

Understanding Prophecy: Insights from the Old Testament and Beyond

Exploring the complexities of
prophecy as depicted in the Old
Testament and its relevance
today



Author's Note

In my book *Grow Up, Church*, I delve into the various spiritual gifts and provide guidance on how to mature in each of them. This current work is a natural progression from those discussions, and I highly recommend reading *Grow Up, Church* to fully appreciate the insights presented here.





Contested Nature of Prophecy

Prophecy holds a significant place in contemporary Christian discourse, with various interpretations regarding its validity and purpose. Some believe it ceased with the apostles, while others view it as outdated or irrelevant. However, many within the faith still embrace the prophetic ministry as active and essential.



Personal Experiences with Prophecy

Throughout my spiritual journey, I have received numerous prophetic words that have provided guidance, comfort, and clarity during difficult times. These words have not only shaped my personal faith but have also propelled me into fulfilling my God-given purpose.



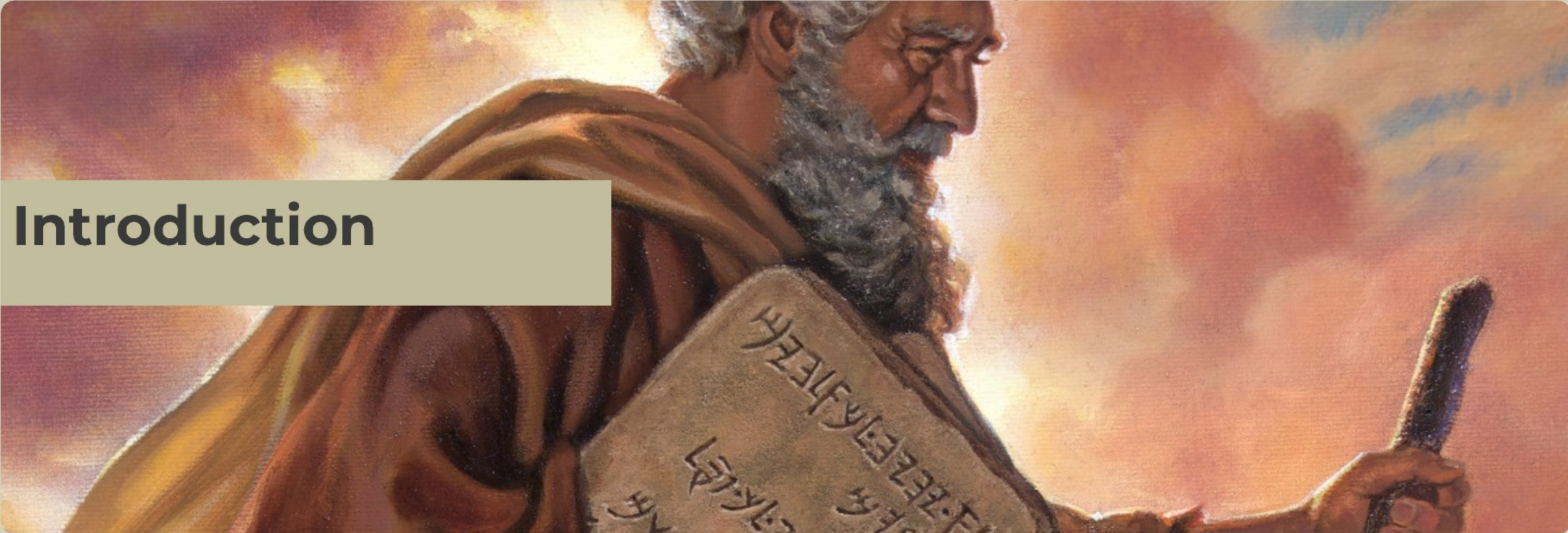
Global Appreciation for Prophecy

In my travels across different nations, I have noted a profound respect and appreciation for the gift of prophecy. This appreciation contrasts with skepticism often found in some Western circles, highlighting a cultural divergence in how the prophetic is perceived and practiced.



