

THUS SAYS *the* LORD

**GOD SPEAKS THROUGH
HIS SERVANTS THE PROPHETS**

VOLUME II: RESTORATION & REDEMPTION

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FOR AS THE RAIN AND THE SNOW
come down from heaven,
and do not return there but water the earth,
making it bring forth and sprout,
giving seed to the sower
and bread to the eater,
so shall my word be
that goes forth from my mouth;
it shall not return to me empty,
but it shall accomplish that which I intend,
and prosper in the thing for which I sent it.

—*Book of Isaiah 55:10–11*



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GOD SPEAKS THROUGH HIS SERVANTS THE PROPHETS

VOLUME II: RESTORATION & REDEMPTION

2 KINGS 17:1–41

17¹In the twelfth year of Ahaz king of Judah Hoshea the son of Elah began to reign in Samaria over Israel, and he reigned nine years. ²And he did what was evil in the sight of the LORD, yet not as the kings of Israel who were before him. ³Against him came up Shalmaneser king of Assyria; and Hoshea became his vassal, and paid him tribute. ⁴But the king of Assyria found treachery in Hoshea; for he had sent messengers to So, king of Egypt, and offered no tribute to the king of Assyria, as he had done year by year; therefore the king of Assyria shut him up, and bound him in prison. ⁵Then the king of Assyria invaded all the land and came to Samaria, and for three years he besieged it. ⁶In the ninth year of Hoshea the king of Assyria captured Samaria, and he carried the Israelites away to Assyria, and placed them in Halah, and on the Habor, the river of Gozan, and in the cities of the Medes.

⁷And this was so, because the sons of Israel had sinned against the LORD their God, who had brought them up out of the land of Egypt from under the hand of Pharaoh king of Egypt, and had feared other gods ⁸and walked in the customs of the nations whom the LORD drove out before the sons of Israel, and in the customs which the kings of Israel had introduced. ⁹And the sons of Israel did secretly against the LORD their God things that were not right. They built for themselves high places at all their towns, from watchtower to fortified city; ¹⁰they set up for themselves pillars and Asherim on every high hill and under every green tree; ¹¹and there they burned incense on all the high places, as the nations did whom the LORD carried away before them. And they did wicked things, provoking the LORD to anger, ¹²and they served idols, of which the LORD had said to them, “You shall not do this.” ¹³Yet the LORD warned Israel by every prophet and seer, saying, “Turn from your evil ways and keep my commandments and my statutes, in accordance with all the law which I commanded your fathers, and which I sent

to you by my servants the prophets.”¹⁴ But they would not listen, but were stubborn, as their fathers had been, who did not believe in the LORD their God.¹⁵ They despised his statutes, and his covenant that he made with their fathers, and the warnings which he gave them. They went after false idols, and became false, and they followed the nations that were round about them, concerning whom the LORD had commanded them that they should not do like them.¹⁶ And they forsook all the commandments of the LORD their God, and made for themselves molten images of two calves; and they made an Asherah, and worshiped all the host of heaven, and served Baal.¹⁷ And they burned their sons and their daughters as offerings and used divination and sorcery, and sold themselves to do evil in the sight of the LORD, provoking him to anger.¹⁸ Therefore the LORD was very angry with Israel, and removed them out of his sight; none was left but the tribe of Judah only.

¹⁹ Judah also did not keep the commandments of the LORD their God, but walked in the customs which Israel had introduced.²⁰ And the LORD rejected all the descendants of Israel, and afflicted them, and gave them into the hand of spoilers, until he had cast them out of his sight.

²¹ When he had torn Israel from the house of David they made Jeroboam the son of Nebat king. And Jeroboam drove Israel from following the LORD and made them commit great sin.²² The sons of Israel walked in all the sins which Jeroboam did; they did not depart from them,²³ until the LORD removed Israel out of his sight, as he had spoken by all his servants the prophets. So Israel was exiled from their own land to Assyria until this day.

