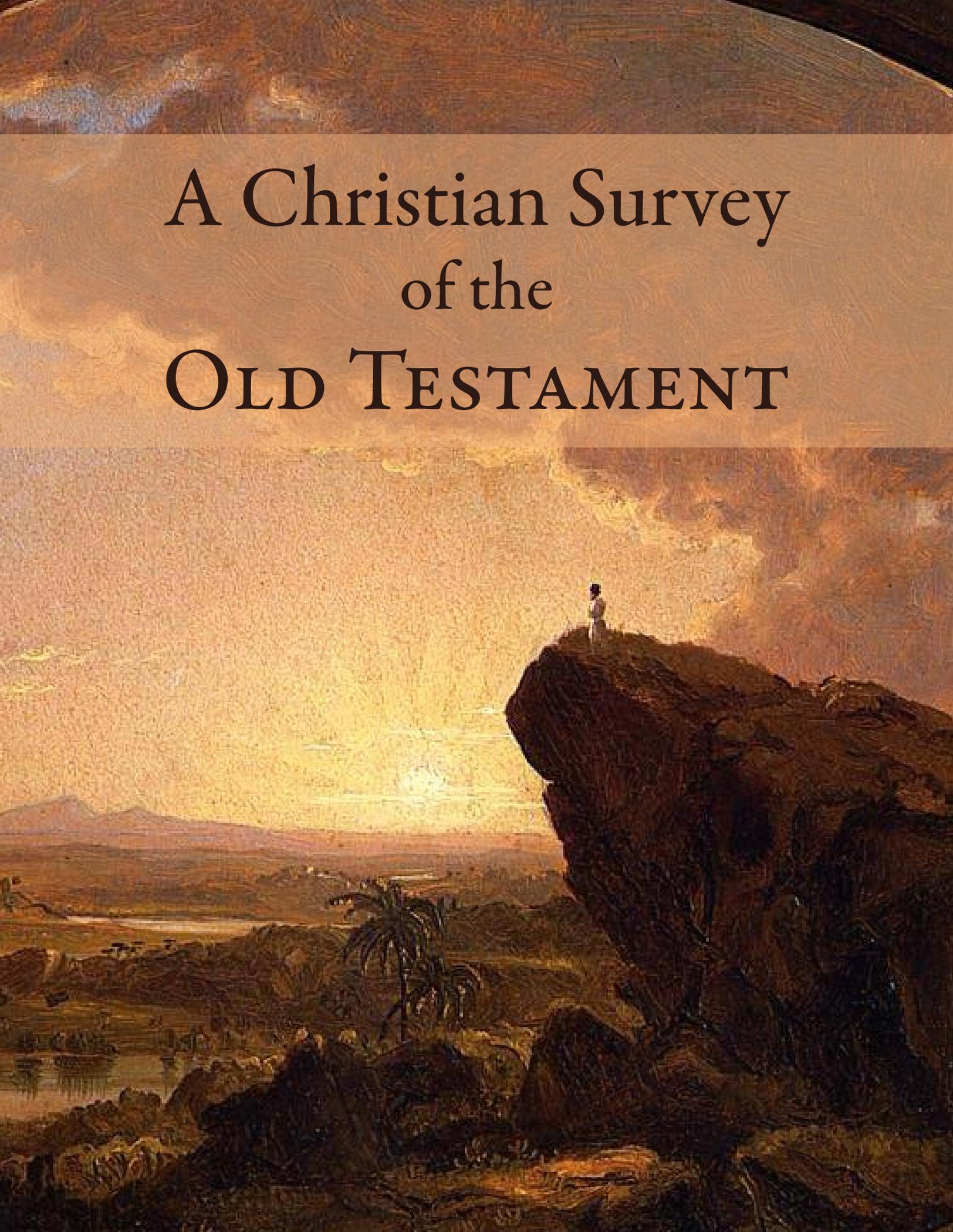


A Christian Survey
of the
OLD TESTAMENT



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The New is in the Old concealed; the Old is in the New revealed.

—Augustine (354-430)

God in the gospel brings forward nothing but what the Law contains.

—John Calvin (1509-1564)¹

The Old Testament may be likened to a chamber richly furnished but dimly lighted; the introduction of light brings into it nothing which was not in it before; but it brings out into clearer view much of what is in it but was only dimly or even not at all perceived before... Thus the Old Testament revelation is not corrected by the fuller revelation which follows it, but only perfected, extended, and enlarged.

—B. B. Warfield (1851-1921)

For whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning, that we through patience and comfort of the scriptures might have hope.

Romans 15:4

Search the scriptures; for in them ye think ye have eternal life: and they are they which testify of me.

John 5:39

For had ye believed Moses, ye would have believed me: for he wrote of me. But if ye believe not his writings, how shall ye believe my words?

John 5:46-47

If they hear not Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded, though one rose from the dead.

Luke 16:31

Now all these things happened unto them for ensamples: and they are written for our admonition.

1 Corinthians 10:11

All things must be fulfilled, which were written in the law of Moses, and in the prophets, and in the psalms, concerning me.

Luke 24:44

For the prophecy came not in old time by the will of man: but holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost.

2 Peter 1:21

¹ *Commentaries of Calvin*, 46 vols. (Edinburgh: Calvin Translation Society; 1843-55); reprinted

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in 22 vols. (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker; 1979), Jeremiah 31:31-32.

A Christian Survey of the OLD TESTAMENT

PART ONE

THEOCRATIC BEGINNINGS

1

Introduction

*All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is
profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction,
for instruction in righteousness.*

2 Timothy 3:16

This book is intended to be a guide to personal study of the Old Testament. That study covers a great deal of material, which will not all be the same. There is in the Old Testament a great variety of subject matter; this will help to make our study interesting. But before we turn to this variety, it is necessary to notice some facts that will provide unity for our study. In order to do justice to our study of the parts of the Old Testament, we must first observe the Old Testament as a whole.

1. The Old Testament Is God's Word

A. From God

It is impossible to study the Old Testament fairly and honestly without first recognizing and acknowledging one basic fact: the Old Testament is God's revelation to men. It is not the entire revelation of God, but all of the Old Testament is God's Word. Unless we start with this fact, our study of the Old Testament is doomed to failure. Some people claim that this is a human idea, imposed upon the Old Testament by men. It is not. It is found in the Old Testament. It is also found in the New Testament. The Bible testifies clearly to its divine authorship.²

It is impossible to present all the evidence to support this statement. Nor is it necessary for us to do so. Let us simply notice that over four hundred times the Old Testament says about its message: "Thus saith the LORD..." And notice what the New Testament says about the Old Testament: "For the prophecy came not in old time by the will of man: but holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost" (2Pe 1:21). In other words, the words of God declare that they are *God's Word*, and for Christians that is enough.

The *Westminster Confession of Faith*³ presents this thought beautifully. After listing some of the "incomparable excellencies" of the Scripture that move us to esteem it highly, it adds: "our full persuasion and assurance of the infallible truth, and divine authority thereof, is from the inward work of the Holy Spirit, bearing witness by, and with, the Word in our hearts." God the Holy Spirit, Who dwells in the hearts of His people, teaches us that the Bible is His revelation to us. Beyond this we need no proof.

B. Inspired

While we affirm that the Bible is God's Word, we do not maintain that God wrote it directly. No hand from heaven wrote the Old Testament, as it did when it traced the message of doom on Belshazzar's wall (Dan 5:5). God used men to write the books of the Old Testament. This fact poses a question: How can books written by men be God's Word? The Bible gives its own answer: by means of inspiration. "All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness" (2Ti 3:16). By "inspi-

² For more about the divine inspiration of the Scriptures, see *The Infallible Word* by C. H. Spurgeon and *The Doctrine of Revelation* by A. W. Pink, and the two courses based upon these: *The Infallible Word of God* (course IWG) and *The Divinely Inspired Word* (DW1 and DW2); all available from CHAPEL LIBRARY.

³ *Westminster Confession of Faith* – one of the great confessions of the Christian faith, produced in 1645-1646 by an assembly of 121 theologians appointed by the "Puritan" Long Parliament to make proposals for reforming the Church of England.

ration,” we mean that God guided the authors of the Old Testament books so that they wrote what He wanted them to write. God did this in a wonderful way. He did not ignore the personalities of the authors. He did not force them all to use the same style. He used them as they were, or perhaps we should say, as He prepared them for their work. They received His words and wrote them—each in his own style, each with his own vocabulary, each according to his own education. But what they wrote was not their own; it was God’s. The words they used were the words chosen by God, and the thoughts they expressed were God’s revelation to men.

We cannot understand precisely how this took place. That is not strange: there are many things in life that we accept without understanding them. Why should we be surprised that we cannot understand everything about such a wonderful and mysterious subject as God’s inspiration of His Word? As Christians, we must humbly confess that we cannot fathom most of the ways of God (Isa 55:9). We do not understand in order that we may believe; we believe in order to understand. And when we believe that God inspired the writers of the Old Testament, the door is opened for us to understand what He has written.

C. Infallible

1. Incapable of Error

By our recognition that the Old Testament is God’s inspired Word, several facts about that Word are brought to our attention. We then recognize that the Old Testament is infallible. This simply means that there are no errors in it, and more: that it is not capable of error. It does not mean that the writers of the Old Testament knew everything; there were many things they did not know. But when they wrote under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, they were kept from any error. After all, they wrote God’s words; and it is impossible for God to make an error. Man may not always know what is true, but God always does: He is omniscient, He knows everything. Whether it be history or science or a basic truth of redemption, God knows it. Moreover, it is impossible for God to lie. He Himself tells us that (Ti 1:2). He is altogether holy, of purer eyes than to look upon iniquity.⁴ Thus it is impossible that there should be any errors in the Old Testament. Let us never forget what Jesus said about it: “thy word is truth” (Joh 17:17). If Jesus proclaimed the Bible to be true and yet it had errors, we could not trust Jesus or the Bible. But when Jesus proclaims it to be true and it is in fact true, then both Jesus and the Bible are reliable, trustworthy, and demand our attention.

⁴ **iniquity** – wickedness.

2. Science

We should realize that not everyone believes that the Old Testament is infallible. Unbelievers often take great pleasure in pointing out places where they think the Bible is wrong. Even some people in Christian churches are influenced by such men, and give up their belief in the infallibility of Scripture. In this scientific age of ours, we are told that belief in infallibility is impossible. But this is simply not true: science has never proven the Bible to be wrong. On the contrary, new discoveries often have shown that the Bible is right and its critics are wrong.

The science of archaeology, which deals with the remains of past civilizations, studies the Bible more directly than any other science—and archaeology supports the Bible. A few examples, chosen from many, will show that this is so. For many years scoffers laughed at the story told in Exodus 5 about the Israelites making bricks without straw. Impossible, they said. The ancient peoples always needed a binding material for their bricks. But excavations made at the Egyptian city of Pithom, which was built by the Israelites (Exo 1:11), proved otherwise. In these buildings, the lower courses of brick were made with good chopped straw. The middle courses were made with less straw, and much of that was stubble. The upper courses were made without any straw. This agrees perfectly with the biblical story.

A second example comes from Jericho. Although sceptics have denied that the walls of Jericho could fall miraculously as pictured in Joshua 6, excavations at the site of ancient Jericho showed that this is precisely what happened. There is no evidence of the walls being battered in. “The bricks that composed the east wall lie as a streak down the eastern slope gradually getting thinner, with conspicuous traces of a general fire. Thus the outer wall fell outwards, and down the hillside, quite flat, making it possible for the invaders to enter ‘every man straight before him’ (Jos 6:5, 20).”⁵ Time after time the critics of the Bible have been silenced by the findings of archaeology.

Thus we see that science attests to the infallibility of the Bible. But notice this: science does not prove that the Bible is infallible. The infallibility of the Bible is proved by its divine authorship. It needs no human proof. Science can show that particular statements of the Bible are true, but it can never provide an adequate foundation for our belief in an infallible Bible. Only God can do that.

3. Predictive Prophecy

I have declared the former things from the beginning...I did them suddenly, and they came to pass. Because I knew that thou art obstinate...I have even from the beginning declared it to thee;

⁵ Halley, H. H., *Bible Handbook* (Chicago, Illinois: Henry H. Halley; 1955).

before it came to pass I shewed it thee: lest thou shouldest say, Mine idol hath done them.—Isaiah 48:3-5

God used a significant tool in the creation of His infallible Word. He used this tool because He wants us to know beyond any doubt that His Word is from God and is infallible. That tool is “predictive prophecy.” As we shall see, prophecy refers to the proclaiming of God’s truth to man. These proclaimed truths often involve God’s holiness, man’s sin, and his need to repent and return to God. But God also proclaimed another category of truth: predictive prophecy, or proclaiming beforehand what will happen in the future. The Bible is unique among the holy books of the world in its focus on the fulfilment of predictive prophecy. Most importantly, the Bible has many, many predictions of events that actually have come to pass in history. This is so important because it also establishes the Bible as coming from God. No one but God knows the future; He knows it because He has designed it and ordained it. He holds it all in His hands. God put predictive prophecies in the Bible so that we would know that the Bible comes from God.

In order to guard against false prophets who would mislead His people, God commanded that they be put to death (Deu 18:22). But how are people to distinguish between true and false prophets? First: does what they say match the Word of God? If not, the Word of God remains true, and the prophet is false. Second, if they predict a future event and the event does not come to pass, they are clearly a false prophet. Today we do not inflict the death penalty upon false teachers, but God’s people should be discerning and avoid them at all costs (2Pe 2:1-9).

2. The Relevance of the Old Testament

A. Purpose

In our study of the Old Testament, we must never think of it as a complete unit. It is like a house that is finished on three sides. The one end is left open, because there is another room to be added. And that room is the most important room of the house: it is the New Testament. The entire Old Testament exists to lay a foundation for, and provide an introduction to, the New Testament. This is true because Jesus Christ is the center of the biblical narrative. The Old Testament points forward to Him; the New Testament centers on Him. So in our study of the Old Testament, we must always have our eyes to the future, looking ahead for the rising of the Sun of Righteousness (Mal 4:2).

The whole of God’s Word is the revelation of His eternal purpose of redemption through His only begotten Son. And the Old Testament is a massive part of that revelation bearing witness to Christ. Jesus Himself declared this: “Search the scriptures...they are they which testify of me” (Joh 5:29). Likewise, after His cru-

cifixion and resurrection, Jesus rebuked two of His disciples on the road to Emmaus for their unbelief, saying, “O fools, and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken: Ought not Christ to have suffered these things, and to enter into his glory? And beginning at Moses and all the prophets, he expounded unto them in all the scriptures the things concerning himself” (Luk 24:27). To another group of disciples, Jesus explained, “These are the words which I spake unto you, while I was yet with you, that all things must be fulfilled, which were written in the law of Moses, and in the prophets, and in the psalms, concerning me” (Luk 24:44). Jesus is referring to the traditional Hebrew division of the Old Testament when He mentions the Law, prophets, and psalms. So Jesus is declaring that, from beginning to end, the Old Testament is about Him and His saving work. The apostles affirmed the same thing. For example, when Paul addressed the Jews of Rome, he persuaded them “concerning Jesus, both out of the law of Moses, and out of the prophets, from morning till evening” (Act 28:23). The whole Bible then, including the Old Testament, is God’s testimony about Jesus Christ.

New Testament believers should study the Old Testament because the *whole* Bible is inspired, infallible, and all about Jesus Christ. Because this is true, a caution is appropriate here: our reason for taking a survey such as this should not simply be a matter of wanting to know Scripture better. If this is the case, we will truly miss the point. Our heart’s desire should be to *know God*: “And this is life eternal, *that they might know thee* the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom thou hast sent” (Joh 17:3). We will know God by knowing and believing His Word; and in knowing Him, we will know ourselves as we really are and our need of Him. May the Lord reveal Himself to us as we survey the Old Testament.

B. Importance

When we see that the Bible is God’s Word, we also recognize that the Old Testament is authoritative. It speaks with all the authority of God Himself. We who are God’s creatures, and especially we who are His children, must obey His Word. What He says we must believe; what He commands we must do. We can tolerate neither doubt nor disobedience in ourselves. And this is so simply because it is God Who speaks to us in the Old Testament. If the Old Testament contained the ideas of men about God, we would be free to accept or reject their thoughts. But since it is God Who speaks, we have no choice but to believe and to obey—or else we are in rebellion against Him.

Since the Old Testament is part of God’s Word, it is applicable to our lives. If it were merely a human account of the religious experiences of the ancient Jews, this would not be true. We might find it interesting, but insist that it was of no value to us. Changing times and differing cultures might make their example nearly worthless to us. But the Old Testament is God’s Word, and God’s Word

does not change. His holiness and righteousness, His loving-kindness and mercy, His wisdom and grace are the same today as they were thousands of years ago. Therefore we can discover in the pages of the Old Testament directions as to how we may live holy lives and please God. In fact, Paul tells us that the things which happened to the Israelites were recorded for our benefit (Rom 15:4). Since this is true, our study of the Old Testament must be practical. We must continually ask ourselves how these things apply to us. Therefore, we must approach our study of the Old Testament in a spirit of prayer, asking God to reveal to us His will as it is contained in His inspired Word.

God presents important lessons to us by telling isolated stories from the lives of His people. The Hebrew way of thinking is not in deductive logic like the Greeks, but in stories that illustrate universal principles of God's truth. The principles are then emphasized through more stories, which repeat the same principles for emphasis.

In preparation for our study, then, three things are necessary for a proper understanding of God's Word: the illuminating power of the Holy Spirit, prayer, and a teachable heart. So before you begin this survey, pray that the Author of Scripture, God the Holy Spirit, will teach you. And as you study, if you discover that "what *you* think" conflicts with the Bible, throw out what you think and believe God's Word!—for the Bible says, "Be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind" (Rom 12:2). This will be a significant step toward applying God's truth to your life and obtaining the peace, joy, and eternal life that only Jesus Christ can give.

3. The Composition of the Old Testament

A. Authors

We have seen that it is impossible properly to understand the Old Testament without taking into account its divine origin and its infallible character. We must also recognize that it is impossible properly to understand the Old Testament unless we have some knowledge of its historical background. The Old Testament is a collection of thirty-nine books. Two of these books, Psalms and Proverbs, are themselves collections, containing the writings of various authors. So we can see that God used many men to write the Old Testament. In addition, He used men who lived at various times in the history of Israel. The earliest books of the Old Testament were probably written about 1500 B.C., and the last book was not written until about 400 B.C. So the writing of the Old Testament covers a period of a thousand years or more. In addition, they were written in various parts of the Middle East. Most of them originated in Palestine, but some came from Mesopo-

tamia (modern Iraq), and some from Egypt or the Sinai Peninsula. Finally, the authors came from dramatically different backgrounds: shepherds, farmers, noblemen, and kings.

All of these factors point to the great diversity that is present in the books of the Old Testament. Yet, in spite of all these differences, there is one consistent message about who God is, what He is like, and His plan for redemption from sin. This is ensured by God the Holy Spirit inspiring each of the authors. In addition, there is one factor that links all the books and their authors together: all these authors were members of God's chosen people. All these books originated within the framework of the covenant nation. And the covenant nation was a divinely constituted organization. It was the Church⁶ of God in the Old Testament.

"Though the Bible has in it 66 books, written by 40 different authors over a period of 1,600 years, covering 4,000 years of history and so many generations of the world, relating to widely different states of society, containing such a variety of matter upon so many different subjects, and abounding in supernatural incidents—*yet it agrees in all its parts*, which becomes increasingly evident the more closely it is examined. Their consistency without collusion is too uniform to be accidental, and too incidental to have been mutually planned."⁷ The whole Bible, therefore, must be the divinely inspired Word of God.

B. The Collection of the Books

The writers of the Old Testament recorded God's revelation as He had given it to them. As these books appeared, God's people recognized that they were God's Word, used them as such, and gradually gathered them into a collection. This collection is known as the Jewish canon (a "canon" is simply a list, in this case a list of inspired books). The Jewish canon is exactly the same as our Old Testament. The collection was completed by the early part of the fourth century B.C., and it has remained the same ever since. One point needs to be made clear: the collectors of the Hebrew canon did not give these books authority by including them in the canon. The Old Testament Church acknowledged that they had divine authority because they were internally consistent, useful, important, and transcendent⁸ in their truths. These books showed their inspiration clearly, and therefore they were included in the canon. Other religious books did not possess the marks of inspiration, and they were rejected.

⁶ **Church** – the spiritual "invisible Church" universal, which includes all true believers throughout the world and throughout all of time, as differentiated from the "visible church": local assemblies of professing Christians.

⁷ Pink, A. W. (1886-1952), *The Doctrine of Revelation*, 1947 (Pensacola, Florida: CHAPEL LIBRARY, reprint), 157.

⁸ **transcendent** – surpassing others of its kind; going beyond ordinary limits of men.

C. Typology

One of the means⁹ by which the Old Testament points to Christ is its system of types. A type may be defined as something (a person, object, or event) in the Old Testament that is designed by God to resemble and foreshadow a greater spiritual truth in the New Testament. In the Old Testament, God taught the same truths as in the New Testament, but the revelation of the Messiah was not as clear. In the Old Testament, God prepared certain things so that they would point forward to the New Testament expression of His truth.

Perhaps we can better understand typology (i.e.,¹⁰ the study of types) if we see its connection to symbolism. Certain historical events symbolize divine truths. They teach lessons. And this is no accident; God designed it that way. Take, for example, the brass serpent that Moses prepared (Num 21:8). The historical purpose for which that serpent was made was to save the Israelites from death by snake bite. It did that. Anyone who looked at it was healed. Now if any Israelite thought about that brass serpent for a while, he would see that it taught a lesson. It taught him that faith in God was really the means by which he was saved from death. He believed God, he looked, he was healed; if he did not believe and refused to look, he died. He learned the lesson that faith in the God-provided remedy was absolutely necessary. That was the symbolism of the brass serpent.

The typology of the serpent is like its symbolism. But as a type, the serpent points forward to that which is a higher revelation of the same truth. The serpent is a type of Christ, Who is the God-appointed remedy for sin. And here, too, it is necessary to have faith in the God-provided remedy. “And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of man be lifted up: That whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have eternal life” (Joh 3:14-15). This is the “typical” lesson of this incident.

So we see that God taught Israel certain lessons through symbols. The same lessons, spelled out in New Testament language, are called types. What God taught Israel through symbols, He teaches the Church through types.

We will find some types presented as such in the New Testament. In Hebrews, for instance, the Tabernacle and its worship are presented as types of the way we now approach God through Christ. But there are other types that are not mentioned in the New Testament. We must recognize these types, too. If a person, event, or object was a symbol for Israel of old, then we may examine it to see if it is a type for us. By means of these types, we shall have our attention drawn con-

⁹ **means** – methods by which something is accomplished.

¹⁰ **i.e.** – *Latin: id est*, “that is”; to make the meaning more clear, to say the same thing in different words.

stantly to the New Testament. Types are one method by which “The New is in the Old concealed; the Old is in the New revealed.”¹¹

D. Theme

In choosing a theme for our study, it is important that we look ahead to Christ and to the New Testament. We need a theme as a highway to direct our travel through the Old Testament. There are so many side roads we could travel, so many interesting lanes into which we could take excursions. But there we would lose sight of the whole picture that the Old Testament presents. We want to follow one road, and we want to be sure that road is the main highway which leads us directly to Christ and the New Testament. We find this highway in the theme “The Kingdom of God.” We will see in our study how this constitutes the main line of thought in the Old Testament. We will see how every book contributes to this basic theme.

But before we do this, we should jump forward to the New Testament and assure ourselves the same highway is to be found there. And here too we find it to be a main thoroughfare. We are told that Jesus came “preaching the gospel of the kingdom of God, And saying, The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand” (Mar 1:14-15). Many of Jesus’ parables were about the Kingdom. When He announced the founding of His Church, He said, “I will give unto thee the keys of the kingdom” (Mat 16:19). After the Resurrection, He taught His disciples about the “things pertaining to the kingdom of God” (Act 1:3). And when He returns in glory, He will come as “KING OF KINGS, AND LORD OF LORDS” (Rev 19:16). The road marked “The Kingdom of God” is the highway that leads from one end of the Bible to the other. It is the road we shall walk together.

E. About This Study

Before we begin this journey, it would be well to survey the road ahead. Rather than follow the order of the English Old Testament, our study takes up the books in the order in which it is estimated they were written. The historical books form the backbone of this guide. The poetic and prophetic books are inserted after the history of the time in which they were written. It is hoped that these features will make it easier to see the way in which God’s kingdom and redemption developed over the centuries.

In addition to an outline for the Old Testament as a whole, there also will be outlines for each book. All the outlines are designed for memorization, and for this reason they are short. The biblical references of the outlines have been re-

¹¹ **Augustine** of Hippo (354-430) – early church theologian born in Tagaste, North Africa.

Known by many as the father of orthodox theology; taught the depravity of man and the grace of God in salvation.

stricted in most cases to chapters, even when accuracy might demand that division come in the middle of a chapter.

This study is designed primarily to be straight forward, and this is reflected in both form and content. The vocabulary is kept to a basic international standard. Technical terms have been defined as simply as possible. Some “interesting” non-essential problems have been ignored and others have been greatly simplified.

4. The Structure of the Old Testament

A. Divisions

1. The Hebrews' Sacred Books

When the Hebrews themselves collected the sacred books given to them by God, they put them into three groups: the Law, the Prophets, and the Writings. This grouping is a natural one.

The Law, consisting of the five books of Moses, was the first written revelation that Israel had. It contained the basic revelations of God, such as those at Mount Sinai, which not only were the foundation of Israel's religious and civil life, but also a more complete revelation of the holiness of God. It is natural that these books should have a unique place in the thinking of believers everywhere.

The second group, the Prophets, derives its name from the office held by the authors of the books. A prophet was a man who was called of God to receive His revelation and to communicate it to the people. The Hebrews divided the Prophets into two groups, Former and Latter. The Former Prophets include Joshua, Judges, Samuel, and Kings. The contents of these books testify to the authors' prophetic offices, because they portray the history of Israel as a revelation of God's redemptive work. The Latter Prophets were written by the men whose names are attached to them and include both the Major and Minor Prophets. The Major Prophets are Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and Daniel. They are “major” because their writings are longer and include multiple themes. The Minor Prophets are also called “The Twelve.” They include some history, but chiefly they contain the words of prophecy spoken by these prophets on one theme.

The third group is called the Writings. The Writings have one thing in common: they were written by men who were not prophets. That is its distinguishing feature. The Writings mix several types of books: poetry, history, and five books used by the Jews in their sacred festivals. These five are called the Megilloth (“five rolls”). The Song of Solomon was read on the eighth day of the Feast of Passover; Ruth on the second day of the Feast of Pentecost; Lamentations at *Tisha B'av*, a feast commemorating the destruction of the Temple; Ecclesiastes on the third day of the Feast of Tabernacles; and Esther at the Feast of Purim.

The Hebrew Bible was originally comprised of twenty-four books. While this is fifteen fewer books than the thirty-nine books of the English Bible's Old Testament, the material in both is identical, the only difference being in the labeling of books and parts of books.¹²

2. *The English Bible's Old Testament*

In the English Bible, we can list these thirty-nine books into five groups: five books of the Law, twelve *historical* books, five *poetry and wisdom* books, and five *major prophets*, and twelve *minor prophets*.

The thirty-four historical and prophetic books span a period of at least 4,000 years, from Creation to the prophet Malachi about 400 B.C. However, the books are not chronological in sequence, nor do they cover time at the same pace. Some stories are brief, while others are told in great detail. While the overall span of the Old Testament is about 4,000 years, the first eleven chapters of Genesis cover the entire first half of this time—approximately 2,000 years! One can read this in about 45 minutes, which would be like covering the entire history of the world since Jesus Christ in 45 minutes, a fast pace indeed! These chapters consist of only four accounts: the Creation of the world and of man, the Fall of man, the Flood, and the Tower of Babel. But after those first eleven chapters, we come to the story of Abraham in chapters 12 to 24, and the pace slows considerably—a period of only about 25 years!

So the first eleven chapters of the Old Testament cover the first 2,000 years, and the remaining 900+ chapters cover 1,600 years before Christ up to 400 B.C. The bulk of the Old Testament is about Abraham and his descendants (his seed), which starts approximately 2000 B.C.

When we look at the thirty-nine Books of the Old Testament, we see that the five in the middle are in a class by themselves: Job, the Psalms, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, and the Song of Solomon. We generally call these books *personal literature* in the sense that much of their content reflects the experience of one individual with God personally. We can relate to their personal expressions as if they were our own. While much of their content is set in the context of the unfolding story of the history of Israel, we do not always have to know much history in order to understand them. They are personal books about personal experience with God. They include both poetry and wisdom literature.

¹² The Hebrews considered 1&2 Samuel, 1&2 Kings, 1&2 Chronicles, and Ezra-Nehemiah as single books. The twelve Minor Prophets were combined into the *Book of the Twelve*, which brings their number to twenty-four. Some editions combined Jeremiah with Lamentations, and Ruth with Judges, bringing the number to twenty-two.

The remaining thirty-four books are *national* in nature, and are in two groups of seventeen on either side of the *Personal Literature*. Men formulated this sequence when they assembled the books together into the Old Testament, but it is interesting and helpful to realize how orderly is the structure. Some of the first seventeen books are written by prophets, but all seventeen can be labeled *History* because they are chronological stories of the actual events. The last seventeen are labeled *Prophets* (the Latter Prophets), where a particular prophet speaks to the kingdom during a specific period. The first five books of the History (called the “Pentateuch”) are foundational in nature. If these five are understood, then all the rest will be understood, because all the major principles and themes are introduced in them. In the same way, the first five books of the Prophets can also be grouped together as the Major Prophets: the books are longer and contain all the major themes of redemption.

Of the remaining twelve historical and twelve prophetic books, the first nine of each category are *pre-exilic*, i.e., they were written prior to the exile into Babylon, during the Divided Kingdom. The last three of each are *post-exilic*, i.e., they were written after the Babylonian captivity began. We call all twelve of these last prophetic books the Minor Prophets, because each book is shorter and, in contrast to the major prophets, deals with only one theme in one setting.

Books of the Old Testament

<u>History</u>	<u>Personal Literature</u>	<u>Prophets</u>
<i>The Pentateuch (foundational)</i>		<i>Major Prophets*</i>
Genesis	Job	Isaiah
Exodus	Psalms	Jeremiah
Leviticus	Proverbs	Lamentations
Numbers	Ecclesiastes	Ezekiel
Deuteronomy	Song of Solomon	Daniel
		<i>Minor Prophets**</i> (“The Twelve”)
<i>Pre-exilic</i>		<i>Pre-exilic</i>
Joshua		Hosea
Judges		Joel
<u>Ruth</u>		<u>Amos</u>
1 Samuel		Obadiah
2 Samuel		Jonah
1 Kings		<u>Micah</u>
2 Kings		Nahum
1 Chronicles		Habakkuk
2 Chronicles		Zephaniah
<i>Post-exilic</i>		<i>Post-exilic</i>
Ezra		Haggai
Nehemiah		Zechariah
Esther		Malachi
<p>* <i>major prophets: include all major themes</i></p> <p>** <i>minor prophets: one theme only</i></p>		

B. Outline

Our journey will take us through various stages of the Kingdom of God. The Kingdom does not suddenly appear in perfect final form. Instead it develops, much as a plant does. It does not grow by additions, as earthly empires grow by adding new areas of land. It grows as does a plant, by the development of something that is already present. We might compare it to a tulip bulb. If you hold a bulb in your hand, you hold a tulip. The tulip is hidden in the bulb. But you cannot find it by cutting the bulb apart. You must plant it and allow it to grow. In a

similar way, God planted the seed of His kingdom in the earth of human history. He watered it abundantly with His grace. And it grew—first a shoot, then a plant, a bud, and finally the perfect flower. In the Old Testament, we will not find the flowering, that is reserved for the New Testament. But we will be privileged to see the necessary early stages of development, and that is a wonderful unfolding of God’s truths.

We are now ready to trace the development of God’s kingdom in the Old Testament. In order that we may see the development clearly, we will divide the time covered by the Old Testament into five periods. Each period will tell us something about the Kingdom of God. Creation, the Exodus from Egypt, the establishment of the nation’s united kingdom, the split of the kingdom into Judah and Israel, the judgment of God taking His people into exile—all are major historical events that mark the boundaries of each period. All ends with the people’s return to the land in preparation for the coming of Christ.

<u>The Period of</u>	<u>Content</u>	<u>Begins with</u>	
I. Theocratic Beginnings		Creation & Abraham	Creation
II. Theocratic Establishment		Wanderings & Judges	Exodus
III. Theocratic Development		United Kingdom	Reign of Saul
IV. Theocratic Decline	Divided Kingdom	Reign of Rehoboam	
V. Theocratic Transition		Remnant	Exile

This is not the only possible outline of the Old Testament. But if you will examine the Table of Contents, you will see that this outline is a guide to our study.

In this outline, the word *theocratic* is used repeatedly as a synonym for that which pertains to the Kingdom of God. For example, “The Period of Theocratic Beginnings” could also be called “The Period of the Beginning of the Kingdom of God.” But that is not as easily remembered. The term *theocratic* is easier to use. Since the word may be unfamiliar, let us examine it. The word *theocratic* resembles the word *democratic*. “Democratic” comes from two Greek words: *demos* (people) and *kratos* (power). It means that the power resides in the people. So a democratic government is a government “of the people, by the people, and for the people.” “Theocratic” likewise comes from two Greek words: *theos* (God) and *kratos* (power). It means that the power resides in God. God is the ruler. And since God is an absolute monarch, “theocratic” refers to the Kingdom of God.

C. Dates

In addition to an outline, it is essential to our study that we have in mind a few very important dates. Since the Old Testament may use much space dealing with

a short period of time, and may pass over a longer period of time in silence, we can become confused as to when various people lived and various events occurred. The only solution to that problem is the memorization of a few key dates. The dates given below are not exact, but close approximations.

Call of Abraham	2100 B.C.
Exodus	1450 B.C.
Saul becomes king	1050 B.C.
Division of kingdom	930 B.C.
Exile of Israel	720 B.C.
Exile of Judah	586 B.C.
End of Old Testament	400 B.C.

Rounding these dates even more, notice a general pattern that should be easier to memorize:

Abraham	~2000 B.C.
Exodus	~1500 B.C.
Saul and David	~1000 B.C.
Exile of Judah	~500 B.C.
<i>Birth of Christ</i>	~0 B.C.

A detail time line follows, which can serve as a reference throughout the course.

Questions for personal reflection and group discussion

A separate study guide with complete questions covering all aspects of the text also is available, for correspondent, independent, or group study.

See ChapellLibrary.org, or contact us at the same address or at school@mountzion.org.

1. What is “inspiration”?
2. Why is predictive prophecy important in the Bible?
3. What is the purpose of the Old Testament?
4. Why is the Old Testament important?
5. How does the Kingdom of God develop?
6. What is the meaning of “theocratic”?

Old Testament Time Line

<u>BC</u>	<u>duration</u>	
<u>Theocratic Beginnings</u>		
~4000+	Creation	(7 days) Gen 1-2
	- Fall	(1 day) Gen 3-7
~3000	Noah, Flood, Tower of Babel	Gen 8-11
~2000	Abraham	100 Gen 12-23
	- covenant (one-way, unconditional)	
	Isaac Ishmael	150 Gen 24-26
	Jacob Esau	" Gen 27-36
	Joseph and 11 brothers	" Gen 37-50
	- slavery in Egypt	400
<u>Theocratic Establishment</u>		
	Moses – preparation	80 Exo 1-2
~1500	The Exodus	1 Exo 3-40
	- covenant (two-way, conditional)	Exo 19-24
	Law: Mount Sinai	(9 mo.) Leviticus
	- wanderings in the desert	40 Numbers, Deuteronomy
	Conquest of the land	7 Joshua
<u>Theocratic Development</u>		
1043	The United Kingdom	
	Saul	32 1Sa
	David	40 1-2Sa, 1Ch
	- covenant (one-way, unconditional)	
	Solomon	40 1Kings 1-11, 2Ch
<u>Theocratic Decline</u>		
931	The Divided Kingdom	209 1Kings 12-22, 2Kings
722	Northern Kingdom falls to Assyria	Jonah, Amos, Micah, Hosea
	Judah Alone	136 Joel, Zephaniah
612	Babylon overthrows Assyria	Isaiah
606	- first deportation of Judah	Habakkuk
586	Southern Kingdom falls	Jeremiah
<u>Theocratic Transition</u>		
	- captivity in Babylon	50 Ezekiel, Daniel
536	Return of the Remnant	20 Ezra, Nehemiah
516	Zerubbabel returns, rebuilds the Temple	Haggai, Zechariah
458	Ezra returns, rebuilds the people	Ezra, Esther
445	Nehemiah returns, rebuilds the wall	Nehemiah
400	Malachi	Malachi

2

Five Books of Moses

*In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth.
And the earth was without form, and void; and darkness
was upon the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God
moved upon the face of the waters.*

Genesis 1:1-2

1. Names

“Pentateuch” is not a biblical name. It is derived from the Greek and means simply “five books.” It has been applied for a long time to the first five books of the Bible: Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy. The Jews themselves referred to these books as the “Torah,” that is, the Law. Either of these titles can be used to designate the five books written by Moses.

The Bible refers to the Pentateuch by a variety of terms. Some of these are: the Law of Moses; the Book of the Law; the Law of God. These terms are composed of various combinations of four words: law, book, Moses, and God. These words express well the major points to remember about the Pentateuch.

“Law” expresses the legal character of the Pentateuch, which contains many of God’s laws to men.

“Book” shows that the Pentateuch is intended to be permanent.

“Moses” identifies the human author of the books.

“God” points to the divine author, by whose inspiration Moses wrote.

If we keep these terms in mind, we will always have a proper approach to our study of the Pentateuch.

2. Purpose

In the Pentateuch, God gives us a picture of the earliest historical development of the theocracy. The five books, taken together, enable us to understand how God laid the foundations of His kingdom. God designed everything in the Pentateuch to accomplish this end. The Pentateuch is not simply history. It does not attempt to present or explain everything that happened; there are places

where it passes over large periods of time in silence. For example, the four hundred and thirty years in Egypt are scarcely mentioned. The thirty-eight years of wilderness wandering are summarized briefly. These omissions are explained by the fact that, during these periods, nothing happened that advanced the development of God's kingdom. God inspired Moses to write with a purpose in mind: to trace the beginnings of the Kingdom of God. God chose the material carefully so that this account would stand out clearly, and not be lost amidst the clutter of unnecessary information.

These five books could be as one, for they flow together as one story. The Genesis/Exodus, Exodus/Leviticus, and Leviticus/Numbers transitions could have been simply the next chapter in the same book. There is one subject, not five; we have five books because of the physical limitations of the papyrus scrolls! It is best to consider these five books as one continuous historical account.

3. Author

A. What the Bible Says

For centuries Christians and Jews have agreed unanimously that Moses was the human author of these books. This belief has a solid basis in the testimony of God's Word. There is not a part of the Bible that questions the Mosaic authorship of the Pentateuch. On the contrary, every part of the Bible affirms that Moses wrote these books. The Pentateuch contains at least six places where Moses is said to write certain events or revelations from God (Exo 17:14; 24:4-8; 34:27; Num 33:1-2; Deu 31:9, 22). One of them, Deuteronomy 31:9, is especially significant. It tells that Moses not only wrote the Law of God, but delivered it to the Levites for safekeeping.

The rest of the Old Testament also assumes that the Pentateuch is the work of Moses. Already in Joshua we have a reference to "the book of the law of Moses" (Jos 8:31). From the time of Joshua to the time of Ezra, the repeated, unanimous testimony of the Old Testament presents Moses as the author of the Pentateuch. In the New Testament, Christ names Moses as the author of certain statements that are found only in the Pentateuch (Mat 19:8; Mar 10:5). And He speaks of the "law of Moses" (Luk 24:44). In fact, throughout the Bible, wherever the author of the Pentateuch is named, it is Moses. This does not mean that Moses wrote every word of the Pentateuch. For instance, Deuteronomy 34 deals with his death and the mourning that followed it. This was surely added by another inspired writer. But, in the main, the Pentateuch comes from God through Moses.

B. What Men Say

With such a weight of evidence in favor of the Mosaic authorship of the Pentateuch, one would expect to find unanimous agreement on this matter. But such agreement is sadly lacking. Many deny that Moses wrote the Pentateuch. Why do they deny what the Bible so clearly teaches? First of all, they do not believe that the Bible is the Word of God. While some may state this more openly than others, basically it is true of all the Higher Critics,¹³ as they are called. They think that the Old Testament must be studied as a piece of human literature. They do not hesitate to declare that it can be, and is, wrong at many places. They are sure that it is wrong when it presents Moses as the author of the Pentateuch. They believe that it was written much later, and that the author used Moses' name to gain recognition for his work.

By taking this view, the Critics can explain away some features about the Pentateuch that they do not like. For instance, the Pentateuch contains some prophecies that later were fulfilled. These the Higher Critics explain by claiming that the book was written *after* the fulfillment, and that the prophecy was included in the book to impress the readers. In a similar manner, the miracles of the Pentateuch are explained as mere legends of an early age, which did not actually happen.

You may wonder why these men work so hard to explain away these things. The answer is really quite simple. If these men admit that Moses wrote these books, if these prophecies are real prophecies and these miracles are true miracles, then the God presented in the Pentateuch must also be real. If He is real, they should love Him and obey Him. But they do not do so, and they do not want to do so. This makes them sinners—but they do not want to admit that they are sinners before God. They do not want to face the demands of a sovereign¹⁴ God, so they simply deny that the Pentateuch presents an accurate picture of God. And

¹³ **Higher Criticism** – modern method of re-evaluating the biblical texts to determine if men believe they are genuine. Its basic principles are as follows: 1) the external evidence of the manuscripts (the remaining Hebrew and Greek scrolls from antiquity) is to be “weighed” (i.e., according to presumed age and text-type) and not evaluated based on their number and use; 2) the shorter reading is to be preferred (assuming longer readings have scribal additions); 3) the more difficult reading is to be preferred (assuming others were simplified by scribes); 4) the reading which “best explains” the other readings (in the opinion of the scholar) is to be preferred; 5) the reading which is most characteristic of the author is to be preferred (not allowing for assistants to the authors). These principles are highly subjective in nature, a matter of personal opinion of men rather than objective truth.

¹⁴ **sovereign** – kingly; absolutely authoritative; with highest authority. If a sovereign ruler also has almighty power, then his decrees will always come to pass (Dan 4:35; Eph 1:11).

therefore, in order to deny the God of the Pentateuch, they must deny that Moses wrote the Pentateuch.

If Moses did not write the Pentateuch, who did? And when? These are fair questions to put to the Higher Critics. And if we did so, each one would give a different answer. And each one would be sure that the others were wrong and that he was right. They can only agree on one point: that Moses did not write the Pentateuch. They cannot agree at all about how it did come into existence. This disagreement is an indication that they do not speak the truth.

As we study the Old Testament, we cannot afford to ignore such men. We must never forget that they exist, for some day we may meet them. Many people teach the views of higher criticism as if they were the truth. We must know about this false position, but we must always remember that these men speak as they do because they deny that the Bible is God's Word. They do not have the light of the Holy Spirit, which is necessary for understanding Scripture—and we do not want to be led by those who themselves walk in darkness.

Questions for personal reflection and group discussion

1. What is God's main purpose in the Pentateuch?
2. What is the motive of the Higher Critics for denying the Mosaic authorship of the Pentateuch?

3

First Theocracy

Genesis: Creation, Fall, Flood

And God saw every thing that he had made, and, behold, it was very good.

Genesis 1:31

And GOD saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually.

Genesis 6:5

1. Purpose

The Old Testament deals with the nation of Israel. Israel's history is presented, her poetry is preserved, and the words of her prophets are recorded. Why is the Word of God so interested in this one nation? The Old Testament itself answers that question. Israel is God's covenant nation. It is in Israel that God established His theocracy in Old Testament times. But this answer raises other questions. Why did man need a covenant with God that provided for salvation from sin? Why is there sin, evil, and suffering in the world? Who is God? What is He like? How does God relate to man? How may man come to God? Why did God have a covenant nation? And how did Israel become that nation?

These questions are answered in Genesis. The first book of the Bible thus provides a foundation for the rest of the Old Testament and the New. It shows who God is, man's dramatic problem, and how he may come to God. It also shows why God separated a people for Himself and how Israel became that people. Genesis provides an introduction to the account of the theocracy that God founded in Israel.

When God sent Moses to deliver the Hebrew slaves from their Egyptian taskmasters, the Hebrews had little idea of who God is. The stories passed down verbally for over 400 years had grown dim. God seemed remote and unknowable to them; they felt abandoned and hopeless. God inspired Moses to write Genesis so

that the people could know God and His dealings with their family. They learned what God had said to their father, Abraham, “In thee shall all families of the earth be blessed” (Gen 12:3)—and in Genesis 12-50, they learned all about Abraham and the family God chose to be His covenant people.

But why did all the families of the earth *need* to be blessed? The answer is clearly told in Genesis 1-11, where we learn about God, man, and the nature of sin. The Hebrews, and we ourselves, must be prepared to trust God and to walk with Him by faith. The two parts can be outlined as follows.

I. The destruction of the first theocracy	Genesis 1-11
A. Creation	1-2
B. Fall	3-5
C. Flood	6-11
II. The promise of the new theocracy	Genesis 12-50
A. Abraham	12-24
B. Isaac	25-27
C. Jacob	28-36
D. Joseph	37-50

2. The Creation

*Please read Genesis 1-2.*¹⁵

A. Importance

The first chapter of Genesis presents the creation of the heavens and the earth, and emphasizes the sovereignty of God. It shows clearly that God, and God alone, is the Creator of the universe. Thirty-four times we are told that God acts: God created, God saw, God said, God divided, God made, etc. Genesis 1 pictures the sovereign God bringing to pass by His almighty word that which is good in His sight.

Why is the doctrine of creation important?¹⁶ Because it teaches that everything belongs to God because He created it. Therefore He has the sovereign right to dispose of all His creatures as He wills. He Who is the source of all things is therefore also the ruler of all things. This is set forth beautifully in Psalm 24:1-2:

*The earth is the LORD's, and the fulness thereof;
the world, and they that dwell therein.*

¹⁵ Genesis 1-2 – from beginning of Genesis chapter 1 through end of chapter 2.

¹⁶ See *Understanding the Times* by Ken Ham of Answers in Genesis; available from CHAPEL LIBRARY.

*For he hath founded it upon the seas,
and established it upon the floods.*

Creation is also important because it shows us clearly that we have a Creator. God formed each one of us in the womb (Psa 139:13-16). Because God created each one of us, we are accountable to Him. In a very real sense, He owns us (1Co 6:19-20; Rom 9:21). We have a moral obligation to seek and to know our Creator.

B. Who God Is

In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth. And the earth was without form, and void; and darkness was upon the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters. And God said, Let there be light: and there was light.—Genesis 1:1-3

“In the beginning, God...” As the Scriptures open, God tells us a number of fundamental things we must know about Him. Through Creation, God reveals to us *His majesty and glory*. This is the first of five major principles that God reveals to us in the Old Testament. If people do not know God, this is always the place to start, because here we learn about who God is. The most important thing about you as a person is what you think about God. This shapes our entire thinking as human beings. What, then, are the things God first revealed to us about Himself?

1. One

God is uncreated; everything else is created by Him. Sometimes people start to think in terms of dualism, where there are two gods: God Who is good, and the devil who is evil. They think everything that happens is determined by which of these wins a particular battle. But the devil is not a god. Putting evil as a co-equal force against God is to deny God’s sovereign rule over all else. If the devil and every demon were to oppose you directly, and God was for you, then you would win (Rom 8:31)! The reason the devil seems so strong is only because God has delegated to him the earth as a realm of influence; it has nothing to do with his relative power. There is only one true God; He is the only one for us to know as God.

2. Personal

God is personal. While it is not true of animals, God made man personal so that He could fellowship with man. Personal nature, God’s and man’s, includes preferences, interests, desires, emotions, and decisions.

3. Powerful

“And God said...” God spoke, and it came into existence. There was no exertion or effort. Nothing was difficult or tiring.¹⁷

In this day, we should be more impressed by this than all mankind before us. We know much more about the vastness of creation than did prior generations. When Aristotle investigated the universe, he reckoned there were about 10,000 stars, because that was all he could see. In the Middle Ages, men working together estimated there to be 20,000 stars. When telescopes were invented, these estimates grew considerably. In 1973, the estimate was 100 million galaxies, each with 100 billion stars! In 1991, the absolute limit to what science could imagine was one billion galaxies, each with 100 billion stars (you cannot count out loud to one billion in your lifetime). When the space-based Hubble Telescope was first used in 1995, the estimate increased to 100 billion galaxies, many with 200 billion stars or more. Today the furthest known galaxy is 13 *billion* light years from the earth!

