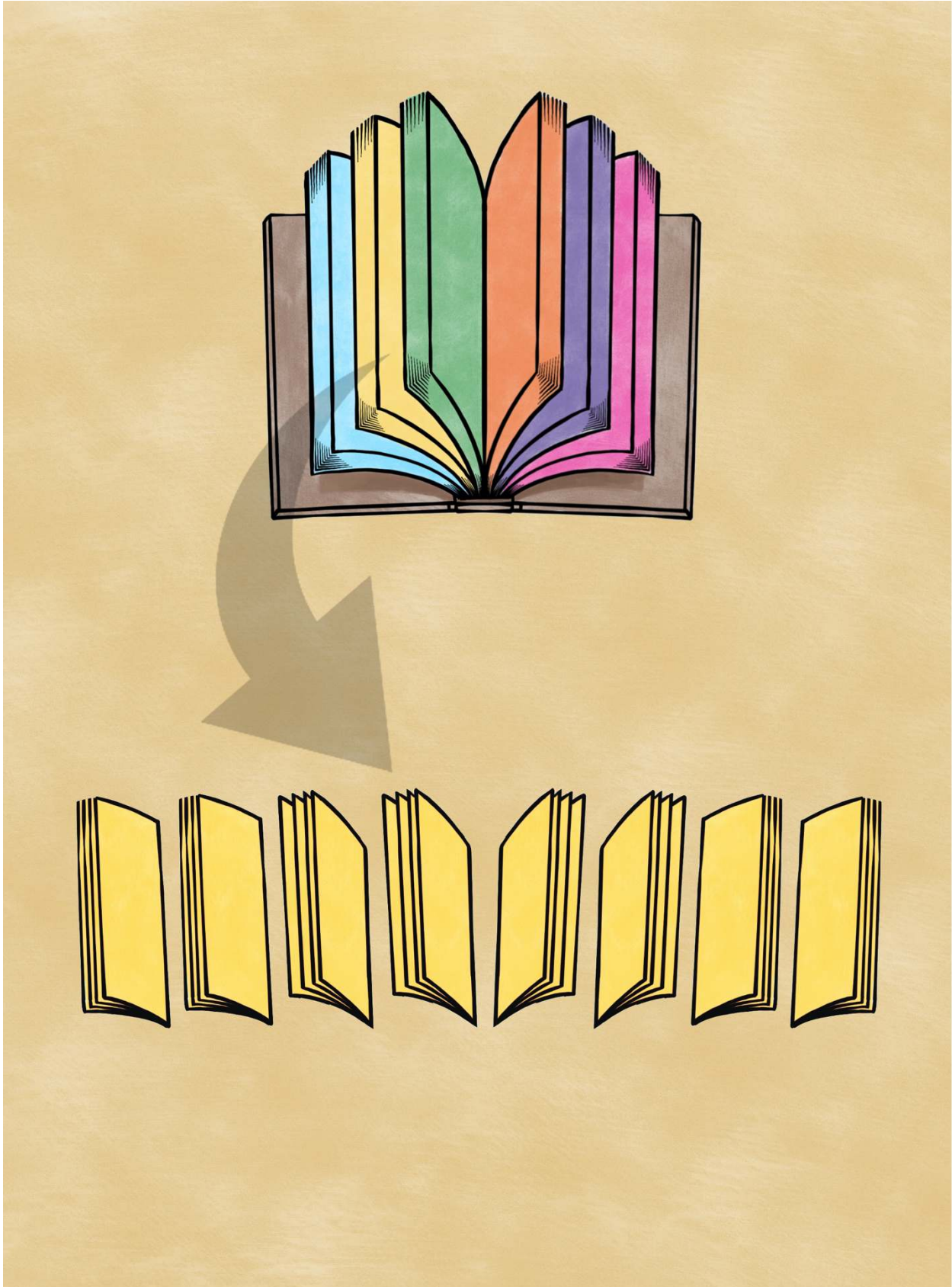


THE PROPHETS



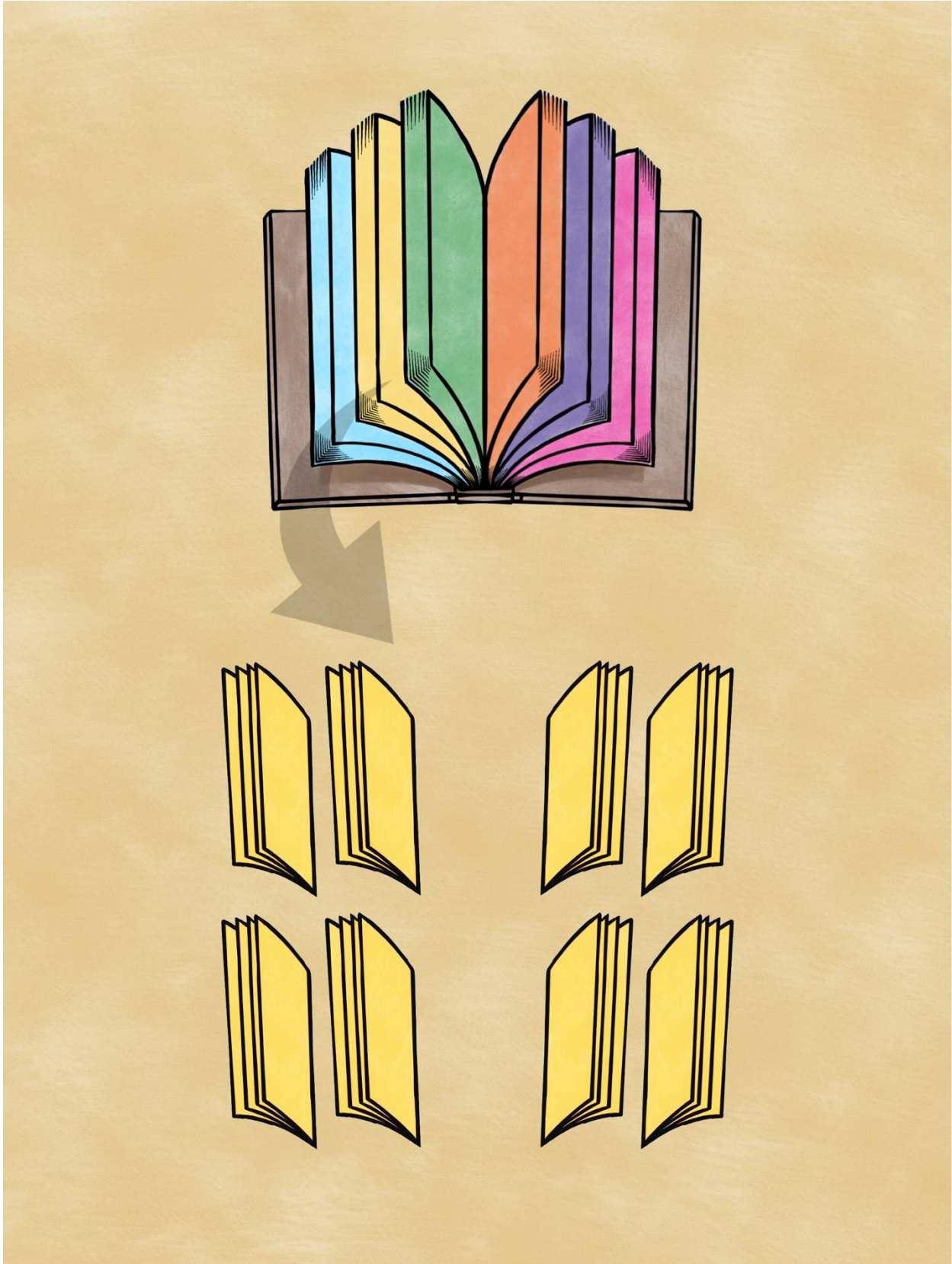
DEVELOPING LEADERS
WORKSHOP



1. What books are found in the Prophets?

The books in the Prophets are as follows: Joshua, Judges, Samuel (1-2 Samuel were originally one book), Kings (1-2 Kings were originally one book), Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Isaiah, and “the 12” (Hosea, Joel, Amos, Obadiah, Jonah, Micah, Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah, Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi). These books presume the reader has some familiarity with the Law (Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy). All of the books in the Prophets draw a great deal of material from the Law. The books are a natural progression after the Law. This means they are the next logical step in the story of God’s people. These books prepare the reader for the Writings (the third section in the Old Testament). Finally, the Prophets are frequently quoted in the New Testament. New Testament writers assume the reader has some familiarity with the Prophets. New Testament writers consider the writings in the Prophets to be true.





2. How are the Prophets arranged?

The Prophets may be divided into two categories. The first group of books in the Prophets are **history** books. The books in this first category in the Prophets are Joshua, Judges, Samuel (1-2 Samuel were originally one book), and Kings (1-2 Kings were originally one book). The second group of books in the Prophets are books filled with **sermons written in Hebrew poetry**. These could also be called books of **commentary**. While there are some narratives (i.e., stories) in the books in this second category in the Prophets (for instance, the books of Jonah includes a good deal of narrative), for the most part, the books in this second category in the Prophets are, again, sermons written in Hebrew poetry. The books in this second category in the Prophets are Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Isaiah, and “the 12” (Hosea, Joel, Amos, Obadiah, Jonah, Micah, Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah, Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi).

The history books within the Prophets are focused upon Yahweh’s actions and Israel’s actions. More specifically, the history books focus upon Yahweh’s faithful care for his people and the people’s obedience and/or disobedience to Yahweh. Quite often, the focus is upon the king. The king is the leader of God’s people. Therefore, his actions are of particular importance. The people follow the king into obedience or disobedience.

The history books within the Prophets aren’t focused on world history. They do not describe all of the events taking place in all of the parts of the world. Rather, they are focused on the history of Israel (or, at a later point in time, the history of Israel and Judah). This is not because God does not care about the rest of the world. Rather, it is because God promised to bring blessing to all of the nations of the world through the descendants of Abraham (see **Genesis 12:1-3**). That is why the events taking place in Israel are of particular importance. At rare times, however, the writers in this section of books do focus upon events taking place in other nations. For instance, a military

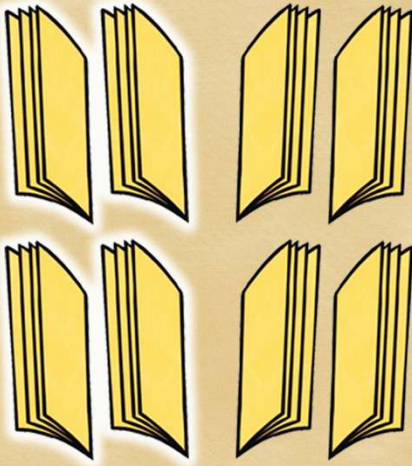


commander from Syria is healed of leprosy (see **2 Kings 5**). According to Jesus, he was the only one healed of leprosy at this time. No one from Israel was healed (see **Luke 4:27**). This Syrian man's healing was intended to send a message to the nations and to Israel. While they are rare, these sections focusing upon other nations demand special attention. They demonstrate God's plans are for the entire world. They also demonstrate God's people must obey him or they will not receive his care.

The books with sermons in the Prophets are, like the history books in the Prophets, mainly focused upon Israel. As with the history books within the Prophets, this is not because God does not care about the rest of the world. Rather, it is because Israel's obedience to the covenant is key to God's blessing coming to the rest of the world.

It is a great help to the preacher or teacher to consider how Jesus and the apostles interpret events from the first category of books within the Prophets. It is also important to consider how Jesus and the apostles interpret the sermons found in the second category of books within the Prophets.



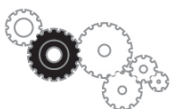
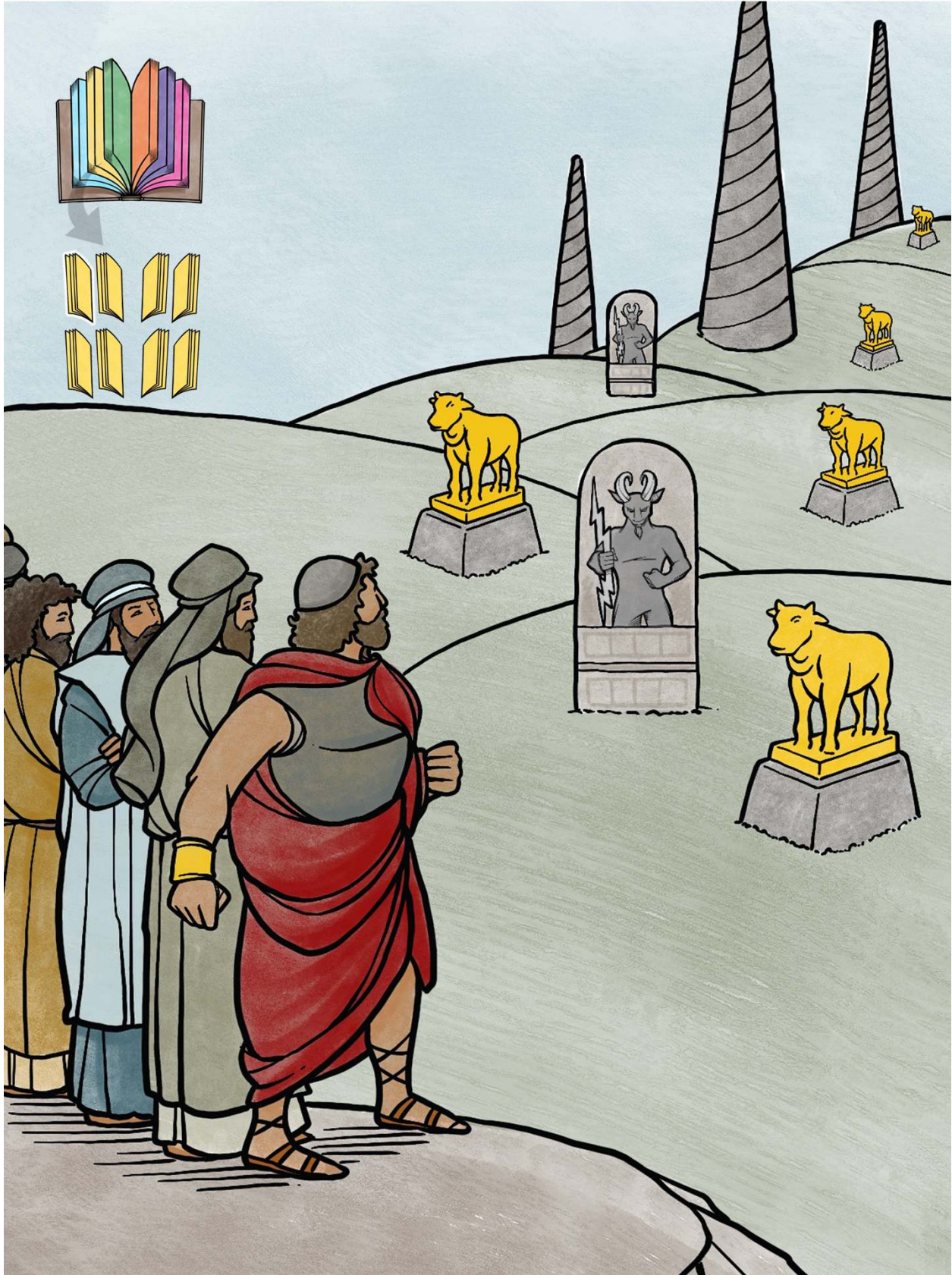


3. The tragic history of Israel in the Promised Land.

The book of Moses ends with Israel about to enter into the Promised Land. The reader is hoping that Israel will walk in obedience to Yahweh. However, a close reading of the book of Moses would have prepared the reader for Israel's sad history of false worship and disobedience. Moses had prophesied that Israel would disobey and would not stay in the land (see **Deuteronomy 4:15-31**). As the reader reads the Prophets, he or she is able to watch Moses's prophecy come to pass in Joshua, Judges, Samuel, and Kings. From the very beginning, Israel refuses to walk in obedience to Yahweh (see **Joshua 7**). Even though Yahweh delivers Israel again and again, Israel walks in disobedience again and again. Israel worships false gods. Yahweh sends prophets to call Israel to repentance. Israel refuses to listen. Eventually, just as Moses had prophesied, Israel was driven from the land. In the same way God's first son (Adam) was driven from God's good place, God's "son" Israel was no longer able to stay in God's place.