²⁴ And the king of Assyria brought people from Babylon, Cuthah, Avva, Hamath, and Sepharvaim, and placed them in the cities of Samaria instead of the sons of Israel; and they took possession of Samaria, and dwelt in its cities.²⁵ And at the beginning of their dwelling there, they did not fear the LORD; therefore the LORD sent lions among them, which killed some of them.²⁶ So the king of Assyria was told, “The nations which you have carried away and placed in the cities of Samaria do not know the law of the god of the land; therefore he has sent lions among them, and behold, they are killing them, because they do not know the law of the god of the land.”²⁷ Then the king of Assyria commanded, “Send there one of the priests whom you carried away from there; and let him go and dwell there, and teach them the law of the god of the land.”²⁸ So one of the priests whom they had carried away from Samaria came and dwelt in Bethel, and taught them how they should fear the LORD.

²⁹ But every nation still made gods of its own, and put them in the shrines of the high places which the Samaritans had made, every nation in the cities in which they dwelt;³⁰ the men of Babylon made Succoth-benoth, the men of Cuth made Nergal, the men of Hamath made Ashima,³¹ and the Avvites made Nibhaz and Tartak; and the Sepharvites burned their children in the fire to Adrammelech and Anammelech, the gods of Sepharvaim.³² They also feared the LORD, and appointed from among themselves all sorts of people as priests of the high places, who sacrificed for them in the shrines of the high places.³³ So they feared the LORD but also served their own gods, after the manner of the nations from among whom they had been carried away.³⁴ To this day they do according to the former manner.

They do not fear the LORD, and they do not follow the statutes or the ordinances or the law or the commandment which the LORD commanded the children of Jacob, whom he named Israel. ³⁵The LORD made a covenant with them, and commanded them, “You shall not fear other gods or bow yourselves to them or serve them or sacrifice to them; ³⁶but you shall fear the LORD who brought you out of the land of Egypt with great power and with an outstretched arm; you shall bow yourselves to him, and to him you shall sacrifice. ³⁷And the statutes and the ordinances and the law and the commandment which he wrote for you, you shall always be careful to do. You shall not fear other gods, ³⁸and you shall not forget the covenant that I have made with you. You shall not fear other gods, ³⁹but you shall fear the LORD your God, and he will deliver you out of the hand of all your enemies.” ⁴⁰However they would not listen, but they did according to their former manner.

⁴¹So these nations feared the LORD, and also served their graven images; their children likewise, and their children’s children—as their fathers did, so they do to this day.

2 KINGS 24: 8–25:15 & 25:18–21

24 ⁸Jehoiachin* was eighteen years old when he became king, and he reigned three months in Jerusalem. His mother’s name was Nehushta the daughter of Elnathan of Jerusalem. ⁹And he did what was evil in the sight of the LORD, according to all that his father had done.

¹⁰At that time the servants of Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon came up to Jerusalem, and the city was besieged. ¹¹And Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon came to the city, while his servants were besieging it; ¹²and Jehoiachin* the king of Judah gave himself up to the king of Babylon, himself, and his mother, and his servants, and his princes, and his palace officials. The king of Babylon took him prisoner in the eighth year of his reign, ¹³and carried off all the treasures of the house of the LORD, and the treasures of the king’s house, and cut in pieces all the vessels of gold in the temple of the LORD, which Solomon king of Israel had made, as the LORD had foretold. ¹⁴He carried away all Jerusalem, and all the princes, and all the mighty men of valor, ten thousand captives, and all the craftsmen and the smiths; none remained, except the poorest people of the land. ¹⁵And he carried away Jehoiachin* to Babylon; the king’s mother, the king’s wives, his officials, and the chief men of the land, he took into captivity from Jerusalem to Babylon. ¹⁶And the king of Babylon brought captive to Babylon all the men of valor, seven thousand, and the craftsmen and the smiths, one thousand, all of them strong and fit for war. ¹⁷And the king of Babylon made Mattaniah, Jehoiachin’s* uncle, king in his stead, and changed his name to Zedekiah.

¹⁸Zedekiah was twenty-one years old when he became king, and he reigned eleven years in Jerusalem. His mother’s name was Hamutal the daughter of Jeremiah of Libnah. ¹⁹And he did what was evil in the sight of the LORD, according to all that Jehoiakim had done. ²⁰For because of the anger of the LORD it came to the point in Jerusalem and Judah that he cast them out from his presence. And Zedekiah rebelled against the king of Babylon.

