



6

God Speaks Clearly

Key Theme

- God is omniscient.

Key Passages

- 1 Kings 13:1–7; 2 Kings 23:15–20; Isaiah 44:28–45:7; Ezra 1:1–4

Objectives

Students will be able to:

- Describe the timing and details of the prophecy of Josiah.
- Describe the timing and details of the prophecy of Cyrus.



Lesson Overview



Come On In

Write on the board, “How much does God know?”

Students will review their memory verse by helping each other stand in the proper order according to the phrases taped onto their backs.

- Memory Verse Review Phrases, cut apart



Studying God’s Word

God knows all things—past, present, and future. He revealed specific future events in the Bible through His prophets and each of those events came to pass exactly as He intended. Unlike people who make vague prognostications or use a “might” phrase to trick people, God speaks clearly and there is no doubt of His omniscience.

- Study the Prepare to Share section.
- Read the lesson Key Passages.
- Go Before the Throne.



Activity: God vs. Nostradamus

Students will examine a prediction made by Nostradamus to distinguish it from predictions found in Scripture.

- Student Guides
- Pencils



Prepare to Share

SCRIPTURAL BACKGROUND

Prepare to teach by preparing your heart. Read the lesson key passages along with this background.

Old Testament prophets had many different functions. They delivered messages of coming judgment to the Jews, told of pending destruction of foreign nations, called people to worship God rather than idols, received and communicated truth about God and His character, and delivered messages to individuals about specific situations. And sometimes, they told of future events, such as giving glimpses of the life and ministry of the Messiah. When you mention that someone was a prophet, most people think that he told of the future. While this is one part of a prophet's role, we need to be careful not to put too much emphasis on the future-telling role of a prophet—that was only part of his job.

With that preface, one of the most dramatic confirmations of the Bible's truthfulness is the specificity of the future-telling prophecies of the Old Testament. While some prophecies are somewhat vague, others give such clear detail that there is no doubt that they could ever be the result of "coincidence." Some details of future events are increasingly revealed as time goes on. We see the first hints of a Savior in Genesis 3:15, and later prophets proclaimed more details about His coming. Jacob told us He would come from the tribe of Judah (Genesis 49:10); Micah told us where He would be born (Micah 5:2); and Isaiah told us how He would suffer and die (Isaiah 53).

God was displaying His omniscience for our benefit. God knows everything that ever has happened or ever will happen. He was not making some guesses about what might happen some day or hoping that someone would read what was written and do it. God was demonstrating His absolute power and knowledge about the future. What an amazing gift God has given to us in His Word. He has graciously allowed us to see His character to know that He is in control. When we place our trust in God, we trust the God who is in control—knowing the future and directing it to His ends.

Jeroboam was the first king of the 10 Northern tribes. Shortly after taking power, he made two calves for Israel to worship, along with altars, so the people didn't have to worship in Jerusalem (1 Kings 12:28–33). Jeroboam had no interest in serving God in a faithful way, but he sought to blend the worship of God with false gods. He appointed priests who were not from Aaron's line, and he led the people into idolatrous adultery. Jeroboam set a feast day to initiate his new system of worship, offering sacrifices to the calf gods at Bethel. The sacrifices and incense burned on the altars were about to rise up before the Lord—but He was not pleased. He was no more pleased with this than when His chosen people worshipped the calf Aaron had made for them (Exodus 32).

God sent a prophet to pronounce judgment on Jeroboam and Israel. An unnamed prophet ("a man of God") went from Judah to Bethel, and he cried out with God's judgment against the king. Twice in the opening verses of 1 Kings 13 we read the phrase "by the word of the Lord." The message communicated by the prophet came from God through the lips of a man. The words delivered were words that had both immediate and future fulfillment.

As Jeroboam cried out against the prophet, God made his hand wither and the altar was split, spilling the ashes of the detestable sacrifices, just as the prophet had proclaimed (1 Kings 13:3). God used an immediate miracle to authenticate the message of the prophet and assure the future prophecy. In verse 2, God revealed that a king named Josiah would be born to the house of David and he would confront the spiritual adultery in Israel—killing the adulterous priests and burning the bones of dead men on the altars.

In order for this prophecy to be fulfilled, there would have to be a king by the name of Josiah born from the house of David. He would have to kill the high priests who were offering at the high places and then burn the bones of dead men on the altars. Well, that is exactly what happened 300 years after Jeroboam had his adulterous feast day. As we look at 2 Kings 23:15–20, we see this prophecy about the future fulfilled to

the letter by a king named Josiah—a true testament to the omniscience of God.

