Ninevites repent and turn to the Lord in repentance, the destruction is mollified and put off. Likewise, we see in the story about David's son with Bathsheba, David is told that his son will die, and yet he mourns and laments and repents to the Lord saying, who knows, maybe the Lord will take this judgment, this curse, away from me. David knew that true prophecy requires repentance, requires a response of faithfulness.

This is also the case with the story of Isaiah and Hezekiah. When Hezekiah becomes ill, Isaiah tells him, put your house in order for the disease that you have is fatal. But Hezekiah repents and he turns to the Lord, and the Lord relents and extends Hezekiah's life. You see, Hezekiah knew that Isaiah is not a false prophet because his prophecy did not come true, but rather, his prophecy had the desired effect of calling about faithfulness in God's king Hezekiah.

#### **Dr. Robert Lister**

There is an interesting class of prophecies in Scripture that apparently are not fulfilled, or don't come to pass. Now, the classic example of this is in the book of Jonah, where Jonah goes to the city of Nineveh, when he finally gets there, and says, "Yet forty days, and Nineveh shall be overthrown," in fulfillment of God's command to him to go and warn of coming judgment, coming condemnation on Nineveh. The people of Nineveh are not told that if they repent they will be spared. The king and the people surmise that perhaps this might be the case, and they decide to call a fast and, on the hope that if they repent, that God may relent of the judgment that he intended to do to them. They find, in fact, that that is what happens. And then you're left asking the question, "Was God's prophecy of judgment on the city of Nineveh true or not?" And in this case of prophecies of threatened judgment, because of this principle that we see in Jeremiah 18 that leads some people to talk of this kind of prophecy as a conditional prophecy, what I think we actually see is that God's intention is accomplished. God intends, by way of the word of warning through Jonah, to stir up the repentance of the Ninevites so that he may treat them in kind with mercy instead of judgment.

It is interesting that in the case of the book of Jonah, God does not just rain fire from heaven. He could. They're already wicked. They're already guilty. They're already deserving of judgment. So when Jonah shows up and says, "Yet forty days, and Nineveh will be overthrown," he attaches a time period. And it's interesting to ask the question: Why is there a time period between the announcement of God's judgment and the foretold experience of God's judgment? It seems to me that that's an indicator that God's purpose here is to give them an opportunity to repent. He initiates the relationship. He initiates the contact by issuing the word of warning so that there will

be an opportunity to repent, when he could have just rained fire had he so chosen. He didn't. His desire was to stir up their repentance. It's also interesting to see Jonah's response to what happens to the Ninevites in chapter 4 of the book of Jonah. After the people repent, and God relents from his fierce anger, Jonah says effectively, I knew this is what you were going to do. This is why I fled to Tarshish in the first place, because I knew what kind of God you are: slow to anger, abounding in compassion, steadfast in love. Basically, you love to forgive sinners. That's why I left in the first place. Not because God told him, "I'm sending you there to preach this message with the result that they will repent," but God told him, "Go and preach judgment," and Jonah knew the character of God. So Jonah, it seems, knows that God's intention in this instance is to stir up their repentance, which means that God's word accomplishes what it was intended to accomplish.

If I could use an analogy, when I warn my children, my young children, not to play in the street, and I threaten them with judgment, so to speak, if they disobey that command, my purpose in issuing that warning is not done in hopes that they will disobey my command and play in the street, and then I will have the opportunity to punish them; that's not my desire. My desire in stating the warning is to establish the boundary of prohibition so that they will heed my call and not do what I have prohibited in that instance. In a similar fashion, God's taking the initiative with these people who, like all of the rest of us don't deserve it, is done so for the purpose of stirring up their repentance so he may relate to them in kind. It's not the only kind of prophecy that there is. There are prophecies of unilateral direct fulfillment by God, and prophecies where God says he's going to directly do something through this or that person, and it is unconditionally fulfilled. But there are some examples of prophecies, like this one, where it seems that the condition attaches, and the point of the threat of judgment or the promise of blessing hinges on either continued obedience on the one hand, or repentance on the other.