*Jehoiachin is called Jeconiah or Coniah in some other Old Testament books.

25 ¹And in the ninth year of his reign, in the tenth month, on the tenth day of the month, Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon came with all his army against Jerusalem, and laid siege to it; and they built siegeworks against it round about. ²So the city was besieged till the eleventh year of King Zedekiah. ³On the ninth day of the fourth month the famine was so severe in the city that there was no food for the people of the land. ⁴Then a breach was made in the city; the king with all the men of war fled by night by the way of the gate between the two walls, by the king's garden, though the Chaldeans were around the city. And they went in the direction of the Arabah. ⁵But the army of the Chaldeans pursued the king, and overtook him in the plains of Jericho; and all his army was scattered from him. ⁶Then they captured the king, and brought him up to the king of Babylon at Riblah, who passed sentence upon him. ⁷They slew the sons of Zedekiah before his eyes, and put out the eyes of Zedekiah, and bound him in fetters, and took him to Babylon.

⁸In the fifth month, on the seventh day of the month—which was the nineteenth year of King Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon—Nebuzaradan, the captain of the bodyguard, a servant of the king of Babylon, came to Jerusalem. ⁹And he burned the house of the LORD, and the king's house and all the houses of Jerusalem; every great house he burned down. ¹⁰And all the army of the Chaldeans, who were with the captain of the guard, broke down the walls around Jerusalem. ¹¹And the rest of the people who were left in the city and the deserters who had deserted to the king of Babylon, together with the rest of the multitude, Nebuzaradan the captain of the guard carried into exile. ¹²But the captain of the guard left some of the poorest of the land to be vinedressers and plowmen.

¹³And the pillars of bronze that were in the house of the LORD, and the stands and the bronze sea that were in the house of the LORD, the Chaldeans broke in pieces, and carried the bronze to Babylon. ¹⁴And they took away the pots, and the shovels, and the snuffers, and the dishes for incense and all the vessels of bronze used in the temple service, ¹⁵the firepans also, and the bowls. What was of gold the captain of the guard took away as gold, and what was of silver, as silver. . . .

. . . ¹⁸And the captain of the guard took Seraiah the chief priest, and Zephaniah the second priest, and the three keepers of the threshold; ¹⁹and from the city he took an officer who had been in command of the men of war, and five men of the king's council who were found in the city; and the secretary of the commander of the army who mustered the people of the land; and sixty men of the people of the land who were found in the city. ²⁰And Nebuzaradan the captain of the guard took them, and brought them to the king of Babylon at Riblah. ²¹And the king of Babylon struck them, and put them to death at Riblah in the land of Hamath. So Judah was taken into exile out of its land.



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HOW THE DIVIDED KINGDOM CAME TO AN END

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Many Christians are unfamiliar with the history of God’s people after the destruction of the northern and southern kingdoms—in 722–721 BC and 587–586 BC, respectively—and before the birth of Jesus—which scholars date between 6 BC and 4 BC. *Thus Says the LORD: God Speaks Through His Servants the Prophets—Volume II: Restoration & Redemption*—covers activity of the prophets from the Babylonian Exile through the end of the New Testament. The prophets’ messages are aimed at preparing God’s people for the coming of Jesus, and they include image-filled visions of heaven in the apocalyptic *Books of Ezekiel* and *Daniel*. Paragraph 122 in the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* teaches that the Old Testament deliberately prepares for and declares in prophecy the coming of Christ, redeemer of all men. *Volume II: Restoration & Redemption* concludes with a look at John the Baptist as the first New Testament prophet and John of Patmos, author of the book of *Revelation*, as the last. The consistent focus is on Jesus as the ultimate prophet who speaks for God the Father.

What do you think is the most important job of a prophet? Consider what role prophecy plays in the present-day Church. What do you hope to learn from this Bible study about the prophets and about Old Testament prophecy that can help you to draw closer to Jesus?

1 Read the *Second Book of the Kings* 17:1–6. How does the biblical text characterize Hoshea’s reign over the northern kingdom of Israel? What might have led Hoshea to agree to pay tribute to Assyria? What does Hoshea do to attempt to extricate himself and his kingdom from this situation? How long does it take Assyria to capture Samaria, the capital of the northern kingdom? What happens to the inhabitants of Israel? What has been the fate of Hoshea?