A metaphor commonly used in the Old Testament of Israel is of a vine (see **Psalms 80:8-14, Isaiah 5:2, Jeremiah 2:21, 5:10, 6:9, and 8:13**). Yahweh is compared to a gardener. He planted his vine in land he had prepared (see **Isaiah 5:2**). For a brief time, it appeared the vine was growing (see **1 Kings 4:25**). However, the vine produced bad fruit (see **Isaiah 5:2** and **Hosea 10:1**). Eventually, the vine was ripped out of the soil and the land sat empty (**Psalms 80:8-14**). This is, sadly, the history of Israel in God's good place. Jesus's parables in **Matthew 21:33-42, Mark 12:1-10, Luke 13:5-7, and 20:9-17** are all intended to remind the people of this sad story. However, the story of God's "vine" doesn't end with fruitlessness. Jesus is, like Israel, compared to a vine (see **John 15**). In this chapter, Jesus calls himself the "true vine." Unlike Israel, Jesus always bears good fruit (see **Psalms 1:3**). All those who are in him also bear good fruit (see **Galatians 5:22-23**).





4. The book of Joshua – entrance into the land.

The book of Joshua is a book of narrative (i.e., stories). The book of Joshua is the first book in the Prophets. Again, the Prophets may be divided into two categories. The first category contains books of history. The second category contains books of commentary. Joshua is the first book in the first category of books within the Prophets.

As the first book in the Prophets, Joshua has a unique place among the books in the Prophets. This book serves as a **transition** between the Law (the book of Moses) and the Prophets. The book introduces the reader to a new leader of God's people. But even though Joshua is in a new section of the Bible (the Prophets) and focuses on a new leader of God's people (Joshua), it is still connected to the first section of the Bible. It is telling the same story as Moses began in the book of Moses. The book of Joshua makes it clear that everything written in the book of Moses still applied to the people of Israel (see **Joshua 8:32**).

The author of Joshua is not named in the book. It is not known if Joshua wrote any of the book. While Joshua clearly was interested in recording details of Israel's conquest of the land (see **Joshua 18:8**), he could not have written the entire book. This is clear, because the book of Joshua describes the death of Joshua (see **Joshua 24:29-31**). Based on how the author speaks of events recorded in the book of Joshua, portions of the book may have been written shortly after the events recorded in the book. For instance, the author speaks of twelve stones that Joshua set up as a memorial and declares "they are there to this day" (see **Joshua 4:9**). And the author speaks as if Rahab was still alive when he wrote the book (see **Joshua 6:25**). Whenever the author lived, it is clear he wants the reader to believe that the events actually happened. That is why he makes so many connections between events recorded in the book and the day the book was written (see **Joshua 7:26**). These things all serve to prove that the events recorded in the book actually happened in the way they are described. For instance, the author explains why places are called by



certain names (see **Joshua 5:9**). It is clear, as with all of the authors in the Bible, the author of Joshua loves God and has great faith in him. The author wants his readers to put their trust in Yahweh.

Joshua was a great man, however he is never presented in the book of Joshua as “a prophet like Moses” (see **Deuteronomy 18:5-19** and **34:9-12**). He is not the prophet whom God was going to raise up. Even as the reader admires Joshua’s faithfulness, the reader is left waiting for a different leader—a prophet who is “like Moses.” This means this coming prophet would, like Moses, see God face-to-face and, like Moses, perform many signs and wonders. That prophet is Jesus!

Joshua had been Moses’s assistant (see **Joshua 1:1**). He was “full of the spirit of wisdom, for Moses had laid his hands on him” (see **Deuteronomy 34:9**). God commanded Joshua to lead God’s people over the Jordan River and into God’s good place. Based on **1 Kings 6:1**, the exodus took place in 1446 BC. This means the conquest of Canaan took place 40 years later. Therefore, the conquest of Canaan took place around 1406 BC.

Joshua was a great leader. The people of Israel “served the LORD all the days of Joshua” (see **Joshua 24:31**). In this way, Joshua is a type of Christ. Christ, like Joshua, leads God’s people to God’s good place and he helps them obey God. Unlike Joshua, however, Jesus is able to do this perfectly. And Joshua had another weakness. His leadership was temporary. Death prevented him from serving any longer. Jesus, even though he died, has risen again. He lives forever, therefore God’s people will never be without his leadership. And Jesus is able to do something else Joshua could not do. He is able to change the hearts of God’s people so they are able to obey God (see **John 14:15-31**). Therefore, Jesus is like Joshua and he is unlike Joshua. Joshua’s leadership is a small picture of Jesus’s leadership.



Even though the book is named Joshua and describes Joshua's actions and his leadership, it is not just about Joshua. It is also about the nation of Israel and their inheritance of the land God promised to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. The author carefully records Israel's entry into the land and their subsequent victories and defeats as they go through the land and divide the land. The author's words demonstrate that Israel's successes and failures were all directly related to Israel's obedience or disobedience to God's Law (recorded in the book of Moses). The author wants his readers to carefully think about Israel's defeats and victories in the light of the Law.

The author of Joshua clearly wants his readers to see that Yahweh was faithful in giving the land to Israel. The author wants his readers to see Yahweh keeping his part of the covenant (see, for instance, **Joshua 10:14**). Yahweh's faithfulness is summarized in **Joshua 21:43-45**:

Thus the LORD gave to Israel all the land that he swore to give to their fathers. And they took possession of it, and they settled there. And the LORD gave them rest on every side just as he had sworn to their fathers. Not one of all their enemies had withstood them, for the LORD had given all their enemies into their hands. Not one word of all the good promises that the LORD had made to the house of Israel had failed; all came to pass.

The book of Joshua demonstrates that Yahweh perfectly kept his part of the covenant. All of Israel's victories are demonstrations of Yahweh fighting for his people. However, Israel did not keep their part of the covenant. In their "marriage" to Yahweh, Israel frequently committed **spiritual adultery**. From the moment when Israel entered into the Promised Land, they disobeyed God's commands. Beyond this, some of the people still worshiped other gods (see **Joshua 24:14**).

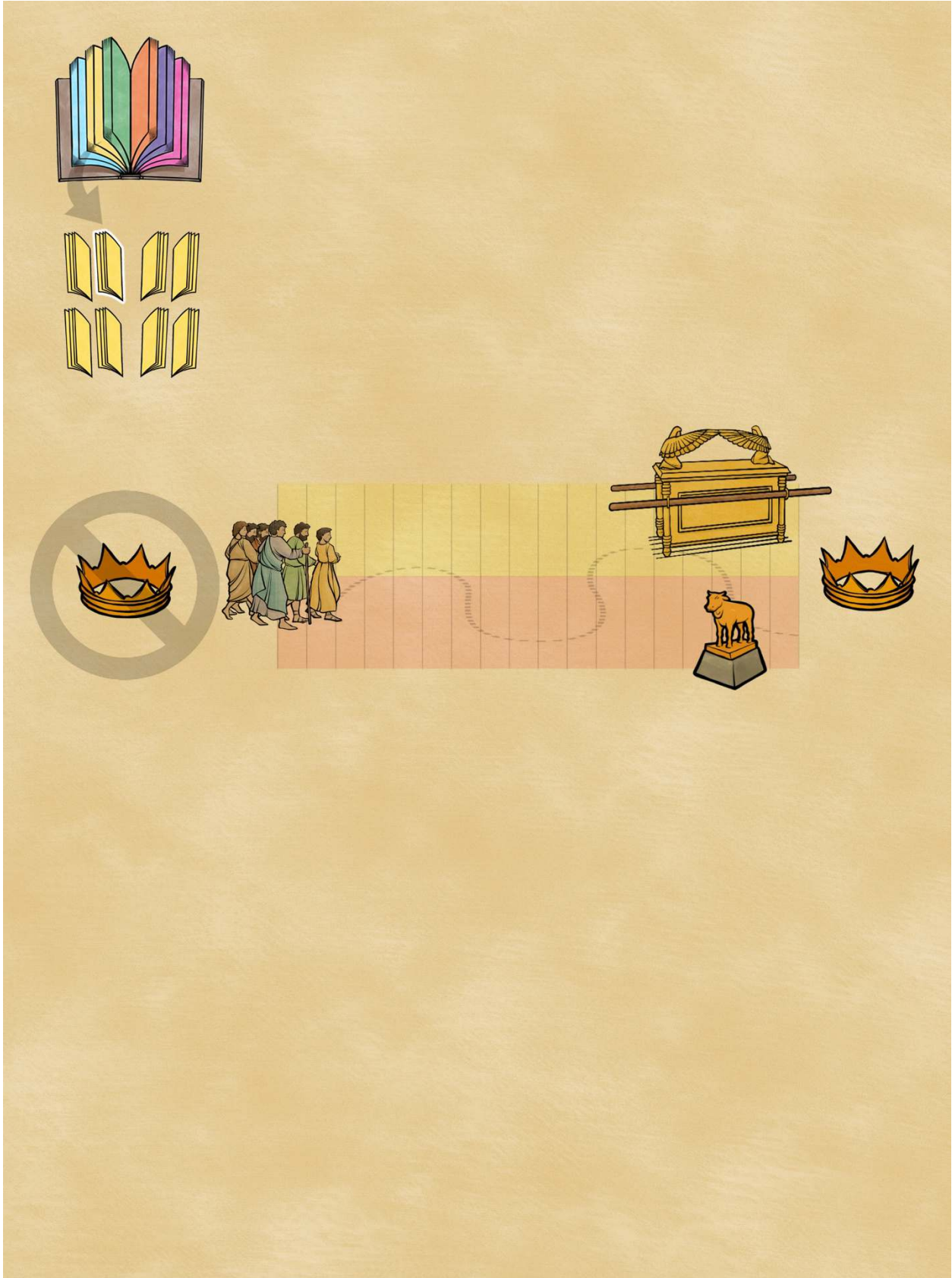


Later prophets declare that Israel was disobedient from the moment they entered into the land. For instance, in **Hosea 9:15** Yahweh declares, “Every evil of theirs is in Gilgal; there I began to hate them.” Gilgal was the first place Israel stopped after they crossed into the Promised Land (see **Joshua 5:8**). Yahweh’s words in Hosea indicate that, even at this first stop in the land, Israel was not obedient.

But the reason Israel wasn’t able to walk in complete obedience didn’t just rest with Israel. It also rested with Joshua. As Israel’s leader, he simply did not have the power to change their hearts. He didn’t always seek God’s wisdom (see **Joshua 9**). A new and better leader was needed in order for God’s people to obey—a leader with power to change the hearts of the people. Jesus is that leader.

The writer of Hebrews (in the New Testament) wants his readers to consider that Joshua was not able to give the people “rest”: “For if Joshua had given them rest, God would not have spoken of another day later on. So then, there remains a Sabbath rest for the people of God, for whoever has entered God’s rest has also rested from his works as God did from his” (**Hebrews 4:8**). This means, even though Joshua brought the people into God’s good place, he could not give them the ultimate rest they needed. A better leader than Joshua was needed if Israel was to truly “rest” in God’s good place.





5. The book of Judges – life without a king.

Judges is a book of narrative (i.e., stories). As with most books of narrative, there is more than one type of literature in this book. There is also a long poem in Judges 5. It is important for preachers and teachers to understand how to use all types of literature found within the Bible.

Judges is the second book in the Prophets. The author (or authors) of Judges is not named, however, it is clear the author lived after the time period described in Judges. The author is a man of faith, and he wants the reader to know that the things he is writing about actually took place. That is why he includes certain details connecting events taking place in his day with events that took place during the time of Judges (see **Judges 1:21**). While portions of the book may have been written shortly after the events described in Judges, the final form of Judges was not completed until after the Israelites went into captivity (see **Judges 18:30**). For Israelites living during the time of the captivity, this book would have demonstrated that, from the very beginning of Israel's entrance into the land, Israel had been disobedient to Yahweh.

The author describes events that took place during the time period after the death of Joshua (see **Judges 1:1**) and before there was a king in Israel (see **Judges 17:6, 18:1, 19:1, and 21:25**). This means Judges describes the events that took place in Israel after the time period described in the book of Joshua and before the time period described in 1-2 Samuel. The events described in the book of Ruth also took place during the time period described in Judges. However, Judges and Ruth are in different sections of the Old Testament. Judges is the second book in the Prophets. It is located after Joshua and before 1-2 Samuel and 1-2 Kings. Ruth is the first book in the section of the Old Testament called the Writings. In the oldest lists of the books in the Hebrew Bible, Ruth is placed just before Psalms. The placement of the books within the **Old Testament canon** is not the only difference between these two books. They have a very different tone. Judges describes the repeated failures of the people of



God and ends in a very negative way. The author emphasizes that Israel had no king and that the people were doing whatever they wanted to do (see **Judges 17:6, 18:1, 19:1, and 21:25**). The people within the book of Judges, with the exception of a few leaders and a few situations, do not generally obey God or follow his commandments. Ruth, however, describes the obedient choices made by God's people and ends in a very positive way. The book ends with an emphasis on King David. He is important because Yahweh promised David that one of his sons would sit on the throne forever (see **2 Samuel 7:1-17**). Jesus is the one spoken of in this prophecy to David. He is God's forever King.

The book of Judges clearly demonstrates that God's people were not living in obedience to the covenant that was made between Yahweh and the people at Mount Sinai. Over and over again, the people of Israel fell into sin and idolatry. Thus, Judges demonstrates that Israel was unfaithful. It was breaking the covenant. In fact, late in the book of Judges (see **Judges 17-21**), Israel's sin is purposely described in a way that would have reminded the reader of the sin of Sodom and Gomorrah. The reader is supposed to think about the sin of Sodom and Gomorrah when he or she reads about the sins of God's people. Israel during the time of the Judges was just like those two cities that were wiped out because of sin (see **Genesis 18:22-19:29**)! But while the book of Judges emphasizes the unfaithfulness of the people, it also emphasizes the kindness, mercy, and faithfulness of Yahweh. He is constantly portrayed as listening to his people and delivering them from their enemies.