### **Question 5:**

#### **How can we be sure that Jesus will fulfill the prophecies about his return?**

**When some Christians realize that the prophecies of true prophets don't always come to pass as stated, they start to worry about the return of Jesus. They start to ask questions like: Is he really coming back? What if his return is conditional, and the condition isn't fulfilled? These are legitimate questions. How can we be sure that Jesus will fulfill the prophecies about his return?**

#### **Dr. Peter Chow, translation**

We have confidence because Jesus Christ is the truth. He does not lie, and he will accomplish all that he has promised. Since Jesus has promised that he will come again and take us to the place he has prepared for us, we can believe with full

assurance that he will come again because he does not lie.

**Rev. Jim Maples**

When we look at the prophecies about Jesus' return and we wonder, or people question, can these be believed, are these reliable, I think we need to go first to the Old Testament. There are over 300 prophecies in the Old Testament concerning Christ's coming. John Gerstner, in his book *Reason for Faith*, said that someone went to the trouble to calculate the probability of those things coming to pass in the life of one person by sheer coincidence, and they determined that it was a number that was  $8.4 \times 10^{41}$  of 1%. In other words, it is a virtual impossibility. And yet, we know, and we see in the Scripture over and over, in the Gospels, this phrase, "this happened to fulfill that which was spoken of by the prophet Isaiah." "This happened to fulfill that which was spoken of by the prophet Malachi," and on and on, David, Zachariah, and so forth. So we see the truth of the Old Testament prophecies fulfilled in the life of Christ. When we come to the New Testament, there are over 300 references and/or prophecies concerning Christ's return. And many of those were spoken of by Christ the prophet himself. And we see, like in Luke 21, Jesus said, "Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away." And this follows hard on the heels of his description of his own return. So how can we believe the prophecies of Christ's return? One, we have historical proof and evidence that the Scripture is true and these prophecies do come to pass just as the prophets say, and secondly, we have his word on it.

**Question 6:**

**Is Jesus the prophet like Moses that was foretold in Deuteronomy chapter 18?**

As we think about the ways that Jesus fulfilled the office of prophet, one passage that helps us understand his role is Deuteronomy 18, where we're told that God would eventually raise up another prophet like Moses from among the people. Theologians commonly recognize that this prophecy referred to the future Messiah, whom we know to be Jesus. Is Jesus the prophet like Moses that was foretold in Deuteronomy 18?

**Dr. Peter Chow, translation**

In Deuteronomy 18, Moses foretold that God would raise up a prophet like himself and that the people should listen to this prophet. This is all closely related to the revival of God's kingdom. So who could this prophet be, the one who is raised up and will be like Moses? We must understand that Moses was not just a prophet but was the mediator of the covenant at Sinai. 1 Corinthians 10 mentions that when the Israelites crossed the Red Sea, they were baptized into Moses. So Moses was not just a prophet, but the mediator of the covenant. So, who is this prophet to be raised up that will be like Moses? Jesus Christ, the mediator of the new covenant. The prophecy

in Deuteronomy 18 that predicts that God will raise up a prophet like Moses points to Jesus Christ, who will bring God's kingdom.

**Dr. Glen Scorgie**

It's very interesting that we have in the Scriptures certain parallels drawn, sometimes explicitly, between Moses and the future Jesus. The significance of that, I think, is intriguing. Because at one level, the emphasis of the New Testament as it presents Jesus is that one greater than Moses is now present. And we could list some of the significant ways that Jesus Christ is greater than Moses. But all of that relative greatness is premised on certain affinities or similarities between Moses and Jesus, always keeping in mind that eventually, if you will, Jesus trumps Moses. But Moses is the quintessential mediator of the Law of God. And in some ways, you know, the Sermon on the Mount is the upgrade on the Mount of Sinai, where Jesus says, "You have heard it said...but now I say to you" — not in a way that discredits Moses but intensifies and deepens the wisdom that Moses was able to apprehend. Moses was the liberator, the one God used to bring a people in bondage into a promised land. And in a somewhat more spiritualized and profoundly more important way, Jesus is the new and greater Moses who delivers people from the multifaceted dimensions of bondage into the promised land of infinite grace and an eternal future. I'm sure there are many other similarities between the two, but the way the Messiah is presented in the gospel is always a matter of comparing and then upgrading with Jesus.