After what you have just read, meditate on this truth: God spoke at one point in time, and all was in place. “The heavens declare the glory of God; and the firmament [i.e., the earth] sheweth his handywork” (Psa 19:1). Sooner or later, God will test your belief about His power. We must always remember how powerful He is.

4. Good

The biggest reason men reject God is because they do not think that God cares about them; they do not believe that God is “good.” But at each step in creation, “God saw that it was good.” The greatest truth in Genesis 1 and 2 is not His power or intelligence, but His goodness. There are several aspects of His goodness that are important for us to understand.

Perhaps the most important is His moral goodness. Everything in Him is pure, upright, and good.

God created everything in a moment, and it was all exactly correct the first time. There were no adjustments or fine-tuning, no trial and error to get it right. Nothing man ever does is exactly right the first time. But what God does is always good and right the very first time. God’s goodness functions perfectly in the lives of those who truly belong to Him as His children (Rom 8:28-29).

¹⁷ If God created without effort, why did God “rest” on the Sabbath, the seventh day? Jesus Christ said, “The Sabbath was made for man, and not man for the Sabbath” (Mar 2:27). The seventh day was man’s first day after God had made him. The reason God “rested” on the seventh day was in order to enter into fellowship with man, to give man the privilege to get to know Him! God’s work was completed not just when everything was created, but when it was functioning correctly (for fellowship) as He had designed it.

God's goodness is flowing with blessing. When God does something, there is blessing in it on all sides. Even the stars are there for man's benefit; God gives them to tell us about Himself: to display His power and vast magnificence. Adam was not focused on himself during this period of time; he was totally content in the goodness of the Garden.

5. *Intelligent*

God wants us to be amazed at creation—and we should be! Man is right in the middle of the orders of magnitude in all of creation. A spoonful of water contains about 10^{26} atoms (10 with 26 zeros after it). And science has discovered many orders of magnitude smaller than the atom. The smallest of these particles is proportionately as much smaller than man as the universe is larger than man! Every time science discovers the next larger thing, it also discovers the next smaller! Man is just in the middle of all the created universe—and this is not coincidence. Everything in nature shows evidence of the most intelligent design.¹⁸

6. *True*

God is *true*: what He says, happens. This is an important ingredient of trustworthiness. When God said, "Let there be light" (Gen 1:3), then there *was* light. And the same thing happened with everything God said during the act of creation. Based on creation, therefore, we never have cause to doubt what God says.

7. *Sovereign*

God is in complete command of everything: He created all things from nothing¹⁹ and orders all the events that happen thereafter—right up through this very moment.

C. *Man's Place in Creation*

1. *The Highest of God's Creatures*

And God said, Let us make man in our image, after our likeness: and let them have dominion... over all the earth.—Genesis 1:26

Man is the highest of God's creatures. He is the crowning work of creation. This is communicated to us in five ways.

¹⁸ See *Evolution or Creation?*, a summary of many scientific facts comparing the two theories of origins; available from CHAPEL LIBRARY.

¹⁹ This is known as *creatio ex nihilo* or "creation out of nothing." This understanding of creation makes a clear distinction between God and His created order, and maintains that God, not matter, is eternal.

1. Man was made last. In Genesis 1, we notice that the simpler creatures were made first. Each step in creation prepares for the following steps. Man comes last, and this points to his high position.

2. Before man was created we read these words, “Let *us* make man...” This might be called a conference among the three persons of the Godhead.²⁰ Nowhere else in the creation narrative do we find such a conference. Man must be the crown of creation to receive this special concern by God.

3. Man was given dominion over the other creatures. In Genesis 2, this is expressed by the fact that man is given the task of naming the animals.

4. God “breathed into his nostrils the breath of life” (Gen 2:7). In the other acts of creation, God spoke and it came into being. This tells us of the special place God has for man. He is not just another of many animals.

5. Man is the only creature that is made in the image of God: “Let us make man *in our image*...” Surely this likeness to the Creator indicates that man is the highest creature. But how is man in God’s “image”?

2. *In God’s Image*

a. *How*

Man is unique in all creation because he is created in God’s image and likeness. In some wonderful ways, God made man like Himself. Exactly how can this be seen?

1) *Our mental capacity* is the ability to think, to reason things through, to consider conceptual thoughts, and to associate abstract ideas like loyalty, love, compassion, patriotism, etc. Man has the unique capability, like God, to enter into the thoughts and emotions of another, even though he has not actually lived that person’s experience. He can be loyal, for example, to someone he has never even met. Animals absolutely cannot do this.

2) *We are like God socially*: we have a strong desire to fellowship with others. You can actually enter into another’s experience of painful grief or blessed rejoicing in close, personal intimacy. You can enter into the emotions of a fictional person who does not even exist. This identification can exist even at a distance, across hundreds of miles or years. Animals flock together for procreation and for protection, but this is all by instinct.

3) *We are like God in dominion*: He has commanded mankind to rule in the world as His earthly representative (Gen 1:26; Rev 19:6).

4) *We are like God in moral capacity*, and in this we are distinctly different from animals. This moral likeness has three components:

²⁰ See *The Trinity* by Jonathan Edwards (1703-1758); available from CHAPEL LIBRARY.

a) Mind: to grasp an abstract moral standard, what is right and wrong.

b) Will: to make choices, to come to decisions about alternative actions.

c) Conscience: to tell us if we have acted rightly or wrongly. The conscience innately compares the choice we make to the moral standard. If you are told, “Don’t walk on the grass,” and you walk on the grass, you will get a message about it from your conscience. The conscience is formed by the mind choosing what to believe as true. (Emotions only disrupt the conscience; they cloud its objectivity and make a black-and-white situation into a complicated “gray area.”) Animals have none of this.

5) *God’s people are like God in certain moral perfections*: He has imputed Christ’s *righteousness* to them (Rom 4); He makes them *holy* over time (1Pe 1:15); and He produces *goodness* in them as a fruit of the Holy Spirit (Gal 5:22).

b. *Why*

Why did God give these capacities to man as part of being made in His image? There is only one reason: to give us the capacity to know Him. Let that sink in for a moment. God made us in His image in order to give us the unique ability to know, love, fellowship with, and share the thoughts and emotions of the living God! Augustine (A.D. 354-430) said, “God has made us for Himself; we are restless until we find our rest in Him.” Another said, “There is a vacuum in the heart of man, which was made for God and which only God can fill.”²¹ The reason we were made differently from the animals is so that each of us *personally* can enter into fellowship with God.

Why did God make us moral beings? The only way we could enter into the love of God is by having the capacity to love. Why did God give us social capacity whereby we can enter into the heart of another? Only so that we could enter into God’s own heart. Jesus Christ died, “the just for the unjust, that he might *bring us to God*” (1Pe 3:18).

The great waste of human capability is to use these capacities to serve ourselves. We take the capacity to love and waste it on wondering whether others will love us! The capacity to love is not given to help us become popular with others. Relationship to other people is important, but it is designed to be secondary. Relationship to God is designed by God Himself to be primary in our lives. That is why we are created in His image.

D. Summary

This picture of man, the highest creature, standing between God and the rest of creation, presents the first theocracy. God is the sovereign ruler by virtue of

²¹ **Blaise Pascal** (1623-1662) – French mathematician, physicist, inventor, writer, and Christian philosopher.

creation. He has made man in the image of God, placed him in the world, and has delegated to him to exercise dominion as God's vice-ruler. In this we have all the elements of a divine kingdom. Man manages the world as a steward.²² He does not govern for himself. He governs on behalf of God, and willingly acknowledges God as his own king, submitting himself to God's rule.

3. The Fall

Please read Genesis 3.

A. Before the Fall

Man's life with God before the Fall is a picture of believers' future eternal life with God after physical death here on earth. The purpose of Christ's redemption of His people from their sins is to glorify God by 1) restoring to the saints the intimate fellowship that Adam had with God before the Fall, and 2) forming the Church, the Bride of Christ. What was life like before the Fall?

1. *Enormous intelligence.* We know Adam had enormous intelligence because He named all the animals. And he did not need to be reminded of those thousands of names, even after just one time through! This is notable.

2. *No death or aging.* Adam was never sick; there was no disease in the Garden at all. He was perpetually young and strong. Today people reach their peak physically around the age of 20, and after that it is all a fading away: "The grass withereth, the flower fadeth...surely the people is grass" (Isa 40:7).

3. *Dominion.* The whole earth was Adam's to rule. And it was a friendly earth. There was little or no toil for food, mainly just to pick fruit when desired. The mosquitoes didn't bite, the sun didn't burn, and the lions didn't attack.

4. *Fellowship with God.* We need to notice the free and easy manner of Adam's fellowship with God. It was within that blessed balance between cold formality and treating God too casually. Reverence for God's holiness, and family love, mark the fellowship God has for us.

5. *Vast freedom.* Adam before the Fall had only the one restriction: avoid eating the fruit of one particular tree. That is the entirety of the restrictions upon him. Adam had virtually unlimited freedom over all the earth, a simple life with one purpose: walking with God. God is not interested in putting us in bondage. But He knows our hearts, so He *has* to put restrictions on us—to protect us from ourselves. With our sin nature, the devil on our back, and the world pressing in upon us, what would we do with virtually unlimited freedom? It would be terrible:

²² **steward** – one who is responsible to manage the property of another.

the planet would be a vigilante zone with suffering at the hands of others on every side.

6. *Responsibility*. “Be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth, and subdue it: and have dominion...over every living thing” (Gen 1:28). It is important to realize that all privileges carry with them responsibilities. A responsibility is a choice that has consequences. It is quite different from a restriction, which is something we should not do. While God placed on Adam only one restriction, He gave Adam many responsibilities in the Garden: to rule over the earth and bring it into subjection, so that the earth might prosper. The text implies that Adam fulfilled these responsibilities with joy and pleasure by the grace of God. It was only when he violated the one restriction that everything changed.

Notice also in Genesis 2:22-24 that it is God Himself Who instituted marriage: “the *LORD God*...brought her unto the man,” and commanded that marriage be between one man and one woman for life: “Therefore shall a man leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave unto his wife: and they shall be one flesh.”

7. *Fulfillment*. Think about this: Adam had no wants and no needs! He had extraordinary fellowship with God and wonderful, continuous harmony in marriage. He was truly “free” because sin had no power over him. Freedom is *not* “not having to obey someone else’s rule book.” Freedom is finding fulfillment in God Himself. Adam was *secure*: he was safe in God at all times. Adam was *satisfied*: he had no sense of wants or needs. And Adam had *sufficiency*: all of God’s resources were available to him so that he never felt incapable or frustrated.

To summarize, before the Fall man had enormous intelligence, dominion over the entire earth, fellowship with God, virtually unlimited freedom to go where and do what he believed best, complete fulfillment, and only one small restriction to observe. There was no death or aging, no sickness or accidents, and no long list of rules to follow. He lived in a perfect world.

B. The Fall Itself

This first theocracy was perfect; there was no flaw in it. But it was not necessarily permanent. God set before man a choice. He gave to man the one and only command: to abstain from eating the fruit of the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil. If he obeyed, God would continue to bless him; but God warned man that if he disobeyed, then he would die. This warning refers not only to physical death, the separation of body (which decays) and soul (which lives eternally). It also includes spiritual death, which is separation from God.

When God said that disobedience would mean death, He implied that obedience would bring continuance of life eternally. This was a covenant between God and man. God told man precisely what to do. He told him what would happen if

he obeyed or disobeyed. Man's actions would decide his future. We call this the "covenant of works,"²³ because under this arrangement man could earn eternal life by obeying God's law.

1. *The Condition: Obey God*

We must realize that it was Adam, not Eve, who had the responsibility of the race on his shoulders. It was Adam who had been given the authority over the earth and the responsibility to submit himself to God by observing the one restriction. Biblically, God made the man and gave him the authority. He made Eve from the man and gave her to him to help him in his responsibility. To be clear, Eve was not inferior to Adam; she simply was created by God for a different role from Adam. Temptation came by Eve; the Fall came by Adam.

Even though Adam had all the authority, it was given upon the condition of his keeping the one restriction—and we must keep this one restriction in perspective. It was not as if there were only a few trees from which Adam could choose to eat. No, the Garden of Eden was great in size and filled with abundant trees. In addition, although the Garden was a special place, the whole earth was given to him for dominion. In this abundance, God set one tree in one place to put this one restriction on Adam—*just one!* He could not eat the fruit of that one tree.

God gave this one restriction for one purpose: that Adam might know that *God was God*. As God's special creation, Adam had to be able to demonstrate submission to God through moral choices. The tree was that daily opportunity to show his submission to God, to learn to carry responsibility. Adam was still the creature, not the Creator.

2. *The Devil*

In Genesis 3 we are introduced to the third main character of the Bible. We have seen God, and then man, and now the devil makes his first appearance. He is not named here specifically, but is displayed as the "serpent."

The thief cometh not, but for to steal, and to kill, and to destroy: I am come that they might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly.—John 10:10

The devil may have been the highest of created spiritual beings at one time, but he rebelled against God and has been set on exalting himself above God ever since by any means (Isa 14:12-15). Today he is capable of nothing but destruction:

²³ **covenant of works** – agreement God established with Adam in the Garden of Eden before his fall into sin. It established man's obligation to obey God with the penalty of death for disobedience (Gen 2:16-17). See *The Covenants—of Works and of Grace* by Walter Chantry; available from CHAPEL LIBRARY.

his goals are to steal from us God's blessings, kill us, and destroy our fellowship with God. When God asks something of you, it is for your *life* ("I am come that they might have life...more abundantly"). When sin is tempting you, it is for the purpose of your own *destruction* ("The thief cometh...to destroy").

The devil's goal in the Garden was simple: to get for himself the authority over the earth that God had given to man. How would Adam give his authority away to the devil? There was only one way: to disobey the one command God had given. But how do you get a man who has *everything* to give it up in exchange for *nothing*? The devil's strategy was to go after Eve, and through her to get to Adam. This is a common strategy of his. In order to get to us, he often attacks someone or something we love or care about.

3. *Temptation*

But of the fruit of the tree which is in the midst of the garden, God hath said, Ye shall not eat of it...lest ye die.

And the serpent said unto the woman, Ye shall not surely die: For God doth know that in the day ye eat thereof, then your eyes shall be opened, and ye shall be as gods, knowing good and evil.

And when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was pleasant to the eyes, and a tree to be desired to make one wise, she took of the fruit thereof, and did eat, and gave also unto her husband with her; and he did eat.—Genesis 3:3-6

Eve was as blessed with abundant life as was Adam. How did the devil manage to get to her? It was by the same way he attacks us today.

a. He lies

The devil has nothing to offer, so he has to convince man that what he does have to offer is something, when it is actually nothing. The devil approaches each one of us just as he did Eve, using *doubt* and *dissatisfaction*.

- 1) He creates doubt that God is telling the truth in His commands to you: "Ye shall not surely die."
- 2) The devil also creates dissatisfaction with what God has provided for you: "For God doth know that in the day ye eat thereof...ye shall be as gods, knowing good and evil."

When a fisherman puts a little minnow on a hook, it looks like he is offering a free meal to the big fish. But when the fish bites, the fisherman's whole attitude changes: his whole focus becomes catching, killing, and eating that fish! It is just so with the devil.

The key in deception is that it looks good on the surface, but the reality is *very* different. God has given the devil the possibility to influence the world system. The devil has used this influence to make the world system *totally destructive* to our eternal souls. The devil's deception is twofold:

- 1) to make the lie look as attractive as possible, and
- 2) to use the lie for the sole purpose of destruction.

b. He offers "life"

What did the devil offer Eve that she didn't already have? There was nothing new to offer her, so he offered her "life." Real "life" is what men seek today: fulfillment, satisfaction, completeness, self-actualization, recognition, achievement. Please realize: this was what Eve already had in her abundant life with God.

Now, the "life" the devil offers *does not exist*. In television, movies, and our thoughts, there is selfishness without consequences, destruction without pain or suffering, and compromise without guilt. It is not "harmless entertainment"; it creates an attitude of mind that thinks the world actually works that way. The "life" the world offers is a *deception designed to destroy* the abundant life with God of true believers on this earth.

How does the devil offer "life"?

1) He points to the *world* around you, rather than to *God*. He says "life" is in first experiencing the pleasures of the world, rather than of God.

2) The devil's offer of "life" is *always later*. It always requires just one more step beyond what we already have at that time.

3) The devil's offer is *always just outside God's boundary*, which is His moral law. The devil offers "life" just on the other side of what God has said is good for us, just across the line that God has drawn. If there were something needful outside His boundaries that is also good for us now, He would have already brought it in. God's boundaries have nothing to do with cutting us off from anything we really need.

The solution to temptation is to keep well within the boundaries that God has set (Rom 13:14), especially in areas to which we are susceptible. Instead, Adam and Eve were within sight of the tree, able to gaze upon its fruit. In this, they were setting themselves up for the Fall.

4. *Man's Sin*

Now we are introduced to the second major principle in the Old Testament: the reality and nature of sin.

Man sins when he disobeys God's laws (1Jo 3:4). For Adam, this meant

- a) ignoring all the freedom he enjoyed with God, and
- b) choosing to violate the one restriction God had given him, to help him re-

member that he was just a creature and not a god.

This is the nature of sin, and this is the way we sin too. The way of life is to obey God; the way of wickedness is to follow our own hearts instead. Our hearts are “deceitfully wicked,” driven by selfish desires. We therefore break God’s Law, which is sin (1Jo 3:4).

C. Consequences of the Fall

Man’s testing in the covenant of works ended in failure. He sinned: he ate the forbidden fruit. The sentence of spiritual death was immediately imposed: Adam and Eve’s sin separated them from God. This brings misery as well as death. Envy and hatred fill the earth, sickness and suffering abound, and anxiety is at an all-time high. From the moment of the Fall to this day, men are fallen in their flesh.

Men are *deceived*. We believe the lies of the devil. We listen to others and to our own hearts, and not to God. We make far more of what the devil offers than what it actually is.

Men are *discontent*. Even though God gives us what we need, we think we need just one thing more in order to be happy. We make less of what God gives to us than what it actually is.

Men are *selfish*. We put our own interests in the world ahead of our relationship with God.

Men feel *self-conscious*. Today, most people spend most of their time thinking about themselves. Adam felt *guilt* and *self-consciousness* for the first time. Adam had a conscience before the Fall, but after the Fall it was a *guilty* conscience for the first time.

Men feel *inadequate*. This varies by person. Some may be very self-confident, but everyone comes to a place where he feels overwhelmed in his own resources, whether it be in finances, a job, a relationship, or a storm.

In addition, men have

- 1) a slavish fear of God (demonstrated by Adam when he hid himself). They experience
- 2) spiritual and physical death,
- 3) God’s anger toward their sin,
- 4) contention between men (demonstrated immediately by Adam when he blamed his fall upon Eve),
- 5) decay and sickness, and
- 6) God’s curse upon the world: it no longer naturally yields up its fruit to men, but all must come with toil and trouble.

Sin is terrible! We must understand these things in order to learn to hate sin the way God does.

D. Redemption

But God did not curse only man. He also cursed the serpent. And His curse upon the serpent contained a promise of redemption for men, which would bring salvation from sin and the effects of sin. God said, “I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed; it shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel” (Gen 3:15). Theologians call this the *proto-evangelium*,²⁴ the first promise of the gospel. Notice what is included in this promise.

1. God promises salvation by declaring that He will put enmity between the seed of the woman and that of the serpent, “I will put enmity” shows that God will undo the results of the Fall. By sinning, man had become Satan’s friend and God’s enemy. God is going to save man by restoring man to fellowship with Him. This will make man the enemy of Satan, as he was before he sinned.

2. This salvation will be certain, because it is based on God’s action alone. He says that *He will* put enmity. It is to be a sovereign salvation, because only God’s sovereign work could guarantee man’s salvation.

3. God promises a Savior, the Seed of the woman, Who will destroy Satan. This is a promise of Christ. There can be no salvation apart from Him. The first promise of redemption includes a promise of Christ, and the rest of the Old Testament prepares for His coming.

4. This Savior will suffer at the hands of Satan (“bruise his heel”). This suffering will be part of the Savior’s redemptive work, when as men’s substitute He bears the penalty for their sins.

In this promise we have the seed of the new Kingdom of God. The first theocracy was destroyed, and immediately God set into operation the forces that would produce the second theocracy, which will continue forever. From this seed the plant of God’s redemptive kingdom will grow. The rest of the Bible is dedicated to tracing the growth of that plant.

E. The Growing Effects of Sin

Please read Genesis 4:1 – 6:5.

Before continuing that account, however, Genesis presents to us just how awful sin really is. The sin of Adam did not affect only him; by his first sin he infected all his descendants as well. Since that time, man is born in sin and has a sinful

²⁴ *proto-evangelium* – Greek: *protos*, “first”; *evangelion*, “gospel” or “good news.”

nature. The effects of this sinful nature are now set forth. It has been suggested by some writers that the period between the Fall and the Flood was one in which God withheld His grace to a large degree, so that men might see how awful sin really is and what misery it brings. Sin erupted in the first murder, when Cain killed Abel (Gen 4:5-8). But Cain at least tried to hide his sin. The second murderer mentioned shows a greater hardness of heart. Lamech admits his act, and composes a song about it (Gen 4:23). Thus we see the growing effects of sin.

Not all Adam's children are of Cain's evil line. There is another line, descending from Seth. This line retains at least some knowledge of Jehovah. But sin also affects the Sethites. Genesis 5 shows that death, the result of sin, did not bypass them. The fact that Enoch escaped death only spotlights the fact that everyone else experiences death. His experience was unique. Sin was everywhere, and everywhere it brought forth death.

And it came to pass, when men began to multiply on the face of the earth, and daughters were born unto them, That the sons of God [the children of Seth] saw the daughters of men [the children of Cain] that they were fair; and they took them wives of all which they chose. And the LORD said, My Spirit will not always strive with man.—Genesis 6:1-3

Just before the Flood, sin reached its peak. Notice the cause: the line of Seth, among whom were many men of faith, intermarried with the line of Cain, who had rejected God. Here is a lesson that every Christian should take to heart. Marriage with unbelievers is disastrous for the Christian, for the Church, and for the world. Christian homes are one of the main barriers against the spread of sin. Intermarriage breaks down this barrier. It was in this way that open sinfulness spread throughout the entire world just before the Flood.

Notice what is said of man in Genesis 6:5. "And God saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually." This exposes the sinfulness of man's heart, but in this case, that sinfulness was turned loose in the world. Notice how great man's sin is.

1. It begins at the very center of his personality—the imaginations of the thoughts of his heart. It is not simply on the surface, limited to a few evil deeds.
2. It includes everything that comes from his heart. His thoughts are "only evil continually." His sin is so great that it excludes all good.
3. It extends to everything that he does—"the wickedness of man was great in the earth."

By putting these statements together, it becomes clear that there is no good in man. Swelling from the very core of his being, his sins extend wherever the influence of man is felt. And the corruption that fills the earth as a result of this sin calls for divine punishment. That punishment was soon inflicted.

4. The Flood

Please read Genesis 6-11.

The purpose of the Flood was for God's justice to destroy sinful man and the results of his sin from the earth. "And God said unto Noah, The end of all flesh is come before me; for the earth is filled with violence through them; and, behold, I will destroy them with the earth" (Gen 6:13). This end was achieved. The Flood destroyed man and beast from the face of the earth. Of course, not all life was destroyed. God called Noah to build the ark to save himself, his family, and a pair of each type of animal. This was a representative group through whom God would again populate the earth. By thus saving a remnant from the physical punishment of sin, God pictures the fact that He will save His Church from the eternal punishment of sin. Most importantly, God preserved the promised seed of the woman so that the Redeemer could come at the appointed time.

The Flood fulfilled its purpose, and when that was done God brought the remnant forth from the ark. Then God made a covenant with Noah, which we call the Noahic Covenant or the "covenant of nature" (Gen 9:8-17). In this covenant, God promised that never again would the course of nature be interrupted by a worldwide flood, nor would mankind again be destroyed, until God's plan of history is completed. This covenant is important for the development of the theocracy. It guarantees stability in the world. It assures us that there will be a stage on which the drama of redemption can be played without interruption, until the last act is completed.

Noah himself became living proof that redemption was still needed. The Flood could not erase the sin from the human heart, and Noah soon became the one through whom sin first manifested its ugly presence in the regenerated world.

And Noah's descendants quickly turned away from God. They planned the Tower of Babel, by which they intended to avoid being scattered. To prevent them from fulfilling their purpose, God changed their languages so they could not understand each other, and scattered them abroad. This prepared the way for the next step in God's plan. Mankind as a whole had failed. Now God was ready to separate a people for Himself, that through them He might redeem His people.

Questions for personal reflection and group discussion

1. What is the purpose of Genesis?
2. What is the first major principle in the Old Testament?
3. What does it mean to say that man was created in God's image?
4. a. Who is the devil?
b. What are his goals today?
5. Describe the second major principle in the Old Testament.
6. Describe the parts of the first promise of redemption.
7. What was the purpose of the Flood?
8. What does it mean that man is totally depraved?

4

Promise of the New Theocracy

Genesis: Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob

*And he believed in the LORD; and he counted
it to him for righteousness.*

Genesis 15:6

1. Purpose

Please read Genesis 12-17.

The second part of Genesis is different from the first in many ways. Here we see God narrowing the limits of His work. Instead of dealing with the whole human race, God now works with one man and his descendants. But there is a close connection between the two sections. The first part (Gen 1-11) served to show us *why* God limited His Old Testament kingdom to a single nation. The human race as a whole had fallen into sin and was separated from God. The second part of Genesis (Gen 12-50) tells us *how* God begins to separate His chosen nation from others. This nation will be the line of the Redeemer to come and His instrument in purifying men.

2. God's Kingdom and the Covenant of Grace

A. Covenants

The new stage in God's redemptive work begins with Abraham. Abraham receives the promise that God will establish a new theocracy with him and with his family. This promise comes in the form of a covenant. A covenant is an arrangement or an agreement in which two parties understand completely what is expected of each: blessings are attached to fulfillment, and sanctions are attached to non-fulfillment. God is a covenant God. He does not leave His people ignorant of what He expects of them. Nor does He leave them in ignorance of what He will do for them.

We have already seen that God makes covenants with men. First, He entered into the covenant of works with Adam. Next, He made the covenant of nature with Noah. Now, He establishes His covenant of grace with Abraham.

B. The Covenant of Grace

This covenant is the beginning of the nation of Israel. The rest of the Old Testament is the account of the working out of this covenant. God also made a second major covenant, the Mosaic or National Covenant of Law at Mount Sinai, which also is worked out in the nation's history. But the National Covenant failed, and when it did so, the Abrahamic Covenant held things together. More importantly, it contains the promise of Jesus Christ, the Redeemer of God's children from the penalty of sin and death. That is why this covenant is so important.

It is given in three stages. The covenant is promised in Genesis 12:2-3 at the time of Abraham's call: to make of him a great nation and to bless all the earth through him. The covenant is formally enacted in Genesis 15. And in Genesis 17, God explains and establishes His covenant with Abraham.

I will make of thee a great nation, and I will bless thee...and in thee shall all families of the earth be blessed.—Genesis 12:2-3

Look now toward heaven, and tell [i.e., count] the stars, if thou be able to number them: and he said unto him, So shall thy seed be.—Genesis 15:5

Thou shalt be a father of many nations...And I will establish my covenant between me and thee and thy seed after thee in their generations for an everlasting covenant, to be a God unto thee, and to thy seed after thee.—Genesis 17:4-7

Let us examine Genesis 15, for it contains the great statement of faith. When God took Abraham out under the stars, He did not say that Abraham would have

as many descendants as there are stars, but “so shall thy seed be,” meaning that they would both be beyond counting. Abraham then asked how he should know this. His asking was not unbelief, but only seeking some encouragement, because from a human perspective the promise was by now impossible to come to pass due to old age. That same evening, God told Abraham to prepare animals for a covenant. In the ancient Middle East, covenants came with the pain of sacrifice: men would slay an animal, divide it into halves, and walk between the halves to ratify the covenant. Abraham did this, and the next evening God appeared in a fiery presence. “Behold a smoking furnace, and a burning lamp that passed between those pieces. In the same day the LORD made a covenant with Abram” (Gen 15:17-18).

Please notice that only God went through the pieces. God made the covenant with Abraham. It is one-way and unconditional; Abraham had nothing to do with it. This is extremely important and marvelous, because you cannot break a covenant that you did not make! Because it is one-way and unconditional, it cannot be broken: not by Abraham and not by any other man—and not by God, for He does not change.

The Old Testament revolves around three major covenants. This is the first, the National Covenant at Mount Sinai is the second, and the Davidic Covenant is the third. The National Covenant is conditional: in it God said He would bless them *if* they obeyed Him, and chastise them if they would not. Like the first, the third covenant is unconditional: God promised David that He would keep his descendants on the throne forever. This was wonderfully fulfilled in Jesus Christ.

All three covenants move along together and act as a guide to explain why God acts. Whenever He says He will do something for Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob’s sake, He is acting to fulfill the Abrahamic Covenant. God chastens the nation because He loves them, even taking them into the Babylonian captivity. But He brings them back to the land, not because the remnant deserved it, but because He was fulfilling His covenant with Abraham: through Abraham there will be a Redeemer to pay the penalty for man’s sins—and all nations will be blessed.

It is by means of this covenant of grace with Abraham that the way is paved for the establishment of the new theocracy. But Genesis does not record the actual establishment of this theocracy. Abraham did not see the fulfillment of the promises God gave to him. Nor did his immediate descendants see the promises fulfilled. That fulfillment was reserved for a later time. They received the promises, and they lived in complete faith in those promises of God. God was their God and they were His people. This was enough to satisfy them. And so they lived with God, waiting for Him to do what He had promised. As they waited, God guided their lives and pictured in them some of the important truths about His kingdom.

3. God's Blessings and Abraham's Life

A. Real Blessing

The life of Abraham teaches us two important lessons. The first is that God gives real blessings to His people. Some men think that the only benefit of religion is the ability it gives us to have proper attitudes toward life, where the value is all in our minds. But that is simply not true. God's kingdom contains many blessings for His people. And these are real blessings. Some of them we receive in this life and others we will receive in the life to come. God displayed this fact in Abraham's life: He gave Abraham many blessings. As you read about his life, look for these blessings. They show us that God's kingdom is the source of much good for God's people.

B. The Life of Faith

The life of Abraham also teaches us what our response to the theocracy must be. Abraham is called the father of those who *believe*. His whole life was a life of faith. A careful reading of the story of his life will reveal instance after instance in which his faith is displayed (Heb 11:8-10). As you look for evidences of faith, remember that faith in God is revealed by obedience to God. This is the *third major principle* in the Old Testament: the life of faith, walking with God in a lifestyle of obedience. It is demonstrated in Abraham's life: God's blessings are to be received by faith.

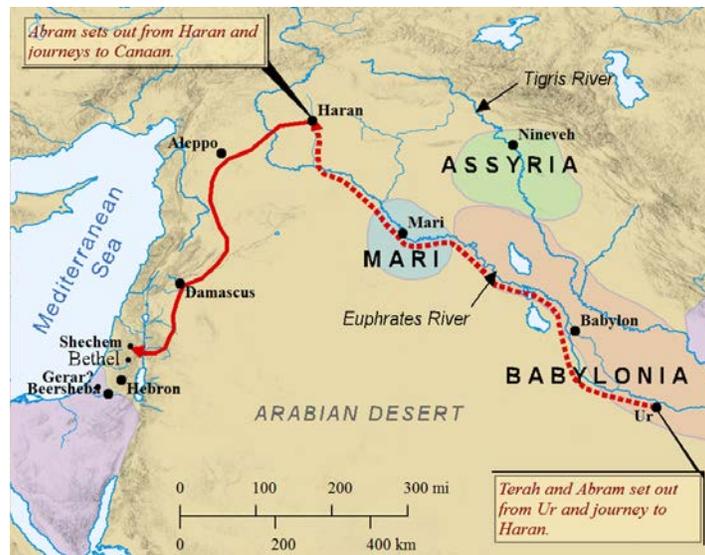
The New Testament makes an important point of highlighting that this principle of faith comes early in the Old Testament account (Rom 4). Abraham "believed in the LORD; and he counted it to him for righteousness" (Gen 15:6). This is the great testimony of faith as the basis of our salvation. Obedience to God's laws—which were not given until centuries later—and good works both flow from faith. The Pharisees of Jesus' day wanted to seek after God in their own way: they started with the Law, not with faith. But Abraham's life of faith comes approximately 400 years before the Law for a specific purpose: that we should start there in understanding how we are to come to God. It is vitally important that we start with faith and not with the Law.

Faith is not a commodity to be stored up, but a *way of living!* When you walk by faith through difficult situations, your faith grows. Faith is a way of life. There are three steps in the life of faith as revealed in Abraham's experience: 1) the call to the life of faith (salvation), 2) how a man grows in the life of faith (sanctification), and 3) the reward of the life of faith (fellowship).

1. *The Call to the Life of Faith*

To grow in the life of faith, you must begin the life of faith. It starts when God speaks to you. On a given day, God spoke to Abraham. Your faith also begins on a given day—it was not always in you, and it did not just “evolve.” You may not know it at first, but at a point in time, God begins a work, an awakening, a new birth. It is certainly noticeable: you see it clearly when you begin to repent from your sin because you hate the sin itself, not just its punishment.

Genesis 12:1-3 is the original calling of Abraham. “Now the LORD had said unto Abram, Get thee out of thy country, and from thy kindred, and from thy father's house, unto a land that I will shew thee” (Gen 12:1). God says to Abraham to do two things: leave your country and leave your family. The whole burden of fulfilling God’s calling rests on God. God told Abraham his part was only to leave; God’s part was to bless. If you are to live the life of faith, God says essentially the same thing to you. Your part at the beginning is small: to repent and believe (Mar 1:15). And your life of faith does not begin until you do it!



First Journeys of Abraham

Abraham did leave Ur, but not his family—they all went to Haran. But half-following God is not following God. Therefore, nothing happened at Haran. The years there were years of delay—lost years, unused years. Nothing happens until he left his family as well. We know that “leaving” family does not necessarily require moving to a different city. God gave the fifth commandment so that boys and girls, men and women, will always honor their parents (Exo 20:12). To “leave” is to move your love for them to second place behind God: He must be first, all else is secondary.

What is it to make God first, to live by faith? It is to find your security, satisfaction, and sufficiency in God alone. Everything you do on this earth is related to trying to find answers in these three areas. If you live by faith, you will be *secure* because God is your King and Protector. You will come to lasting *satisfaction* because you know God as your Provider and Shepherd. You will feel *sufficient* because the Almighty Omnipotent God is your strength. You will have true peace, because Jesus said, “My peace I give unto you: not as the world giveth, give I unto you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid” (Joh 14:27). It does not depend on you alone anymore to make it all work.

Your source for security, satisfaction, and sufficiency are all embodied in your national culture. Your culture determines what language you speak, what food you eat, how you dress, what music you listen to, what your house is like, what heroes you have, and what success is. God comes to Abraham and says to him in effect, “If I am going to make you a man of faith, you must leave it all!” God tells us to put the whole culture behind us, and our whole family behind God. If you are going to learn the life of faith, you must stop being governed by the culture in the choices you make.

2. Growing in the Life of Faith

When you commit yourself to the life of faith, you place yourself in God’s hands. He has a plan; He knows what He wants to make of you. Your part is to follow Him in the path in which He leads you, to obey Him. You commit to Him, and He teaches you to grow in godliness.

How does God teach you in the life of faith? He does it in two ways:

- 1) God teaches you through His Word to know His character and His ways (you will trust only someone you know).
- 2) God also puts you into certain pre-designed experiences so that you can practically apply what you know of Him into your life. Christianity is not merely *intellectual*; it is *experiential*. He speaks truth to you, and then He gives you the opportunity to experience the truth in practice.

How does God train you? In a word: *suffering*. It is not necessarily suffering in the sense of physical pain, sickness, or injury. When God trains you in the life of faith, He keeps putting you in places where you are not in control. He must bring you out of your familiar habit of *self-sufficiency*, into *God-sufficiency*. Your trust in yourself and your resistance to trusting in God are so great, that changing from it is very painful. The Bible describes it as denying yourself and trusting God (Mat 16:24-26).

But please realize this: you will not see a difficult trial through if you have not committed yourself to God. If you are still the final authority in your life, you will resort to your own efforts when the going gets tough.

When Abraham trusted God, the first thing God did was to take him to a *barren* place. Abraham had lived for 75 years in Ur of the Chaldees. Ur was the center of culture and civilization; it was where the art, music, and entertainment were. God takes Abraham out of Ur and into Canaan—the backwoods of the world. There were some small towns there, but he was out in the fields as a shepherd of sheep. Shepherds were the lowest class in the world, despised by almost everyone.

God took Abraham from all the richest possibilities for his future, to the remotest area of no possibilities (only smelly sheep!). He did this so that Abraham could learn that his walk of faith must be centered in God.

3. *The Reward of the Life of Faith*

Please read Genesis 21-28.

Remember the promises God made to Abraham: to make him a great nation, and to abundantly bless him with descendants too numerous to count. At the end of his life, what were the rewards of his faith?

When he died, Abraham effectively had one son, Isaac; the other, Ishmael, had been banished away from home. Isaac had two sons, Jacob and Esau. Esau was totally unspiritual, as worldly as a man could be. Jacob was willful and conniving. The only property Abraham owns is the burial plot of his wife Sarah! He had nothing permanent in this world. What had become of the promise?

When Isaac was in his late teenage years, God again spoke to Abraham (Gen 22:2). The Hebrew word used for Isaac here refers to a teenager, a male who is past puberty but not yet a full grown adult. He probably was somewhere between 15 and 20 years old.

God gave Abraham one of the most difficult commands that anyone could ever hear: he must sacrifice his only son Isaac. It seems overwhelming to us, beyond anything we could ever conceive of doing. Because God had promised him millions of descendants, Abraham concluded by faith that God planned to raise Isaac from the dead (Heb 11:19). But he still had to build an altar, to bind his son, and to plunge the knife into his body! Anyone with a son or daughter knows that Abraham had to deny himself completely in order to trust God completely in this. It was an agonizing mission from the start.

God told Abraham to take Isaac to Mount Moriah, three days journey away. When Isaac asked where the offering was, Abraham said, “My son, God will provide himself a lamb” (Gen 22:8). From that day, they called the place Jehovah-Jireh, “God will provide.”

In this God gave Abraham one of the clearest pictures of God's provision of the atoning sacrifice of His Son. To one side of Mount Moriah is Mount Zion, the site of the Temple, to the other side is Mount Calvary. In the same place 2,000 years later, God Himself sacrificed His only Son Jesus Christ on the cross, to pay for all the sins of all His children, that they might live and not die. Others knew not even the meaning of the prophecy that "God would provide," but Abraham experienced it first hand with God. He experienced God's agony at the cross when he raised the knife. He knew God's joy of salvation when God accepted the substitute. And he experienced all of this at the same place!

The reward of the man who truly walks with God by faith is that he comes to know God intimately. If we hesitate in learning the lessons of faith, we will miss the deep knowledge of God (Jam 1:2-8).

4. God's Choices and Abraham's Seed

The life of Isaac is much different from that of his father Abraham. Here our attention is directed to the supernatural way in which God works in His kingdom. Isaac's birth illustrates this fact. Abraham and Sarah thought that they had the only answer to a great problem. Abraham needed a son so that the promise could be fulfilled. So they used a device that was an accepted custom in those times. Abraham had a son who was born of Hagar, Sarah's maid. This was the natural answer, since Sarah was too old to have any children. But God would not accept the natural answer. He provided a supernatural answer: Isaac was born of Sarah in her old age. This and other incidents in the life of Isaac illustrate the fact that the theocracy is brought about by supernatural action.

Isaac's son Jacob teaches us that membership in God's kingdom is based upon election. It is not because of what we are, but because of God's choosing us that we become members of the theocracy. In the birth of Isaac, God displayed His supernatural method of working. But in the birth of Jacob, His election is displayed. In the case of Isaac, we could find a reason why God might choose Isaac and not Ishmael. But in the case of Jacob, there is no such reason. In fact, everything points in the other direction. The culture demanded that Esau, the older son, would be heir. But Jacob is chosen, and this is the result of God's electing love. That it was not due to Jacob's character is clear from the story of his early life. At first he was a despicable character. But later in his life he becomes a true saint of God. This shows us a second truth about God's election: God does not choose us because we are good, but in order that He might make us good.

5. God's Guidance and Israel's Early History

Please read Genesis 39-50.

The early history of Israel is the story of the lives of the patriarchs: Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. After this the family begins to enlarge. Jacob has twelve sons, who are to become the fathers of the twelve tribes of Israel. Of these the most prominent is Joseph. God is preparing the way for the next step in the biblical narrative, the Exodus. But we should also notice that Joseph is one of the Old Testament characters who may be called a type of Christ. By that we mean that the events which occur in his life have a striking resemblance to and teach us about the events in the life of our Lord. As an example, compare the treatment Joseph received from his brothers with the words of John 1:11, "He came unto his own, and his own received him not."

The book of Genesis ends with the blessings that Jacob bestows upon his sons. These blessings are prophetic and foretell the fortunes of the various tribes of Israel. Of special importance is part of the blessing upon Judah.

*The sceptre shall not depart from Judah, nor a lawgiver from
between his feet, Until Shiloh come; And unto him shall
the gathering of the people be.—Genesis 49:10*

This asserts that Judah will be the ruler of Israel, and out of Judah shall come a special ruler. This is a prophecy of Christ.

6. Conclusion

The book of Genesis brings us to the end of the period of promise. In it we see the first theocracy established by creation and destroyed by sin. We see the wrath of God upon a sinful world expressed in the Flood. And then we see the beginning of a new theocracy, given in the form of a covenantal promise to Abraham and his children. This new theocracy is the subject of the rest of the Bible. God is still perfecting His kingdom. It will come to its perfection only when Christ returns from heaven to judge the living and the dead. So Genesis is truly the foundation of the Bible. It provides the basis on which the entire redemptive plan of God rests. One could not write "The End" after Genesis. It is like an introductory chapter. There is much more to follow.

Questions for personal reflection and group discussion

1. What is the purpose of the second part of Genesis?
2. What is a covenant?
3. What blessings did God promise Abraham in Genesis 12, 15, 17?

4. For what purpose does God maintain the people of Israel throughout the Old Testament?
5.
 - a. What is the third major principle in the Old Testament?
 - b. How does Abraham's life illustrate this principle?
6.
 - a. What is the significance of Genesis 15:6?
 - b. Why is it placed early in the Old Testament?
7. Explain the three components of the life of faith:
sufficiency, satisfaction, and security.
8. How does Genesis provide the basis on which the entire redemptive plan of God rests?

PART TWO

THEOCRATIC ESTABLISHMENT

5

Covenant People Delivered

Exodus, Part One

And the blood shall be to you for a token upon the houses where ye are: and when I see the blood, I will pass over you, and the plague shall not be upon you to destroy you, when I smite the land of Egypt.

Exodus 12:13

1. Purpose

The book of Exodus continues the narrative of Genesis. It is intended to show how God redeems His people, and how He brought about the organization of the covenant nation. That which was prepared for in Genesis, now takes place in Exodus.

In the first part of Exodus we see the people of Israel redeemed from their bondage in Egypt. To be redeemed is to be delivered from captivity by paying a ransom price. This is a necessary step toward their organization as a nation. It is also typical of redemption from sin, when God delivered His elect from sin unto salvation by the means and merit of the ransom paid by Jesus Christ at the cross.

The outline of Exodus consists of three parts.

- | | |
|--|--------------|
| I. Israel is delivered from Egyptian bondage | Exodus 1-18 |
| II. Israel receives the covenant at Sinai | Exodus 19-24 |
| III. Israel receives its sanctuary for worship | Exodus 25-40 |

2. God's Promises Fulfilled

A. A Nation Formed

Exodus cannot be understood without Genesis. The events that take place here are based on promises given there. You will recall that Abraham received certain promises, but never saw the fulfillment of those promises. The central promise of the covenant of grace required no waiting—God was the God of Abraham. But the threefold promise—of 1) a land to be received, 2) a nation to be formed, and 3) a blessing to be bestowed upon all men through Abraham—was not fulfilled in the time of the patriarchs. It is in Exodus that the fulfillment begins. Here we see the seed of Abraham formed into a great nation. Here we see set into motion the power of God that gave unto Israel the Promised Land of Canaan as her own land. But not yet is the third part of the promise fulfilled. That must await the coming of Him Who is the great Seed of Abraham. It is in Christ that Abraham becomes a blessing to all the world.

The book of Genesis ends with about 70 people in the family of Jacob going *into* Egypt. We are not told anything about what happened to them there for the next 430 years. But the book of Exodus begins with this same family coming *out of* Egypt with 600,000 men, plus women and children. God has made them ready to become His covenant nation.

Exodus contains the two most important events in the Old Testament. The first is the Exodus itself. It lasted three days, from leaving Pharaoh to the crossing of the Red Sea. What God did for them in those three days was enough to obligate them to Him for the rest of their lives. And the first Passover was the clearest picture of Christ's redeeming sacrifice. The second important event is the establishment of the National Covenant at Mount Sinai. Israel becomes a great nation. The rest of the Old Testament traces that nation's experience with God.

The first two chapters of Exodus cover a total of 80 years: Moses' birth, his killing an Egyptian 40 years later, and his flight into the wilderness. Not until another 40 years had passed did God speak to him. These eighty years are presented without great detail. But from that point to the end of the book covers less than two years. God hones in on some key events by greatly slowing down the narrative, so that we might notice their importance.

It was probably less than one year from God's appearance to Moses at the burning bush, to the Exodus at the Red Sea. The plagues were not in ten consecutive days, as many assume. They probably took place over a period of six months or so. The remainder of the book also covers about one year. The National Covenant was established, the Law was given, the Tabernacle was built and completed, and two weeks later the people were ready to celebrate the Passover again.

B. Slaves in Egypt

Please read Exodus 1-2.

In Exodus we also see the fulfillment of another word of God to Abraham. "Know of a surety that thy seed shall be a stranger in a land that is not theirs, and shall serve them; and they shall afflict them four hundred years; And also that nation, whom they shall serve, will I judge: and afterward shall they come out with great substance" (Gen 15:13-14). The first part of Exodus is concerned with precisely this.

When Jacob descended into Egypt to live there, he was received by Pharaoh with great honor because of Joseph, and was given the good land of Goshen for a residence. But the favored status of Israel gave way to slavery and bondage when "there arose up a new king over Egypt, who knew not Joseph" (Exo 1:8). Who was this king? Why did he not know Joseph? When did these events occur?

The history of Egypt is reckoned according to dynasties, or ruling families. The first thirteen dynasties are Egyptian. But then Egypt was conquered by a Semitic people known as the Hyksos, or the Shepherd kings. These people composed dynasties fourteen through seventeen. Then the native Egyptians arose, threw off the yoke of foreign rule, and established the native eighteenth dynasty. From that time on Egypt was ruled by Egyptians.

Commentators do not all agree exactly where Israel fits into this picture, but the following account seems most in accord with the biblical facts. Joseph came to Egypt during the latter part of the twelfth dynasty or early in the thirteenth dynasty, when the Egyptians ruled their own land. The descendants of Jacob were already settled in Egypt when the Hyksos invasion took place. The Hyksos treated the Israelites kindly, for they were of the same racial background and of the same occupation. But when the Egyptian revolt ended the Hyksos rule, the new Pharaoh forgot about Joseph and remembered only that the Israelites were much like the hated Hyksos, as they became very numerous. He determined to reduce them to a state where they could never rebel or aid any invader. To this end he placed them in bondage.

3. Israel's Bondage Pictures Our Sin

The bondage of the Hebrews was not simply political dependence. The Bible clearly pictures it as slavery of the worst kind. It was intended to make them perpetual slaves, forever unable to free themselves. This bondage had religious implications. God taught Israel to look back on her redemption from the bondage of Egypt as the basis of her faith. The Hebrews were God's people because He had redeemed them. So we see that the release from bondage symbolized the redemption from sin, and that bondage itself symbolized the cruel captivity in which man is kept by sin.

In order to release Israel from Egyptian bondage, God prepared a redeemer. Moses occupies a place of unique importance in the Old Testament. He was God's servant who had charge of the Old Testament Church of God. In this he is compared to Christ, Who is the head of the New Testament Church. We might find many ways in which Moses' life was like Christ's. But the important point is the work each did. Moses was God's instrument in redeeming His people from Egyptian bondage; Christ was God's instrument in redeeming His people from the bondage of sin. Moses was the typical redeemer; Christ was the actual redeemer.