Another amazing foretelling comes through the mouth of Isaiah. About 150 years before the Jews were to return from their exile in Babylon, Isaiah spoke of a king named Cyrus, whom God would prosper and then use to send the people back to Jerusalem to begin its rebuilding (Isaiah 44:28–45:7). Providentially, a king named Cyrus rose to power in Persia, overthrowing Babylon and allowing the Jews to return. As Ezra records, the Lord stirred up Cyrus to make a proclamation that the Jews should return to Jerusalem and rebuild the Temple (Ezra 1:1–4). Not only did he allow them to return, but also he gave them riches and commanded others to support them!

From the creation of the universe, God has been in absolute control of all that He created. Not only does God know who He will place in power in the future, but also He guides the hearts of those kings like channels of water. Stop for a moment and thank God for revealing His omniscience and sovereignty to us.

HISTORICAL/APOLOGETICS BACKGROUND

Since they reject supernatural events, liberal theologians like to point to these passages as proof of the rewriting of the Bible at later dates. From a liberal perspective, if the Bible records the name of a ruler before he was ever in power, it must have been added later. They would insist that some editor (or redactor) came along and added those details into the passages. Of course, this view undermines the authority of the Bible and can't be held in a consistent Christian's life.

There have also been many people in history who have claimed to be able to see the future. One of the most famous was Nostradamus. Nostradamus made many statements about the future, but they were quite cryptic and vague, written in four-line poetry. Many people claim that the prophecies have foretold events such as the rise of Hitler and the assassination of the

Kennedy brothers, but the statements are typically interpreted after the events have already happened.

From an apologetics standpoint, we need to be careful not to think that the fulfilled biblical prophecies are a magic bullet that will bring everyone who hears them to faith in Christ. These truths can be used to confirm the supernatural nature of the Bible, but only God can open the eyes of those who are blind to His truth. We have the privilege of proclaiming the truth of God's Word (Romans 10) and watching as He uses that truth to draw people to Himself. You can boldly proclaim the truth of God's Word, including the clear future-telling that pointed to the coming of the Messiah who would save His people from their sin. Just as we can trust and confirm the accounts of Josiah and Cyrus, we know that Jesus has truly come to bring us new life.

For more information on this topic, see the Online Resource Page.



BEFORE THE THRONE

Dear Lord, almighty Father, you alone are worthy of my worship. This lesson reviews some really important truths about your character. The truths in this lesson impact my life each time I revisit them. Your love, Lord, for me is so undeserving. Help me to be faithful as you are faithful. Your holiness, Lord, takes my breath away. I am awed to be in your presence. Only by your grace and through the perfect sacrifice of my Savior, Jesus, your only Son, is it possible. Forgive me when I take you for granted and allow other things to push you aside. You deserve so much more! Keep a guard over my heart. My love and full devotion is yours alone. Help me to encourage my students to do the same. May your will be done as this lesson is taught. Set your Word in each of our hearts that we would know you better.

➤ **Pace your lesson!** Use the clocks to mark the time you want to finish each section. This will help you stay on track and finish on time. You may need to shorten or drop sections as necessary.





COME ON IN

- Write on the board, “How much does God know?”
- Students will review their memory verse by helping each other stand in the proper order according to the phrases taped onto their backs. See the Memory Verse Review Phrases on the Resource DVD-ROM for instructions.



Review

This week we are going to take a bit of a detour and look at some prophecies that were made during the time of the divided kingdoms of Israel and Judah. We are still looking at things from the flow of history of Israel, but the events we will look at today are separated from one another. The first takes place in Israel, and the second takes place in Judah.

? When I say the word *prophecy*, what comes to mind? *Accept various answers.*

We typically think of prophecies as a prophet making a prediction about a future event. This is surely an important part of

biblical prophecy, but the word means so much more than that. Any statement that is given through a prophet can be called a prophecy—a proclamation of God’s words. Prophecy can tell about the present condition of a people, deliver a doctrine or specific command, tell of the future, or call people to repentance. Prophecy is much more than just foretelling the future.

While our lesson today will look at prophecies that predict the future, be careful not to limit your understanding of prophecy to this dimension alone.



► Write on the board, “How much does God know?”



Studying God’s Word

READ THE WORD

For a bit of background, Jeroboam was the first king of Israel. He had decided to build two golden calves as gods for Israel to worship instead of going to the Temple in Jerusalem. Jeroboam had set a feast day to dedicate the calves and their worship. Let’s read 1 Kings 13:1–7 together and look at God’s response to Jeroboam and a prophecy related to this event. *Have someone read the passage aloud.*

1 Kings 13:1–7

EXAMINE THE WORD

Observe the Text

? Who is the “man of God” mentioned in verse 1? *He is never identified by name, but this phrase is a common term for prophets in the Old Testament.*

