# GOD'S REVIVAL PROMISED

CORE PASSAGE: EZEKIEL 37:1-14

### **CONTEXT**

Ezekiel was brought up to be a priest in Jerusalem, but he was carried away to Babylon during the first wave of the Babylonian exile. Yet even there, the Lord's hand was on him, and he was called by the Lord as a prophet. Ezekiel prophesied to the people who remained in Judah that their hardheartedness and sin would result in the Lord's abandonment of the temple and the total destruction of Jerusalem. When God's judgment came to pass, the people understandably lost all hope. They had earned their punishment. But God still had a plan for His people, and Ezekiel prophesied their revival and spiritual new birth.

### **KEY CONCEPT**

# God revives His people when hope seems lost.

As you examine Ezekiel 37:1-14:

- Visualize Ezekiel's experience of God commanding him to tell dry bones to come to life and them obeying.
- Reflect upon the role of the Holy Spirit in transforming us and drawing us out of hopelessness.



### TIMELINE

Jeremiah Prophesies Judgment on Judah and a New Covenant (Jeremiah 1–38)

Babylon Besieges and Conquers Judah, Deporting the People (2 Kings 25; 2 Chronicles 36) Daniel Prophesies in Babylon (Daniel 1–12)

Ezekiel Is Deported in a First Wave of Exiles and Prophesies Against Judah (2 Kings 24; Ezekiel 1–33)

SESSION STUDY: Ezekiel Prophesies Hope and Restoration for the Exiles (Ezekiel 34–48)



### **Daily Readings**

☐ **Day 1:** Ezekiel 1–11

■ Day 4: Ezekiel 25–32

■ Day 2: Ezekiel 12–17

■ Day 5: Ezekiel 33–39

■ Day 3: Ezekiel 18–24

☐ Day 6: Psalm 80



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### WHEN HOPE SEEMS LOST, WE RELY ON GOD'S POWER TO REVIVE US (EZEKIEL 37:1-10).

### Circle every use of "live" and "breath" in the passage.

1 The hand of the LORD was on me, and he brought me out by his Spirit and set me down in the middle of the valley; it was full of bones. 2 He led me all around them. There were a great many of them on the surface of the valley, and they were very dry. 3 Then he said to me, "Son of man, can these bones live?" I replied, "Lord God, only you know." 4 He said to me, "Prophesy concerning these bones and say to them: Dry bones, hear the word of the LORD! 5 This is what the Lord GoD says to these bones: I will cause breath to enter you, and you will live. 6 I will put tendons on you, make flesh grow on you, and cover you with skin. I will put breath in you so that you come to life. Then you will know that I am the LORD." 7 So I prophesied as I had been commanded. While I was prophesying, there was a noise, a rattling sound, and the bones came together, bone to bone. 8 As I looked, tendons appeared on them, flesh grew, and skin covered them, but there was no breath in them. 9 He said to me, "Prophesy to the breath, prophesy, son of man. Say to it: This is what the Lord God says: Breath, come from the four winds and breathe into these slain so that they may live!" 10 So I prophesied as he commanded me; the breath entered them, and they came to life and stood on their feet, a vast army.

Several years into their seventy years in exile, God's people were discouraged. But the vision God gave His prophet in Ezekiel 37 signified a restoration of hope. The vision began with the Holy Spirit taking Ezekiel to see a valley of dry bones scattered all about. As a priest, Ezekiel would have been forbidden to touch dead bones and become unclean (Lev. 21:1-2). Ezekiel likely recognized this shocking scene as an image of judgment against his people.

**LEADER NOTE:** For a dead person to remain unburied indicates that something unnatural has happened. Typically loved ones will bury a relative, or brothers-in-arms might take up that responsibility in battle conditions. But a valley of bones would imply no one was left to bury the dead, at least no one who cared. Furthermore, the Lord had warned Israel in Deuteronomy 28:26 that rebellion would result in curses and death, signified by corpses left out to be food for birds and wild animals (see also Jer. 34:19-20).

Ezekiel was led all around the valley to see that the bones had been dry for a very long time. God then asked, "Son of man, can these bones live?" (Ezek. 37:3). Ezekiel responded with reverence, acknowledging that only God would "know," and only in God's power could it be possible.