4. The Name of God

Please read Exodus 3-4.

And Moses said unto God, Behold, when I come unto the children of Israel, and shall say unto them, The God of your fathers hath sent me unto you; and they shall say to me, What is his name? what shall I say unto them?

And God said unto Moses, I AM THAT I AM: and he said, Thus shalt thou say unto the children of Israel, I AM hath sent me unto you.

And God said moreover unto Moses, Thus shalt thou say unto the children of Israel, The LORD God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, hath sent me unto you: this is my name for ever, and this is my memorial unto all generations.

—Exodus 3:13-15

When God's time had come for Israel to be redeemed, God appeared to Moses in the burning bush. There He revealed Himself as I AM THAT I AM.²⁵ This name

²⁵ **I AM THAT I AM** – sacred name for God in the Old Testament, meaning “the self-existent one.” It consists of the Hebrew consonants YHWH and is called the tetragramma-

is closely connected to the name Jehovah. Both have the same meaning. They refer to the unchangeableness of God, especially as it is concerned with His covenant. Thus they indicate that He is the One Who is faithful to keep all His covenant promises. The revelation of this name was appropriate for this time when the promises made to Abraham were about to be fulfilled.

5. Moses

Please read Exodus 5-6.

Moses was a man with exceptional abilities in every category. By Moses, God teaches us how He prepares gifted men for spiritual leadership. How does God prepare a leader? It is not through the person's natural talents! No one comes naturally prepared for service. All men have to be prepared by God spiritually.

Moses was given the best education the world had to offer (Act 7:22). He lived in the lap of luxury and was pampered at every turn. He had the best opportunities through direct, personal contact with the most important people on earth. He knew all the politics of power. The royal court was rich to his intellect and senses. All the pride of Egypt told him how great he was. He was forty years old and in his prime. But just because of these things, Moses was not ready to be a spiritual leader.

Then one day he chose to identify with the people of God, and had to flee into the desert after killing the Egyptian. God's presence with Moses there was evident as He protected him, provided for him, and faithfully taught him. But there in the desert, isolated and barely scratching out a survival, much of the education Moses had received gradually drifted away.

So at the age of 80, only then did God take him into leadership. With God, it does not depend upon a person's talents. When God spoke to Moses from the burning bush (Exo 3), the key message was this: it was all of God; God was doing everything. God said: "I am...", "I have seen...", "I have heard...", "I am come to deliver...", "I will send..." This was all about God's plan for what God would do. God had given Moses all his talents, education, and contacts—then God by-passed all of his human wisdom! In 40 years of leading Israel, Moses learned that everything depended upon God.

ton (transliteration of a Greek word meaning "of four letters"). "Yah-weh" is the pronunciation most widely accepted by Hebrew scholars. The Hebrew people considered this name too sacred to be uttered by man. They filled in the consonants with vowels to make "Jehovah." In some English Bible translations, the word is spelled "LORD" in capitals to indicate that the Hebrew used the tetragrammaton.

It took Moses 40 years to learn that he was “something,” 40 years to learn that he was “nothing,” and 40 years to learn that God was “everything.” While God often uses men’s talents, He always teaches His true spiritual leaders that He is their strength and wisdom, and not they themselves (2Co 12:9; Phi 4:13).

6. The Plagues

Please read Exodus 7-10.

God shows us His wisdom in the plagues by doing one thing, and through that one thing accomplishing *multiple beneficial results* simultaneously. He does this every day all around the world.

1. *Create a Lasting Impression*

God knows human nature. When people are delivered from suffering, they soon forget how bad it was! Therefore, God used the plagues to create a lasting negative impression of their final months in Egypt, so that men of faith might never fall to the temptation to want to go back.

2. *God Makes Himself Known*

In the plagues, one of God’s purposes was to reveal Himself to the Hebrew people of that generation, so that they would know who He is. The Hebrews really did not know anything about God. Why? First, they were worked seven days a week. There was no time for seeking God. Second, they had been in slavery for at least 80 years, in excess of four generations. No one knew anything else but slavery.

We see the grace of God to Israel displayed by the division that He makes between Israel and Egypt. The first plagues strike all alike, but beginning with the fourth Israel was exempted from them. This was a manifestation of God’s love. Having chosen Israel to be His people, He now shelters her from the worst plagues. The Israelites could trust Him in everything.

3. *Know the Judgment of God against Sin*

Another purpose for the plagues is that the people might know and feel the judgment of God against sin. If you do not hate sin the way God does, you will be easy prey for the enemy. God used the plagues to execute judgment on the Egyptians, and *at the same time* to teach the Hebrew people the terrible wrath of God toward sin, so that they might hate it as He does.

4. *The Egyptians Might Know God*

It is not only the Hebrews, but also the Egyptians to whom God reveals Himself by means of the plagues. God loves His creation. No matter how bad the condition of man becomes, God desires that all men everywhere repent from sin and

turn to Him (Act 17:30). God could have brought Israel out of Egypt without this display of power. He could have caused Pharaoh to submit without a battle. But notice in the seventh plague: “He that feared the word of the LORD *among the servants of Pharaoh* made his servants and his cattle flee into the houses” (Exo 9:20). God hardened Pharaoh’s heart so that the plagues would be completed in order to make Himself known—all according to His plan.

5. *Judgment upon the Egyptians’ Gods*

With so many false gods among the Egyptians, the judgment in the plagues was also a judgment upon each of their gods. God showed them to be as nothing, and Himself to be the one true God, beside Whom is none other (1Co 8:4).

6. *Preparation for the Future*

The plagues upon Egypt were also a preparation for the future conquest of the Promised Land. “For this cause have I raised thee up, for to show in thee my power; and that *my name may be declared throughout all the earth*” (Exo 9:16). The word about God’s power went out to all the nations of the earth. Forty years later, when the people arrived at the east side of the Jordan to begin the conquest of the land, they found fear of the power of Jehovah among the inhabitants (Jos 2:9-10). God used this fear in many ways to accomplish His purposes in winning the land of Canaan for Israel as an inheritance.

Summary

The first nine plagues were not intended to bring the people out. God used them for other purposes. From this we learn that God is *pre-determinate*. He can use the one circumstance of the plagues upon Egypt and accomplish multiple, harmonious, and complex purposes at the same time. God has given you a will to make choices within His sovereign rule, and God perfectly accomplishes His will at the same time.²⁶ This is a great mystery, yet true according to the revelation in the Scriptures.

7. The Exodus Pictures Our Redemption

Please read Exodus 11-18.

The tenth plague was distinctly different from the first nine. It brought death to the first-born! In eastern culture, the first-born son is of extreme importance throughout his life. He occupies the attention of the parents, representing the family name and heritage. This plague was designed by God to bring His people

²⁶ See *Divine Sovereignty and Human Responsibility* by J. I. Packer; available from CHAPEL LIBRARY.

out of physical bondage and into freedom. It also beautifully typifies Christ's bringing His people out of spiritual bondage and into freedom.

And the blood shall be to you for a token upon the houses where ye are: and when I see the blood, I will pass over you.—Exodus 12:13

1. *Sacrifice.* From this tenth plague, Israel was not automatically excluded. The Passover lamb is given as the means whereby Israel shall escape this plague. The sacrifice of a lamb and the sprinkling of the blood on the doorposts provide salvation from death. Here we see pictured the grand truth that sin must be removed by sacrifice if the punishment of sin is to be avoided. How clearly this points to Christ, our Passover Lamb, Who was sacrificed to take away the sin of the world (Joh 1:29; 1Co 5:7). When God sees Christ's shed blood at Calvary, He will pass over judgment upon His people in the great Day of Judgment to come.

...that ye may know how that the LORD doth put a difference between the Egyptians and Israel.—Exodus 11:7

2. *Difference.* What is the basis for the distinction between the Egyptians and the Hebrews, between the most intense suffering and the most gracious protection? It was only in the blood of the lamb. It was either on the doorposts, or it was not.

In our day, unsaved men imagine that they are blessed when they perform well—when they are more clever or work harder, earning the rewards of achievement. Even professing Christians sometimes believe that God is blessing them because they have somehow earned His favor through their religious duties, obedience, or even the amount of their faith!

But in the Exodus, God made it clear from the very start that these are totally false concepts—untruths that blaspheme the very nature of God. The difference between the Hebrews and the Egyptians on that night had nothing to do with the Hebrews, and everything to do with God. God did not simply remove them from the effects of the plague, because there was a *moral* problem that had to be dealt with: the *sin of the people*. Their sin separated them from the perfect and holy God. God could not accept them without a sacrifice; if He were to do so, He would no longer be holy.

The blood sacrifice represented the ultimate sacrifice of the Lamb of God, Jesus Christ, upon the cross of Calvary. There the sins were paid for once and for all. The sacrifices instituted here in the Old Testament were a recognition of the sin problem that separates man from God. They were God's provision to forebear

the penalty for their sins until the actual and full payment for sin was made at the cross (Rom 3:25).

The Hebrews that night received the benefit of the blood only if they obeyed God. The only distinction between them and the Egyptians had nothing at all to do with their nationality or their relative merit before God, but everything to do with the blood. They were either in a house protected by the blood or they were not—it was that simple. In exactly the same way today, there is only one difference between you and any other human being before a holy and righteous God: you are either protected by the shed blood of Jesus Christ, or you are not.

*And ye shall keep it a feast to the LORD throughout your generations;
ye shall keep it a feast by an ordinance forever.—Exodus 12:14*

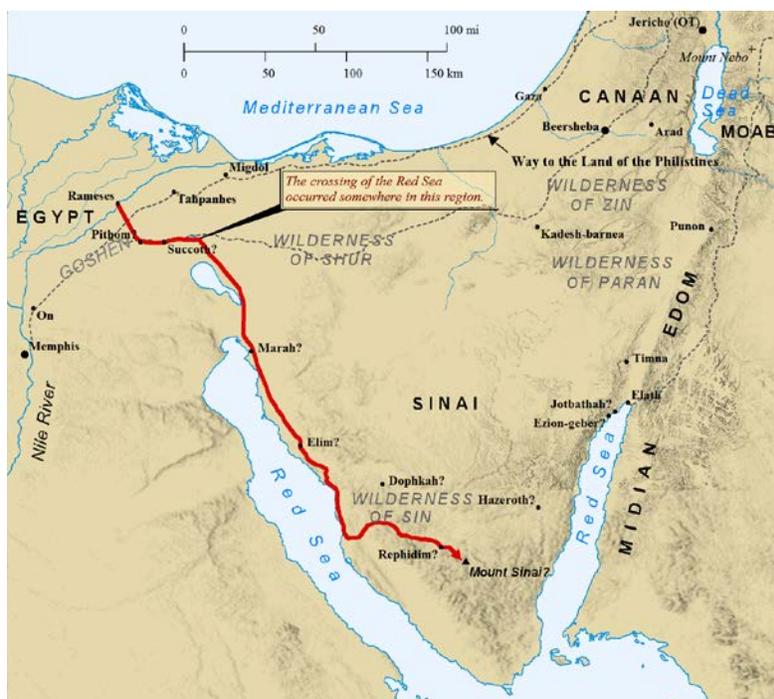
3. *Fellowship.* Fellowship is the purpose of a feast in the Old Testament. The Passover meal shows that expiation (i.e., taking away of sin) is followed by fellowship with God. It is like the peace offerings, which we shall learn about in Leviticus. It symbolizes that the eater is actually eating in God's presence. It showed the Israelites how precious they were to God.

4. *Freedom.* In the release from Egypt, we also see that the salvation of God's people includes the destruction of their enemies. This idea is present in the dreadful plagues. It comes to its climax at the Red Sea, where the Israelites are safely delivered, while Pharaoh and his army are drowned. Even though the Hebrews were set free from bondage when they left Pharaoh, they were not truly free until their enemy was destroyed.

Freedom is not just separation from an enemy; no one is ever truly free until his enemy is *destroyed*. Today, Christians enjoy true freedom from the penalty and power of sin: these were destroyed at the cross of Jesus. But we still experience the presence of sin because of the Fall, and we struggle with its temptation in our flesh. We will not be free from the presence of sin until we enter into the very presence of God.

5. *Continual.* In the story of their journey to Sinai, we learn that God does not redeem His people and then forget them. We see how He continually protects His people from their enemies and provides for all their needs.

All of these points are also true of the redemption from sin that God provides for His people through Christ. The study of the Exodus should help us to understand our salvation better and to appreciate it more.



From Egypt to Mount Sinai

Questions for personal reflection and group discussion

1. What is the purpose of the book of Exodus?
2. What promises to Abraham are fulfilled in Exodus?
3. a. What are the two most important events in the Old Testament?
b. Why are they each so important?
4. How does Moses picture Christ?
5. What does *I AM THAT I AM* mean?
6. How does God prepare gifted men for spiritual leadership?
7. How is the Passover lamb like Christ?

6

Covenant Nation Organized

Exodus, Part Two

Now therefore, if ye will obey my voice indeed, and keep my covenant, then ye shall be a peculiar treasure unto me above all people: for all the earth is mine.

Exodus 19:5

1. Purpose

The purpose of Exodus is to present the redemption of Israel and its organization as the covenant nation. We have taken note of the first step in that process. Now, in the second part of the book, we come to the formal procedure by which Israel becomes the theocratic nation. From chapter 19 to the end of Exodus, the people were at the foot of Mount Sinai for nine months, receiving the Law and the instructions for building the Tabernacle. The last event in Exodus is the assembling of the Tabernacle for the first time, almost one year after leaving Egypt.

2. God's Covenant with Israel

Please read Exodus 19.

God has brought Israel out of Egypt and down the Sinai Peninsula to Mount Sinai. This is the same place where He had called Moses and promised: "When thou hast brought forth the people out of Egypt, ye shall serve God upon this mountain" (Exo 3:12). Here also God now makes His covenant with the people.

Ye have seen what I did unto the Egyptians, and how I bare you on eagles' wings, and brought you unto myself. Now therefore, if ye will obey my voice indeed, and keep my covenant, then ye shall be a peculiar treasure unto me above all people: for all the earth is mine: And ye shall be unto me a kingdom of priests, and an holy nation.—Exodus 19:4-6

God makes the purpose of the covenant plain. It is by means of this covenant that Israel is organized into a nation. But she was not an ordinary nation. Israel was to be a God-centered nation. She would be a theocracy, a nation ruled by God.

The covenant is here presented as being voluntary. That is, Israel can choose to enter the covenant or not. If they agree to the covenant, then the condition for blessing is their obedience. Does that make this a covenant of works? Not at all. Remember that this covenant is made after the Exodus from Egypt, and that Exodus is the symbol and type of redemption. It is as a redeemed people that Israel becomes the covenant nation. The obedience required from Israel is the obedience to the redeeming God Who loved them and delivered them. Obedience flows from gratitude for His redeeming work.

There is a purpose behind this demand for obedience. It stresses the fact that the nation about to be organized is distinct from other nations. It is a theocracy. It is not man, but God Who makes the laws of Israel. Therefore, it is not man, but God Who rules. In Israel there will be no distinction between church and state. They are identical. They have the same head. The God Whom they worship is the ruler. The God Who rules them is the object of their worship.

A. “Brought you unto myself”

“Brought you unto myself” is a very important phrase for all Christians to remember. Later, the covenant is described in terms of “bringing them out of Egypt” in order to “bring them into Canaan.” But the essence of the covenant is relationship, and that relationship is given to us here: God brought the Hebrews unto Himself. God does not redeem men primarily to save them from hell—that is a secondary purpose. He redeems men primarily to remove their separation from Himself, to win them as His Bride (the Church), restoring the intimate relationship with them that was lost at the Fall.

B. “An holy nation”

“Holy” in verse six is the introduction of one of the great words of the Old Testament. God calls His people to be a *holy* people. It is exactly the same in the New Testament, where the word “saints” is translated from the Greek word for “holy ones.” The basic and very important meaning of “holy” is to be “set apart.” One of the major problems in Christianity today, however, stems from not understanding what it means to be holy.

In marriage, no one can ask for a woman’s commitment except her suitor, and a suitor asks for a commitment only from the one he chooses. In like manner, holiness can only be given by God. He alone is holy. Giving His holiness to another is something only He can do. God’s call to become “an holy nation” is an enormous opportunity for the Israelites.

Notice also that the people did not ask for this relationship with God. When God comes to you, it is not because you asked Him to come, but because He, in infinite kindness, has chosen to come. You cannot be holy unless God extends Himself to you by giving you a new heart (regeneration). The Egyptians never had a chance to be holy. They were lost in their sins because of their rebellion against God—just like the Israelites and all the rest of mankind. But God in His mercy and grace did choose Israel to become a holy nation, set apart from the rest of the world for God’s peculiar use. This was a tremendous moment for the nation of Israel.

C. Dependent upon Commitment

And all the people answered together, and said, All that the LORD hath spoken we will do.—Exodus 19:8

1. Unconditional commitment

What does it mean practically to “live for God”? We must understand that it means more than simply keeping the letter of God’s commandments. From man’s perspective, what it means to live for God is found in making an unconditional commitment to God—by saying “All that the LORD hath spoken we will do.”

When a couple says “I do” or “I will” in a marriage ceremony, they are making an unconditional commitment to each other. He commits to love her unconditionally, and she commits to follow him. The picture they have is incomplete because they simply do not know all that will happen in the future (even though God ordains and knows it completely). But even with the incomplete picture before them, the wife makes a one-time commitment to follow her husband—regardless of the later circumstances.

This is exactly what God required the people to do in the National Covenant. They should agree to follow Him unconditionally because of His proven character and His gift of redemption. They had seen first-hand His power, guidance, protection, provision, wisdom, and love. The Israelites did not know where God would lead them; they simply needed to agree to follow Him wherever He would lead. What God would require later is not important—the details were not revealed. The decision they had to make was whether or not they would simply commit to follow Him.

If the wife wanted to know all the details of future benefits, and made her decision based upon whether the benefits would outweigh the negatives, she would not be marrying him, but rather a set of conditions. This is the sad state of secular marriage today in Western culture, where pre-marital agreements often define as much as possible the expected conditions. It becomes a breakable contract rather than a covenant relationship for life.

The National Covenant, then, is both conditional and unconditional. The blessings were conditional: if the Israelites continued in relationship to God, then He would protect, guide, and provide for them in a special way. If they did not, then He would chasten them in order to bring them to repentance. But the covenant relationship itself is unconditional. Once it is entered into, it can never be broken. So it is with believers in the New Covenant today.

2. Love-relationship

The biblical concept for marriage is wholehearted commitment to one another without reservation. It is not commitment to a particular condition or to what the other can do for you, but rather it is commitment to the person forever. The open fellowship and abundant life with God that Adam lost at the Fall, is to be restored in covenant relationship with God!

The National Covenant teaches us that relationship to God is above all *personal*. It is not simply a governmental relationship, where you have an authority over you which kindly provides certain protection and services when you agree as a citizen to obey its laws in return. It is not a business deal, where you agree to fulfill certain conditions and you get some benefits in return. It is not a contract you negotiate. If you apply these concepts to God, you have entered into idolatry! Idolatry is where you agree to follow your god on the condition that he will give you what you want. Sadly, this is the state of much of professing Christianity today. The biblical relationship with the true God is filled with many responsibilities, but the responsibilities *flow out* from the relationship—they are not the *basis* for it.

Everything you do in the Christian life is important; everything has an impact on your personal relationship with God. The responsibilities of that relationship must influence every thought, word, decision, and action. It requires all of your heart, all of the time, forever. May each true child of God follow after Him no matter what the cost, because we have a clear sense of belonging to Him in an eternal, personal, covenantal love-relationship.

3. The Law of God

Please read Exodus 20-24.

A. The Ten Commandments

This close union of love-relationship, religion, and government is found even in the Ten Commandments. These commandments are broad principles. They are applicable far beyond the borders of Israel. They are the sum of God's require-

ments for all of mankind.²⁷ But notice how they begin, “I am the LORD thy God, which have brought thee out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage” (Exo 20:2). The call to obey these commandments is based upon what God has done for His people.

The Ten Commandments are for all men in every age. They are ethical standards that flow from the very nature of God Himself. When properly understood—as Jesus understood and explained them—they cover all of life and demand nothing less than perfect love and perfect obedience to God. They tell us how we are to worship God and how we are to treat our fellow men. They are broad principles that apply to all the situations of our lives.

Because the commandments are broad and general, and the problems of life are so practical and specific, we must be discerning to apply the principles to various situations of life. As Christians, we are responsible for doing this for ourselves, because we have God’s Word as our guide and the Holy Spirit as our teacher. But in the young theocratic nation, it was necessary for God to spell out in detail just how the commandments were to be applied to Israel’s life.

So God did not give Israel just the unchangeable moral law—that is, the Ten Commandments, the standard of right and wrong. He also gave the civil law and the ceremonial law. The civil law contains God’s rules for Israel’s social life. The ceremonial law contains God’s rules for Israel’s worship. But in Israel, life and worship were closely united. Therefore, we often find the ceremonial and the civil laws presented together. Bible students make the distinction to aid understanding, but the Bible simply presents them all together as the ordinances of God. The whole of the Law—the moral, civil, and ceremonial laws—are useful to Christians today in showing us the character of God and how He views the world.

In the midst of the giving of the Law, we find the first use of “Lord GOD” (Exo 23:17), a name of God used often in the Scriptures (Deu 3:24; Jos 7:7; 1Ki 2:26; Eze 2:4; etc.). “Lord” is the Hebrew *Adon* (which means lord, master, or ruler), a shortened form of *Adonai*, which also appears often in the Scriptures. “GOD” is the Hebrew *Jehovah* (derived from YHWH), the self-existing one or “I AM THAT I AM” (Exo 3:14), which is often translated as “LORD” (see chapter 5 section 4, “The Name of God”). So the name of God, YHWH, is translated both as LORD and GOD, and is written in capitals in the KJV and other translations to indicate this most sacred name.

²⁷ See *The Ten Commandments from the Westminster Larger Catechism* for many insights regarding applications to all of life; and *The Purpose of the Law* (evangelistic tract); both available from CHAPEL LIBRARY.

B. The Essence of the Law

God makes clear that the essence of the covenant was love for Him resulting in total commitment to Him. By the time Jesus Christ was born into the world, the Pharisees had missed this completely. They had codified the commands of God's Law (numbering approximately 600), and added 6,000 more of their own rules in an attempt to be certain that they would not violate the 600! Rule-keeping became their way of being "holy"—and it was an abomination to God (*see* Mat 23)! God did not redeem men in order to get "workers" or "rule-keepers"—if rule-keeping were the issue, men would have a right to be proud of themselves. No, God redeemed men to form His Church, so that He might fellowship with His people (Rev 3:20).

What, then, is the heart of the Law? God tells us twice in the Scriptures, in both the Old and New Testaments.

Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like unto it, Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself. On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets.—Matthew 22:37-40

(quoting from Deuteronomy 6:4-5 and Leviticus 19:18)

When Jesus said all the Law and the prophets "hang" on these statements, He meant that they were the foundation for all the rest of what is written for our instruction in how to walk with God in a holy life. How do you joyfully obey God's commands every day? You do it by maintaining love for God and love for your neighbor.

When God covenanted with Israel to make them a holy nation, then they were no longer like any other people on the face of the earth. They were in a unique relationship that carried both privileges and responsibilities for maintaining the relationship. No one else had those responsibilities, because they were not in the same privileged relationship. It was just that simple.

4. The Tabernacle

A. Purpose

Please read Exodus 25.

And let them make me a sanctuary; that I may dwell among them. According to all that I shew thee, after the pattern of the tabernacle.—Exodus 25:8-9

In the theocratic nation, it was necessary that the worship of God should be central in all of life. In fact, if God had not given them their form of worship, they would not have become a truly theocratic nation. The giving of the instruction for building the Tabernacle is closely connected with the giving of the Law. In the giving of the Law, the God Who redeemed His people from bondage asserts His right to rule them. In the giving of the Tabernacle, the God Who is their ruler asserts His right to declare how He shall be worshipped.

The Tabernacle lies at the center of all Old Testament worship. The Temple was built later as a permanent sanctuary, built on the pattern of the Tabernacle. We can get some idea of the purpose of the Tabernacle by the names that are given to it. It is called:

“The dwelling place,” to signify that here God dwells among His people and is truly their God.

“The tent of meeting,” to show that here God meets with His people and has fellowship with them.

“The tent of testimony,” because it testifies constantly to the covenant that God had made with His people.

“The holy place,” because it is set apart from everything else, because God is present there. It is to be viewed with reverent awe, and God’s ordinances concerning it are to be most carefully obeyed.

Ever since the Fall, God appeared to have been distant from men. He is omnipresent,²⁸ but His visible presence was never seen except on very rare occasions. After the people entered into His covenant, God’s first action was to manifest²⁹ His presence among them in the Shekinah Glory.³⁰ This was not the place where God

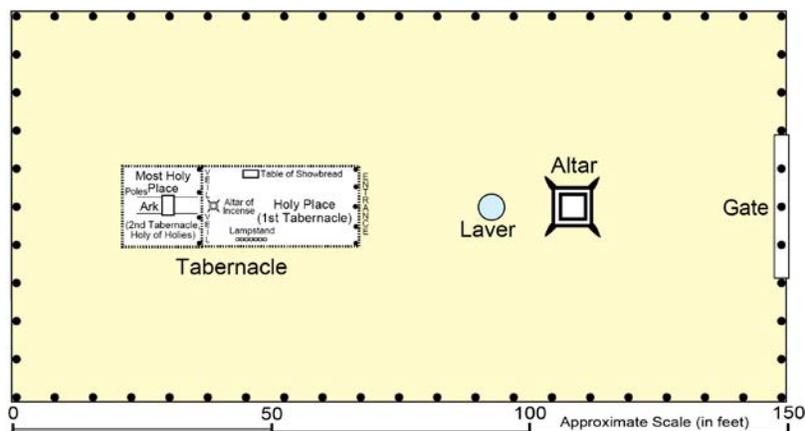
²⁸ **omnipresent** – to be present everywhere at the same time, with no exceptions.

²⁹ **manifest** – make visible; reveal.

³⁰ **Shekinah Glory** – glory of God made visible to the human eye in the form of radiant light. It first appeared in the Exodus as a pillar of cloud by day and of fire by night (Exo 13:21-22). Later it covered Sinai (Exo 24:16), filled the Tabernacle (Exo 40:34-35), and filled the Temple (1Ki 8:11). Significantly, Ezekiel pictured its departure because of sin (Eze 10:18). After a long absence, the Shekinah Glory reappeared in Christ at the transfiguration (Mat

would “live,” because He exists everywhere. It is rather the place where His *presence* was made visible. No one since Adam and Eve had ever had the experience of God’s visible presence in the midst of His people in this way.

God manifested His presence among the people by dwelling in the Tabernacle. His glory was visible and seen. For the first time, the people had an established way to communicate with and learn from God. One noteworthy aspect of this is that the pillar of cloud was in the center of the camp directly above the Most Holy Place; it was seen continually by over two million people. When the cloud moved, the people moved (Exo 40:36).



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The Tabernacle

The outer wall of the Tabernacle surrounded a courtyard that was about 75 feet wide and 150 feet long. This was not very large, half the size of a football field. At the rear of the courtyard was the tent that covered two chambers. The first chamber was the Holy Place, about 15 feet wide and 30 feet long; it was in front of the Most Holy Place (also called the Holy of Holies), which formed a perfect cube about 15 feet wide, 15 feet long, and 15 feet high.³¹

B. The Priests

The New Testament tells us that all believers in Jesus Christ have become a royal priesthood (1Pe 2:5, 9; Rev 1:6). The Christian can approach God directly through Jesus Christ, our High Priest, and be heard; he can fellowship with God person to person. But in the Old Testament, someone had to go between the sinner and God.

17:5).

³¹ In the metric system: the Tabernacle – 23 x 46 meters; the Holy Place – 4.5 x 9 meters; the Most Holy Place – a 4.5 meter cube.

A priest is a man who stands before God on behalf of a man. He is the representative of that man before God. The people of the Old Testament never approached God directly in worship. They all understood that God's prescribed way of approach was through another, and that this way of approach could never be by-passed.

The worship ritual in the Tabernacle was performed by the priests. God had promised to make Israel a kingdom of priests (Exo 19:6), but she had not yet attained to that position; they were not yet sufficiently advanced spiritually to be allowed to enter the house of God. So God appointed a group of Israelites, taken from the tribe of Levi, to represent their brethren and serve as priests. Not everyone in the tribe of Levi was a priest, but everyone who was a priest was from this tribe. They were given the responsibility of carrying out the ritual of worship on behalf of their fellow Israelites. They were mediators between God and man. In this they were types of Christ, the "one mediator"³² between God and men" (1Ti 2:5).

C. The Typical Meaning of the Tabernacle

The Tabernacle was the divinely appointed place of worship for Israel. It was the place where God dwelt with His people, and they could fellowship with Him. The Tabernacle has a typical meaning as well. It finds its New Testament reference in Christ. John 1:14 reads literally, "And the Word was made flesh and [tabernacled] among us." In Christ we see God dwelling among men in the form of man. Christ did not stop dwelling among men when He ascended into heaven. He still dwells in His Church by His Spirit. And in Revelation, when John pictures the perfect consummation of God's redemption, it is introduced by the angel cry, "Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men" (Rev 21:3). This is what the Tabernacle typifies: the perfect fellowship of God and His people. In New Testament times, this is the fellowship of Christ and His Church.

³² **mediator** – go-between; "It pleased God in His eternal purpose, to choose and ordain the Lord Jesus His only begotten Son, according to the Covenant made between them both, to be the Mediator between God and Man; the Prophet, Priest and King; Head and Savior of His Church, the heir of all things, and judge of the world: Unto whom He did from all Eternity give a people to be His seed, and to be by Him in time redeemed, called, justified, sanctified, and glorified." (1689 *London Baptist Confession* 8.1) See also *Free Grace Broadcaster* 183 "Christ the Mediator"; both available from CHAPEL LIBRARY.

D. The Furniture

1. The Furniture in the Court

The altar of burnt offering was the focal point of Israel's worship. Here the sacrifices and offerings were brought. This altar can represent only one thing. It is the Old Testament symbol of the sacrifice of Christ for the sins of His people.

For if the blood of bulls and of goats, and the ashes of a heifer sprinkling the unclean, sanctifieth to the purifying of the flesh: How much more shall the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without spot to God, purge your conscience from dead works to serve the living God?—Hebrews 9:13-14

Also in the court was the brass laver, where the priests washed their hands and feet before entering the Tabernacle or serving at the altar. This washing signified that they were purified, and therefore able to deal with holy objects. So, too, there must be a purification of God's people today if they are to worship Him properly. No longer is there a distinct order of priests. Through Christ all Christians have been made priests. But we still need to be purified. This is done "by the washing of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Ghost" (Ti 3:5). The brass laver symbolizes and typifies the cleansing work of the Holy Spirit, beginning with regeneration³³ and including our sanctification.³⁴ By this work the sacrifice of Christ is applied to us individually, and we are prepared to fellowship with God.

2. The Furniture in the Holy Place

In the holy place we find the golden lampstand, the table of showbread, and the altar of incense. Of these three, the altar of incense stood closest to the veil, behind which lay the Most Holy Place. Here, at the very entrance to the Most Holy Place, incense was burned morning and evening using live coals plucked from the fire of the brass altar. The symbolic meaning of this was evident even to the Old Testament saints. "Let my prayer be set forth before thee as incense," prays David (Psa 141:2). And in Revelation, the incense is connected with the prayers of the saints. This is also its significance for us. Prayer is "the chief part of the thankfulness that God requires of us" (*Heidelberg Catechism*³⁵). It is part of our worship of God. In fact it is that part of our worship in which we draw nearest to God.

³³ **regeneration** – God's act of creating new life in a sinner by the power of the Holy Spirit, resulting in repentance and faith in Christ; the new birth.

³⁴ **sanctification** – "Sanctification is the work of God's Spirit whereby we are renewed in the whole man after the image of God and are enabled more and more to die to sin and live to righteousness." (*Spurgeon's Catechism*, Q. 34) See also *Free Grace Broadcaster* 215 "Sanctification"; both available from CHAPEL LIBRARY.

³⁵ *Heidelberg Catechism* (1563) – one of the most influential of the Reformation catechisms,

The table of showbread stood along the north wall of the sanctuary. On it in two piles were twelve loaves of “presentation bread.” On each pile was a jar of frankincense. Most likely there were also two jars of wine. These were all placed on the table on the morning of the Sabbath and remained there until the next Sabbath. What did they mean? They represented the fruits of the land. To the Israelite, they symbolized the fruits of righteousness that he was to produce. And this is also what they typify for us. This is what we bring as an offering to God. The symbolism does not exclude the material gifts we bring to God as part of our worship. But the emphasis is on that which makes the gifts worthwhile: a life which is lived to God’s glory.

The golden candlestick—or more accurately, the golden lampstand—was made of pure gold. It held seven golden lamps in which olive oil was burned. These were lit every night, so that there would always be illumination in the house of God. The symbolism of the lampstand is most difficult. Probably it typifies the light of truth that shines forth from us and brings glory to God. Then it would picture our worship of God through witnessing, both with our life and our lips.

3. The Furniture in the Most Holy Place

The only article of furniture in the Most Holy Place was the Ark of the Covenant. This was a box of wood covered with gold. On its top was a slab of solid gold, from which rose the figures of two cherubim. This was called the mercy seat. Above the mercy seat was a pillar of fire, which symbolized the presence of God. This was the fact to which all the Tabernacle pointed: God dwelt among His people. It symbolized that they could enter into the very presence of God and find mercy.

But not all Israel could enter the Most Holy Place. Not even all the priests could enter, but only the high priest, once a year. When he came in, he had to come with blood, in order to obtain forgiveness. This pointed forward to Christ, the great High Priest, Who entered into the very presence of God in heaven with His own blood shed for us, as the author of Hebrews indicates (Heb 9:12). When His work is fully completed and we are glorified with Him, we ourselves shall stand in the presence of God Almighty. So the Ark of the Covenant is the type of our current entrance into God’s presence “in Christ.” And it is the type of the coming glory, when we shall be with Him for all eternity.

which takes the form of a series of questions and answers for use in teaching Christian doctrine.

5. The Covenant Nation's Tragic Beginning

Please read Exodus 32-34, 40.

The giving of the Law and the giving of the Tabernacle were events of the utmost importance. Coupled with the redemption from Egypt, they form the foundation for all the national life of Israel. Henceforth Israel was *the* covenant nation, chosen from among all the nations of earth to serve the living God. But she was still far from the theocratic ideal, in which every Israelite would gladly serve Jehovah and Him alone. No sooner had she been constituted as the covenant nation, than the people fell into sin. The tragic event with the golden calf in Exodus 32-34 proves again that God did *not* make this covenant with the people of Israel because they were worthy, but because God had chosen them in His sovereign love.

When the golden calf had been destroyed, when Israel had been punished, when Moses had obtained forgiveness for the people, then the Tabernacle was built. And the book closes on a glorious note: "the glory of the LORD filled the tabernacle" (Exo 40:34). The covenant God takes up His residence with the covenant nation.

Questions for personal reflection and group discussion

1. What was the purpose of the covenant God made with Israel?
2. What was the role of obedience in the covenant?
3. Describe the Ten Commandments.
4. What is the heart of the Law?
5. How did God manifest His presence among the Israelites?
6. Describe the role and responsibilities of the priests.
7. What is the typical meaning of the Tabernacle?
8. a. What purpose did the altar of burnt offering serve?
b. What is its typical meaning?
9. a. Describe the Ark of the Covenant.
b. What is the typical meaning?

7

Covenant Nation's Laws

Leviticus

And ye shall be holy unto me: for I the LORD am holy, and have severed you from other people, that ye should be mine.

Leviticus 20:26

1. Purpose

Please read Leviticus 1-5.

The name *Leviticus* is derived from the tribe of Levi, one of the twelve sons of Jacob, whose descendants were chosen by God to be priests in Israel. The book of Leviticus does not advance the progression of the history of the nation. It is not a history book, but a legal book. It contains the laws that God gave to His covenant nation. Having been formally organized as the theocracy, Israel now needed to receive her laws from her divine ruler.

When the Tabernacle was first assembled, it was immediately put into service for the worship of God. The Tabernacle showed the people *how God would dwell in their midst* as He manifested His presence among them. Leviticus showed *how people must worship* in the Tabernacle through sacrifice. But there is also a larger principle here: Leviticus also shows all of us *how people who have God in their midst must walk in holiness*—so that they could worship aright and enjoy the unique experience of fellowship with God. This is the purpose of Leviticus.

There are two key words used to describe how a person can actually and truly fellowship with the living God: *sacrifice* and *holiness*. Although some of the Levitical laws deal with both areas, generally the laws in the first half of the book deal with sacrifice, and those in the last half deal with holiness. Sacrifice provides access to God, but the privilege of access requires the responsibility of holiness in return. Everywhere in Leviticus is the clear instruction that Israel can worship rightly only when she lives rightly.

In order to understand sacrifice and worship in Israel, we must begin by considering the concept of holiness. Holiness is the focus of the second half of Leviti-

cus, but we consider it first because it is foundational to understanding the principle of sacrifice.

The outline for Leviticus is in two parts.

- | | | |
|--------------------------|-----------------|------------------|
| I. Laws for holy worship | Leviticus 1-16 | <i>sacrifice</i> |
| II. Laws for holy living | Leviticus 17-27 | <i>holiness</i> |

2. Holiness

A. God's Holiness

In the English language, there are the words “holy” and “holiness,” but there is no verb form of “to make holy.” Therefore we also have the verb “sanctify” and its derivatives: one who is holy is “sanctified”; the process of becoming holy is “sanctification”; a man who is holy is a “saint”; a place that is holy is a “sanctuary.” The Bible as translated into English uses all these words to communicate the concept of “holiness.”

It is extremely important that we understand what the Bible says about holiness, so that we might think about it the same way that God does. But holiness is never defined in the Scriptures per se; instead, it is described through examples. Our concept of holiness must begin with God, for He is the only one Who is ultimately holy. God's holiness involves His transcendence and His perfect moral purity.

To be *transcendent* means that He is completely above and different from everything else that exists (Isa 55:9). This is why God commands us to make no “image” of Him (Exo 20:4)—any image that attempts to represent God is totally insufficient and therefore terribly in error. He is solitary and sovereign in His Godhood. At no point is His authority ever in question or His power diminished.

God is also perfectly *morally pure*. There is no sin mixed in, not even in the smallest fraction. He has complete moral uprightness. This quality alone would be enough to elevate Him to be totally above everything else.

B. Our Holiness

And ye shall be holy unto me: for I the LORD am holy, and have severed you [i.e., set you apart] from other people, that ye should be mine.—Leviticus 20:26

God's holiness is both the reason and the example for Israel's holiness. All God's people are called to be holy. Chapters 17 through 27 are known as the “Holiness Code,” because the word *holiness* appears some 50 times in them.

For something to be holy, it must meet three conditions.

1. *Chosen by God*

In order to be holy, one has to be chosen by God: “ye shall be holy *unto me*.” In fact, those chosen to be holy become so only *because* God has chosen them. God chose Abraham; we do not know why—it was only God’s sovereign choice. God also chose Aaron and the Levites to be holy as priests. In the same way, when God calls someone to Himself today to come to salvation, that person is chosen to become a part of God’s royal priesthood (1Pe 2:9): he is chosen and called to be holy.

God’s quality of moral purity requires Him to ensure that everything around Him be holy. Therefore, the privilege of being chosen by God carries with it the great responsibility actually to *be holy*. The high privilege of being chosen creates this moral obligation.

Remembering that God’s sovereign choice is the foundation for holiness is very important. When you drift away from it, spiritual pride begins to set in—you think you are special because of something you have somehow achieved. And it is at this point that your whole conception of holiness becomes corrupted.

2. *Cleansed through Sacrifice*

Throughout all of Scripture, whenever something is made holy, it must first be cleansed. Something polluted requires cleansing before it can belong to God. Then Scriptures reveal that God’s way of setting apart for His use (sanctifying) is by blood sacrifice—He *always* requires a sacrifice to be made for making holy. The sacrifice is God’s way of dealing with defilement—the corruption that entered everything at the Fall.

At the Passover, when the people were to be set apart by coming out of bondage, there was a sacrifice. At the National Covenant, when the people entered into covenant to become God’s people, there was a sacrifice. When the Tabernacle was completed, there was a sacrifice. When the articles in the Tabernacle were inaugurated for use, there was a sacrifice. When Aaron was appointed as high priest, there was a sacrifice. And so it is throughout the rest of the Old Testament. Whenever God chooses something to be holy, a sacrifice is made to consecrate it unto God.

3. *Use Determined by God*

Of course, everything on earth belongs to God. But when something is set apart for God’s peculiar possession, He “owns” it in a special way: “ye shall be holy *unto me*: for I...have severed you [i.e., set you apart] from other people, that *ye should be mine*.” He has the right to govern what is holy unto Him; He specifies how it is to be used.

For example, the nation of Israel belonged to God; therefore God had the right to regulate everything about their life as a nation. For Israel to be holy meant that the people must live however God told them to live. Even the formula for the incense and the Tabernacle articles and utensils were specified and regulated by God.

The key is this: God is the one who determines the regulations for use of the holy things, because they are His. When you treat holy things the way God says to treat them, it is an act of holiness.

Those who do come to God belong to Him. They are called “saints”: God’s “holily [or sanctified] ones.” Because Christians become God’s peculiar possession, He has the right to regulate everything about their lives. Men make two errors about holiness. 1) They say they believe God, but they disregard His rules for holy living. But you cannot have salvation without the resulting holiness. The two always go together. 2) They try to become holy by attempting to make themselves holy, by keeping all sorts of rules that are not commanded in Scripture. Their motive at its root is self-glory, which only leads to legalism, pride, and the condemnation of God—not holiness. Both these responses to holiness are serious sins.

Holiness at the root involves inward attitudes as specified by God. He said to “love one another” (Joh 13:34) and to “rejoice always” (Phi 4:4). As you deal with holiness over time, you will see that your inward attitudes of love, joy, kindness, gentleness, gratitude, etc. are the greater part of holiness, because from these will flow holy behavior. Holiness is following God’s instructions (in His Word) for His holy ones, out of a motive of love for Him. Because of this, the key focus in holiness is inward submission to God’s authority over us as the One Who makes us holy.

C. The Vocabulary of Holiness

*And that ye may put difference between holy and unholy,
and between unclean and clean.—Leviticus 10:10*

In Leviticus, the priests are told both how to present the sacrifices and how to maintain holiness.

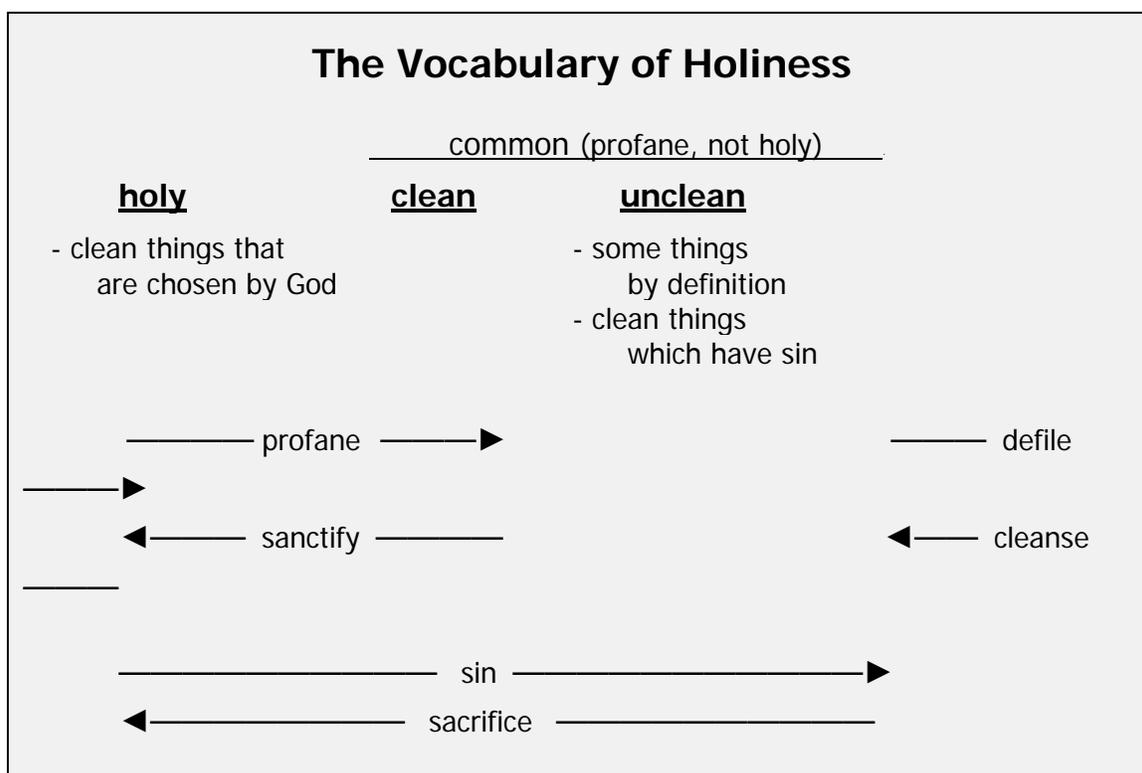
1. Presenting the Sacrifices

Please read Leviticus 10.

It was the priests’ job to show the people what is clean versus unclean, and what is holy versus profane.

In Leviticus 10:10, there are four different root words used in the original Hebrew language: *holy*, *profane* (i.e., *unholy*), *clean*, and *unclean*. These words are not parallel: clean things are not holy, and profane things are not necessarily un-

clean. Because these words are used often in the Old Testament, it is important to our understanding of biblical holiness that we clearly see the distinctions in their meanings.³⁶



The words of Leviticus 10:10 describe three basic categories: *holy things*, and common things that are *clean* or *unclean*.

a. Common. Fundamentally, all things are “common”; they are not holy. The only things that are not common are those which are given the privilege of being made holy. Common things are not necessarily “defiled”; to be common is just the general state of all ordinary things. All common things are in one of two conditions: clean or unclean.

b. Clean. The bulk of common things in the Old Testament were *clean*. They consisted of all those common things that were not unclean.

c. Unclean. There were two ways something could be *unclean*. First, some things were unclean *by definition*, for example birds of prey, fish that eat off the bottom, and swine. These things were always unclean, and could not be made

³⁶ Chart abstracted from G. J. Wenham, *New International Commentary, Leviticus* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co.; 1979).

clean. To be clear, we are no longer under the Old Testament dietary or ceremonial laws. In the New Testament, all food was declared by God to be clean (Act 10:11-16). The regulations we are considering here, however, were not for health: they were for holiness. God gave them to teach Israel about Himself: that they must be set apart in order to be holy, because one aspect of God's being holy is that He Himself is set apart.

Second, and more importantly, anything could be made unclean *by defilement*. Something could become defiled in either of two ways: sickness or sin. The emphasis upon sin in the Scriptures indicates that to be defiled by *sin* was by far the more serious occurrence among the people. They often came to the Tabernacle to be cleansed because they had defiled themselves. To be defiled by *sickness* included not only specific diseases, but also childbirth or death—a corpse was unclean, and touching a corpse also made *you* unclean.

Becoming unclean by sickness did not involve sin, but both conditions of uncleanness had the same consequence: all those who were unclean were restricted from the ceremonial system (the feasts and sacrifices) until they could be made clean. The reason for this was to teach Israel that there was a specific way to approach and deal with God. To be holy you had to follow His ways on His terms.³⁷

d. Holy. When something was taken out of the common things and set apart for God's use, it became *holy*. It is a great mystery why God chooses some things, and not others, to be made holy. But it is as clear as crystal why He does so by His own choice: He wants it to be based solely on Him, and not at all in any way whatsoever on the merit of the thing chosen—if it were, then it would detract from God's glory.

2. Maintaining Holiness

Neither shall ye make yourselves unclean with them, that ye should be defiled thereby. For I am the LORD your God: ye shall therefore sanctify yourselves, and ye shall be holy; for I am holy: neither shall ye defile yourselves.—Leviticus 11:43-44

And he that is to be cleansed shall wash his clothes.—Leviticus 14:8

They shall therefore keep mine ordinance, lest they bear sin for it, and die therefore, if they profane it: I the LORD do sanctify them.—Leviticus 22:9

³⁷ Salvation is and always has been by faith alone. Even in the Old Testament, the faith of the saints was hidden in the perfect sacrifice of Jesus Christ once for all (Rom 3:21-26). Therefore, even a leper in Old Testament times was not excluded from salvation, for it was by faith, then as now.

