



# VARIOUS GENRES OF OLD TESTAMENT BOOKS

## Narratives



Narrative books are true stories recorded in the Bible. These books include characters, plots, and settings.

*Books: Genesis, Exodus, Numbers, Joshua, Judges, Ruth, 1 & 2 Samuel, 1 & 2 Kings, 1&2 Chronicles, Ezra, Nehemiah, Esther, Job, and many of the prophets.*



## Laws



There are over 600 laws in the first 5 books of the Old Testament. Many people skip over these passages since most of the laws seem odd and outdated, but they are still God's Word and are valuable to us.

*Books: Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy*



## Wisdom



The wisdom books offer instructions to developing a godly life. These books do not offer much *universal* truth but they do offer wise advice for godly living.

*Books: Job, Psalms, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Song of Songs*



## Prophecies



There are 2 divisions of prophets in the Old Testament: major prophets and minor prophets.

*Books: Major Prophets (Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Daniel) and Minor Prophets (Lamentations, Hosea, Joel, Amos, Obadiah, Jonah, Micah, Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah, Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi)*



# WARNINGS BEFORE STUDYING: OLD TESTAMENT NARRATIVES



## Do NOT...

### Blindly imitate

God does not approve of everything recorded in the Bible. The Old Testament narratives record *some* events and actions that should not be imitated. David, Samson, Gideon, Samuel, and Moses are among a few of the strong figures in Israel's history who had flaws and sinned against God.<sup>1</sup>

### Find hidden meanings

Many people ignore the obvious and clear interpretation of Old Testament narratives in exchange for a hidden message. These accounts are historical and factual, they are not merely stories with spiritual meanings so this form of interpretation is incorrect.

### Personalize

Some readers relate every story in the Bible back to them. An example of this is reading about Moses' fear of public speaking and interpreting the passage to mean "I need to be more bold when speaking in public". This is a self-centered form of Bible study and it is to be avoided.

### Moralize

People who study narratives this way tend to ask "what is the moral of the story?" Gordon Fee and Douglas Stuart write, "The fallacy of this approach is that it ignores the fact that the narratives were written to show the progress of God's history of redemption, not to illustrate principles."<sup>2</sup>