Understanding the Action of Prophecy

A common question among believers is whether prophetic words necessitate any action or if they will naturally come to pass without our intervention. This inquiry reflects a deeper understanding of the dynamics between God's sovereignty and human responsibility in the fulfillment of prophecy.



Introduction



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Human Will and Divine Sovereignty

Human will and the sovereignty of God are both topics the Bible addresses yet doesn't seek to reconcile, presenting a complex relationship between individual choices and divine intervention.

Proverbs on Planning

Solomon stated, "The plans of the heart belong to man, but the answer of the tongue is from the Lord" (Proverbs 16:1), illustrating that while humans can make plans, ultimate outcomes are determined by God.

Partnership in Life Choices

Our own choices impact our lives, and at the same time, God is working with us, suggesting a partnership in the journey of life where both human agency and divine sovereignty coexist.

Conditional Outcomes

The Bible uses the conditional word "if" to illustrate potential outcomes of choices, emphasizing the importance of human responsibility in the face of divine sovereignty.

Desire for Flourishing Life

God wants us to live a full life and not die in our youth, highlighting His desire for human flourishing and the importance of wise decision-making.



Chapter 1: Man's Will v. God's Sovereignty

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Purpose of Prophecy

Prophecy is intended to be a gift that provides encouragement and exhortation to the body of Christ. It serves to build up the church and guide believers in their walk with God, allowing them to experience His love and guidance through divine communication.



Misuse of Prophetic Gifts

Many who have a prophetic gift don't know how to use it, leading to misuse. This lack of understanding can result in individuals giving prophetic words based on personal feelings rather than divine inspiration, which can cause confusion and harm.



Types of Prophecy

Prophecy can be described as forthtelling (current truth) and foretelling (future predictions). Forthtelling focuses on proclaiming God's truth as it relates to the present, while foretelling involves predictions about future events as revealed by God.



Respecting Prophetic Words

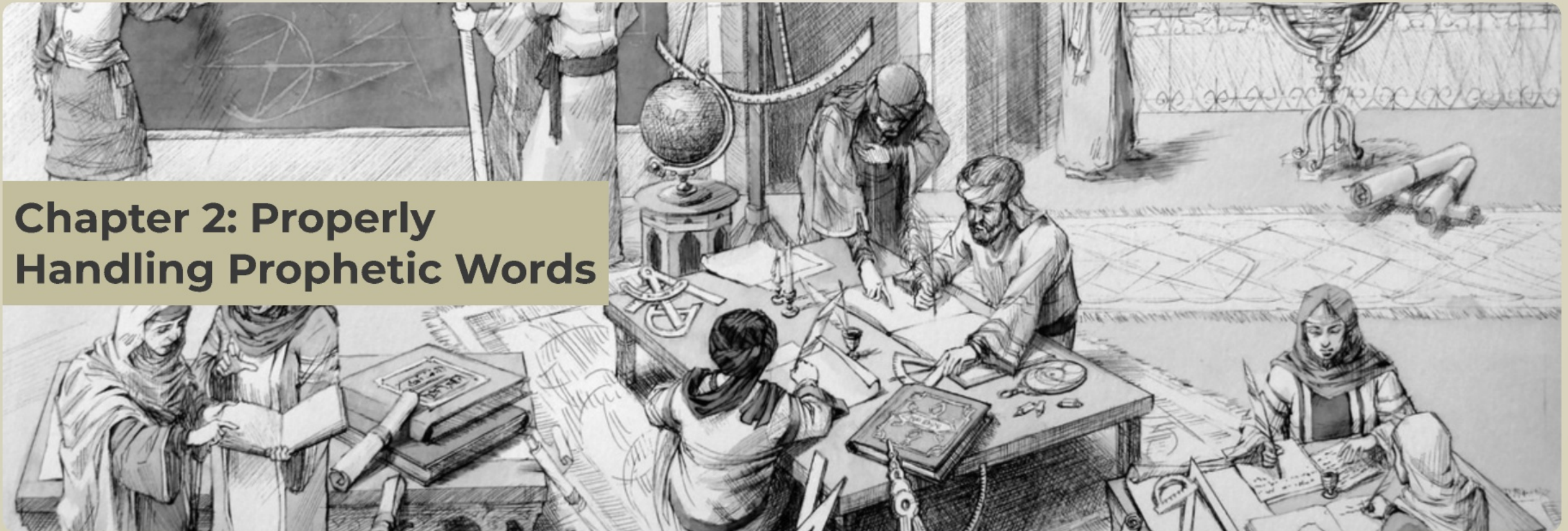
The early church respected and tested prophecies rather than despising them. This approach helped the church discern true prophetic words from false ones, fostering a healthy environment for prophetic ministry. (Agabus the Prophet, Acts 11:27-28 (famine); Acts 21:10-11 Paul's Arrest)



