

# He Gave Us Prophets

Lesson 1

Essential Hermeneutical  
Perspectives

Lesson Guide



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Our goal is to offer free Christian education to hundreds of thousands of pastors and Christian leaders around the world who lack sufficient training for ministry. We are meeting this goal by producing and globally distributing an unparalleled multimedia seminary curriculum in English, Arabic, Mandarin, Russian, and Spanish. Our curriculum is also being translated into more than a dozen other languages through our partner ministries. The curriculum consists of graphic-driven videos, printed instruction, and internet resources. It is designed to be used by schools, groups, and individuals, both online and in learning communities.

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## HOW TO USE THIS LESSON GUIDE

This lesson guide is designed for use in conjunction with the associated video. If you do not have access to the video, the lesson guide will also work with the audio and/or manuscript versions of the lesson. Additionally, the video and lesson guide are intended to be used in a learning community, but they also can be used for individual study if necessary.

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- **Before you watch the lesson**
  - **Prepare** — Complete any recommended readings.
  - **Schedule viewing** — The Notes section of the lesson guide has been divided into segments that correspond to the video. Using the time codes found in parentheses beside each major division, determine where to begin and end your viewing session. IIM lessons are densely packed with information, so you may also want to schedule breaks. Breaks should be scheduled at major divisions.
- **While you are watching the lesson**
  - **Take notes** — The Notes section of the lesson guide contains a basic outline of the lesson, including the time codes for the beginning of each segment and key notes to guide you through the information. Many of the main ideas are already summarized, but make sure to supplement these with your own notes. You should also add supporting details that will help you to remember, describe, and defend the main ideas.
  - **Record comments and questions** — As you watch the video, you may have comments and/or questions on what you are learning. Use the margins to record your comments and questions so that you can share these with the group following the viewing session.
  - **Pause/replay portions of the lesson** — You may find it helpful to pause or replay the video at certain points in order to write additional notes, review difficult concepts, or discuss points of interest.
- **After you watch the lesson**
  - **Complete Review Questions** — Review Questions are based on the basic content of the lesson. You should answer Review Questions in the space provided. These questions should be completed individually rather than in a group.
  - **Answer/discuss Application Questions** — Application Questions are questions relating the content of the lesson to Christian living, theology, and ministry. Application questions are appropriate for written assignments or as topics for group discussions. For written assignments, it is recommended that answers not exceed one page in length.

## Notes

### **I. Introduction (0:24)**

### **II. Our Confusion (2:02)**

Pastors and other Christian leaders tend to avoid careful explanations about Old Testament prophets because they're so confused about this part of the Bible.

#### **A. Sources of Confusion (2:59)**

##### **1. Prophetic Books (3:18)**

The books of prophecy in Scripture are probably the most difficult parts of the Bible to grasp.

The kings, nations, wars and other events are so complex that we have a hard time keeping our bearings.

**2. The Church (4:17)**

When it comes to interpreting Old Testament prophecy, there is hardly any harmony at all, only disagreements.

**B. Results of Confusion (5:16)****1. Victimization (5:27)**

There's so much disagreement and confusion that so-called prophecy experts rise to bring order to the confusion.

Christians are easily victimized by so-called experts.

**2. Apathy (7:19)**

Many Christians seem to go through phases in their approach to prophecy. First, with a lot of enthusiasm.

Believers find themselves in a crisis.

In many cases, Christians give up trying to understand this part of the Bible.

We need to learn about Old Testament prophecy so that:

- We will not be victimized by every wind of doctrine
- We can avoid apathy.

### **III. Prophet's Experience (10:10)**

There are at least three common misconceptions about the experiences of prophets.

#### **A. Mental State (10:54)**

Many act as if prophets were practically out of their minds when they received their prophecies.

Some mistakenly think that biblical prophets went into a state of feverish delirium, much like Canaanite prophets of Baal, and other religions of the ancient and modern world.

**B. Inspiration (12:04)**

**1. Mechanical Inspiration (12:14)**

Prophets were not passive instruments of revelation. They were not mere mechanical mouthpieces of God.

**2. Organic Inspiration (12:47)**

The Holy Spirit inspired the writings of prophets so that they have no errors.

God used the personalities, thoughts, backgrounds and outlooks of human writers.



**C. Comprehension (13:51)**

Prophets understood much of what they said.

Commonly misinterpreted passages about prophetic understanding:

- Daniel 12:8

Daniel understood what he had heard and written. He knew the vocabulary and grammar. But he didn't understand precisely how the prophecy would be fulfilled.

- 1 Peter 1:11

Old Testament prophets remained ignorant of the details of timing and circumstances. But they still comprehended much of what they were saying.

#### **IV. Original Meaning (16:16)**

- We must first discover the original meaning of a passage, and then submit ourselves to the authority of that original meaning.
  
- With Old Testament prophecy, we forget this basic hermeneutical principle.

#### **A. Popular Exegesis (16:59)**

##### **1. Atomistic (17:23)**

It's very typical for Christians to read the prophets as collections of loosely connected predictions.

Most Evangelicals don't concern themselves with the historical context of prophets.

Christians tend to look at what is happening in the world around us today and we seek to fill the empty canisters of prophecy with current, historical events.

**2. Ahistorical (17:56)**

Reading without a concern for the historical context of the writer and audience.

**B. Proper Exegesis (19:43)**

- We have to apply the basic principles of interpretation that we use in other parts of the Bible.
- The original meaning of prophecy is to be discovered through grammatico-historical exegesis.

**1. Literary Context (20:23)**

We have to learn how to handle large sections of material, verses and chapters, sections of books, even whole books of prophecy.

**2. Historical Context (21:38)**

Proper exegesis includes reading prophecies within their historical context.

