

# UNDERSTAND BIBLICAL PROPHECY

Rev. Howard Sloan

www.hartlepooltheologicalcollege.com

1

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

## Understanding Biblical Prophecy

- Misconceptions
- What is prophecy? What is the prophet's task?
- LANGUAGE: Forms of Biblical Prophecy
- OCCASION: Historical and Cultural Context
- KEYS
- Making Application

www.hartlepooltheologicalcollege.com

2

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

## MISCONCEPTIONS

www.hartlepooltheologicalcollege.com

3

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

## Misconceptions

- Prophecy is about foretelling the future.
- We want to know the future.
- Interpreters often focus on Old Testament prophets' prediction of the Messiah
- Interpreters often focus on Old Testament prophets for what they say about OUR future.

[www.thirdmill.org/newfiles/ric\\_pratt/ric\\_pratt.OT.prophecy.html](https://thirdmill.org/newfiles/ric_pratt/ric_pratt.OT.prophecy.html)

4

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

## Misconceptions

*I remember one time being in the Ukraine, talking about some other subject, and a fellow in the back of the room lifted his hand up and said, "Do you think that the meltdown at Chernobyl is a sign of the end of time, that Jesus is coming back very soon?" I thought for sure it had been mistranslated and I wasn't getting the point, so I looked over at the pastor and said, "Did he say what I think he said?"*

[www.thirdmill.org/newfiles/ric\\_pratt/ric\\_pratt.OT.prophecy.html](https://thirdmill.org/newfiles/ric_pratt/ric_pratt.OT.prophecy.html)

5

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

## Misconceptions

*The pastor explained to me that Chernobyl means wormwood in the dialect there. In Jeremiah it says, "In the latter days there will be wormwood." So this fellow had lifted this verse out of the book of Jeremiah, Chernobyl had melted down, and he therefore saw it as a sign of the end of time. –Dr. Richard Pratt*

[www.thirdmill.org/newfiles/ric\\_pratt/ric\\_pratt.OT.prophecy.html](https://thirdmill.org/newfiles/ric_pratt/ric_pratt.OT.prophecy.html)

6

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

## Misconceptions

- “Using the prophets this way in this way is highly selective. Consider in this connect the following statistics.”

- Less than 2 percent of Old Testament prophecy is Messianic
- Less than 5 percent specifically describes the new-covenant age.
- Less than 1 percent concerns events yet to come.

Gordon D. Fee and Douglas Stuart, *How to Read the Bible for All Its Worth*, Grand Rapids, Zondervan, 2003, p. 182.

7

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

## Misconceptions

- So this leads us to 2 questions ...
- What is prophecy?
- What is the prophet's task?

www.christiancollege.com

8

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

## What is prophecy? What is the prophet's task?

- The prophet's primary task is forthtelling, not foretelling.
- Prophets are covenant spokesmen.
- Sometimes that means foretelling.
- It always means they speak for God.
- They are “covenant enforcement mediators.”\*