Response to Prophetic Words

Knowing how to respond to prophetic words can be the difference between life and death. Properly handling prophecy involves discernment, understanding the nature of the word, and taking appropriate action as guided by God.

Chapter 2: Properly Handling Prophetic Words





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Learn from Biblical Examples

Wise believers learn from the successes and failures of those in the Old Testament, understanding how their responses to prophetic words shaped their destinies. The narratives serve as instructive examples for us today.

Responsibility in Prophecy

Conditional prophecies require individuals to take responsibility for their responses. Their fulfillment may hinge on the choices made by those receiving the prophecy, indicating that our actions can alter the course of events.

Saul's Disobedience and Consequence

King Saul, despite being chosen by God, lost his blessing due to disobedience. His story illustrates the importance of aligning our actions with God's will to maintain his favor and blessings.

Solomon's Conditional Peace

Solomon's reign was marked by conditional promises from God. His peace and prosperity were contingent on his obedience to God's commands, emphasizing the link between compliance and divine favor.

Nature of Prophetic Words

Prophetic words can be either conditional or unconditional. Understanding the nature of a prophecy makes it possible for us to respond appropriately and align our actions with God's intended outcomes.



Chapter 3: Prophecy in the Old Testament

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Solomon's Compromise Led to Division

Solomon's compromise in his faith led to the eventual division of the kingdom of Israel, emphasizing the importance of a steadfast relationship with God in leadership roles.



Opportunities for Repentance

Throughout history, God has provided opportunities for kings and leaders to repent and turn from their sinful ways. However, many chose to disregard these opportunities, leading to dire consequences for themselves and their people.



Conditional Prophetic Words

The conditions surrounding prophetic words may not always be clear before individuals respond. In many instances, the full understanding of these conditions is revealed only after a reaction is made.



Knowing God's Character Matters

Understanding God's character is crucial to responding appropriately to prophecy. A correct perception of God as loving and just fosters a positive reception of prophetic messages.



Fear-Based Perspectives Hinder Prophecy

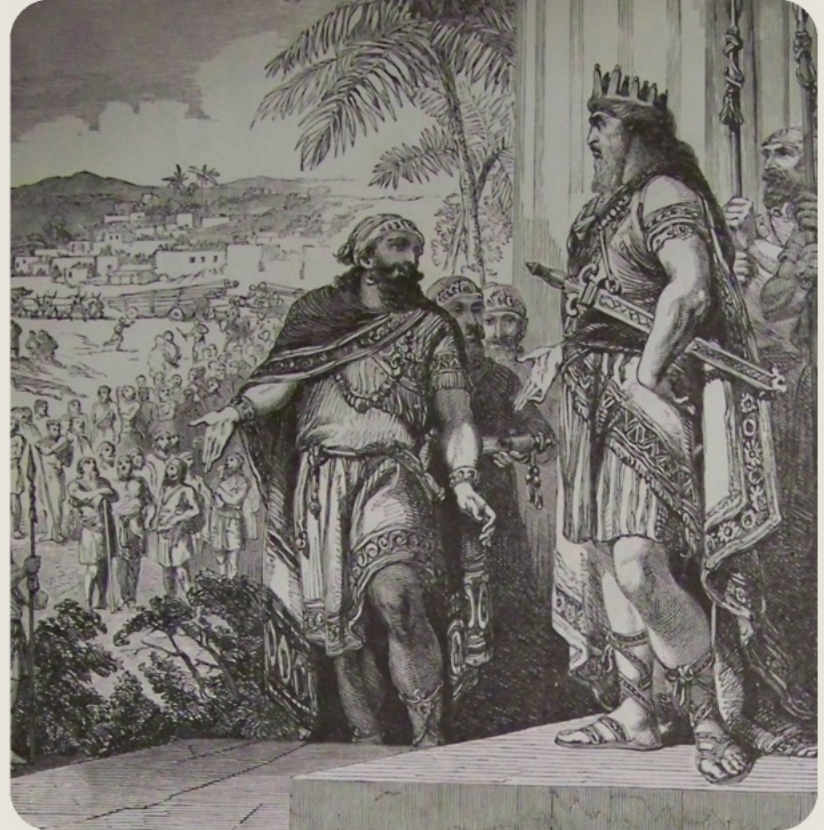
A fear-based perspective of God can significantly hinder our ability to accurately receive or deliver prophetic words. True understanding of God leads to confidence in His promises.