**Dr. Frank Barker**

Well, the connection between the prophet that God would raise up who would be like Moses in connection with Christ is, of course, that prophet would be the Lord Jesus Christ. And Moses was a type of the Lord Jesus Christ in one sense. Remember when God gave the Ten Commandments on Mount Sinai, the mountain thundered and shook and the people said, "Mmmm-oses, you go talk to him," and they sensed their need of a mediator. And God, in Deuteronomy 18, says, they have well said what they said, because they do need a mediator, and I will raise up the real mediator, a prophet like you, Moses. He will come and he will be the one who will be the true mediator. So Deuteronomy 18 really points to that.

**Question 7:**

**In the transfiguration, why did God only command the disciples to listen to Jesus?**

During his transfiguration, Jesus revealed his glory to some of his disciples, and both Moses and Elijah appeared and spoke with Jesus. But when Peter suggested making shelters for Jesus, Moses and Elijah, God responded by commanding the disciples to listen to Jesus; he didn't say anything about Moses and Elijah. Why didn't God mention these heroes of the faith? In the transfiguration, why did God only command the disciples to listen to Jesus?

**Dr. Stephen Wellum**

One of the unique events in Christ's life is his transfiguration. At the transfiguration it's as if for a moment the veil is pulled back and we see the glory of God the Son incarnate. It's very interesting there, when we think of the prophetic ministry of Christ, that Moses and Elijah meet with him. Moses and Elijah really stand as pinnacle prophets in the Old Testament. Moses, obviously, as the one where the whole prophetic line comes from him. Deuteronomy 18 anticipates a prophet like him. Elijah also serves a unique role where, as the later prophets come, he stands head and shoulders above the other prophets. And there's anticipation of an Elijah figure picked up in John the Baptist who will come. So that those two individuals who are there with Christ on the Mount, God the Father says, as important as those prophets are, those prophets serve the role of ultimately pointing forward to the coming of the Son. And now in the revelation that has come in Jesus Christ, God the Son incarnate, the summation of the prophets has come to pass. We are to listen to him and him alone, and in listening to him we are listening to the prophets. We are listening to that which the prophets ultimately spoke of and pointed forward to.

**Dr. Peter Chow, translation**

During the transfiguration God said, "This is my beloved Son, listen to him." But he did not say that they should listen to Moses or Elijah. Why? It's because Moses represents the Law and Elijah the prophets, and the Law and the prophets represent the revelation of God throughout the Old Testament. During the transfiguration, God's words meant that Jesus Christ is the one who fulfills all of the prophecies of the Old Testament Law and the prophets. Since Jesus is that fulfillment, Jesus is the one we are to listen to.

**Question 8:****How is God's revelation through Jesus superior to his revelation through other prophets?**

Throughout the Bible, prophets like Moses and Elijah revealed God's will in critically important ways. They reminded God's people of their covenant obligations, calling them to repentance, and delivering a message of hope in future redemption. The New Testament makes it clear that as a prophet, Jesus is superior to all the prophets that came before him. But in what way? If all prophets do essentially the same job, and all speak the words of God, why is Jesus better than the rest? How is God's revelation through Jesus superior to his revelation through other prophets?

**Dr. Vern Poythress**

How is God's revelation through Jesus superior to the prophets who came before? Hebrews 1 talks about that very superiority in saying, "Long ago, at many times and

in many ways, God spoke to our fathers by the prophets, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed the heir of all things, through whom also he created the world. He is the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of his nature.” What you’re seeing there is that the Son’s revelation is superior because of who he is, that he is God himself, that he perfectly reveals God. It’s also the culmination of those foreshadowing and prophecies that were there in the Old Testament. It is a final revelation. It is the definitive revelation that is the capstone of everything that came before.

#### **Dr. Simon Vibert**

The revelation of God through his Son Jesus is described variously, particularly in Hebrews 1, as being full, sufficient and final, that Jesus is God’s last word, and there is a sense in which Jesus in his incarnation not only came as a fully perfect human being, but he also came to reveal God, and therefore there is a sense which nobody else could have done what Jesus did. He’s not just another prophet, he is actually coming God in the flesh to show us what God is like, and therefore we encourage the readers of the Bible to see Jesus as God’s full and final revelation of himself.