Fee and Stuart, 184.com

9

---

---

---

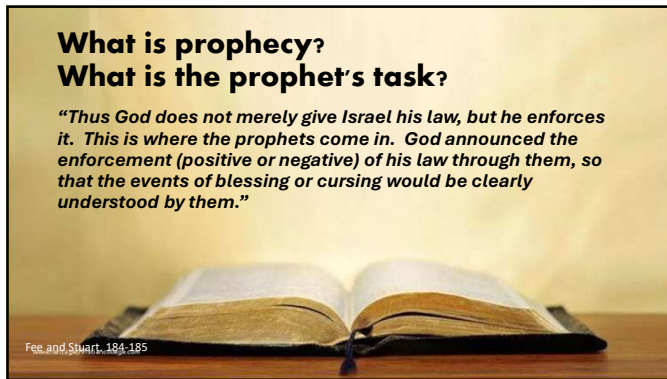
---

---

---

---

---



10

---

---

---

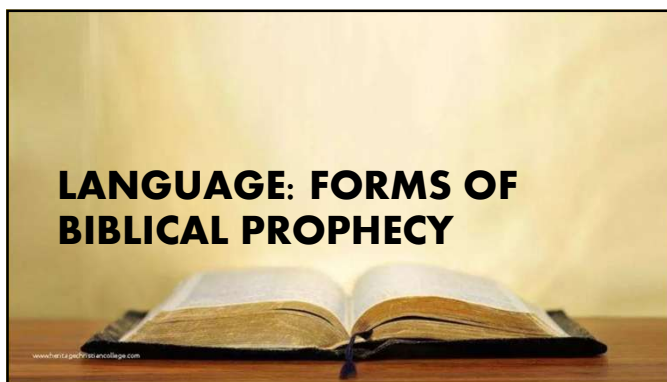
---

---

---

---

---



11

---

---

---

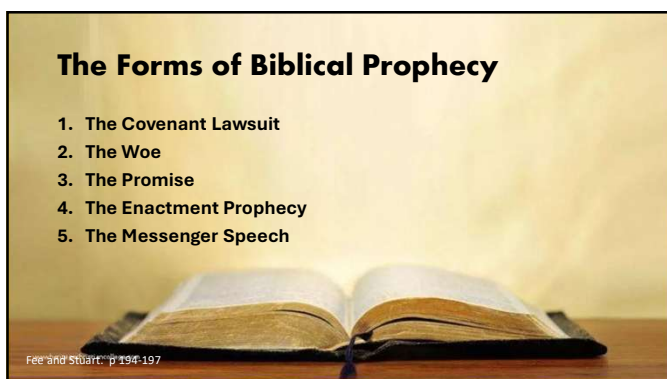
---

---

---

---

---



12

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

**The Forms of Biblical Prophecy:**  
**1. The Covenant Lawsuit**

In the Covenant Lawsuit, God is making a court case against Israel.

- God is plaintiff.
- God is prosecutor
- God is judge
- God is bailiff



13

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

**The Forms of Biblical Prophecy:**  
**1. The Covenant Lawsuit**

Isaiah 3:13-26 (ESV)

The LORD takes his place in court; he rises to judge the people.  
<sup>14</sup>The LORD enters into judgment against the elders and leaders of his people: "It is you who have ruined my vineyard; the plunder from the poor is in your houses <sup>15</sup>What do you mean by crushing my people and grinding the faces of the poor?" declares the Lord, the LORD Almighty.



14

---

---

---

---

---

---

---


---

**The Forms of Biblical Prophecy:**  
**2. The Woe**

*The Woe Oracle* – Woe oracles contain, either explicitly or implicitly, three elements

1. an announcement of distress (the word "Woe," for example),
2. the reason for the distress
3. a prediction of doom.

Habakkuk 2:6-8 as an example of a woe oracle spoken against Babylon.



15

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

## The Forms of Biblical Prophecy:

### 2. The Woe

Habakkuk 2:6-8

<sup>6</sup> Shall not all these take up their taunt against him, with scoffing and riddles for him, and say, "Woe to him who heaps up what is not his own—for how long?—and loads himself with pledges!" <sup>7</sup> Will not your debtors suddenly arise, and those awake who will make you tremble? Then you will be spoil for them. <sup>8</sup> Because you have plundered many nations, all the remnant of the peoples shall plunder you, for the blood of man and violence to the earth, to cities and all who dwell in them.

www.bible.org/seriespage/30-understanding-writing-prophets#P4150\_1451022  
ESV

16

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

## The Forms of Biblical Prophecy:

### 3. The Promise

Promise (or Salvations) Oracles have three elements

1. reference to the future
2. mention of radical change
3. mention of blessing.

www.bible.org/seriespage/30-understanding-writing-prophets#P4150\_1451022  
[https://bible.org/seriespage/30-understanding-writing-prophets#P4150\\_1451022](https://bible.org/seriespage/30-understanding-writing-prophets#P4150_1451022)

17

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

## The Forms of Biblical Prophecy:

### 3. The Promise

Hosea 2:16-20

<sup>6</sup> "And in that day, declares the Lord, you will call me 'My Husband,' and no longer will you call me 'My Baal.' <sup>17</sup> For I will remove the names of the Baals from her mouth, and they shall be remembered by name no more. <sup>18</sup> And I will make for them a covenant on that day with the beasts of the field, the birds of the heavens, and the creeping things of the ground.

www.bible.org/seriespage/30-understanding-writing-prophets#P4150\_1451022  
[https://bible.org/seriespage/30-understanding-writing-prophets#P4150\\_1451022](https://bible.org/seriespage/30-understanding-writing-prophets#P4150_1451022)