Chapter 4: Your Perception of God Affects Your Reception of Prophecy

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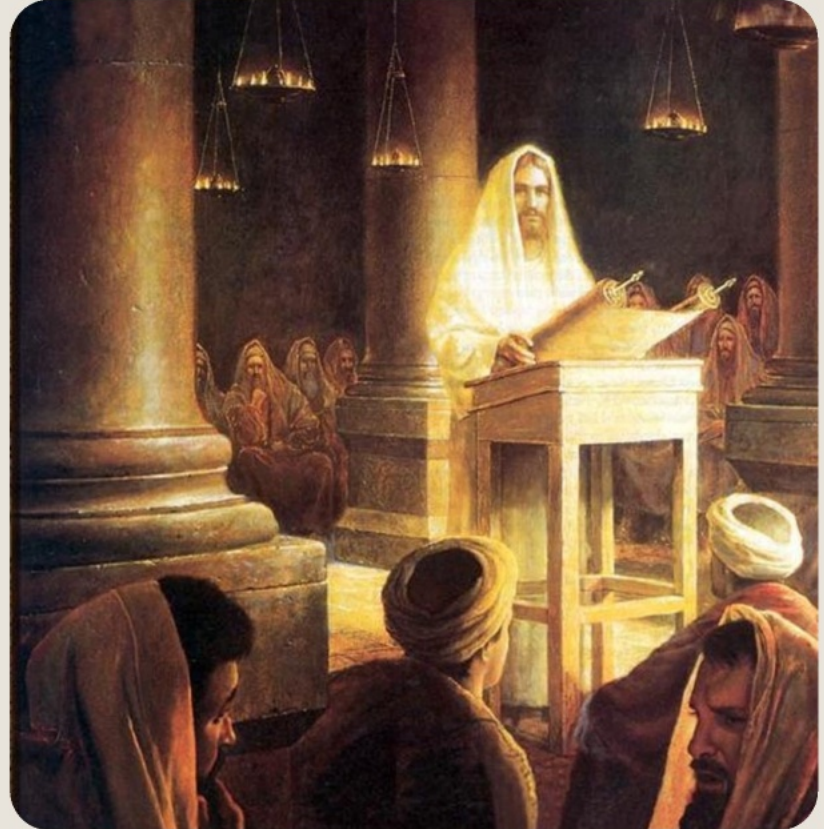
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Conditional Prophecy to Jeroboam

Jeroboam received a conditional prophetic word from God through Ahijah, indicating that his reign would be established if he followed God's commands.

Fear-Induced Idolatry

Driven by fear of losing his subjects, Jeroboam established new worship places in Israel, which led the people into idolatry and a departure from true worship of God.

Prophetic Warning Against Jeroboam

A man of God prophesied against Jeroboam, warning him about the consequences of leading Israel into sin. This exemplifies how prophetic words can serve as warnings.