### Take passages out of context

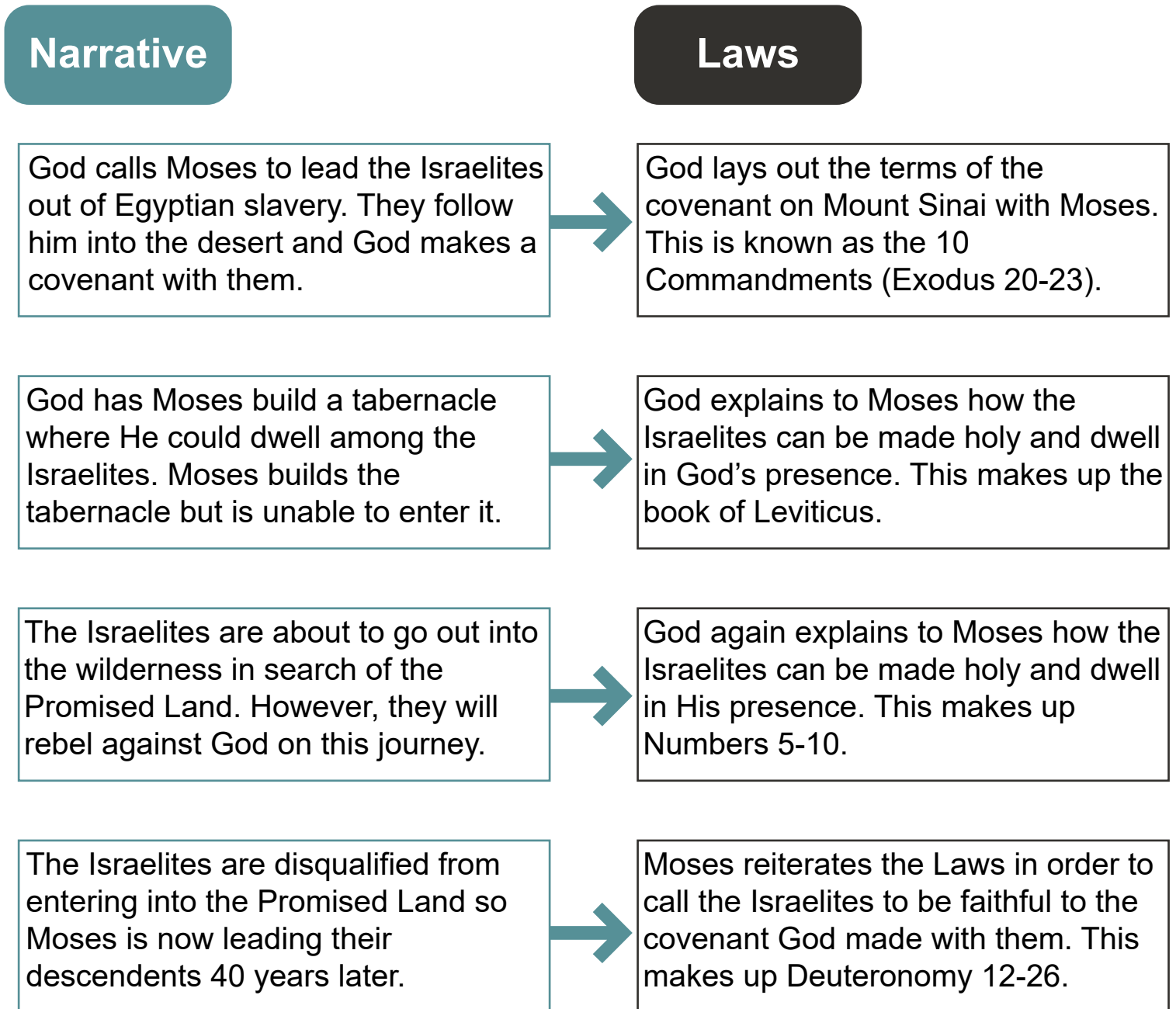
Readers of the Old Testament narratives need to read each verse with the rest of the story, book, and Bible in mind. Many readers twist verses and passages to mean something other than the intended message.



# HOW TO STUDY: LAWS



The Old Testament Laws are an important part of the surrounding narratives. The laws in Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy are essential components of the historical accounts of God's chosen people: the Israelites.





# HOW TO STUDY: LAWS

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## Context

What happened before the laws were given?  
What will happen after the laws are given?  
What were the practices of the surrounding nations at that time?

## Background

Why did God include these laws in His covenant with Israel?  
What did these laws mean to the Israelites?

## Understanding Old Testament Laws

How do these laws relate to God's holiness and man's sinfulness?  
How do these laws relate to Jesus' payment on the cross?

## Miscellaneous

Is the law referenced elsewhere in the Bible?  
Was a sacrifice required if the law was disobeyed?

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## What do these laws mean?

Some laws are straightforward and logical:  
*love your neighbor*  
*do not commit adultery*  
Others are dismissed by Christians:  
*do not get a tattoo*  
*do not wear clothing of 2 kinds of material*  
And some are just plain weird:  
*do not cook a goat in its mother's milk*  
*do not cut the hair at the sides of your head*

Many of the laws that seem strange to us simply require us to understand the cultures that the Israelites were surrounded by. For example, some of the laws that God gave Israel were meant to protect them from adopting the practices of the Canaanites. Laws restricting the Israelites from planting different seeds together or wearing clothing of different material was a reminder that they were to be set apart from other cultures.

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## What spiritual truths can be discerned from these laws?

The Old Testament laws reveal a lot about God, man, sin, and atonement. Even though most of the laws seem strange to us, learning why God gave the Israelites these laws should clear up our confusion. Even the laws that are no longer applicable to us reveal spiritual truth.