God's people were delivered during the time period described in Judges because God gave them **leaders**. These leaders are called "judges" in the book of Judges. While the word judges (in English) is sometimes associated with judges sitting in a court of law, that is not what these judges did. A judge was primarily a strong leader whom God raised up to deliver Israel from its enemies and to lead the people. God delivered the people as long as the judge was alive. However, **after the death** of the judge, the people would very quickly be overcome by evil and would, once again,

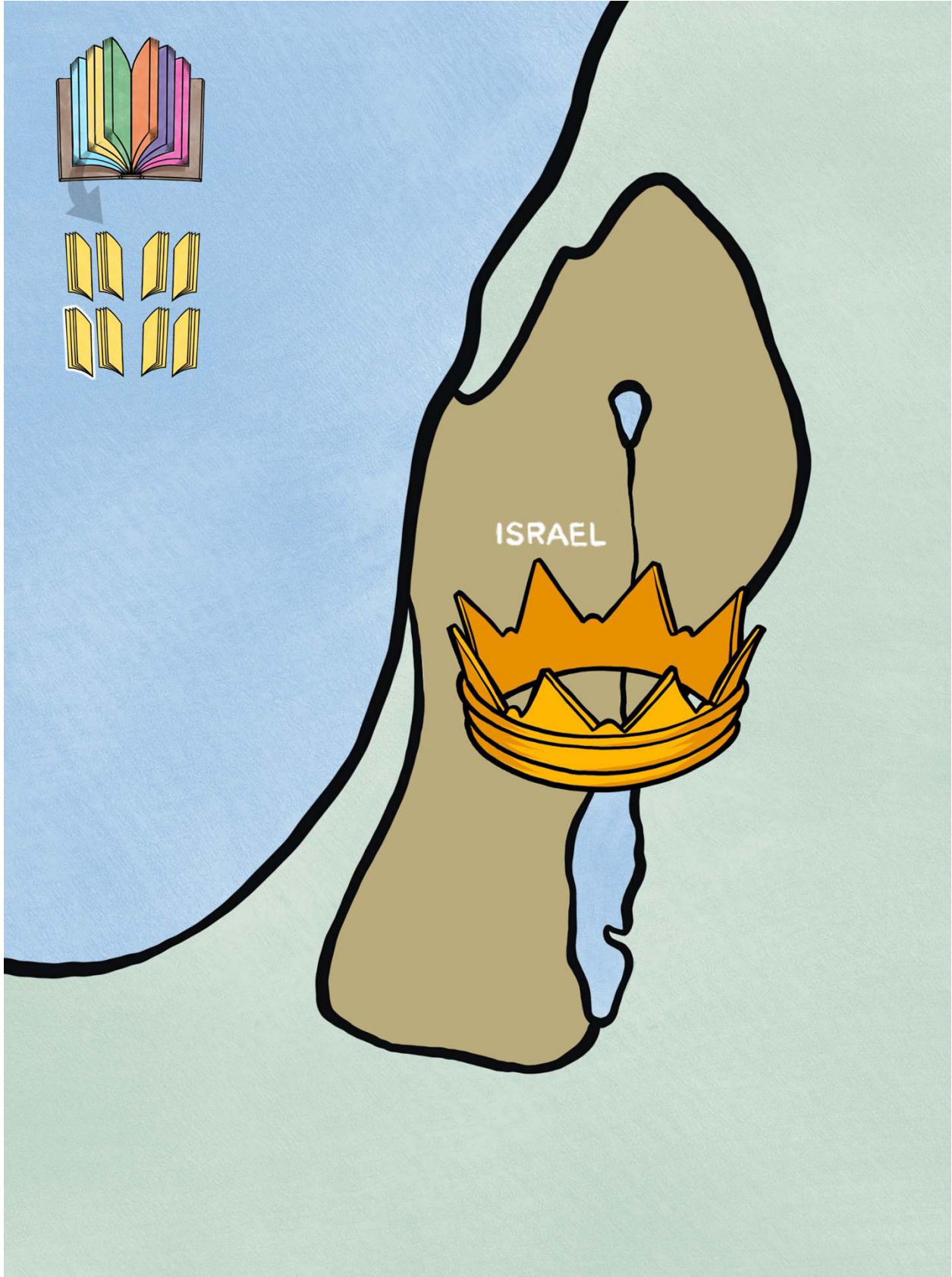


be conquered by enemies (see **Judges 2:16-19**). This would start the pattern of sin, destruction, and deliverance all over again. The people would cry out to God for help, he would raise up a judge, and the judge would rescue the people. The death of the judge, then, was a major problem for the people of Israel, for death prevented the judges from saving Israel for a long period of time. Obviously, if God's anointed leader had never died, this would have been a great help to God's people! But, because of sin, all people die. Thus, deliverance of God's people was always short-lived. This book creates a desire for a leader who will not die. That leader has come. His name is Jesus! He **always lives** to deliver God's people (see **Hebrews 7:25**)!

The fact that the book focuses so much attention on the leaders of God's people demonstrates the fact that God's people need someone to lead them. If God's people do not have a godly leader, they will walk in disobedience and they will be conquered by enemies. But this book demonstrates that God's people need more than a godly leader, they need a king! The book of Judges is intended to create a desire among God's people for a godly king. It is clear the author of Judges wanted a godly king. Only a godly king will deliver God's people from their enemies. Only a godly king will cause God's people to obey. No longer are God's people waiting for a king like this to appear. Jesus has come! He has defeated the enemies of God's people and he causes God's people to walk in obedience. **In these days, there is a king in God's place, and everyone who follows the king is doing what is right in his eyes!**

The book of Judges prepares the reader for the book of 1-2 Samuel (these books were originally combined in Hebrew). The reader finishes Judges longing for a king. 1 Samuel describes the coming of that king.





6. The book of Samuel – Samuel, Saul, and David.

Samuel is a book of narrative (i.e., stories). As with most books of narrative, there is more than one type of literature in this book. There are also long poems in **1 Samuel 2:1-10**, **2 Samuel 1:19-27**, and **22:1-23:7**. These poems, particularly the ones at the beginning and end of Samuel, are important. Poetry frequently emphasizes the main point of the text and includes details about the Christ. This is true of the poems at the beginning and end of Samuel. It is important for preachers and teachers to understand how to use all types of literature found within the Bible.

1-2 Samuel was originally one book in the Hebrew. Therefore, 1-2 Samuel can be described as one book—the book of Samuel. Samuel is the third book in the Prophets. It is found within the first category of books within the Prophets. Again, there are two categories of books in the Prophets: history books and books of commentary. Samuel is a book of history. The author of Samuel is not named.

Samuel describes the end of the time when judges were leading in Israel and the beginning of the time when kings began to lead Israel.

The book begins with a description of the birth of Samuel (1 Samuel 1). Samuel was the last judge to lead Israel. He was also a prophet. As God's spokesperson, Samuel anointed the first two kings in Israel. He anointed Saul as king over Israel (see 1 Samuel 8-10) and he anointed David as king over Israel (see **1 Samuel 16:1-13**).

There is an important poem in **1 Samuel 2:1-10**. The poem is a prayer of Hannah—Samuel's mother. This poem is important because it speaks of God delivering his people by means of his "anointed." The word translated "anointed" in the English is "Messiah" in the Hebrew and "Christ" in the Greek. Hannah is prophesying about the coming of the Christ! He is the one who will deliver God's people. Mary's words of praise after she became pregnant by the Holy Spirit are connected to Hannah's



words in **1 Samuel 2:1-10** (see **Luke 1:46-55**). This demonstrates that Jesus is the one being talked about by Hannah in 1 Samuel 2.

After Hannah's poem, there are several chapters describing the evil things that were happening at the tabernacle. The book then describes a time period when the ark of the covenant was taken into a foreign nation (**1 Samuel 5-6**). It must have appeared, to people living in Israel at that time, that God had forgotten about his people. Even though Samuel was leading God's people, the people wanted a king. This was displeasing to Samuel. The people wanted a king not because they wanted to follow God more faithfully, but because they wanted to be like the other nations (see **1 Samuel 8:5**). This was, therefore, a rejection of God as their king (see **1 Samuel 8:7**).

It is important to know that it was not wrong for a king to lead God's people. Moses declared that a king could lead God's people (see **Deuteronomy 17:14-20**). As Moses's words in Deuteronomy make clear, this king was to be a follower of Yahweh. He was to love Yahweh's commandments and to lead the people in obedience. The people during Samuel's time were not asking for this type of king. They did not want a king who reflected God's image (see **Genesis 1:26-28**). Instead, they wanted a king who reflected the image of the kings in other nations! This is exactly what God gave them. King Saul was like the kings in other nations. He was very tall, so he looked like a king. But he did not love Yahweh or treasure his words. 1 Samuel 8-31 describes the reign of king Saul. He did not lead the people into obedience.

Even though Saul was unfaithful to Yahweh, Yahweh still delivered the people of Israel. This demonstrates his mercy and faithfulness. It demonstrates that he was keeping his part of the covenant made with Israel at Mt. Sinai.

In 1 Samuel 15, Yahweh rejects Saul as king over Israel. In 1 Samuel 16, a new man is anointed king over Israel. This man's name is David. David is very important in the story of the Bible. Even though he was anointed king over Israel in 1 Samuel 16, he



didn't begin ruling over Israel until the time period described in 2 Samuel. Between 1 Samuel 16 and 2 Samuel, David was recognized as king by Yahweh and by a few people in Israel, but most of the people recognized Saul as king. This is similar to the Lord Jesus. When he was on earth, he was anointed by a prophet. This anointing happened at Jesus' baptism. At Jesus's baptism, God spoke from heaven declaring that Jesus was "my Son." God was declaring that Jesus was his anointed king! But people did not recognize Jesus as king. Like David, Jesus was persecuted and most of the people recognized another person as king (Caesar). There will come a day, however, when all people will recognize Jesus as king. In this way, David's reign is similar to the reign of Christ. David is a **type** of Christ. This means he is like Jesus in many ways.

David's victory over Goliath is another way David is like Christ (see 1 Samuel 17). Goliath was an enemy God's people could not defeat. David went to battle for them and defeated this enemy. The people followed David and joined in the battle after David defeated Goliath. In the same way, Jesus defeated an enemy God's people could not defeat. His death on the cross defeated Satan, death, and sin. In the same way that the battle continued even after David defeated Goliath, there is still a battle being waged today. God's people have followed Jesus and joined in the battle. Other elements of David's reign are also pictures of Christ's reign. For instance, David wrote many of the psalms. He led Israel in worship. The wise preacher or teacher will not focus on David as the ultimate hero in these chapters. Rather, he or she will use David and compare or contrast him with Christ.

It is clear the author of Samuel doesn't want the reader to see David as the perfect king. The author clearly speaks about David's sin (see 2 Samuel 11 and 24). In this way, David is not like Christ.

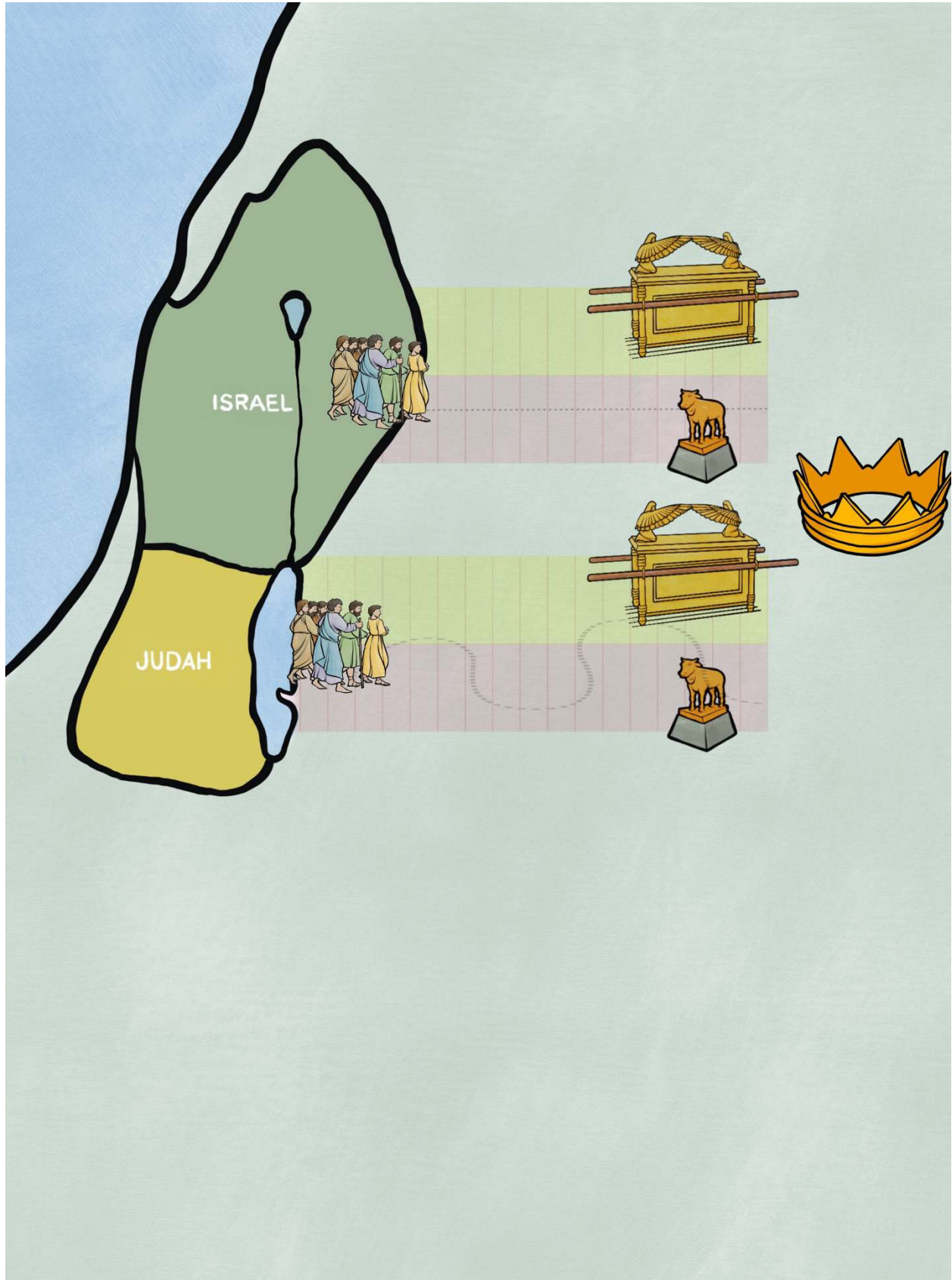
2 Samuel 7:1-17 is very, very important. These verses are referred to throughout the rest of the Bible. 2 Samuel 7 describes **God's covenant with David**. This is



sometimes referred to as the **Davidic Covenant**. In these verses, Yahweh speaks to David. However, his words impact all people. Yahweh tells David, “I will raise up your **offspring** after you, who shall come from your body, and I will establish **his kingdom**. He shall build **a house** for my name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever. I will be to him a father, and he shall be to me **a son**.” This is a reference to Jesus as God’s forever king! Jesus is David’s **offspring**. That is why people in the New Testament sometimes refer to Jesus as the “son of David” (see, for instance, **Matthew 9:27, 12:23, 15:22, 20:30-31, 21:9, 21:15, and 22:42**). This promise means that David’s son will have an eternal kingdom, will build a place (temple) where God is worshiped, and will have a special relationship with God as his Son. Jesus is the one who fulfills all of these promises! This can be seen in many places. For instance, at Jesus’s baptism and when Jesus was on the mountain when he was **transfigured, a voice came from heaven saying “this is my Son!” God is telling people that Jesus is the one who fulfills 2 Samuel 7. He is God’s Son!** These verses from Samuel are referred to in many different places in the New Testament. They are also referred to in other books in the Prophets and in the Writings. It is very important for the preacher or teacher to understand that these verses are speaking about Jesus! God’s Son has come. He has built his temple (the church!). He will forever be sitting on his throne!