God instructed Ezekiel to prophesy to the bones, commanding them to hear the word of the Lord. As Ezekiel spoke, an unbelievable transformation unfolded. Bones came together; muscle, fat, and skin covered them; and bodies became whole—whole but lifeless. Then God commanded Ezekiel to prophesy to the breath. As the prophet obeyed, the breath entered the bodies, bringing them to life. The bones once completely dry rose up as a vast, living army.

LEADER NOTE: The re-formed bodies in the valley were lacking something integral; therefore, they were still dead and lifeless. They needed "breath in them." This recalls the account of God's creation of the first man. In Genesis 2:7, the Lord formed the man from the dust of the ground, but it wasn't until He "breathed the breath of life" into the man's nostrils that the man became a living being. Through this vision, God is reasserting that He is the One who raises up the dead and the downtrodden, and He is the One who gives life and vitality.

What areas in your life feel spiritually "dry" or lifeless? How can the Lord bring renewal and restoration?

The vision of the once-dead bones, now-living bodies told the story of Israel. The dead and dry bones represented the Israelites' despair and sense of hopelessness as they lived in exile, feeling abandoned and forgotten by God. Perhaps many of them believed the story of God's mercy and covenant with Israel was over. The living and vast army, however, pointed to the impending revival and God's promise to restore His people from the inside out, cleansing them from their sin and giving them a new heart and spirit (36:24-30).

God is the One who brings judgment and life, and He is the One who restores what is broken. Ezekiel's vision reassured the exiles that their restoration was certain. Likewise, we believers in Christ can be reassured of this unwavering truth: God's covenant faithfulness endures forever.

How does this passage challenge your faith in God's power to work in hopeless situations?

### **GOSPEL CONNECTION**

Though sin, guilt, and shame may have a hold on us, God's resurrection power brings renewed life to those who trust in His Son, Jesus, who conquered sin and death through His resurrection.

### PERSONAL PREPARATION

Notes

### GOD WILL REVIVE US WITH HIS SPIRIT SO THAT WE WILL KNOW HIM (EZEKIEL 37:11-14).

Circle all the times God says the words "1" and "my." Then underline all the times God says the words "you" and "your."

11 Then he said to me, "Son of man, these bones are the whole house of Israel. Look how they say, 'Our bones are dried up, and our hope has perished; we are cut off.' 12 Therefore, prophesy and say to them, 'This is what the Lord GoD says: I am going to open your graves and bring you up from them, my people, and lead you into the land of Israel. 13 You will know that I am the LORD, my people, when I open your graves and bring you up from them. 14 I will put my Spirit in you, and you will live, and I will settle you in your own land. Then you will know that I am the LORD. I have spoken, and I will do it. This is the declaration of the LORD."

When Jesus taught His disciples and audiences in parables, they were not readily understood, being somewhat vague stories that invited interpretation. Therefore, Jesus explained His intended meaning of the parables to His disciples. If Jesus told the story of Ezekiel's vision, we might assume it referred to our physical resurrection or life after death, which may not be too far afield. But so it would be clear to Ezekiel and his audience among the exiles, God explained in detail the meaning of Ezekiel's vision.

God stated that the bones represented Israel and their struggle with hopelessness during the Babylonian exile. They had been so confident that Jerusalem could not fall because God had chosen it as the place where His name would dwell (1 Kings 9:3). Now that Jerusalem was destroyed, did that mean the covenant God had made with His people could not be restored? The people of God scattered across the Babylonian Empire were to see themselves in the scattered and disconnected valley of bones.

**LEADER NOTE:** The image of a valley of dry bones corresponds well to the status of all people as sinners in rebellion against God. The house of Israel was destitute and cut off, having been exiled from the promised land and suffering under the just judgment of their God. Sinners, in general, are "dead in [their] trespasses and sins," and because we have all lived this way, "we [are] by nature children under wrath," cut off from a covenant relationship with the Lord (Eph. 2:1-3). As such, our only hope for restoration and life comes from God alone, which He has given to us in Jesus and the Spirit.

What is God's role in our understanding of His Word, and how should we submit to that?

In the midst of His people's sorrow, which they had rightly earned by their rebellion, God promised to do what felt impossible. He promised to take scattered Israel and re-form them together in their land. This would not be just a physical restoration to the land but also a spiritual restoration in which the people would return to covenant relationship with God. The restoration would not be just individual but communal. Israel would one day be restored back to God as a unified nation in beautiful fellowship with Him.