18

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---



## The Forms of Biblical Prophecy:

### 3. The Promise

And I will abolish the bow, the sword, and war from the land, and I will make you lie down in safety. <sup>19</sup> And I will betroth you to me forever. I will betroth you to me in righteousness and in justice, in steadfast love and in mercy. <sup>20</sup> I will betroth you to me in faithfulness. And you shall know the Lord.

www.christianpostgraduatecollege.com  
https://bible.org/seriespage/30-understanding-writing-prophets#P4150\_1451022

19

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

## The Forms of Biblical Prophecy:

### 4. The Enactment Prophecy

Ezekiel 4:1-3 (NASB)

<sup>1</sup> "Now you son of man, get yourself a brick, place it before you and inscribe a city on it, Jerusalem. <sup>2</sup> Then lay siege against it, build a siege wall, raise up a ramp, pitch camps and place battering rams against it all around. <sup>3</sup> Then get yourself an iron plate and set it up as an iron wall between you and the city, and set your face toward it so that it is under siege, and besiege it. This is a sign to the house of Israel.

www.christianpostgraduatecollege.com

20

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

## The Forms of Biblical Prophecy:

### 4. The Enactment Prophecy



www.christianpostgraduatecollege.com  
https://freebibleimages.org/illustrations/rg-ezekiel-2/

21

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

## The Forms of Biblical Prophecy:

### 4. The Enactment Prophecy

But this is also a good example of what happens when people take Scripture out of its context.



22

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

## The Forms of Biblical Prophecy:

### 4. The Enactment Prophecy



Ezekiel 4:9 "But as for you, take wheat, barley, beans, lentils, millet and spelt, put them in one vessel and make them into bread for yourself; you shall eat it according to the number of the days that you lie on your side, three hundred and ninety days.

23

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

## The Forms of Biblical Prophecy:

### 4. The Enactment Prophecy



It's a good thing they stop there ....

Ezekiel 4:12  
<sup>12</sup> You shall eat it as a barley cake, having baked it in their sight over **human dung.**"

24

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---



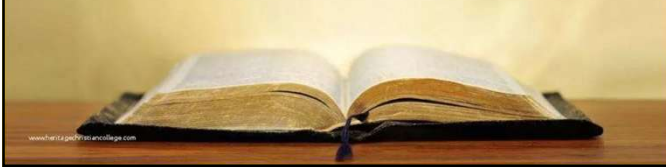
## The Forms of Biblical Prophecy:

### 5. The Messenger Speech

The most common of the forms.

Often occurs along side other forms.

Begins with something like "This is what the Lord says..."



25

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

## The Forms of Biblical Prophecy:

### 5. The Messenger Speech

<sup>4</sup> And the word of the LORD came to Isaiah, saying, <sup>5</sup> "Go and tell Hezekiah, 'Thus says the LORD, the God of David your father: "I have heard your prayer, I have seen your tears; surely I will add to your days fifteen years. <sup>6</sup> I will deliver you and this city from the hand of the king of Assyria, and I will defend this city." '



26

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

## The Forms of Biblical Prophecy:

### 5. The Messenger Speech

<sup>7</sup> And this *is* the sign to you from the LORD, that the LORD will do this thing which He has spoken: <sup>8</sup> Behold, I will bring the shadow on the sundial, which has gone down with the sun on the sundial of Ahaz, ten degrees backward." So the sun returned ten degrees on the dial by which it had gone down.