- ? **Why did he go to Bethel, in Israel, from Judah?** *God had directed him to go there. This is expanded later in the passage.*
- ? **What was Jeroboam doing?** *He was offering incense on the altar.*
- ? **How do we know the source of the message delivered by the man of God?** *Three times in verses 2 and 3, the message is identified as coming from the Lord.*
- ? **What are the three specific claims of the prophecy delivered by the man of God?** *A king named Josiah from the line of David will be born; he will sacrifice the high priests on the altar; dead men's bones will be burned on the altar.*
- ? **What is the sign of the assurance of the prophecy?** *The altar would be split, spilling its ashes.*
- ? **What other sign of the authority of the messenger was shown?** *Jeroboam's hand was withered when he raised it against the prophet.*
- ? **Did the sign come to pass?** *Yes, so the message is authentic and the prophecy of Josiah must come to pass in the future.*
- ? **When was this prophecy made?** *It was in the early part of Jeroboam's reign, approximately 975 BC.*
- ? **Was this prophecy fulfilled?** *We know it must have been since God proclaimed it.*

Turn to 2 Kings 23:15–20 and listen for the fulfillment in the name of the king and the two actions he took. *Read the passage for the class.*

- ? **How accurate was the prophecy?** *Josiah killed the priests of the false gods on the altar and burned dead men's bones on them, exactly as prophesied.*
- ? **How much time had passed between the prophecy and its fulfillment?** *Josiah reigned from 641 to 610 BC. 2 Kings 22:3 tells us that these events were precipitated in the eighteenth year of Josiah, so approximately 623 BC. This makes it about 300 years between the prophecy and its fulfillment.*

2 Kings 23:15–20

➤ Refer to the History of Israel poster for dates.

Discover the Truth

The prophecy came to pass exactly as the man of God had said it would. There is no way the prophet could have made a lucky guess about who the king in Judah might be 300 years later. This is an amazingly clear prophecy that could only have been made by God.

- ? **What attribute of God is displayed in delivering this prophecy?** *Omniscient; God knows everything—past, present, and future.*
- ? **What attribute of God is displayed in bringing the prophecy to pass?** *Sovereign; God directed the events to bring this very specific prophecy to pass.*

God can make the future known to His prophets, and we see this displayed clearly in these passages.



OMNISCIENT

SOVEREIGN



God vs. Nostradamus

MATERIALS

- Student Guides
- Pencils

INSTRUCTIONS

- ? How many of you have actually read any of the predictions of Nostradamus? *Allow discussion.*

Nostradamus was a French astrologer who lived in the sixteenth century. He believed that the events of the past and their astrological influences would repeat in the future. Based on this, he made predictions about the future. He wrote in poetic quatrains—poems of four lines—that are organized by number. I would like you to read Quatrain 10-72, which you will find in the God vs. Nostradamus activity in your Student Guide. After you read the prophecy, answer the first three questions and then we will discuss the answers in a few minutes.

CONNECT TO THE TRUTH

- ? Now that you have read the prophecy, what event is being described? *Accept various answers.*
- ? Who are the King of Terror and the King of the Mongols? *Accept various answers.*
- ? When was this prophecy to have been fulfilled? *Most will say July 1999.*

Well, let's see what The Nostradamus Society of America has to say about this prophecy. *Explanation taken from <http://www.nostradamususa.com/911prophecy.html>.*

The tragic events of 9-11 were truly foreshadowed here. Presently, we use the Gregorian calendar. But during Nostradamus' lifetime they used the Julian Calendar. The seventh month on the Julian Calendar is September. The date 1999 provides a time clue of an event around the millennial change. However, the real clue is that the date 1999 is nothing more than a numeric anagram. If we reverse the order of the "1"s and "9"s, we arrive at the date 9-11-1 (the date of the 9-11 attacks).

It is obvious that Osama bin Laden is the "great king of terror who comes from the sky." Regarding the "great king if the Mongols," Kabul was the capital of the Mongol Empire during Nostradamus' lifetime, so it appears that we have an additional symbolic reference to bin Laden here. In summation, this quatrain provided an "astonishing preview" of 9-11!

So, it is "obvious" that this prophecy is about the attacks on America on September 11, 2001. Never mind that the year was supposed to be 1999 or that it was supposed to be in July, this was an "astonishing preview" of the 9-11 attacks. Followers of Nostradamus must invent distorted interpretations in order to make the prophecy fit reality.

This is the type of prophecy that people compare to the biblical prophecies. Take a moment to answer the final question in your Student Guide.



READ THE WORD

Let's look at another prophecy. We find this prophecy in Isaiah 44:28–45:7. *Have someone read the passage aloud.*

Isaiah 44:28–45:7

EXAMINE THE WORD

Observe the Text

If you think it is appropriate, have the students work out this prophecy in pairs, giving them the first reference and then asking them to find the passage that describes its fulfillment using any study tools they have available. Suggest they not search for the answer on the internet—that is cheating.