2 Samuel ends by describing the end of David’s reign. There are many troubles in David’s reign. Some of these are caused by David’s sin. It is important for the reader to see David as a sinner, for this helps the reader focus on Christ Jesus as the hero rather than David. David, like the rest of humanity, needed a Savior. He, like the rest of the Old Testament saints, was hoping in the coming of the Christ.





7. The book of Kings – a history of the kings ruling God’s people before the exile.

1-2 Kings is a book of narrative (i.e., stories). While poems were a significant part of Samuel and, because of their strategic placement at the beginning and end of the book, demand close attention, they are not nearly as prominent in Kings. There is one poem in **2 Kings 19:20-28**. Again, it is important for preachers and teachers to recognize and to understand how to use all types of literature found within the Bible.

The author (or authors) of 1-2 Kings is not named. 1-2 Kings was originally one book in the Hebrew. Therefore, 1-2 Kings can be described as one book—the book of Kings. Kings is the fourth book in the Prophets. It is found within the first category of books within the Prophets. Again, there are two categories of books in the Prophets: history books (Joshua, Judges, Samuel, and Kings) and books of commentary (Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Isaiah, and the Twelve).

But while Kings is a book of history, it is directly connected to many of the books in the commentary category of the Prophets. Isaiah, Jeremiah, Hosea, Amos, Jonah, Micah, Nahum, Habakkuk, and Zephaniah were all written during the time period described in Kings. For this reason, Kings is specially connected to the commentary books in the Prophets. Kings provides readers of the Prophets with essential background information. (Joel may have been written during the time period described in Kings. Ezekiel, Obadiah, Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi were written after the time period described in Kings.)

Kings begins where Samuel ended. It begins with a description of the last days of David’s reign and the beginning of Solomon’s reign. Initially, it appears that Solomon may be the “forever” king promised in **2 Samuel 7:1-17**. He is given great wisdom by God, he loves God, and he builds the temple. He leads Israel into a golden age (see 1 Kings 1-10). In the early days of his ministry, Solomon was a type of **Christ**. This



means his reign was a picture of the reign of Jesus Christ. The wise preacher or teacher will use Solomon's early years to speak about Christ's eternal reign.

However, Solomon's later years as king are not like the reign of Christ. He began worshiping other gods. He broke all of the laws concerning kings that were given by Moses in **Deuteronomy 17:14-20**. For instance, he acquired many horses, he married many different women, and he acquired for himself a great deal of silver and gold.

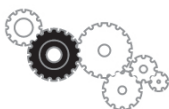
Because of Solomon's disobedience, the one unified kingdom of Israel was broken into two kingdoms—Judah in the south and Israel in the north (see **1 Kings 12:16-24**). Kings related to King David ruled in Judah. Kings who were not related to King David ruled in Israel. From the time of its beginning, the northern kingdom of Israel was guilty of great idolatry. The first king of Israel placed two golden calves in Israel (see **1 Kings 12:25-33**). He did not want the people in Israel to travel south to the temple in Judah. The people in Israel began worshiping the golden calves. None of the kings in Israel (to the north) worshiped the Lord with all their heart. All of them, to one extent or another, tolerated idol worship. Some of the kings in Judah also tolerated idolatry. Some of them tried to walk in obedience to Yahweh. But many of the kings who were obedient were only partially obedient. Thus, while Judah did not embrace idolatry as fully as Israel, it was also guilty of walking in disobedience to Yahweh.

The book of Kings alternates between descriptions of events taking place in Israel and events taking place in Judah. While a great deal of the attention is placed on the **kings** ruling in Israel and Judah, the book of Kings also focuses attention on **prophets** who were working mighty miracles in Israel during this time period. Two prophets, in particular, are focused upon—Elijah and Elisha. In the same way that the kings are types of Christ, the prophets are types of Christ. Their miracles are small pictures of the work that Jesus does among his people. Jesus is the ultimate king, and



he is the ultimate prophet. (He is also the ultimate priest, however priests are not a major focus in Kings.)

The book of Kings demonstrates that the people of God need a godly king in order to follow Yahweh. The book demonstrates that none of the kings of Israel or the kings of Judah (even the godly ones) were able to change the hearts of the people. Thus, the book creates the hunger for a better king. While there are godly kings in the book of Kings, all of these kings have the same problem: death. The book of Kings creates a hunger for a king who will reign eternally!





8. The important words and deeds of the prophets.

The author of the book of Kings focuses on the actions and obedience or disobedience of the **kings** in Judah and Israel and the actions and obedience or disobedience of **the people** in Judah and Israel. But there is another group of people focused on in the book of Kings. The author focuses a great deal of attention on the words and the actions of **the prophets** during this time period. Some of the prophets in Kings are not named. Some of the prophets in Kings are named. The author of Kings pays particular attention to two of the prophets: Elijah and Elisha.

Remember, there are two categories of books in the Prophets. Joshua, Judges, Samuel, and Kings are books of history. These books record the history of the nation of Israel from the time period of Joshua through the time period when it was split into two nations (Israel and Judah) until the time when Judah was conquered by Babylon and taken in exile. Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Isaiah, and the Twelve are books of commentary. These books record the comments of the prophets during this same time period.

In the same way that the books in the Prophets may be divided into two categories, the prophets in these two categories of books within the Prophets may be divided into two categories. The prophets in the first category of books (Joshua, Judges, Samuel, Kings) are more known by their **deeds**. This is fitting, because the first category of books in the Prophets is about the history (or deeds) of Israel. The prophets in the second category of books in the Prophets are more known by their **words**. This is fitting, because the second category of books in the Prophets is about the words of the prophets directed toward Israel at this time.

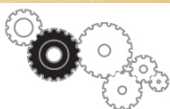
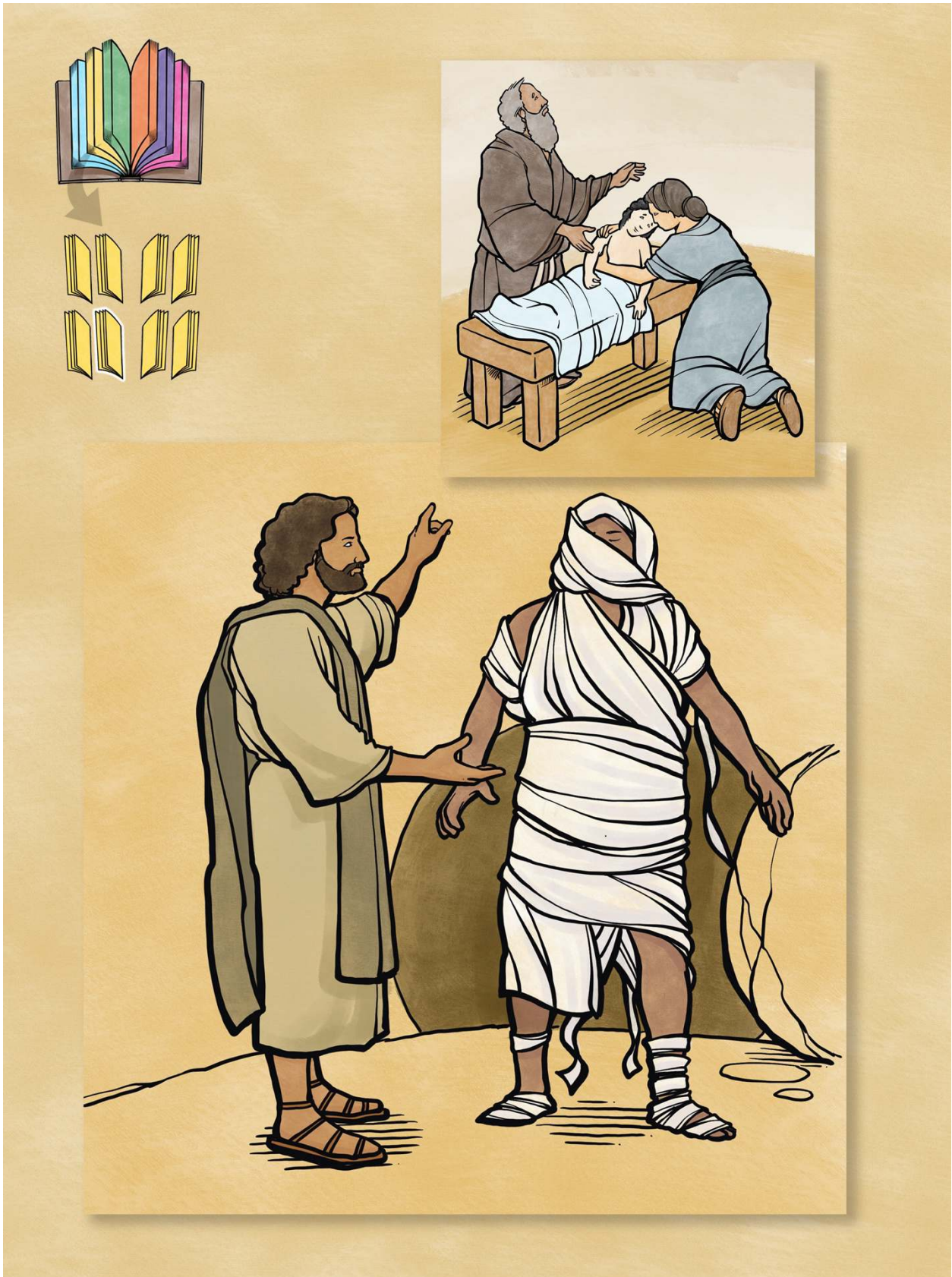
The author in this first category of books in the Prophets focuses on the deeds of the prophets because the deeds of the prophets during this time period were a visual reminder of God's power. They were meant to demonstrate that God was real and that the people needed to repent of their idolatry.



Beyond this, the deeds of the prophets were intended to demonstrate that Baal was false. The deeds of the prophets were intended to mock the identity and the power of Baal. This purposeful mocking of other gods by the prophets is sometimes called **polemical theology**. For instance, the 3 1/2 year famine during the time period of Elijah was intended to mock Baal, for the Israelites thought worshiping Baal would cause the land to be very fruitful. Statues of Baal often include him holding a lightning bolt in his hand. This demonstrates that he was considered to be the god of rain. The fact that it stopped raining at Elijah's word (see **1 Kings 17:1**) and did not rain again until Elijah prayed (see **1 Kings 18:41-46**) was intended to be a mockery of Baal. Baal, the weather god, could not cause it to rain! In ancient stories about Baal, Baal is often pictured as if he rides through the heavens in a chariot. Thus, Elijah running ahead of Ahab's chariot was a demonstration that Yahweh's prophets running on their feet are faster than Baal in his chariot! This was, again, a mockery of Baal. This polemical theology was intended to send a message to the people of God. They were being called to repent of their sin and to turn back to the living God.

The Israelites were given important instructions regarding how they could recognize true and false prophets in **Deuteronomy 18:20-22**. Based on their acceptance of false prophets, it is clear they did not obey God's words regarding prophets.





9. The miracles performed by the prophets prepare the reader for Christ's miracles.

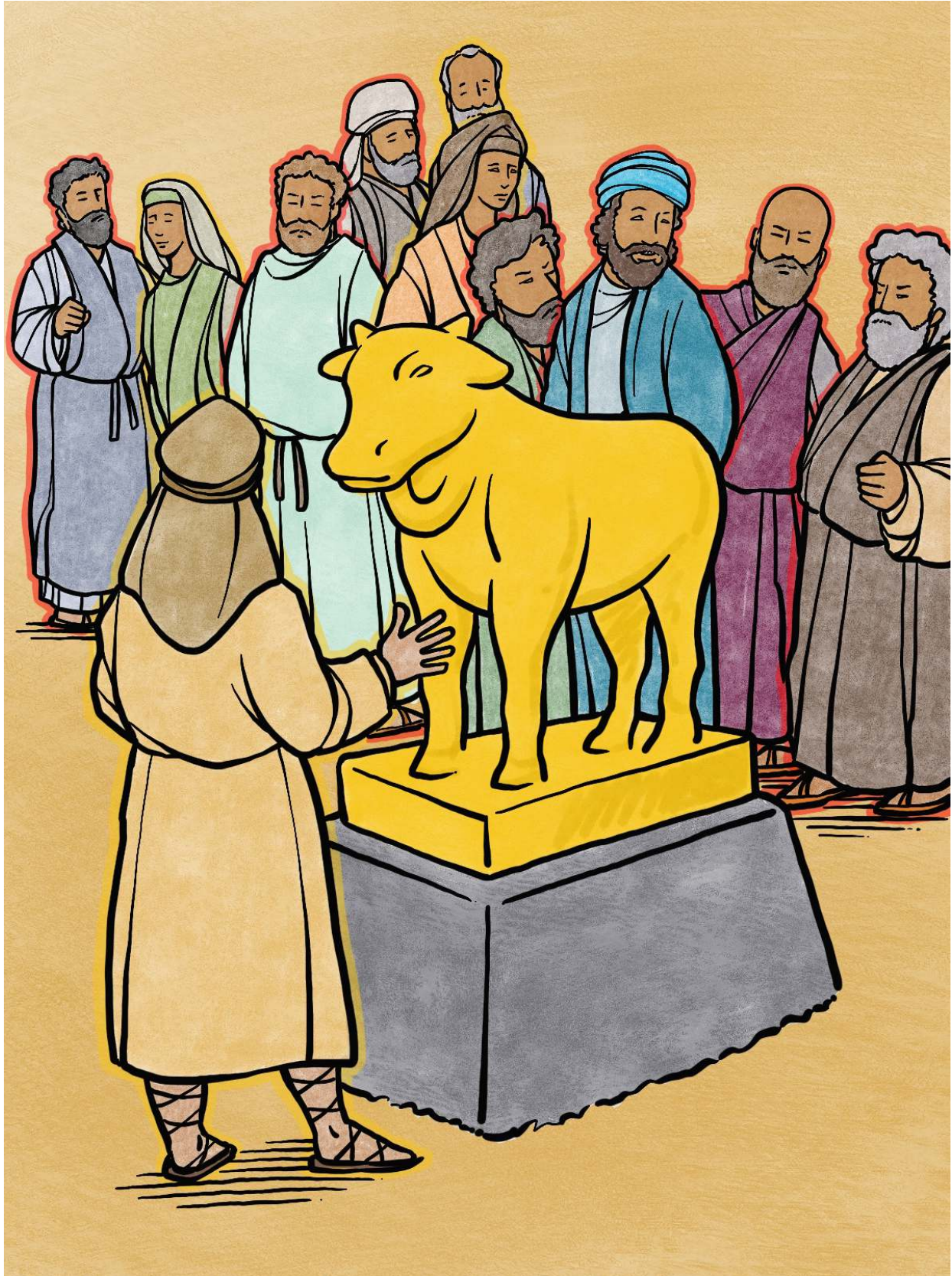
Miracles are performed by God's prophets in many of the Old Testament books. The reader of Kings, in particular will read about many miracles performed by prophets in Israel and in Judah. The miracles of the prophets should be carefully meditated upon. They are demonstrations of God's power and evidence that he is over all things (including wicked kings and nature) and he can do all that he wants. They provide evidence that even in times of great wickedness, God is still ruling in heaven. He is still judging sin. They provide evidence that God cares for his people. But the miracles are more than just Old Testament stories. They should be connected to miracles performed in the New Testament. Specifically, the wise preacher or teacher will connect the miracles of the Old Testament prophets with the miracles performed by Jesus. This is important, because the Old Testament prophets are **types** of Christ. This means their miracles, in some way, are intended to picture Christ's miracles and his ministry. For instance, the fact that Elijah raised a dead boy (see 1 Kings 17:17-24) is intended to remind the reader of Christ raising the dead. Ultimately, Christ doesn't just raise one person. He raises all those who are in him! When Elijah caused the food to multiply for the widow in Zarephath (see Acts 17:8-16), this was a picture of Jesus meeting the needs of all God's people for all time! He is the bread of life (see John 6:22-59).