#### **Dr. Gideon Umukoro**

Jesus is the prophet. We have other prophets who came to speak about him, but when he came we heard directly from the true and only prophet who has no flaw in his message. And the Scripture in Deuteronomy where Moses was talking about God raising another prophet from among us who is going to be greater than every other prophet that lived, that really came to my mind that his words are the final, and that is the authority that we have in the Word of God today. Any other prophet that comes to speak to us outside of this true prophet of God who came in his human form, I would say this prophecy could be subjective, but the whole truth and counsel of God has been spoken to us through Jesus Christ in his prophetic office.

#### **Dr. Glen Scorgie**

As prophet, Jesus reveals more than any of the previous prophets. Particularly, he reveals, with more clarity than any one of them achieved, the plan of redemption, and he also penetrated in his prophecies, his forth-telling of God’s truth, the profound ethical and spiritual dimensions of God’s holy expectations. He revealed the future with greater clarity than any one of them was able to do. But I think that the distinction, the real watershed difference between Christ as the prophet “par excellence” and all the faithful prophets of the past is hinted at the outset of the epistle to the Hebrews where we’re told that in many ways and in different times God spoke through the prophets. It was real prophecy, but now he has spoken to us through his Son, and it’s something about the unique identify of this prophet that’s key to understanding his superiority.

And I think it can be distilled to this — that of all the truth that we can acquire through investigation or through revelation, there are two kinds of knowledge that stand out as of paramount importance: knowledge of God and knowledge of who we really are. And in the God-man, Jesus Christ the prophet, we have the clearest



revelation ever, before or since, of what God is like. We look upon the face of Jesus and there we see God through a window like no other. Ever. And the great mystery is that in his full and complete identification with us, we also see in Jesus Christ what true restored humanity looks like. Not only is Jesus Christ the supreme and quintessential window of revelation into the true nature of God, but he is also, precisely because he has taken upon himself our complete and full humanity, he is the revelation to us of what we are destined to become. He is the prototype of the new humanity. He is in the present what we are destined to become when this defaced image of God in us is fully restored to its untarnished splendor. He points to our future through the grace of God. And so in the incarnate Christ, we have both the most profound insight into the true nature of God, and we see also in the face of Jesus our own destiny and future through the redeeming and glorifying grace of our Lord Jesus Christ.

**Dr. Carl Trueman**

God's revelation through Jesus is superior to his revelation through other prophets I think in two major ways. First of all, Jesus is the fulfillment of the Old Testament prophets. As he tells the disciples on the Emmaus road that these prophecies spoke of him and were fulfilled in him. Secondly, there is the fact that Jesus is God manifest in the flesh. Other prophecies pointed towards God. Jesus himself was the manifestation, the very revelation of God's inner being in the flesh.

**Dr. Brandon Crowe**

God's revelation to us through Jesus is superior to any other revelation that has come through the prophets in a number of ways. First, we see that Jesus teaches with an unparalleled authority. One of the remarkable things as you read through the Gospels is not just that the people were amazed at his authority when he healed someone or cast out a demon, but they were even amazed at the authority of his teaching. It was an authority that was unmediated; it was an authority that came from Jesus himself in a way that was unique among those who came before him. But we also see, secondly, that Jesus is superior in revelation because he's not simply teaching God's law; he's actually fulfilling God's law. He was born in the fullness of time and came to fulfill all righteousness. So, as Jesus is teaching about who God is, he is also fulfilling what God has been requiring of his people. A third way is Jesus is God incarnate. He is the one who has made God known in a way that no one before him could ever make God known in the same way, because as John tells us, he is himself in the Father's bosom and is himself the only begotten God. This Son of God, the only begotten God, is making God known in a way that no one else ever could in the same way that he gave us grace and truth in his teaching, in a way that not even Moses could do.

**Question 9:**

**Has Jesus made the Old Testament prophets irrelevant for Christians?**



**Scripture and theology ensure us that God’s revelation through Jesus is superior to his revelation through other prophets. But does that make the other prophets obsolete? Is there any benefit to reading their writings? Has Jesus made the Old Testament prophets irrelevant for Christians?**

**Dr. Glen Scorgie**

One of the roles that Jesus fulfilled in his incarnation, the Son fulfilled in his incarnation, was a prophetic role, and some people ask in what ways was Jesus as prophet superior to the Old Testament prophets? First of all, it’s important to clarify that he did not refute the antecedent prophets. His superiority was not a superiority of contradiction but of standing on their shoulders and going beyond what they had been able to perceive and faithfully communicate to the people of God.