## Does the New Testament add to or modify these laws?

The Old Testament laws are a result of God's covenant with Israel. Since we are under a different covenant (the New Covenant) the Old Testament laws no longer apply to us. Some of the laws are put in place in the New Covenant (restated in the New Testament) and therefore apply to us, but unless an Old Testament law is affirmed in the New Testament it is no longer binding to Christians.

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## How can I apply the spiritual truths to my life?

Everyone will apply spiritual truth differently. Here are some examples of common spiritual truth found in the Old Testament laws and how we might apply it to our daily life:

### Spiritual Truth

### Possible Forms of Application

God is holy  I need to worship God by \_\_\_\_\_

God requires His followers to be holy  I need to refrain from \_\_\_\_\_ which is unholy

Blood is required to atone for sin  I need to accept Jesus' payment on the cross

Sin separates man from God  I need to share the gospel with the lost



# HOW TO STUDY: WISDOM



## Job

The book of Job records the events of a righteous man who suffered great loss and then discussed his pain with 3 of his friends. This book needs to be read as a whole because (1) it tells a story and (2) some of the verses are taken out of context. Job's friends are trying to explain why Job is experiencing these trials but they make some untrue statements throughout their interactions. Many Christians take verses out of context by forgetting that God rebukes the friends at the end.



## Psalms

The book of Psalms is comprised of 150 poems which praise God and/or cry out to God. The purpose of the Psalms is to "give us inspired models of how to talk and sing to God."<sup>3</sup> The Psalms are broken down into 5 sections or "books". Some of the major themes of the Psalms are the Messiah's future reign; the call to obedience of God's covenant; the holiness, justice, majesty, and glory of God; trusting God; and relying on God for strength and perseverance.



## Proverbs

The book of Proverbs does not tell a story, rather it shares short statements of wisdom. Most of the proverbs are merely 2 lines long in order to be quick, catchy, and memorable. The Proverbs do not always represent timeless truths. For example: Proverbs 15:22 reads, "Plans fail for lack of counsel, but with many advisers they succeed." This does not mean that whenever we have someone advise us our plans will be successful, instead it is a wise practice to have mentors who advise us.



## Ecclesiastes

Ecclesiastes is a search for the meaning of life. The teacher, who is introduced at the beginning of the book, looks for the meaning of life in wisdom, pleasure, work, advancement, and wealth. All of these things leave him feeling empty and unfulfilled. The author of Ecclesiastes concludes at the end of the book that the purpose of life is to fear God, keep His commandments, and anticipate God's coming judgment (12:13-14).



## Song of Songs (Song of Solomon)

Song of Songs is a collection of love poems between a man (called "lover") and a woman (called "beloved"). The man and woman describe each other's beauty and their love for one another. The woman also shares some dreams she has of her lover. This book is sometimes interpreted as symbolic, however it probably should be interpreted as it appears: a collection of love poems which show how important intimacy and love are in a marriage.



# HOW TO STUDY: WISDOM

	observe	interpret	discern	apply
J o b	Who is speaking? What does God say about each person at the end? How does that change the meaning and interpretation of their words and arguments?	How does this passage fit into the overall story of Job? What does this story mean? How did Job and his friends misunderstand how God uses evil in our lives?	What spiritual truths are present in this passage? Does the New Testament add to this passage's teaching? What can we learn about God based on this book?	How will I respond to pain and suffering based on the spiritual truths presented in this book? How will I interact with people who are experiencing pain and suffering?
P r o v e r b s	What stands out in this proverb? Who is this proverb directed to? (young men, married women, etc) What is the imagery being used?	What did this proverb mean to the original audience? What does this proverb mean?	What spiritual truths are present in this proverb? Does the New Testament add to this passage's teaching? <i>NOTE: Remember that most of the proverbs are not timeless truth but "guidelines to develop character and to help with life's choices."<sup>4</sup></i>	Who will I become as a result of this proverb? How will I modify my character? How can I implement this wise practice into my life?
E c c l e s i a s t e s	What literary styles are present? What is the text saying? Does anything, apart from God, add meaning to life?	What do these phrases and illustrations mean? How does the teacher's failure to acknowledge an afterlife impact the passage?	Does anything, apart from God, add meaning to life? What are the shortcomings of wisdom? What does the New Testament add to this passage (look at James in particular)?	How will the fact that everything is meaningless outside of your relationship with Jesus affect you? How should you prioritize your passion, time, resources, and energy as a result of this book?
S o n g s o f	What are the images the lovers use of one another? What is the text saying? How is the book broken down?	How does this book model how a husband and wife should love one another? What does the imagery the lovers use actually mean?	At first, spiritual truths seem absent from this book, however there is at least one primary and overarching truth throughout the book: A godly life, of those that are married, involves passionate love for one's spouse.	How will I love my spouse as a result of this book? How else will I apply the truths and teachings of this book to my life?



