

# • In God's Time

PARTICIPANT'S GUIDE

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This course is based on the book

*In God's Time: The Bible and the Future*

by Craig C. Hill

Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2002

## Preparation for Session 2: The History of the Future

### **Learning Objectives:**

*At the end of this session, students should be able to:*

- Define “prophet.”
- Identify marks of true prophets and their message.
- List the similarities and differences between biblical and other ancient prophets.

### **Connecting with Scripture:**

*Read the following passages and answer the question in the space provided.*

- Isaiah 6
- Jeremiah 1:10

These passages tell of the calling of two great prophets of Israel. Isaiah 6 recounts the story of Isaiah's vision in the temple. Jeremiah 1:1-10 recalls God's words to the young Jeremiah.

What in these verses seems relevant to your calling as a Christian?

### **Study for this Session:**

- Read Chapter 3 of *In God's Time*, pages 30-43.

**Study Overview:**

Many of the biblical writings deal in some way with the future. Naturally, this is true of the prophetic books.

It was common in the ancient world to believe that the future could be predicted. Many persons also believed that the future was already determined by external forces, e.g., the Fates. Today, religions still vary in the way they understand the limits of human freedom.

Prophecy existed in other ancient Near Eastern cultures and was similar in many ways to prophecy found in the Hebrew Bible.

It was seldom easy to tell which prophets were true and which were false, an issue that the biblical writers take up at numerous points and in various ways.

**Prophet** – *Someone who speaks for God. A prophet is concerned with speaking God's truth, not necessarily with predicting the future. Often, the focus of the message was on changing the future: "Here's what will happen if you don't straighten up..."*

**Prophecy** – *a word from God, God's message*

**Marks of true prophets** – *They often acted against their own self-interest, speaking harsh and unpopular words against the powerful.*

### **Personal Reflection - Session 2: The History of the Future**

*As you reflect on the readings, consider the following questions and be prepared to share your thoughts during class.*

1. Where do you find people forecasting the future today? How do you evaluate their predictions?
2. What images does the word “prophet” bring to mind?
3. Are there modern-day prophets? If so, can you give examples?
4. What is your view of history? Is it heading toward some predetermined conclusion? Can we change the future?
5. Does God communicate with humanity today? Have you experienced God’s guidance? If so, how?

## ***Class Session 2: The History of the Future***

### **Opening Prayer**

Almighty God, give us grace, that we may cast away the works of darkness, and put upon us the armor of light, now in the time of this mortal life...that in the last day when he shall come again in his glorious majesty to judge both the quick and the dead, we may rise to the life immortal, through him who liveth and reigneth with thee and the holy ghost now and ever. Amen.

--Thomas Cranmer, 1489-1556<sup>2</sup>

### **Focusing**

*In groups of 2 or 3, discuss the following question:*

- Where do you predict the world will be in ten years?

### **Video**

*As you watch the video, take notes to answer the following questions:*

1. What is a prophet? What actions were typical of prophets? What is the purpose of prophecy?





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# In God's Time

LEADER'S GUIDE (ver. 2.1)

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## Preparation for Session 2: The History of the Future

### Learning Objectives:

*At the end of this session, students should be able to:*

- Define “prophet.”
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- List the similarities and differences between biblical and other ancient prophets.

### Connecting with Scripture:

*Read the following passages and answer the question in the space provided.*

- Isaiah 6
- Jeremiah 1:1-10 [Erratum: *Participant's Guide* incorrectly says “Jeremiah 1:10”]

These passages tell of the calling of two great prophets of Israel. Isaiah 6 recounts the story of Isaiah's vision in the temple. Jeremiah 1:1-10 recalls God's words to the young Jeremiah.

What in these verses seems relevant to your calling as a Christian? Erratum:

### Study for this Session:

- Read Chapter 3 of *In God's Time*, pages 30-43.

Note: It is recommended that students read the corresponding portion of *In God's Time*, but it is not required that they do so. The video contains enough information for those who do not read the book to participate in the class discussions.

**Page 8 of Participant's Guide****Study Overview:**

Many of the biblical writings deal in some way with the future. Naturally, this is true of the prophetic books.

It was common in the ancient world to believe that the future could be predicted. Many persons also believed that the future was already determined by external forces, e.g., the Fates. Today, religions still vary in the way they understand the limits of human freedom.

Prophecy existed in other ancient Near Eastern cultures and was similar in many ways to prophecy found in the Hebrew Bible.

It was not always self-evident which prophets were true and which were false, an issue that the biblical writers take up at numerous points and in various ways.

**Prophet** – Someone who speaks for God. A prophet is concerned with speaking God's truth, not necessarily with predicting the future. Often, the focus of the message was on changing the future: "Here's what will happen if you don't straighten up..."

**Prophecy** – a word from God, God's message

**Marks of true prophets** – They often acted against their own self-interest, speaking harsh and unpopular words against the powerful.