**Dr. Guy Waters**

Well, it becomes clear in reading Hebrews and in the rest of the New Testament that Jesus has not displaced the prophets; Jesus is not coming along saying something different from what the prophets have said. Rather, the point that Hebrews is making, the point the New Testament writers make of the Old Testament is that Jesus is, on the one hand, the final word. He is the last in the succession of prophets, but he’s not simply one prophet among many. He is that prophet who brings all to fulfillment that to which all earlier prophecy, all earlier prophets were looking and anticipating, and he is God’s final and complete Word. So what that does is it enables us to go back and read those prophets rightly because we understand the trajectory, we understand the goal to which all of those prophets and their revelation was moving. And if you read on in the epistle to the Hebrews, you see in chapter after chapter examples of just that, how it was that God’s old covenant prophets were looking to Jesus Christ and their prophetic word was anticipating the final consummate word in Jesus Christ.

**Question 10:**

**Can we have a true appreciation for Jesus’ teachings without also appreciating the rest of Scripture?**

**Even unbelievers recognize that Jesus was an important teacher. In fact, there are many people throughout the world that say they’re happy with Jesus, but that they have problems accepting the rest of the Bible. Is this a legitimate approach to take? Can we have a true appreciation for Jesus’ teachings without also appreciating the rest of Scripture?**

**Dr. Peter Walker**

The words of Jesus Christ are so precious, and it’s absolutely vital that we should listen to those words. There are some Bibles who actually print the words of Jesus in red for that reason, to try and give them an extra level of importance. And in one sense, that’s good; the words of the Master are vital. But Jesus himself would say that

there's more teaching that we need to receive, and that the rest of the Scripture is vitally important. And he says this, actually, both about the Old Testament and about what will become, after him, the New Testament. With regard to the Old Testament, Jesus himself in Luke 24, the risen Jesus, takes the disciples there on the Emmaus road back through a Bible study of the Old Testament, and he shows them in all the Scriptures the things concerning himself. Now, that must mean that Jesus saw the Old Testament as important, as pointing to him. And it's almost as if he's saying, "Look, you may have the resurrection, my resurrection, that's marvelous, but don't think because you've now got me, you don't need the text, you don't need the background book. On the contrary, you need it all the more to understand me and to understand God's purposes for the world." So, we see Jesus affirming the Old Testament then and in many other instances — I mean, when he's tempted, he just keeps repeating, "It is written... It is written... It is written..." — this is the Master showing us that if he was submitted to Scripture, how much more do we his followers need to be? So that's the Old Testament.

And as for the New, well, obviously it isn't written at the time when Jesus is speaking, but in John's gospel, for example, he says, you know, the Spirit is given to lead you "into all truth." And he says, now look, I haven't been able to tell you everything you need to know, and there's more truth that needs to come, and that you need to receive and then pass on. So, I take it that that's actually effectively Jesus' commissioning his disciples, his apostles, to write truths about him, things which he couldn't convey at the time, and which wouldn't have been understood at the time. And if that's the case, then we do need the New Testament, because it's not just the words of Christ that are important, it's the words about Christ, and we need someone else other than Jesus to tell us who Jesus is. And that's what we have in the New Testament. The answer is, yes, we need the whole Scripture.

#### **Dr. Frank Thielman**

We know that Christ is the ultimate fulfillment of God's purposes. He's the very Word of God according to John 1, the explanation to us of who God is. And so it's understandable why people on a first glance might think that, well, the Old Testament now has been fulfilled. It's a big thick book. It's sort of complicated. Do we really need to pay attention to it? But it's absolutely critical that we read the whole Bible. Not just the New Testament and not just the words of Jesus. Because the whole Bible is God's revelation of himself to us, and there are many wonderful elements of God's character that are revealed to us in the Old Testament. We can't really even understand who Jesus is apart from the Old Testament because Jesus is the Christ; he is Jesus Christ. And we can't understand what it means for him to be Christ, or the anointed King, unless we read the Old Testament. Psalm 2 is a very good example of that where God's anointed King is said to be given victory by God, and we know from what the New Testament says that that Psalm is fulfilled in Christ.