# HOW TO STUDY: PSALMS

## Types of Psalms

### •Grief / Lament

Many of the Psalms are poems of distress. These Psalms give many people encouragement during difficult times.

### •Praise

These Psalms praise God for His goodness, faithfulness, power, justice, provision, holiness, love, mercy, and more.

### •Celebration

Some Psalms were written to celebrate God's covenants with Israel.

### •Thankfulness

These Psalms thank God for what He has done either for the individual or for a group of people.

### •Assurance

There are a few Psalms which were written to reveal the psalmist's trust in God's provision.

### •Wisdom

There are a few Psalms which read like a Proverb. These Psalms offer the reader sayings of wisdom.

### •Historical

Some Psalms recount what God has done to deliver Israel from their various trials.

## Literary Styles of Psalms

### Imagery

The Psalms create an image in the minds of its readers. Vivid descriptions and figures of speech help paint a picture through words.

### Simile and Metaphor

Similes compare 2 things using the words "like" or "as" while metaphors compare 2 things without using those words.

### Acrostic

Some Psalms, in the original Hebrew language, are acrostic. The 1st line begins with the 1st letter in the alphabet, the 2nd line begins with the 2nd letter, and so on.<sup>5</sup>

### Succinctness

Many of the Psalms use short phrases to get the point across quickly and in a memorable way (similar to that of Proverbs).

### Parallelism

Multiple lines form a single thought rather than a sentence. It is important to read line by line rather than sentence by sentence. Usually 2 lines form 1 thought. Typically the lines will relate to each other in one of the following ways: (1) the lines will essentially state the same thing in slightly different ways (96:1), (2) the lines will build off of each other (102:27), (3) the lines will contrast or differ from one another (55:23), or (4) the lines will finish an idea with an image (36:7).

## Psalms

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Take each grouping of verses that are parallel with one another (see above description) and find the main point of that group of verses. We can then take all of the main points and provide a summary of the Psalm, answering the question: "What does this passage say?"

Other observations to make include: the background of the Psalm (author, events that caused the Psalm to be written, etc) and the literary styles used in the Psalm (imagery, simile, metaphor, etc).

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The next question is "what does this passage mean?" We need to interpret through the lens of those who first received the Psalm. Remember, we are not the original audience of the Bible. Emotion drives the poetic nature of the Psalms whereas logic drives the letters in the New Testament. Images are central to the Psalms whereas rational arguments are central to the New Testament letters. Again, we can interpret each group of verses individually and then bring it together to get the big picture.

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The following question would be "what spiritual truths are present in the Psalm?" We first look to see if the spiritual truth is added to, affirmed, or modified in the New Testament before going any further. Spiritual truths are timeless, transcend culture, are in-line with the rest of the Bible, and are clearly present in the text.

