



Part 1
Meeting the Prophets



The point of this study

The goal of every Inspire study is to draw closer to Jesus Christ. In this series, we will explore the role of the prophets through the ministry of Amos. Though each prophet has a unique voice and message, Amos gives us a powerful glimpse into the prophetic tradition and its call to justice, faithfulness, and readiness to encounter God. As we listen to his challenge to "Prepare to meet your God," we will discover what the prophets still have to teach us today.

This study draws on the Four Ancient Lenses of Interpretation, which are introduced in the Inspire video series **How to Read the Bible (Part 2)**. These lenses help us engage Scripture more deeply, exploring its literary, theological, kingdom, and ethical dimensions.

The check-in & opening prayer

We know that what we bring to the study can impact what we take from the study. So, let's take a moment to check in with ourselves and to ask the Holy Spirit to illuminate our heart. You can do this through personal journaling or by sharing with the group.



I wonder what was a highlight of your week.

**I wonder where you may have needed
prayer or support this week.**

I wonder where you noticed God at work this week.

I wonder what you are bringing to this study.
(questions, concerns, distractions, hopes, fears, learnings...).

I wonder what you hope to receive from God through this study.

Holy God,
open our eyes to see the world as you see it, open our ears to hear
your voice through the prophets, and open our hearts to be
transformed by your truth. Give us courage to seek your justice,
hope to trust your kingdom, and faithfulness to follow your call;
through Jesus Christ, your living Word,
our friend and helper. Amen.

Meeting the prophets

*Reading Scripture through the **Theological Lens**.*

Let's take a moment to reflect on the theological theme of **prophets**.

The Hebrew Bible usually uses the word **nābî'** for "prophet." Although scholars debate its exact origin, it seems to carry the idea of someone who has been called and entrusted with a message. That is exactly how Scripture introduces us to the prophets. A prophet is someone who has been addressed by God and entrusted with a word for the community. The prophet does not simply offer personal opinions, political commentary or general spiritual wisdom. Prophetic speech begins with a summons: "Go," "Speak," "Say to this people," or "Thus says the Lord." Prophets have encountered a truth that does not belong to them alone and cannot faithfully be kept to themselves.

**I wonder what truths God has entrusted to us –
and what they have asked of us.**



Prophets tell **the truth about the present**. They uncover realities that a community has learned not to notice: the suffering hidden beneath prosperity, the violence protected by respectable institutions, the distance between public worship and daily behaviour, and the stories powerful people tell to preserve their position. Prophets are therefore more than predictors; they are interpreters. They reveal what the community's life looks like when it is seen in the presence of God.

**I wonder what parts of our common life might appear differently
if we learned to see them in the light of God.**



Prophets tell the truth about the present because **they have been captured by God's purposes for the world**. They do not announce judgement because they have abandoned hope. They announce judgement because they believe that injustice, exploitation and faithlessness cannot finally belong to God's future. The prophet is not necessarily convinced that every institution, social order or generation will survive. The prophet is convinced that God's justice, mercy and faithfulness will. Prophets proclaim that certain worlds must end precisely because God has not given up on the world.

**I wonder what in our world God may be seeking to heal –
and what may have to change or end for that healing to come.**



Prophets stand within the community even when they speak against it. Abraham intercedes, Moses pleads for Israel, Jeremiah weeps, and Amos identifies himself with a people whose life he condemns. The prophet is not merely a superior observer shouting accusations from a safe distance. Prophetic speech may involve grief, vulnerability, courage and love. A true prophetic word does not delight in destruction; it longs for people to turn toward life, even when it fears that they will refuse.

**I wonder how we can tell the difference between a voice that
condemns the world and a voice that loves the world enough to tell
it the truth.**



Here is a working definition for prophets:

Prophets are people who have become so convinced of God's justice and faithfulness that they can recognize what is false and death-dealing in the present, warn where it is leading, and call the community back toward life.

**I wonder what you like about this definition.
I wonder what challenges you about this definition.**



Context (*read and reflect*)

Reading Scripture through the Literary Lens.

Before we even enter into the text of the Prophet Amos, let's look at the role of prophets in the ancient world of Israel more generally.

Prophecy was not unique to Israel. Throughout the ancient Near East, people believed that gods communicated through human messengers. Important records of prophetic activity survive from the city of Mari in the eighteenth century BCE and from the Neo-Assyrian Empire in the seventh century BCE. These prophets — both women and men — delivered messages concerning kings, warfare, political crises, temples, divine protection and royal responsibilities.