Jesus said he was a prophet (see Matthew 13:57). Beyond this, Christ's miracles prove he is a prophet. He did miracles like the Old Testament prophets. The people in Jesus' day recognized that he was a prophet. That is why they said, "he is a prophet" (see Matthew 16:14, 21:11, Mark 6:15, and 8:28). But Jesus is more than just "a prophet". His ministry demonstrates that he is "the Prophet". He is the prophet Moses wrote about in Deuteronomy 18:15-19 (see also Acts 3:17-26). Because he has been raised up by God as "the Prophet", all people are commanded to listen to him and to obey his



words. Consider God's words to the disciples about Jesus when he was transfigured: "And a cloud overshadowed them, and a voice came out of the cloud, 'This is my beloved Son; **listen to him**'" (Mark 9:7). These words about listening to the Son are connected to the words about listening to "the Prophet" in Deuteronomy 18. These words demonstrate that Jesus is God's ultimate spokesperson. In the same way that the people of Israel were to listen to the prophets that were sent to them, all people are to listen to the words of the Christ. Regarding the miracles of Jesus being signs, see John 20:30-31. As with earthly signs that are intended to point to something greater. Jesus' miracles are signs pointing to his power and greatness and to the mercy of God.





10. How are the books in the second part of the Prophets arranged?

The books in the Old Testament are arranged in three groups (see **Luke 24:44**). These groups are called the Law, the Prophets, and the Writings (the Writings are sometimes called the Psalms). The group of books in the Prophets may be broken into two sections. The books in the first section focus on the history of the people of Israel. These books are Joshua, Judges, Samuel, and Kings. The books in the second section are not, primarily, books of history. They are books of commentary. That is, they are books commenting on the actions of Israel. In some ways, these books are like collections of sermons. The books in the “commentary” section of the Prophets are Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Isaiah, and “the Twelve.” “The Twelve” is a reference to the 12 minor prophets: Hosea, Joel, Amos, Obadiah, Jonah, Micah, Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah, Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi. While these shorter books of commentary are all separate, the Jews combined them into one book—“the Twelve.” Thus, there are four books in the history section of the Prophets (Joshua, Judges, Samuel, and Kings) and there are four books in the commentary section of the Prophets (Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Isaiah, and “the Twelve”).

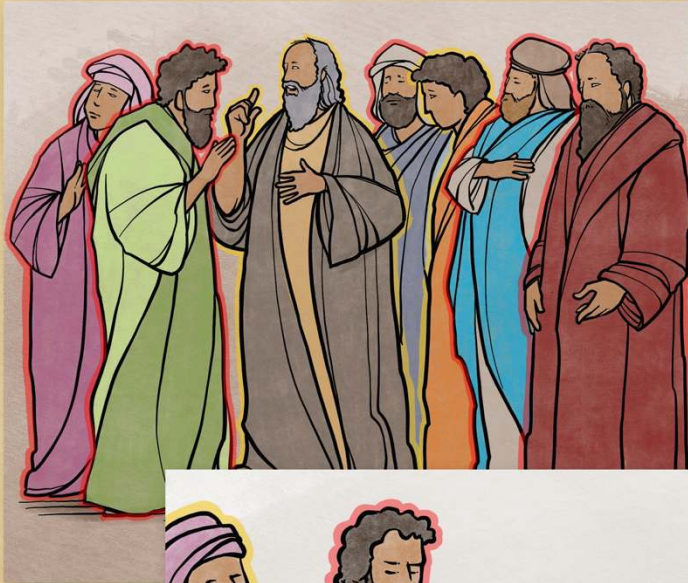
While the books in the history section of the Prophets are arranged in chronological order, the books in the commentary section of the Prophets are arranged in order of size. Jeremiah is longest. Therefore it is the first book in the Prophets. (It is not the first book listed in modern editions of the Bible.) The second longest book is Ezekiel. The third longest book is Isaiah. And the smallest book is “the Twelve.”

Sometimes, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and Isaiah are referred to as “major” prophets. This does not mean they are more important than the “minor” prophets (i.e., “the Twelve”). It merely means their books are larger than the books of the “minor” prophets. The “major” prophets and the “minor” prophets are all inspired by God. The books are true and should be studied.



A major topic in the commentary section of the Prophets is the judgment coming upon Israel and Judah because of their idolatry. The prophets called Israel and Judah to repent of their sin. The people, with the exception of a small remnant, did not want to repent. Instead, they persecuted and killed the prophets (see **Matthew 5:12, 23:29, 23:34-37, and Luke 11:47**). To kill a prophet was a great crime. It was an attempt to silence God!

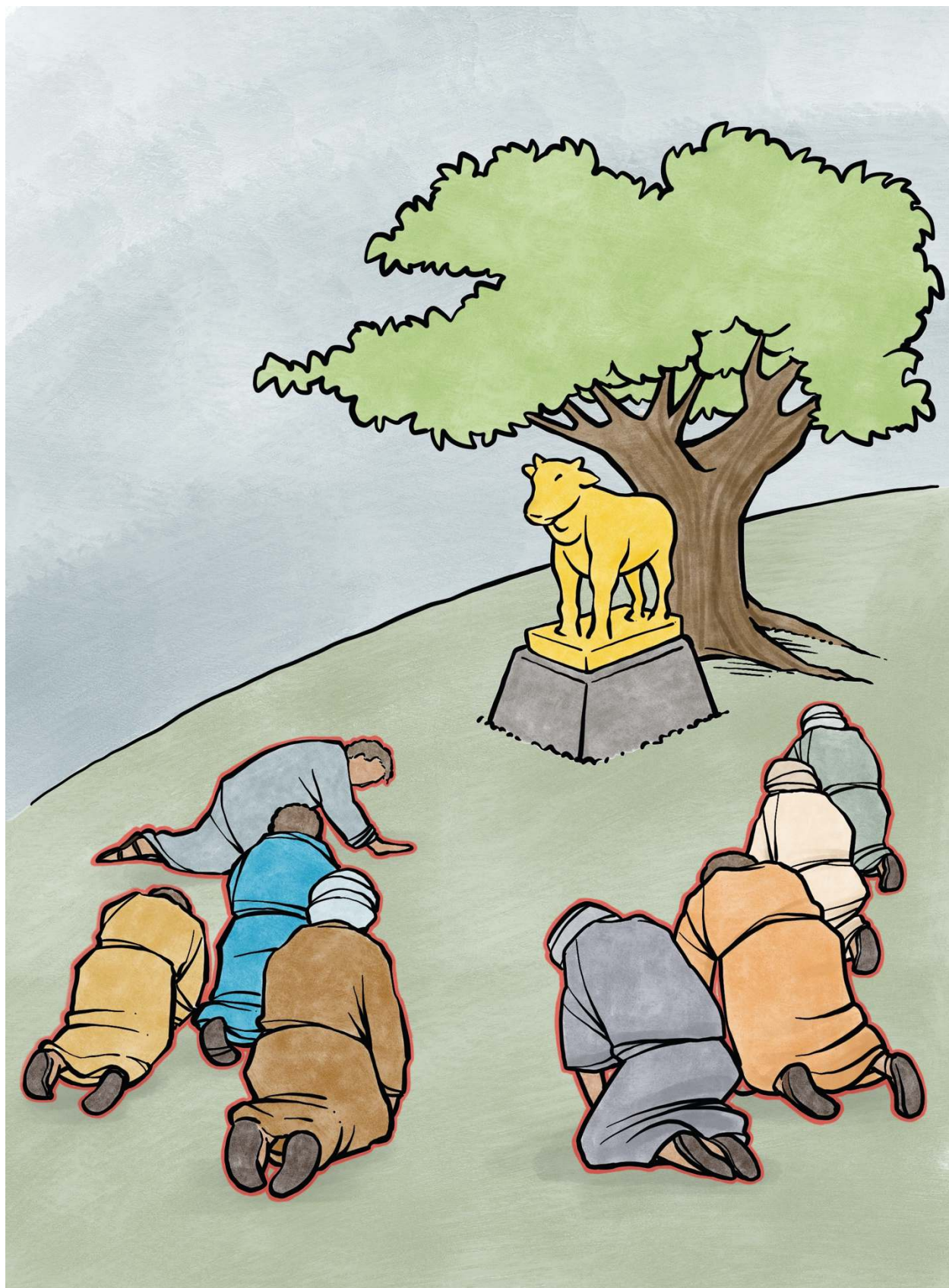




11. The words spoken by prophets prepare the reader for Christ's words.

All of the commentary books within “the Prophets” include teaching about God and his ways and his plans. The teaching of the prophets in these books should be carefully meditated upon. Based on how these teachings are used in the New Testament, it is clear these teachings should be studied and used by Christians today. But in the same way that miracles performed by the Old Testament prophets were intended to remind us of Jesus Christ, the words and the teaching of the Old Testament prophets is intended to remind us of Jesus Christ. The wise preacher or teacher will connect the words of the Old Testament prophets with the teaching of Jesus. He is, in both word and deed, God's perfect representative. He is “the Prophet” spoken of in **Deuteronomy 18:15-19** (see also **Acts 3:17-26**). Because he has been raised up by God as “the Prophet,” all people are commanded to listen to him and to obey his words.





12. Israel worshipped many gods.

There is only one God. He alone is to be worshiped. This is proclaimed throughout the Old Testament and the New Testament. Yahweh declares that he is a “jealous God” (**Exodus 20:5, 34:14, Deuteronomy 4:24, 5:9, 6:15, 32:21, and Joshua 24:19**). He will not tolerate any other gods. Israel was commanded to worship Yahweh alone (see **Exodus 20:3-5**). They were repeatedly warned that if they worshiped other gods, they would be driven from the Promised Land (see, for example, **Deuteronomy 4:15-26 and 30:17-18**). When Israel entered into the Promised Land under Joshua, they were to destroy the nations who were in the land because these nations were idol worshipers. These nations worshiped idols “on the hills and under every green tree” (see **Deuteronomy 12:2**). This means the nations that were in the land before Israel were worshiping idols everywhere throughout the land. Wherever they found a suitable place, they would make an altar to a false god. The people of Israel were warned about making alliances with the nations who worshiped other gods. Israel did not obey these commandments. Instead, the people of Israel worshiped the gods of the nations. They made alliances with other nations. They began doing the things the other nations did and worshiping like the other nations worshiped. In fact, the Israelites are described in the same way the nations were described! They set up idols “on every high hill and under every green tree (see **1 Kings 14:23, 2 Kings 16:4, 17:10, Jeremiah 2:20, 3:6, 17:2, Ezekiel 6:13, and 2 Chronicles 28:4**)! The prophets warned the people of Israel about their idolatry. They reminded the people of what would happen if they did not repent. But the people did not repent. Instead, they killed the prophets. See, for instance, how Elijah describes what the people did in his day (**1 Kings 19:10-14**).

Many of the messages in commentary section of “the Prophets” are about Israel worshiping idols and the punishment that will come upon Israel because of its worship of idols.





13. The Old Testament prophets repeatedly refer to the covenant made at Mt. Sinai.

Sometimes, people speak of Old Testament prophets as if their primary role was predicting the future. While that was part of their role, one of their main tasks was speaking about the distant past. They reminded the people of Israel of the covenant they had made with Yahweh at Mount Sinai (see **Exodus 20-24**). Thus, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Isaiah, and the Twelve frequently refer to commandments that were written in the Law. The prophets remind the nations of Israel and Judah of their covenant with Yahweh and they charge the nations of Israel and Judah with the crime of breaking the covenant. In this way, the prophets are like modern police officers. They are charging the people of Israel with the crime of breaking the covenant.

The book of Moses (Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy) was written hundreds of years before the time of the prophets. It was widely known in Israel, for the book of Moses is regularly referred to by the prophets who lived after the time of Moses. It is clear the prophets had read the Law (another name for the book of Moses), understood it, believed it, and expected God's people to obey what was written in it.

The prophets creatively incorporate the law into their books. They frequently use language taken directly from the Law. They refer to stories and people from the book of Moses. They constantly remind the people of the covenant made between God and Israel at Mt. Sinai. And they use events recorded in the book of Moses as a template for events that were to take place in the future.

For instance, Jeremiah, Isaiah, and Hosea clearly speak about a **second exodus event**. They take words and details from the first exodus and use them in their description of a second exodus event that would take place. Based on the prophets' use of the law, it is clear they expect their readers to be familiar with the book of



Moses. It is also clear they consider the book to be authoritative. Because of the many connections between the book of Moses and the Prophets, it will be a great help for the preacher or teacher to study the book of Moses along with the Prophets.





14. The prophets knew about the coming of Christ and about his kingdom.

While the prophets frequently spoke about the covenant in the past, they also spoke about the future. All of them, in one way or another, wrote about the coming of the Christ and his kingdom (see **Acts 3:18, 24**, and **1 Peter 1:10-12**). This explains why Jesus was able to use the words of the prophets to speak about himself (see **Luke 24:25-27** and **44-47**). Even as the prophets declared that the people had broken the covenant, they declared that God was bringing a **new covenant** to his people (see **Jeremiah 31:31** and **Ezekiel 36:24-27**). The prophets knew that this new covenant would be enacted by the coming of the Christ. The prophets were eagerly waiting for the coming of the Christ (see **Matthew 13:17**). They were men of faith.





15. The prophets were rejected.

It was not safe or easy being a prophet. The message of the prophets was not accepted by most of the people. The prophets were sent with a message that would have made most of the people very angry.

Consider how Yahweh describes the ministry of the prophets:

*Therefore I have hewn them by the prophets;
I have slain them by the words of my mouth,
and my judgment goes forth as the light. Hosea 6:5*

The words of the prophets were intended to cut the Israelites! This is because God loved the people and wanted them to repent! With the exception of a small **remnant** of people who believed their message, most of the people rejected the words of the prophets. The prophets were persecuted (see **Matthew 5:11-12, Matthew 23:29-39, Mark 12:1-2, Luke 11:47-51, 13:34, Acts 7:51-53, and Hebrews 11:32-38**). Many of them died because of the message God called them to proclaim (see, for instance, **1 Kings 19:14**). Killing a prophet was a great sin, for it was an attempt to silence God. The prophet, remember, was God's spokesperson. Therefore, to kill a prophet was an attempt to "kill" the voice of God. Most of the people rejected the words of the prophets. This was true in the time of the Old Testament, and it was true when Jesus, the greatest prophet, was ministering on earth.