Something chosen to be *holy* is no longer *common*. But holiness, unlike salvation, is not a permanent state. Because life is lived in the midst of a fallen world, holy things can be defiled. So there is another vocabulary to describe the changes that can occur among the holy, clean, and unclean things, when something moves from one category to another.

a. Defile. A clean thing became unclean when it was *defiled*, either by sin or sickness. Once it was defiled, it was excluded from the nation's ceremonial life until made clean.

b. Cleanse. In order to become holy, something unclean had first of all to be *cleansed*. This was true whether it had become unclean by sin or sickness. Things were cleansed by various washings and/or by sacrifice. The priests were responsible for ensuring that no unclean things were presented for sacrifice.

c. Sanctify. Once something was made clean, then and only then could it be made holy. The process of moving from clean to holy was to *sanctify*. God often says, "Sanctify unto me..." (Lev 11:44; 21:15; etc.). It means to set apart from the common to be made holy for God's use.

d. Profane. You can also go the other direction, away from holiness. When you take something that is holy and do not treat it according to God's instructions, then you *profane* it.

When Aaron's two sons brought in "strange fire" (Lev 10:1), they were immediately judged by God. Bringing fire from one place to another was not a sin. But when they brought strange fire into the holy Tabernacle, fire that had not been set apart according to God's way, they not only violated a command of God not to bring it in, they also were profaning the holy altar that had been consecrated to God.³⁸

Throughout the Old Testament, God judged the sin of profaning His holy things much more severely than other sins. This is because He has granted an enormous privilege to His chosen people. To violate that privilege and responsibility is a very serious offense against God.

This was so important that, in the midst of God's instructions to the covenant nation, He also issued prophetic warnings. The nation must not break its covenant with God, or God will thrust them out of the Promised Land!

³⁸ Leviticus 10 is one of many passages that establish the Regulative Principle of Worship, which can be stated as follows: "We must have a clear biblical command or precedent, expressed or implied, for all we introduce into the worship of the church"—*Alan Cairns, Dictionary of Theological Terms*. For New Testament worship the Bible indicates that God has authorized and approves of prayer, singing, reading of the Scriptures, and preaching.

Ye shall therefore keep my statutes and my judgments, and shall not commit any of these abominations; neither any of your own nation, nor any stranger that sojourneth among you... That the land spue not you out also, when ye defile it, as it spued out the nations that were before you.—Leviticus 18:26, 28

e. *Sacrifice*. Finally, anytime something defiled was to be cleansed, there had to be a sacrifice. Sin defiles you; sacrifice restores you. Let us understand more about the crucial role of sacrifice.

3. Sacrifice

And almost all things are by the law purged with blood; and without shedding of blood is no remission [i.e., forgiveness].—Hebrews 9:22

A. Fourth Principle: Sacrifice

In Genesis, we saw the first three of the five major principles that God teaches us in the Old Testament. He gives these so that we may fully understand the new covenant in Christ Jesus as shown in the pages of the New Testament. These principles prepare us for the full revelation of Christ. They are:

1. *The Majesty and Glory of God*, as revealed in Creation.
2. *The Reality and Nature of Sin*, as revealed in the Fall.
3. *The Principle of Faith*, as revealed in the life of Abraham.

The fourth principle is *The Principle of Sacrifice*. This principle can be stated briefly: The basis for fellowship with God is sacrifice. This is because God is holy—no one can approach Him unless they are made holy, by cleansing from sin and being set apart for Him. Sacrifice is the only way for you to be made holy, because death is God's prescribed penalty for sin (Gen 2:17; Rom 6:23). Having the penalty for your sin paid is the only way for you to approach the holy God and fellowship with Him.

B. Atonement

Please read Leviticus 17.

For the life of the flesh is in the blood: and I have given it to you upon the altar to make an atonement for your souls: for it is the blood that maketh an atonement for the soul.—Leviticus 17:11

Now, how does sacrifice make men holy? Leviticus 17:11 states the principle of sacrifice for us in terms of *atonement*. Atonement is through blood. Making

atonement through blood is the reason sacrifices are made. But why is atonement only through the blood? And what is atonement? Why is it even necessary?

Leviticus chapter 17 is given to answer these questions. In chapters 1 to 10, we have a description of the various offerings to be made. In chapters 11 to 15, the priests' duties are described. Chapter 16 is a description of the Day of Atonement. And chapter 17 tells us why all this is necessary.

God was making of them a nation, a holy nation to be His chosen treasure. God was taking two million people who were used to doing things in their own way, and teaching them to do things in His way—to worship Him in only one way, in the way He prescribed.

“Atonement” in the Bible is a *deliverance from sin*. Why is deliverance from sin necessary? Remember that in Genesis chapter two, God gave Adam but one limitation on his freedom to rule the earth: not to eat the fruit from one particular tree. God told Adam that if he did so, the consequence would be his death. “For in the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die” (Gen 2:17). When man sins, he forfeits his life—it is that simple. God said, “The soul that sinneth, it shall die” (Eze 18:20). God did this in order to be consistent with His holy and pure nature, which is completely without sin.

If this were the end of God's Word, each of us would be in a hopeless condition. There is no way out; we cannot pay the price of death to rescue ourselves from death. The One we have offended is the only one who can help us!

C. About Sacrifice

Let us understand what the Bible tells us about the sacrifice for sin.

1. *Any single sin is enough to condemn you* (Jam 2:10).
2. *All have sinned* (Rom 3:23).
3. *The penalty for sin is death* (Rom 6:23). God hates sin. He lives and “breathes” righteousness with every fiber of His being. He has a settled, abiding, unchanging hatred toward sin. Beyond this, we must realize that God is perfectly holy. His very nature demands that all sin be removed from His presence. Therefore God cannot adjust to sin. He cannot accept just a little sin and let it be OK. The penalty for sin must be death.
4. *The life to be forfeited (through death) is represented by blood*. In Leviticus 17:11, we are told, “For the life of the flesh is in the blood...for *it is the blood* that maketh an atonement for the soul.” This is why the blood is so precious: the life is in the blood. Blood is the representation of life in a man, and the shedding of blood is the evidence that the life has been given. That is why God specified to Israel that there was to be no eating of blood and that no blood was to be shed away from the Tabernacle.

5. *It is possible for another to pay the price for your life in your place.* This is substitution. We do not fully understand why God has made this possible to be so, but it is none the less true. His ways are higher than our ways (Isa 55:9). “I have given it [i.e., the substitutionary sacrifice] to you upon the altar to make an atonement for your souls: for it is the blood [i.e., payment of the substitute’s life] that maketh an atonement for the soul” (Lev 17:11b).

God cannot forgive a debt directly by excusing it through His mercy; He cannot just ignore it. His moral justice requires that the debt and a payment for the debt be in balance. Therefore, every sin must have a payment. God, in order to restore fellowship with those deserving death, declares that He will accept the payment of a substitute.

6. *For the forgiveness of His people, God Himself initiates the payment that is due.* “For the life of the flesh is in the blood: and *I have given it* to you upon the altar to make an atonement for your souls: for it is the blood that maketh an atonement for the soul” (Lev 17:11). This is the amazing fact of the principle of sacrifice: God is the initiator. He makes a way for a substitute payment to be made on our behalf.

7. *Man receives the substitute payment by identification.* The sacrifice is identified with the person offering the sacrifice. When the sacrifice dies, it is as if the person dies. If the person has “died” (via his identification with the death of the sacrifice), then the death penalty due for his sin has been paid. In this way, the death of the sacrifice is a substitute for the death of the person. The person offering the sacrifice receives the payment for his sins—through the death of the sacrifice by substitution.

8. *Like for like.* In the Old Testament, an animal was chosen to shed its blood (i.e., give its life) for a man’s sin. Now we must ask, how can a bird or a lamb pay the price for a man? The answer is simple: *it cannot do so!* The Bible never says the animal sacrifice pays the penalty due. The blood is no more valuable than the life it represents, and animals have no moral nature as made in the image of God. Therefore the life of an animal cannot actually pay the penalty due for a man. The animal sacrifices of the Old Testament were only a temporary covering until a permanent substitute appeared.

D. Acceptable Sacrifice

What then constitutes an acceptable blood sacrifice for the sins of a man—one that would be a permanent payment and not just a temporary covering?

1. *It must be of equal value to what is owed.* It must in fact be a man. But each and every man has sinned many times, and thus has no merit to pay for the sins of another.

2. *It must be a perfect man.* He must have no impurity in order to be an acceptable sacrifice; in other words, he must be completely without sin.

3. *It must somehow be great enough to account for all men.* The only way this could be accomplished is by a man who was also of infinite value: the man somehow would have to be a man and also to be divine. As we shall see, this can only be Jesus Christ, the perfect sacrifice of God.

4. The Offerings

In Exodus we saw that Israel received the Tabernacle as the place where she should worship Jehovah. We saw how every part of the Tabernacle was designed to teach Israel—and us too—how sinful man is to have fellowship with God. In Leviticus we find directions given regarding the sacrifices, which were the primary means of worship in the Tabernacle.

God commanded that Israel worship Him through five classes of offerings: the burnt offering, the meal offering, the peace offering, the sin offering, and the trespass offering. Each of these was to be offered under certain conditions. Each had a special meaning. Each can teach us something about our fellowship with God.

A. The Burnt Offering

The burnt offering is mentioned first because it was the most common. It was offered twice daily for all Israel as part of the regular Tabernacle worship. Any Israelite might also voluntarily bring a burnt offering. Since the other offerings share many of the elements of the burnt offering, we shall examine it more fully than the others.

The worshipper who came to present a burnt offering had to bring with him an animal. A bullock, a sheep, or a goat was permitted. In case of poverty, he might bring a turtledove or young pigeon. The sacrifice had to be a male and the very best, without blemish. Bringing this into the court, the worshipper first laid his hands on it, then slew it on the north side of the altar. The priests then sprinkled the blood of the sacrifice upon the altar. After this, the animal was cut into pieces, and all the pieces placed on the altar and burned.

Several of the actions required in this offering make its meaning plain. The *laying of the worshipper's hands on the animal* signifies that something is transferred from one to the other. This is the uniform meaning of this action in the Bible. In this case, there is only one thing that can be transferred: the sin of the man. By the laying on of hands, the animal becomes the bearer of the worshipper's sins.

This shows us why *the sacrifice was killed*. The animal that bears the worshipper's sins must now pay the penalty of sin. That is the idea in all Old Testament sacrifices. It is said that the burnt offering is "accepted for him to make atonement for him" (Lev 1:4). The worshipper's sin had been laid upon the animal. Now the death of the animal represented the payment of the penalty due the worshipper. The penalty having been paid, the sins could no more be counted against him.

The *sprinkling of the blood* on the altar signified that this was so. The animal was polluted by sin. But the death of the animal paid for that sin. Consequently the blood of the animal, which represents its life, is no longer considered as sinful. It can now be sprinkled on the holy altar. It is now acceptable to God. By this act, the worshipper was assured that his sin and guilt were removed.

Finally, *the sacrifice was burned* on the altar "to be a burnt sacrifice, an offering made by fire, of a sweet savor unto the LORD" (Lev 1:9). This brings us to the climax of the burnt offering. Since sin was removed and the worshipper was forgiven, his sacrifice was burned on the holy altar. And since the sacrifice represented him, this burning pictured the worshipper himself rising as a "sweet savor unto the LORD." The burnt offering thus symbolized the consecration of the worshipper to his God. In the burnt offering he was presenting himself, first to be cleansed from sin and then to be pleasing to God.

With this offering, the sin of Israel was symbolically acknowledged and atoned for, albeit only temporarily. The offering had to be repeated twice daily. By this, the goal and purpose of the covenant nation was expressed: the smoke of the sacrifice ascending to God declared that God's covenant people were offering themselves to Him, so that He might delight in them.

B. The Meal Offering

Closely connected to the burnt offering, and often presented with it, was the meal offering.³⁹ The meal offering had nothing about it to signify the removal of sin. That is the reason why it was not offered alone. The grain, along with oil, frankincense, and wine, was partly burned and partly given to the priests for their food. This offering, composed of the fruits of the ground, pictured the fruits of righteousness. Like the burnt offering, it symbolized consecration. But where the burnt offering symbolized the consecration of the whole man, the meal offering especially had in view the expression of consecration in holy living.

³⁹ **meal offering** – called the "meat offering" in the Authorized Version. "Meat" used to refer to all sorts of food; now it is used only for flesh. So the word used may give a mistaken impression. It was grain, not meat, that was offered.

C. The Peace Offering

The procedure for the peace offering was the same as that for the burnt offering up until the blood had been sprinkled. But here the whole animal was not burned. The fat, or tender parts, was burned. This symbolized the presentation of the animal to God. Part of the animal, the breast and the right shoulder, was given to the priest. The remainder was returned to the offeror to be eaten. This eating was part of the offering. It symbolized eating with Jehovah. And eating together, in eastern and middle-eastern countries, signifies fellowship, communion, oneness. So the peace offering symbolized most beautifully that for which the whole sacrificial system existed: fellowship between God and His people.

D. The Sin Offering

The sin offering was provided for the Israelite who had committed a sin "in error." If anyone committed a sin in deliberate defiance of God's Law, there was no offering for his sin. God considered this sin so severe, that the defiant one had to be executed. But for the sinner who sinned through lack of knowledge, or lack of will power to resist temptation, or in the heat of passion, God provided this offering. It consisted of an animal to be slain, except in the case of the poorest people; they instead could bring grain unmixed with oil or incense. The animal was slain and the blood was brought into God's presence by being sprinkled on the altar (in most cases), applied to the horns of the altar (for a ruler of the people), or applied to the altar of incense (when the high priest or the whole congregation sinned). Then part of the animal was burned before Jehovah, and the rest was disposed of in a way that signified that it was holy. This offering signified that the guilt of the offeror was taken away.

E. The Trespass Offering

The trespass offering is closely connected to the sin offering. It appears that it was intended only for those sins which were an invasion of the rights of God or of a fellow man. The trespass offering differs from the sin offering only slightly. The sacrifice was always a ram. The blood was always put on the brass altar. And the worshipper had to return what he had gained by violating the right of another, with an additional twenty per cent for damages. This offering showed that it was necessary, not only for sin to be covered, but also for God's justice to be satisfied.

F. The Meaning of the Sacrifices

We should have no difficulty in recognizing that all these sacrifices point to Christ. The sacrifices themselves are not enough. The intelligent and pious Old Testament worshipper must have recognized this fact. The animal could never be a satisfactory substitute for the man. God accepted animal sacrifices only because

there was a perfect sacrifice yet to come. The pages of the New Testament leave us without doubt about this.

Whom [i.e., Jesus] God hath set forth to be a propitiation⁴⁰ through faith in his blood, to declare his righteousness for the remission [i.e., forgiveness] of sins that are past, through the forbearance⁴¹ of God.—Romans 3:25

God accepted the Old Testament sacrifices of animals only as a temporary appeasement of His just wrath toward the Israelites' sins. The sacrifice of Jesus Christ on the cross accomplished God's complete and total forgiveness for all the sins of all His people, including those that were "past": those of the Old Testament saints.

Again and again the work of Christ is explained in terms of the Levitical sacrifices. It is the slaying of the animal that pictures Christ's work most directly (Isa 53). His death, the perfect sacrifice made by the great High Priest, truly makes atonement for sin. It is the reality of which the Old Testament sacrifices were simply shadows.

So from Leviticus, we learn one of the most simple and yet most profound truths of the Bible. The Principle of Sacrifice tells us that a) we cannot have fellowship with God b) unless and until our sins have been covered permanently c) through the shed blood of Jesus Christ. Then and only then can we present our bodies "a living sacrifice, holy, *acceptable unto God*" (Rom 12:1). Then and only then can we enter into that fellowship which "is with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ" (1Jo 1:3).

5. The Day of Atonement

Please read Leviticus 16.

The Day of Atonement deserves our attention as the most special day of sacrifice. On the tenth day of the seventh month, all Israel gathered together. On that day sin offerings were presented for the high priest and for the people. Only on this day was the blood of these sacrifices carried into the holy of holies and sprinkled directly onto the mercy seat. This ceremony was the most important single event of the Jewish year. By this annual sacrifice, all Israel's sins were atoned for, and the covenant nation was able again to offer the burnt offerings of consecration daily. We should not be surprised to find that the writer of Hebrews uses this as a picture of Christ's work:

⁴⁰ **propitiation** – sin offering that turns away wrath; an appeasement.

⁴¹ **forbearance** – patient, deliberate waiting for the appropriate time.

For Christ is not entered into the holy places made with hands, which are the figures of the true; but into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God for us: Nor yet that he should offer himself often, as the high priest entereth into the holy place every year with blood of others; For then must he often have suffered since the foundation of the world: but now once in the end of the world hath he appeared to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself.—Hebrews 9:24-26

6. The Feasts

Please read Leviticus 23.

Leviticus also prescribes that the life of Israel should be built around her religious feasts. The weekly Sabbath (every seventh day), the annual feasts (half of them in the seventh month), the sabbatical year (every seventh year), and the year of jubilee following the seventh sabbatical year made up the framework of Israel's life. All these feasts reminded Israel of her relationship to God. And the constant repetition of seven (a number often used to symbolize God or perfection) suggested that God required of them nothing more than a faithful keeping of His laws and statutes out of love for Him. All this was a perpetual reminder that Israel was a holy people unto Jehovah.

7. The Meaning of Leviticus

Overall, the book of Leviticus is often neglected. To some extent that is understandable, for it hardly seems to have any bearing on our present-day problems. But when we read Leviticus in the light of the New Testament, especially in connection with the epistle to the Hebrews, we will discover how up-to-date Leviticus is. The Old Testament presents the same Christ as does the New Testament. To see Him in the types and shadows of the ancient Church as well as in the clearer revelation of this age is to increase in understanding. And to increase in understanding of Christ is to increase in love, worship, and service. Is that not the goal of every Christian?

Questions for personal reflection and group discussion

1. What is the purpose of Leviticus?
2. What concepts are involved in God's holiness?
3. Why must there be a sacrifice in order to become holy?
4. What is the fourth principle major principle in the Old Testament?
5. Why is atonement necessary?

6. What are the characteristics of an acceptable permanent sacrifice?

8

Covenant Nation Disciplined

Numbers

The LORD bless thee, and keep thee: The LORD make his face shine upon thee, and be gracious unto thee: The LORD lift up his countenance upon thee, and give thee peace.

Numbers 6:24-26

1. Purpose

The book of Numbers continues the history of Israel from where it ended in Exodus to the border of the land of promise. Their travels cover about 40 years. Numbers is a book of this history and of organization. You cannot fight a war successfully without discipline. In battle, disorganization is a disaster. God's purpose in Numbers is 1) to organize the people for entering into the conquest of the Promised Land, and 2) to show us how God trains or disciplines His people so that they will be ready to receive what He has promised.

The route of their journey is marked on the map later in this lesson. Use that map to spot the places in the following chart.

<u>Book</u>	<u>Places</u>	<u>Duration</u>
Exodus	- the plagues in Egypt	~6 months
	- from the Exodus to Mt. Sinai	3 months
	- at Mt. Sinai	9 months
Leviticus	(while at Mount Sinai)	–
Numbers	- from Mt. Sinai to Kadesh-barnea	4 months
	- at Kadesh-barnea	6 weeks
	- wanderings in the desert	~38 years
	- from 2 nd time at K-b. to Jordan plain	1 year
Deuteronomy	(while at the Jordan plain)	–

The name *Numbers* is given because part of the organization was to count the people (chapters 1 and 26). The people were assigned positions and a marching order as preparation for conflict.

The outline of Numbers is in three parts.

- | | | |
|---------------------------------------|---------------|--------------|
| I. Israel's discipline for travel | Numbers 1-9 | Sinai |
| II. Israel's discipline for obedience | Numbers 10-21 | Wilderness |
| III. Israel's discipline for conquest | Numbers 22-36 | Jordan plain |

2. Preparing to Leave Mount Sinai – chapters 1 - 9

Please read Numbers 1 through 4.

After the Tabernacle had been built and consecrated, and God had taken up residence in the Most Holy Place, it was time to prepare for travel. God had promised the land of Canaan to His people; it was there that He would establish His theocratic nation.

A census of the available fighting men was taken. They numbered 603,550. On the basis of this number, it has been estimated that the entire population would have been approximately two and one-half million. Jacob went down to Egypt with only 70 souls—how greatly God had blessed Israel while there, even when they were in bondage! But a group this large could not wander through the wilderness in undisciplined fashion. To travel and to camp with a people like this would demand careful planning.

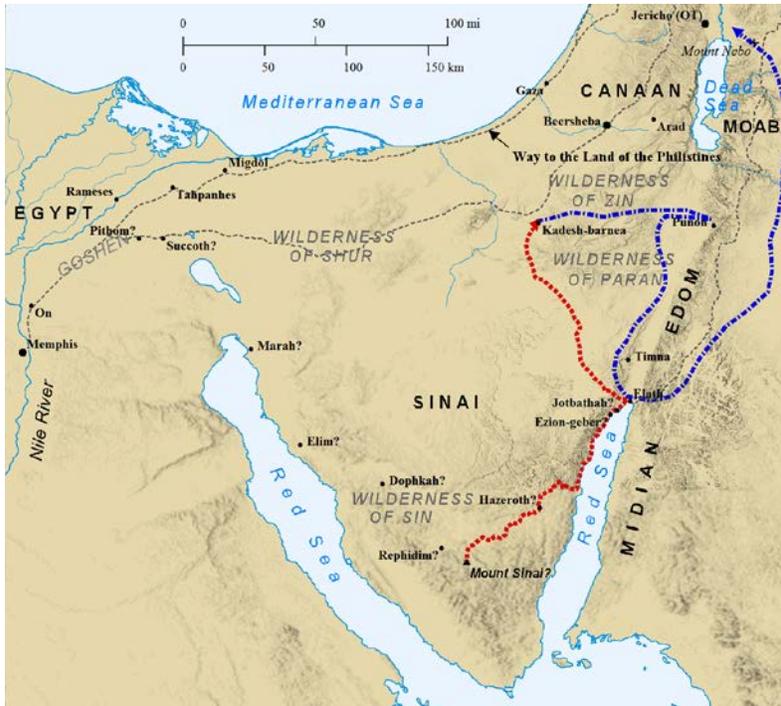
God Himself did the planning. The tribes were each given a specific side of the Tabernacle on which they were to camp (Num 2). As a result, the camp of Israel was always in the form of a square, with the Tabernacle, the presence of God, in the center. Three tribes were on each side of the Tabernacle. For each of these three, one tribe was marked out by God as the leader. When it was time to move, the nation marched by tribes. The order of march was also prescribed by God. In this way the large multitude could do all things in an orderly fashion.

At the time of the first Passover, God had declared that the firstborn of Israel were His, to be consecrated for His service. Now God chose the tribe of Levi to take the place of the first-born (Num 3:5ff.). Some served as priests, and the others both aided the priests and carried the Tabernacle when the camp moved. At God's command, they were consecrated for these tasks. It was a beautiful time of communion with God and with each other. The priests blessed the people with the following:

The LORD bless thee, and keep thee: The LORD make his face shine upon thee, and be gracious unto thee: The LORD lift up his countenance upon thee, and give thee peace.—Numbers 6:24-26

As Israel left Sinai, she was not to forget that she was a holy nation, separated unto God. Therefore, for twelve days the heads of the tribes brought sacrifices and offerings to God. In order that they might never forget that they were a redeemed people, God again told them that they were to keep the Passover annually. They celebrated this feast before they left Mount Sinai.

3. The Trip to Canaan



From Mount Sinai to the Promised Land

A. From Mount Sinai to Kadesh-barnea – chapters 10 - 12

Please read Numbers 10-14.

Israel was now prepared to travel. They began the trip to the land of Canaan going up the east side of the Sinai Peninsula. The people faced several difficult experiences as they left Mount Sinai. Ten times the Lord tested them, each test designed to teach them faith—to trust God to meet their every need, no matter how bad the circumstances looked. Instead of walking by faith, however, there was only murmuring and complaining. Indeed, they did not pass even one of the ten tests God sent their way after leaving Mount Sinai.

You must learn from the circumstances that God faithfully provides for you as you go along through life. There comes a point when there is a big test, and you

must be ready. If you have not learned from what He has taught you beforehand, you will not be ready. You will be most miserable on that day and you will fail the test.

B. At Kadesh-barnea – chapters 13 - 14

The great test of their willingness to obey God came at Kadesh-barnea, on the southern border of the Promised Land—the fertile region that God had promised by covenant to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. It was then occupied by a people called the Canaanites.

1. The Spies' Mission

The people, by God's command, sent spies into the land. This is what the people wanted to know from the spies:

And see the land, what it is; and the people that dwelleth therein, whether they be strong or weak, few or many; And what the land is that they dwell in, whether it be good or bad; and what cities they be that they dwell in, whether in tents, or in strong holds; And what the land is, whether it be fat or lean, whether there be wood therein, or not.—Numbers 13:18-20

2. The Spies' Report

After spying the land, the spies gave their report:

And they told him, and said, We came unto the land whither thou sentest us, and surely it floweth with milk and honey; and this is the fruit of it. Nevertheless the people be strong that dwell in the land, and the cities are walled, and very great: and moreover we saw the children of Anak there.—Numbers 13:27-28

“*Nevertheless.*” This is a chilling statement. It is all too common today. We say that God is true, and then we say, “but...” We must learn that with God there are no “buts”—there are no exceptions to His Word, His character, His sovereign rule, His power, or His goodness.

Men without faith will panic when called on to trust the Lord, because they do not know Him. You cannot trust what you do not know. The life of faith is quite the opposite: you trust in God because you learn of Him. You know Him in biblical truth. You know that He is “with you” in the most real sense imaginable.

3. The Congregation's Response

And all the congregation lifted up their voice, and cried; and the people wept that night. And all the children of Israel murmured against

Moses and against Aaron: and the whole congregation said unto them, Would God that we had died in the land of Egypt! or would God we had died in this wilderness!...were it not better for us to return into Egypt?

But all the congregation bade stone them with stones. And the glory of the LORD appeared in the tabernacle of the congregation before all the children of Israel. And the LORD said unto Moses, How long will this people provoke me? and how long will it be ere they believe me, for all the signs which I have shewed among them?—Numbers 14:1-3, 10-11

God manifested His presence to them in the *Shekinah Glory* (visible presence). He was clearly in control and was now going to judge their disobedience. They had crossed the line marking the limit of God's patience. They had tested God to see how far He would go, but they found out that they had pushed Him too far. The consequences they were about to suffer at the chastening hand of God were severe and they were final!

When God appeared to them, they all knew they had made a mistake. The next day they wanted to go in, but it was too late. For over a year they had been saying, "would that we had died in the wilderness." And now God judged them by saying, "as ye have spoken in mine ears, so will I do to you" (Num 14:28). He gave them exactly what they had said they wanted! For the next thirty-eight years, they will wander in the wilderness until all the adults have died.

When you stubbornly resist God over time, you can miss His blessing completely and reap instead what you have sown. But you have no excuse to miss God's blessing while you still have opportunity.

C. In the Wilderness – chapters 15 - 19

After the people's refusal to go into the land, Korah and others blamed it all on Moses and rebelled against both him and God! The result was the immediate and severe judgment of God: He commanded a line to be drawn, and all opposed to Moses were immediately consumed (Num 16)! There is an important lesson for us here: God was teaching the people that He is God! As such, He is to be obeyed—and the leaders whom He appoints are to be obeyed. Authority is from above; rebellion is from beneath.

At Kadesh-barnea, the people had said not only "we won't go into the land," but also "would that we had died in the desert!" Because of this larger rebellion, God brought to pass both of the people's complaints: everyone over twenty did not

go into the land because they all were led into the desert to die over the next 38 years!⁴² Only three families escaped this judgment: Moses, Joshua, and Caleb.

During these thirty-eight years, they were not far from the Promised Land. They probably were often within sight of it. They mostly were within a few days journey of it. This was a constant reminder to them of what could have been. They knew that sin carries a terrible price. It reminds us of souls in hell who are constantly aware of their surroundings and what might have been for them (Luk 16:23-24).

Little is said about those 38 years. There are a few incidents recorded, generally connected with sin and its consequences. But the discipline of those years was not in vain. The people did not become sinless, but the next generation learned to trust God.

D. To the Jordan – chapters 20 - 24

Please read Numbers 20-21.

1. At Kadesh-barnea the Second Time

After 38 years, the story is picked up again with the death of Miriam, Moses' sister, and another account of rebellion. These people for the most part had been born and raised in the desert, where they had experienced God's direct provision for them. They had eaten manna for all these years; their sandals had never worn out; they had seen many miracles. But the prior generation had had the benefit of dramatic encounters with God: the ten plagues, marching through the Red Sea, the thunderings of Mount Sinai.

As a result, God brought the people to Kadesh-barnea for the second time. They had to return to the exact point of departure in order to go on with God. They again had to be organized and given the instructions for the conquest of the land. And again God had to train them in how to walk by faith in Him.

This is to teach us that there is no skipping of the lessons of faith in God's classroom of life. When we depart from the narrow way of obedience to Him, we must return to that same point in order to learn God's lessons. We can learn of Him either initially or after discipline, but learn of Him we must!

So, suddenly, when they returned to Kadesh-barnea, God stopped the water (Num 20)! It was a next step in their training; but once again, just like their par-

⁴² The forty years are calculated from the crossing of the Red Sea to the arrival on the Jordan plain, ready to begin the conquest of the Promised Land (Deu 1:3). The actual time of the wanderings in the desert were about 38 years (Deu 2:14), between the two visits to Kadesh-barnea.

ents before them, this new generation failed the test. They began to grumble and complain. Even their words sound the same as the prior generation.

It was at this point when Moses lost his patience—he became totally exasperated with these people. In hot anger, he struck the rock two times, specifically disobeying God’s instructions for meeting their need.

God pronounced what seems like a severe judgment upon Moses: he would not be permitted to enter the Promised Land after many years of faithful service to God, with just one recorded mistake. This is a warning to us all: God is no respecter of persons (Act 10:34). He does not treat one person in one way and another in a different way. God’s standards are always the same, and His Word is wide open to everyone. A man who has walked with God for fifty years must still walk with God today.

2. *The Bronze Serpent*

As the people journeyed around Edom, they “spake against God, and against Moses” (Num 21:5). Notice that their sin was not outright rebellion, but complaining and discontent. These are major sins in the eyes of God, for they speak of internal rebellion against God’s will as revealed in circumstances.

God therefore brought fiery serpents among the people in order to judge their sin. It is a judgment and at the same time another lesson of faith. He allows difficulties when we are in His will—so that we might grow in faith by trusting Him more. He allows difficulties when we are out of His will—so that we might practice faith by *repenting of sin*. Indeed, the people said, “We have sinned, for we have spoken against the LORD, and against thee” (Num 21:7). This is a key lesson in the life of faith: we must continually examine ourselves to repent from all sin—to recognize it for what it is, to call it by its worst name (and not try to make excuses for it), and to turn from it.

God brought the fiery serpents for a second purpose: to purify the camp. He was removing those people who had an evil heart of unbelief. God commanded that a bronze serpent be placed on a pole, and everyone bitten must look at it in order to survive. People could be saved from the serpents only by *doing what God said to do*. Those who refused would die.

Indeed, people of unbelief refuse to do what God says to do. They do not believe His Word has relevance to them; they attempt to survive in their own way, or they just do not care. This is exactly the way it is for every person on the face of the earth today. We all have a major sin problem. We cannot remove it by our good works. The bronze serpent on the pole is a major type of Christ. God has put His Son, Jesus Christ, on the cross that we might look to Him and be saved. There is no

other way. We must either *do what God says*, or if we do not believe Him, we will die in our sins.

And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of man be lifted up: That whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have eternal life.—John 3:14-15

3. Sihon, Og, and Balaam

When they left Kadesh-barnea the second time, God directed their feet eastward. He brought them to the area east of Jordan. Here they met and conquered Sihon and Og, two great and powerful kings. God showed them that, when they trusted Him, He would give His covenant nation victory over the strongest of foes.

The kings of Moab and Midian saw that God had given Israel the victory over these foes. They began to fear what Israel would do to them. So they sought aid from Balaam, a heathen prophet who knew about Jehovah but did not worship Him. He tried to force God to curse Israel. Balaam's altars and sacrifices resembled pulling strings on a puppet: they were supposed to make Jehovah do what Balaam wanted done. But Jehovah is not manipulated by men. He caused Balaam to bless Israel instead of cursing her. One of these blessings is a beautiful prophecy of Christ:

I shall see him, but not now: I shall behold him, but not nigh: there shall come a Star out of Jacob, and a Sceptre shall rise out of Israel, and shall smite the corners of Moab, and destroy all the children of Sheth.—Numbers 24:17

When Israel learned of this prophecy (and they must have learned about it, since Moses recorded it in detail), they were assured again that God was able to give them the victory over all opponents. Neither mighty armies nor heathen gods could stand against Jehovah, the one true God, the God of Israel.

4. Preparations for Entering Canaan – chapters 25 - 36

As they stood on the borders of Canaan, a census of this new generation was taken. Israel now numbered 601,730 fighting men, a slight decrease.

At this time God also prescribed new offerings. The burnt offering was already being offered morning and evening. Now, in addition, special offerings were to be brought on every Sabbath, on the first day of every month, and at the scheduled feasts. These would involve a sizable number of animals. Here we see God's tender care for His people. When they were in the wilderness, which could not pasture large flocks, these special offerings were not required. Now that they are entering

a land flowing with milk and honey, the new sacrifices are added. God always supplies what He requires His people to give Him.

Before entrance, final preparations needed to be made. Moses could not enter Canaan. Joshua was appointed to replace him. Reuben, Gad, and half the tribe of Manasseh desired the lands of Sihon and Og for their inheritance. This was granted, with the understanding that they send fighting men across Jordan to help conquer the land of Canaan. In full faith that they would conquer the land, the guidelines for dividing it were set forth before they had ever set foot in the land.

5. Conclusion

In Numbers, God taught His people obedience and faith.

A. Obedience

Obedience is the first requirement of God's government. Any people is expected to obey its ruler. In the theocracy, the ruler is God. Therefore obedience is also a religious duty. Israel had to be disciplined so that she would learn to obey. This discipline did not consist simply of punishment for sin. The strict rules for camping and traveling, the tests of faith, the victories that followed obedience, the defeats that followed disobedience, and the added prescriptions for worship were also means of discipline. God used this discipline to bring about His will. It was this disciplined generation that wrested the land of Canaan from the heathen nations. It was this generation that was obedient to God's Law.

B. Faith

When God teaches you the way of faith, He gives you two things: 1) His Word, and 2) opportunities to apply it. It is in the application to everyday life, in practical experience, that you grow in faith—because it is then that you are actually trusting Him. Everything else can remain only intellectual, but when you are dealing with life by faith, it is the real thing. When you trust God in your outward experience, you begin to walk in peace, no matter if the circumstances are tumultuous. Your confidence moves from yourself to God. The walk of faith is characterized, then, by an increasing inward peace and confidence in God. May it be so for each one of us.

Questions for personal reflection and group discussion

1. What is the purpose of Numbers?
2. What was the purpose of the difficulties that God allowed the Israelites to suffer as they traveled?
3. Why did the people fail the big test at Kadesh-barnea?

4. Why did God bring the people back to Kadesh-barnea a second time?
5. How is the bronze serpent a type of Christ?

9

Covenant Nation Consecrated

Deuteronomy

Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God is one LORD: And thou shalt love the LORD thy God with all thine heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy might.

Deuteronomy 6:4-5

1. Purpose

After wandering in the wilderness for 38 years, a new generation of Israelites has arrived at the plains of Moab, on the east side of the Jordan River. Under Moses' faithful leadership, they have learned much about God and what it is to walk with Him by faith. To the west lies the Promised Land. The next steps are for this new generation to conquer the enemies in that land.

But first this generation must grow in their understanding of God's Law. The name Deuteronomy means "second law," a reference to the repeating of the Law a second time. This title is not strictly accurate, however. (The names of the books are not inspired, but were given later by men.) Deuteronomy does not simply repeat the laws given earlier. It contains a "summary of the whole Law and wisdom of the people of Israel, in which those things that related to the priests and Levites are omitted, and only such things included as the people in general needed to know" (Luther,⁴³ quoted in Keil and Delitzsch⁴⁴). The laws in Leviticus contained much that were for the priests. The laws in Deuteronomy are expanded for the people to know more about how to live their daily lives. It also includes not only

⁴³ **Martin Luther** (1483-1546) – German Roman Catholic monk, theologian, university professor, and church reformer, whose writings and preaching inspired the Protestant Reformation and changed the course of Western civilization.

⁴⁴ Keil, C. F. and Delitzsch, F., *Commentaries on the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., reprinted).

the letter of the laws, but also what is behind the details: what must be our motives for obedience.

The book is composed chiefly of three addresses to the people given by Moses over a four week period just before he dies. He speaks to Israel as a father to his children. He has only one main purpose in mind: that Israel, when she enters her land, shall be true to Jehovah. Everything in Deuteronomy points to the renewal of the covenant between God and His covenant nation.

The outline of Deuteronomy is in four parts.

- | | |
|---|-----------|
| I. Moses' first address, a review of God's guidance | Deu 1-4 |
| II. Moses' second address, a review of God's covenant | Deu 5-26 |
| III. Moses' third address, a call to covenant obedience | Deu 27-30 |
| IV. Moses' farewell and death | Deu 31-34 |

2. The First Address – chapters 1 - 4

Please read Deuteronomy 1:1-18.

Deuteronomy begins with the record of a speech in which Moses reminds Israel of her past history. This is good preparation for the following speech, which will deal with the covenant. The burden of the first speech is God's care for Israel in spite of Israel's disobedience. Moses reminds the people how God provided elders to judge them, how they rebelled against God at Kadesh-barnea, and how God had recently given them victories over Sihon and Og. Moses also recalls how he had entreated God for permission to enter Canaan, but had been refused because of his sin.

3. The Second Address – chapters 5 - 26

Please read Deuteronomy 5-7.

A. The Law

The second speech begins with a repetition of the Ten Commandments. We should remember that the commandments are found in Deuteronomy 5 as well as in Exodus 20. The Lord knew it would be impossible for His people to remember 600-plus laws, so He gave the Ten Commandments as a wonderful summary. Then He further summarized the Law to two, repeated in Matthew 22:36-40,

Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God is one LORD: And thou shalt love the LORD thy God with all thine heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy might.—Deuteronomy 6:4-5⁴⁵

⁴⁵ Deuteronomy 6:4-5 is the Hebrew *Shema* (from the first word in the text, meaning to listen in the sense of obeying), the confession of monotheism affirmed by Christ as the greatest

*...Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself:
I am the LORD.—Leviticus 19:18*

Every other commandment is an application of these two. All the prophets speak in order to explain, amplify, and apply these two. And notice Deuteronomy 6:6-9. This love for God flows out into families in the training of children by their fathers. This is central to life with God.

This restatement of the moral law of God is followed by a strong warning against apostasy (falling away from God). Then Moses sets forth a series of laws that are given to guide Israel when she enters Canaan. These include laws that deal with worship, laws that deal with the proper organization of government for a theocratic nation, and laws that explain what it means in practice to love your neighbor as yourself.

B. The Purposes of the Law

Sinful men run from the Law because they see it as restrictive—and they do not want to be restricted in any way. Their underlying attitude is: I don't want what is "good" if it requires giving up what I like! They try to avoid responsibility; they blame others for their problems. They say God expects too much, and that they are good enough because they are not as bad as some others. They say that the standard is up to each person to decide for themselves.

But God says that the Law is good. The Law is good in three ways. First, the Law reveals *God's moral perfection*. He is righteous in all His acts, decrees, and judgments. The Law give us a moral compass to direct us to understand what is good and what is evil.

Second, the Law is *instructive*. In the Law, God reveals what He is like: 1) in His character, 2) in His absolute goodness, and 3) in His justice. His is a moral universe; every sin has consequences and a penalty. Every action and attitude is either right or wrong according to the standard of God.

Third, the Law is *protective*. 1) It removes from society those who threaten society. 2) It limits sin by creating a fear of punishment in those who do not know God. And 3) it protects men from selfishness. It provides for the poor and encourages doing good to others. Without God's Law, men drift more and more into self-centeredness over time.

commandment (Mat 22:36-40), showing that love is the heart of the Law. This is the foundation of true religion.

4. The Third Address – chapters 27 - 30

Please read Deuteronomy 27-28.

A. Renewal of the Covenant

The first two speeches lead to this third address. Moses calls Israel to renew her covenant with God. This is a new generation from those who were at Mt. Sinai. God tells them that, when they have entered Canaan, they are to make an altar as a permanent record of the covenant, and to perform a ceremony in which the blessings and the cursings of the covenant are solemnly proclaimed by the Levites and acknowledged by the people. To these instructions the people give assent. (When they entered Canaan, they faithfully followed these instructions—Deu 27; Jos 8:30-35.)

B. The Principle of Obedience

And all these blessings shall come on thee, and overtake thee, if thou shalt hearken unto the voice of the LORD thy God.—Deuteronomy 28:2

This brings us to the fifth of the five major principles in the Old Testament. God has given us four major principles to this point in the Scripture so that we may fully understand the new covenant in Christ Jesus as shown in the pages of the New Testament. The principles prepare us for the full revelation of Christ. They are:

1. *The Majesty and Glory of God*, as revealed in Creation.
2. *The Reality and Nature of Sin*, as revealed in the Fall.
3. *The Principle of Faith*, as revealed in the life of Abraham.
4. *The Principle of Sacrifice*, the basis for fellowship with God, as revealed in the ceremonial laws of Leviticus.

The fifth principle is *The Principle of Obedience*, which is this: Obedience is an expression of love for God; and when we obey, God blesses. Importantly, obedience is not simple conformity to an outward command. The Pharisees of Jesus' day considered themselves worthy of God's blessing because they thought they were successful in obeying all the laws of God in outward form, even adding many rules of their own to be sure of not breaking any of God's laws. But they were not approved by Christ; they were severely condemned (Mat 23). Jesus Himself made it clear 1) that the heart of the Law is obedience, not sacrifice (Mat 9:13); and 2) that obedience must spring from a heart of love for God (Joh 14:15, 23).

The Principle of Obedience as given in Deuteronomy has both positive and negative parts. If they obey, they will be physically, tangibly, and outwardly

blessed beyond their wildest dreams: in prosperity, protection, and health. If they do not obey, God will withdraw the blessing. Their experience of success or failure will depend entirely upon their relationship to God.

We are in the light of God's blessing when we truly know God through relationship with Him, not just know some facts about God. But people by nature do not know God; they are in darkness—there is sin and deception throughout the earth. What is needed is to know God. God laid the foundation for knowing Him in the Pentateuch, and particularly in this section of Deuteronomy. Later, He gave the complete revelation for knowing Him by revealing His Son, Jesus Christ.

When we do know God, truly, we will love Him. Out of this love will come our obedience to His will. And in our obedience, God responds with blessing.

Love —► Obedience —► Blessing

Our love *for* God springs from the love we have already received *from* God (1Jo 4:19). This love is both the motive and result of obedience. As we love Him, we want to please Him in every way; as His children, we want to please our Father. And as we obey Him and receive His blessings, we grow to love Him more.

“All these blessings shall...overtake thee.” The word *overtake* is normally used of robbers intending harm. It carries the meaning of suddenly overcoming resistance. Here it is used of God. In our sin, we resist Him. But He intends to bless us when we are obedient. And this is an important part of the principle of obedience: we are never to obey in order to get physical blessings. If we do so, we are selfish and idolatrous! The blessings of God “overtake” us and “come upon” us as we are obedient with a pure motive of love. Our part is to obey His Word; God's desire is to bless us when we do.

Let us take this in. When we seek material blessings, we are veering off course. God's way is for us to focus on obeying His Word. When we do so, then God blesses us according to what He knows is the very best for us.

C. God's Purpose for His People

Importantly, the Old and New Testaments are the same in this: God blesses obedience and chastens disobedience. God does not change; but the patterns are different. In the Old Testament, God actually promised *physical* blessings to the nation of Israel; but in the New Testament, He promises *spiritual* blessings to His Church (Luk 11:13).

1. Blessings in the Old Testament

Why did God promise these physical blessings to Israel?

The LORD shall establish thee an holy people unto himself, as he hath sworn unto thee, if thou shalt keep the commandments of the LORD

thy God, and walk in his ways. And all people of the earth shall see that thou art called by the name of the LORD; and they shall be afraid of thee.—Deuteronomy 28:9-10

There were two big powers in the world: Egypt and Mesopotamia (in the area of Assyria, Babylon, and Persia). The only route between them is through Israel, the same path that Abraham had followed. The Promised Land lay on the path of the richest trade route in the world!

God's physical blessings upon Israel will attract the attention of the people of the world. But there is no king or standing army in Israel. To obey God will require great faith in God; it is He Himself Who will lead and defend them. This will prove His power to the world. All nations will recognize and know that He is God (Isa 55:5). Israel was to be God's beacon to shine His glory into a dark world.

2. Blessings in the New Testament

How does this pattern differ in the New Testament? Ever since the time of Christ, Christians have been under the political government of unbelievers. God's people are no longer in one place under His theocracy. His people today are spread across the face of the earth, and His kingdom today is spiritual in nature (Luk 17:21). His purpose today is to build His Church all around the world. When God's people obey His Word, He blesses them *spiritually*—regardless of their circumstances—with great faith, peace, and joy; with fellowship with Him and one another; with victory over sin; and with power in gospel witness.

God works sovereignly to save His people from their sins. As they live under godless worldly governments, they often suffer persecution for the name of Christ (Mat 5:10). When they do—even in the daily trials of life—and when they respond with faith, peace, and joy, the world sees how different they are. The Holy Spirit uses these means and the Word of God to open blind eyes to the good news of salvation in Christ. The Church is to be God's beacon to shine His light into a dark world.

Summary. The dynamics are the same: love produces obedience, in which God gives blessings. In the National Covenant, the blessings were physical, as promised here in Deuteronomy. *God would bring the world to Israel* to seek after the God Who blessed her physically. In the New Covenant, as His people live throughout the world, *we go out into the world*. God produces His character in us, often through trials. As we shine with His light and goodness through His *spiritual* blessings, we are witnesses for Him. In everything, God receives all the glory, honor, and praise!

As God blesses His people (physically in the Old Testament, spiritually in the New), others will ask, "why are they blessed?" They will learn that His people are

blessed because they obey. Then the others will ask, “why do they obey?” They will learn that God’s people obey because they love God. Their obedience is a moral difference pointing to a holy God.

3. *Disobedience*

But it shall come to pass, if thou wilt not hearken unto the voice of the LORD thy God, to observe to do all his commandments and his statutes which I command thee this day; that all these curses shall come upon thee, and overtake thee.—Deuteronomy 28:15

Disobedience will not be blessed of God, because His aim is to glorify His name and character. If He blessed when there was a lack of love and obedience, then His blessing would be disconnected from His holiness, and there would be no testimony to His justice. His holiness requires the just punishment of sin.

In the National Covenant, this meant that the nation would be punished when it disobeyed the Law of God, when it drifted into the sins of pride and idolatry. God’s punishment served two purposes for the nation: 1) as a warning that something was wrong, in which they needed to return to God, and 2) as a testimony to His justice and holiness.

In the New Covenant, we now understand that the punishment for sin has been laid upon Jesus Christ at the cross, and God’s people receive Christ by grace through faith, not by good works or obedience to law (Eph 2:8-9). This was also true for *individual* believers under the National Covenant. While not a punishment for sin, God still allows suffering and difficulties among His New Covenant people for two broad purposes: 1) to awaken them to their sin, that they might repent and be restored to fellowship with Him, and 2) to grow their faith, to help them to trust Him more. In both of these, repentance and faith, God receives much glory.

4. *Summary*

Obedience to the Law, then, is based on love. What God had done for His people in the Exodus, was enough to obligate them for all time. When they accepted the National Covenant at Mount Sinai and when they renewed it here on the plains of Moab, it was their formal acknowledgement of all that God had done for them, and of their resulting love for Him. When we submit to God in obedience to His will, we are saying “You are worthy enough for me to obey You.” When we disobey, we are saying “You are not worthy enough; my own will is more important!” To understand where your heart is, then, you must simply ask yourself what you love: be it money, pleasure, self—or God.

That thou mayest love the LORD thy God, and that thou mayest obey his voice, and that thou mayest cleave unto him: for he is thy life,

and the length of thy days: that thou mayest dwell in the land which the LORD sware unto thy fathers, to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob, to give them.—Deuteronomy 30:20

5. The End of Moses' Work – chapters 31 - 34

Please read Deuteronomy 31-34.

At the end of his service to God, Moses, like a loving father, implores his children to keep this covenant that God has made with them. What a man says just before his death is often different and noteworthy. This is certainly the case here.