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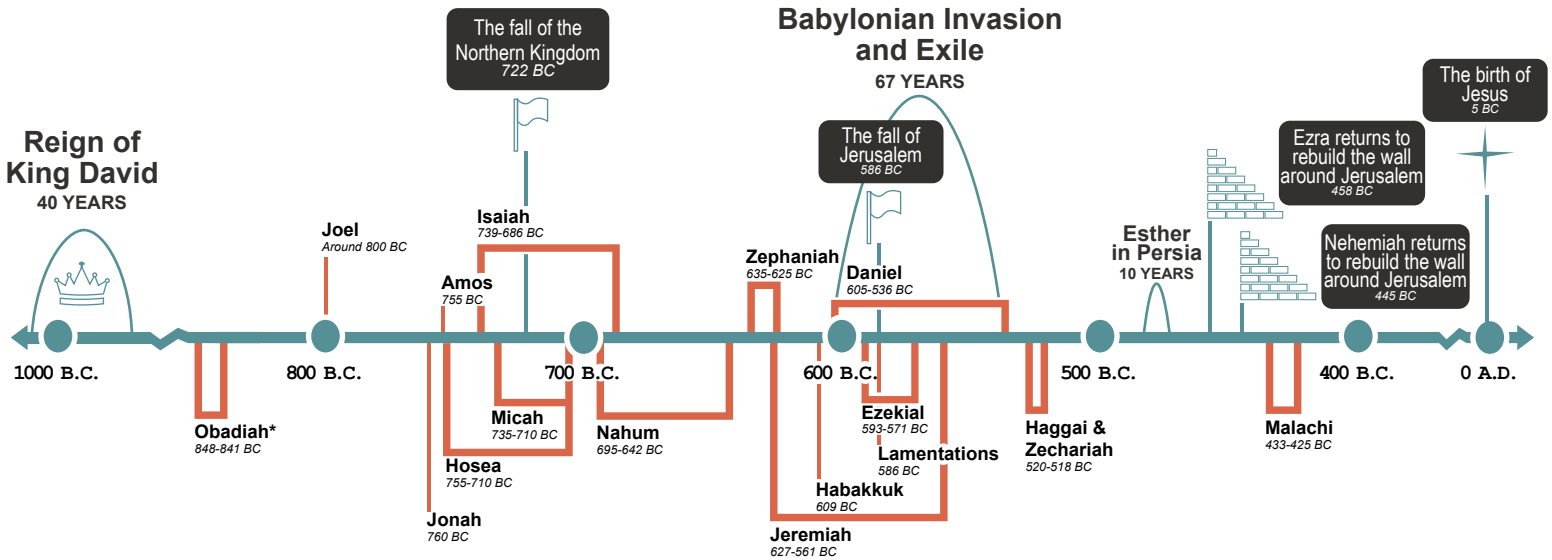
The final question to ask is "how can I apply this passage to my life?" Many of the Psalms inspire us to worship God, others give us comfort through trials, and some inspire us to any number of actions. Each Psalm will affect each reader differently, but everyone is called to action by every Psalm and every passage in the Bible.





# HOW TO STUDY: OLD TESTAMENT PROPHECIES

## Major Events at the Time of the Prophets



\*Some believe that Obadiah was written around 600 BC

## The Message of the Prophets

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### Repent

The Israelites continually failed to hold up their end of the covenant God made with them. Many of the prophets wrote extensively about what sins the Israelites were guilty of and how they broke the covenant with God.

2

### Judgment

The prophets warned Israel that if they did not repent then they would experience judgment from God. This judgment came in the form of 2 invasions: the Assyrian invasion and the Babylonian invasion.

3

### Hope

The prophets would remind Israel that there was still hope even with God's coming judgment. Their messages of hope varied between hope for the reconstruction of the wall around Jerusalem, the Messiah's 1<sup>st</sup> coming, or the Messiah's 2<sup>nd</sup> coming.



# HOW TO STUDY: OLD TESTAMENT PROPHECIES

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## What does this message say?

- What was happening at the time the prophet ministered?
- What sins was Israel guilty of? How did this break their covenant with God?
- Observe the Israelites social injustice and their call to social justice
- Observe how the Israelites were worshipping idols instead of God
- Nearly all prophecies have been fulfilled already
- Look at the imagery

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## What does this message mean? How did the original audience interpret this prophet's message?