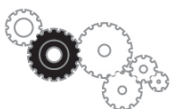
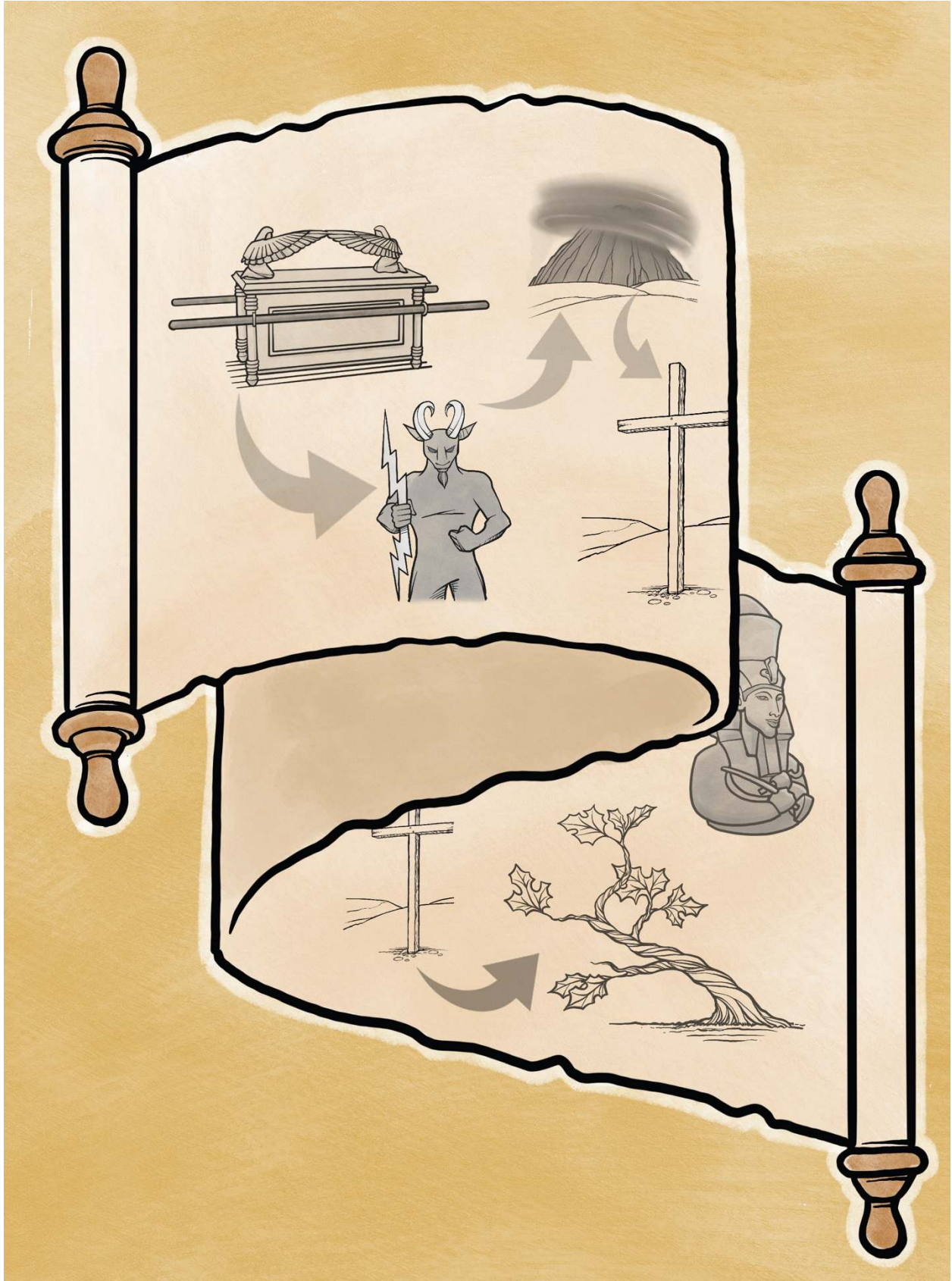
However, a small remnant of people believed the prophets and responded to their words. This was true in the Old Testament. It was true when Jesus was ministering on earth. And it is also true today. God's people listen to the words of the prophets and respond to those words. During Old Testament times, a remnant followed Yahweh and listened to the voice of the prophets because Yahweh called



them and enabled them to follow him (see, for instance, **1 Kings 19:18**). Today a remnant of people still listen to the prophets because God enables them to follow him (see **John 6:44**).

The church is built on the foundation of the apostles and the prophets (see **Ephesians 2:20**). The reason the word “apostles” appears first in **Ephesians 2:20** is because the apostles serve a very important role in interpreting the words of the prophets for believers.





16. How the messages in the commentary books of the Prophets are arranged.

The prophetic books often alternate between words of condemnation regarding Israel's past sins and words of hope regarding the future. (Sometimes the words of condemnation are in regard to the sins of other nations.) The author does not announce when he is switching topics. The reader needs to recognize that frequent changes in the Prophets are normal. In this way, the commentary books in the Prophets are unlike books of narrative.

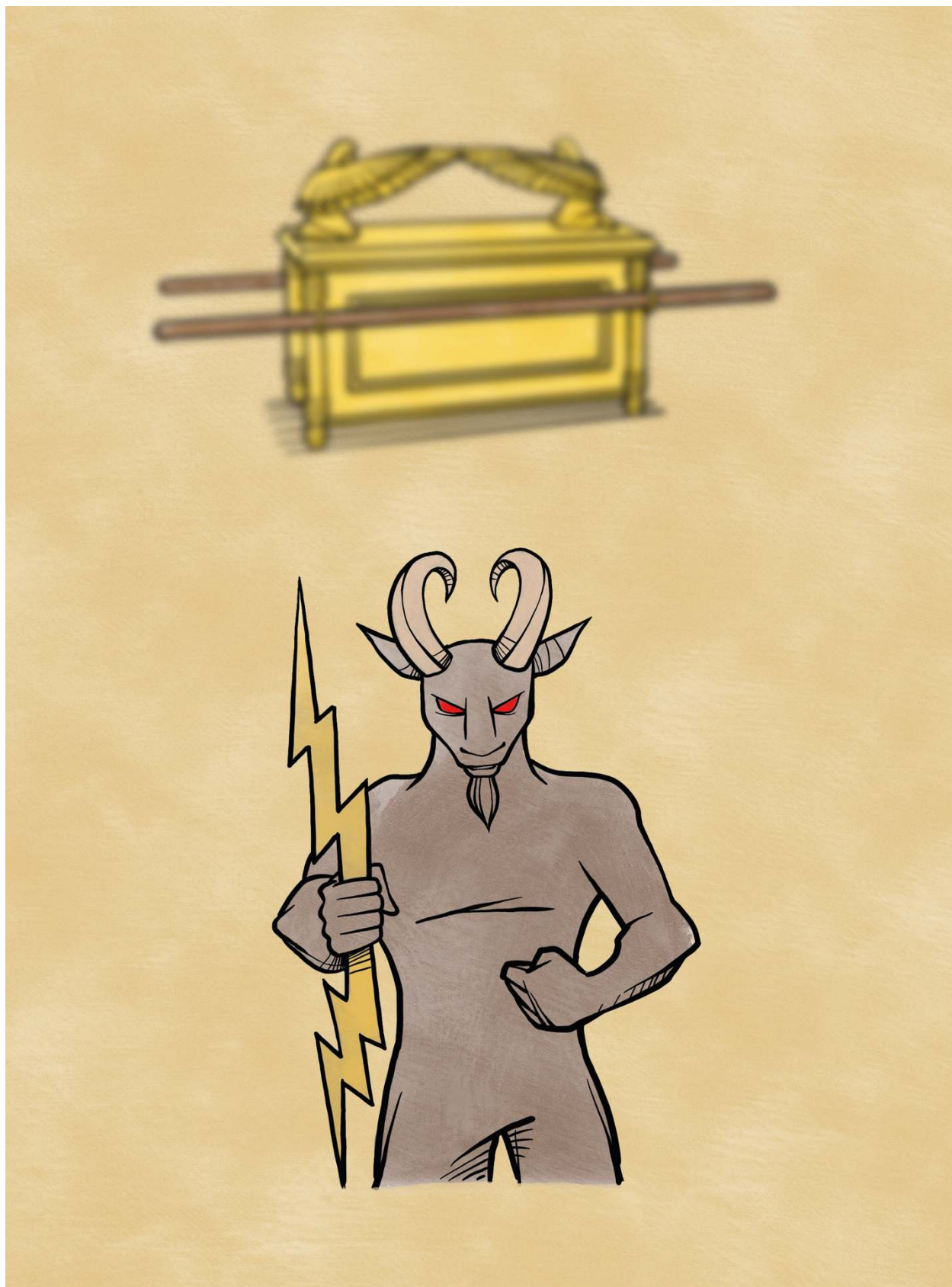
Again, a feature of Hebrew prophecy is that it frequently changes between negative and positive statements. A certain group of verses is negative. These negative verses are immediately followed by a group of verses that are positive. This cycle between negative and positive statements is common in the books of prophecy in the Hebrew Bible. For instance, consider the pattern in the book of Hosea. **Hosea 1:1-9** is negative. It is a promise of Israel's destruction. **Hosea 1:10-2:1** is positive. It speaks of Israel's resurrection to life. It also speaks of Israel's deliverance and great multiplication under a chosen leader sometime in the future. This is a promise of the gospel! **Hosea 2:2-13** is negative. **Hosea 2:14-23** is positive. This pattern continues throughout the book. Other books in the commentary section of the Prophets follow this same pattern.

Why are the books in the Prophets like this? Why aren't all of the negative sections placed together and all of the positive sections placed together? Perhaps this frequent changing between positive and negative allows the messages within the book—both positive and negative—to be repeated over and over again in new words. Repeating the messages in the book is important because God's people need to hear these messages over and over again. It is easy for the preacher or teacher to emphasize the glorious things being emphasized within the text. At the same time, it is



easy to skip the difficult things being emphasized in the text. This is not wise. The wise preacher or teacher will emphasize all of the things found within the Prophets.





17. Who is Baal?

The people of Israel during the time of the Prophets worshiped many gods. One of the gods frequently referred to is a god named Baal. Sometime Baal is referred in the singular (“Baal”). Sometime, the text refers to “the Baals.” In either case, worship of Baal is against God’s law.

Worship of Baal involved, at least to some extent, the people committing acts of fornication with cultic prostitutes. These illicit sexual encounters were done because it was thought that Baal would respond to these acts by doing the same thing with Anat (the goddess to whom he was married). Thus, people believed human sexual activity on earth stimulated the gods to have sexual relations in the heavens, which would result in favorable weather and agricultural prosperity.

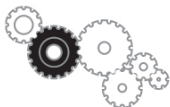
A large number of ancient stories concerning Baal have been found. Some stories describe Baal’s battle with the sea-god Yamm. Other stories describe his battle with Mot, the god who brought about droughts in the summer. According to these stories, Baal’s main helper was Anat. Anat was, again, a goddess with whom he had sexual relations. Anat was Baal’s sister and his wife.

The people of Israel and Judah didn’t worship Baal alone. They often combined worship of Baal with “worship” of Yahweh. This mixing of religions is sometimes called **syncretism**. Yahweh did not receive Israel’s “mixed” worship during the time period described in the Prophets (see **Exodus 20:2-6**). It was impossible to trust in Baal and, at the same time, to trust in Yahweh. Yahweh, as Israel’s husband, had promised to provide and care for his wife. It was part of his covenant with her (i.e., Israel). She,



however, as Yahweh's "wife", did not trust in his care. She thought that Baal was the one who provided her food and drink and comfort.

God has not changed. He still will not receive "mixed" worship (see, for example, **Matthew 6:24**). People must be careful to worship God alone. He will punish all those who worship other gods.





18. How does biblical poetry work?

Prophecy in the Bible is often presented to the reader in the form of poetry. This is true throughout Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Isaiah, and the Twelve. Except for a few narrative portions in these books (for instance, Jeremiah, Isaiah, Hosea, and Jonah all have narrative portions in them), most of the prophets present their message using a form of poetry. Poetry is a great gift to the reader and to the preacher or teacher. It is important to learn how to read biblical poetry. It is important for the preacher to learn how to preach from passages of biblical poetry.

Next to narrative (the term for the type of writing used in storytelling), poetry is the most common form of writing in the Old Testament. Job, the Psalms, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Song of Solomon, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Lamentations, Ezekiel, Daniel, Hosea, Joel, Amos, Obadiah, Jonah, Micah, Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah, and Zechariah all include a good deal of poetry. Poetry is also scattered throughout the other Old Testament books (see **Exodus 15:1-18**). Beyond this, many of the poems in the Old Testament are quoted in the New Testament (see **Acts 28:26-27**). Thus, it is important for the preacher to be able to recognize, understand, and use biblical poetry.

The reader can learn to easily recognize the poetry in the Bible because biblical poetry uses unique words and patterns of words. The poetry found in the Old Testament doesn't, for the most part, rhyme. The poetry in the Bible is written in a verse form called **parallelism**. Parallelism is a structure in which one line says something, and the line immediately following it repeats the idea from the first line, and, by using different words, usually strengthens the idea in some way. This is similar to two railroad tracks that are laid parallel to one another (although sometimes three statements are parallel with each other). Imagine that the second rail in the railroad track is noticeably stronger than the first rail. That is how parallelism in biblical poetry often works.



Another way to think of parallelism is as an echo. The second line is, in ways, an echo of the first line. In a “normal” echo, when a person yells something, the responding echo uses exactly the same words. In biblical poetry, however, the echo does not use the same words. Even though they are similar, the second line is different from the first line. It is usually a little stronger in some way.

Here is an example of biblical poetry from one of the psalms. Notice how the second line repeats the ideas found in the first line, but uses stronger words to do it:

*O LORD, rebuke me not in your anger,
nor discipline me in your wrath!* **Psalm 38:1**

Again, like two train tracks lying parallel to one another, the second line in **38:1** is parallel to the first line. This can be seen in the words that are used. They are clearly like each other. The word “rebuke” in the first line is like the word “discipline” in the second line. But notice the word “discipline” is stronger than the word “rebuke.” Again, the two lines of poetry are like a railroad track, they are parallel to each other, but the “second rail” is noticeable stronger than the first rail. In the same way that the word “discipline” in line two of **Psalm 38:1** is parallel to “rebuke” in line one, the word “wrath” in line two is parallel to the word “anger” in line one. However, as is expected in parallelism, the word “wrath”, while parallel to the word “anger”, is also stronger than “anger.”

Consider another example of parallelism from **Hosea 6:2**:

*After two days he will revive us;
on the third day he will raise us up,
that we may live before him.*



Notice how the number referred to in the second line (“third”) is one greater than the number in the first line (“two”). This way of using numbers is typical in parallelism. The second number is greater than the first. This explains why a Proverb might say something like, “There are six things the LORD hates, seven that are an abomination to him” (**Proverbs 6:16**). Yahweh is not confused about whether it is six or seven things that he hates. Rather, this is classic biblical poetry. The second line is parallel to the first line, but it has intensified the first line in some way. (Notice, also, the progression between something Yahweh “hates” and something that is an “abomination” to him. The second statement is stronger.)

Why did God inspire the prophets to rely so heavily on poetry? There are probably several answers to this question. One answer is that the nature of the prophet’s message demanded poetry. The people were not listening to the words written in the Law of Moses. This means they were not listening to God! This is why, in the Prophets, God used a form of literature that speaks much more strongly. It is like turning up the volume on something. The people were not listening, so God ordained a form of speech that is “louder” and harder to ignore.

The constant repetition that is part of parallelism is particularly well-suited to emphasizing a point. The main points are said and re-said with stronger and stronger words. Another reason is that poetry uses words that tend to be more shocking than regular speech. The shocking nature of the words makes poetry hard to ignore. A final reason is that the words of biblical poetry are memorable. At a time when most people could not read, the message of the prophets came in a form that the people could repeat and remember. This is still true. The words found in the Prophets are easier to memorize than narrative portions of the Bible.





19. Why the prophets used such strong language.

The prophets use language in a way that is intended to shock the readers. The very strong words regularly used by the prophets is understandable because the people would not listen any longer to “normal” words. Because the people would not listen to “normal” words, the prophets were forced to use stronger and stronger words to convey their message. These stronger words are often **metaphors**. These are words describing one thing by comparing it to something else. For instance, sometimes Israel is described as a vine. Sometimes it is described as a stubborn donkey. The prophets were experts at using metaphors.