God will be faithful to His people and keep His promises. For the nation of Israel, the Lord would return the people to the land and His Spirit would be with them and in them, helping them to live in obedience. God would write His new covenant on their heart, and He would breathe new life into them. In this way He would restore, uphold, sustain, and show His sovereignty over His people, proving to them without a shadow of a doubt that He is the Lord.

LEADER NOTE: In Ezekiel 37:14, God promised that He would put His Spirit within the Israelites, enabling them to live. This, again, is a promise of the new covenant, in which the Spirit of God will live with and in His people and help them to know the Lord. The Spirit will help them live according to God's will and obey Him. This also shows that the Holy Spirit is necessary to help people walk with God and fulfill His will for them.

How can we rely on the Holy Spirit to live out God's purposes for our lives?

### THEOLOGY CONNECTION

**REGENERATION:** Regeneration takes place at the beginning of the Christian life and is the miraculous transformation, or the new birth, that takes place within an individual through the supernatural work of the Holy Spirit (John 3:3-8; Titus 3:5). It is the divine side of conversion (a person turning to Christ in repentance and faith), being the work of God within a person's life that causes him or her to be born again, a work that human effort is unable to produce.

### **GROUP EXPERIENCE**

Notes

### **ARRIVAL**

ENGAGE: Bring one or more of the following with you: a pencil, a wooden spoon, or a cardboard box. Set the item at the front of the room as the group arrives. Talk about how the item, at one time in the past, was alive: it was part of a tree. Consider (theoretically) the journey taken by that tree to yield the item: logging, hauling, processing, etc. Ask: "Would you call this alive today? Is there anything we could do to make this alive again?"

TRANSITION: When we get to the book of Ezekiel, and particularly the latter chapters, the nation of Israel had been utterly decimated. The Northern Kingdom was long gone, but now the Southern Kingdom had been captured, destroyed, and demolished. Its people were hopeless. They felt dead, no more alive than the item I brought today, but God promised to make them alive again.

### CONTEXT

**REVIEW:** Some of God's prophets spoke words of warning, instruction, and hope to God's people before the falls of Israel (722 BC) and Judah (586 BC). But Ezekiel was a prophet who spoke God's words to His people during their exile. The levels of hope and endurance for God's people were at an all-time low. Some of Ezekiel's messages likely contributed to that mood as he, a fellow exile, foretold the final destruction of Jerusalem. But God also gave them words of hope through Ezekiel: The Lord was still with them, He was still working, and His plan was still in motion.

### **RECAP**

SAY: In Ezekiel 37, the prophet was brought out by the Holy Spirit to a valley where he could see the remnants of a devastating battle: mounds of dry bones. God then commanded Ezekiel to command the bones to live, and they did.

DISCUSS: Why do you think God led Ezekiel "all around" the bones before asking if the bones could live? What else stood out to you from the passage as you read it this week?

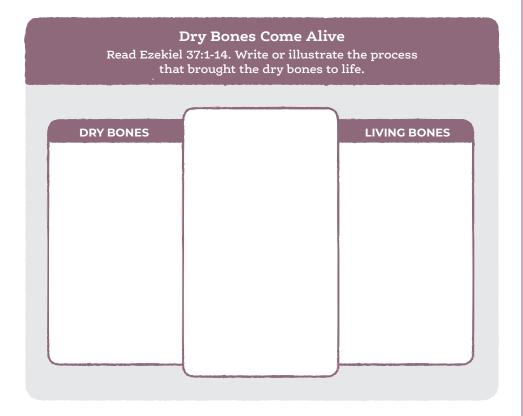


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Ministry Grid, Apple Podcasts, or Spotify ministrygrid.com/gospelproject · gospelproject.com/leader-training. **GROUP ACTIVITY** 

Notes

**DIAGRAM:** Direct your group to page 126 in their Personal Study Guide (PSG), where they will find a diagram titled "Dry Bones Come Alive." Recreate this diagram on a board in your room so you can record the group's findings as they interact with the Scripture text.



**READ:** Invite a volunteer to read Ezekiel 37:1-14 aloud, slowly. As he or she reads, invite all participants to listen with eyes closed, picturing the scene.