Miracles Without Repentance

Despite witnessing miracles, Jeroboam did not repent, illustrating that experiencing God's power does not guarantee a change of heart.

Compassion in Prophecy

Compassion should guide those delivering prophetic words, as it is essential to remember the humanity of those receiving them.



Chapter 5: Jeroboam 1 Kgs 11; 14 2 Chr 9; 13

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Testing of the Man of God

The man of God faced a significant test when an old prophet led to him, demonstrating how easily one can be misled by those who may appear wise but are not aligned with God's truth.



The Waiting Period

The waiting period after receiving a prophetic word often serves as a time of testing for the individual. This phase is crucial for character development and discerning God's voice amidst distractions.



Cultural Influence

Cultural respect for elders can sometimes lead to deception in prophetic interpretation. It's important to discern truth over tradition, ensuring that all prophetic words align with Scripture.



Prioritizing God

Believers must prioritize pleasing God over seeking the approval of men. This principle is essential for maintaining integrity in the prophetic ministry and avoiding the pitfalls of peer pressure.



Testing Against Scripture

Testing prophetic words against Scripture is essential for discerning their authenticity. True prophecy should always align with God's Word, providing a reliable standard for evaluation.



Chapter 6: Challenges in Prophetic Interpretation

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King Ahab's Repentance Alters Prophecy

King Ahab, known for his wickedness, repented after receiving a dire prophetic message from Elijah. His genuine repentance led to God relenting from the destruction initially foretold, demonstrating the transformative power of a humble heart before God.

God's Mercy for the Repentant

God's nature is characterized by mercy and grace. When individuals turn to Him with sincerity and contrition, He responds positively, showcasing His desire for restoration rather than condemnation.

David's Faith Amidst Loss

David's response to the death of his son shows a profound understanding of God's mercy. Rather than succumb to despair, he turned to God in faith, embodying the belief that God could still work miracles even amidst tragedy.

The Power of Repentance

Repentance can significantly alter the course of prophetic declarations. It reflects a willingness to return to God's path and can lead to a different outcome than what was initially prophesied, illustrating the dynamic nature of prophecy.

Divine Nature and Human Choice

God's allowance for human choice reflects His divine nature. Throughout Scripture, He respects our free will and desires for us to make choices that align with His will, emphasizing the importance of our decisions.



Chapter 7: The Role of Repentance in Prophecy

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Hezekiah Restores the Temple

Hezekiah was a king who repaired the temple of God, fixed broken doors, and restored proper ceremonial sacrifices, demonstrating a commitment to leading the people in repentance and worship.



Isaiah Prophesies Hezekiah's Death

Isaiah the prophet communicated a prophetic word to Hezekiah stating that he would die, without any conditions attached to it. This illustrates how prophetic words can sometimes be straightforward without further context or conditions.



Hezekiah Pleads for Mercy

Upon hearing the prophecy about his death, Hezekiah turned to God in prayer, demonstrating his understanding of God's character and mercy. This act of pleading for mercy highlights the importance of seeking God's favor.