Another really important reason, which would be enough apart from anything else, is that what we call the Old Testament was the Bible of the first Christians. What we call the Old Testament was Jesus's own Bible. He considered it God's authoritative

Word and God's Scriptures. Paul considers the Old Testament to be God's Word. And so, in the very well-known verse, 1 Timothy 3:16, where Paul tells Timothy that all Scripture is inspired by God, since there was at that time no written New Testament, he was referring to the Old Testament. Now we correctly believe that that principle in that verse can be extended to cover the New Testament and that it, too, is inspired by God and is the fulfillment of the Old, but its very first reference is to the Old Testament itself. So, if we want to be New Testament Christians, we've got to read, understand, explain, exegete, and preach the Old Testament.

**Dr. Simon Vibert**

Obviously when we read the New Testament accounts they take us straight to Jesus and his full and final work, but in the anticipation of Christ's coming, we learn much about the sacrificial system, the way in which God's design for kingship in the kingdom brought about in anticipation of Christ's coming, and so Christians are now able to go back now and read the Old Testament through the eyes of Christ's coming and to gain greater understanding of the way in which God was preparing for his Son to come into the world and to do the work that he did. And, therefore, Christians are encouraged to read the whole of the Bible, but to actually to see Christ as the key for unlocking the meaning not only of the New Testament but also the Old as well.

**Question 11:**

**What is the relationship between the Old Testament and New Testament?**

**In his role as prophet, Jesus commissioned his apostles and prophets to write additional Scriptures, which we call the New Testament. So, now that we have the New Testament, how are we supposed to use the Old Testament? Is it just a historical record? Does it still apply to our lives? Does it work together with the New Testament in some way? What is the relationship between the Old Testament and the New Testament?**

**Dr. Peter Chow, translation**

The whole Bible is the revelation of God. Without the Old Testament it's very difficult for us to understand the New Testament. The New Testament is the fulfillment of the Old Testament, but the Old Testament forms the premise of the New. Without the Old Testament, we'd be hard-pressed to know what the New Testament is talking about when it discusses fulfillment. We can put it this way: the Bible is very long, and not every phrase can be applied in the same way. Some passages of the New Testament may have more direct application to our lives today than those in the Old Testament, but we can't go without it, because without the Old Testament we can't fully understand the New Testament.

**Dr. Frank Thielman**

The Old Testament tells a story that is incomplete without the New Testament. And the New Testament tells a story that cannot be fully understood without what we read in the Old Testament. The story begins with God's creation of humanity, and the story continues with human sin and rebellion against God. And then the story continues with Israel and God's work through Israel to, among his people, to give them his laws and to have them be a witness for who he is to all of creation. Israel wasn't faithful in that task, but the record of how God gave them that task is a very important element in understanding who Jesus is. Well then, Jesus comes, and the New Testament shows us how he fulfilled the task that Israel really failed to fulfill. And in fulfilling that task, he not only called Israel to repentance but all of humanity. And so, in the end of the story — and we're not there yet, but we're told what it's going to be — in the end of the story, God restores humanity to what he intended for it to be in the beginning. We can't really understand that whole story, and Christ's absolutely central and critical role in it, apart from knowing the Old Testament as well. So, the Law, the prophets, the writings, they're all important.

### **Question 12:**

#### **Why did Jesus' gospel message focus on repentance and the kingdom of God?**

**When modern Christians proclaim the gospel, we often emphasize things like Jesus' identity, the forgiveness of sins, and God's free offer of eternal life. But in his role as prophet, Jesus tended to summarize the gospel by saying things like "Repent, for the kingdom of God is at hand." Why did Jesus' gospel message focus on repentance and the kingdom of God?**