Ancient people also practised technical forms of divination: examining animal organs, interpreting celestial signs, studying unusual births or consulting other established systems. Prophecy was somewhat different. Prophets were understood to receive a message through speech, vision, dream or overwhelming inspiration and then translate that message into human words or symbolic actions. Biblical prophets belonged to this wider cultural world.

Biblical prophecy nevertheless developed some striking emphases. We read that the prophets not only supported rulers but also confronted them; not only promised national victory but also announced judgement against their own nation; and not only addressed warfare and royal succession but also connected the community's survival with justice for the poor. Israel's prophetic traditions were gathered, edited and reapplied as literature so that words first spoken in one crisis could address communities living generations later.

Amos is generally regarded as the earliest of the preserved literary prophets whose ministry can be placed with reasonable historical confidence. He spoke in the prosperous northern kingdom of Israel around 760–750 BCE. His hearers believed they were living in a time of blessing and security. Amos saw something very different. The Book of Amos preserves an early and powerful collection of prophetic words concerning worship, wealth, power and justice, asking whether a nation can truly claim to know God while ignoring the poor.

**I wonder what all these prophets,
both inside and outside Israel, have in common.**

**I wonder what is distinctive about the prophets
we encounter in Scripture.**



Scripture (mark and note)



Reading Scripture through the **Literary Lens**. As you read these four passages,, circle, underline, and make notes. Notice the characters, the setting, the verbs, the allusions to other parts of Scripture, the metaphors, and anything else that draws your attention.

The first person explicitly called a prophet in the biblical narrative is **Abraham**. While Abraham and Sarah are staying in Gerar, Abraham, fearing for his life, tells King Abimelech that Sarah is his sister. Believing this to be true, Abimelech takes Sarah into his household. God then appears to Abimelech in a dream, reveals the truth about Sarah and Abraham, and commands him to return Sarah. God says in Genesis 20:7:

“return the man’s wife, for he is a prophet,
and he will **pray** for you, and you shall live.”

I wonder why the first prophet in the Bible is introduced as someone who prays for another person.

I wonder where else we see Abraham standing before God on behalf of others.

Miriam is described as a prophet. We read in Exodus 15:19–21

When the horses of Pharaoh with his chariots and his chariot drivers went into the sea, the Lord brought back the waters of the sea upon them, but the Israelites walked through the sea on dry ground.

Then the prophet Miriam, Aaron’s sister, took a tambourine in her hand, and all the women went out after her with tambourines and with dancing. And Miriam **sang** to them:

“Sing to the Lord, for he has triumphed gloriously;
horse and rider he has thrown into the sea.”

I wonder how singing about God's faithfulness can be a prophetic act.

I wonder how remembering God's faithfulness gives prophets hope for the future.

The prophet may pray. The prophet may sing. The prophet may confront injustice. As we read Amos 3:3-8, I wonder what these prophetic acts have in common.

A Note About Hebrew Poetry

Prophetic books are mostly written as Hebrew poetry, not prose. Unlike English poetry, Hebrew poetry does not usually rely on rhyme. Instead, it uses repetition, parallel ideas, vivid images, questions, and metaphor to help readers see the world in a new way.

As you read Amos, don't worry about understanding every image — or even the whole message — immediately. **Notice repeated words, surprising comparisons, and patterns in the text.** The poetry invites us to slow down, wonder, and imagine before rushing to explain.

Do two walk together
unless they have made an appointment?

Does a lion roar in the forest
when it has no prey?

Does a young lion cry out from its den
if it has caught nothing?

Does a bird fall into a snare on the earth
when there is no trap for it?

Does a snare spring up from the ground
when it has taken nothing?

Is a trumpet blown in a city,
and the people are not afraid?

Does disaster befall a city
unless the Lord has done it?

Surely the Lord God does nothing
without revealing his secret
to his servants the prophets.

The lion has roared;
who will not fear?

The Lord God has spoken;
who can but prophesy?

Parallels

How are roaring and
speaking parallels?
fear and prophesy?

What metaphors are employed to help us understand what a prophet is?

- People on a journey together
- A roaring lion
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Sharing

*Reading Scripture through the **Kingdom of God Lens**.*

I wonder how prayer becomes a prophetic act in God's kingdom.

I wonder how remembering and sharing God's story helps God's kingdom take root in the world.

I wonder how God's kingdom challenges the unjust kingdoms we build for ourselves.

*Reading Scripture through the **Ethical Lens**.*

I wonder who we could pray for this week, as Abraham prayed for others.

I wonder what story of God's faithfulness we could share this week, as Miriam did.

I wonder where God may be inviting us to speak truth with humility, courage, and love.

You may close in prayer.



The Parish of St. Mark – *Ocean Park*