We study the lives tonight of two of the greatest men of God who ever graced this planet, ISAIAH and JEREMIAH. In the Word of God, their books begin a series of prophetic writings that continue through Malachi. The section is divided into MAJOR prophets and MINOR prophets - a designation that relies solely upon the length or size of the books under their names. All of these prophets were vital. God used them in a time when neither priest nor king had enough standing with God to be trusted with His message.

There is more than foretelling or prophecy in these books. They also contain within them history and the laws of God. These men wrote about the future - both near and distant. They were well within the parameters God set forth for prophetic ministry:

Deut. 18:20-22 [New Living Testament]

But any prophet who claims to give a message from another god or who falsely claims to speak for me must die.’ [21] You may wonder, 'How will we know whether the prophecy is from the Lord or not?' [22] If the prophet predicts something in the Lord's name and it does not happen, the Lord did not give the message. That prophet has spoken on his own and need not be feared.

There are many today who call themselves “prophets” or “prophetesses.” I would be very careful about assigning such a designation to myself for fear of “falling stones.” I am a pastor and teacher, not a prophet, evangelist, or apostle as listed in Ephesians. 4:11:

And he gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers;

All five of these ministries, plus others listed in the Word, are desperately needed in this day! Make no mistake about it: Christianity is under siege in America today. Little by little the “faith of our fathers” is being chipped away as per the announcement made last week by New York Governor Andrew Cuomo who said he believes that pro-life activists along with those who oppose gay marriage and support the second amendment when it comes to arming ourselves ARE NOT WELCOME IN HIS STATE! Quoting him verbatim: “....they have no place in the state of New York!” Is that a challenge to our faith or not????
God’s prophets - Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Daniel (major), Hosea, Joel, Amos, Obadiah, Jonah, Micah, Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah, Haggai, Zechariah and Malachi were such “gifts” from God to their nation. How do we know they were really prophets? THEIR HUNDREDS AND HUNDREDS OF PROPHECIES CAME TO PASS - with some still to be realized.

The Law of Compound Probability

This is a phrase I believe was originated by Dr. J. Vernon McGee: The law of compound probability forbids man from consistently foretelling the future. Each uncertain element which he adds decreases his chance of accuracy 50 percent. Let me illustrate: Suppose I make a prophecy that it is going to rain tomorrow. I would have a 50/50 chance of being right - that is for sure. Now I will add another element to my prophecy by predicting that it will begin raining at eleven o’clock in the morning. That reduces my chance of being right another 50 percent but I still have a 25 percent chance of being correct. But I don’t stop there. I not only say that it will start raining at eleven o’clock, but I add that it will stop raining at three o’clock. I have reduced my chance of being right to only 12 1/2 percent. If I keep adding uncertain elements until have three hundred prophecies, you know they would never be literally fulfilled. No man can guess like that. Only the Holy Spirit of God could give such information. Yet God’s Word has over three hundred prophecies concerning the first coming of Christ which have been literally fulfilled.

THRU THE BIBLE - VOLUME 3 / MCGEE / NELSON PUBLISHERS / PP 183-184

How could Christ’s followers be so sure He was the Messiah (Matthew, Mark, Luke and John)? Because the prophecies of these man hundreds of years before made it clear what to look for. Again I turn to McGee for this delightful illustration:

Suppose I am invited to your hometown. You ask me, “When you arrive at the airport, how will I know it’s you?” I would write back and say, “I am arriving at the airport at a certain time on a certain flight. I will be wearing a pair of green-checked trousers and a blue-striped coat. I will have on a big yellow polka dot necktie and a pink shirt with a large purple flower on it. I will be wearing one brown shoe and one black shoe and white socks. On my head you will see a derby hat, and I will be holding a parrot in a cage in one hand and with the other hand I will be leading a jaguar on a chain.” When you arrive at the airport, do you think you would be able to pick me out of the crowd? When Jesus came to earth, those who had the Old Testament scriptures, and knew what they said, should have been waiting for Him in Bethlehem or waiting for the news of His birth, for they had all the information they needed.