**ASK:** What did the bones represent in light of Ezekiel's ministry?

**EXPLAIN:** Help your group understand that the bones represented the nation of Israel, God's chosen people. They had been utterly conquered and left in ruins, exiled and scattered abroad without any hope for their future.

**ENGAGE:** As a group, identify how Ezekiel described the bones in verses 1-4, and write the answers in the left column on the board. Then direct the group to carefully consider verses 5-10, asking: "What took place to bring the bones from dry to living?" Record those actions in the center column of the diagram on the board (Ezekiel prophesying; noise; rattling sound; bones attaching; tendons; flesh growing; breath entering from the four winds). And finally, fill in the right column with the descriptions of the now-living bones in verse 10.

### **GROUP EXPERIENCE**

Notes

ENGAGE: Now turning to verses 11-14, guide your group to draw a line on the diagram in their PSG to separate the entries from Ezekiel's vision from the notes your group will make from the Lord's interpretation of the vision. Invite volunteers to highlight descriptions and comments from verses 11-14 and to suggest where to place them on the diagram.

### **DEBRIEF**

What is the significance of the breath in these verses? What does "breath" represent throughout Scripture?

(PSG p. 126) After all that the nation of Israel had done to reject God, why would He choose this course of action? What was His purpose in revealing this scene to Ezekiel?

### SUMMARIZE

God is faithful to His promises. And though the descendants of Abraham had soundly rejected Him and found themselves living out the punishment for their sinful idolatry and unbelief, God's plan for eternity still included His chosen people. So, since they wouldn't live for Him, He would bring them back to life through His Spirit. We will see this in part when the Lord calls His people to return home after their exile. But ultimately we see this come to pass in the New Testament, when the first believers in Jesus Christ found themselves filled with the Holy Spirit. The hope of this passage remains true for us today: No matter how dry you feel inside, God's Spirit is there to bring you back to life.

### **HEAD, HEART, HANDS**

Walk the group through the Head, Heart, Hands section in the PSG (p. 127). If running short on time, specifically highlight the Head section in this week's study, inviting volunteers to share their responses to the question in this section.

**HEAD:** When God first revealed this vision to Ezekiel, He asked His prophet a question that seemed impossible to answer: "Son of man, can these bones live?" (Ezek. 37:3). Ezekiel deferred to God as the One who knows all things and has the power to do the impossible. When God told him to prophesy to dead, lifeless bones, Ezekiel obeyed, and the bones lived.

How does our understanding and faith in God impact our obedience to Him and our proclamation of His gospel?

**HEART:** God renewed and revived the dry bones in the valley, and He promises this same effect for all His people. This renewal came to ultimate fruition in Jesus as He brings new life to all who follow Him through the new covenant sealed with His blood.

In what areas of your life are you lacking hope and feeling cut off from God? How does this passage encourage you?

HANDS: The purpose of the restoration of Israel was not only for individual benefit but for the whole nation. The restoration of Israel would also be how God would extend His blessing to the whole world, as He promised Abraham (Ezek. 36:36; cf. Gen. 12:3). The great thing about the community of faith being restored to God is that believers can usher others into the family of God.

How will you pray and prepare for sharing the gospel of Jesus with those who are spiritually dead in their sins?

### **NEXT STEPS**

Challenge the group to consider these actions as responses to this week's session.

- Take one verse, sentence, or phrase that stood out to you this week and use it as a journal prompt each morning.
- Allow this text to remind you to pray for nations, churches, and individuals
  who feel their situation seems hopeless. Look for opportunities to point
  others to the Lord's faithfulness.
- Study the biblical concepts of revival and regeneration this week. Be ready to explain them to someone who doesn't understand what they mean.

Invite volunteers to share prayer needs for this week. Encourage them to record these in the space on page 127 in their PSG so they can pray for others throughout the week.

### **PRAYER REQUESTS AND PRAISES**

### **PRAYING SCRIPTURE**

**CLOSE:** Pray through Psalm 80:14-19 with your group, asking God to rebuke and remove any sin in your hearts and to supply you once again with hope for salvation through revival and restoration in Him.

GROUP ARTICLE

# 3 REASONS WE DON'T SHARE THE GOSPEL (AND WHAT TO DO ABOUT IT)

By Ken Braddy





When people find a great new restaurant, golf course, retail store, or ice cream shop, they will go to great lengths on social media to let others know about their discovery. Word-of-mouth advertising takes over, and things can go viral. You've seen it happen, I know.