### **Personal Reflection - Session 2: The History of the Future**

*As you reflect on the readings, consider the following questions and be prepared to share your thoughts during class.*

1. Where do you find people forecasting the future today? How do you evaluate their predictions?
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## Class Session 2: The History of the Future

### Opening Prayer

Almighty God, give us grace, that we may cast away the works of darkness, and put upon us the armor of light, now in the time of this mortal life...that in the last day when he shall come again in his glorious majesty to judge both the quick and the dead, we may rise to the life immortal, through him who liveth and reigneth with thee and the holy ghost now and ever. Amen.

--Thomas Cranmer, 1489-1556<sup>2</sup>

### Focusing

*In groups of 2 or 3, discuss the following question:*

- Where do you predict the world will be in ten years?

### Video

*As you watch the video, take notes to answer the following questions:*

#### **1a. What is a prophet?**

*Biblically, a prophet is someone who speaks for God.*

#### **1b. What actions were typical of prophets? What is the purpose of prophecy?**

*Sometimes that did involve speaking about the future. More often, they were concerned with speaking God's truth to the present, partly in hope of changing the future. "Here's what things are going to look like if you don't straighten up – so ..."*

### Opening Prayer (2 minutes)

Read the prayer together as a class or ask a volunteer to lead the prayer.

### Focusing (5 minutes)

Ask participants to break into groups of two or three to answer the question in the Participant's Guide.

### Video (17:59 plus discussion)

Before you start the video, ask participants to review the questions in the Participant's Guide and to jot answers to the questions as they view the video.

After the video, discuss participants' answers to the questions listed in the Participant's Guide. Provide clarification as needed. Below are the questions with answers taken directly from the video

Sample answers are provided in red at left.

**2a. In what ways was ancient Israelite prophecy similar to the kinds of prophecy found in surrounding nations?**

*Certain language and behaviors were widely characteristic of biblical and non-biblical prophets. One of the most important of these, of course, is the idea that prophets were possessed by a divine spirit, which was thought to produce the ecstatic or trance state in which they prophesied.*

*Ancient prophets received their communications in signs, visions, dreams, and words. Many prophets in the ancient world were attached to royal courts and religious shrines.*

**2b. In what ways was it different?**

*Some of the excesses of Canaanite prophecy are not attributed to Israelite prophets. More important are the theological differences.*

**3. How did people attempt to distinguish between true and false prophecy?**

*True prophets acted against their own self-interest, often speaking harsh and unpopular words against the powerful.*

**Page 11 of Participant's Guide**

**Activity: Prophetic Messages**

*Prophets often said, in effect, “Here is what things will look like if you do not straighten up” (IGT, p. 33).*

*Working in small groups, compose one such prophetic “word” to our nation today. (You might begin with the phrase “Beware O Nation, for you have...”) Be sure to consider the following points as your group develops its message:*

- ❑ What sin(s) must be addressed?

**Activity: Prophetic Messages (15 minutes)**

This activity should allow the participant to understand the role of prophets as something more than predictors of the future.

Participants will work in small groups to create a prophetic message to deliver to the nation today.

Ask participants to break into small groups with no more than four participants. Tell them they will have 10 minutes develop a prophetic message that includes the four points listed in the Participant’s Guide.

- ❑ What are the inevitable consequences if the nation does not heed your message?
- ❑ What must people do to repent?
- ❑ What hope can you offer to those who listen to your message?

*At the end of the activity, your group will speak its “word” to the rest of the class.*

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#### **Group Discussion**

1. Does God reward obedience and punish wrongdoing in this world?
2. Do the prophets of the Hebrew Bible matter today? Why or why not?
3. How do you know if someone speaks for God?
4. Are there prophets in the church today? Are there prophets *outside* the church?

While participants are working, circulate among the groups to answer questions.

Call the class back together and ask a representative from each group to speak their prophetic word.

After each group has “spoken,” ask the group:

- Why did your group choose the particular sin(s) for its message?
- How did you, as a group, determine the content of your prophetic message?

After all the groups have spoken, ask the class:

- If you heard these prophetic messages today, how would you respond?

#### **Group Discussion (10 minutes)**

Allow up to 10 minutes for discussion to help connect this week’s material to participants’ lives.

Use the questions in the Participant’s Guide to start the discussion.

If a question does not get a quick response, be patient. Allow participants to think during the silence before you introduce a different question.

**Conclusion and Closing Prayer**

**Conclusion and Closing Prayer (5 minutes)**

Ask participants to turn to “Preparation for Session 3: The Covenant Future” in their Participant’s Guide and briefly review the assigned study. Answer any questions, distribute materials, and make announcements, as necessary.

Invite participants to share prayer concerns and joys. Encourage participants to write down the concerns / joys in their guides and to remember them as they pray during the week.

Ask a volunteer to lead the closing prayer.