- ? **Who is the king identified in this passage?** *Cyrus.*
- ? **Was Cyrus a follower of God?** *No, verse 4 says Cyrus had not known God.*
- ? **What was God going to give to Cyrus?** *The various verses describe the lands and people that God will give to Cyrus, along with their riches.*
- ? **What decree was Cyrus going to make?** *Verse 28 says that he would make a proclamation that Jerusalem would be rebuilt and that the foundation of the Temple would be laid.*
- ? **When was this prophecy made?** *Isaiah prophesied from 759 BC to around 700 BC, from the reign of Uzziah to the reign of Hezekiah. This passage comes after the description of Hezekiah's reign, so probably closer to 700 BC, but we can't fix a firm date.*

So, this prophecy was announced even before Jerusalem needed to be rebuilt or the Temple had been torn down. Jerusalem was still intact and would be until 588 BC. So, we know that this prophecy can't be fulfilled until Jerusalem and the Temple are destroyed.

➤ Point out Isaiah on the History of Israel poster.

I want you turn backward in your Bibles to Ezra, but remember that we are moving forward in history. As we have discussed in the past, the Bible is not arranged in a chronological manner. Listen as I read Ezra 1:1–4. *Read the passage for the class.*

Ezra 1:1–4

- ? **How was the prophecy fulfilled?** *King Cyrus of Persia recognized that God had given him his kingdoms and he sent the Jews back to rebuild the Temple and Jerusalem.*
- ? **Why did Cyrus make this decree?** *The Lord stirred up the spirit of Cyrus to make the proclamation.*
- ? **What other prophet is mentioned?** *Jeremiah also prophesied of these events after Isaiah in Jeremiah 25 and 29, but Isaiah is much more specific.*
- ? **When was this decree made?** *Since this is the first year of King Cyrus (verse 1), so 537 BC is the date of the decree.*

Discover the Truth

Again, we see God's omniscience and sovereignty on display in the specificity of a prophecy fulfilled over 150 years after it was announced.





Applying God's Word

WHAT YOU HEARD IN THE WORD

Many people will set aside the miraculous nature of these texts and tell you that an editor went back and added in the details after they had already happened. You can believe them, or you can trust that God is indeed the author of these texts and of all of history. I will trust in God and point to these true texts as a clear demonstration of God's activity in and authority over this world. These passages are great confirmations of the authority of Scripture.

It is this same type of prophecy that points us from the Old Testament to the New Testament. The prophecies of Isaiah also point to a Savior who would come and bear my sins even when I was a sheep going astray. The prophecies of Micah point to the Savior's humble birth in an obscure town. The prophecies of David tell us of the Savior's suffering and His coming kingdom. These are the truths spoken long before they happened that I will place my trust in above the theories of men who wish to rewrite the Bible.

GOD'S WORD IN THE REAL WORLD

- ? Does the fulfillment of the prophecies prove that the Bible is true? *Rather than saying that these fulfilled prophecies prove that the Bible is true, we might rather say that they are great confirmations of the truthfulness of Scripture. We can use them to show others why we are sure in our faith-based trust in the authority of Scripture which is grounded in the character of the God who reveals Himself to us in their pages.*
- ? In what way does this study encourage you? *Discuss various answers.*
- ? If someone were to claim that the Bible only made specific predictions because later editors went back and filled in those details, how would

you respond? *We can't expect anything less from unbelievers who reject supernatural claims from the Bible. However, there are Christians who make this claim. This can serve to undermine the prophecies that announce the Messiah and lead to doubt about the authority of Scripture.*

? **If someone were to claim that the Bible and the predictions made in it were no different than those of people like Nostradamus, how would you respond?** *The first thing to do would be to ask if they have ever read a prophecy from Nostradamus. Most will respond that they have not—they are just parroting an argument they heard someone else make. The next step is to open up the Bible and show them a specific prophecy and its fulfillment in the Bible, possibly following this with a reading of a few quatrains of Nostradamus. Ask them if they still want to compare the two as if they are in the same class. This places them in the position of receiving or rejecting the clear words of God and gives a great opportunity to share the hope of the gospel.*

? **If you show someone the clear prophecy and its fulfillment, should you expect them to acknowledge God and their need for His salvation?** *Not necessarily; these are not a magic bullet. The Holy Spirit must reveal these things to them, along with their sinfulness. Our arguments may be used by God for this purpose, but we must leave the results to God.*

? **Do you trust these passages as prophesying the future?**
Use this question as a challenge to encourage people to think carefully about why they believe what they believe.



MEMORY VERSE

Isaiah 42:8 I am the Lord, that is My name; and My glory I will not give to another, nor my praise to carved images.



GROUP PRAYER TIME

Be sure to pray with your class before you dismiss them.

- Thank God for revealing His truth to us.
- Praise God for His omniscience and sovereignty.
- Ask God to help you proclaim the authority of His Word.