2 Read the *Second Book of the Kings* 17:7–12. Which of the tribes descended from Jacob have been dwelling in the northern kingdom? If necessary, refer to “The Lost Tribes” (page 10). What reason is given for why they have been conquered? Which commandment did they violate? If necessary, refer to the book of *Exodus* 20:1–17. What might explain why God is so offended?

3 Read the *Second Book of the Kings* 17:13–20. Consider why the prophets had limited success warning God’s people of the LORD’s displeasure. Consider what is the most important quality for a prophet. What sins are listed in this passage? Although the passage primarily is concerned with the fall of Israel, what criticism do its authors level against the southern kingdom of Judah?

4 Read the *Second Book of the Kings* 17:21–28. Where are the people from who are resettled in the former northern kingdom? What unexpected danger faces them, and with which of the tribes of Israel is that danger associated? If necessary, refer to the book of *Genesis* 49:9. How does the king of Assyria decide to solve the problem? What is one obvious way that plan could backfire?

CHRISTIAN CONNECTION

YOU SHALL HAVE NO OTHER GODS

The book of *Exodus* 20:2–3 lists the first commandment as: “I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage. You shall have no other gods before me.” This establishes beyond any doubt the exclusive nature of the covenant relationship that God entered into with the descendants of Jacob. In the *Second Book of the Kings*, God’s people repeatedly are chastised for failing to honor this commandment. Christians as well are reminded of the constant threat posed by forms of idolatry that do not involve the worship of carved idols but that nevertheless can turn our hearts away from God.

THE LOST TRIBES

Because the Assyrians forced people from nations that they conquered to intermingle, when the northern kingdom fell, descendants of Jacob living in Israel were scattered. They eventually began to be referred to as “the 10 lost tribes.” A few people were allowed to remain in the territory—which started to be called Samaria—and traditional Hebrew worship was mixed with sacrifices to foreign idols. The lost tribes consisted of Asher, Dan, Gad, Issachar, Naphtali, Reuben, Simeon, Zebulun, and the half-tribes of Ephraim and Manasseh. Descendants of Levi, dedicated to serving God, lived in both kingdoms. The southern kingdom was home to the tribes of Judah and Benjamin, some of whom returned to the region after the Babylonian Exile.



5 Read the *Second Book of the Kings* 17:29–41. What might cause the new inhabitants of the former northern kingdom to combine worship of the LORD with idol worship? How do their newly appointed priests fail to meet traditional Hebrew requirements? If necessary, refer to the book of *Exodus* 28:1. What are the conditions of God’s covenant with the descendants of Jacob? If necessary, refer to “Covenant” (page 19). Consider whether the fall of the northern kingdom indicates that God has abandoned his covenant.

6 Read the *Second Book of the Kings* 24:8–17. The focus moves to the southern kingdom of Judah, where Jehoiachin (Jeconiah) reigns for only three months. How does the biblical text characterize his behavior as king? How does Jehoiachin respond when Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon besieges Jerusalem? Who gets taken from Judah to Babylon in the first wave of the Exile? Who is allowed to remain? Who is appointed to rule Judah? What might explain why Nebuchadnezzar puts one of Jehoiachin’s relatives in power?

7 Read the *Second Book of the Kings* 24:18–20. How long does Zedekiah reign? How is his reign characterized? According to the text, how does God feel about Jerusalem and Judah, and why?

graven image a carved idol

The word **graven** means “to carve” and is related to the word “engrave.” The *Second Book of the Kings* 17:41 records that although the foreigners brought in to settle in the former northern kingdom (Samaria) had been taught to fear the LORD, they clung to pagan worship habits and served their own **graven images**. For the descendants of Jacob, worship of such **images** represented a serious offense against the monotheistic Hebrew God of their patriarchal ancestors.

8 Read the *Second Book of the Kings* 25:1–7. Also read the *Second Book of the Chronicles* 36:12. To which prophet does that account suggest Zedekiah should have listened to avoid seeing Judah dominated by foreign powers? What was the gist of the warning God’s prophet gave to the people of Judah? If necessary, refer to the *Book of Jeremiah* 26:1–6. The Chaldeans are semi-nomadic people who eventually become assimilated by the Babylonians. What happens to Zedekiah when Jerusalem falls to Chaldean forces?