#### **Dr. Stephen Wellum**

A lot wrestle with the relationship between the gospel. We have a summary of it maybe, say in 1 Corinthians 15 that Christ has come; he has died according to the Scriptures for our sins; he was buried; he was raised again for our salvation — and then the announcement of the kingdom. Sometimes people set these over against each other, as if there's a kingdom message and a kind of gospel message, even so much where they would say that the announcement of the kingdom and Jesus' earthly life doesn't really give us a message of the cross, a message of his atonement, and atoning work for our salvation. This is not a correct way of putting it together. The message of the kingdom is intimately tied to the gospel message of death, burial and resurrection. The kingdom must be understood in terms of the Old Testament. All the way back with Adam's fall into sin, plunging the human race into depravity, affecting all of creation, you have the promise of God that he will bring his saving rule and reign to this world. That's worked out in a whole host of ways in the Old Testament, primarily in the coming of the Lord himself through the Davidic king, these great messianic themes. Christ is the one who is the Lord, who is the King. He is the one

who ushers in that saving reign. He ushers in that saving reign by not only his incarnation and his life, and putting to flight his enemies, you think of Satan and his powers, but he does so ultimately in consummation on the cross, in his resurrection. The problem of sin is a relationship with God, and all of its effects upon the human race. Sin has to be dealt with before God. And so the inauguration of the kingdom takes us to the cross, demonstrated then that he has won victory over sin, he has paid our price before God's righteous requirements, resurrection now has taken place, and the gospel message of death, burial, and resurrection is the very inauguration of that kingdom that is here and then will be consummated in the end. So the relationship between the two is intimately put together in the Scriptures.

**Dr. Stephen Chan, translation**

“The kingdom of heaven is near. Repent and believe the good news!” This kingdom is the authority of God. When the authority of God comes, the only attitude people should have is that of repentance, turning their hearts around completely from that of self-centered treason and rebellion against God to being God-centered and obedient to him. Repentance is not just a feeling of remorse for one's sins, but a positive turning towards God, living a new life through God's grace, a complete turnaround, renewal, and changing of the will that produces a holy, sanctified life. Repentance isn't just remorse or regret, but a renewal.

**Question 13:**

**Should Christians regularly confess and repent of our sins?**

**The 16th-century Reformer Martin Luther famously taught that repentance isn't just necessary as a means of obtaining salvation when we first come to faith. He insisted that repentance is also necessary because it helps us live continually in our restored relationship with God. But was he right? Do we really need to keep repenting of our sins if we've already trusted in Christ? Should Christians regularly confess and repent of our sins?**

**Dr. Stephen Wellum**

Yes, the question of repentance and confession of our sin is very, very important for us, especially in relation to Christ's work as prophet. We normally think of these things in terms of his priestly work, but when we think of it in terms of his prophetic work — from the Old Testament God speaks of his coming salvation as well as coming judgment — so that we are to align ourselves with his kingdom, to align ourselves with what he is doing in the world. Repentance at its heart is changing our mind. Confession, sometimes we think of it as agreeing with God, that what he is doing is exactly right. So that when we think of his prophetic work — Christ has come, he has fulfilled the prophecies, he has brought his kingdom to pass yet it still awaits its culmination. We as Christians, we enter into that kingdom, but we need to constantly be reevaluating in terms of our priorities, repenting of not following him as

we ought, making sure that we are faithfully seeking to live out our lives in conformity to his will, agreeing with him in terms of his values, what the kingdom is all about. So, there's a constant need for repentance, confession, coming to him as our prophet, as well as priest, as well as King, the one that we then seek to follow and serve in such a way where we carry out his purposes for us in this world.

**Dr. Peter Chow, translation**

Repentance and confession are very important because we need to keep a clean conscience before God. We must become clean vessels, suitable for God. Not only that, but when we have guilty consciences, God will discipline us, and that can be difficult and painful. So, don't ask for trouble, but hurry before the cross. Confess and repent of your sins so that you can be covered by the precious blood of the Lord. That way we can experience the peace and joy of life and become precious vessels, useful to the Lord.

**Dr. Simon Vibert**

In our worship services we're encouraged to begin by repenting of our sins, and that's not because we think we need to become Christians all over again, but there is a sense in which in becoming a Christian, you believe for the first time, the direction of your life changes, but repentance means change of mind leading to change of conduct, and in a sense we regularly need to do that because all of us continue to be sinful and all of us need to continue to repent of our sins. So, ongoingly we say sorry to God for our sins as we repent daily of the things that we do wrong.