27

---

---

---

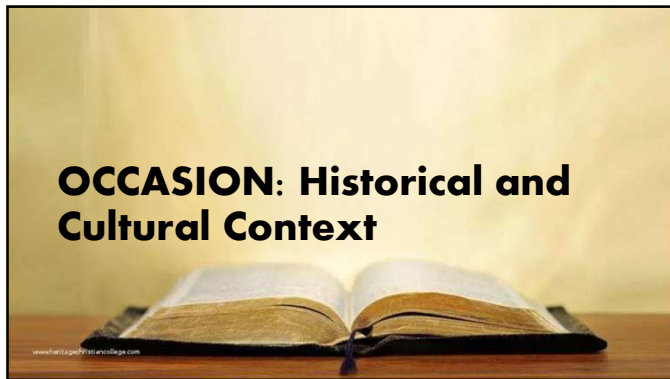
---

---

---

---

---



28

---

---

---

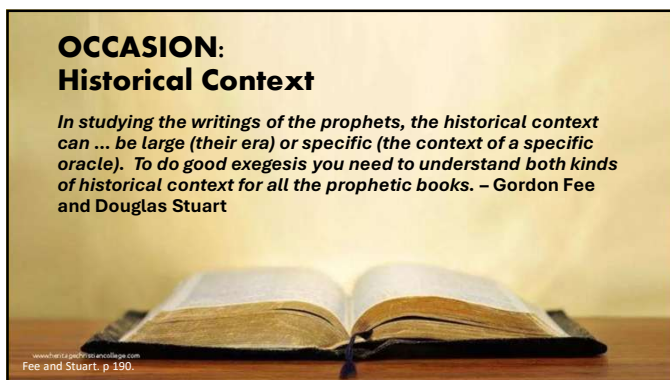
---

---

---

---

---



29

---

---

---

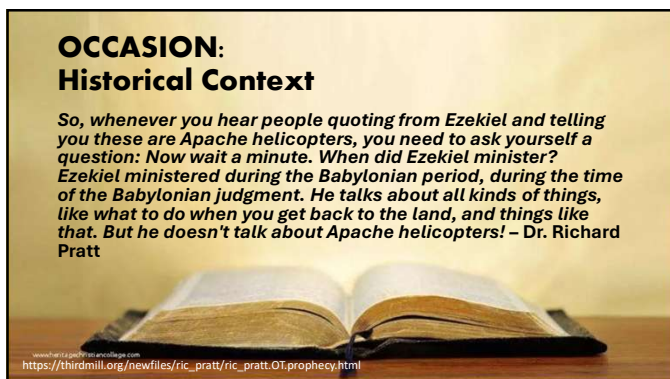
---

---

---

---

---



30

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

## OCCASION: Historical Context

FIVE PERIODS OF PROPHECY – Dr. Richard Pratt

- 1) Early Monarchy
- 2) The Assyrian Judgment
- 3) The Babylonian Judgment
- 4) The Restoration Period
- 5) Intertestamental Period

www.thirdmill.org/thirdmillcollege.com  
https://thirdmill.org/newfiles/ric\_pratt/ric\_pratt.OT.prophecy.html

31

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

## OCCASION: Historical Context - **Early Monarchy**

- The time of David and Solomon, a united kingdom.
- Prophets like Nathan and Gad. No books named for them.
- After Solomon's death, Israel is split north and south.
- This was never what God wanted for His people.

www.thirdmill.org/thirdmillcollege.com  
https://thirdmill.org/newfiles/ric\_pratt/ric\_pratt.OT.prophecy.html

32

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

## Discovering the Meaning of the Prophets: Historical Context – **Early Monarchy**

*“The ideal was for them to be united and joined together under the One Son of David. So this early monarchy period really does form a background, a sort of baseline for what prophecy is, and if you can get that, you'll understand a whole lot more about what the prophets talked about.” – Pratt*

www.thirdmill.org/thirdmillcollege.com  
https://thirdmill.org/newfiles/ric\_pratt/ric\_pratt.OT.prophecy.html

33

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

### Discovering the Meaning of the Prophets: Historical Context – **Early Monarchy**

*"This is what the prophets are concerned about: they're concerned about the people of Israel, the people of God, under the One Son of David as they ought to be."* – Pratt

www.thirdmill.org/newfiles/ric\_pratt/ric\_pratt.OT.prophecy.html

34

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

### Discovering the Meaning of the Prophets: Historical Context – **Assyrian Judgment**

- Prophets during this time: Jonah, Hosea, Amos, Micah, Nahum and Isaiah.
- The sins of Israel were so great that God sent the Assyrians to destroy them. They became God's hand of judgment.
- The Northern Kingdom (Israel) wandered far from God.
- Judah needs to pay attention, or they could be next.

www.thirdmill.org/newfiles/ric\_pratt/ric\_pratt.OT.prophecy.html

35

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

### Discovering the Meaning of the Prophets: Historical Context – **Babylonian Judgment**

- Isaiah, Jeremiah, Zephaniah, Joel, Obadiah, Habakkuk, Ezekiel and Daniel.
- Like Israel to the north, Judah was being sent into exile.
- Not by the Assyrians, but the Babylonians who conquered the Assyrians.

