

# The Daily Reader

Reading through the Bible together in June

## BOOK Introductions

In the Old Testament, we are still in the group of books known as “the prophets.” But now we are entering into the Prophets as we know them, starting with three of the “major prophets” (so called because their books are longer than the “minor prophets”).

**Isaiah** was the first of the major prophets (740-686BC). The prophets were “covenant enforcers,” God’s heavy hitters sent to speak powerfully to a people that were not listening to God’s Word. The people of Judah were continually faithless toward God and consequences were looming. First, in chapters 1-35, there was the Assyrian threat (who had already defeated the northern kingdom) and then, from chapters 40-66, God’s response to the promise of deportation to Babylon. (Chapters 36-39 repeat the events of 2Kings 18-20, providing a narrative bridge between the first and second “half” of the book). Judah was a nation under a dark shadow, but what a light shines through Isaiah’s message! He doesn’t simply call the people to faithful obedience rather than mere lip-service, he also calls for trust in God’s great plan. This great plan included the coming Messiah who would suffer for the sins of others and also reign in righteousness over the nations! Reading the prophets can be difficult because they seem to be a patchwork of apparently disconnected messages. Perhaps it is helpful to read Isaiah as if it were a symphony, with great themes weaving in and out. These themes would include human sin, God’s grace, coming judgment, kingdom hope and salvation!

**Jeremiah** lived almost a century after Isaiah. In the Bible’s longest book we see the challenges Jeremiah faced as he offered an unwelcome message of coming judgment to an arrogant nation. Judah had survived the earlier Assyrian invasion, but now concluded that the temple was a God-given good luck charm! They faithlessly worshipped other gods, but felt certain they would be safe from foreign invasion. Jeremiah repeatedly warned that judgment was coming.

He was treated as a traitor for urging the people to surrender to the Babylonian invaders. The people resisted the idea that God’s plan was for Judah to go into exile and remain for 70 years. The majority opinion was wrong. Jeremiah spoke truth. The Chaldeans (Babylonians) came against Jerusalem three times, the city eventually fell. While many were taken into exile, Jeremiah remained with the few left behind. Jeremiah is no carefully written auto-biography of a “glorious” ministry. It is raw. It tells of the painful realities of his personal and his peoples’ experiences. Jeremiah presents the confused status of truth in a fallen society; where loyalty to God is seen as sedition, rewarded with imprisonment and death threats. Our situation may be very different, but will we represent the truth of God as faithfully as Jeremiah did?

**Acts** is really Luke part 2! Luke’s gospel is what Jesus began to do and teach, and Acts continues the story of Christ’s influence following His return to heaven. Acts is the story of Christ building His church, as the witnesses of Jesus’ resurrection prayerfully preach on through persecution! The story moves from the birth of the church at Pentecost to the imprisonment of Paul in Rome. In these three decades, the young church grew from a group of hesitant disciples to a major spiritual force. The reason for the transformation is the work of the Spirit in and through these young believers. Initially the ministry of the young church is very Jewish focused and Jerusalem centred. Midway through the book Paul is converted and called to his mission among the Gentiles. Paul’s three journeys, imprisonment, three trials and a trip to Rome, are the skeleton of the story. The flesh on that skeleton is the story of God working out His purposes as the risen Christ is proclaimed to Jews and Gentiles right the way to Rome. The book ends with the story incomplete: What happened to Paul in Rome? Was he freed to travel more? What happened to the church? Acts is a lively story of Christian expansion, a story that began in Acts and continues to this day.

**Where we’ll be in June:** 2 Kings 20-25, Isaiah, Jeremiah 1-2, Luke 24, Acts 1-17

For a reading plan see Andy Jack or the church website [www.oakballchurch.org.uk](http://www.oakballchurch.org.uk)