One of the primary purposes we have as Christians is to share the good news of Jesus with others. The Great Commission is clear—we are to

make disciples, and that process takes place when we introduce people to Jesus's redemptive work on their behalf.

Many believers don't step out in faith and share what they've discovered about Jesus for several reasons. Here are three reasons why people don't share their faith and how you as a leader can help them tell others the most important message in the world.

The Great Commission is clear—we are to make disciples, and that process takes place when we introduce people to Jesus's redemptive work on their behalf.

# 1) PEOPLE DON'T KNOW A SIMPLE GOSPEL PRESENTATION

I remember when people used to attend 12-week seminars to learn a 1-hour gospel presentation. I doubt many people today will sit still that long! Knowing a simple gospel presentation is important. Find a method that can be written down and easily shared quickly using one verse, such as Romans 6:23 or John 3:16.

As a Bible study leader, I've taught groups a oneverse method using Romans 6:23, and it is easy to learn and share with others. The one-verse method feels more like a conversation than a presentation, and you can find visual guides online that you can easily sketch on a napkin too.

One of the primary purposes we have as Christians is to share the good news of Jesus with others.

# 2) PEOPLE DON'T KNOW HOW TO ARTICULATE THEIR TESTIMONY

Some believers don't know how to give an "elevator speech" about their come-to-Jesus moment. If they haven't thought it out, they just don't know where to start.

Teach your group to write out their story (testimony) in three parts: (1) their life before coming to Christ; (2) the situation surrounding their salvation experience; and (3) their life after receiving Jesus as their Savior.

Give your group time to write this out during Bible study, and then give them more time to practice sharing their testimony with another person in the group. This gives people a safe place to practice and hone their story. As their confidence grows, they will be more likely to speak up with a non-believing person.

# 3) PEOPLE DON'T FEEL THE URGENCY TO SHARE

Just like Peter's critics (see 2 Pet. 3), believers can be lulled into thinking that Jesus's return isn't imminent. Peter reminded his opponents that the Lord counts time differently, that He "delays" His return so that people can hear the gospel, and that unbelievers at Christ's return will face a terrible day of judgment. Second Peter 3 is a passage that group leaders can teach to help their group members see the seriousness and the urgency of helping others hear about Jesus.

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We sometimes see evangelism as needed only when opportunities arise. But as a discipline, it needs to be cultivated in our lives as an everyday practice. When we look at God's people throughout Scripture, we see them sharing God's words with others. Thus, as people of God, we are still to proclaim this message of hope and life for those left in darkness and hopelessness. But what does this look like? Studying the prophets reveals a holistic discipline of evangelism that we can learn from.

# WE LEAD PEOPLE TO THE ONE TRUE GOD

Part of evangelism is leading people to the one and only Way. The prophets of old, like Elijah, knew the people were prone to worshiping multiple gods, and false gods at that. But they called people to remove those false gods and worship the one true God. Evangelism today is helping people see the false gods of our culture and pointing them to our true Lord, Jesus Christ. It is also helping those who want to worship Jesus plus other gods realize that Jesus is the only Way, Truth, and Life. A syncretistic worship will not satisfy our holy God. Only the Lord God deserves our worship.

# WE FIGHT AGAINST INJUSTICE FOR THE GLORY OF GOD

Evangelism also involves calling out injustices in this world for God's glory. We battle injustices in this world to be a light, calling for holiness and righteousness as God would have it. Like Elijah calling out Ahab and Jezebel for their wickedness and injustice against Naboth, we stand up for those who can't stand up for themselves. Micah 6:8 states what is required, "to act justly, to love faithfulness, and to walk humbly with your God."