Now Moses has come to the end of his mission. It is time to enter Canaan. But he may not enter because of his sin at Meribah. Joshua has been chosen to replace Moses; now he is consecrated for that task. Like a true patriarch, Moses then blesses the people. Alone, he ascends into Mount Nebo, to the high peak called Pisgah. From that vantage point God shows him the Promised Land—but Moses enters instead into a better land. There, alone with God, he leaves this life and begins his heavenly rest.

6. Conclusion

We have come to the end of the Pentateuch. These books by Moses are designed to trace the history of the theocracy until the time when Israel was ready to occupy her own land. Each book has contributed to that goal:

1. Genesis shows the need for a separate people and has described the calling of that people in Abraham.
2. Exodus pictures the formal organization of Abraham's children into the covenant nation.
3. Leviticus sets forth the laws by which the theocratic nation is to be a holy nation.
4. Numbers traces the ways in which the covenant nation was disciplined to serve God faithfully.
5. Deuteronomy tells how Israel was consecrated for the task of conquering Canaan.

It is obvious that we cannot stop at the end of the Pentateuch. The story of God's kingdom does not end here. But Moses' work in recording the development of the theocracy is finished.

Questions for personal reflection and group discussion

1. What is the main purpose of Deuteronomy?
2. Describe how the Law is "good."

3. What is the fifth major principle of the Old Testament?
4.
 - a. Where does our love for God come from?
 - b. How does it grow?
5.
 - a. How are God's blessings in the New Covenant different from the Old?
 - b. Why are they different?

10

Covenant Nation's Land

Joshua

This book of the law shall not depart out of thy mouth; but thou shalt meditate therein day and night, that thou mayest observe to do according to all that is written therein: for then thou shalt make thy way prosperous, and then thou shalt have good success.

Joshua 1:8

1. Introduction

When we come to Joshua, we leave behind us the first major section of the Old Testament, the Pentateuch, sometimes referred to as "the Law." Now we are no longer studying books written by Moses; we enter into the first of twelve historical books narrating the account of the nation of Israel in the Promised Land.

These are books of history, but they do not simply record the facts of history. They choose, from all the events that occurred in Israel, those facts that most clearly trace the development of God's kingdom and emphasize God's work in the midst of His people. They present history from God's point of view, showing His hand in everything that happens. Everything is preparing for the coming Messiah. In this way the historical books provide a background for the Prophets. Without the history contained in these books, the prophecies found in the Prophets would be almost meaningless.

Some believe the book of Joshua could not have been written by Joshua himself, because it mentions his death and several incidents thereafter. But most conservative commentators believe it to be written by Joshua, references to his death

and after being added by another inspired writer—just as the account of Moses' death may have been added to Deuteronomy by Joshua.

The book of Joshua shows how Israel was brought into the land of Canaan. They would spend seven years in three campaigns of conquest, and then eight years in settling the land. This was a fulfillment of God's promise to Abraham, the final step in establishing the theocratic nation. Israel was formally organized, had received her laws, and was now given possession of the land in which the theocracy was to develop.

The outline of Joshua is in two parts.

- I. Israel conquers the Promised Land Joshua 1-12
- II. Israel divides the Promised Land Joshua 13-24

2. Preparation for Conquering Canaan – chapter 1

Please read Joshua 1-5.

There shall not any man be able to stand before thee all the days of thy life...I will not fail thee, nor forsake thee. Be strong and of a good courage: for unto this people shalt thou divide for an inheritance the land, which I swear unto their fathers to give them. Only be thou strong and very courageous, that thou mayest observe to do according to all the law...turn not from it to the right hand or to the left, that thou mayest prosper whithersoever thou goest. This book of the law shall not depart out of thy mouth; but thou shalt meditate therein day and night, that thou mayest observe to do according to all that is written therein: for then thou shalt make thy way prosperous, and then thou shalt have good success...for the LORD thy God is with thee whithersoever thou goest.—Joshua 1:5-9

A. Preparing the Leader

Moses was dead, and the people had mourned for him thirty days. Now God appeared to Joshua, the chosen successor, and encouraged him. He had successfully prepared for this new role.

How does God prepare a spiritual leader? In Joshua's case, he served Moses and the people for 40 years (he was about 40 years old at Kadesh-barnea). This pattern is repeated often in the Scriptures: Elisha served Elijah, Timothy served Paul, the apostles served Christ Jesus. All Christians must learn to submit their wills to God's authority, but it is absolutely essential for spiritual leaders (Mat

20:28). Far too often, “Christian Leadership Training” just brings the world’s techniques into the church, with disastrous results.

B. Crossing the Jordan

Joshua began preparing for conquest by sending spies to Jericho. There they were aided by a harlot named Rahab. She saved their lives through letting them down the city wall by a scarlet line. They instructed her to use the same scarlet line as an identifier (Jos 2:18-21), so that they could see the line and save her family during the coming battle. This scarlet line may be a type of the blood of Christ, which symbolizes His sacrificial death to cover the sins of His children. When we look to Christ in His death and resurrection, the Lord saves us from our sins.

Importantly and surprisingly, Rahab appears in the blood line of Joseph, the husband of Mary, the mother of Christ (Mat 1:5). She is given as an example of great faith (Heb 11:31). Among God’s purposes at Jericho was the preparation for the coming of the Messiah. His redeeming grace was active then just as it is in this day.

When the spies returned from Jericho with the report that the heathen trembled for fear of Israel, the time for action had come. God added to that fear by bringing Israel across the Jordan by a miracle. When the Ark of the Covenant, the symbol of God’s presence, was carried into the Jordan (which was at flood stage this time of year), the waters were stopped above them and they crossed on dry ground.

For the LORD your God dried up the waters of Jordan from before you, until ye were passed over, as the LORD your God did to the Red sea, which he dried up from before us, until we were gone over: That all the people of the earth might know the hand of the LORD, that it is mighty: that ye might fear the LORD your God for ever.—Joshua 4:23-24

If the Israelites had needed any assurance that Jehovah was with them, this miracle surely would have provided it. In order that this lesson might not be lost on future generations, Joshua erected two memorials of twelve stones as a reminder of God’s mighty deeds.

Notice also that now the manna stopped, the temporary provision from God; and they began eating from the land, His permanent provision for His people. When they obeyed by crossing the Jordan, they entered into God’s promise.

C. Preparing the People

Israel now camped at Gilgal on the west side of Jordan and prepared for the battles ahead. Human wisdom would have spent this time in training and strategizing. However, God's ways are so different from our ways.

Here Israel instead displayed by her actions that she realized her need of obeying God's covenant. During the time of wilderness wandering, the covenant sign of circumcision had been neglected. Now it was administered to all who were uncircumcised. This was a reminder to them of God's covenant with Abraham. It was also, on their part, a promise to be faithful to that covenant.

At Gilgal the people of Israel also celebrated the Passover. It was forty years to the month since they had left Egypt. Some commentators believe that the Passover was not celebrated from the time Israel left Sinai until this day in Gilgal. If so, this was the first time in thirty-eight years that Israel had received this reminder of God's redeeming grace by which she had been brought out of Egypt. How important this lesson was at the beginning of a time of warfare. Reminded both of God's faithful covenant and of His redeeming grace, Israel was prepared for her task.

D. Principles for Victory

1. God in Charge

When Joshua was by Jericho...there stood a man over against him with his sword drawn in his hand: and Joshua...said unto him, Art thou for us, or for our adversaries? And he said, Nay; but as captain of the host of the LORD am I now come. And Joshua fell on his face to the earth, and did worship.—Joshua 5:13-14

As a final encouragement to Joshua, the Angel of Jehovah (Whom many believe is really the Son of God) appeared to Joshua and announced that He would lead Israel in battle. God is not on any "side" per se; He is in charge! He does not join us in our efforts for our own ideas, but we must join Him in His will. Enthusiastic persons who are not under control of the Captain are a hindrance in God's work.

2. God's Promise Certain

Every place that the sole of your foot shall tread upon, that have I given unto you, as I said unto Moses.—Joshua 1:3

The land was theirs the moment they crossed the Jordan. God had promised it, and refers to the transaction in the past tense. When God willed it, it was done. This is the same for us today. God has given us great and precious promises. They

are certain to come to pass. Only one thing can stop Joshua, and us today, and that is being unfaithful to God.

3. *Active Obedience*

The land was theirs, promised to them by God Himself. However, the people still had to possess the land. The certain promise was not real in their experience until they obeyed God. So it is with God's people of all ages. Our part is to obey Him in faith. We must walk faithfully in obedience to God's Word every day (Luk 9:23). As we do, He will give us the abundant spiritual life He has promised (Joh 10:10).

3. **Conquest of Canaan** – *chapters 2 - 12*

A. **The Central Campaign**

The stories of the capture of the important Canaanite cities of Jericho and Ai are very familiar. But we must not allow familiarity to blind us to the lessons set forth therein for Israel and for us.

1. *Jericho*

Israel's strategy must have seemed strange to the inhabitants of Jericho. Perhaps it seemed strange to the Israelites as well. The normal city-state defense strategy was to hole up inside the city walls and outlast a siege. The normal attack strategy was to lay siege to the city, cutting off the food and water supply, and outlast the city.

When Jericho's walls came down in a moment, all the rest of the land trembled in fear and chose to fight in the open field. If the Israelites had had to lay siege at Jericho, all the other cities would have stayed in also. A siege could take one to three years. There were 31 fortified cities to conquer in Canaan. If each took two years in siege, this would be more than sixty years! Another generation would have to be trained in order to continue.

So God had powerful reasons for His strategy. All were to learn that the victory was not of Israel, but of God. In a miraculous manner, Jericho was opened wide to the swords of Israel's warriors, so that it might be clear to all that God Himself led the children of Israel to victory.

2. *Ai*

Israel hath sinned, and they have also transgressed my covenant which I commanded them: for they have even taken of the accursed thing... neither will I be with you any more, except ye destroy the accursed from among you... thou canst not stand before

thine enemies, until ye take away the accursed thing from among you.—Joshua 7:11-13

The story of Ai emphasizes clearly the truth that God's covenant nation must be holy in order to receive God's blessing. Nothing is hidden from God's eyes. As long as the sin of Achan goes unpunished, Israel cannot win a victory. But when the sinner was punished, the city is quickly taken. God is jealous for His holiness and the holiness of His people.

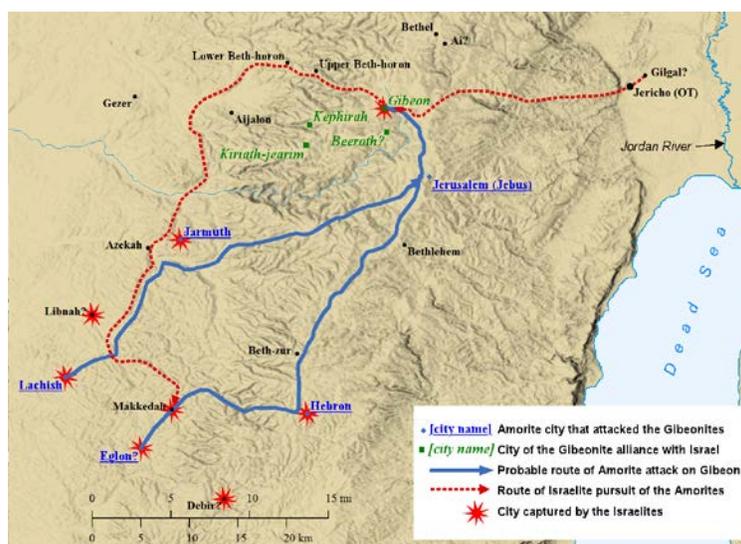
B. The Southern Campaign

Please read Joshua 10.

And all these kings and their land did Joshua take at one time, because the LORD God of Israel fought for Israel.—Joshua 10:42

The incident of the deceitful Gibeonites, who pretended that they had come from a far country, was a lesson to Israel that it was not enough to trust in one's own wisdom. For lack of asking Jehovah what to do, Israel was tricked into disobeying God's express command to spare none of the Canaanites.

Nevertheless, God turned even this evil to good. The Canaanites in the south united to attack Gibeon for making this alliance with Israel. Joshua came to their aid from Gilgal, and with one sweep broke the back of enemy power in the southern part of Canaan.

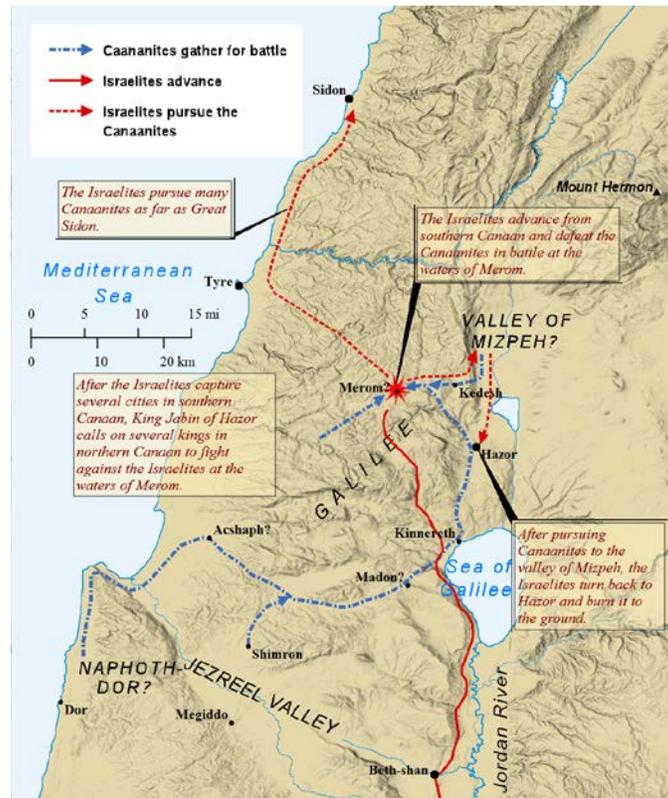


Conquest of Canaan: Southern Campaign

C. The Northern Campaign

Please read Joshua 11.

The destruction of the Amorite confederation that attacked Gibeon had opened the way to the capture of all the south. A similar confederation, led by the king of Hazor and including all the city-states of northern Canaan, now formed to fight against Israel. But Joshua attacked swiftly, apparently catching the enemy in a confused and unprepared state, and scattered them. This one victory gave Israel control of the northern part of Canaan.



Conquest of Canaan: Northern Campaign

D. Lessons from the Conquest

1. Every Battle Different

God can do the unusual, which completely changes circumstances. Jericho's walls fell in a moment, but no other walls fell in all the other attacked cities. At Bethel and Ai, Israel faked defeat by retreating; and when the enemy pursued, then they turned with massive force to defeat them. In the south, the Lord used hailstones, and then held the sun for 36 hours across 25 miles of fighting (Jos

10:11-13).⁴⁶ In every battle, Joshua had to listen to God to understand His will and renew his dependence upon Him. We must be careful about “proven techniques” and attempting to repeat experiences. We must instead focus on personal obedience to the Word of God, and all will be well.

2. *God’s Presence, Our Faith*

Our God always meets us in just the way we need, and this is different for every person. Sometimes it is in a still small voice, sometimes in mighty power, sometimes He is present but unseen (2Ki 6:17). Joshua needed to know that God was with him and in charge. Therefore God met him in just that way (Jos 1:5-9).

Notice, also, that the Lord is again sovereignly using the wicked intentions of evil men to accomplish His purposes, just as He did in Egypt with the plagues. “For it was of the LORD to harden their hearts, that they should come against Israel in battle, that he might destroy them utterly” (Jos 11:20).

We must trust God in every situation. We base our conception of our needs only on what we can see, and this is faulty at best. Most of the time, if God met us in the way we wanted, it would be different and more powerful than what we actually needed—and this would result in sinful pride.

3. *Man’s Wisdom*

In the midst of the account of the northern campaign, there is a mighty act of faith tucked away. Horses were prized and rare. There even came a time later when there were no horses in Israel: the kings rode mules, vastly inferior animals! Horses and chariots gave any nation military might. To the human eye, these were just what Israel needed in this and future conflicts. But “the Lord said...hough⁴⁷ their horses and burn their chariots with fire” (Jos 11:6). And the people obeyed to the letter (v. 9). This required great faith. They were declaring to God and each other: we would rather walk in the way of the Lord, even when we don’t understand it, and even when great worldly possibilities come to us.

4. *Holiness*

The conquest of Canaan poses a problem for some people. When the people of Israel captured the Canaanite cities, they killed everyone. Neither man, woman, nor child was spared. This was not their own idea. They did it by express command of God. “But of the cities of these people, which the LORD thy God doth give thee for an inheritance, thou shalt save alive nothing that breatheth” (Deu 20:16). In the eyes of some people, this is not in accord with the loving nature of God. The very idea that God would require such cruelty is unthinkable to them.

⁴⁶ This seemingly impossible miracle should not surprise us. It is not more difficult than giving new birth to a dead soul, or creating a world.

⁴⁷ **hough** – to cut the tendons of a horse’s legs in order to render it unfit for military use.

However, God was acting consistent with His holiness and justice. We must remember that God punishes sin. He punished sinners among His own people: remember Nadab and Abihu (Lev 10:1-2), Korah, Dathan, and Abiram (Num 16), and Achan (Jos 7)! He also punishes the sins of other men, and the Canaanites were terrible sinners. God had said to Abraham that his seed would not yet inherit Canaan because “the iniquity of the Amorites is not yet full” (Gen 15:16). But now their iniquity was filled up. That the harlot Rahab was apparently a respectable citizen of Jericho is one piece of evidence. And much more is available to us through archaeology. We have learned that the Canaanite religion involved immoral sexual practices, and sacrificing first-born children to their gods. The Canaanites were idolatrous to the core and ripe for punishment. “Archaeologists who dig in the ruins of the Canaanite cities wonder why God did not destroy them sooner than he did.”⁴⁸

We must also remember that Israel was commanded to be holy. We have seen from her past history how prone the people were to murmur against Jehovah and even to follow other gods. The utter destruction of the Canaanites was commanded in order to preserve Israel from following the sinful religions of the heathen.

5. *Compromise*

*And they drave not out the Canaanites that dwelt in Gezer:
but the Canaanites dwell among the Ephraimites unto
this day, and serve under tribute.—Joshua 16:10*

In the midst of these many provisions from God, the seeds of the nation’s destruction appeared in the form of compromise, a half-hearted obedience that seemed to afford the best of two worlds. They could obey God to some extent (but not completely). And they could gain some immediate worldly benefits for themselves, as they saw it.

Why would the people not obey God in completely destroying their enemies? Because some of the tribes became weary of the battles. It was easier to “live and let live” as they sought peace and comfort in their own way. They also wanted slaves to serve them.

But idolaters in the midst carried an enormous price. These people preserved their idolatry, and their idolatry would infect all that was around them. In this way, idolatry gradually spread among the Israelites—to their great harm.

⁴⁸ Halley, H. H., *Bible Handbook* (Chicago, Illinois: Henry H. Halley; 1955).

4. Distribution of the Land – chapters 13 - 24

And the LORD gave unto Israel all the land which he swore to give unto their fathers; and they possessed it, and dwelt therein. And the LORD gave them rest round about, according to all that he swore unto their fathers: and there stood not a man of all their enemies before them; the LORD delivered all their enemies into their hand. There failed not ought of any good thing which the LORD had spoken unto the house of Israel; all came to pass.—Joshua 21:43-45

Although not all the land was conquered, the time had come to begin dividing it. The back of the opposition was broken. Each tribe was to continue the fight in their own territory to completely eradicate their enemies.

Reuben, Gad, and the half-tribe of Manasseh had received their inheritance on the east side of the Jordan River. At a meeting in Gilgal, the remaining inheritances were decided by lot.⁴⁹ In this way it would be God, not man, who determined the land each tribe should receive. Jacob had twelve sons, including Joseph. The first lots fell to Judah and to the sons of Joseph—Ephraim and Manasseh. They received the best and most important sections.

The remaining tribes were told to search out the land and describe it to Joshua. After this was done, they met again in Shiloh and the other seven tribes received their inheritance.

The tribe of Levi received no inheritance. Instead, the Levites were given forty-eight cities in which to dwell. Of these, six had already been designated as cities of refuge (*see* map: Allotment of the Land). By giving Ephraim and Manasseh each a share of the land, and not Levi, God preserved the number of tribes at twelve.

The assignment of the land to tribes, each of which were committed to obey God's Law, was immensely practical. There would be continuous security in the land. If you kept the Law, no one would be destitute. You could not sell your land to just anyone; it had to be to a family member (of the same tribe), and they had to sell it back to you when you could afford it. If you could never afford it, then the land returned to its rightful owner in the Year of Jubilee, every fifty years.

Three tribes dominate the remaining history of the Old Testament. Ephraim contained the site of Samaria, and became leader of the Northern Kingdom when it was formed. Judah contained the site of Jerusalem and led the southern tribes.

⁴⁹ This was prescribed for them by God, but is to be avoided today. See *How to Know God's Will* by John Newton (1725-1807) and *Divine Guidance* by B. A. Ramsbottom, both available from CHAPEL LIBRARY.

Only six miles across, Benjamin occupied the small territory between the two. Ephraim and Judah became the most important tribes in Israel, in accord with the prophecy of Jacob made centuries before (Gen 49:1ff.). Much of the Old Testament is the story of conflict between these two tribes.

Of the other tribes, Simeon gets absorbed into Judah. The people of Dan do not like their assigned land. Half the tribe go to the far north at the base of Mount Hermon, at an enormous spring, the headwaters of the Jordan, which is green all year round. But it is not where God had put them—they are the very first tribe to go into idolatry!



Allotment of the Land

5. Conclusion

Please read Joshua 23-24.

We will miss the point of Joshua if we simply regard the book as history which tells how Israel conquered and divided her land. It is that, but it is more than that. We must never forget the promise to Abraham. That promise made the re-

ceiving of the land a religious matter. It connects this history with the covenant faithfulness of God. The Kingdom of God is now established: it is God's people, in God's place, under God's rule.

The book of Joshua also points forward. Time and again it speaks of rest. The goal of all this struggle and conflict was that Israel might rest in her land. This is typical; the Promised Land always had a symbolic meaning. It spoke to Israel of the rest that they should have in God—a higher, spiritual rest. So too it speaks to us of the Sabbath rest that remains for the children of God. The Promised Land is a type of the heavenly rest: it pictures the eternal glory that awaits God's children. And Joshua, who was God's servant to give Israel her rest, must be considered a type of that later Joshua (Hebrew form of Jesus) in Whom God's people are given their perfect rest (Heb 4:1-11). Out of this people, and this nation, in this land, would come the promised Messiah, Who would bless all the nations of the earth.

Questions for personal reflection and group discussion

1. Why was the book of Joshua written?
2. When do God's promises for spiritual blessing become real to us?
3. What principle did God teach at Ai?
4. What do the differences in battle tactics teach us about God's ways?
5. What principles were involved in the extermination of the Canaanites?
6.
 - a. Why did some of the tribes compromise?
 - b. What dangers did this present?
7. Regarding the southern and northern campaigns (Jos 10-11),
 - a. How were they different?
 - b. How were they similar?

PART THREE

THEOCRATIC DEVELOPMENT

11

Covenant Nation Forsakes Jehovah

Judges

In those days there was no king in Israel: every man did that which was right in his own eyes.

Judges 21:25

1. Introduction

A. Overview

With the book of Judges, we enter into a new period in the history of the Old Testament. The reception of the land under Joshua was the final step in the period of Theocratic Establishment. God's people are in God's place and under God's rule. Now we enter the period of Theocratic Development of that which has been established.

It would be wonderful to be able to record that Israel continued to progress onward and upward without any failure or backslidings. But such is not the case. On the contrary, the history of Israel is marked by continual sin and rebellion. Often the Israelites are spoken of as a stiff-necked and disobedient people. Think back over the history already studied, and it will be evident that this is so. Now, at

the beginning of this period of theocratic development, we find Israel falling from the high estate to which God has brought her. The book of Judges presents a terrible picture. Yet in it all, God is working and developing His kingdom. Even though the surface movement of history seems to be flowing against the fulfillment of God's plan, beneath the surface the irresistible current of the divine purpose moves on to the appointed end.

The next step in God's purpose is the development of a theocratic kingdom, that is, a nation ruled by a king who acknowledges that he is a dedicated servant of the God of Israel. The development of that kingdom begins with the period of the judges and continues until David, the theocratic king, rules over Israel. This period covers about 350 years and includes the last chapters of Joshua, and Judges, Ruth, and 1 Samuel 1-7.

B. Purpose

The purpose of Judges is to show how God delights to intervene in mercy. It warns against compromising God's ways with the idolatrous culture around you. It shows God's faithfulness to preserve His covenant, even in the midst of passive rebellion and rejection. The message is clear: when sin is not thoroughly put to death (Rom 8:13), it will rise up to trouble us. When sin is confessed in repentance and faith, God will rise up to save us.

Each cycle of deliverance is different: Jael with his nail, Gideon with his trumpets, Samson in Dagon's temple. God was preparing His people to look for the Messiah, Who would ultimately deliver His people from sin and death.

The outline of Judges has three parts.

- | | |
|--|--------------|
| I. The rapid growth of Israel's apostasy ⁵⁰ | Judges 1-2 |
| II. The historical results of Israel's apostasy | Judges 3-16 |
| III. The moral consequences of Israel's apostasy | Judges 17-21 |

Although the book of Judges treats the accounts in the third part of this outline separately from the history in the second part, this does not mean that these episodes occur at a later date. They probably occurred early in the period of the judges. These accounts are added after the history to give us a clear picture of what life in Israel was like at this time.

C. Writing

While the book of Judges is anonymous, the time of its writing can be fixed rather closely. The statement, "In those days there was no king in Israel" seems to imply a contrasting statement: *as there is now*. If that is so, then Judges was written no earlier than the beginning of Saul's reign.

⁵⁰ **apostasy** – state of abandoning the faith one had professed.

Another statement in the book helps us decide on the latest possible date of composition. In Judges 1:21 we are told that “the Jebusites dwell with the children of Benjamin in Jerusalem unto this day.” But when David had reigned in Hebron for seven years, he did what none before him had been able to do. He routed the Jebusites from their stronghold in Jerusalem and made it his capital. So Judges must have been written during the reign of Saul or the early reign of David. Tradition says that it was written by Samuel.

Judges is not simply a book of history. It does not attempt to tell us everything that happened during this period of 350 years. But everything in the book is related to three great facts it sets forth.

1. Faithfulness to Jehovah results in national unity; unfaithfulness results in disintegration into tribes that are sometimes at odds with each other.
2. Faithfulness to Jehovah results in the complete possession of Canaan; unfaithfulness results in oppression by other nations.
3. Throughout Israel’s checkered history, God is faithful to His covenant and shows His mercy to His people.

The selection of material shows that Judges was written from the viewpoint of a prophet. History is a revelation of the purposes and works of God. The prophet who wrote this book took pains to make that clear.

2. Israel’s Downward Path

Please read Judges 1-2.

A. God’s Design

And it came to pass, when Israel was strong, that they put the Canaanites to tribute,⁵¹ and did not utterly drive them out.—Judges 1:28

And the people served the LORD all the days of Joshua, and all the days of the elders that outlived Joshua, who had seen all the great works of the LORD, that he did for Israel.—Judges 2:7

While Joshua lived, Israel obeyed God and carried out the responsibilities of the covenant. God had designed that, when Joshua died, the nation would be administered through elders, that is, all the men who were too old to work in the field. The elders daily gathered at the city gate. Anyone who had questions or issues could come to the elders there, present their request or grievance, and the elders would prayerfully seek God’s wisdom to decide the matter. This would

⁵¹ **tribute** – forced labor.

bring a tremendous freedom. All men were to seek God and follow the Law. There was no one telling others what to do, no police, no bureaucratic government overhead.

However, when the generation that had conquered Canaan under Joshua's leadership passed away, the new generation turned away from God. There was continual compromise, and lawlessness reigned.

B. Seven Cycles

And it came to pass, when the judge was dead, that they returned, and corrupted themselves more than their fathers, in following other gods to serve them, and to bow down unto them; they ceased not from their own doings, nor from their stubborn way. And the anger of the LORD was hot against Israel; and he said, Because that this people hath transgressed my covenant which I commanded their fathers, and have not hearkened unto my voice; I also will not henceforth drive out any from before them of the nations which Joshua left when he died: That through them I may prove Israel, whether they will keep the way of the LORD to walk therein, as their fathers did keep it, or not.—Judges 2:19-22

The Israelites would not walk by faith alone. Gradually their attempts to rid the land of the Canaanites became less and less vigorous. Eventually they did not try to remove them, but simply made them bond-servants. Finally God sent an angel to tell Israel that the Canaanites would remain in the land and be a plague to Israel.

From this time on until the end of the period of the judges, the history of Israel followed a pattern. As you read the history of the judges, this pattern repeats itself seven times:

1. *Rebellion* The children of Israel turn away from Jehovah and serve the gods of the heathen. This is called apostasy.
2. *Retribution* As a punishment, God sends other nations to oppress Israel (Jdg 2:22).
3. *Repentance* When the oppression becomes too great, Israel cries to God for deliverance.
4. *Restoration* God raises up judges to deliver Israel from her oppressors.
5. *Rest* The people obey and worship Jehovah for a time (usually until the judge dies) and “the land had rest.”

C. About Idolatry

And the children of Israel did evil again in the sight of the LORD, and served Baalim, and Ashtaroth, and the gods of Syria, and the gods of Zidon, and the gods of Moab, and the gods of the children of Ammon, and the gods of the Philistines, and forsook the LORD, and served not him. And the anger of the LORD was hot against Israel, and he sold them into the hands of the Philistines, and into the hands of the children of Ammon.—Judges 10:6-7

1. Its Rise in Israel

Israel compromised and failed to drive out all the Canaanites from the Promised Land. Amazingly quickly, through having servants and intermarriage, the Israelites turned to idolatry. Pagan idol worship is always more exciting to the flesh⁵² than reverent worship of the holy God. Whenever men have no fear of God, they become lawless and more sensual. Their worship comes to be based on sensuality and emotion. Idolatry was a continuing problem in Israel from this time of the judges until the exile to Babylon.

2. Its Nature

God raised up enemy nations to chasten His people, to bring them back to Himself. Each nation had its own gods, often associated with their territory. When the one true God allowed one pagan nation to triumph over another, that nation thought it was because their own god was stronger than their enemy's god.

These pagan nations were *polytheists* (they each had multiple gods). The Jewish monotheistic God was a totally new concept in the world. This fact alone is testimony to the divine inspiration of the Old Testament Scriptures. In a polytheistic world, no men could or would have created such a singular, gracious, good, sovereign, and all-powerful God.

These nations were also *animists*. Their gods were in all of nature, in the trees, fields, and waters. And they were also *syncretists*. Any new gods were easily added to all the others in their religious life.

Like humans, pagan gods were believed to have their good days and bad days. Everything that happened on earth was a result of how the gods were feeling that day and how they reacted to one another. They were also totally amoral. There was no concept of absolute right and wrong.

⁵² **flesh** – part of man that is concerned with his own selfish interests and wars against the spirit; all that a man is without Christ. Elsewhere used of man's body or being.

3. *Its Supposed Deities*

There were several pagan gods around Israel that had a large influence at the time of the judges. Molech was the god of the Phoenicians and was considered evil. Dagon was the god of the Philistines.

Baal (plural: Baalim) was a word that meant “master” and was a category of male gods. There were larger Baals for regions and races, and smaller Baals in many different towns. Baal-Peor, for example, was the Baal at the town of Peor. Baal was identified with prosperity, which included the weather, sunshine, commerce, and victory. It was very popular; there were many stone figures of Baals.

Ashtorah, Ashtaroth, or Asheroth are variants of the word for “tree.” These were a category of female gods, the counterpart of the male Baals. They were identified with fertility and represented by wooden poles and clusters of trees, sometimes translated as “groves.”

4. *Its Practice*

In this context, men’s response to their pagan gods was idolatry. They would worship a tree, or create statues and try to please the god of the statue. The motivation for pleasing the god was completely selfish: when a man wanted something, he would do something to please his god on the condition that the god would give him what he wanted. It was “do this to get that.”

Man without Christ always seeks to rule his own life by influencing his circumstances apart from God. But he cannot rule everything, and therefore he turns to a perceived god for help. The drift to idolatry occurs because sinful man wants to rule his own life, to be as a god. He gives the impression of religion while keeping the final say in his life. It is a way to get what you want with minimal requirements placed upon you.

This is still the fundamental concept in all religions today, except for biblical Christianity. This is why the unconditional, unmerited love of Christ is so important: our salvation from sin has nothing to do with our earning His favor through good works, and our life with Him is all about denying ourselves and obeying His Word because we love Him—because He first loved us (Eph 2:8-9; Joh 14:21; 1Jo 4:19).

Pagan worship often took place in “high places,” at the top of any hill. The highest place in a region or a town was often designated for this worship. Significantly, these high places were not torn down during the conquest of the land. God had commanded that there would be no worship except at the Tabernacle, and later at the Temple in Jerusalem. He knew that if the people had their own altars, the temptation for idolatry would be even greater.

3. The Judges of Israel

Please read Judges 3-4 and 6-7.

There are twelve judges mentioned in the book of Judges. We should know the six most important ones, and the oppressing nations from whom they delivered Israel.

<u>Judge</u>	<u>Defeated nation</u>
Othniel	Mesopotamia (3:7)
Ehud	Moabites (3:15)
Barak and Deborah	Canaanites (4:1)
Gideon	Midianites (6:1)
Jephthah	Ammonites (10:6)
Samson	Philistines (13:1)

None of these judges delivered or judged all of Israel. At this time there was little national spirit. An oppressor could attack and occupy one part of Israel without being attacked by the other tribes. This is especially obvious in the case of the last two judges mentioned. The oppression by Ammon (which was primarily over the eastern tribes) and the oppression by the Philistines (which was primarily in the southwestern part of the country) probably took place at the same time.

When we read the word “judges,” we are likely to put into the term the idea of judges as we know them. These judges of Israel were not men who presided over courts of law; at least that was not their primary task. First of all, they were military leaders. God raised them up to deliver the people from those who were oppressing them. In order to do this they had to win military victories over the enemies of Israel. Only after these victories did they begin to rule. In their ruling they were much like kings, but on a smaller scale.



The Period of the Judges

The judges were men of faith. Of the six judges listed above, Barak, Gideon, Jephthah, and Samson are included in the eleventh chapter of the book of Hebrews—the catalogue of Old Testament heroes of faith. (Othniel is probably missing because so little is said of him in Judges. Read the story of Ehud carefully and you will see why he is not included.) These men did not think of themselves as military heroes, but as servants of Jehovah. The battles they fought were religious battles and the victories they won were given them by God. The song of Deborah and Barak (Jdg 5) clearly shows that fact. These judges were beacon lights of faith in an age that was dark with sin.

The judges were also men of their time. They may have been the best specimens of Israel's piety⁵³ and valor, but they shared many of the faults of the people. Gideon is an example of this (Jdg 6-9). God used his 300 men to defeat an army of 135,000, without one casualty (8:10)—if you think God cannot do this, then your

⁵³ **piety** – reverence for God, love of His character, and devout obedience to His will.

conception of God is too small! Yet afterwards, Gideon made a golden image that led him astray—and the people of Israel with him.

4. Samson as a Typical Judge

In Samson (Jdg 13-16), we can see both the best and the worst in Israel. His life is typical of the children of Israel. In one sense, Samson was the ideal Israelite, the picture of what Israel should have been. He was a Nazarite from birth. A Nazarite was one who was especially separated to God. He was placed under certain restrictions. One restriction was that he could not cut his hair. Most Nazarites followed the restrictions for just a short period, but Samson was a Nazarite for life. As a Nazarite, Samson pictured the fact that Israel was separated to God. As God was with him and strengthened him, so God was also with Israel to provide for all her needs.

But Samson was far from being a Nazarite at heart. His heart was far from God, at least during part of his life. He fell into sin, especially the sin of adultery. As a result, he lost the strength and blessing that God had given him. In this he symbolized Israel's actual experience. By committing spiritual adultery and going after other gods, Israel sacrificed God's blessing and was oppressed by the surrounding nations.

5. The Spirit of the Age

The two accounts that make up the final part of Judges give us insight into the age in which these things took place. The idolatry of Micah, the willingness of a Levite to be a private priest of a false god, the audacious theft of Micah's gods and priest by the tribe of Dan, and the worship of those false gods by the Danites, make us realize that this people had fallen far from that time of faith when they had conquered mighty foes. The wicked conduct of the men of Gibeah and the terrible method the Levite used to broadcast their crime show us that the time of Judges was one when conscience was stifled and evil was running wild. We are reminded of the conduct of the people of Sodom and Gomorrah just before their destruction. The war of the other tribes against Benjamin indicates clearly that there was no national spirit in Israel.

There is a good reason why this section comes last. We have read about the judges and their exploits. Now we are shown that the judges themselves were insufficient. And these stories are interlaced with the comment, "in those days there was no king in Israel." The spirit of the age testifies clearly that Israel desperately needed to submit to God as its King.

6. Conclusion

By the end of the book of Judges, the Tabernacle has fallen into disrepair, the Ark is in storage, and the people are worshipping at the high places. It is a dark day in Israel indeed.

Thus, the great lesson that this book teaches is that Israel's fortunes are clearly connected to her relationship to God. When Israel followed Him, all was well. When she did not, all was ill. So it always is for God's people. The pattern may not always be so clear, because our blessing or trials may be spiritual rather than physical. But it is now an indisputable and established fact that obedience to God is the requirement for all blessing.

Questions for personal reflection and group discussion

1. What is the purpose of Judges?
2. How was the nation to be administered after Joshua died?
3. Describe the pattern of Israel's history found in Judges.
4. Why did idolatry arise in Israel?
5. What is the fundamental motivation in pagan religion?
6. Describe the spirit of the age of the judges.

12

Covenant Nation's Faithful Minority

Ruth

Intreat me not to leave thee, or to return from following after thee: for whither thou goest, I will go; and where thou lodgest, I will lodge: thy people shall be my people, and thy God my God.

Ruth 1:16

1. Introduction

A. Purpose

When we finish the book of Judges and turn to the book of Ruth, it is like turning from the field of a bloody battle to gaze at a quiet pastoral scene. There is a reason for this contrast. The book of Judges was designed to show us how desperate was the situation in which Israel found herself. Ruth is designed to show us that the situation was not hopeless. True piety was not dead. All respect for God and His Law had not departed from Israel. God was still working, even in the hearts of those in other nations, bringing them within His covenant and making them faithful and true members of the covenant nation.

The book of Ruth is connected to Judges in another way. Judges showed us how badly the people of Israel needed a king. Ruth helps us to understand how God was preparing, even then, to give Israel a king who would truly reign for Him, and ultimately bring Messiah.

B. Overview

It is not possible to date the book of Ruth precisely. From the fact that her descendants are traced to David and no further, it seems likely that the book was written after David was known to become king. Tradition attributes the book to Samuel.

The outline of Ruth has four parts.

- I. Ruth chooses Jehovah Ruth 1
- II. Ruth serves Naomi Ruth 2
- III. Ruth petitions Boaz Ruth 3
- IV. Ruth marries Boaz Ruth 4

2. Ruth's Character

Please read Ruth 1-4.

The best-known words in the book of Ruth are surely those in which Ruth expresses her determination to remain with Naomi.

Intreat me not to leave thee, or to return from following after thee: for whither thou goest, I will go; and where thou lodgest, I will lodge: thy people shall be my people, and thy God my God: Where thou diest, will I die, and there will I be buried: the LORD do so to me, and more also, if ought but death part thee and me.—Ruth 1:16-17

These words are filled with love for her mother-in-law. But they contain far more than that. The Moabitess will become an Israelitess, and the God of Israel shall be her God. This is the expression of a deep religious faith.

The depth of Ruth's faith is clearly shown by her conduct in Israel. She gave herself to caring for Naomi, in the spirit of the fifth commandment. In the first few months of her stay in Bethlehem, she became well known as a virtuous woman. Boaz knew how well she cared for Naomi. The elders of the city were ready to bless her when Boaz declared his intention to marry her. Her good works, for which she quickly became known, are evidences of the sincerity of her statement, "thy God [shall be] my God."

3. God's Law in Action

The book of Judges showed us a black picture of lawlessness. The book of Ruth presents a striking contrast. In it we see a high regard shown for God's Law. To understand the events of the last two chapters of Ruth, we must go back to the Mosaic Law. Provision was made in the Law for keeping the land received within the family (Lev 25:23ff.). If poverty rendered the sale of the land necessary, the closest relative (who was called the kinsman-redeemer) had the first privilege of buying the land. But there was also a duty placed on the kinsman. When there was a childless widow, the relative had a duty to marry her and raise a family, so that the husband's name would not die out in Israel (Deu 25:5ff.). It was considered very important to keep family lines intact.

Ruth went to Boaz and asked him to carry out this duty. There was no immorality in her going to the threshing floor, but a cultural tradition for her to make an appeal to her kinsman.

However, Naomi had a closer relative than Boaz. So Boaz asked him, in the presence of the elders of the city, if he wished the privilege of buying Naomi's field. The man did. Boaz then pointed out that this involved the duty of marrying Ruth. This the man did not wish to do. Then Boaz was free to fulfill the duty of the law and marry Ruth. How strong a contrast we find between this careful observance of the Law of God and the sinful character of the nation as a whole.

There were three requirements to fulfill the role of kinsman-redeemer: 1) kinship, 2) capability (to buy the land), and 3) willingness. This is a beautiful type of Christ. In order to redeem His people, Christ had kinship: "He is not ashamed to call them brethren," having been incarnated as a man (Heb 2:11). Only Christ had the capability: no other man had infinite worth to satisfy the just wrath of God. And Christ desires to save: "him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out" (Joh 6:37).

4. Ruth and the Theocracy

We must not forget that the development of the theocratic kingdom was the next step in God's plan. The story of Ruth fit into that plan. The theocratic kingdom was founded in David. Rahab had married Salmon and bore Boaz. And Ruth, the Moabitess who chose Jehovah as her God, became the great grandmother of David, the king, and through him she became the ancestress of the great King, Jesus Christ.

The secret providences of God⁵⁴ guided the personal tragedy of the loss of Ruth's husband and father-in-law, personal choices to leave her country and commit to the God of Israel, and seemingly random events in the harvest fields of Boaz. These led directly to King David and the King of Kings. God works in mysterious ways. Ruth "is the only instance in which a book is devoted to the domestic history of a woman, and that woman a stranger in Israel. But that woman was the Mary of the Old Testament" (Edersheim).

Questions for personal reflection and group discussion

1. What is the purpose of the book of Ruth?

⁵⁴ **providences of God** – God's...most holy, wise, and powerful preserving and governing all His creatures and all their actions. (*Spurgeon's Catechism*, Q. 11) See *God's Providence* by Charles Spurgeon, or course *GRA God Reigns over All*; all three available from CHAPEL LIBRARY.

2. How is the kinsman-redeemer a type of Christ?
3. Why is Ruth's history important?

13

Covenant Nation's Demands

1 Samuel, Part One

*Talk no more so exceeding proudly; let not arrogancy
come out of your mouth: for the LORD is a God of
knowledge, and by him actions are weighed.*

1 Samuel 2:3

1. Introduction

A. Date and Author

The book of Samuel was probably written after the division of the kingdom. The statement "Ziklag pertaineth unto the kings of Judah unto this day" (1Sa 27:6), would scarcely make sense until the time when Israel and Judah existed as separate kingdoms. The evidence found within the book makes us think that it was written soon after the division of the kingdom. Tradition credits its authorship to Samuel for the first part, and to Nathan the prophet for the second part.

B. Purpose

The book of Samuel is not just a history book. The author chose various incidents that best served his purpose: to set forth the development of the theocracy. One point that Samuel emphasizes is the means by which God established a theocratic king in Israel. A short continuation of the last days of the judges shows why the people decided that they wanted a king. The story of Saul, who is the kind of king that appealed to the people, teaches that a selfish monarch is not what Israel really needs. Finally, the crowning of David provides the theocratic king, the king after God's own heart.

But there is another point closely connected to the first. The kingdom is *always* to be theocratic. God never abdicates as ruler of Israel; the king only serves

under God. To provide direction for the kingdom, God establishes an order of prophets, through whom He makes known His will.

It is the purpose of the book of Samuel to present the rise of these two institutions, the monarchy and the prophetic order, and lay the foundation for the Messiah to come. The establishment of a theocratic king portrays the coming Messiah, Who will reign over all and rule His people with an everlasting love. God promised Abraham that He would raise up kings from his offspring (Gen 17:6). He repeated this promise to Jacob (35:11), who prophesied the kingdom would come through the tribe of Judah (49:10). Moses revealed the pattern for the ideal king (Deu 17:14-20).

The two books of Samuel were originally one book. Not only do they have one theme, with the contents inseparably connected, but they are found as one book in the Hebrew manuscripts. So we will deal with them as one. The outline of Samuel, then, is in three parts.

- | | |
|--|---------------|
| I. Israel under Samuel, the praying judge | 1 Samuel 1-8 |
| II. Israel under Saul, the selfish king | 1 Samuel 9-31 |
| III. Israel under David, the theocratic king | 2 Samuel 1-24 |

These three points in the outline of Samuel are also the three divisions under which we will study the book of Samuel. The rest of this lesson deals only with the first point.

C. When Did Samuel Live?

In order to trace clearly the way in which God brought about the development of His kingdom in Israel, we should first examine the time when the events of 1 Samuel 1-8 took place. It is easy to assume, as we read through the Bible, that the order in which events appear on the pages of Scripture is the order in which they happened. Such is not always the case. The writers of Scripture were not interested in presenting events in chronological order. They often grouped similar events in order to make clear the principle involved in those events. This lack of chronological order makes it necessary for us to study the Bible carefully so that we do not become confused.

Although some disagree, most biblical commentators believe that the events of 1 Samuel 1-8 occurred at the same time as the events of Judges 10-16. In other words, while Eli was the priest at the sanctuary at Shiloh, Jephthah was judging the eastern tribes and Samson was carrying on his one-man war against the Philistines. There is no reason why this cannot be so. The author of Judges was interested in showing the awful conditions in Israel and the temporary relief that God gave through judges. The author of Samuel is interested in showing how, in the same period, God was preparing to show His grace to His people.

2. The Good and Evil in Israel

Please read 1 Samuel 1-3.

Talk no more so exceeding proudly; let not arrogancy come out of your mouth: for the LORD is a God of knowledge, and by him actions are weighed.—1 Samuel 2:3

The early chapters of Samuel provide a sharp contrast between the heights of faith and the depths of wickedness that existed side by side in Israel. The story of Hannah, Samuel's mother, reminds us of Ruth. In simple faith she seeks a child from Jehovah, and unselfishly promises that the child will be given as a Nazarite to Jehovah. When God answers her prayer, she has no hesitation about fulfilling her vow. When Samuel is about three, she brings him to the Tabernacle, there to serve God. The Tabernacle is referred to in the book of Samuel as "the temple." But remember that the Temple was built by Solomon, at least a century later. The use of the term *temple* may indicate that the Tabernacle received a more permanent structure when it was in Shiloh.

Samuel and Samson were both Nazarites for life. Only three such are mentioned in Scripture, the third being John the Baptist. Samuel and Samson embody the differences existing in the religious life of Israel at this period. Samson was a Nazarite because God demanded it; Samuel was offered voluntarily as a Nazarite. Samson was a Nazarite outwardly, and was blessed with outward strength. Samuel was a Nazarite from his heart, and was blessed with strength of soul. It was Samuel, not Samson, who was used of God to deliver Israel from both the oppression of the Philistines and the sin which caused that oppression.

Against the beautiful picture of Hannah's faith, we see the awful wickedness of Eli's sons. They are "sons of Belial" (1Sa 2:12), a Hebrew expression that means worthless and characterized by wickedness. They despise the worship of Jehovah and His laws for conduct. By taking their portion of the sacrifice before the offering was completed, they acted as if the worship of Jehovah existed only to enrich them. They also committed adultery with the women who served at the door of the Tabernacle. In every way they led the people away from Jehovah. What a dreadful picture! The piety of Israel is found in a humble woman; the sin of Israel centers in her priests.

God blessed the pious Hannah, and judged the wicked house of Eli. A prophet appeared to Eli and declared that his sons would both die on the same day, and that Eli's family would be cut off from being high priests.