For instance, the people of Israel were worshiping idols. They had been warned about this sin again and again. The prophets were sent to warn them about their idolatry and to plead for their repentance. The prophets were, in a sense, Israel’s last hope. Israel had, for many, many years, refused to listen to God’s word as it came to them in the book of Moses. And Israel had refused to listen to God’s word as it came to them through earlier prophets. That is why later prophets was forced to speak using stronger and stronger words that could not be ignored.

For instance, the prophet Hosea was sent to warn Israel about its idolatry. He could have said, “turn from your idolatry.” These words would have been grace from God. But Hosea doesn’t use these “normal” words when he speaks to Israel about its idolatry. Israel would not have listened to Hosea’s words. Instead, Hosea uses a word to describe the actions of the nation that is far more shocking than idolatry. He declares that the nation has been **whoring**. This word and the many words like it that Hosea used surely captured the nation’s attention!



Notice the following lines of poetry describing Israel's idolatry. Imagine hearing these words if you were an Israelite living during Hosea's time:

*'Plead with your mother, plead—for she is not my wife,
and I am not her husband—
that she put away her whoring from her face,
and her adultery from between her breasts ...'*

Hosea 2:2

Hosea is describing Israel as if she is a prostitute! To feel the weight of this line of poetry, imagine if someone described your mother in this way! It is no wonder the people wanted to kill the prophets. The strong words of the prophets are intended to cut the people deeply so they can hear God's words. God himself declares this is what he was doing when he sent the prophets. Consider these lines of poetry (this is an example of three lines of poetry which are parallel to one another):

*"Therefore I have hewn them by the prophets;
I have slain them by the words of my mouth,
and my judgment goes forth as the light."* **Hosea 6:5**

People living in Old Testament times needed to hear these strong words and people living today need to hear these strong words. It is important to remember that this strong language wasn't just for the benefit of people living during the time described in the Old Testament. People today need to hear these same words. We often need to be shocked out of our callousness! The words of the prophets are God ordained. They have been carefully chosen to capture the people's attention so these



people might hear God's good words, repent, and walk in obedience to him (see **Hebrews 4:12**).

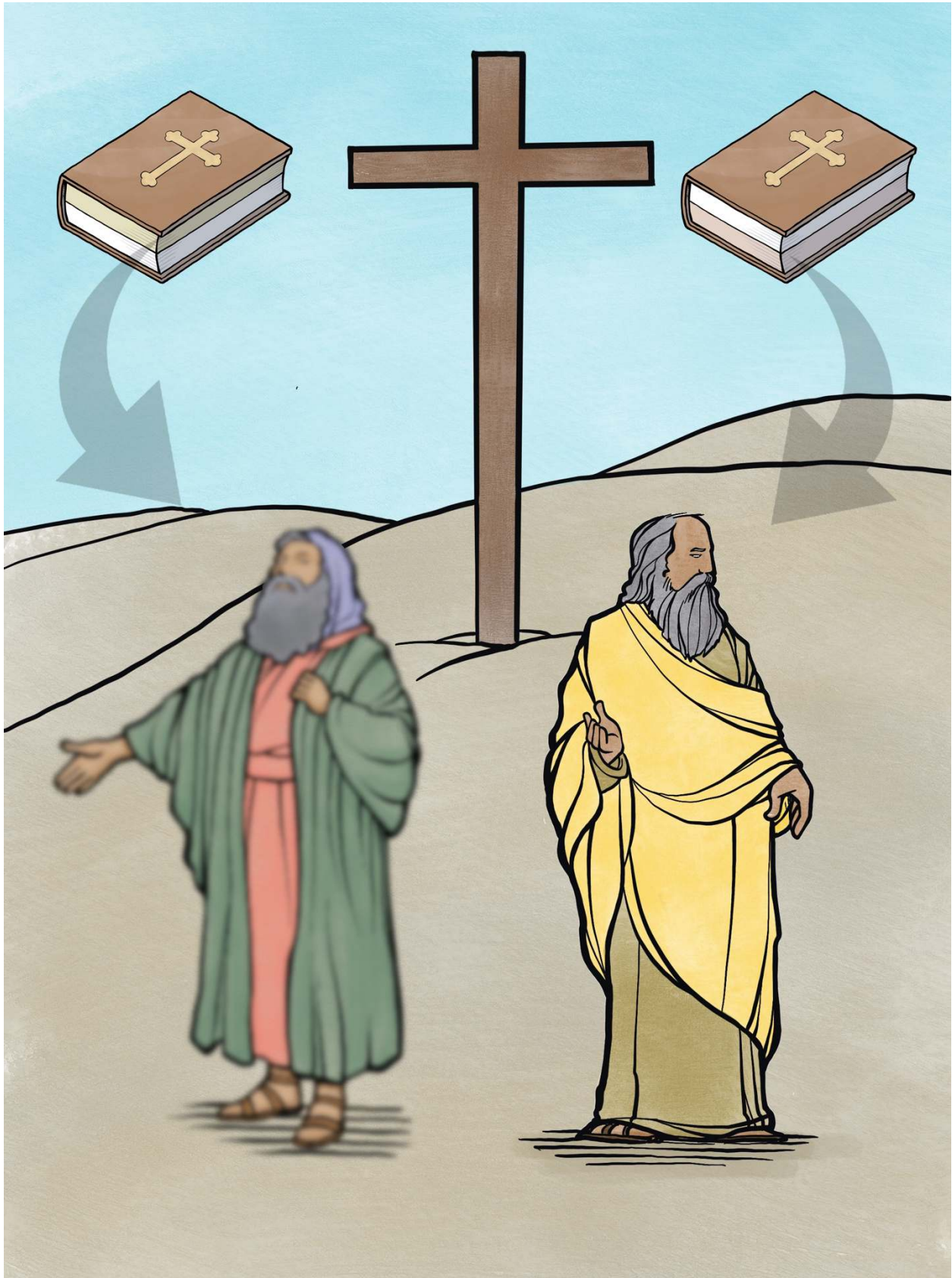




20. The incomplete knowledge of the Old Testament prophets.

Even though the Old Testament prophets lived before the coming of the Christ, all of the prophets knew about the Christ and his kingdom and spoke about him (see **Luke 24:25-27, 44-48, Acts 3:18-26, and 1 Peter 1:10-12**). Thus, even though they were believers living under the **old covenant**, the prophets were longing for, speaking about, and writing about the age of the **new covenant**. They knew God's promises would come to pass in the days of the Christ and they longed to live during the days of the Christ (see **Matthew 13:17**). However, even though they spoke truly about the Christ, the knowledge of the prophets was incomplete. They wanted to know more about the Christ, but they only knew what had been revealed to them in the book of Moses (Genesis-Deuteronomy), in other Old Testament writings that had been completed, and what God revealed to them personally. This meant there were certain details about the Christ the Old Testament prophets did not know. The truths about the Christ are revealed in a **progressive** way in the Old Testament. Thus, later prophets were building on the things revealed to earlier prophets. The picture of the Christ becomes clearer and clearer as the reader moves through the sections of the Old Testament.





21. The complete knowledge of the apostles.

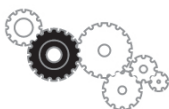
Both the apostles in the New Testament and the prophets in the Old Testament were writing about the Christ. This is why the church is built on the “foundation of the apostles and prophets” (see **Ephesians 2:20**). The apostles are listed first in this passage in Ephesians because they are the interpreters of the prophets. They show the reader the proper way to understand the prophets. Even though the Old Testament prophets were writing about the Christ and his kingdom, the reader should not expect the words of the Old Testament prophets about the Christ to be as clear as the things written about the Christ in the New Testament. The apostles had seen Christ up close. They had touched him. The Old Testament prophets had not seen Christ. They are like people who are describing something far off in the distance. The person seeing something in the far distance can see major details, but some of the minor details will only become clearer when the thing being described is closer.

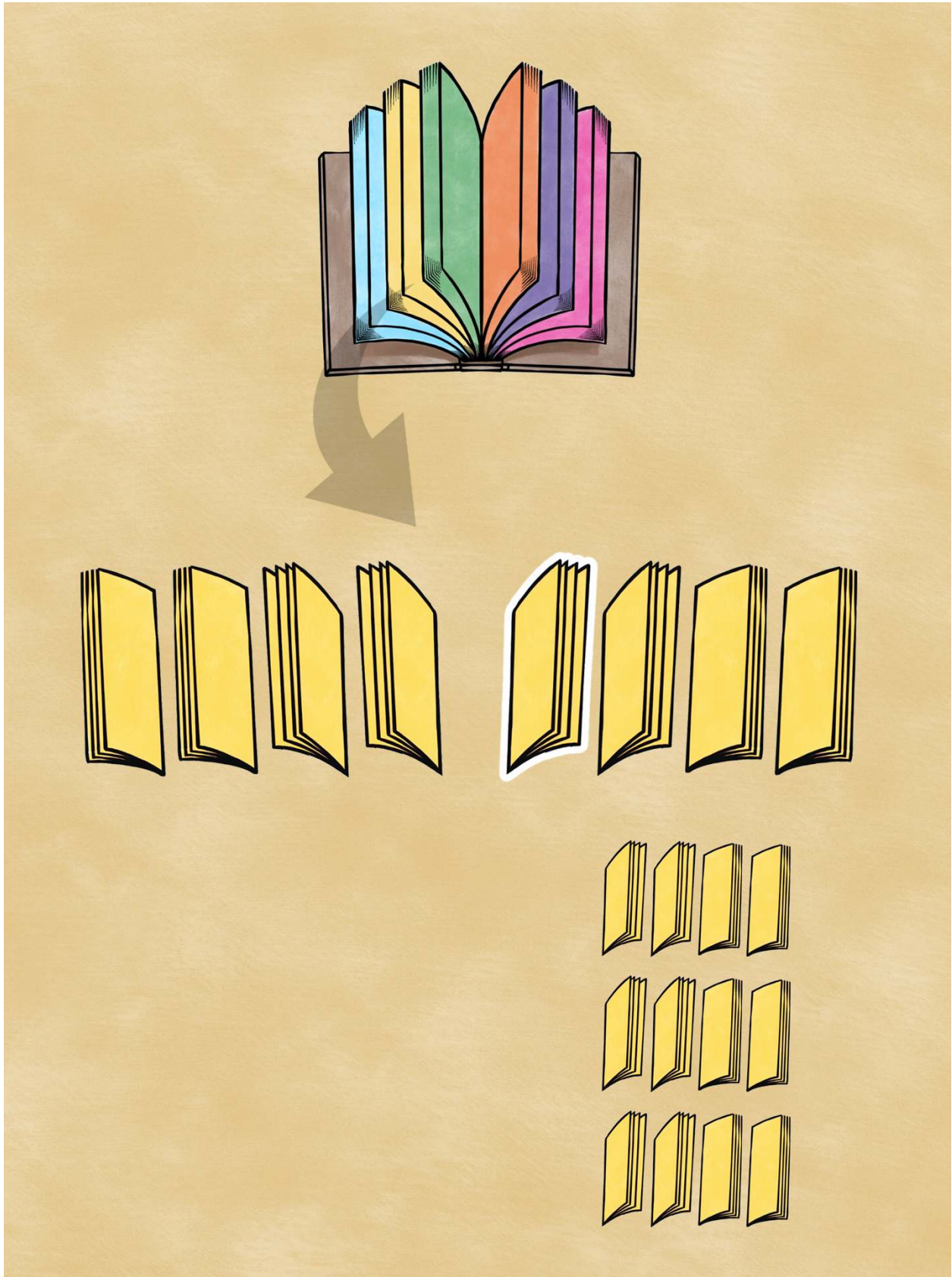
Again, the words of the prophets are absolutely true, but the prophets lived before the time of the events they were describing. Therefore, the reader should expect the prophets’ descriptions of the Christ and the gospel event to have a certain **lack of clarity**. This lack of clarity is actually a gift to the reader. It forced the prophets to use many different poetic ways of describing the Christ and his kingdom. The poetry of the Old Testament about the Christ is stunning in its beauty. Beyond this, because they are in poetic form, these words are easy to memorize. These words are, in some ways, harder to understand than the writings of the New Testament. But, in other ways, they have a depth and richness that goes beyond the words of the apostles. Poetry is intended to reach into the very heart of a person and stir the deepest emotions. The Old Testament descriptions of Christ and his kingdom are deeply encouraging to New Testament believers. The prophets knew they were writing for later generations of people who would also love God. They knew these later generations would read their words and find hope and encouragement in them.



Thus, reading prophecy from the Old Testament is not like reading an epistle in the New Testament. The writings in an epistle are very precise. They often quote the Old Testament and explain its meaning. The writings in an Old Testament book of prophecy are not as precise as the writings in a New Testament epistle. They are more like a musical performance. The words of the prophets are intended to evoke strong feelings. They are not intended to be precise.

The words of the Prophets should have inspired faith and hope in those who heard them. Their words should have prepared people for the coming of the Christ. In fact, Jesus rebuked two of his disciples for being “slow in heart” for not understanding that the Old Testament was about the Christ (see **Luke 24:25-27**). But this does not mean that all people were slow in heart to understand the Prophets! It is clear some people did believe the words of the prophets and were prepared to meet the Christ when he came. For instance, both Jesus’s mother Mary and John the Baptist’s father Zechariah had thought deeply about the promises in the Old Testament and this had built their hope and expectation in the Christ (see **Luke 1:46-55** and **67-79**).