9 Read the *Second Book of the Kings* 25:8–12. What punishment does Nebuchadnezzar inflict on the captured city of Jerusalem and on the Temple? What happens to the people found in the city after the siege? Who is allowed to remain in Judah when the final wave of God’s people is deported to Babylon?

10 Read the *Second Book of the Kings* 25:13–15 & 25:18–21. What do the Chaldeans do with the items that they find in the Temple? Who is singled out to be put to death in Babylon? Read the *Second Book of Chronicles* 36:15–16. Why did the LORD send so many prophets to the descendants of Jacob? Consider why the people failed to heed these prophets’ warnings.

proph•et

one who speaks for God

The Greek word προφήτης (*prophetes*) comes from the word πρόφημι (*prophemi*), a combination of a verb meaning “to speak” and the prefix *pro-*, which can mean either “before” in the sense of time, or “in front of” in a spatial context. As a mouthpiece for God, the **prophet** was sent as a corrective measure to appoint, counsel, and—when necessary—reject kings; to authorize war, which involved invoking divine aid; and to teach and model righteousness.



HOW THE EXILE INFLUENCED WORSHIP

Woven throughout the narrative books of *Deuteronomy*, *Joshua*, *Judges*, *First and Second Samuel*, *First and Second Kings*, and *Jeremiah* is a focus on the covenant law that underlies the fifth book of the Torah, *Deuteronomy*. Scholars often refer to all of these biblical works as Deuteronomistic.

Although the book of *Deuteronomy* is heavily based on ancient oral tradition, many scholars believe that the Deuteronomistic works were put into final form by one or more editors in the 7th to early 5th century BC after the conquest of the southern kingdom of Judah by the Babylonians.

Everything in these biblical books revolves around the covenant between the LORD and the people he has chosen—the descendants of the patriarchs Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Through the covenant, God promises land and protection conditional on the people keeping the law. Obedience brings blessings; disobedience brings curses and death. The destruction of Judah and the Temple at Jerusalem is understood to be the inevitable consequence of sin, especially the sin of idolatry.

Although Deuteronomistic history blames infidelity to God’s covenant as the cause of the fall of both the northern and southern kingdoms, only the relocated inhabitants of the south were able to maintain their cultural identity in exile. No longer able to worship at the Temple in Jerusalem, they turned to the sacred scrolls that they had carried with them to Babylon. They began to think of themselves as people of the book. During the Exile, traditional Hebrew worship practices were bolstered by prophets who focused on upholding God’s covenant. The resulting law-based religion was called Judaism, and its practitioners were called Jews.

Deuteronomistic history concentrates on the two southern tribes while more or less writing off those tribes in the north. By the time of Jesus, the rift between these groups was ingrained in the culture of the Jews, who had been allowed to return to Jerusalem in 538 BC by the Persian king Cyrus the Great. The New Testament Gospels point toward the fact that Jesus—and therefore God—did not share this prejudicial attitude.



GEOPOLITICS

BIG SHIFTS IN REGIONAL POWER

When the northern kingdom of Israel falls in 722–721 BC, Assyria is the most powerful nation in the Middle East. In 612 BC, fewer than a hundred years later, the Assyrian capital of Nineveh will fall to the Babylonians. Fifteen years after that, the Babylonians will defeat the southern kingdom of Judah and take the descendants of Jacob who are living there into exile.

From a scriptural point of view, the turning point that determines the Assyrians' loss of power can be seen in the thirty-seventh chapter in the *Book of Isaiah*. There the prophet describes Assyria's failed attempt at conquering the southern kingdom of Judah in 701 BC. With Jerusalem under siege, God listens to the prayers of King Hezekiah. The ensuing defeat of Assyria allows Judah to remain intact another 115 years.