3. Samuel

A. *Samuel as Prophet*

The LORD was with him, and did let none of his words fall to the ground. And all Israel from Dan even to Beersheba knew that Samuel was established to be a prophet of the LORD.—1 Samuel 3:19-20

In the days of Moses and Joshua, God had revealed Himself to men. But for some time the word of God had come only rarely. Now God again began to reveal Himself through Samuel. He called Samuel one night and told him that the doom pronounced upon Eli's house would be fulfilled. His call to the prophetic office explains the important part that Samuel played in the establishment of the monarchy. If the monarchy was to be theocratic, it must be God-directed. Samuel was God's instrument in guiding the establishment and development of the monarchy.

Actually, the Lord brought three major changes in Israel through Samuel. 1) Civil leadership transitioned from judges to a kingdom, and Samuel is the last great judge. 2) Spiritual leadership transitioned from the priesthood to prophets, and Samuel is the first great prophet. 3) The spiritual condition of the nation changed from decline to recovery. To accomplish this, God began the "school of the prophets" during this time, sometimes called "sons of the prophets." While this ministry is mentioned only indirectly in 1 Samuel (1Sa 19:20), it appears at key points in Israel's history. This involved teachers who were learned in the Law, traveling throughout Israel to train the people how to live under the Law to glorify God. Biblical renewal requires biblical knowledge, biblical obedience out of love for God, and much of God's grace.

B. *The Battle of Aphek*

How far Israel had departed from Jehovah is portrayed in the loss of the Ark (ch. 4-6). Defeated by their enemies the Philistines, the children of Israel do not repent of their sin. Instead, they send to Shiloh for the Ark, thinking that Jehovah has to be with them if they carry the Ark to battle. Remember, in these times nations considered that their battles were between their gods. The sons of Eli bring the Ark and carry it into the battle. But the Ark is not something with magical powers; it is not to be used as a token to get what men want. Jehovah can never be forced to carry out man's selfish desires. Therefore, Israel is defeated, and the Philistines capture the Ark!

The lesson is clear. When the Ark was captured, Jehovah was not overcome by the power of heathen gods, or outmaneuvered by an enemy army. Instead, God

showed that He does not help unrepentant sinners—in this case, His own people Israel. This is another demonstration of the principle of obedience: obedience in love brings blessing; disobedience brings chastening.

But in order that the Philistines may know that this victory does not prove that their gods are greater than Jehovah, God causes them so much trouble that they soon send the Ark back. God supernaturally returns the Ark, directing its path so that all will know that He is the one true God over the nations.

C. Samuel as Judge

All the house of Israel lamented after the LORD. And Samuel spake unto all the house of Israel, saying, If ye do return unto the LORD with all your hearts, then put away the strange gods and Ashtaroth from among you, and prepare your hearts unto the LORD, and serve him only: and he will deliver you out of the hand of the Philistines. Then the children of Israel did put away Baalim and Ashtaroth, and served the LORD only.—1 Samuel 7:2-4

After twenty years had passed, Samuel issued a call to Israel to repent. And Israel heeded the call. God worked among them to raise them from the awful condition in which they were living. To express the national repentance, Samuel called for a national assembly at Mizpah.

The Philistines assumed this gathering was a rebellion against their dominance, and they attacked. Israel had no weapons, and their women and children were with them in the assembly. But now Israel was again a holy nation, and therefore God fought for Israel. He sent a terrible thunderstorm upon the Philistines and they fled (7:10). This victory ended the Philistine oppression. From this time on Samuel judged Israel. He was recognized as a prophet by all Israel, but he probably was judge only in the tribes of Judah, Benjamin, and Simeon.

4. Wanted: A King

Please read 1 Samuel 8.

They have not rejected thee, but they have rejected me, that I should not reign over them. According to all the works... wherewith they have forsaken me, and served other gods, so do they also unto thee.—1 Samuel 8:7-8

When Samuel was old, he called on his sons to help him judge. But they were not honest. They took bribes and perverted justice. In addition, the Ammonites were threatening. So the elders of Israel came to Samuel and said, “Behold, thou art old, and thy sons walk not in thy ways: now make us a king to judge us like all

the nations” (1Sa 8:5). This displeased Samuel, and Jehovah declared that Israel was rejecting not Samuel but Him.

What was wrong with this request? We have stated that Judges was written to show that Israel needed a king. That need existed, and these elders recognized it. God had made provision for a king in the Mosaic Law, even giving instructions how the king should conduct himself. What was wrong?

Their motive was wrong. The people wanted a king “like all the nations.” They had the wrong ideal for Israel; Israel was supposed to be different. It was supposed to be God’s nation, where He would rule His people. In fact, God had been ruling them, but His rule could be seen only by faith. The Israelites wanted to walk by sight, according to their own wisdom. In this they were rejecting God. God planned for them to have a king who would rule under God’s own authority. But Israel wanted a king to rule *instead* of God.

We must all always be careful of what we ask God for. He gives it to us sometimes, and uses it to show us how poor is our individual discernment and judgment, how strong is our self-will, and how much we should be trusting Him.

God told Samuel to warn the people what such a king would be like, one similar to those of all other nations. Kings in the ancient world were arrogant and self-centered. There were two classes of people: rulers who had everything, and the people who had nothing. All property was owned by the king. Often 50% of the produce of the land went to the king to support his wives and court. He would oppress the people for his own purposes.

Yet somehow, none of this mattered to the people! So Samuel announced that they would get the type of king they wanted. They had learned that they needed a king. Now they must learn that the wrong kind of king is worse than none at all.

Questions for personal reflection and group discussion

1. What is the purpose of the book of Samuel?
2. How does Hannah demonstrate great faith?
3. What three major changes did God bring in Israel through Samuel?
4. What was wrong with the people’s request for a king?

14

Covenant Nation's Selfish King

1 Samuel, Part Two

*For the LORD seeth not as man seeth; for man
looketh on the outward appearance, but
the LORD looketh on the heart.*

1 Samuel 16:7b

1. Purpose

The second part of 1 Samuel fits into the purpose of the book as a whole. We have seen how the anarchy in the time of the judges brought the people to the realization that they needed a king—but not a theocratic king. They wanted a king like all the other nations. In this section, we see what happened when they got what they wanted. From their sad experience under Saul, the people of Israel were made to realize that the theocratic nation needed a theocratic king. God was preparing His people for the theocratic kingdom under David and the future Messiah.

In this part we also see the prophets becoming more prominent. Especially Samuel stands out in the narrative, although other prophets are mentioned. They are always God's voice leading Israel toward the ways of God and a true theocracy.

2. Saul Anointed King

Please read 1 Samuel 9-10.

Israel had demanded a king. Wanting a king in itself was not wrong, but Israel's motive and manner were altogether wrong. The people wanted a leader they could see. It was not enough that they had Jehovah. They wished to walk by sight and not by faith (2Co 5:7). Thus God declared that they were rejecting Him—yet He nevertheless gave them the king they desired. But He chose their king, thus indicating that He was still the ruler of Israel, even though Israel had rejected Him. The new king would rule over all twelve tribes of Israel in a United Kingdom.

By a series of providential circumstances, God sent Saul to Samuel. Before Saul arrived, He told Samuel that this man was to be Israel's king. So Saul received an honored reception from Samuel and was anointed to be king of Israel.

This act of anointing by which Samuel made Saul king of Israel, is very important. It is one of the most important acts in the Old Testament. In studying Exodus, we learned that the priests were anointed because they were called to serve God in the Tabernacle. The king was anointed because he also was to serve God. So, in spite of Israel's sinful motive, the kingdom is shown to be part of Jehovah's plan for Israel.

In the Old Testament, anointing symbolizes three things:

1. The person who is anointed is called by God and set apart for a certain office. In the case of Saul, he was called to be king.
2. God sends His Spirit upon the person anointed so that he will be able to fulfill the duties of his office. Thus we read that "the Spirit of God came upon him [Saul]" (1Sa 10:10). This gift of the Spirit does not refer to salvation. It is simply the gift enabling one to do God's work.
3. The person who is anointed is under God's protection. Therefore David would not harm Saul, even when Saul was trying to kill him, because Saul was "God's anointed."

That which was symbolized by anointing was realized in Jesus Christ. *Messiah* means "the anointed one" in Hebrew, just as *Christ* does in Greek. As the Anointed One of God and the great Servant of Jehovah, Jesus Christ received the offices of prophet, priest, and king. He is our chief Prophet, our great High Priest, and our eternal King. The Son of Man stands as the fulfillment of the Old Testament offices. They were simply types and shadows; He is the reality. They were imperfect; He is perfect. They were temporary; He continues forever.

This fact puts the Old Testament kingdom in its proper light. Although the monarchy was begun as the response to a sinful request, the kingship is not something opposed to God's plan and purpose. It was an important step in the development of the theocracy. It was a step that prepared for the fullness of the theocracy in and through Jesus Christ.

3. Saul Receives the Throne

Please read 1 Samuel 11-12.

A. Saul's Qualifications

Saul appeared to have all the qualifications for the throne. He stood head and shoulders above all the other men in Israel (10:23). When he was publicly chosen,

most of Israel received him gladly as their king. He showed proper humility. He did not force himself upon the people. He awaited an opportunity to show himself as their leader.

B. Ammonites – chapter 11

This came when he was called upon to rescue Jabesh-gilead from the Ammonites. After his victory, he was charitable toward those who had not immediately accepted him. And he began a series of wars that God used to free most of Israel from her enemies.

C. Samuel at Gilgal – chapter 12

If ye will fear the LORD, and serve him, and obey his voice, and not rebel against the commandment of the LORD, then shall both ye and also the king that reigneth over you continue following the LORD your God: But if ye will not obey the voice of the LORD, but rebel against the commandment of the LORD, then shall the hand of the LORD be against you, as it was against your fathers.—1 Samuel 12:14-15

After a great victory over the Ammonites, Samuel called the people to “renew the kingdom” at Gilgal. Here many principles for the theocratic kingdom are repeated and emphasized. The people understand their haste for a king, and repent from this sin. And we have another principle set forth for God’s kingdom: when a major sin is discovered and repented of, sometimes it cannot be undone—and the people must live with the consequences.

D. Philistines – chapters 13 - 14

Please read 1 Samuel 13-14.

Saul was a striking figure, a bold warrior, and a just ruler so far—what more could Israel ask in a king? One thing more could be asked of Saul: obedience to Jehovah. Here Saul failed. When he had ruled only two years, he had developed pride. An attack by his son Jonathan on a Philistine garrison at Geba brought the Philistine army into Israel. Saul gathered his forces at Gilgal, and there they waited for Samuel to come and offer sacrifices before the battle. The seven days within which Samuel had promised to come had almost passed, and the army was deserting daily. So Saul himself offered a burnt offering. As king, he rejected the sacred rules that God had set forth for His worship, and took upon himself the task of priest.

And Samuel said to Saul, Thou hast done foolishly: thou hast not kept the commandment of the LORD thy God, which he commanded thee: for now would the LORD have established thy kingdom upon Israel for ever. But now thy kingdom

shall not continue: the LORD hath sought him a man after his own heart, and the LORD hath commanded him to be captain over his people, because thou hast not kept that which the LORD commanded thee.—1 Samuel 13:13-14

This sin brought the first punishment upon Saul: his children would not inherit the kingdom. He had forfeited for his family the right to rule over Israel, but he himself was not yet rejected as king.

E. Amalekites – chapter 15

Please read 1 Samuel 15.

Another failure followed. Saul continued to fight against Israel's enemies. The Amalekites, who dwelt south of Canaan, were among Israel's worst enemies. They had fought against Israel at the time of the Exodus. At that time God had declared that there would never be peace between the two nations. Now, through Samuel, God told Saul that the Amalekites were to be completely destroyed. None were to be left alive nor any living creature taken as spoils. Saul went forth and conquered the Amalekites. But he kept alive the king of Amalek and the best cattle and sheep. This was disobedience, pure and simple. An independent spirit shows itself when we mix our plans with God's: we keep what we like and change what we don't like or prefer differently.

When Samuel arrived, he confronted Saul with his sin. To Saul's claim that he had done this on religious grounds, Samuel replied, "Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, and to hearken than the fat of rams. For rebellion is as the sin of witchcraft, and stubbornness is as iniquity and idolatry" (1Sa 15:22-23). What a majestic statement of the essentials of true religion! It is heartfelt obedience that God desires, not mere conformity to religious ceremonies. Samuel continued, "Because thou hast rejected the word of the LORD, he hath also rejected thee from being king" (1Sa 15:23). This was Saul's second punishment, far more immediate and final than the first.

4. Israel Receives a New King

Please read 1 Samuel 16-19.

The LORD seeth not as man seeth; for man looketh on the outward appearance, but the LORD looketh on the heart.—1 Samuel 16:7

A. God's Choice of David

The king whom Israel had desired, the king that was so representative of the nation, had failed. He had been rejected, although the people as a whole did not

yet know it. A new king had to be chosen. That king would become a man after God's own heart (1Ki 11:4). In fact, although it is clear that David had many talents, like Moses, it is equally clear that God never chooses a man for spiritual work based upon his talents. God always looks upon his heart.

Scripture devotes sixty-four chapters to David's history. For 200 years after his death, God is still blessing Israel because of him. Enabled by God, David wrote 72, and possibly 30 others for which the author is uncertain. These have blessed God's people throughout the centuries. David became the standard for all Israel's kings. Even the King of kings has come from His line.

B. David's Anointing

God sent Samuel to the city of Bethlehem to anoint David, the son of Jesse. But Samuel did not know at first which son was to be chosen. In that culture, the older son was always first and favored. God again shows that His ways are higher than man's ways when He chose the youngest and smallest of the seven brothers (16:7). God works by faith, not by natural qualifications.

This was done secretly, lest Saul should discover it. From this time on it is David, not Saul, who is the chief character in the books of 1 and 2 Samuel. Saul may still sit on the throne, but David is the true king. As evidence of this, "the Spirit of the LORD came upon David from that day forward" and "the Spirit of the LORD departed from Saul, and an evil spirit from the LORD troubled him" (1Sa 16:13-14).

C. David's Heart

Blessed are they that keep his testimonies, and that seek him with the whole heart... With my whole heart have I sought thee: O let me not wander from thy commandments.—Psalm 119:2, 10

What is it to have a whole heart for God? It is many things, but among others it is when you love what God loves and reject what God hates. It is when God is your sufficiency, satisfaction, and security. It is when you seek first His kingdom and His righteousness. It is when you love not the world system and its deceitful pleasures.

But how do you develop a whole heart for God? You come to a whole heart for God only by consistency. God gives us principles in His Word that collectively build consistency over time. Today, many people seek instead a formula for instant success—they want instant gratification. The key to growth in the Christian life is to learn the principles from God's Word very clearly, and to develop disciplines in living by them daily. You become transformed (Rom 12:1-2). Obeying

God is not “achieving,” “forcing yourself,” or just enduring, but springs from the working of the Holy Spirit in your heart.

In this, there are some things in the world you will have to skip. Otherwise you will be on a spiritual roller coaster with continual ups and downs, and you will be in a never-ending success/stumble/repent/restore cycle.

Three psalms of David in particular show us the commitments that God used to develop his heart after God’s own heart. These commitments are interwoven throughout many other psalms as well.

*His delight is in the law of the LORD; and in his law
doth he meditate day and night.—Psalm 1:2*

1. *Psalm 1.* You must make the Word of God your delight, your direction, your “life.” But “the ungodly are not so.” The world system is not some unusual “force,” but it is the atmosphere we live in, directed by pop culture: its music, movies, sports, and monetary success. To come out of this culture takes a concentrated effort, a deliberate daily decision to think differently. You must shape your thinking as well as your values by the Word of God, and not the world’s ways. Consider David and Saul in Saul’s last years: David is in the desert, yet flourishing like a tree planted next to water; Saul is in the royal court, yet wasting away.

The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want.—Psalm 23:1

2. *Psalm 23.* You must allow the Lord, like a shepherd, to order your circumstances as your constant guide. This may sound like the first commitment: guidance by the Word. But it is more: there is commitment to this source of guidance—and still more, there is constant trust in Jesus Christ as your Shepherd. A shepherd is also a protector and provider, but life is always in the path where he leads. “He restoreth my soul”: God heals the inner man by evening out the temperament. God gives us to think rightly, have self-control, and grow in humble love. David’s outward success did not breed independence, rather, he remained dependent upon his Shepherd.

*The LORD is my light and my salvation; whom shall I fear? the LORD
is the strength of my life; of whom shall I be afraid?—Psalm 27:1*

3. *Psalm 27.* When you step into a totally dark room, there is threat, mystery, danger, and care. But when you turn on the light, everything changes: there is great freedom. “Thy face, LORD, will I seek”: *face* is an expression for intimate fellowship. David knew God’s calling to intimate fellowship, and enjoyed it with Him. But in this world, this

does not come easily. We must seek God in His Word; finding Him there is the only guaranteed return that God gives us (Jer 29:13).

David made these three commitments: to make the Word of God his delight, to trust God like a shepherd to guide him, and to seek intimate fellowship with the Lord daily. And God brought David to have a whole heart for Him. Let us follow in the personal spiritual steps of this godly king.

D. David's Preparation

After his anointing to become king, David made no attempt to advance his claim to the throne. But God in His providence brought him to a position of prominence. First as the singer in Saul's court, then as the slayer of Goliath, then as the son-in-law of Saul, and then as a leader in Saul's army—he was drawn more and more into royal court life. While he gained valuable experience to prepare to be king, he had to work to maintain his spiritual commitment to God.

David's defeat of Goliath is a noteworthy example. Warfare in the ancient world often involved the champions of the two sides fighting to the death, to determine whose god was stronger. Saul was a head taller than the rest of the Hebrews, and one of few with armor. It is he who should be standing up to Goliath. David was probably in his late teens, and yet he was so spiritually discerning that—more than the king and all his advisors, more than the whole army of Israel—he knew that Goliath defied not Israel but God, and that the battle was the Lord's. Fitting David with Saul's armor was only the wisdom of man. God's purpose was to show that He is faithful to those who have a whole heart for Him. So David was right from the beginning; he had no hope in his own strength, but was totally dependent upon the power of God—the battle was the Lord's. Guided by the hand of God, David's stone found its small target, the impossible happened, God was glorified, and Israel won a great victory.

E. David's Danger

David's growing fame also brought him increased danger. Saul, troubled by the evil spirit, was subject to fits of maniacal anger. In such fits he first threatened David, then tried to kill him. Eventually, what Saul had attempted in madness, he began to plot in his sane moments. David's rising fame, and perhaps the rumors of his anointing by Samuel, made him appear to Saul as a threat to the throne. Finally, David had to flee the palace, and spend years in the rough wilderness of southern Judea and in the land of the Philistines, because the entire army of Saul was now turned to the task of killing this single fugitive. Yet even this was used of God, for at this time David gathered unto himself a band of followers who were to be his most loyal supporters when he came to the throne.

David's life during this period contains elements that are unpleasant. We must not think that the great sins of his later life are the only sins he committed. Lying, brutality, deceit, and anger are all mentioned. But in spite of his sins, David was basically a man after God's heart. He believed firmly that God ruled Israel, and that God would raise him to the throne without scheming or rebellion on his part. Thus he refused to kill Saul when he twice had the opportunity. This utter dependence upon Jehovah is *the* characteristic of the theocratic king.

5. Saul's Downward Path

Please read 1 Samuel 26 and 31.

What a contrast is the life of Saul to that of David. It is not that Saul is a sinner and David is without sin. Both committed grievous sins. But there is a basic difference in their attitude toward sin. We might say that David sinned in spite of the fact that his heart was right before Jehovah. But Saul's sins were the result of a headstrong, self-centered nature that was not yielded to God at all.

The fact that the Spirit of Jehovah came upon Saul does not mean that he was converted (1Sa 10:10). In the Old Testament, the Holy Spirit sometimes came upon men officially but not personally. That is, He would enable them to do the work to which God had called them, but would not change their hearts and lead them to salvation. His coming upon Saul was official only. We know this, because He departed from Saul when Saul was rejected as king. The Holy Spirit never leaves those whom He regenerates.⁵⁵

All God's people are sinners. But they are repentant sinners: they are sorry for sin, they try to overcome sin, they seek forgiveness for sin. There was no repentance in Saul: he sinned, and he continued in his sin. Finally his sin brought him to an awful end. He died by his own hand. "The wages of sin is death" (Rom 6:23). Saul lived and ruled as a selfish, sinful king. He received his just wage.

6. Rise of the Prophets

This period of Israel's history marks the introduction of a new order—the prophets. There had been prophets before. Abraham is called a prophet, and Moses is the great prophet of the Old Testament. But now, under the leadership of Samuel, a prophetic order appears in Israel. This marks the beginning of an institution that continued until the coming of Christ.

⁵⁵ **regenerates** – God's acting to create new life in a sinner by the power of the Holy Spirit, resulting in repentance and faith in Christ and holiness of life; the new birth.

A prophet is a man called of God to receive God's word and to communicate it to the people. This definition includes all that is essential to the biblical idea of a prophet. He is the mouthpiece of God.

The rise of the office of prophet (and with it the schools of prophets or "sons of the prophets") takes place at the same time as the beginning of the monarchy. There was good reason for this. God had ordained that Israel should have kings. But these were to be theocratic kings who ruled under God. Such kings had to know God's will. It was the task of the prophets to make God's will known to the kings. Most of the prophets were closely associated with kings. When the kings were true to their theocratic calling, the prophets were their counselors. But when the kings forsook Jehovah, the prophets were their opponents, warning them of their sins.

In this period, it is Samuel who is the chief prophet. He announces God's will. He gives God's instructions to King Saul. He declares the king's sins to him, and boldly proclaims the punishment that God will bring. He anoints the new king. And when David flees from Saul, he goes first to Ramah to consult with Samuel. Samuel is the first of many who will be God's voice to the kings of Israel.

Questions for personal reflection and group discussion

1. How did Saul fail at Gilgal when facing the Philistines?
2. How does an independent spirit show itself?
3. a. What is it to have a whole heart for God?
b. How do you develop a whole heart for God?
4. What do we learn about David when he faced Goliath?
5. What is a prophet?

15

Covenant Nation's Theocratic King

2 Samuel

*And thine house and thy kingdom shall be established for ever
before thee: thy throne shall be established for ever.*

2 Samuel 7:16

1. Purpose

We have traced the steps by which God brought Israel to the recognition of her need for a theocratic king. Now, in David, we see just such a king. Israel now becomes a truly theocratic kingdom, for the one on the throne acknowledges Jehovah as the king of Israel and rules as His servant.

Yet the picture is not all pleasant. David is not free from sin. And his sin is pictured that we might learn again that God rules over His people in mercy and in justice. He rules in mercy, for He forgives David's sin and does not depose him. He rules in justice, for sin is punished, even when it is committed by the man after God's own heart.

2. David Becomes King

Please read 2 Samuel 1, 2, and 5.

*And it came to pass after this, that David enquired of the LORD,
saying, Shall I go up into any of the cities of Judah? And the
LORD said unto him, Go up. And David said, Whither shall
I go up? And he said, Unto Hebron.—2 Samuel 2:1*

While Saul lived, David was a fugitive. But when Saul died, God told David to go up to Hebron. Notice David's careful dependence upon the guidance of Jehovah (2Sa 2:1). He sought the Lord in prayer. Already he demonstrates that his spirit is after God's own heart. Today, God does not guide us primarily by speaking new words to us in our thoughts. The world, the flesh, and the devil influence our thoughts in addition to the Holy Spirit. Today, God speaks to us in His Word.

We receive guidance for all of life's decisions through the commands, principles, and patterns in God's Word.

In Hebron, David was anointed king over Judah. But the rest of Israel followed Ish-bosheth, a son of Saul. For seven and a half years David ruled in Hebron. During that time his kingdom grew stronger, while that of Ish-bosheth became weaker. When Ish-bosheth was assassinated by his servants, all Israel gladly claimed David as king.

When he was established as king of all the nation, David turned his attention to the capture of Jerusalem. This was still a stronghold of the heathen Jebusites. Although it was a fortress that seemed too strong to be captured, David conquered it and made Jerusalem his capital.

The Philistines, those perennial enemies of Israel, heard that David was made king of all Israel. Fearing a united Israel, they came up to fight against David. But their expedition led only to a decisive victory for David. This victory established David firmly on the throne.

3. David and Jehovah

Please read 2 Samuel 6-7.

David was a very religious man. We see this in the psalms he wrote. We see it also in his actions as king. He soon made plans to bring the Ark of God to Jerusalem. Surrounded by thousands of rejoicing Israelites, the Ark was moved. But David had set the Ark on a cart, not according to God's instructions, and its journey was interrupted by the death of Uzzah. This grieved David. But he learned his lesson, and when the Ark was brought the rest of the way, it was carried by Levites. Thus, with much rejoicing, the symbol of God's presence was brought to Jerusalem. The Ruler of Israel and His servant the king "dwelt" in the same city.

However, David was not satisfied: he had a fine house, yet God dwelt in a tent. He longed to build a house for God, but God would not permit him to build it. Instead, He made a promise to David:

*I will set up thy seed after thee...and I will establish his kingdom.
He shall build an house for my name...My mercy shall not depart
away from him, as I took it from Saul, whom I put away
before thee. And thine house and thy kingdom shall
be established for ever.—2 Samuel 7:12-16*

What a tremendous promise this is: God will establish David's descendants on the throne of Israel forever. This is the great Davidic Covenant. It is unconditional: God alone will ensure that it comes to pass completely.

This is the third of the three major covenants that we must understand and remember from the Old Testament. The first is the unconditional Abrahamic Covenant: all nations would be blessed through Abraham's descendants. The second covenant is the conditional National or Mosaic Covenant: if the nation of Israel obeys God, it would be blessed; and if not, it would be punished.

The fulfillment of the Davidic Covenant began with Solomon, for he is the one who built the Temple. But it did not end with him. It continued on through the generations. The wicked kings were punished, but the line continued. Then the throne of David disappeared under Gentile rule, but only that it might reappear in a spiritual sense, when the great Son of David came to occupy that throne eternally. Yes, this promise to David speaks of Christ. And through this promise the whole theocratic kingship points to Him, the eternal King.

4. David's Success as King

The reign of David was a time of greatness for Israel. He was a man after God's own heart. Not only was the true religion central in the life of the nation, but the boundaries of Israel were expanded greatly. David conquered the heathen nations round about, who had so often oppressed Israel, until his domain stretched from the river Euphrates to the peninsula of Sinai.



Expansion of the Kingdom: Saul, David, Solomon

David's greatness found expression also in deeds of kindness. Although as a warrior he was feared by all his enemies, yet in his rule there is none of cruelty and dictatorship so common in Eastern monarchs. His kindness to Mephibosheth is but one example of his love and mercy (2Sa 4:4; 9:1-13).

5. David's Grievous Sins

Please read 2 Samuel 11-12.

How wonderful it would be if we could present only the bright side of David's reign. But the Scripture is perfectly honest. In sharp contrast to his success as a warrior, his piety as a worshipper of Jehovah, and his goodness as king over Israel, stands the story of his great sin. When we read of his adultery with Bathsheba and the murder of Uriah we can only exclaim, "How are the mighty fallen!" This is one of the lessons God would have us learn from this awful episode. None of us is immune to sin. If the man after God's heart could stoop to such sin, we dare not imagine that we are somehow beyond them. Let the one who thinks that he stands take heed lest he fall (1Co 10:12)!

It is in connection with this sin that we again see the place of the prophets in Israel. Nathan, who had brought David the great promise of God, now stands before him to point the finger of God at the sinner on the throne. Like Saul before him, David has sinned against the King for whom he rules. But unlike Saul, David repents of his sin. The charge of sin brings forth confession of sin, and confession of sin brings forgiveness of sin. And out of the depths of this experience have come to us two beautiful psalms—Psalm 32 and 51.

Sin confessed is sin forgiven (1Jo 1:9). But sin must be punished; God's justice demands it. The prophet spells out the punishment: as David slew Uriah by the sword, "the sword shall never depart from thine house" (2Sa 12:10). Because David took the wife of Uriah secretly, another shall take David's wives in the eyes of all Israel. Though David shall not die for his sin, the child born of adultery shall die. From this point on, the story of David is not the same—the rest of the book unfolds the just punishment given to David.

We need not trace this punishment in great detail to see that the punishment fits the crime. David's lust is repeated in his son Amnon, who disgraces his sister Tamar. The sword falls on David's house when Absalom avenges his sister by slaying Amnon. In neither case does David punish the offender as he should. Perhaps he recognizes how much his sons resemble their father. His poor handling of the offenders leads to the rebellion of Absalom, which almost costs David his throne. Importantly, in this David does not suffer alone: all Israel is affected—the country

is torn by tumult. Only with much difficulty is all rebellion suppressed and peace restored to Israel.

6. A Pause for Perspective

As we stand at this point in the Bible history and look back, we find ourselves on a vantage point from which we can survey all that has gone before. The Kingdom of God stretching behind us can be compared to three broad plateaus, each higher than the one before.

Farthest back and lowest, we see the first plateau: the early days when the first theocracy under Adam was destroyed by sin and the knowledge of God was only barely kept alive. Perhaps this is more of a valley than a plateau. But then comes a rise and we see the second plateau: the plateau of promise on which the patriarchs dwelt. The tents that they pitched there are those of men who live by faith in the promises of God. Dwelling as sojourners in the land of promise, they look for a better country, that is, a heavenly home.

Another rise brings us to the third plateau: the establishment of Israel as the covenant nation. The upward climb that leads to this plateau is marked by well-known events. The Exodus, the giving of the Law, the wilderness wanderings, and the conquest of Canaan are milestones that mark the way. As we look back, we remember that the scenes on this plateau are not pleasant. The troublous time of the judges shows that much is yet lacking.

Directly below us there is another rise. We see the steps in the development of the Kingdom. And those steps bring us to the point on which we now stand—at the beginning of the high plateau of the theocratic kingdom. God has set on the throne of Israel one who rules for Him, and by his hand God has caused Israel to rise to a place of importance among the nations of the world. The nation is truly theocratic, for although there is still sin in the lives of the people and the life of the king, yet there is a recognition of Jehovah and a revival of true worship such as Israel has not seen since the time of Joshua.

But we cannot stop here. We must also look forward. The plateau of the Kingdom lies before us. That plateau must be traveled. The results of David's reign must bring about the prosperity of Solomon's. But we must also travel through much that will be discouraging. The story of the Divided Kingdom and the Exile is far from pleasant. So even now we should lift up our eyes and look ahead. There in the distance is another rise. This plateau is not the summit. The Kingdom of God must develop still further. Though the sin of man may lead to apparent defeat for the purposes of God, He yet brings to pass His will. His Kingdom is coming—and will come. The Old Testament era is but preparation for the New. The

Kingdom of God finds its perfection in Jesus Christ, the King of kings Who shall reign on the theocratic throne eternally.

Questions for personal reflection and group discussion

1. What is the purpose of 2 Samuel?
2. What are the terms of the Davidic Covenant?
3. What lesson should we learn from David's sins against Bathsheba and Uriah?
4. What are the differences between Saul and David in their sins?

16

Covenant Nation's Songbook

Introduction and Psalms

Wherewithal shall a young man cleanse his way? by taking heed thereto according to thy word... Thy word have I hid in mine heart, that I might not sin against thee.

Psalm 119:9, 11

The poetic books come next in our study because our lessons are in the approximate sequence in which the books were written. In this case, David and Solomon wrote the major part of the poetic books, and we therefore consider their poetic writings now.⁵⁶

1. Introduction to the Poetic Books

A. Number of Poetic Books

The Hebrews list Psalms, Proverbs, and Job as the poetic books. These three books are provided with a special system of accents (in the Hebrew) to bring out their poetic character. But these are not the only examples of Hebrew poetry. We find poetry scattered throughout the historical books. For instance, there is the

⁵⁶ To wait until after Solomon to consider the poetic books would interrupt the history of 1 and 2 Kings.

song of Moses in Exodus 15, the song of Deborah and Barak in Judges 5, the song of Hannah in 1 Samuel 2, and the song of David in 2 Samuel 1.

The Song of Songs and Lamentations are also poetic in form. The Hebrews did not include them in their classification of poetic books because they were read at certain Jewish feasts, and were therefore placed in the Megilloth.⁵⁷ Since the Reformation, evangelicals consider Psalms, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Song of Solomon, and Job as the five poetic books or “personal literature.” Lamentations, written by Jeremiah, is included with the prophets.

B. Characteristics of Hebrew Poetry

1. Parallelism

Hebrew poetry contains neither the rhyme nor the meter that is commonly used in English poetry, but emphasizes similarity of thought. All forms of Hebrew poetry are basically intended to teach. Since parallelism is a good teaching form, it became the chief characteristic of Old Testament poetry. Parallelism is the similarity of thought that exists between two or more lines of Hebrew poetry. We find a good example in Psalm 19:1:

*The heavens declare the glory of God; And
the firmament showeth his handiwork.*

It is easy to see that both lines of this verse speak about the same subject. They even say the same thing, but in different words. There are three main types of parallelism.

a. *Synonymous parallelism*: when the second line repeats the thought of the first line. This is the simplest type of parallelism. It is found frequently in the psalms. The one mentioned above is an example of this kind. Another example of synonymous parallelism is Psalm 24:1:

*The earth is the LORD's, and the fulness thereof;
The world, and they that dwell therein.*

b. *Antithetical parallelism*: when the second line of the parallelism presents a contrast to the first line. In this kind, the second line often begins with “but.” An example is Proverbs 15:1:

*A soft answer turneth away wrath:
But grievous words stir up anger.*

c. *Synthetic parallelism*: when the second line completes the thought of the first line. This may be done in various ways. The second line may give reason for the first line, as in Proverbs 4:23:

⁵⁷ See Chapter 1 section 4A.

*Keep thy heart with all diligence;
For out of it are the issues of life.*

The second line may also explain the result of the first, as in Psalm 23:1:

*The LORD is my shepherd;
I shall not want.*

The two lines may also make a comparison. This is usually indicated by the use of “as” and “so.” An example of this type is Psalm 125:2:

*As the mountains are round about Jerusalem,
So the LORD is round about his people
From henceforth even for ever.*

2. Acrostic

Parallelism is a characteristic found in all Hebrew poetry. There is another characteristic, but it is found only occasionally. Hebrew poetry is sometimes arranged in acrostic fashion. In an acrostic, the letters that begin each line form a pattern. In Hebrew poetry, the usual pattern is alphabetic; that is, the first letters of the lines form the Hebrew alphabet. Thus the first line of an alphabetic acrostic in English would begin with “a,” the next with “b,” etc. Psalm 119 is an extended acrostic. It is divided into groups of eight verses. All the verses of the first group begin with Aleph, the first letter of the Hebrew alphabet. The verses of the next group begin with Beth, the second letter, and so on through the 22 letters of the Hebrew alphabet. Some Bible versions mark this clearly by indicating the letter that begins each group.

C. Value of Hebrew Poetry

We may be very grateful to God for including these poetic books in the Old Testament. Poetry often expresses the deepest feelings of men. Strong emotions easily bring forth poetic expression. So it is in the Old Testament. By means of the poetic books, we gain an insight into the thinking and feelings of God’s people in ancient times. We see them in joys and sorrows, in pain and pleasure, in blessing and punishment—and we learn to understand them better by means of their poetry.

But the poetry of the Old Testament does more than that. It gives us the revelation of God from a different point of view. Much of God’s revelation is objective. It tells us what God has done and is doing for His people. But the poetic books show us the work of God in the hearts of His people. David’s sorrow for sin, for example, is not simply an interesting study; it is God’s revelation of how he felt when he sinned.

And here is another valuable purpose of the poetic books: they are intended to be used by God's people in all ages to express their innermost feelings to God. We can identify how godly men responded to life, and we can make their godly responses our own. Even more importantly, God has given these poetic books so that His people in all ages might find great comfort. In these Words of God, the Spirit of God speaks from God's heart to ours.

Here is a revelation from God that reaches to the depths of our souls, that guides our emotions and our thoughts to Christ. How impoverished we would be if the Psalter were suddenly taken away from us. How we would miss the insights of Job and the practical wisdom of Proverbs. The poetic books are filled with choice blessings for us, if we are willing to search for them.

2. Introduction to the Book of Psalms

A. Date

The book of Psalms, or the Psalter, was not written at any one time. The various psalms were written over a period of about one thousand years. Within this time, there were three periods in which most of the psalm-writing took place.

1. The early period the time of Moses
2. The classical period the time of David and Solomon
3. The late period during and after the Exile.

Of these three, the classical period is the most important. Most of the psalms were written during the reigns of David and Solomon.

B. Authors

Since the book of Psalms was written in these three periods, it is clear that the entire Psalter is not the work of one man. Rather, there were many men who wrote the Psalms. David wrote more than anyone else; he wrote seventy-two psalms. Twelve were written by Asaph, who was David's choir director. Eleven were written by the sons of Korah, a family of Levites who helped with the singing in the Temple. Two psalms were written by Solomon, one by Moses, and one by a man named Ethan. We do not know for sure who wrote the remaining fifty, but thirty of these also may have been written by David. Since David wrote far more of the psalms than anyone else, the Psalter is sometimes called the Psalms of David.⁵⁸

⁵⁸ See *The Treasury of David* by Charles H. Spurgeon (1834-1892) with commentary on each psalm; selections available from CHAPEL LIBRARY.

Why did David begin writing so many psalms? Some commentators believe the courts around the tabernacle that David had made for the Ark in Jerusalem, may have been filled with people who were milling around, often engaged in idle talk. David wrote many of the psalms so that choirs could sing them within this tabernacle area. With the singing, there would be a more quiet atmosphere of reverent worship.

C. Use of the Psalter

The Psalter much resembles a hymnbook. We know that some of the psalms were sung by the people in their worship. Psalms 120-134 are called songs of ascent,⁵⁹ because they were sung by pilgrims as they approached Jerusalem when they were coming to join in the religious festivals. Psalms 113-118 are called the hallel psalms. They were sung by Jewish families at the Passover. As a matter of fact, they are used in the same way even today. Some psalms were intended to express the deep religious feelings of the psalmist's soul and were not intended for singing.

In addition, the Psalms are useful to God's people in prayer. They are the intimate expressions of love for and dependence upon God. Christ often quoted the Psalms throughout His ministry. Even four of Christ's last seven words on the cross were from the Psalms.

The most effective way to use the Psalms in prayer is to pray the words back to God. Read several Psalms every day; some find it useful to read five each day, starting with the day of the month and adding thirty (for example: on the fifth of the month, read Psalm 5, 35, 65, 95, and 125). As you read, find one verse that stands out to you. Then pray those words back to God, making them personal. It is also useful to substitute your own name for the personal pronouns. In these ways, Psalms becomes your book of prayer as well as your book of songs.

D. Division of Psalms

Whether or not we think of the Psalter as a hymnbook, it is clear that the psalms have been divided into five books. According to an ancient Jewish tradition, each book in the Psalter corresponds to a book in the Pentateuch.

Book I	1-41	(Genesis)
Book II	42-72	(Exodus)
Book III	73-89	(Leviticus)
Book IV	90-106	(Numbers)

⁵⁹ The rise in elevation from the Jordan River to Jerusalem, the traditional route from the north, is approximately 3,400 feet (~1,160 meters). Thus the Scriptures often speak of going "up" to Jerusalem, even when traveling southward.

Book V 107-150 (Deuteronomy)

At the end of the last psalm in each book, a doxology of praise to God is added. Read Psalms 41:13, 72:18-19, 89:52, and 106:48. Psalm 150 is a complete doxology, placed last to bring the Psalter to a fitting close.

For study purposes, the material in the Psalms can be divided in many ways. The threefold division suggested by the Heidelberg Catechism (1563)—sin, salvation, and gratitude—assists our understanding.

3. Psalms Dealing with Sin

Please read Psalms 14, 32, 51, and 73.

The Psalms contain an outstanding description of man's sin in Psalm 14. The word "fool" in the first verse does not refer to one who is stupid or mentally deficient; it speaks of one who is blinded by the folly of sin. The description of the fool that is given in this psalm is used by Paul in Romans when he presents the sinfulness of the human race. This psalm tells us what man is like naturally, apart from God's saving grace.

The most important psalms that talk about sin, however, do not simply insist that man is sinful. They also portray sorrow for sin. We call them penitential psalms, because "penitence" means sorrow for sin. And these psalms truly present penitence. The writers are not sorry that they were caught sinning, nor are they sorry that they are liable to be punished. They are deeply sorry because they have sinned against God, and thereby have dishonored Him. The penitential psalms are 6, 32, 38, 51, 102, 130, and 143. Of these, the best known are Psalms 32 and 51.

Psalm 51 is notable in that it was written by David after his sin with Bathsheba. Psalm 32 probably was also. Psalm 32 is a picture of God's forgiveness to the penitent sinner. Before repentance there was sorrow and punishment; with repentance the sinner receives forgiveness; after repentance comes blessing. Psalm 51 follows much the same pattern. But where Psalm 32 seems to be written from the viewpoint of one who is looking back on past forgiveness, Psalm 51 is the song of one who is receiving forgiveness in the present.

Psalm 73 is not listed as a penitential psalm, but it also deals with sin. In it the psalmist traces the events that led him into sin—the sin of doubting God—and then explains how he was delivered from his sin. Wherever the psalms speak of salvation, there is usually some mention of sin.

4. Psalms of Salvation

The psalms that speak of salvation can be divided into three types—the historical psalms, the imprecatory psalms, and the messianic psalms.

A. Historical Psalms

Please read Psalms 81 and 106.

The historical psalms look back over the past history of the children of Israel. By means of this history, the psalmist seeks to remind his people of the fact that God has truly been their savior.

Psalm 81 is a good example of this. In it the psalmist reminds Israel of the release from Egyptian bondage. But this is not done simply to recall past history. It is used as the basis for a commandment and a promise (Psa 81:13-16). History, especially the history of God's people, is intended to teach later generations the truth about God.

In a similar manner, Psalm 106 traces the history of Israel in the wilderness. It emphasizes Israel's rebellious actions and God's mercy to His people because of His covenant. Remembering that covenant faithfulness, the psalmist prays that God will still save His people (Psa 106:47).

B. Imprecatory Psalms

Please read Psalms 109 and 139.

The imprecatory psalms differ greatly from the historical psalms. In these psalms the writer asks God to destroy his enemies. These psalms sometimes sound very bloodthirsty. For instance, David prays about his enemies like this:

Let his days be few; and let another take his office. Let his children be fatherless, and his wife a widow. Let his children be continually vagabonds, and beg: let them seek their bread also out of their desolate places.—Psalm 109:8-10

These are harsh words. Because of these sentiments, some people say that Christians cannot agree with these psalms or sing them in worship. After all, they say, Christians are supposed to love their enemies (Mat 5:43-44): rather than pray for their destruction, they should pray for their conversion.

These statements are true, but they do not present the whole truth. Most of these psalms are by David. David was the anointed servant of God, and therefore he was under God's protection. Anyone who fought against David was fighting against God. His enemies were God's enemies.

Do not I hate them, O LORD, that hate thee? And am not I grieved with those that rise up against thee? I hate them with perfect hatred: I count them mine enemies.—Psalm 139:21-22

David's enemies have set themselves against God and His servant. In this way they place themselves under the wrath of a just God. David is really praying that God's justice may be displayed in the punishment of His enemies. We as Christians can pray for the same thing, for God has promised to punish the wicked, both in this life and after death. Perhaps our imprecatory prayers cannot always be as specific as David's psalms were, but the spirit of our prayer can be the same as was his.

C. Messianic Psalms

Please read Psalms 2, 16, 22, and 110.

By far the best expression of Israel's songs of salvation is to be found in the messianic psalms. While the historical psalms point to God's salvation in the past, and the imprecatory psalms cry out for God's salvation at the present time, the messianic psalms look forward to the future perfection of God's salvation. These psalms speak of Christ. The word *Messiah* in Hebrew (from which the word "messianic" comes) means "the anointed one," the same as the word *Christ* in Greek. Although the writers of these psalms did not know the details, they were actually writing about Jesus Christ.

It is wonderful how much we can learn about Christ from these psalms. In Psalm 2, He is presented as the king given by God who will rule the entire earth. Psalms 45 and 72 also speak of His kingship, emphasizing the fact that it will be eternal. Psalm 110 shows another side of Christ's work: He will be a priest forever after the order of Melchizedek (Gen 14:18-20). In Psalm 22 we have a picture of the crucifixion in amazing detail. And in Psalm 16 we find a prophecy of the Resurrection.

Since God's salvation was given to men before Christ appeared, we also find in the Psalms echoes of the psalmists' salvation. In fact, almost every time sin is mentioned, salvation is also mentioned. For the Old Testament saints as well as for us, salvation is neither only historical nor only something in the future. Neither is it simply deliverance from human enemies. Salvation is first of all deliverance from sin and its consequences. And echoes of this personal salvation ring throughout the Psalms from the Old Testament men of faith.

5. Psalms of Gratitude

Please read Psalms 95, 100, and 147.

No one who has been made aware of his great sin and misery, and who has received God's wonderful salvation, can stop there. Salvation always results in thankfulness. And those who are thankful want to show their gratitude in every way possible. Every true Christian prays:

*Fill thou my life, O Lord, my God, in every part with praise,
That my whole being may proclaim Thy being and Thy ways.
Not for the lip of praise alone, nor even the praising heart,
I ask but for a life made up of praise in every part.⁶⁰*

The Old Testament people of God knew this gratitude and expressed it in their psalms. Most of the psalms contain echoes of a thankful heart. This is to be expected. A person who is truly thankful cannot keep it to himself.

There are several types of songs in which this thankful spirit is especially evident. These are the theocratic psalms, the hallel psalms, the songs of ascents, and the hallelujah psalms. To these we will add Psalm 119 as another song of gratitude.

Psalms 95-100 are called the *theocratic psalms*. They receive this name because of the many times they refer to the sovereign rule of God. Because God reigns, these psalms call on us to worship Him and to sing His praises. Indeed, all the earth is exhorted to praise the sovereign God. Here the gratitude of Israel breaks forth in songs of praise.

Psalms 113-118 are the *hallel psalms*. Like the theocratic psalms, they also bring praise to God. In fact, the word *hallel* means "praise." But these psalms form a separate group because of their use. These were the psalms sung by the Israelites during the Passover. Psalms 113 and 114 were sung before the meal, and Psalms 115 and 118 after the meal. The themes of these psalms are appropriate for remembering and celebrating the Exodus.

Psalm 119 is another psalm that expresses gratitude. It deserves separate mention because of its unique structure. Psalm 119 has 176 verses, divided into 22 stanzas of 8 verses each. As an acrostic, the verses in each stanza begin with the same letter of the Hebrew alphabet, and each stanza with the next consecutive letter. The difficulty of this type of writing is easily discovered if one will only try to think of a group of words that refer to the same object, one beginning with each

⁶⁰ **Horatius Bonar** (1808-1889) – Scottish Presbyterian minister whose sermons, hymns, books, and religious tracts were widely popular during the 19th century. Born in Edinburgh, Scotland. See *Treasures of Bonar*, available from CHAPEL LIBRARY.

letter of the alphabet. Moreover, the writer of Psalm 119 centered every verse, except just two, on the Word of God. It is this emphasis on God's Word that makes this an expression of gratitude. The Word of God is a means to a holy life, and a holy life is a life of gratitude to God. Every student should be familiar with stanzas B (vs. 9-16), M (vs. 97-104), and N (vs. 105-112).

The *songs of ascent* (Psalms 120-134) are psalms believed to be sung by pilgrims coming up to Jerusalem to worship at the feasts. In these psalms there is much said about the Temple, the sanctuary, and the mountain of God. These terms all refer to the Old Testament house of God. Worshipping God in His holy place is the chief expression of thankfulness in these psalms.

The *hallelujah psalms* (Psalms 146-150) end the Psalter. They receive their name from the fact that each one begins with the word *hallelujah*, translated as "praise ye the LORD." It is therefore obvious that in these psalms, praise is the chief form of gratitude. This group comes to its climax in Psalm 150, which is a complete doxology of praise. Every line in this psalm speaks of praise to God. It is a fitting finale to the Psalter.

Questions for personal reflection and group discussion

1. Which books do evangelicals today include as personal literature?
2. Define the three main types of parallelisms in Hebrew poetry.
3. What is an acrostic?
4. How are the poetic books valuable?
5. How are the psalms useful in personal prayer?
6. Briefly, describe each of the following.
 - a. Penitential psalms
 - b. Historical psalms
 - c. Imprecatory psalms
 - d. Messianic psalms
7. Briefly describe each of the following.
 - a. Theocratic psalms
 - b. Hallel psalms
 - c. Songs of ascent
 - d. Hallelujah psalms

17

Covenant Nation's Wisdom

Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, and Song of Solomon

*Trust in the LORD with all thine heart; and lean
not unto thine own understanding. In all thy ways
acknowledge him, and he shall direct thy paths.*

Proverbs 3:5-6

*Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter: Fear God, and
keep his commandments: for this is the whole duty of man.*

Ecclesiastes 12:13

1. Proverbs

A. Introduction to Proverbs

The very first verse of Proverbs tells us its main author: “The proverbs of Solomon the son of David, king of Israel.” Some of the proverbs are said to be those of the “wise men” (Pro 22:17; 24:23), some of whom may have preceded Solomon. We also are told that Agur and Lemuel (concerning whom we know nothing) are the authors of the last two chapters of Proverbs. Yet the majority of the sayings are by Solomon, the king who received directly from God great wisdom beyond any other man of his time.