The Power of Genuine Tears

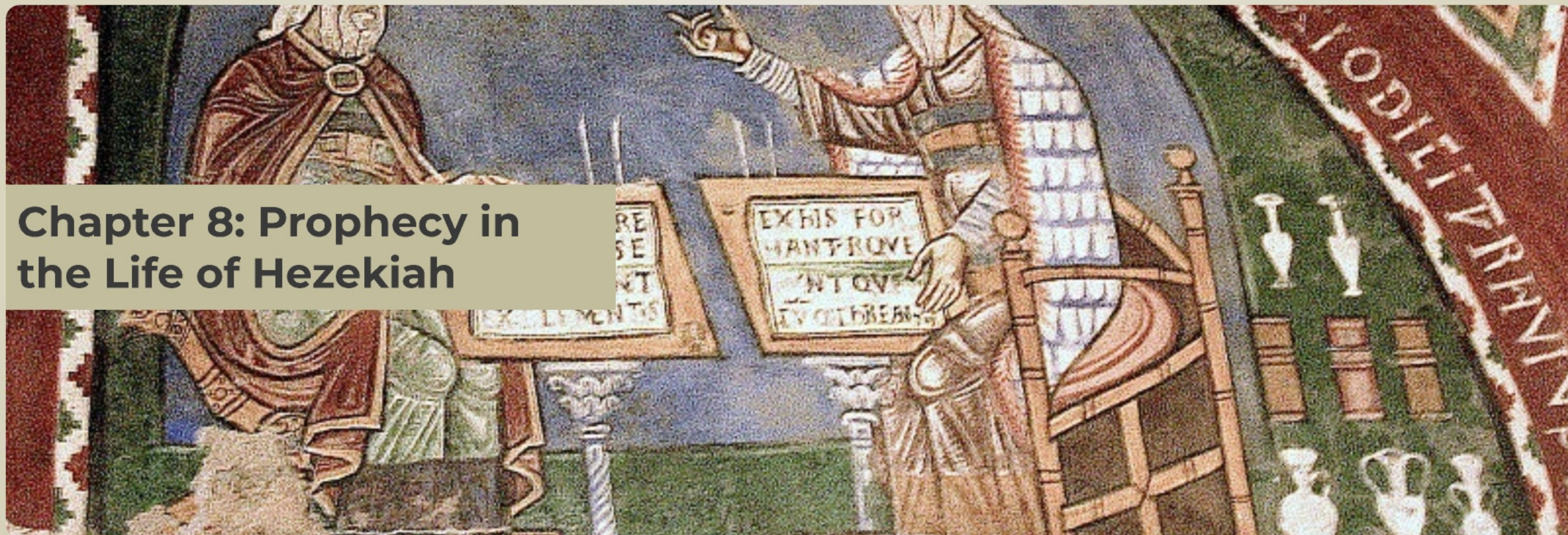
Hezekiah's tears and heartfelt plea to God exemplified how genuine emotional expressions can move God and lead to divine intervention in desperate situations.



Following God's Wisdom

Hezekiah's actions reveal the importance of following God's wisdom in response to prophetic words. His humility and willingness to seek God's direction ultimately resulted in a miraculous extension of his life.

Chapter 8: Prophecy in the Life of Hezekiah





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Prophetic words may not happen in the expected time frame, leading to doubt about their validity. It is essential to remember that God's timing can differ from our expectations, and some prophecies may not be fulfilled within our lifetime.



Human Choices Matter

Some prophecies are delayed due to people's choices, illustrating the significant role human decisions play in the fulfillment of divine promises. Our actions can hinder or expedite the realization of prophetic words.



Fulfillment Beyond Life

Elisha's request for a double portion of Elisha's spirit showcases that fulfillment of prophetic promises may occur over extended periods, sometimes even posthumously, as seen when Elisha performed his final miracle after death.



Seek God's Counsel

Josiah's reign emphasizes the importance of seeking God's counsel before making decisions. His actions demonstrate that aligning with God's will leads to successful outcomes and blessings.



Legacy of Choices

Our decisions can impact generations, underscoring the necessity for wisdom in our choices. The legacy of our actions has far-reaching effects, influencing not just our lives but also those who come after us.



Chapter 9: The Timing Issue in Prophecy

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Huldah's Prophecy to Josiah

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Josiah's Choices and Consequences

Despite the prophetic promise of peace, Josiah made a decision to engage in battle without seeking God's guidance, leading to his untimely death.



Wisdom in Decision-Making

The narrative of Josiah's reign highlights the importance of wisdom in decision-making, particularly in relation to prophetic words and guidance from God.



God's Mercy in Judgment

Even in judgment, God's mercy is evident, as He provided warnings and opportunities for repentance before consequences were enacted.



Trust in God's Guidance

Trusting in God's guidance and leaning on His understanding is essential for leaders as they navigate decisions influenced by prophetic words.



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Study Guide

This study guide provides reflective questions and prompts for deeper engagement with the material presented in the book. Readers are encouraged to meditate on the teachings, apply them to their lives, and explore how the principles of prophecy can enhance their spiritual journey.



References



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