CLASSIFYING THE PROPHETS

Categorizing the individuals who have spoken for God throughout history is a daunting task. Scripture itself is unclear about what constitutes a prophet. Most common Christian classification labels the prophets as major (*Isaiah, Jeremiah, Lamentations, Baruch, Ezekiel, and Daniel*), minor (*Hosea, Joel, Amos, Obadiah, Jonah, Micah, Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah, Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi*), and "other" (Moses, Samuel, Elijah, and more). Although Daniel is considered a prophet, scholars generally classify the *Book of Daniel*—as well as much of the *Book of Ezekiel*—as apocalyptic literature.

The Hebrew Bible is divided into the law, the prophets, and the writings, with the books of the prophets further divided into former (*Joshua, Judges, First and Second Samuel, First and Second Kings*) and latter, sometimes labeled "classical" or "canonical" to reflect that entire biblical books are attributed to their authorship (*Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and the 12 so-called minor prophets*).

Although we expect major prophets to be more significant than minor ones, a prophet does not start in the minors and get moved up. Neither—as in music—do major prophets sound happier notes than minor ones. The distinction is based entirely on the length of their books. Some extraordinary prophets are classified as "other"—Elijah, for instance.

A•she•rah Canaanite fertility goddess

In Canaanite religions, **Asherah** was seen as the mother goddess. **Asherim**, sometimes referred to in Scripture as sacred poles, were objects used in cult worship. Made of wood, they symbolized trees. These sacred poles represented **Asherah's** power over all matters pertaining to fertility. This female goddess was believed to be able to bring about abundant harvests as well as an increase in herds and flocks.

Ba•al Canaanite god of storm & fertility

The Canaanites worshiped **Baal** as a father-figure god who was thought to have power over the weather and, by extension, over crop yields. The word **Baal** also means "master" or "lord." The plural **Baals** is used to refer to a collective of pagan gods.

i•dol•a•try worship of false gods & images

The first of the Ten Commandments in the book of *Exodus* 20:3 stipulates monotheistic worship of the patriarchal God who rescued the descendants of Jacob from slavery in Egypt. After settling in the land of Canaan, these people abandoned their nomadic lifestyle and began to view the local deities associated with agriculture as viable substitutes for the LORD, whom they primarily saw as a God of war and deliverance. The *Second Book of the Kings* 17:29–33 describes how the worship of foreign gods became intermingled with traditional Hebrew worship practices among the descendants of Jacob and others living in the former northern kingdom of Israel after 722–721 BC.

PROPHETS & RULERS OF JUDAH & ISRAEL

	JUDAH	ISRAEL	
Shemaiah is prophet to Rehoboam	Rehoboam—931–913 BC	Jeroboam I 931–910 BC	Ahijah is prophet to Jeroboam I
	Abijam 913–911 Asa 911–870	Nadab 910–909 Baasha 909–886	Jehu is prophet to Baasha
	Jehoshaphat 870–848	Elah 886–885 Zimri 885 Tibni 885–880 Omri 885–874	Elijah is prophet to Ahab Micaiah is prophet to Ahab Elisha is prophet to Joram, Jehu, Jehoahaz & Jehoash
the earliest that Joel may have prophesied to Judah	Jehoram 848–841 Ahaziah 841 Athaliah 841–835 Joash 835–796	Ahab 874–853 Ahaziah 853–852 Joram 852–841 Jehu 841–814	
	Amaziah 796–767	Jehoahaz 814–798 Jehoash 798–782	
	Azariah (Uzziah) 767–740	Jeroboam II 782–753	Amos is prophet to Jeroboam II Hosea is prophet to Jeroboam II
	Jotham 740–732 Ahaz 732–716	Zechariah 753–752 Shallum 752 Menahem 752–742	
Proto-Isaiah is prophet to Ahaz & Hezekiah Micah is prophet to Judah	Hezekiah 716–687 Manasseh 687–642	Pekahiah 742–740 Pekah 740–732 Hoshea 732–722 fall of Samaria in 722–721	
	Amon 642–640 Josiah 640–608		
Zephaniah is prophet to Judah Jeremiah is prophet to Judah Habakkuk is prophet to Judah	Jehoahaz 608 Jehoiakim 608–597 Jehoiachin (Jeconiah) 597 to first Exile to Babylon Zedekiah 597–586 fall of Jerusalem & final Exile to Babylon in 587–586 BC		Nahum is prophet to Assyria

Dates are approximate. Scholars disagree about how to handle calendar differences and deal with coregencies.