This wisdom shows itself in the book. Its sayings encompass so much of practical life in dealing with people and ourselves. Although Proverbs presents some truths that are generally accepted by people, it does so in a way that exalts the sovereign God, with a perfection of truth guaranteed by inspiration. This wisdom is an invaluable guide to believers of all ages.⁶¹

⁶¹ See *Proverbs* by Charles Bridges (1794-1869) (The Banner of Truth Trust), with commentary on each verse; selections available from CHAPEL LIBRARY.

The New Testament quotes Proverbs as inspired Scripture (compare Pro 3:11-12 with Heb 12:5-6, etc.). Chapters 25-29 were collected from Solomon's writings during Hezekiah's reign (Pro 25:1). We may be sure that God inspired the collectors as well as the writers, so that all of Proverbs is God's inspired Word.

Proverbs is a poetic book. It is written in parallelisms, which are the outstanding characteristic of Hebrew poetry. The poetry of the ancient Hebrews, just like poetry in our own language, contains great variety. As English poetry may range from two-line verses to long epic poems, so Hebrew poetry may include short sayings, poems of some length, and acrostics. We find all of these in Proverbs. Proverbs 10-15, for instance, are composed of short sayings that contrast the righteous and the wicked. Proverbs 2 is a long poem in praise of wisdom. In Proverbs 31:10-31, we find an acrostic in praise of a virtuous woman.

The book of Proverbs cannot be outlined by topics. The only practical outline is that which shows the various collections in the book.

- | | |
|---------------------------------|----------------------|
| I. Solomon on wisdom | Proverbs 1:1-9:18 |
| II. Proverbs of Solomon | Proverbs 10:1-22:16 |
| III. The words of the wise | Proverbs 22:17-24:34 |
| IV. More proverbs of Solomon | Proverbs 25:1-29:27 |
| V. The words of Agur | Proverbs 30 |
| VI. The words of Lemuel | Proverbs 31: 1-9 |
| VII. Acrostic: A virtuous woman | Proverbs 31:10-31 |

B. Contents of Proverbs

Please read Proverbs 1, 2, 3, and 9.

Proverbs has been called "Laws of heaven for life on earth." When Jesus Christ summarized the Law of God, He told us to love God with every aspect of our personalities and to love our neighbors as ourselves. In those words, there are three kinds of duties: to self, to others, and to God. Let us examine Proverbs in these three areas.

1. Our Duties to Ourselves

The Bible never suggests that man was made to be unhappy. Man was made to be happy, and true happiness is found in obedience to God's rules for our conduct. Proverbs is a mine laden with gems of practical wisdom. Some are given below. A useful study, which you can do later, is to go through Proverbs line by line and collect every item of practical wisdom under topical headings.

Here are some of our duties to ourselves:

1. To be diligent, not slothful (Pro 6:6-11)
2. To avoid sexual impurity (7)

3. To gain wisdom and receive instruction (2)
4. To avoid the danger of strong drink (23:29-35)
5. To avoid entanglement in others' financial problems (6:1-5)
6. To avoid excessive luxury (21:17).

2. *Our Duties to Others*

On an equal level with ourselves, we should focus on our fellow men. Our dealings with them are to be governed by the law of love. Proverbs gives many practical applications of the law, "Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself" (Lev 19:18). Some of these are:

1. Honesty in all our business dealings (Pro 11:1; 28:8)
2. Tact and kindness in our speech (15:14; 25:11)
3. Mercy to those in need (11:25-26; 19:17)
4. Fairness and justice without respect of persons (28:20-21)
5. Training our children properly (13:24; 19:18)
6. Helping friends who are in need (17:17; 27:10).

3. *Our Duties to God*

Above and beyond all our duties to ourselves and to others is our duty to God. Our chief purpose in life is to glorify Him. Proverbs also provides sound advice in regard to this. For instance, we are:

1. To trust in Jehovah (Pro 3:5)
2. To give our offerings to Him (3:9)
3. To fear Jehovah (10:27)
4. To run to Him in time of trouble (18:10)
5. To put Him before anything else (30:7-9).

4. *Promises of Proverbs*

If we think that Proverbs consists merely of one strict requirement after another, we are badly mistaken. Proverbs not only presents our duties, but it also speaks of the blessings that come to those who fulfill their duties, and the misery that comes to those who live in wickedness. Proverbs is a practical book from beginning to end. It points us to the proper way of life, and by its promises stirs us up to walk in that way.

2. Ecclesiastes

Please read Ecclesiastes 1, 2, and 12.

A. Introduction to Ecclesiastes

“The words of the Preacher, the son of David, king in Jerusalem” (Ecc 1:1). “Preacher” in Hebrew is a title for one who summons or addresses an assembly. The verb form is used in 1 Kings 8:1, “Then Solomon *assembled* the elders of Israel.” The most likely author of Ecclesiastes is Solomon, although opinions differ even among conservatives. In any case, our focus must be on the message itself: it is “upright” and “true” and “given from one shepherd,” which is God Himself.

This book was written to explain the ways of God to His people, in order to comfort them in sorrow, encourage them in their labors, and direct them to godliness. This is accomplished by showing the vanity of earthly things apart from God, and by leading them to a recognition of the great duty of man: to fear God and keep His commandments.

B. Theme

The author of this book begins with a statement of the theme he is going to develop. “Vanity of vanities, saith the Preacher, vanity of vanities; all is vanity. What profit hath a man of all his labor which he taketh under the sun?” (Ecc 1:2-3). “Vanity of vanities” is literally “breath of breaths,” meaning something that is only momentary, that does not last. It does not mean useless, but suggests brevity of life: something is of little value because it will not be here tomorrow. “Vexation of spirit,” used often in the book, means literally “chasing after the wind”—it is futile, offering no reward or fulfillment; it comes to nothing.

This world, with all that fills it, is just so much emptiness, and all that man can get of this world’s goods and pleasures is but a puff of smoke! None of it lasts into eternity. This is the author’s estimate of the world he lives in—and it is a true estimate of the world, which is in bondage to sin and subjected to vanity (Rom 8:20). Having stated his theme, he goes on to demonstrate how true it is in his own experience.

C. *The Vanity of Wisdom* – chapter 1

First, the Preacher shows the vanity of wisdom. Wisdom is the highest of this world’s possessions, sought after by the noblest of men. But even wisdom, that is, the wisdom of the world, is empty and vain (1Co 2:5).

And I gave my heart to seek and search out by wisdom concerning all things that are done under heaven: this sore travail hath God given to the sons of man to be exercised therewith...For in much

*wisdom is much grief: and he that increaseth knowledge
increaseth sorrow.—Ecclesiastes 1:13, 18*

D. The Vanity of Pleasure – chapter 2

From wisdom, the Preacher turns to pleasure. Pleasures of all sorts are his, yet he retains wisdom so that he may evaluate pleasure. And his conclusion is this:

And whatsoever mine eyes desired I kept not from them, I withheld not my heart from any joy; for my heart rejoiced in all my labour: and this was my portion of all my labour. Then I looked on all the works that my hands had wrought, and on the labour that I had laboured to do: and, behold, all was vanity and vexation of spirit, and there was no profit under the sun.—Ecclesiastes 2:10-11

The pleasure of the Preacher was not limited to feasting and drinking and other such pleasures of the flesh. He also took great delight in architecture, gardening, and other useful pleasures. What made these pleasures so empty? Behind all his labors, and all the pleasurable activities with which the Preacher filled his time, there was a thought that filled him with bitterness:

Yea, I hated all my labour which I had taken under the sun: because I should leave it unto the man that shall be after me. And who knoweth whether he shall be a wise man or a fool?—Ecclesiastes 2:18-19

All man's labor is emptiness. So what shall a man do? He may as well enjoy what he has, and not covet.

There is nothing better for a man, than that he should eat and drink, and that he should make his soul enjoy good in his labor. This also I saw, that it is from the hand of God.—Ecclesiastes 2:24

To "eat and drink" does not refer to sinful foolishness, but a contentedness in the basic functions of life.

E. The Providence of God – chapter 3

The Preacher pauses to think about these things, and he sees in it all the working of God's providence. There is a time for everything; it is all in God's hands. God has made all things. He has given man a unique position. And yet man cannot understand the world he lives in.

He hath made everything beautiful in his time: also he hath set the world [i.e., eternity] in their heart, so that no man can find out the work that God maketh from the beginning to the end—Ecclesiastes 3:11

Man must recognize that God is in ultimate control, and it is his privilege to wait upon God—and to do good while he waits. Even when there is wickedness in the seat of justice, we must remember that there is a time for everything, and God will judge in the proper time.

F. All Is Vanity – chapters 4 - 6

Oppression, envy, a man piling up riches and having no one to share them with—all these the Preacher surveys and again sees vanity on every side. In contrast to such vanity of the things of earth is set the worship of God. The Preacher is aware how we tend to bring the world's standards into the house of God. He warns against it:

Be not rash with thy mouth, and let not thine heart be hasty to utter any thing before God: for God is in heaven, and thou upon earth: therefore let thy words be few... When thou vowest a vow unto God, defer not to pay it; for he hath no pleasure in fools: pay that which thou hast vowed.—Ecclesiastes 5:2, 4

Why does the Preacher emphasize the vanity of all worldly things? Because God's people are so easily deceived about this truth. Whether in prosperity or difficulty, we imagine that success in the world brings happiness! Riches or poverty, sickness or health, freedom or oppression—all is emptiness without God. Let us therefore look to God and rejoice in what He has given us.

This comfort is applicable to all God's people of every age. It teaches us to take our eyes off the things we lack and to count the blessings we have. Learning that lesson is one of the important steps to true happiness.

G. Words of Wisdom – chapters 7:1 - 11:6

Now the Preacher presents to his people words of wisdom to guide them. He reminds them that the end of a thing is better than the beginning. Therefore they should not murmur about their present condition.

In the day of prosperity be joyful, but in the day of adversity consider: God also hath set the one over against the other, to the end that man should find nothing after him.—Ecclesiastes 7:14

What lies at the root of all this vanity? Why is it that our world is so full of emptiness? The Preacher sees the answer. "Lo, this only have I found, that God hath made man upright; but they have sought out many inventions [i.e., plans or schemes]" (Ecc 7:29). Here is the root of the problem: the sinfulness of man. Despite the fact that man was made in the image of God, mankind has sought after all manner of sinful things. And this is the reason why everything is vanity. Sin has divorced the world from God, the only one Who gives meaning to all things.

From this point on there is a slight shift in the Preacher's thought. He still points out the vanity in the world, and gives instructions for living in this vain world. But more frequently now he emphasizes that God is behind all things and is governing all things. For instance, he says,

Though a sinner do evil an hundred times, and his days be prolonged, yet surely I know that it shall be well with them that fear God, which fear before him: But it shall not be well with the wicked, neither shall he prolong his days, which are as a shadow; because he feareth not before God.—Ecclesiastes 8:12-13

Since all things are in God's hands, and the same end awaits all men (i.e., physical death), the Preacher commends the enjoyment of those blessings that God gives. "Go thy way, eat thy bread with joy, and drink thy wine with a merry heart; for God now accepteth thy works" (Ecc 9:7). Though the sinfulness of man may bring many foolish things to pass, yet the people of God are not to be dismayed. Rather they are to continue in good works, for this has God's blessing. "Cast thy bread upon the waters: for thou shall find it after many days" (Ecc 11:1). If we would be content and joyful, we must labor with whole hearts for God.

H. Advice to Young People – chapter 11:7 - 12:1

The Preacher ends his words of wisdom by exhorting young people.

Rejoice, O young man, in thy youth; and let thy heart cheer thee in the days of thy youth, and walk in the ways of thine heart, and in the sight of thine eyes: but know thou, that for all these things God will bring thee into judgment. Therefore remove sorrow from thy heart, and put away evil from thy flesh: for childhood and youth are vanity. Remember now thy Creator in the days of thy youth, while the evil days come not, nor the years draw nigh, when thou shalt say, I have no pleasure in them.—Ecclesiastes 11:9-12:1

I. The End of the Matter – chapter 12

God has given His people the one source of wisdom: His Word. It is to this to which the Preacher points God's people:

The words of the wise are as goads, and as nails fastened by the masters of assemblies, which are given from one shepherd. And further, by these, my son, be admonished: of making many books there is no end; and much study is a weariness of the flesh.—Ecclesiastes 12:11-12

When God's people despair, it is caused by a neglect of God's Word. How true it is that there are innumerable books to guide us in this life. But this life is vani-

ty, and too much study simply wearies us. But that is true only of study that is not based on God's Word. The Preacher calls us to a study of the Scriptures, for only the Scriptures can give meaning to life. To study the world apart from God's Word is a great vanity, but study based on the Scriptures finds real meaning in life and the world.

Thus the Preacher draws to his conclusion. He has shown us the vanity of all that this world contains. He has provided words of wisdom to guide us through life. He has pointed to the Holy Scriptures as the guidebook that we should study. Now he says,

Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter: Fear God, and keep his commandments: for this is the whole duty of man.—Ecclesiastes 12:13

His conclusion is the only correct one for any people in any age. No matter what our circumstances, no matter when or where we live, this is our duty: to fear God and keep His commandments.

3. Song of Solomon

A. Introduction to Song of Solomon

Please read Song of Solomon 1.

There is no question about the authorship of this book. It is “the Song of Songs, which is Solomon's” (Song 1:1). And since there are references to Solomon as king, it must have been written during the forty years of his reign.

Every passage of Scripture has been interpreted in different ways. But the Song of Solomon has been especially subjected to a variety of interpretations. Dr. Edward J. Young⁶² lists at least eight different types of interpretations of the Song. But amid this wide variety there are really only two interpretations that have found great favor among evangelical Christians.

The first view holds that this book really speaks of the love of Christ for His Church and of the Church for Christ. This view is very popular. It has been defended by competent scholars, and is reflected in the chapter headings that are often found in the King James version of the Bible. According to this view, Solomon represents Christ and the bride represents His Church. The expressions of love reflect the deep and mutual love of Christ and the Church.

⁶² **Edward Joseph Young** (1907-1968) – Reformed theologian and Old Testament scholar at Westminster Theological Seminary in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania.

In favor of this view, it may be said that it gives the book a religious meaning. This makes it easier to explain why God put this book in the Old Testament. Also, some of the messianic psalms seem to reflect the Song of Solomon. This is additional support for this view.

Other commentators point out that this method of interpretation leads to all sorts of fanciful conclusions. According to these scholars, the book should be interpreted literally. It is just what it seems to be: a picture of the beauty and purity of true love. God has included it in the Old Testament to help safeguard the purity and sanctity of marriage. However, the purpose of the Song does not end with human love. By pointing out the wonders of pure love, it points to a higher love that is altogether pure and beautiful. In this way the Song of Solomon is like a parable about the love of God, and specifically the love of Christ.

B. Contents

It is very difficult to analyze the Song of Solomon. In general, we may say that the Song is like a conversation, in which the bride and the bridegroom sing to each other and about each other. The following outline may help in understanding the book. It is not designed to be memorized, but may be helpful as an aid to reading.⁶³

I. The bride and groom sing to each other	Song 1:1-2:7
II. The bride sings the groom's praises	Song 2:8-3:5
III. The marriage; the bride is praised	Song 3:6-5:1
IV. The bride sings of her love and the groom's beauty	Song 5:2-6:9
V. The beauty of the bride	Song 6:10-8:4
VI. The beauty of love	Song 8:5-14

No outline can do justice to this book. Even quotations are unsatisfactory. This book must be read and reread, preferably at one sitting. Its beauty is fitting for its wonderful message of marital love.

Questions for personal reflection and group discussion

1. How does wisdom show itself in the book of Proverbs?

⁶³ Outline adapted from *An Introduction to the Old Testament* by Edward J. Young (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co; 1952). The reader may find it helpful to mark these divisions in his Bible.

2. In Proverbs, what stands out to you regarding
 - a. “Duties to ourselves”?
 - b. “Duties to others”?
 - c. “Duties to God”?
3. What is the purpose of Ecclesiastes?
4. Why is everything we see just a “vanity of vanities”?
5. Why is it good to wait upon God?
6. Summarize the advice given about worship.
7. How can we walk contentedly in this world?
8. What is the end of the matter?
9. Explain the two best interpretations of the Song of Solomon.

18

Covenant Nation Examines Suffering

Job

And said, Naked came I out of my mother's womb, and naked shall I return thither: the LORD gave, and the LORD hath taken away; blessed be the name of the LORD.

Job 1:21

1. Introduction

Please read Job 1-4, 28, and 38-42.

A. Purpose

The book of Job presents a question that has been asked by men in every age: Why do the righteous suffer? Job also provides an answer to that question. It denies that all suffering is punishment for open sin. It does not even admit that all the suffering of the righteous are chastisements, intended to remove our sins and make us better Christians. Sometimes suffering is God's means of testing His people, so that their faith will be clearly demonstrated to be genuine. When they respond by faith, they grow in faith and testify to others of God's grace.

B. Author and Date

The author of *Job* is unknown. It is most likely that he was a man who had himself passed through great sorrows and had been forced to think about the question of suffering. God might well use such a man to provide the divine answer to this important question. Scholars have presented many different views about the time of writing; it seems possible that it was written during the time of Solomon, possibly by Solomon himself. Two facts favor this: 1) This problem required deep thought, and wisdom literature reached its zenith during Solomon's reign. 2) The book of *Job* is very much like *Proverbs* and *Song of Solomon*, which were written about this time.

C. Who Is Job?

The name *Job* means "the much persecuted." Some have thought that *Job* was not an actual person, but simply a picture of sufferers. But in *Ezekiel* 14:14 and 20, he is mentioned in connection with Noah and Daniel, who were actual persons. And in *James* 5:11, his patience is set forth as an example for us. These references demand that we accept *Job* as a historical person. But when and where did he live? The fact that he is not presented as an Israelite, and the absence of any mention of the Law of Moses, make it necessary to place him at a very early date. He is probably a contemporary of the patriarchs of *Genesis*. He is a non-Israelite who worships the true God.

Job lived in the land of Uz. No area in the Middle East is known by that name today. Tradition locates the area where *Job* lived somewhere in the modern kingdom of Syria.

The outline of *Job* is in five parts.

- | | |
|---|------------------|
| I. Prologue: The cause of <i>Job</i> 's suffering | <i>Job</i> 1-2 |
| II. Conversation with friends: <i>Job</i> is being punished | <i>Job</i> 3-31 |
| III. Speeches of Elihu: <i>Job</i> is being chastised | <i>Job</i> 32-37 |
| IV. Words of Jehovah: <i>Job</i> is being tested | <i>Job</i> 38-41 |
| V. Epilogue: The result of <i>Job</i> 's suffering | <i>Job</i> 42 |

2. *Job*'s Problems

The book of *Job* approaches the problem of the suffering of the righteous in several steps. First we are shown the true cause of *Job*'s suffering. Then we have various explanations set forth by his friends. Finally, God Himself provides the proper answer.

A. Job's Enemy – chapter 1

The suffering of Job is caused by Satan, who desires to corrupt Job's righteousness. For Job is righteous; God Himself says so. But Satan's actions are limited by God's permission, and it is only within the limit of God's permission that Satan can bring evil upon Job. This applies to us today as well. We must never think our troubles come only by Satan's attacks, as if he had somehow overwhelmed or outmaneuvered God! Our trials are always designed and allowed by God for His purposes, which always involve the ultimate good of His people (Rom 8:28-29).

At first Job passes the test with flying colors. Neither Satan's attacks on his possessions, on his family, nor on Job himself, turn him from his righteousness.

B. Job's Comforters – chapters 3 - 17

Then Job's friends arrive to "comfort" him. For seven days they sit in silence. Finally, their presence leads Job to curse the day of his birth.

*Let the day perish wherein I was born, And
the night in which it was said, There is
a man child conceived.—Job 3:3*

In reality, this is a cursing of God, Who caused him to be born. With this the three friends begin their conversation with Job. All three of them take the same position: suffering is always punishment for sin.

*Remember, I pray thee, who ever perished, being innocent?
Or where were the righteous cut off? Even as I have seen,
they that plow iniquity, and sow wickedness,
reap the same.—Job 4:7-8*

The more suffering, these friends reason, the greater must be the sin that is being punished. Therefore they conclude that Job must be a great sinner. And they assume, since they are not punished by suffering, that they are not great sinners. No wonder that Job says of them:

*No doubt but ye are the people, and wisdom
shall die with you.—Job 12:2*
Miserable comforters are ye all.—Job 16:2

C. Job's Victory – chapters 18 - 31

At first Job agrees with the reasoning of his friends, but insists that he is innocent. As a result, he is led to attack God's justice. But as the friends continue their charges against him, Job begins to doubt the truth of their position. He comes to full confidence in God his redeemer.

For I know that my redeemer liveth, and that he shall stand at the latter day upon the earth: And though after my skin worms destroy this body, yet in my flesh shall I see God: Whom I shall see for myself, and mine eyes shall behold, and not another; though my reins be consumed within me.—Job 19:25-27

By declaring trust in his “redeemer,” Job is declaring great faith in God, and possibly a prophecy about redemption through Jesus Christ. Either way, this is another highpoint of faith in the midst of suffering.

From this point on Job becomes more bold. He continually asserts that he is not the sinner that his friends assume him to be. He denies that they speak the truth. He shows them that their principle is false, for the wicked often prosper. And while he still cannot understand why he suffers, he no longer complains against God.

Finally, Job reduces his friends to silence. He gives a last speech of his own. Wisdom is not to be found in man’s principles, but in God. “The fear of the Lord, that is wisdom; and to depart from evil is understanding” (Job 28:28). Job recognized that man’s fundamental problem is more than his outward sinful acts: it is that his heart is deceitfully wicked (1:5; 15:16; 31:1).

After contrasting his former blessed state with his present misery, Job again declares his righteousness. But here his words end. He cannot arrive at the answer to his problem.

D. Elihu’s Challenge – chapters 32 - 37

Now another speaker comes to the fore. Elihu has kept silence because the others are older. But now he speaks, angered at both Job and his friends. Job, he says, justifies himself at the expense of God. The friends have no answer to the problem. Elihu’s answer is this: Job is indeed suffering because of sin, but his suffering is chastisement, not punishment. He is chastised because he is self-righteous. Elihu is even more severe with Job than the three friends were.

Surely thou hast spoken in mine hearing, and I have heard the voice of thy words, saying, I am clean without transgression, I am innocent; neither is there iniquity in me...Behold, in this thou art not just: I will answer thee, that God is greater than man.—Job 33:8-9, 12

3. God’s Answer – chapters 38 - 42

Then Jehovah speaks out of the whirlwind. He speaks to these men about the universe, with all its mysteries that are too great for man to understand. In this way, He shows them that they cannot understand the ways or the purposes of the

infinite God. Therefore it is folly to think that they can explain the reasons for God's actions. God cannot be measured by man's logic. These words of God stir Job up to greater faith. He sees that God is sovereign, and that his sufferings are part of God's plan for him. Therefore he repents of his complaining words.

*I have heard of thee by the hearing of the ear; but now
mine eye seeth thee. Wherefore I abhor myself,
And repent in dust and ashes.—Job 42:5-6*

Finally, God accepts Job's integrity. His righteousness is again declared. And the three friends are required to make sacrifices and have Job pray for them in order that they may be forgiven. God gives Job blessings even greater than those that he had before his time of testing.

4. The Problem of Suffering

The words of God at the end of the book do not give a definite answer to the problem that faced Job and his friends. He does not explain precisely why Job suffered. He simply points out that neither Job nor his friends are able to provide all the answers about this problem of suffering. There are reasons for suffering that are hidden from them.

But this does not mean that the book of Job does not provide an answer to the question that it raises. It both provides an answer and shows us the proper attitude to take when we must suffer. We must remember that God has revealed to us something that was not revealed to Job. We have in chapters 1 and 2 of the book of Job the story of what happened in heaven. We know how Satan challenged the righteousness of Job, and we know that God permitted Satan to test Job by suffering—so that Job's faith would be clearly demonstrated. So when God tells Job and his friends that Job's suffering was caused by something that they could not know about, we know what that cause was. Job's suffering was neither punishment nor chastisement, but testing. Through testing we understand ourselves better and grow in faith.

The reason Job suffered is not the most important point made in this book. The words of God give us the proper attitude toward suffering. From them we learn that there are many reasons why people suffer. It is not for us to ask why we must suffer, or even why we are suffering in a particular situation. We cannot know. God's purposes are too great for us, as they were too great for Job. Therefore we must not question. Above all, we must not doubt the righteousness of God. We must leave the reason with God, and trust Him completely to use our suffering for His glory and for our good (Jam 1).

Questions for personal reflection and group discussion

1. What is the purpose of the book of Job?
2. What did Job's friends think was the cause of all suffering?
3. What did Job recognize about man's fundamental problem?
4. In what way is Job 42:5-6 a high point in the book of Job?
5. What does the book of Job teach us about the proper attitude toward suffering?

PART FOUR
THEOCRATIC
DECLINE

19

**Covenant Nation's
Time of Decision**

Kings, Part One

*And he said, LORD God of Israel, there is no God like thee,
in heaven above, or on earth beneath, who keepeth
covenant and mercy with thy servants that
walk before thee with all their heart.*

1 Kings 8:23

1. Introduction

A. Theocratic Decline

The history that is recorded in Kings brings us to a new period, the period of “theocratic decline.” This term may require some explanation. It does not mean that Jehovah has given up His plan for the advancement of His kingdom. His plans and purposes do not change. But on the surface we come to a time of de-

cline in the nation of Israel. There is a decline of theocratic feeling in the hearts of Israel's kings and people. That is, there is less and less recognition that Jehovah is ruler of Israel. There is a corresponding decline in the monarchy. From the glory of Solomon to the shame of captivity—this is the path traced out in Kings.

But this decline does not frustrate or change the plan and purpose of God. By His prophets, He points the way to that which lies ahead. He draws in bold strokes the picture of that spiritual kingdom where the eternal King of kings, Jesus Christ, reigns in glory from the throne of David.

B. Author and Date

The book of Kings, like that of Samuel, is one book that has been divided into two. Like the other books in this group, it is anonymous. Since the book of Kings traces the history of Israel until the Babylonian captivity, it is obvious that it must have been written after that time. The standpoint from which the events of the final chapters are viewed makes it most likely that the author was one of those who had been carried away to Babylon. Both Jewish and Christian traditions hold that the prophet Jeremiah is the author.

The events mentioned in Kings cover a span of more than four centuries, from 973 B.C. to 560 B.C. Therefore it is obvious that the author could not have firsthand information about all that he relates. He was inspired by God, Who made available to him “the book of the acts of Solomon” (1Ki 11:41), “the book of the chronicles of the kings of Judah” (1Ki 14:29), and “the book of the chronicles of the kings of Israel” (1Ki 14:19). These earlier documents were probably public records of the kingdoms and not inspired writings. But the prophetic writer of Kings was inspired of God as he selected his material from these documents, so that our book of Kings contains the inspired (and therefore infallible) revelation of Jehovah.

C. Purpose

The book of Kings traces the story of the monarchy from the accession of Solomon to the Babylonian captivity. But it is not simply a factual recording of the events by which this decline and fall occurred. It is prophetic. It is designed to show the cause of this tragedy. The kingdom declined and fell because it ceased to be a theocratic kingdom. Beginning with the latter days of Solomon's reign, the people turned away from Jehovah. By rejecting Him, Who had redeemed them for Himself and Who was pleased to be their ruler, they were destroying the foundation on which their nation was built.

The book of Kings also stresses the position of the prophets. Special attention is given to Elijah and Elisha. There are two possible reasons for this. First, these two prophets had left no written record. Second, these two had stood in a most

critical time in Israel's history. No prophetic record of this period would be complete without the story of Elijah and Elisha.

The outline of 1 and 2 Kings is in three parts.

- | | |
|---|---------------------|
| I. The united kingdom under Solomon | 1 Kings 1-11 |
| II. The Divided Kingdom of Judah and Israel | 1 Kings 12 - 2Ki 17 |
| III. The remaining kingdom of Judah | 2 Kings 18-25 |

2. Solomon's Rise to Power

Please read 1 Kings 1-3.

Kings begins with the last days of David, for the events of those days were of great importance to Solomon. David's sin with Bathsheba brought strife into his family, resulting in great pride and selfishness in Amnon and Absalom. The same failure precipitated a crisis during David's final days. Adonijah, his oldest living son, determined to steal the throne for himself, even though David had promised it to Solomon. This promise was based on a divine command. But it required quick, decisive action on the part of Nathan, Bathsheba, and David to bring that promise to fulfillment. Important leaders like Joab the general and Abiathar the high priest had taken sides with Adonijah. But God's plan could not be foiled. Solomon was crowned king and the would-be usurpers scattered.

And keep the charge of the LORD thy God, to walk in his ways, to keep his statutes, and his commandments, and his judgments, and his testimonies, as it is written in the law of Moses, that thou mayest prosper in all that thou doest.—1 Kings 2:3

When David was dying he gave Solomon his blessing and some final advice. Solomon was to punish Joab and Shimei for their crimes. Not only were they now rebels against David, they represented those who might again attempt to seize Solomon's throne. In accordance with David's advice, Adonijah, Joab, and Shimei were executed, and Abiathar was deposed as high priest. God used these measures to give Solomon firm control of the kingdom.

3. Wisdom of Solomon

Solomon reaped the benefits of David's victories. He ruled a large kingdom, situated at the crossroads of the East. One sign of his importance was his marriage to the daughter of Pharaoh, which united the two countries in an alliance. But the size and importance of his kingdom brought problems also. Solomon was a young man, and his task was a great one.

Shortly after his coronation, God appeared to Solomon when he went to Gibeon to worship, and asked him what He should give him. The reply of Solomon, that he sought wisdom to rule the people, pleased God.

The basis of Solomon's wisdom was a heart for God. He could have asked for money, fame, and power. The moment he asked for wisdom, it was in effect giving all these away. But God practiced His principle of giving back to the giver (Deu 15:10). He gave Solomon honor and riches as well as wisdom.

The wisdom of the East is very practical. It is a matter of applying the right principle, at the right time, to bring benefit. It is contained in the solving of problems and the uttering of proverbs. In this Solomon excelled. His decision regarding the child claimed by two women spread his fame throughout the land, and his wisdom in all spheres of learning brought men from far and near to hear him.

In the psalms of David, men are before God, where God is the righteous standard. In the proverbs of Solomon, men wisely live rightly with other men. But wisdom is not equal to righteousness, and Solomon ultimately showed himself to have but half a heart for God.

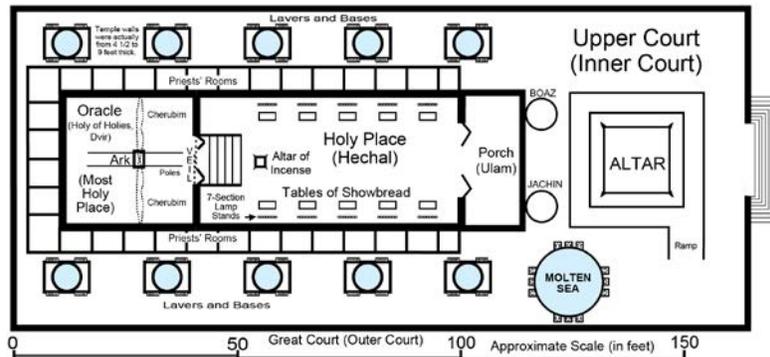
4. Temple of Solomon

Please read 1 Kings 8.

Solomon at first remembered that his kingdom and his wisdom came from God. He recalled the promise God had made to David that his son should build the Temple, which David had desired to build. With the aid of Hiram, king of Tyre, Solomon began the building of the Temple.

The building of the Temple was an event of tremendous importance for Israel. As far as worship was concerned, the Temple could provide nothing that was not already present in the Tabernacle. The presence of God in the midst of His people and the proper approach to God were truths clearly symbolized in the Tabernacle and its worship. But the Tabernacle was a tent. It was designed for travel. Therefore it could not symbolize the rest that God had promised to His people. This was symbolized by the building of the Temple. God had established His people in the Promised Land. He had given them a theocratic king who had made them a great nation. Now it was time to establish the worship of Jehovah in a temple that would be a symbol of the peace and rest that Israel would have as long as she was faithful to God's covenant.

There is something fitting about the fact that Solomon built the Temple. David was a man of war, but Solomon was a man of peace. His reign was one of peace and prosperity for Israel. He himself was a symbol of God's blessing on His covenant nation. In this he typified the coming Prince of Peace.



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The Temple of Solomon

The Great Court surrounds the above diagram and makes the overall temple area much larger. The Temple defies description. This is partly because the author of Kings gives us insufficient information for a description, and partly because the amounts of gold, silver, and precious stone used are beyond our powers of imagination. We do know that the outside of the Temple was stone. Inside, the stone was covered with wood paneling. This was carved, and then overlaid with gold encrusted with precious stones of all kinds. The Temple must have been gorgeous, a fitting dwelling place for the Ruler of heaven and earth.

And yet the important fact about the Temple was not its beauty or its costliness. It was rather that God dwelt therein. That is the emphasis of Solomon's prayer of dedication.

And he said, LORD God of Israel, there is no God like thee, in heaven above, or on earth beneath, who keepest covenant and mercy with thy servants that walk before thee with all their heart.—1 Kings 8:23

This Temple is the center of worship. This is the place where God will hear prayer, and the source from which help will come. Perhaps there is no more glorious scene in Israel's history than this dedicatory ceremony when, amidst the rejoicing and the sacrifices of all the people, the cloud of God's glory filled the Most Holy Place (1Ki 8:10), and flame from on high lit the fire on the great altar.

5. Wealth of Solomon

God had promised to give Solomon riches and honor in addition to wisdom. That promise was abundantly fulfilled. Our imaginations are staggered by the revenue that poured into Solomon's court and the luxury that surrounded him. Some believe it was the most glorious kingdom ever on earth.

Nor were the riches all retained in the court. The people also knew a time of prosperity unlike any other in Israel's history. How dearly God pictured to His people the blessings that would be theirs if only they would be faithful to His covenant.

This was brought again to Solomon's attention. After the dedication of the Temple, God appeared to him again, and promised to be with him if he were faithful. But this time there was an extended warning of the results of unfaithfulness. It was as if God were counseling him against the dangers that lay ahead.

6. Sin of Solomon

Please read 1 Kings 11.

The Law required four things of the nation's kings (Deu 17:14-20): 1) the king himself had to hand-write his own copy of the Law and read it continually, the source of wisdom and strength; 2) not accumulate money, a source of influence; 3) not accumulate horses, the source of military might; 4) not accumulate wives, a source of intrigue and military alliances. We can measure individual kings by these standards. God Himself was to be their sufficiency and strength.

When Solomon was old, he departed from serving Jehovah and began to trust in his own wisdom. He built up his army with horses and chariots (4:26; 10:26), and he married many wives.

But king Solomon loved many strange women, together with the daughter of Pharaoh, women of the Moabites, Ammonites, Edomites, Zidonians, and Hittites...And Solomon did evil in the sight of the LORD, and went not fully after the LORD, as did David his father.—1 Kings 11:1, 6

Perhaps this was partly to make alliances with other nations, but it was against God's design. They did not need might or alliances: God was their Defender. His wives were heathen, and they brought their heathenism with them. As God had warned, Solomon was affected by it. He permitted them to worship their gods. He even built places of worship in Jerusalem for them. It is not certain that Solomon himself worshipped these false gods, but he aided the false worship of his wives.

There is a momentum with sin. He should have never entered into these ways. And once entered, he should have stopped soon, because otherwise it is easier to just keep going and add a bit more. But it is better not to have strength or riches, than to have them and lean on them, independently from God. The only protection from the momentum of sin is to do what the Word says. We need never require explanations from God as to why He commands us in a particular way; there

are always human reasons not to follow Him completely. Ours is to trust and obey our God.

Solomon brought upon himself his own downfall. By the end of his reign, every person in Israel had to work four months of each year for the king, and one-third of all crops were paid in taxes to the king. He needed a great income to care for his wives, horses, army, royal court, and buildings.

David was a sinner. His sins were grievous, but never had he been guilty of idolatry or toleration of idolatry. Idolatry was a more fundamental and severe sin: it was rebellion against the Ruler of Israel. This was the denial of the theocracy. So God appeared to Solomon and announced the division of the kingdom.

In recognition of God's blessings upon David, the kingdom would not be divided in Solomon's day. But in his time the seeds of division were sown. God raised up adversaries in Edom and Syria who would reduce the boundaries of Israel. And in the tribe of Ephraim—which had always been a tribe that coveted leadership in Israel—there was a man named Jeroboam who “lifted up his hand against the king” (1Ki 11:26). God told Jeroboam through the prophet Ahijah, that the rule of ten tribes would be his after the death of Solomon. Solomon had caused the division of the kingdom by his sin. Now God set the stage for that division to occur. Solomon's reign had been a time of decision. In spite of the wisdom, the glory, the wealth, the blessing, it had been a reign in which the wrong decision had been made.

Questions for personal reflection and group discussion

1. What is meant by “theocratic decline”?
2. What is the purpose of the book of Kings?
3. What was the most important fact about the Temple? Why?
4. What four things did the Law require of a king?
5. Describe the momentum in sin.

20

Covenant Nation's Time of Division

Kings, Part Two

Whereupon the king took counsel, and made two calves of gold, and said unto them, It is too much for you to go up to Jerusalem: behold thy gods, O Israel, which brought thee up out of the land of Egypt.

1 Kings 12:28

1. Purpose

We noticed before that the purpose of Kings is to show how the decline and fall of Israel was caused by the United Kingdom's failure to be true to its theocratic character. In Solomon's reign we noted the blessing that God poured out on Israel, but also the fatal error that entered in the last years. In the section before us now, we see the first unfolding of God's judgment. In this period of the Divided Kingdom, our attention will be focused more on Israel, the northern kingdom, than on Judah, the southern kingdom. The northern kingdom of Israel came into being because of sin. From its beginning it forsook the theocratic principle. Its history shows us the awful results of such apostasy.

2. Division of the Kingdom

A. Revolt of the Ten Tribes

Please read 1 Kings 12:1 through 13:6.

The end of Solomon's life was marked by compromise with idolatry. Having received the theocratic throne, Solomon so far departed from serving God that he built altars for other gods in Jerusalem. As a result of this, God told him that the kingdom would be divided in the days of his son. The only reason why he would not lose it entirely was God's promise to David. God was acting directly to preserve the Davidic line. Therefore, in the succession of kings, we have the hand of

God not only judging sin, but also in love faithfully preserving His people for the messianic King to come.

When Solomon died and Rehoboam began to reign, the threatened split became a reality. Motivated by tribal jealousies, the northern tribes promised allegiance to Rehoboam only if he would reduce the oppressive levies of money and manpower that Solomon had introduced.

Thy father made our yoke grievous: now therefore make thou the grievous service of thy father, and his heavy yoke which he put upon us, lighter, and we will serve thee.—1 Kings 12:4

Rehoboam foolishly refused the counsel of older men and listened to those his own age, who advised him to increase the burden. The northern tribes then rejected him as king. God intervened to ensure that they did not destroy each other.

The northern tribes then chose Jeroboam, who had “lifted up his hand against the king [Solomon]” to be their king instead (1Ki 11:26). This too was a fulfillment of prophecy.

B. Jeroboam’s Sin

This revolt could hardly lead to friendly terms between the two kingdoms. The time of the Divided Kingdom can be separated into three periods. At first there was a 1) time of enmity, which was the natural outcome of the rift. This was followed by a 2) period of harmony, when the two royal families intermarried. Finally, there was a 3) second period of enmity, which lasted until the captivity of Israel in 722 B.C.

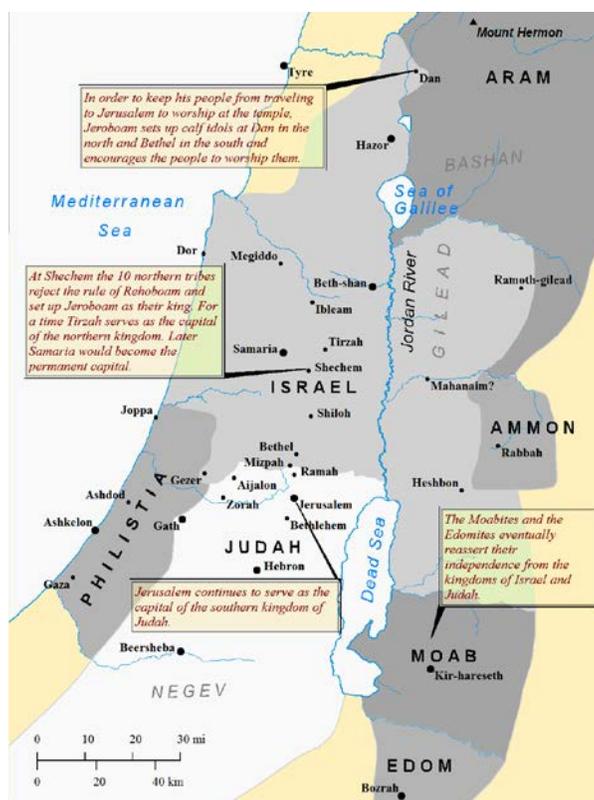
And Jeroboam said in his heart, Now shall the kingdom return to the house of David: If this people go up to do sacrifice in the house of the LORD at Jerusalem, then shall the heart of this people turn again unto their lord, even unto Rehoboam king of Judah... Whereupon the king took counsel, and made two calves of gold, and said unto them, It is too much for you to go up to Jerusalem: behold thy gods, O Israel, which brought thee up out of the land of Egypt. And he set the one in Bethel, and the other put he in Dan. And this thing became a sin.—1 Kings 12:26-30

Up until now, the people in the northern kingdom had worshipped Jehovah; the Temple in Jerusalem was the center of their worship. The Law required the people to travel to Jerusalem three times each year for worship. This unity in religion between the northern and southern kingdoms would lead to a desire for political unity.

In order to keep this from happening, Jeroboam resorted to the ancient heresy of Israel. He made golden calves like the one Aaron had made at Sinai. He set them up at Dan and Bethel, and established a new, national religion around them. The northern kingdom went rapidly into idolatry. Once you start a little compromise, it goes quickly downhill. Within 70 years after Jeroboam departed from Jehovah, Israel's national religion was Baal worship.

God condemned this departure from His Law. A prophet denounced Jeroboam's altar at the height of the ceremony of dedication. His denunciation was accompanied by a sign: the altar split and the ashes poured out. But this solemn warning was not heeded. Jeroboam continued his false worship. And every king of Israel also continued in this false worship, following in the sin of Jeroboam.

This religion introduced by Jeroboam was a complete denial that the northern kingdom of Israel was a theocratic nation. The king had declared independence from Jehovah, and the people had willingly followed him. Such apostasy was bound to bring judgment upon the northern kingdom.



The Divided Kingdom

3. First Period of Enmity

The history of Israel, during this first period of enmity between the Divided Kingdoms, is in striking contrast to that of Judah. In Judah there was order, and for most of the time a king who was true to Jehovah sat on the throne. But for Israel this was a time of near anarchy. Jeroboam had been promised that if he obeyed God his family would continue to rule. But Jeroboam disobeyed from the start, and the kingdom did not long remain with his family. His son Nadab ruled two years and then was slain by his general Baasha. Baasha became king, and his son Elah followed him. Elah reigned two years and was killed by Zimri. Zimri ruled for seven days before he perished. Then Israel was divided for four years between Tibni and Omri. Omri finally did away with his rival and established himself as sole king. All these kings had been wicked, but Omri “did worse [i.e., dealt more wickedly] than all that were before him” (1Ki 16:25). And his son and heir was Ahab, the most wicked king of Israel.

In Judah, this period began with the reign of Rehoboam. He turned away from Jehovah, and his son Abijam followed in his footsteps. But these two together reigned less than twenty years, and they were followed by Asa, who ruled for forty years. Asa was a good king. He put away the idolatry and wickedness in Judah. He led the people back to Jehovah. He was a theocratic king.

And Judah did evil in the sight of the LORD, and they provoked him to jealousy with their sins which they had committed, above all that their fathers had done. For they also built them high places, and images, and groves, on every high hill, and under every green tree.—1 Kings 14:22-23

The high places, images, and groves were idols and altars, like the Canaanites had earlier. There clearly were forbidden by Jehovah. They would plague Judah throughout its remaining history.

The Difference between Israel and Judah

We might pause at this point to notice how different the religious histories of the two nations are. Israel began in sin and continued uninterruptedly in sin. Never was the sin of Jeroboam cast aside. As a result Israel went into captivity more than a century before Judah.

The history of Judah, religiously speaking, is checkered. While there were wicked kings in Judah, there were also some who were very good kings. Even when the wicked kings introduced the worship of false gods into Judah, idolatry never became as firmly established as it did in Israel. Edersheim points out three reasons for this:

1. The Temple in Jerusalem was a continual influence for good. This place where God dwelt among His people was a hindrance to the introduction of idolatry and an inspiration to true worship.

2. The wicked kings, who imported other gods, were always followed by good kings, who swept away the idolatry of their fathers.

3. The reigns of the evil kings were always brief as compared to the reigns of the good kings.

On one hand, this greater faithfulness to the worship of Jehovah explains the longer life of the kingdom of Judah. On the other hand, we must not forget that it is God Who keeps this people more faithful to Himself, in order that the promise to David might be fulfilled.

4. Period of Harmony

A. Ahab

The time of harmony between Israel and Judah began in the reigns of Ahab and Jehoshaphat. Ahab, the son of Omri, is rightly known as the worst king of Israel. His father had been worse than those who went before, but Ahab far outstripped his father in wickedness. His marriage to Jezebel, the heathen daughter of the king of Sidon, was a wicked act that caused much more wickedness. Jezebel was an ardent worshipper of Baal. Under her influence, Ahab made the worship of Baal the official worship of Israel. A systematic attempt to wipe out the worship of Jehovah was begun. The prophets were killed and the faithful worshippers persecuted.

B. The Ministry of Elijah

Please read 1 Kings 18.

In this critical hour, God raised up Elijah the Tishbite. He was a strange figure, but a mighty prophet of God. To him and his successor, Elisha, God gave the power to work miracles. This power is not often displayed in the Scriptures. Many miracles had accompanied the establishment of the theocratic nation in the days of Moses and Joshua, but there had been few if any since then. However, now the theocracy was threatened by heathenism. If Baal worship was successfully established in Israel, the harmonious relations existing between Israel and Judah would surely have led to its spread to the southern kingdom also. As the power of Jehovah had been displayed against the gods of Egypt, it must now be set forth against the false god Baal. Jehovah must be shown to be the true and living God, while the gods of the heathen are but dumb idols. It is for this reason that God worked miracles through Elijah and Elisha.

Elijah is the prophet of judgment. He is the “John the Baptist” of the Old Testament, calling the people to repentance. His first appearance is to Ahab. He pronounces that there will be no rain except at his command. Then he disappears. For three years Israel suffers without the life-giving rain. Elijah’s reappearance is equally sudden, and results in the famous confrontation on Mount Carmel.

And Elijah came unto all the people, and said, How long halt ye between two opinions? if the LORD be God, follow him: but if Baal, then follow him. And the people answered him not a word.—1 Kings 18:21

The miraculous outcome of this contest turns the people from their idolatry. Jehovah is acknowledged as the true God. The priests of Baal are slain. Even Ahab is a changed man for a short time, and receives aid from Jehovah in his battle against the Syrians. But Jezebel is unchanged, and her evil influence turns Ahab again to iniquity. It is Elijah who pronounces God’s judgment upon Ahab and his family.

Elijah’s life ends as spectacularly as it began. Without tasting death, he is carried into heaven in a whirlwind. Elisha is left to take his place. But Elisha’s task is not the same as Elijah’s, for Elijah had been partially successful. His call to repentance, presented in powerful words and supported by powerful deeds, had been heeded. Although the influence of the evil Jezebel still lingered, Elisha faced a people who had repented. Baal worship still existed, but it had lost much of its hold on the people. The tide had been turned by this mighty servant of God, Elijah the Tishbite.

C. The Work of Elisha

Please read 2 Kings 6-7.

The story of Elisha’s life is not presented in chronological order. Although the author of 2 Kings presents Elisha’s ministry as though it all occurred within the short reign of Ahaziah, we should remember that he lived through the reigns of six kings. The recorded events probably occurred over a period of many years, but were gathered together in this way in order to tell of his ministry more effectively.