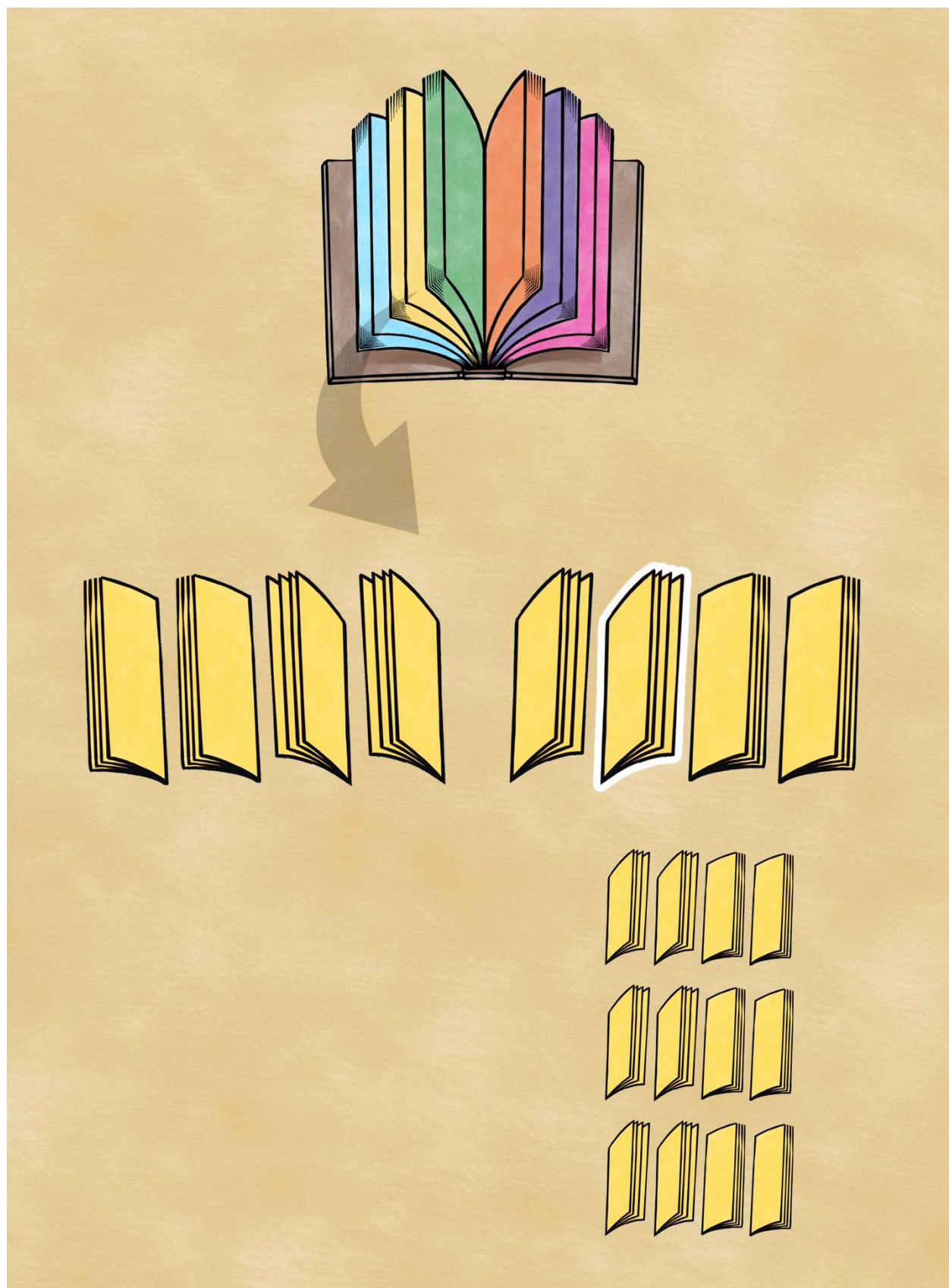
22. The book of Jeremiah.

Jeremiah is the first book in the second section of the Prophets (the books of **commentary**). Jeremiah's placement as the first book in this section of the Prophets is not because Jeremiah is the most important book in this section. All of the books in the Bible are "breathed out by God" and are important (see **2 Timothy 3:16**). And Jeremiah's placement as the first book in this section is not because Jeremiah was the earliest prophet in this section. In fact, Jonah, Amos, Hosea, Isaiah, Micah, Nahum, Habbakuk, and Zephaniah all prophesied before Jeremiah.

It appears Jeremiah is first because it is the longest book in this section of the Prophets. Since the books were originally written on scrolls, the one arranging a scroll would place the longest work first, this would ensure there was enough room to contain the entire book in one scroll. If the scroll began with a shorter work, there may not have been enough room for the longer book to be completed in one scroll.

Jeremiah prophesied between 627-580 BC. He was writing to the people of Judah, warning them of the consequences of their sin and speaking about the days to come. Like other prophets, Jeremiah was persecuted. He wrote about the New Covenant (see **31:33-34**). He wrote about a "second exodus" for the people of God (see **16:14-15** and **23:7-8**). Jeremiah connected this second exodus to the coming of king from David's family (see **23:5-6**). This king from the family of David has come. His name is Jesus (see **Matthew 1:1**)!



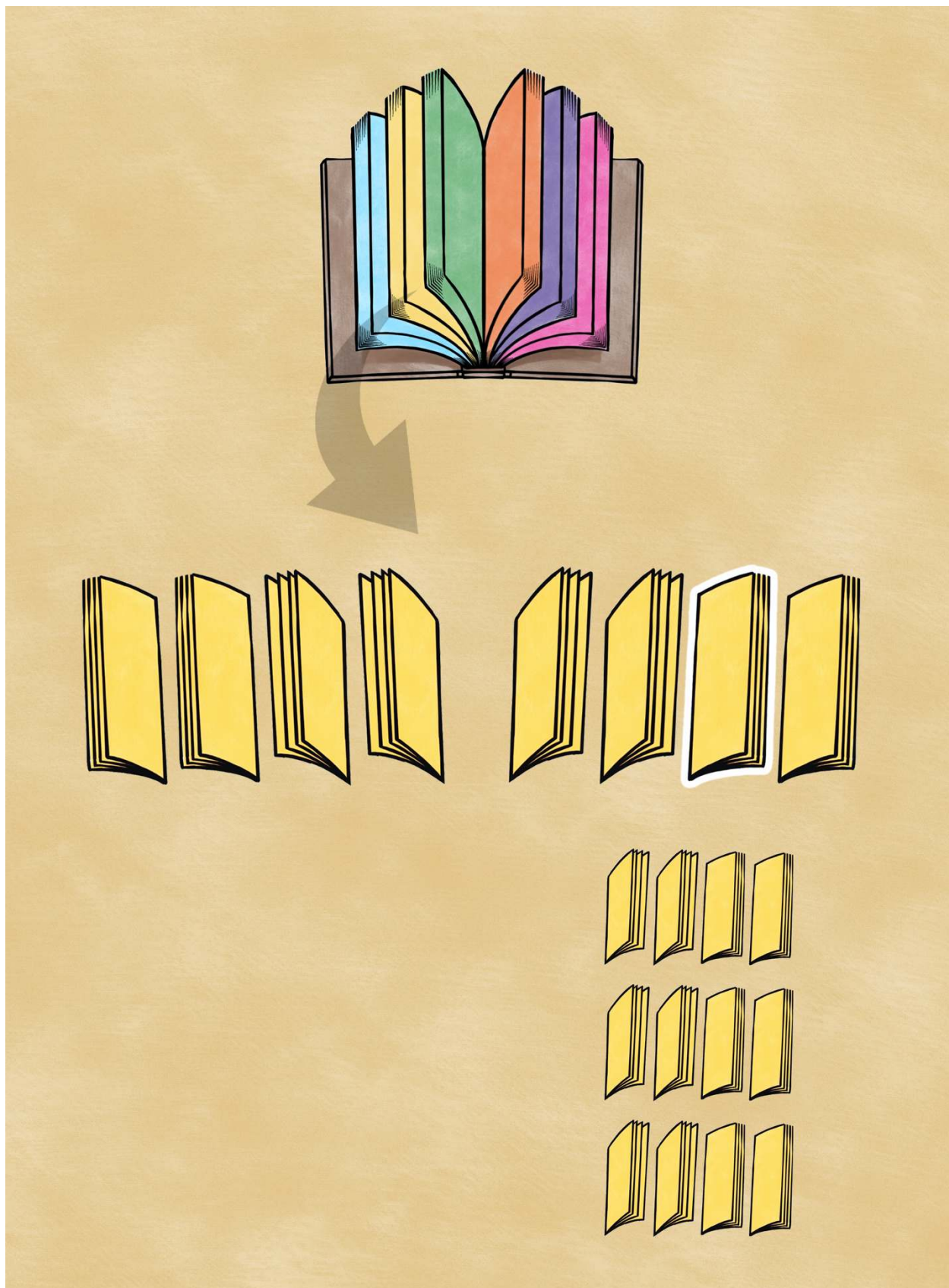


23. The book of Ezekiel.

Ezekiel is the second book in the second section of the Prophets (the books of **commentary**). Ezekiel's placement as the second book in this section is not because Ezekiel was the second earliest prophet in this section. Many of the prophets prophesied before him. The books in this section of the Prophets are not arranged chronologically. Ezekiel is the second book in this section because it is the second longest book in this section of the Prophets.

Ezekiel was a priest and a prophet. He prophesied between 593-570 BC. He was writing to the people of Judah. He wrote shortly before and after the destruction of Jerusalem and the temple. Ezekiel's words offer hope to God's people who had lost their place and their temple. They surely wondered if God still had plans for them. Like Jeremiah, Ezekiel speaks of a second exodus event (see **34:11-16** and **36:22-38**). Ezekiel writes of the rebirth of God's people (see **37:1-14**) and their life under a king coming from David (see **37:15-28**). He writes about the destruction of Israel's enemies (see **38-39**). And he writes about a new temple to be built in the future (**40-48**). The language in this section of Ezekiel is used by Jesus as he describes the life he brings to people and the work of the Holy Spirit. The apostle John uses many of Ezekiel's words and images in his description of the New Jerusalem in **Revelation 21-22**.



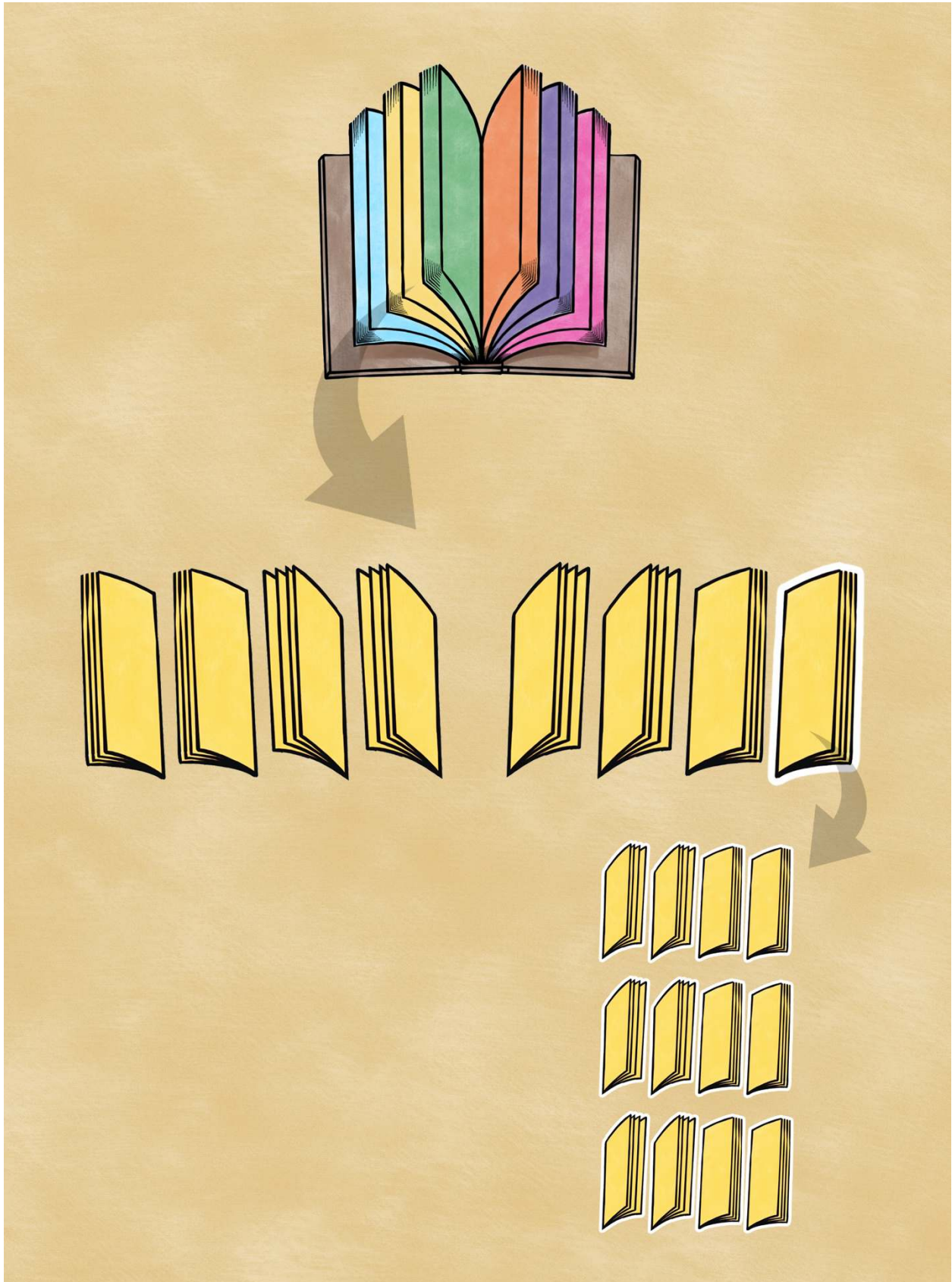


24. The book of Isaiah.

Isaiah is the third book in the second section of the Prophets (the books of **commentary**). It is the third longest book in this section of the Prophets. Isaiah prophesied between 740-700 BC. He was writing to the people of Judah before their exile to Babylon. Hosea prophesied at the same time as Isaiah, although his ministry was directed to the people in Israel. Micah also prophesied at the same time. In fact, Isaiah and Micah have a nearly identical section (compare **Micah 4:1-5** with **Isaiah 2:1-5**). This means one of these prophets (either Isaiah or Micah) had heard the words of the other prophet and was using his material! This is evidence that the prophets were listening to each other!

Like Jeremiah and Ezekiel, Isaiah speaks of a second exodus. He speaks a great deal about the “servant” of Yahweh. That servant is Jesus. In fact, there are four “servant songs” in Isaiah (see **42:1-4**, **49:1-6**, **50:4-9**, and **52:13—53:12**). Isaiah prophesies in many places about the coming of Christ and the reign of Christ (see, for example, **9:1-7**). He also declares that “the servant” will bear the sins of God’s people (**53**). Isaiah was a man of faith. He had a vision of Yahweh (see **6:1-13**), and he longed for the day of the fulfillment of God’s promises—the day when God would dwell with his people (**64:1-12**). Jesus quoted **Isaiah 61** when he was teaching in the synagogue (see **Luke 4:16-21**). Jesus said, “Today this Scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing.” This means he read Isaiah and he understood that Isaiah was speaking about him!





25. The book of “the Twelve.”

The Twelve was considered by the Jews to be one book with 12 parts. There is great value in modern readers of the Scriptures viewing these 12 books as one unit as well. In this sense, they function, together, like Jeremiah, Ezekiel, or Isaiah. They (the Twelve) are one book in the same way that Isaiah is one book.

It is clear the 12 books within this one book are not arranged chronologically. If the arrangement had been chronological, Jonah, Amos, and Hosea would have been the first books. Rather, the 12 books found within the book of the Twelve seem to have been arranged by topic. Certain words at the end of one book are tied to words appearing at the beginning of the next book. It is the joy of the preacher to discover how the books are put together.

Since it appears first, Hosea serves as an introduction to the entire “book” of the Twelve. Thus, Hosea sets the context for the entire book. Since it is last, Malachi serves as a conclusion to the entire “book” of the Twelve.

Sometimes, the books in the Twelve are referred to as the “minor prophets.” This does not mean they are less important than the “major prophets” (Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and Isaiah). This simply means they are not as long as the “major prophets.” “All Scripture is breathed out by God” and is important (see **2 Timothy 3:16**), even small books found within the Twelve. All books contribute to the story of the Christ and his kingdom.

As with Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and Isaiah, the Twelve speaks of a second exodus of the people of God, the coming of the Christ, the reign of the Christ, and the defeat of God’s enemies. Every one of these books is “useful for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness” (see **2 Timothy 3:16**). The apostles frequently quote the words found in the Twelve.



Outlined below are the approximate dates when each of the prophets named in the Twelve prophesied:

Hosea — 760-730 BC

Joel — possibly around 600 BC

Amos — approximately 760 BC

Obadiah — possibly around 586 BC

Jonah — approximately 770 BC

Micah — 737-690 BC

Nahum — around 650 BC

Habakkuk — around 630 BC

Zephaniah — around 627 BC

Haggai — around 520 BC

Zechariah — 520-518 BC

Malachi — approximately 433 BC