# WE CARE FOR PEOPLE'S BODY AND SOUL

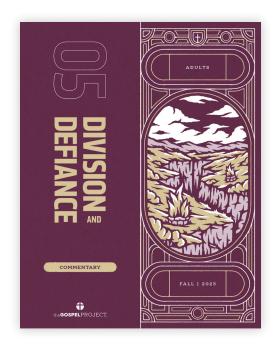
Some think we just need to live a good life helping others, and that is evangelism enough for us. Others think we need to pass out tracts showing people Scriptures that point to Christ, and that is evangelism. If we can move from both extremes to a balanced approach that cares for and loves all people by both helping with physical needs and sharing the gospel message seen in Scripture, we will get to a better understanding of what evangelism is about. Looking specifically at Jesus's life, He shared messages of hope with acts of love. He cared for body and soul. He helped meet the needs of others while sharing about their need for salvation. The prophet Elisha was an example of one like Christ who met the physical needs of people while also giving them messages of hope.

# WE WARN PEOPLE OF JUDGMENT AND BLESS THEM WITH HOPE

Evangelism always includes a message of hope, but it also includes a warning of judgment. We cannot skip over the sin and death factor, even though our culture may think it's politically incorrect. At the same time, if we only talk about sin, death, and hell and do not provide people with the message and source of hope, then we have lost the true meaning of the gospel. The prophets in the Old Testament warned God's people and even their enemies that continuing in their sin would bring God's judgment. But they also spoke of a day when a Messiah—a Savior—would come. Today we know that Savior as Jesus Christ. He is our Lord and salvation. In Him, we now have new life and know we are to share that same hope with others so that they may come to follow Him as well.

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Context: After Elijah's victorious showdown on Mount Carmel with the 450 prophets of Baal, whom Elijah executed, the Lord sent torrential rain on Israel for the first time in three years. The drought was over, Ahab told his wife, Jezebel, what Elijah had done, and she swore an oath that she would kill Elijah. Some time later, Jezebel found Ahab pouting because his neighbor Naboth would not let Ahab buy his family's vineyard. So she hatched a plot to bring false accusations against Naboth that led to his execution. Then she told Ahab to take what he had wanted. All this incurred the wrath of the Lord against Ahab and Jezebel.

Key Concept: God will not ignore injustice among His people, but He is merciful.

### DAILY READINGS

□ **Day 1:** 1 Kings 21

□ **Day 4:** 2 Chronicles 19–20

☐ **Day 2:** 1 Kings 22

☐ **Day 5:** 2 Kings 1

□ **Day 3:** 2 Chronicles 17–18 □ **Day 6:** Psalm 58

<sup>17</sup> Then the word of the LORD came to Elijah the Tishbite: 18 "Get up and go to meet King Ahab of Israel, who is in Samaria. He's in Naboth's vineyard, where he has gone to take possession of it. 19 Tell him, 'This is what the LORD says: Have you murdered and also taken pos-In the place where the dogs licked up Naboth's blood, the dogs will also lick up your blood!" 20 Ahab said to Elijah, "So, my enemy, you've found me, have you?" He replied, "I have found you because you devoted yourself to do what is evil in the LORD's sight. 21 This is what the LORD says: 'I am about to bring disaster on you and will eradicate your descendants: I will wipe out all of Ahab's males, both slave and free, in Israel; 22 I will make your house like the house of Jeroboam son of Nebat and like the house of Baasha son of Ahijah, because you have angered me and caused Israel to sin.' 23 The LORD also speaks of Jezebel: 'The dogs will eat Jezebel in the plot of land at Jezreel: 24 Anyone who belongs to Ahab and dies in the city, the dogs will eat, and anyone who dies in the field, the birds will eat." 25 Still, there was no one like Ahab, who devoted himself to do what was evil in the LORD's sight, because his wife Jezebel incited him. 26 He committed the most detestable acts by following idols as the Amorites had, whom the LORD had dispossessed before the Israelites.

### Ahab Stole Through Deceit and Murder

We do not know exactly when the conflict between Naboth the Jezreelite and Ahab occurred during Ahab's 22-year-rule, but it probably occurred late



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### **DIVISION AND DEFIANCE**

After Solomon's reign over a united people, because of his sin of idolatry, the kingdom split. To varying degrees, the kings of the Northern Kingdom of Israel and the Southern Kingdom of Judah often followed that same idolatrous path, with a few exceptions. Thus, God sent prophets to call them to repentance and to warn the people of His judgment. Because they did not humble themselves and listen, their enemies overtook them and they were sent into captivity. But even as the prophets warned of judgment, they also prophesied a future day of hope—a day when the Messiah, Jesus Christ, would come to establish His kingdom and a new covenant to forgive sin and provide eternal hope for God's people.

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