IBID
We are so indebted to the Old Testament prophets who so clearly laid out the future of humanity. They told us of the dangers and the glories yet ahead.

The Man, Isaiah

No one ever had a more dramatic call from God than this man Isaiah. It is recorded for us in:

Isaiah 6:1-13

In the year that king Uzziah died I saw also the Lord sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up, and his train (robe) filled the temple. [2] Above it stood the seraphims: each one had six wings; with twain he covered his face, and with twain he covered his feet, and with twain he did fly. [3] And one cried unto another, and said, Holy, holy, holy, is the Lord of hosts: the whole earth is full of his glory. [4] And the posts of the door moved at the voice of him that cried, and the house was filled with smoke.

[5] Then said I, Woe is me! for I am undone; because I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips: for mine eyes have seen the King, the Lord of hosts. [6] Then flew one of the seraphims unto me, having a live coal in his hand, which he had taken with the tongs from off the altar: [7] And he laid it upon my mouth, and said, Lo, this hath touched thy lips; and thine iniquity is taken away, and thy sin purged. [8] Also I heard the voice of the Lord, saying, Whom shall I send, and who will go for us? Then said I, Here am I; send me.

[9] And he said, Go, and tell this people, Hear ye indeed, but understand not; and see ye indeed, but perceive not. [10] Make the heart of this people fat, and make their ears heavy, and shut their eyes; lest they see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and understand with their heart, and convert, and be healed. [11] Then said I, Lord, how long? And he answered, Until the cities be wasted without inhabitant, and the houses without man, and the land be utterly desolate, [12] And the Lord have removed men far away, and there be a great forsaking in the midst of the land.

[13] But yet in it shall be a tenth, and it shall return, and shall be eaten: as a tel tree, and as an oak, whose substance is in them, when they cast their leaves: so the holy seed shall be the substance thereof.

For 137 years, the southern kingdom of Judah had fairly good - to excellent leadership:

- King Joash 40 years 835-796 B.C.
- King Amaziah 29 years 796 - 767 B.C.
- King Uzziah (also known in Scripture as Azariah) 52 years 767 -
- King Jotham 16 years (co - regent in part with his father Uzziah
Uzziah would get my vote as one of the top five kings who reigned in Jerusalem. Although
his son Jotham was a fair ruler, he could not equal his father Uzziah. One commentator
observed, “The national glory of Israel died out with King Uzziah and has never recovered
to this day.” (F. Delitzsch) When Uzziah died, Isaiah went to the Temple to mourn.
There he had a vision of God’s utter holiness, including the six magnificent seraphim who
have always hovered over the divine throne (John saw the same seraphim while on Patmos:
Rev. 4:6-8 And before the throne there was a sea of glass like unto crystal: and in the
midst of the throne, and round about the throne, were four beasts full of eyes before
and behind. [7] And the first beast was like a lion, and the second beast like a calf, and
the third beast had a face as a man, and the fourth beast was like a flying eagle. [8] And
the four beasts had each of them six wings about him; and they were full of eyes within:
and they rest not day and night, saying, Holy, holy, holy, Lord God Almighty, which
was, and is, and is to come.)

We are well reminded here of the holiness of God. We must never lose the realization
of God’s holiness. One of my favorite writers (a great Christian and Missionary
Alliance statesman, A. W. Tozer, now with the Lord) observed: A right conception of
God is basic not only to systematic theology but to practical Christian living as well. It
is to worship what the foundation is to the temple; where it is inadequate or out of plumb
the whole structure must sooner or later collapse. I believe there is scarcely an error in
doctrine or a failure in applying Christian ethics that cannot be traced finally to
imperfect and ignoble thoughts about God. It is my opinion that the Christian
conception of God currently is so decadent as to be utterly beneath the dignity of the Most
High God and actually to constitute for professed believers something amounting to a
moral calamity.