www.thirdmill.org/newfiles/ric\_pratt/ric\_pratt.OT.prophecy.html

36

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

**Discovering the Meaning of the Prophets:  
Historical Context – Restoration Period**

- *“This is what the prophets are concerned about: they’re concerned about the people of Israel, the people of God, under the One Son of David as they ought to be.” – Pratt*

www.thirdmill.org/newfiles/ric\_pratt/ric\_pratt.OT.prophecy.html



37

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

**Discovering the Meaning of the Prophets:  
Historical Context – Intertestamental**

- *“This is what the prophets are concerned about: they’re concerned about the people of Israel, the people of God, under the One Son of David as they ought to be.” – Pratt*

www.thirdmill.org/newfiles/ric\_pratt/ric\_pratt.OT.prophecy.html



38

---

---

---

---

---


---

---

---

**KEYS**

www.thirdmill.org/newfiles/ric\_pratt/ric\_pratt.OT.prophecy.html



39

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

## Keys to Interpretation

### Key #1: Principles Behind the Details

Similarly when Old Testament prophets predicted the future, they did so using the vocabulary and concepts they knew. With the passage of hundreds of years, the details, the visible form of the fulfillment often looks different. But the essential principles of their predictions are literally fulfilled. That's the first and most important key for understanding Old Testament prophecy.

www.charlottesvillecollege.com  
Dr. David Murray. <https://www.placefortruth.org/blog/two-keys-to-old-testament-prophecy> Sept 1, 2015.

40

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

## Keys to Interpretation

### Key #2: Three Stages of Fulfillment

The second key for interpreting many Old Testament prophecies is to see them fulfilled in three stages:

1. Commencement
2. Continuation
3. Consummation

www.charlottesvillecollege.com  
Murray.

41

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

## Keys to Interpretation

### Ezekiel 47:1-2

<sup>1</sup> Then he brought me back to the door of the temple, and behold, water was issuing from below the threshold of the temple toward the east (for the temple faced east). The water was flowing down from below the south end of the threshold of the temple, south of the altar.  
<sup>2</sup> Then he brought me out by way of the north gate and led me around on the outside to the outer gate that faces toward the east; and behold, the water was trickling out on the south side.

www.charlottesvillecollege.com  
Murray.

42

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---



## Keys to Interpretation

- So what should we expect as the fulfillment of this? Should we expect a literal rebuilt Temple in Jerusalem and a literal river like this flowing under the Temple door, with lots of fishermen having the best fishing days of their lives? Of course not.
- Ezekiel was using the vocabulary and concepts of his own day to predict a day of massive and spreading spiritual life flowing from the heart of God's dwelling-place to all the nations.

www.charlottesvillecollege.com  
Murray.

43

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

## Keys to Interpretation

- **Commencement**
- Although the Holy Spirit was like a trickle or small stream in the Old Testament, at Pentecost the Spirit burst His banks and flooded the world.

www.charlottesvillecollege.com  
Murray.

44

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

## Keys to Interpretation

- **Continuation**
- The river of the Spirit continues to flow throughout church history, bringing deepening, widening, healing, fruitful, life-giving blessing to the nations. But notice that there are still some untouched salty marshes as long as this world exists (Ezek. 47:11).

www.charlottesvillecollege.com  
Murray.

45

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

## Keys to Interpretation

### • Consummation

- We look forward to the elimination of all salty marshes and the covering of the new heaven and the new earth with life-giving and life-sustaining blessing (Rev. 22:1-2). Eden's life-giving rivers are not only restored, but surpassed and exceeded. Where sin abounded there did grace much more abound.



46

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

## Keys to Interpretation

### Revelation 22:1-2

<sup>1</sup> Then the angel showed me the river of the water of life, bright as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb <sup>2</sup> through the middle of the street of the city; also, on either side of the river, the tree of life with its twelve kinds of fruit, yielding its fruit each month. The leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations.



47

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

## Keys to Interpretation

### Key #3: Understand Covenant Blessing and Curses

- Leviticus 26; Deuteronomy 4; Deuteronomy 28-32
- *"If you will take the trouble to learn those chapters from the Pentateuch, you will be rewarded with a much better understanding of why the prophets said the things they said."*\*\*



48

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

## Keys to Interpretation

**Key #4: Judgment prophecy assumes that if the people repent, God will not judge them even if this is not outright stated.**

- Jonah 3:4 (NASB) <sup>4</sup> Then Jonah began to go through the city one day's walk; and he cried out and said, "Yet forty days and Nineveh will be overthrown."
- But what happened?

www.thelibraryofchristianity.com  
Robert Stein - Biblical Hermeneutics Lecture Notes: 36.