### **Question 14:**

#### **How can believers stay motivated to be faithful to God and avoid sin?**

**Jesus, God's ultimate prophet, calls us to repentance and continuing obedience, so that we can enjoy the benefits of his kingdom. But sometimes being faithful to God actually makes life more difficult. And that can make it hard to get excited about living in ways that please our Lord. So, practically speaking, how can believers stay motivated to be faithful to God and avoid sin?**

**Dr. Dan Doriani**

God says that we should be motivated by love and fear. Not quivering, quailing, servile fear, fear of a beating and punishment. But there is a godly fear, you know, fear the Lord and do what is right. We should have an awe, a reverence of God that doesn't want to let down someone whom we greatly respect. We would not want to let down a beloved father, or grandfather, or leader of our people. We'd be afraid of letting them down. There's a godly fear of failing or disappointing God whom we love. But then that's the main motive, isn't it? That we should do what is right out of love for God, out of the conviction that he is a worthy object of our service, and that when we love him, by obeying him, we'll also love our neighbor. After all, what does

the law command? What's the essence of the law? Love the Lord your God, heart, soul, mind and strength, and love your neighbor as yourself.

If I press a little bit further, let me imagine a scenario in which three people are standing in front of a crowd, and they're all runners and they're being interviewed, and the interviewer says, "Tell me, sir, why do you run?" The first person says, "I run because my father had a heart attack at the age of 53, and I'm currently 52, and you know, I want to live a good, ripe life, I want to see my children get married, I want to see my grandchildren get married. That's why I run." Okay, number two, "Sir, why do you run?" The second man says, "I run because I like to eat sweets, and if I run enough I can eat whatever I want. And besides that, I sleep better at night if I run just about every day." A third person: "Why do you run?" He says, "I run because when I run, I feel alive. I run because I love to feel my heart pounding in my chest like slow heavy thunder. I run because I want to feel the ground soaring under my feet, the wind blowing through my hair. That's why I run." Now I ask you, which one of these three men loves to run? The second man loves to eat whatever he wants. The first man loves his own life. The third man really loves running. He loves it for its own sake. And I think that's what God wants. I mean, there are benefits from obeying God, to be sure. We do live a longer life, life is better, but ideally, we obey God because we love him. And that's what keeps us going even when those benefits aren't so obvious.

#### **Dr. Simon Vibert**

The motivation to live the Christian life and to avoid sin is spoken of in various ways in the New Testament. I think primarily, the motivation is that heaven is ahead, and that heaven will be perfect. We will no longer struggle with sin. We will look forward to seeing our Lord face to face. And there is a sense in which each one of us has a sense of homesickness for heaven because that's our true home and where we belong. And the motivation for living the Christian life is partly out of sheer gratitude for all that Christ has done for us on the cross, but there is also a forward look, an expectation, that God will provide all the resources that we need to live lives that are pleasing to God and that are honoring, and we continue to draw upon those resources until he finally takes us home.

#### **Dr. Peter Chow, translation**

Traditionally, the so-called "means of grace" are useful: God's Word, which we are to read often; Communion, so we remember the Lord; we also need to pray often and have fellowship in the Lord. Besides the means of grace, I'd also like to emphasize that we must have a heart of thankfulness. The Gospel of Luke speaks of a woman who came to Jesus when he was a guest at the house of a Pharisee. When her tears wet Jesus' feet, she used her hair to wipe them, and then anointed them with oil. She did this because Jesus told her that her sins were forgiven. And because she had been forgiven much, she loved much. So, for us to be able to serve the Lord wholeheartedly, we need to love him, and we need a thankful heart. We need to see how serious our sins are and see how dark and frightening our hearts are, and how much we need the Holy Spirit's illumination. When we see the depths of our

depravity, we can then understand and comprehend how great God's grace is, and because we have been forgiven much, love much. This heart of thankfulness should be the motivation for our lifelong service.

**Throughout the Bible, God's prophets were his ambassadors. Their ministries were designed to maintain God's relationship with his people, so that the people would receive God's blessings. And in his office of prophet, Jesus fulfills this same function. He came as the greatest revelation of God's being and of God's will. He brought God's kingdom message of judgment and salvation. And he has continued to minister to the church in these same ways – exhorting us to faithfulness, so that we can enjoy abundant life in this world, and everlasting rewards in the world to come.**



## Contributors

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