THE KNOWLEDGE OF THE HOLY / A. W. TOZER / CHRISTIAN PUBLICATIONS / P 10

I heartily agree. Today many profess they have “touched God” but their lives show little
difference; but look what happened to Isaiah: Isaiah 6:5 Then said I, Woe is me! for I
am undone; because I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people
of unclean lips: for mine eyes have seen the King, the Lord of hosts. The New
Living Testament puts Isaiah’s lament thusly: Then I said, "My destruction is sealed,
for I am a sinful man and a member of a sinful race. Yet I have seen the King, the
Lord Almighty!"

When Uzziah the King died, it appeared outwardly that the nation was still walking with
God. In reality it was questionable. On every side there was a spirit of luxury and
indulgence (much like our nation today) and a true spirit of righteous living was waning.
Following Jothan’s (Uzziah’s son) death, Ahaz became king who gave himself over to the
overthrow of everything holy and right, even destroying Temple worship and actually
closing the doors. THIS IS WHY GOD CALLED ISAIAH!

This mighty man of God publicly rebuked King Jothan. Thankfully, when Jothan died after sixteen terrible years on the throne, he was followed by King Hezekiah who restored much of what had been destroyed – thanks in large part to the faithful ministry of Isaiah.

However, we reap what we sow and some bitter seeds had already been sown that would now begin to approach harvest. The first 12 chapters of Isaiah prophesy on disaster that would come upon Jerusalem and Judah in the future. Here Isaiah proclaimed the judgment of a holy God tempered alongside the mercy God would show to His redeemed who truly lived according to His laws. Isaiah also began prophesying a coming Messiah.

Isaiah prophesied nothing but doom to the nations that stood against God and His people, the Jews. Isaiah said that Babylon, Assyria, Philistia, Moab, Ethiopia and Egypt would be overthrown - which they were.

In chapters 13 - 28 Isaiah dealt with God's dealing with the nations and the doom to follow. But, he declared, God's people would be secure and He would establish His Kingdom on Mount Zion (Jerusalem).

In chapters 28 to 33, Isaiah dealt with God's plans for the relation of Judah and Jerusalem to Egypt and Assyria. Because of Isaiah's prophetic warnings, especially concerning Assyria (to the north and that nation's dedication to the destruction of Jerusalem), King Hezekiah added fortifications to the walls of Jerusalem. (A part of that wall still stands - picture on next page. Note the line I have drawn on the upper right hand side of the picture. That denotes the height of the original wall - close to 30 feet high and about 25 feet wide). I walk by that structure on my daily walks in Jerusalem. The remnant of the wall stands about 15 minute-walk time from the Joppa Gate.)

Interesting - the wall was not actually needed because God miraculously delivered the city from the enemy. 2 Kings 19:35-37

[35] And it came to pass that night, that the angel of the Lord went out, and smote in the camp of the Assyrians an hundred fourscore and five thousand: and when they arose early in the morning, behold, they were all dead corpses. [36] So Sennacherib king of Assyria departed, and went and returned, and dwelt at Nineveh. [37] And it came to pass, as he was worshipping in the house of Nisroch his god, that Adrammelech and Sharezer his sons smote him with the sword: and they escaped into the land of Armenia. And Esar-haddon his son reigned in his stead.

Chapters 34-35 God dealt with the coming doom of Edom (always Israel's enemy) to the
east of the Dead Sea.

Chapters 36-39 have to do with Isaiah's life during the reign of good King Hezekiah.

Chapters 40 to 57 concern deliverance from the dominion of Babylon and a startling prophecy of its overthrow at the hands of Cyrus, the Persian. The Babylonians would somewhat later devastate Jerusalem and take away multitudes of captives; however, Isaiah prophesied that those Jews would, indeed, return to "the land," which they did because of Cyrus' mercy. These are astounding passages in relationship to world history.