- Look for the 3 components of the message (repent, judgment, hope)
- Summarize the message in a few sentences
- Why didn't Israel repent after hearing this message? What might have happened if they did repent?

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## What spiritual truth(s) are present in this message?

- Does the New Testament shed additional light on this truth?
- God's justice, holiness, wrath, love, forgiveness, patience, and omnipotence as well as mankind's rebellion, sinfulness, and redemption are major themes in the prophetic books.

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## How can I apply these spiritual truths to my life?

- As always, meditate on the spiritual truth and ask for God's guidance in applying it to your life. Studying the Bible correctly leads to personal application of Biblical truth.



# HOW TO STUDY: OLD TESTAMENT PROPHECIES

**Isaiah** - Isaiah focused his message on the Southern Kingdom of Judah and during his ministry the Northern Kingdom was defeated by Assyria. He prophesied the coming judgment upon Judah and the restoration through the coming Messiah.

**Jeremiah** - Jeremiah prophesied prior to and during the Babylonian exile. His message was to the people of Judah and shared their coming judgment. He offered hope of restoration through the coming Messiah.

**Lamentations** - This book is written as Jerusalem falls in 586 BC. Each chapter is written as a separate funeral poem. Jeremiah is likely the author of this prophecy and the theme is Israel's sorrow of seeing the destruction of their beloved home.

**Ezekial** - Ezekial wrote this book after Israel has been taken captive by Babylon. He encouraged the Israelites that God would bring them back to Jerusalem and restore the temple.

**Daniel** - Daniel was a Jew that was taken into Babylonian exile as a young man. He prophesied of the coming destruction of earthly kingdoms and revealed that God is in control over all things, even powerful empires.

**Hosea** - Hosea is commanded to marry an adulterous wife to symbolize God's relationship with an adulterous nation (Israel). Hosea then shares with Israel how God has compassion, love, and forgiveness for them even though they continue to turn away from Him.

**Joel** - Joel warns the people of Judah of coming judgment but leaves them with hope by sharing that they will be blessed after they repent.

**Amos** - Amos brought a message of warning to the Northern Kingdom since they were involved in idol worship. He explained that judgment was coming if they did not repent of their sin.



# HOW TO STUDY: OLD TESTAMENT PROPHECIES

**Obadiah** - Obadiah prophecies against the Edomites (the descendants of Esau). There is some debate over the reason for this prophecy of judgment which depends on the dating of the book. Some believe it was written around 845 BC and others believe it was written around 600 BC.

**Jonah** - Jonah was told to prophecy to the city of Nineveh of God's coming judgment upon them. Jonah at first refused but God humbled him and brought him to the city. After his prophecy to the city, Nineveh repented of their sins.

**Micah** - Micah prophesied during the ministry of Isaiah. His prophecies alternated between prophecies of judgment and prophecies of hope or restoration.

**Nahum** - Nahum returned to Nineveh about 100 years after Jonah to tell them to repent once again. This time they refused and God did not spare the city.<sup>6</sup>

**Habakkuk** - Habakkuk questions and even argues with God over injustices that he has witnessed. Habakkuk ends the book acknowledging his faith in God.

**Zephaniah** - "Zephaniah was raised up by God to assist the godly King Josiah in his attempt to bring Judah back to God. The message of Zephaniah revealed, however, that it was too late for the nation of Judah. Judgment was coming, though some individuals could still be saved."<sup>7</sup>

**Haggai** - Haggai urges the people of the tribe of Judah to continue rebuilding the temple. He emphasizes the rewards of obedience and consequences of disobedience.

**Zechariah** - Norman Geisler writes about this book's purpose: "Zechariah's intent was to encourage the returned remnant by showing that God was at work in the world restoring Israel to their spiritual inheritance in preparation for the coming of the Messiah."<sup>8</sup>

**Malachi** - Malachi reassures the Jews that the Messiah will arrive and He will judge the nation as well as bless them.