49

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

## Keys to Interpretation

Jonah 3:5

<sup>5</sup> Then the people of Nineveh believed in God; and they called a fast and put on sackcloth from the greatest to the least of them.

Then?

www.thelibraryofchristianity.com  
Scripture from New American Standard Bible

50

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

## Keys to Interpretation

Jonah 3:10

<sup>10</sup> When God saw their deeds, that they turned from their wicked way, then God **relented** concerning the calamity which He had declared He would bring upon them. And **He did not do it.**

www.thelibraryofchristianity.com  
Scripture from New American Standard Bible

51

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

## Keys to Interpretation

**Key #5: Prophets use figurative, often cosmic, language**

Isaiah 13:9-10

<sup>9</sup> Behold, the day of the Lord is coming, Cruel, with fury and burning anger, To make the land a desolation; And He will exterminate its sinners from it. <sup>10</sup> For the stars of heaven and their constellations Will not flash forth their light; The sun will be dark when it rises And the moon will not shed its light.

www.hatlapethatcollege.com  
Stein, 38. Scripture: NASB

52

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

## Keys to Interpretation

**Key #5: Prophets use figurative, often cosmic, language**

Many ideas combine in this verse, the denial to sinners of all the beneficent influences of creation, symbolized by light; the visitation of wrath of all of creation corrupted by sin ....; the withdrawal of light, and apt symbol of the oncoming darkness of divine judgment. – J. Alec Motyer

www.hatlapethatcollege.com  
The Prophecy of Isaiah: An Introduction & Commentary. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1993. p 138

53

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

## MAKING APPLICATION

www.hatlapethatcollege.com

54

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

## Making Application

- The Problem of Sin is Universal
- Idolatry is Still a Problem Though It Takes a Different Form
- God Judges Sin
- The Hope of Restoration Pictures Our Hope in the Resurrection
- God is Sovereign Over the Nations
- Christ is in the Prophets



55

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

## Making Application: The Problem of Sin is Universal

Jeremiah 7:8-10

“Behold, you trust in deceptive words to no avail. Will you steal, murder, commit adultery, swear falsely, make offerings to Baal, and go after other gods that you have not known, and then come and stand before me in this house, which is called by my name, and say, ‘We are delivered!’—only to go on doing all these abominations?”



56

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

## Making Application: Idolatry is Still a Problem Though It Takes a Different Form

Habakkuk 2:18-20

“What profit is an idol when its maker has shaped it, a metal image, a teacher of lies? For its maker trusts in his own creation when he makes speechless idols! Woe to him who says to a wooden thing, Awake; to a silent stone, Arise! Can this teach? Behold, it is overlaid with gold and silver, and there is no breath at all in it. But the Lord is in his holy temple; let all the earth keep silence before him.”



57

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

### **Making Application:** **God Judges Sin**

Isaiah 3:1-3

For behold, the Lord God of hosts is taking away from Jerusalem and from Judah support and supply, all support of bread, and all support of water; the mighty man and the soldier, the judge and the prophet, the diviner and the elder, the captain of fifty and the man of rank, the counselor and the skillful magician.

www.charlottesvillecollege.com

58

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

### **Making Application:** **The Hope of Restoration Pictures Our Hope in the Resurrection**

Isaiah 10:20-22

In that day the remnant of Israel and the survivors of the house of Jacob will no more lean on him who struck them, but will lean on the Lord, the Holy One of Israel, in truth. A remnant will return, the remnant of Jacob, to the mighty God. For though your people Israel be as the sand of the sea, only a remnant of them will return.

www.charlottesvillecollege.com

59

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

### **Making Application:** **God is Sovereign Over the Nations**

Ezekiel 30:22-24

Therefore thus says the Lord God: Behold, I am against Pharaoh king of Egypt and will break his arms, both the strong arm and the one that was broken, and I will make the sword fall from his hand. I will scatter the Egyptians among the nations and disperse them through the countries. And I will strengthen the arms of the king of Babylon and put my sword in his hand, but I will break the arms of Pharaoh, and he will groan before him like a man mortally wounded.

www.charlottesvillecollege.com

60

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---





61

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---



62

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---