The rest of Isaiah concerns the triumph and universal dominion of God

One Final Note

Let's revisit for a moment the startling call of God on Isaiah's life. When he entered the Temple in Jerusalem to mourn the passing of good King Uzziah, he beheld the Lord and the mighty seraphim. Isaiah recognized his humanity in the face of Deity and called out:
Isaiah 6:5-8  Then said I, Woe is me! for I am undone; because I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips: for mine eyes have seen the King, the Lord of hosts. [6] Then flew one of the seraphims unto me, having a live coal in his hand, which he had taken with the tongs from off the altar: [7] And he laid it upon my mouth, and said, Lo, this hath touched thy lips; and thine iniquity is taken away, and thy sin purged. [8] Also I heard the voice of the Lord, saying, Whom shall I send, and who will go for us? Then said I, Here am I; send me.

The call of God is a sacred and holy summons. Let us never forget that - or that it is only the Spirit of God through us that accomplishes anything eternal.

It is believed that Isaiah died under the rulership of the despicable King Manasseh who had Isaiah’s body stuffed into a hollow log and cut in two while he was yet alive.

JEREMIAH

The prophet Jeremiah came along about a century after Isaiah. He was born in a small town called Anathoth, just a bit north of Jerusalem (where he had his primary ministry). I remember having an outdoor Sunday morning service on a bluff overlooking Anathoth many years ago. It was a spectacular Lord’s day, I can tell you.

Jeremiah was known as “the weeping prophet.” And why wouldn’t he weep? He foretold and actually saw the destruction of Jerusalem in 587 B.C. at the hands of King Nebuchadnezzar and the Babylonians. For years he had warned the rulers of Judah that God would not overlook their idolatry and horrendous destruction was on its way.

At first glance you and I might have thought Jeremiah was not a very successful prophet.

• He was called by God when he was very young
• Times were so horrible that God forbade him to marry
• As far as we know he never made a convert. He was rejected by the very people he was trying to warn: Jeremiah 11:18-21 (New Living) Then the Lord told me about the plots my enemies were making against me. [19] I had been as unaware as a lamb on the way to its slaughter. I had no idea that they were planning to kill me! "Let's destroy this man and all his words," they said. "Let's kill him, so his name will be forgotten forever." [20] O Lord Almighty, you are just, and you examine the deepest thoughts of hearts and minds. Let me see your vengeance against them, for I have committed my cause to you. [21] The men of Anathoth wanted me dead. They said they would kill me if I did not stop speaking in the Lord's name.
• Jeremiah was imprisoned and charged with being a traitor: Jeremiah 37:11-16
When the Babylonian army left Jerusalem because of Pharaoh's approaching army, [12] Jeremiah started to leave the city on his way to the land of Benjamin, to see the property he had bought. [13] But as he was walking through the Benjamin Gate, a sentry arrested him and said, "You are defecting to the Babylonians!" The sentry making the arrest was Irijah son of Shelemiah and grandson of Hananiah. [14] "That's not true!" Jeremiah protested. "I had no intention of doing any such thing." But Irijah wouldn't listen, and he took Jeremiah before the officials. [15] They were furious with Jeremiah and had him flogged and imprisoned in the house of Jonathan the secretary. Jonathan's house had been converted into a prison. [16] Jeremiah was put into a dungeon cell, where he remained for many days.

Jeremiah saw the destruction of Jerusalem and thousands upon thousands of Jews led captive to Babylon.

Dr. W. G. Moorehead gave a graphic portrayal of Jeremiah in his Studies in the Prophecy of Jeremiah): “It was Jeremiah’s lot to prophesy at a time when all things in Judah were rushing down to the final and mournful catastrophe; when political excitement was at its height; when the worst passions swayed the various parties, and the most fatal counsels prevailed. It was his lot to stand in the way over which his nation was rushing headlong to destruction; to make an heroic effort to arrest it, and to turn it back; and to fail, and be compelled to step to one side and see his own people, whom he loved with the tenderness of a woman, plunge over the precipice into the wide, wailing ruin.”