**V. New Testament Perspectives (23:20)****A. Authority (23:50)**

Jesus and the apostles were fully convinced of the authority of Old Testament prophets.

**1. Prophetic Scriptures (24:05)**

Jesus and his apostles affirmed their submission to the sacred Scriptures of the prophets.

**2. Prophetic Intentions (24:58)**

Jesus and his apostles were submissive to the original intentions of the prophets as well.

New Testament writers did not have a God-given right to interpret the Old Testament any way they wanted.

- Acts 2:29-31
  - Peter did not read Christian ideas into Psalm 16.
  - He interpreted David's prophetic words in the light of David's experience and David's intentions.
  
- John 12:39-40
  - John did not take Isaiah's prophecy in a way that was convenient for his own goals.
  - He sought to submit himself to the organically inspired intentions of the prophet.

## **B. Application (28:01)**

Christ and his followers were committed to applying the prophetic word to the dramatic events that were happening in their day.

### **1. Prophetic Expectations (28:33)**

The prophets looked forward to a time when God would restore his people and make all things new.

God would intervene in the world and bring all things to their final end.

## **2. Prophetic Fulfillments (29:30)**

The New Testament saw the fulfillment of Old Testament prophetic expectations in Christ.

Jesus insisted that the interpretation of the prophecies must be centered around him.

Old Testament prophets set a trajectory of hope, a direction of expectation. The New Testament traces this trajectory to its fulfillment in:

- the first coming of Christ
- his kingdom today
- the end of the world when Jesus returns in glory

Followers of Christ must also learn how to apply the expectations of Old Testament prophecy to:

- the first coming of Christ
- the continuation of his kingdom
- the second coming of Christ

## **VI. Conclusion (32:40)**





3. What was the true mental state of the Old Testament prophets?

4. Contrast the two outlooks on prophetic inspiration mentioned in the lesson.

5. Describe the level of understanding that prophets had regarding their own prophecies.

6. Contrast the two approaches to exegesis mentioned in the lesson.

7. What are the two characteristics of proper exegesis?

8. How does popular exegesis hinder us as we seek to understand the original meaning of prophecy? How does proper exegesis help us?

9. How did Jesus and the apostles affirm the authority of Old Testament prophets?

10. How did Jesus and his followers apply Old Testament prophecies to events happening in their day?

## Application Questions

1. Describe the problems that might be created in a church that experienced the types of confusion mentioned in the lesson.
2. What are some improper responses to this confusion? What is the proper way to respond to this confusion?
3. Using an Old Testament prophecy as an example, explain how popular exegesis of that prophecy can lead to misunderstanding and problems, and how proper exegesis can lead to understanding and useful application.
4. In light of the importance of original meaning, what process should we follow in order to apply Old Testament prophecy to events in our day?
5. What is the most significant insight you have learned from this study? Why?

## Glossary

**ahistorical** – Unconcerned with the historical context

**amillennialism** – View of eschatology that teaches that the millennium is figurative and refers to the entire time between the first and second comings of Christ; during this time, Christ reigns from heaven and through his earthly church, and Christians experience both tribulation and blessings; Christ will return only after the millennium is over to crush Satan's rebellion and execute the last judgment before ushering in the final state in the new heavens and new earth

**Amos** – Prophet who ministered from around 760-750 B.C. when Uzziah was king of Judah and Jeroboam was king of Israel

**apocalypse, the** – Term used for the final destruction of the earth as described in the book of Revelation

**atomistic** – Consisting of many unrelated or loosely connected parts

**consummation** – Third and final stage of inaugurated eschatology when Christ will return and fulfill God's ultimate purpose for all of history

**continuation** – Second or middle stage of inaugurated eschatology; the period of the kingdom of God after Christ's first advent but before the final victory

**dispensationalism** – A theological system that teaches that biblical history is best understood in light of successive administrations of God's dealings with mankind called "dispensations"; maintains fundamental distinctions between God's plans for national Israel and for the New Testament church and emphasizes a pre-tribulation rapture of the church prior to Christ's second coming

**exegesis** – From a Greek term meaning "led out of" or "derived from"; the process of drawing out the proper interpretation of a passage of Scripture

**grammatico-historical method** – A method of hermeneutics which investigates the Scriptures in their original languages and in view of their original contexts

**hermeneutics** – The study of interpreting the meaning and significance of Scripture

**inauguration** – First stage in inaugurated eschatology; refers to Christ's first coming and the ministries of his apostles and prophets

**Isaiah** – Prophet from Judah who ministered from approximately 740-701 B.C. during the reigns of Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah

**mechanical inspiration** – View of inspiration that asserts that the Holy Spirit essentially dictated the Bible, and human writers passively recorded what he said

**organic inspiration** – View of inspiration that asserts that the Holy Spirit used the personalities, experiences, outlooks, and intentions of human authors as he authoritatively and infallibly guided their writing

**Pentateuch** – First five books of the Old Testament

**postmillennialism** – View of eschatology that teaches that Jesus will reign from heaven during the millennium; in this view, the millennium is not literally a thousand years, but a period of church expansion and gospel growth that prepares the earth for Christ's return; at the end of the millennium, Christ will return and crush Satan's rebellion, then he will execute the last judgment and usher in the final state in the new heavens and new earth

**premillennialism** – View of eschatology that teaches that Jesus will return before the millennium and physically reign for a thousand years on the earth

**prophecy** – Divinely-inspired proclamation or revelation

**prophet** – God's emissary who proclaims and applies God's word, especially to warn of judgment against sin and to encourage loyal service to God that leads to blessings

**rapture** – Primarily a dispensational term referring to an eschatological event in which believers will be caught up in the air with Christ

**tribulation** – A period of deep distress and hardship during the "last days"