We desperately need a Jeremiah today, especially on alleged Christian TV. We need someone with a national audience (such as Billy Graham had) to cry out our plight, rather than promising every professing believer riches, popularity and success. America is going to hell in a handbasket; as mentioned earlier, Christianity is being marginalized. In the meantime we have killed millions of babies, we have made gay marriage “acceptable,” shootings in public places are now routine, and enemies of America are everywhere. We are not sure our athletes will be safe in the winter Olympics. This nation treats Israel like dirt despite God’s warnings. Where are the Jeremiahs?

I know of a church that advertises that it is a “fun church.” That must thrill the heart of God! Not so. The voice of Jeremiah is lacking today by and large in our churches, including Assemblies of God churches. Giving to world missions DROPPED $8 million last year and has never been what it should be nationally. A full 40% of our churches never had a single missionary last year – too busy having “fun” I suppose.

Jeremiah’s prophetic ministry, begun under King Josiah, continued right through the Babylonian invasion in 587 B.C. and continued on through the Babylonian captivity,
which he prophesied would last for seventy years. However, Jeremiah also foresaw the Jews return later.

Finally, the Babylonians arrived in the valleys surrounding Jerusalem - for the third time, this time with ferocity unknown until then. Earlier King Jehoiachin had surrendered the city and the Babylonians had deported him, along with the Queen-mother, the soldiers and some ten thousand leading men (including Daniel) along with wives and children to Babylon, where Jehoiachin (a terrible king in Jerusalem) had ample time to reflect on Jeremiah’s prophecy - at which he had scoffed. He remained in a Babylonian cell for 37 years.

That left Jerusalem in the hands of its last king, Zedekiah. Had Zedekiah been content to remain a vassal king, serving the Babylonian King Nebuchadnezzar, Jerusalem would have been left alone. However, hot-blooded leaders convinced Zedekiah that he could withstand anything that the Babylonians threw against him - which certainly was NOT true. Now comes Nebuchadnezzar for the final time to the very gates of Jerusalem. He laid siege to the city and slowly starved the people into submission. For a year-and-a-half, the siege continued, until so many died daily there was no place to even bury them. Corpses decayed in streets and in cellars, pestilence engendered by the poison stench of the city and by the lack of sanitary measures, added further horrors to the scene.

Jeremiah saw it all. Against the backdrop of a burning city, a destroyed Temple, and the death of tens upon tens of thousands and the slavery of the rest, the faithful old prophet returned to his cave (now known as Gordon’s Calvary) and there penned:

Lament. 1:1-22

Jerusalem’s streets, once bustling with people, are now silent. Like a widow broken with grief, she sits alone in her mourning. Once the queen of nations, she is now a slave.

[2] She sobs through the night; tears stream down her cheeks. Among all her lovers, there is no one left to help her. All her friends have betrayed her; they are now her enemies.

[3] Judah has been led away into captivity, afflicted and enslaved. She lives among foreign nations and has no place of rest. Her enemies have chased her down, and she has nowhere to turn.

[4] The roads to Jerusalem are in mourning, no longer filled with crowds on their way to celebrate the Temple festivals. The city gates are silent, her priests groan, her young women are crying—how bitterly Jerusalem weeps!

[5] Her oppressors have become her masters, and her enemies prosper, for the Lord has punished Jerusalem for her many sins. Her children have been captured
and taken away to distant lands.

[6] All the beauty and majesty of Jerusalem are gone. Her princes are like
starving deer searching for pasture, too weak to run from the pursuing enemy.

[7] And now in the midst of her sadness and wandering, Jerusalem remembers
her ancient splendor. But then she fell to her enemy, and there was no one to help
her. Her enemy struck her down and laughed as she fell.

[8] Jerusalem has sinned greatly, so she has been tossed away like a filthy rag. All
who once honored her now despise her, for they have seen her stripped naked and
humiliated. All she can do is groan and hide her face.

[9] She defiled herself with immorality with no thought of the punishment that
would follow. Now she lies in the gutter with no one to lift her out. "Lord, see my
deep misery," she cries. "The enemy has triumphed."

[10] The enemy has plundered her completely, taking everything precious that she
owns. She has seen foreigners violate her sacred Temple, the place the Lord had
forgotten them to enter.

[11] Her people groan as they search for bread. They have sold their treasures for
food to stay alive. "O Lord, look," she mourns, "and see how I am despised.

[12] "Is it nothing to you, all you who pass by? Look around and see if there is
any suffering like mine, which the Lord brought on me in the day of his fierce anger.

[13] "He has sent fire from heaven that burns in my bones. He has placed a trap
in my path and turned me back. He has made me desolate, racked with sickness all
day long.

[14] "He wove my sins into ropes to hitch me to a yoke of captivity. The Lord
sapped my strength and gave me to my enemies; I am helpless in their hands.

[15] "The Lord has treated my mighty men with contempt. At his command a
great army has come to crush my young warriors. The Lord has trampled his
beloved city as grapes are trampled in a winepress.

[16] "For all these things I weep; tears flow down my cheeks. No one is here to
comfort me; any who might encourage me are far away. My children have no
future, for the enemy has conquered us."

[17] Jerusalem pleads for help, but no one comforts her. Regarding his people, the
Lord has said, "Let their neighbors be their enemies! Let them be thrown away like
a filthy rag!"

[18] "And the Lord is right," she groans, "for I rebelled against him. Listen,
people everywhere; look upon my anguish and despair, for my sons and daughters
have been taken captive to distant lands.

[19] "I begged my allies for help, but they betrayed me. My priests and leaders
starved to death in the city, even as they searched for food to save their lives.

[20] "Lord, see my anguish! My heart is broken and my soul despairs, for I have
rebelled against you. In the streets the sword kills, and at home there is only death.
[21] "Others heard my groans, but no one turned to comfort me. When my enemies heard of my troubles, they were happy to see what you had done. Oh, bring the day you promised, when you will destroy them as you have destroyed me.

[22] "Look at all their evil deeds, Lord. Punish them, as you have punished me for all my sins. My groans are many, and my heart is faint."

As for King Zedekiah, it is traditionally believed that he tried to hide for a short time in the quarry under the old city of Jerusalem (see picture on final page of notes). Then in an effort to escape, he and his sons were rounded up in Jericho, 16 miles to the east. There, Zedekiah’s sons and certain of the former leaders of Judah were put to death before the eyes of the captured kin. Then with such grizzly scenes burning his vision, the king’s eyes were gouged out and he was taken in chains to Babylon.

As for Jeremiah, he was not taken into captivity because he was too old. At Ramah, north of Jerusalem, the captain of the Babylonian army set the prophet free to return to the burned out city of death and destruction.

Imagine it - living in a city with no structure, no buildings, only smoldering embers, the stench of death and fear still rampant everywhere! In an insurrection, the great Jeremiah was killed, a martyr’s death.

What a story! What a man!
This picture shows only a small portion of Zedekiah's Cave (also known as Solomon's Quarries). It is five acres of limestone cut out from below the Old City of Jerusalem. This quarry was carved by slaves and laborers over several thousand years. Herod the Great used the main quarry stones for building blocks in the renovation of the Temple and its retaining wall.

Suleiman the Magnificent (1494 to 1566), the Ottoman (Turk) sultan who build the present walls around the Old City, apparently mined the quarry. He finally had it sealed for security reasons. It was then lost to history for over 300 years until, in 1984, the American MISSIONARY James Turner Barclay was walking his dog one day. The dog, following the scent of a fox, dug through dirt just north of the present-day Damascus Gate and suddenly disappeared through an opening. That night, Barclay and his two sons, dressed in Arab garb and carrying candles, slithered through to discover the vast cavern as well as the skeletons of previous explorers.

The most revered legend about the cave is that it served as the quarry for King Solomon's first Temple; however, there is no historical or archeological evidence to support this. But it is believed traditionally that King Zedekiah used the cavern as an escape hatch enroute to Jericho where he was captured, blinded and chained.