The ministry of Elisha is primarily one of mercy rather than judgment. Special emphasis is placed upon his miracles. By these miracles the ministry of Elisha is connected with that of Elijah. But at the same time, the two ministries form a contrast: Elijah was the prophet of judgment; Elisha is the prophet of mercy. Elijah called the nation to repentance; Elisha leads a repentant people. Elijah fought against evil within the nation; Elisha helps the nation against evil from without. Notice, for example, God’s amazing deliverance from Syria after the siege of Samaria (2Ki 6:24-7:20). Taken together, their ministries present a balanced picture

of the workings of Jehovah in the midst of His covenant nation. In God, mercy and justice have kissed each other (Psa 85:10)!

5. Second Period of Enmity

A. An Ungodly Alliance

In this period of harmony, most of the attention is focused on Israel. Here the theocratic principle is most sharply challenged. In Judah, on the other hand, the nation is led by godly king Jehoshaphat. His long reign follows that of Asa, who was also godly. All seemed well for Judah. But the very act that brought about harmony between the two kingdoms was the seed of evil in Judah. Jehoshaphat gave his son Jehoram in marriage to Athaliah, the daughter of Ahab and Jezebel. Athaliah was like her mother, and caused Judah's king Jehoram to walk "in the ways of the kings of Israel." Their son Ahaziah, who reigned after Jehoram, was also wicked.

Please read 2 Kings 9-10.

In the northern kingdom, the influence of Jezebel was felt in the reigns of her sons. Ahaziah⁶⁴ followed in Ahab's steps. His brother Jehoram⁶⁵ succeeded him and was not as bad, but he still led Israel into sin. In order to fulfill the prophecy that Elijah had spoken to Ahab, in which Ahab would have no descendants on the throne (1Ki 21:20-22), God sent a prophet to anoint Jehu to be king. Jehu proceeded to wipe out the family of Ahab completely. Jehu also killed Ahaziah, king of Judah, who was visiting his uncle Jehoram. This murder of Judah's king by the one who became king of Israel ended the harmony that had existed.

Jehu seemingly had obeyed God in bringing judgment upon Ahab and Jezebel. But he did not remove the golden calves at Dan and Bethel. He stopped short of complete repentance. And half-hearted repentance is no repentance at all. Israel continued in its rebellion against Jehovah.

In Judah, Ahab's daughter Athaliah was the mother of Judah's king Ahaziah. When he was slain, she attempted to kill all the royal seed and usurped Judah's throne. This all served to increase Judah's enmity toward Israel. One small son, Jehoash, was rescued from Athaliah and hidden in the Temple by Jehoiada, the high priest, and his wife. After six years on the throne, Athaliah was killed, and the influence of Jezebel perished in Judah.

⁶⁴ There were two kings with the name *Ahaziah*: Judah's king, son of Judah's Jehoram and Athaliah, and Israel's king, son of Ahab and Jezebel.

⁶⁵ There were two kings with the name *Jehoram*: Judah's king, son of Jehoshaphat, and Israel's king (also called Joram), son of Ahab and brother to his predecessor, Ahaziah.

B. Judah in the Second Period of Enmity

Again in the second period of enmity, we find a contrast between the two kingdoms. After the death of Athaliah, the kings of Judah were again true to Jehovah. Yet they were not completely faithful to Him. Jehoash departed from Jehovah toward the end of his reign. Amaziah compromised with idolatry. Azariah (also called Uzziah in some translations) had a long reign and was a faithful servant of God. He extended the kingdom and gave it a new time of glory. But he intruded into the priest's office and burned incense in the Temple. For this he became leprous. His son Jotham also followed Jehovah. For a century the people of Judah were led by kings who were basically theocratic. Although they were not without sin, they considered themselves servants of the Ruler of Israel.

This time of good kings was interrupted by Ahaz, who turned Judah to idolatry. He shut up the door of the Temple and placed a heathen altar in the court. He sought to replace the worship of Jehovah with his heathen worship.

But Ahaz ruled only sixteen years. And after his death, the throne went to Hezekiah, of whom it is said, "He trusted in the LORD God of Israel; so that after him was none like him among all the kings of Judah, nor any that were before him" (2Ki 18:5). God continued to bless the kingdom of Judah with good kings. Yet the people of Judah were not deeply devoted to Jehovah; the evil kings had no trouble leading the nation astray. The good kings, therefore, often found it difficult to reform the nation. God's blessing is of grace, not of merit. Judah's favored condition rested upon God's promise to David.

C. Israel in the Second Period of Enmity

This is the last period of Israel's history. From the beginning, the kings of Israel have followed the sin of Jeroboam. During the reign of Ahab, it was necessary to defend the truth against heathenism with mighty miracles. Jehu had ended the threat of Baal worship, but he did not follow Jehovah. He continued in the sin of Jeroboam. This led again to strife and virtual anarchy. Zechariah, great-great-grandson of Jehu (2Ki 10:30), was murdered by Shallum. Shallum in turn was slain by Menahem. Menahem passed the throne on to his son Pekahiah, who was killed by Pekah. Pekah in turn died at the hand of Hoshea.

Please read 2 Kings 17.

During this period the sins of Israel continued to grow. The work of Jehu had been a check on Israel's sin. But the effects of that check were short-lived. During Hoshea's reign Israel was a vassal state, paying tribute to Assyria. But Hoshea attempted to rebel and, in 722 B.C., after a three-year siege, Samaria fell to the Assyrians. The Israelites were carried into captivity, and the land of Israel repopulated with other captive nations. This is why the Jews in the New Testa-

ment did not consider the Samaritans to be Jews, but people of mixed heritage. The captivity by Assyria ended the northern kingdom. This was God's punishment for her sins.

The inspired writer explains the reason for Israel's downfall. In 2 Kings 17, he spells it out carefully.

Because "the children of Israel had sinned against the LORD their God" (:7),

because "the children of Israel did secretly those things that were not right against the LORD their God" (:9),

because "they would not hear [His prophets], but hardened their necks" (:14),

because they "sold themselves to do evil in the sight of the LORD, to provoke him to anger" (:17)—

therefore, "the LORD was very angry with Israel, and removed them out of his sight: there was none left but the tribe of Judah only" (:18).

D. God's Voice to His People

God did not leave Himself without a testimony during this period. As Elijah and Elisha had proclaimed God's will during the period of harmony, other prophets now arose to speak His words. But these prophets also committed their prophecies to writing and their books are in the Old Testament (we shall study them shortly). During this period Joel, Isaiah, and Micah brought God's word to Judah. Israel also heard the word of Jehovah: Amos and Hosea eloquently called that rebellious people to repentance. But they would not hear, and the wrath of God fell upon them.

6. Overview of the Kings

The chronology⁶⁶ of this period is most difficult. It was once thought to be comparatively simple. One had only to add the figures given in the scriptural record to arrive at the proper dates. Many chronologies were set up on this basis. Today these are called "long chronologies." They generally ascribe a total of 390 years from the division of the kingdom to the destruction of Jerusalem.

More recently, scholars have been able to compare a few events in Scripture with the same events in Assyrian and Babylonian history. These peoples had a different method of dating events. Some of their writers make mention of eclipses and other natural events that can be precisely dated. By using such material, we have accurate dates for some events. These dates form a framework for the rest of the scriptural account.

⁶⁶ **chronology** – dating of events.

The application of this knowledge to the chronology of this period has shown that the old chronology was about fifty years too long. The writer of Kings was not interested in providing a strict chronology; he only wished to show how the kings of Israel and Judah were related to each other. Consequently, he ignored such matters as co-regencies (when two kings rule together). Taking these into account, we have a better dating of the kings.

Our present information is insufficient to answer all the questions about dating. Therefore, most of the dates given on the following chart are approximate.⁶⁷

Questions for personal reflection and group discussion

1. What is the purpose of this second part of Kings?
2. a. How did Solomon depart from Jehovah?
b. Why did he not lose the kingdom completely?
3. a. Why did Jeroboam create a different religion?
b. Why was it so offensive to God?
4. Why did God begin doing miracles again at the time of Elijah?
5. Concerning Israel's fall to Assyria,
 - a. What was the direct, visible cause?
 - b. What was the indirect, invisible cause?
6. In reviewing the chart of the kings of Judah and Israel, what trends and differences can you identify?

⁶⁷ Some have found it helpful to keep a copy of the chart in their Bibles. It is copyright free.

Kings of Judah and Israel

1042 - 586 B.C.

B.C.	name	+/-	years	Relation to prior	how left office	reference	prophet (Judah/other)
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United Kingdom

1083	(Samuel)	+	41	(last judge)	anointed Saul	1Sa 1:1	
1042	Saul	-	31	none	died in battle	1Sa 9:1	
1011	David	+	40	none	died	1Sa 16:1	
972	Solomon	+/-	40	son	died	1Ki 1:11	

Divided Kingdom

Kings of Judah

933	Rehoboam	-	17	son	died	1Ki 11:42	
916	Abijam (Abijah)	-	3	son	died	14:31	
913	Asa	+	40	son	died	15:8	
873	Jehoshaphat*	+	25	son	died	22:41	
848	Jehoram* †	-	12	son	stricken by God	2Ki 8:16	
842	Ahaziah†	-	1	son	killed by Jehu	8:24	
842	Athaliah (queen)	-	6	mother	murder by army	11:1	
836	Joash (Jehoash)	+	40	grandson	murder by officials	11:1	Joel
797	Amaziah*	+	18	son	murder by court	14:1	
779	Azariah* (Uzziah)+		52	son	stricken by God	15:1	
740	Jotham*	+	18	son	died	15:32	Isaiah
736	Ahaz	-	19	son	died	16:1	Micah
727	Hezekiah	+	29	son	died	18:1	Jonah (Nineveh)
698	Manasseh*	-	55	son	died	21:1	Obadiah (Edom)
643	Amon	-	2	son	murder by servants	21:19	Nahum (Nineveh)
640	Josiah	+	31	son	died in battle	22:1	Zephaniah
609	Jehoahaz	-	3mo.	son	deported to Egypt	23:31	Habakkuk
609	Jehoiakim	-	11	brother	died in battle	23:34	Jeremiah
598	Jehoichin	-	3mo.	son	deported to Babylon	24:6	Daniel (Babylon)
598	Zedekiah	-	11	uncle	deported to Babylon	24:17	Ezekiel
586					destruction of Jerusalem		

B.C.	name	+/-	years	relation to prior	how left office	reference	prophet (<i>Israel</i>)
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Kings of Israel

933	<u>Jeroboam</u>	-	22	none	stricken by God	11:26	
912	<u>Nadab</u>	-	2	son	murder by Baasha	15:25	
911	Baasha	-	24	none	died	15:27	
888	<u>Elah</u>	-	2	son	murder by Zimri	16:6	
887	Zimri	-	1wk.	(captain)	suicide	16:9	
887	Omri	-	12	(captain)	died	16:15	
876	Ahab	-	21	son	died in battle	16:28	Elijah
854	Ahaziah†	-	1	son	accident	22:40	Elisha
853	<u>Joram</u> † (Jehoram)	-	11	brother	killed by Jehu	2Ki 3:1	
842	Jehu	-	28	none	died	9:1	
814	Jehoahaz	-	16	son	died	13:1	
798	Jehoash*	-	16	son	died	13:10	
783	Jeroboam II	-	40	son	died	14:23	Amos
743	<u>Zechariah</u>	-	6mo.	son	murder by Shallum	14:29	Hosea
743	<u>Shallum</u>	-	1mo.	none	murder by Menahem	15:10	
743	Menahem*	-	10	none	died	15:14	
737	Pekahiah*	-	2	son	murder by Pekah	15:22	
736	<u>Pekah</u> *	-	20	(captain)	murder by Hoshea	15:27	
730	Hoshea	-	9	none	deported to Assyria	15:30	
722					fall of Samaria		

Most dates are approximate.

+/- "Good" or "bad" king

— Change of dynasty

** Co-regency*

† Two kings with the same name served in the same period.

21

Covenant Nation's Time of Disintegration

Kings, Part Three

And the LORD was gracious unto them, and had compassion on them, and had respect unto them, because of his covenant with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and would not destroy them, neither cast he them from his presence as yet.

2 Kings 13:23

1. Purpose

It is the purpose of these closing chapters of Kings (2Ki 18-25) to show how Judah, like Israel, departed from the ideal of a theocracy. The southern kingdom rejected Jehovah as her ruler. As a result, Judah also was taken into captivity.

2. A Spiritual Awakening

Please read 2 Kings 18-20.

Ahaz was one of the most wicked kings of Judah. He was followed by Hezekiah, one of the best kings of Judah. Here we see again what we noted earlier: God blessed Judah by giving her godly kings to overcome the effects of the evil kings.

Hezekiah led the people in religious reform. He removed the idols that Ahaz had permitted and promoted, removed the pagan altar that Ahaz had placed in the court of the Temple, and reopened the Temple, which had been closed!

For he clave to the LORD, and departed not from following him, but kept his commandments, which the LORD commanded Moses.—2 Kings 18:6

He held a great rededication of the Temple and a Passover feast. This was an awakening on the part of the people as well as the king. The people themselves called for a second seven-day feast after the Passover was completed. These events

took place before Samaria fell to Assyria. They marked a new high in the religious life of Judah.

The time of Hezekiah was turbulent, however. In his reign, Israel was taken captive. Assyria, the dominant power at that time, also troubled Judah. Sennacherib led his hosts in a campaign that was designed to bring all Palestine under his control and to remove the threat of Egyptian power from his borders. In this campaign, he attacked the walled cities of Judah and laid siege to Jerusalem. But Hezekiah took the plight of Jerusalem to God in prayer.

Now therefore, O LORD our God, I beseech thee, save thou us out of his hand, that all the kingdoms of the earth may know that thou art the LORD God, even thou only.—2 Kings 19:19

I will defend this city, to save it, for mine own sake, and for my servant David's sake. And it came to pass that night, that the angel of the LORD went out, and smote in the camp of the Assyrians an hundred fourscore and five thousand: and when they arose early in the morning, behold, they were all dead corpses. So Sennacherib king of Assyria departed.—2 Kings 19:34-36

The final story about Hezekiah recorded in Kings tells how he was granted fifteen additional years of life in answer to his prayer for healing. Isaiah the prophet also assured him that God would deliver Jerusalem from the Assyrians. It is likely that this answer to prayer actually occurred before the siege of Jerusalem mentioned above. As a sign and in a great miracle, God made the shadow on the sundial of Ahaz to go backward.

Hezekiah's remarkable recovery brought messengers from the king of Babylon to congratulate him. Perhaps they also came to seek an alliance against Assyria. Hezekiah welcomed them, but rather foolishly showed them all his treasures. God condemned this action through Isaiah the prophet, who declared that the treasures would be taken to Babylon. Here we see the importance of ordering all our actions rightly. From man's perspective, even the godly Hezekiah was partly responsible for the Babylonian captivity.

3. Return to Idolatry

When Hezekiah died, his son Manasseh ascended the throne. The reign of Manasseh was a long one of fifty-five years, but it was one of great wickedness. Not only did he restore the idolatry of his grandfather Ahaz, but he "shed innocent blood very much, till he had filled Jerusalem from one end to another" (2Ki 21:16).

As a result of Manasseh's sins, God punished the people of Judah as He had Israel. God declared through a prophet,

Behold, I am bringing such evil upon Jerusalem and Judah, that whosoever heareth of it, both his ears shall tingle...And I will forsake the remnant of mine inheritance, and deliver them into the hand of their enemies...Because they have done that which was evil in my sight, and have provoked me to anger, since the day their fathers came forth out of Egypt, even unto this day.—2 Kings 21:12, 14-15

We must remember that the people of Judah were guilty along with Manasseh. He may have permitted and encouraged idolatry, but they engaged in it. The nation of Judah would not have gone down to captivity if the people themselves had been faithful to Jehovah. But they always tended to follow the evil example of wicked kings.

The writer of Chronicles tells us that Manasseh was carried into Babylon as a captive and there repented of his sins (2Ch 33:12-16). As a result of this repentance, God caused him to be released and restored to his throne. After this he tried to undo some of his wrongs. But God had the author of Kings focus on the just punishment of the nation's sins. Manasseh's later repentance did not undo the results of his early wickedness.

Manasseh was followed by his son Amon, who ruled two years. He walked in the path of his wicked father, and led Judah down the road to destruction.

4. A National Reform

After Amon's death Josiah received the throne of Judah. Only eight years old when crowned, Josiah became one of Judah's best kings. At first he was guided by older men, but when he began to rule alone he started a great reform. The preceding kings had allowed the Temple to fall into disrepair, and Josiah ordered it repaired. During the repair work, a copy of the Law of God was found. When this was read to the king, it sparked a great reformation.

Go ye, enquire of the LORD for me, and for the people, and for all Judah, concerning the words of this book that is found: for great is the wrath of the LORD that is kindled against us, because our fathers have not hearkened unto the words of this book, to do according unto all that which is written concerning us.—2 Kings 22:13

Josiah, aware that Judah had not obeyed this Law, sent messengers to Huldah the prophetess. He wished to know from Jehovah what would result from this disregard for God's Law. God's answer is instructive. There is no promise that the

nation will be spared. The curses that God had pronounced upon His people if they were disobedient are to be experienced by Judah. The sincere repentance of King Josiah brings only the promise that the punishment will not come in his day.

Josiah led the people in a great reformation. The Law was read to all the people so that they might know how to live before God. Then the king began removing all the signs of idolatry. This was done not only in Jerusalem; Josiah even went into Israel, where there was no king, because their captivity had already taken place. At Bethel Josiah fulfilled the words that the prophet had spoken to Jeroboam (1Ki 13:2). He burned bones on the altar and defiled it. The heathen priests were killed. Then Josiah led the people in a great Passover celebration.

5. The Pangs of Death

Please read 2 Kings 25.

The reforms of Josiah did not touch the hearts of the people. There was outward worship of Jehovah, but their hearts were still idolatrous. They still walked in the sinful ways of Manasseh's first reign. For centuries God had preserved Judah by giving her godly kings, but Josiah was the last one. He died in battle against Pharaoh-necho, king of Egypt. Jehoahaz succeeded his father. He reigned only three months, and then was taken captive into Egypt, where he died.

The king of Egypt put Jehoiakim on the throne. He too was wicked. In 606 B.C., three years after his accession, Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon, came to Jerusalem and plundered it. He also carried away captives: all the high-potential young men, including Daniel and his friends. This was the first part of the Babylonian captivity. Jehoiakim was allowed to remain on the throne as a vassal king.

However, Jehoiakim rebelled against Nebuchadnezzar. When he died, his son Jehoiachin received the throne. He reigned only three months, for the Babylonians came because of his father's rebellion. Jehoiachin was taken captive into Babylon, and many of the upper classes with him, including all the leaders, all the priesthood (Ezekiel among them), and all the money. This second captivity took place in 597 B.C.

Nebuchadnezzar now put Zedekiah on the throne. But he, who had pledged his support to Nebuchadnezzar, rebelled. As a result, Nebuchadnezzar had had enough: the Babylonians laid siege to Jerusalem. After a terrible siege lasting three years, the city fell in 586 B.C. Zedekiah was captured, the city was burned completely, and all Judah was carried into captivity except the poorest people. They were left to cultivate the land.

A man named Gedaliah was appointed governor of those who remained. But after two months he was assassinated. Those who remained then fled to Egypt for fear of Nebuchadnezzar.

The book of Kings does not end with disaster. The author records that Jehoiachin, after thirty-seven years in prison, was given a place of honor in the Babylonian court. This is prophetic of what lies ahead for the people of Judah.

6. Conclusion

We must not forget that God spoke to Judah during these dark days through His prophets. Zephaniah and Habakkuk belong to this period. Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and Daniel all belong to the time of captivity. Ezekiel prophesied to the captives in Babylon. Daniel served in the foreign royal court. Jeremiah suffered through the destruction of Jerusalem, and was carried into Egypt with the fugitives.

We have come to the end of the covenant nation. Although Israel was established as the theocratic nation by God Himself, although God gave her a theocratic king to rule her—yet, because of her constant apostasy, God fulfilled the curses pronounced on disobedience. The decline and fall of Israel and Judah has been a black picture indeed.

But we need to note two facts. *First*, the history of God's people has not ended. In Israel and Judah there was a remnant that was true to Jehovah. God had promised that this captivity would not be permanent. Although the theocratic nation would never rise again, this group would be the theocratic people from whom would come the great spiritual Kingdom of God.

Second, we need to remember again that God's purposes are never defeated. The decline and fall of the kingdoms was not a defeat for God; it was part of His plan. It was part of the preparation for the coming of Christ. The captivity purified Israel as fire purifies fine metals. Idolatry disappeared in Israel, and other developments helped to pave the way for the golden era that lay far ahead.

Questions for personal reflection and group discussion

1. What is the purpose of 2 Kings?
2. How did Hezekiah lead the people in reform?
3. How did Josiah lead the people in reform?
4. Describe the last years of the southern kingdom.
5. Trace the role that Assyria, Egypt, and Babylon played in the history of Judah in this period.

22

Covenant Nation's Lesson from Its History

Chronicles

If my people, which are called by my name, shall humble themselves, and pray, and seek my face, and turn from their wicked ways; then will I hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin, and will heal their land.

2 Chronicles 7:14

1. Introduction

A. Historical Books in the Writings

You will remember that the Old Testament in Hebrew is divided into three sections—the Law, the Prophets, and the Writings.⁶⁸ Thus far all the historical books that we have studied (with the exception of Ruth) have been from the Law or the Former Prophets. Chronicles, Esther, Ezra, Nehemiah, and Daniel are historical writings that belong to the Writings, in that they are written by non-prophets. (Daniel was classified as a non-prophet even though his book contains much prophecy, because he technically was a statesman, and not called to deliver God's Word to His people directly.)

What is the difference between the prophetic and non-prophetic histories? The prophetic viewpoint takes in the whole sweep of the history of God's people. This does not mean that the prophet records everything that happened. But he selects his material from the whole of Israel's history, and uses that material to show how God is working out the development of His kingdom. The non-prophetic writers are more limited in their designs. They "take single parts out of the history of the people of God, and treat those parts from individual points of view."⁶⁹

⁶⁸ See Chapter 1 section 4A.

⁶⁹ Keil, C. F. and Delitzsch, F., *Commentaries on the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co.; reprinted).

We should not judge that this difference in purpose makes the non-prophetic histories inferior to the prophetic. Each has a function in God's revelation; both are valuable. By including both, God has given us a better overall picture of His kingdom. The prophetic writings may be compared to a picture taken from a high mountain. Such a picture enables us to understand the broad outlines of the area pictured. The non-prophetic writings are more like close-up pictures of interesting and important sections of that landscape. They present valuable details not shown in the other picture.

B. Chronicles

Chronicles was originally one book, like Samuel and Kings. It must have been written after the return from the Babylonian captivity. The book ends with a brief record of the decree of Cyrus, king of Persia, which allowed the Jews to return to Jerusalem. This book was written for Jews who had returned to Judah from the Exile.

Ezra begins with the same edict with which Chronicles closes. In addition, there are many similarities between the two books. Some commentators believe that both books were written by Ezra. Jewish tradition has always named him as the author of Chronicles. Certainly Ezra, who was a priest and a scribe, was a person well qualified for the task.

How could the author accurately relate genealogies that go back to Adam and events that took place five hundred years before? He had access to historical records; but, more importantly, he was inspired by God. God ensured that this record instructs us in what He wants us to know.

The outline of Chronicles is in four parts.

- | | |
|---------------------------|--------------------|
| I. Genealogies | 1 Chronicles 1-9 |
| II. The reign of David | 1 Chronicles 10-29 |
| III. The reign of Solomon | 2 Chronicles 1-9 |
| IV. The history of Judah | 2 Chronicles 10-36 |

2. Genealogies

The nine chapters of genealogies at the beginning of Chronicles make dry reading for the average person. But these lists were given for a reason. In the first place, they form a foundation for the rest of the book. They link Israel to the rest of the world. And the genealogies of the tribes show how they received their land as a heritage from Jehovah.

In the second place, these genealogies were tremendously important to the people who had returned from the captivity. "The genealogies that occupy the first nine chapters had for their immediate object the resettling of the land ac-

ording to the public records. Those who had returned from the captivity were entitled to the lands formerly held in their own families. The genealogies showed the people's title to land and office" (Halley).

3. History of the Kingdom

Please read 1 Chronicles 29 and 2 Chronicles 6 and 7.

Since the greater part of Chronicles is parallel to the books of Samuel and Kings, we will not repeat that history. Rather, we should notice the differences between Chronicles and those prophetic histories. These differences will help us to understand why Chronicles was written.

1. The book of Chronicles does not record those incidents in the lives of the kings that are strictly personal. In the life of David, no mention is made of the years David spent as a fugitive from Saul. Nor is there any record of his sin against Uriah or the troubles in his family which were the result of that sin.

2. The book of Chronicles emphasizes incidents connected with faithfulness to the covenant, and especially those connected with the Temple and its worship. It records the preparations David made for building the Temple, and his speech in which he called upon the people to aid in that task. It tells of the Levites and singers who were appointed by David to aid in the Temple worship. It records the building of the Temple in more detail. It emphasizes the worship ceremonies in the days of Solomon, Hezekiah, and Josiah. It enumerates the offerings that were brought. Time and again, the worship in the Temple is brought to the fore.

Please read 2 Chronicles 13.

3. Chronicles utterly disregards the kingdom of Israel. The kings of Israel are mentioned only when they fight against or make alliances with the kings of Judah.

4. Those sins of Judah's kings that affected the nation are presented more fully in Chronicles. Kings does not mention the idolatry of Amaziah, but Chronicles does. This is also true of Uzziah's attempt to intrude into the priestly office by offering incense. In the opposite vein, the repentance and reforms of Manasseh are neglected in Kings, but found here.

4. Purpose

Please read 2 Chronicles 29, 30, and 36.

This description of differences brings us to the purpose of Chronicles. It is clear that the writer omitted many matters and added others. He must have had some basis on which the selection was made. What was it? The author of Chroni-

cles has turned his attention to those times especially in which devotion to God dominated the people and their leaders—and brought them prosperity. He also gives attention 1) to those men who had endeavored to give a permanent house for the worship of God and to restore true worship of Jehovah, and 2) to those events in the history of worship that were important.

These things were emphasized in order to make clear to the returned exiles the lesson that should be learned from the past history of God's people. Faithfulness to God's covenant brought blessing. Faithfulness involved the proper use of the worship that God had ordained. So proper worship was necessary to receive God's blessing, and departing from this worship brought God's curse upon His people. This point Chronicles makes clear: the theocratic nation can be blessed only when God is her ruler, and only when the Ruler of Israel is the object of her worship.

Questions for personal reflection and group discussion

1. Why are the genealogical tables found in Chronicles?
2. What is the purpose of Chronicles?
3. How did God mark the dedication of the Temple?
4. Why do we have both Chronicles and the books of Samuel and Kings in the Old Testament?

God's Voice to His Covenant Nation

The Prophets

*But thou, son of man, hear what I say unto thee; Be
not thou rebellious like that rebellious house:
open thy mouth, and eat that I give thee.*

Ezekiel 2:8

1. What Is a Prophet?

What is a prophet? We have asked this question at various times in the course of our study of the Old Testament. We have given the same answer each time: A prophet is a man who is called of God to receive God's word and communicate it to the people. There are three parts to this definition. All three of these ideas are necessary to the biblical idea of a prophet. A prophet:

1. Is called by God to his particular task,
2. Receives a revelation from God,
3. Is charged with bringing that revelation to the people.

This definition may be considered a technical one; that is, it explains the precise meaning of the office of prophet. This office was very important in Israel. All the writers of the prophetic books were prophets in this technical sense. They had been called to the office of prophet. But we should recognize that the word *prophet* is sometimes used in a more popular sense. Abraham and Daniel are called prophets (Gen 20:7; Mat 24:15), yet neither of these occupied the office of prophet.

Through the prophets, God reveals Himself to men. He is God's representative to man, whereas a priest represents men to God. When the prophet spoke and said, "Thus saith the Lord..." it was as if God Himself were speaking. The people's responsibility was directly to the prophet's words (Deu 18:15). This mirrors the New

Testament preaching of the Word. When the preacher is faithfully preaching, he is speaking the Word of God to the people.

God's way is to speak His Word, through an Old Testament prophet or through the Scriptures, whether in preaching or by reading. When He speaks, He requires people to respond. Today many have the idea that God is more liberal and does not expect strict obedience. They even think it acceptable to sin or to be lukewarm toward God. But when God speaks, He expects whole-hearted obedience. He does not need to give further warnings. When we do not obey, the next step may be discipline (of believers) or judgment (of unbelievers)!

2. The History of the Prophets

A. The Early Prophets

Strictly speaking, the office of prophet began in Samuel's time, but the idea of prophet goes back much further. We find it already in the life of Abraham. There it seems to refer to one who has a close acquaintance with God. In Genesis 20:7, Abimelech is told to restore Abraham's wife, "for he is a prophet, and he shall pray for thee, and thou shalt live."

By the time of Moses, the term appears to designate one who speaks for God. At that time, there were prophets in Israel, but they were inferior to Moses, through whom God spoke most frequently. The difference is expressed in Numbers 12:6-8,

If there be a prophet among you, I the LORD will make myself known unto him in a vision, and will speak unto him in a dream. My servant Moses is not so, who is faithful in all mine house. With him will I speak mouth to mouth, even apparently, and not in dark speeches; and the similitude of the LORD shall he behold.

The difference was in directness and clarity of God's revelation. Yet God did speak through prophets as well as through Moses. That these prophets were spiritual leaders in Israel is clear from the desire expressed by Moses, "Would God that all the LORD's people were prophets, and that the LORD would put his spirit upon them" (Num 11:29).

B. The Institution of the Prophetic Office

With Samuel something new occurred in Israel: a prophetic order was established. Samuel is often called the first of the prophets. That title is well given. He is the first of a line of prophets who continued throughout the rest of Israel's history as the theocratic nation. These men were prophets in the technical sense. They were called to the prophetic office, even as today God calls men to the office

of minister of the gospel. These men were God's special servants, chosen by Him to be His ambassadors, through whom He would make known His Word.

What brought about this new prophetic movement? The institution of the prophetic office is closely connected with the institution of the office of king. The establishment of the monarchy in Israel is the occasion for the rise of the prophets. Samuel, the first of these prophets, was given the task of anointing Saul and David for the kingly office. The establishment of the monarchy gave rise to the office of prophet.

The connection between kings and prophets is important. That there is a connection is clear from the Old Testament history. The prophets appear before and address the kings far more than the people. Some of them, like Isaiah and Jeremiah, were in very close contact with the palace. But why? Because the kingdom in Israel was a theocratic kingdom. The kings of Israel were to be theocratic kings. When He established the kingdom, God did not thereby resign as ruler of Israel. He simply ruled through the kings. It was the duty of the theocratic kings to rule the people according to the will of God. And it was the duty of the prophets to set forth clearly to the king what was the will of God.

The prophets were never servants of the kings. Both prophets and kings were servants of God. When the kings were truly theocratic, then the prophets acted as their counselors. Thus we see Nathan advising David, and Isaiah counseling Hezekiah. But when the kings forsook their theocratic task and sought to rule without God, the prophets did not hesitate to speak out boldly against them. What Ahab said about Micaiah, "he doth not prophesy good concerning me, but evil" (1Ki 22:8), expresses the relation between the evil kings and the prophets.

C. The Change in the Prophetic Outlook

If we study the history of the prophets carefully, we will discover two different stages in the activity of the prophets. The first stage includes the earlier prophets, who did not write their messages. These prophets were interested in the development and maintenance of the theocratic kingdom. They helped the good kings, sounded the alarm against sin and apostasy, and called for repentance. They were the watchdogs of the theocratic kingdom. Their task was to preserve the existing order.

In the eighth century B.C., a new type of prophetic activity came to the foreground. This type is found in those prophets who wrote their messages as well as spoke them. Here we find a change of emphasis. There is still an urgent call to repentance. But these later prophets do not really expect that their call to repentance will be heeded. We find in their prophecies increased emphasis on the judgment that will fall on the people of God. They also point beyond the judgment

to a wondrous work of mercy. They point to a new era, to the dawning of a new day. Instead of preserving the existing order, the later prophets look forward to the establishment of a new and better order. More and more the finger of prophecy points to the Messiah to come, Jesus Christ.

D. Biblical Sequence

We will study the prophets in the sequence of their actual ministries. This will help us to link their writings with the time and situations in which they lived. However, our sequence of study will be different than the sequence of the prophets' books in the Old Testament.

It is good for us to memorize the actual sequence of their books in the Old Testament, so that we can find them in our Bibles when we need to. We'll start with the pre-exilic Minor Prophets, since some of their ministries come first.

Pre-exilic Minor Prophets

Hosea

Joel

Amos

Obadiah

Jonah

Micah

Nahum

Habakkuk

Zephaniah

3. The Message of the Prophets

The various prophets all had different messages, each adapted to the needs of the audience. As a general rule, we find the focus for the major prophets in their commissioning. God makes clear His mission for them at the time they are called. However, the books of the minor prophets are shorter and do not record their commissioning. We still can discern their particular focus, however, in their first chapter or first message.

Even though there are different messages for each prophet, yet several themes run through all the messages of the prophets:

1. Jehovah is presented as the only living and true God, Whose glory fills the heavens, but Who is ever close to His people Israel.
2. The relationship between God and the people of Israel is always based on that covenant made at Sinai, by which God promised to be Israel's God.
3. The sin of Israel is considered as a breaking of the covenant relationship.

4. The result of this sin is judgment from God. But this is not final. There is also a restoration of God's people to His favor and the blessings of His covenant.

These themes are presented in many different ways. We find differing figures of speech, differing expressions, and differing approaches. And yet these same themes underlie all the variety of the prophetic messages, because it is one God Who speaks through them all.

Questions

for personal reflection and group discussion

These questions are designed to reinforce understanding and application.

1. What are the three essential parts of the definition of a prophet?
2. What brought about the institution of the prophetic office?
3. What themes do the prophets develop?

24

God's Prediction of His People's Future

Joel

Therefore also now, saith the LORD, turn ye even to me with all your heart, and with fasting, and with weeping, and with mourning.

Joel 2:12

1. Introduction

Please read Joel 2.

A. Author

Of Joel the prophet we know nothing except the little we can learn from his book. He identifies himself as the son of Pethuel. We infer from the frequent mention of Judah and Jerusalem that he prophesied in Jerusalem.

B. Date

To determine precisely when Joel prophesied is extremely difficult, since he does not supply much information about the time in which he lived and worked. But we are quite sure that he was the earliest of the writing prophets. Two facts point in that direction.

1. The Jews placed Joel, along with Hosea and Amos, at the beginning of the Minor Prophets. Although the order in the Minor Prophets is not strictly chronological, the books are grouped together in a rough chronological order. So the Jews, who were in a position to know, considered Joel to be an early prophet.

2. Joel is quoted frequently by the other prophets. This means that the prophecy of Joel was considered to be Scripture at the time when these men wrote. Since Amos (one of the earliest writing prophets) quotes Joel, Joel must have been written early.

While this does not give us an exact date, some reliable commentators think that Joel probably prophesied during the reign of Joash, king of Judah (836-797 B.C.).

C. Purpose

The ministry of Joel was intended to turn the sinful people of the southern kingdom back to God. To this end he showed them that God's judgments were intended to chastise, not to destroy. If His people would return to Him, God would abundantly bless them. For this reason, the future blessings of God's people occupy an important place in Joel.

The outlines of the minor prophets are useful for reference. It would be good to mark these divisions in your Bible if needful, and to memorize them for your personal benefit if you are able to memorize easily. The outline of Joel has just two parts.

- I. The present plague of locusts Joel 1:1 – 2:27
- II. The future blessing of Israel Joel 2:28 – 3:21

2. The Plague of Locusts

The book of Joel begins with a description of a terrible plague of locusts. The prophet cries out,

*Hear this, ye old men, and give ear, all ye inhabitants
of the land. Hath this been in your days, or even
in the days of your fathers?—Joel 1:2*

Never, as far back as the traditions of the people go, has there been a locust plague such as this one. It takes two years for fig trees to recover and again produce fruit, three years for grape vines, and 15 years for olive trees. This plague was therefore devastating and all men were affected by it, from the drunkards to the priests.

Some students of the Bible have thought that Joel is using the locust plague as a parable; that is, he is not describing a real plague of locusts. He is using the locusts as a symbol of the heathen nations. If this were so, then the whole prophecy would deal with the future. The "locust plague" would not actually take place until the Assyrians came down into Judah in the days of King Hezekiah.

But Joel is describing something that is taking place at the time when he speaks. His language is that of a man who is talking to a people who are in actual distress. We are most likely correct if we take his words literally, as describing an actual plague of locusts.

3. The Day of the Lord

Blow ye the trumpet in Zion, and sound an alarm in my holy mountain: let all the inhabitants of the land tremble: for the day of the LORD cometh, for it is nigh at hand.—Joel 2:1

Joel calls this plague the “day of the LORD.” It also is used to describe the judgment of the nations in Joel 3. This phrase is a common expression in the Bible. Other prophets use it. The New Testament writers use it also. And they give it one of the meanings that it has here in Joel 3. The great Day of the Lord is the final Day of Judgment, when Jesus Christ will judge the nations and all men (Mat 25:32-46). It occurs at the second coming of Christ.

However, if the Day of the Lord is the final day of God’s judgment at the end of time, how can the plague of locusts be connected to it? There are two answers to this question. First, the “day of the Lord” can refer to any major judgment of God, where He brings His special wrath upon sin in a remarkable way. This certainly is the case when He overthrows whole nations and empires. It was the case when He deported the kingdoms of Israel and Judah.

Secondly, the use of the “day of the Lord” has a dual meaning. Its first meaning would be a particular judgment upon a nation to come in the near term. Those prophecies had an immediate context, as Israel and Judah faced enemy nations all around them. However, whenever there is a soon coming judgment upon a nation, the “day of the Lord” also alludes to the final Day of the Lord at the end of time (1Th 5:2). In these cases, the near-term judgment is a type of the final Judgment Day.

This is an example of “prophetic perspective.” Consider this illustration. If you stand on a plain, and look at a hill, behind which is a mountain, it will look as if the hill and the mountain are close to each other. The hill even may seem to be the first rise of the mountain. But when you climb the hill, you discover that between the hill and the mountain there are valleys and other hills. You were fooled because of your perspective. Now, we are not to think that the prophets were fooled. But in their prophecies they often ignore the valleys of time and look only at the hills and mountains of God’s redemptive actions. So they bring together events that are actually separated in time.

In Joel we have an example of this prophetic perspective. The plague of locusts is the beginning of a series of events, actually far separated in time, that culminate in the final judgment of God. Joel does not show the lapse of time. He simply shows how they are connected. Prophecy is primarily intended to tell what God is going to do, not when He will do it.

4. The Results of the Plague

A. Call to Repentance

To Joel, the plague of locusts was a judgment from God. In response, he called the people, one and all, to a solemn assembly where they might pray to God for deliverance from this plague.

*Turn ye even to me with all your heart, and with fasting, and with weeping, and with mourning: And rend your heart, and not your garments, and turn unto the LORD your God: for he is gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and of great kindness, and repenteth him of the evil.*⁷⁰—Joel 2:12-13

Then will the LORD be jealous for his land, and pity his people.—Joel 2:18

Here we see the heart of God. Even in the midst of judgment, He calls the people to repent from their sin and turn to Him with all their hearts. God in the Old Testament seems like He is always chastening and judging, but it is only because almost no one repents! He is the same God as the God of mercy, grace, and love seen often in the New Testament. In Him, holiness and justice are perfectly balanced with love and mercy.

Through Joel, God gave a promise that He would destroy the locusts and bless the land so that it would produce again. The people would have plenty, and would know that Jehovah is indeed their God.

B. Promise of Pentecost

This blessing leads to the promise of a greater blessing. God promises to pour out His Spirit upon all flesh, so that they will prophesy. He will do great wonders in heaven and earth before the great Day of Jehovah comes.

I will restore to you the years that the locust hath eaten...And ye shall know that I am in the midst of Israel, and that I am the LORD your God, and none else: and my people shall never be ashamed. And it shall come to pass afterward, that I will pour out my spirit upon all flesh...who-

⁷⁰ **repenteth him of the evil** – “Repent” means a change of mind that leads to a change in action: turning from sin to God. However, we know that God does not change (Num 23:19; Jam 1:17). This is an anthropomorphism: a human emotion applied to God so that we better can understand His ways. It expresses the assurance that God will withdraw His severe judgment from those who turn to Him. The Hebrew word for *evil* often refers to disaster or difficulty without any connotation of moral wickedness.

*soever shall call on the name of the LORD
shall be delivered.—Joel 2:25, 27-28, 32*

This prophecy was quoted by Peter on the day of Pentecost (Act 2:17-21). He declared that this prophecy was fulfilled at that time. Not all of it, of course. The signs and wonders in heaven and earth will come just before the Day of Judgment at the end times. But God did send His Spirit, and He did open the way of salvation to all who call upon Him (Mat 11:28-30).

C. Final Judgment

This promise leads Joel to another prophecy: in the Day of Judgment, God will bring the nations to justice. Joel speaks in figurative terms, but the thought is clear. All those who oppress God's people will be judged, but God will bless His people with abundant blessings. The Day of Jehovah will mean judgment upon the heathen, but it will be the fullness of blessing for the people of God.

The Old Testament concept is that God is always in control of all things. Mostly, He works behind the scenes, invisibly motivating and leading sinful men in exercising their own decisions, yet always to accomplish His own perfect will. But there are times when God breaks out dramatically to deal with pent-up sin. He then proves that man is not in control—and man's presumed independence ends. When this occurs, you do not want to be in opposition to God.

Questions for personal reflection and group discussion

1. What is the purpose of the book of Joel?
2. a. What is the "Day of the Lord"?
b. When does it occur?
3. Describe "prophetic perspective."
4. How will people be treated on the Day of Judgment?

25

God's Denunciation of Israel's Sins

Amos

*For thus saith the LORD unto the house of
Israel, Seek ye me, and ye shall live.*

Amos 5:4

1. Introduction

A. Author

The book was written by the prophet Amos, whose name it also bears. He was from Tekoa, a small town about five miles southeast of Bethlehem in the kingdom of Judah. He was by occupation a shepherd and a dresser of sycamore trees. Previous to the call to bring these prophecies to Israel, he was not a prophet, nor one of those known as "the sons of the prophets." He prophesied to the people of the northern kingdom during the reign of Uzziah, king of Judah, and Jeroboam II, king of Israel. The book was written more than two years after the prophecies were spoken (Amos 1:1).

B. Purpose

Amos was sent to the kingdom of Israel. The Israelites had departed from the true worship of Jehovah. They worshipped the golden calves made by Jeroboam I. They lived in wickedness and violence, and yet thought that they were safe from calamity because they were the chosen people of God. It was the purpose of Amos' prophetic ministry to destroy this illusion by warning of the judgment of God that would be visited on them because of their sins. Amos' tone is that of thunder and wrath.

The outline of Amos has three parts.

- I. God's judgment against the nations
- II. God's judgment against Israel
- III. Visions of the coming judgment

Amos 1-2

Amos 3-6

Amos 7-9

C. Historical Setting

During the times of Elijah and Elisha, Israel, with its capital at Samaria, and Syria, with its capital at Damascus just 100 miles (170 km) away, were approximately equal powers and constantly at war with each other. But during this time, Assyria, to the northeast with its capital at Nineveh, was growing in strength. Assyria then conquers Syria, destroys Damascus, and dominates the region. Israel is next on its list to conquer, but the Assyrian king dies. Two Assyrian generals fight a civil war to determine his successor, and greatly weaken themselves. Israel, however, on the major trade routes, continues to flourish. Its army also had never been stronger, after being strengthened in preparation to fight Syria.

Jeroboam II, fourth in Jehu's dynasty, had the longest reign of any northern king. Peace, prosperity, and optimism characterized his time in power. There was also an outward religious revival (Amos 4:4; 8:5). Jehu had wiped out Baal worship. The people understood Syria's destruction and Assyria's neutralization as the blessing of God. Signs of outward religion were everywhere: drinking goblets have been found that are styled as sacrificial bowls!

2. God's Judgment against Nations – chapters 1 - 2

Please read Amos 1.

Amos begins his prophecy with a quotation from Joel. "The LORD will roar from Zion, and utter his voice from Jerusalem; and the habitations of the shepherds shall mourn, and the top of Carmel shall wither" (Amos 1:2; see Joel 3:16). With this introduction, Amos begins to predict the woes that God will bring upon the nations. This section is very practical. He begins with those nations farthest away from Israel. Then he mentions the nearer nations, which are also distantly related to Israel. He comes then to Judah, Israel's sister nation and southern neighbor.

As Amos spoke of God's judgment on one after another of Israel's traditional enemies, the people must have shaken their heads in agreement. Even the judgment against Judah was agreeable to them. But step by step, Amos draws closer to Israel itself. Finally he boldly denounces the sins of his audience and announces the exile that will be their punishment.

Thus saith the LORD; For three transgressions of Israel, and for four, I will not turn away the punishment thereof; because they sold the righteous for silver, and the poor for a pair of shoes; That pant after the dust of the earth on the head of the poor, and turn aside the way of the meek...and they drink the wine of the condemned in the house of their god.—Amos 2:6-8

3. God's Judgment against Israel – chapters 3 - 6

Please read Amos 3-5.

There was little true faith in Israel. Terrible social injustice and greed were rampant. Greed, as evidenced in dishonest scales in the marketplaces, leads to social injustice, where the poor lose their lands. The rich people are worshipping on the Sabbath, but stealing from the poor the rest of the week! The people had only a superficial outward religion. Everything was fine on the outside. They thought, "You tell me I don't love God, but look at what I do! God must be pleased, because He is blessing us with peace and prosperity." The flesh delights in formal religion. But when the outward practice of religion does not result in right conduct during the course of our daily lives, God is greatly offended.

Amos declares boldly what God has decreed. The punishment will be so severe that only a remnant will escape.

Thus saith the LORD; As the shepherd taketh out of the mouth of the lion two legs, or a piece of an ear; so shall the children of Israel be taken out that dwell in Samaria in the corner of a bed, and in Damascus in a couch.—Amos 3:12

This punishment comes because they have not returned to Jehovah. He has chastised them for their sins time after time, but never have they repented. Thus their final punishment must come.

I have smitten you with blasting and mildew: when your gardens and your vineyards and your fig trees and your olive trees increased, the palmerworm devoured them: yet have ye not returned unto me, saith the LORD.—Amos 4:9

God is asking them: if they did not think the difficulties were a sign of God's disapproval, why do they think the blessings are a sign of God's approval?

In summary, God condemns them in two areas: 1) empty and false worship, and 2) social injustice.

For thus saith the LORD unto the house of Israel, Seek ye me, and ye shall live: But seek not Bethel.—Amos 5:4-5

Ye who turn judgment to wormwood, and leave off righteousness in the earth... They hate him that rebuketh in the gate, and they abhor him that speaketh uprightly. Forasmuch therefore as your treading is upon the poor, and ye take from him burdens of wheat.—Amos 5:7, 10-11

I hate, I despise your feast days, and I will not smell in your solemn assemblies. Though ye offer me burnt offerings and your meat offerings, I will not accept them: neither will I regard the peace offerings of your fat beasts. Take thou away from me the noise of thy songs; for I will not hear the melody of thy viols. But let judgment run down as waters, and righteousness as a mighty stream.—Amos 5:21-24

4. Visions of Coming Judgment – chapters 7 - 9

In the last section of Amos, we find five visions that picture the judgments to come upon Israel. The plague of locusts and the fire that devours the great deep symbolize the final judgment. Both of these visions picture the terrible destructiveness of that judgment. But God's mercy is also pictured. After each of these visions the prophet prays for his people, and God promises to spare them.

The next two visions represent the captivity of Israel by Assyria. Here there is no intercession by the prophet, nor any promise that God will spare Israel.

Then said the Lord, Behold, I will set a plumbline⁷¹ in the midst of my people Israel: I will not again pass by them any more.—Amos 7:8

A plumbline is an invariable standard that does not compromise; it never breaks or wears down; it is always right. The vision of the plumbline signifies that God has drawn the line of judgment in the midst of His people. He will no longer spare Israel. Even the royal family will be destroyed. The basket of summer fruit shows that Israel is ripe for judgment.

The final vision, the breaking of the Temple upon the heads of the people, illustrates again that God will bring judgment upon Israel. And yet this is not the end of Amos' prophecy. Jehovah is still the covenant God, faithful to all His promises. And He promises,

In that day will I raise up the tabernacle of David that is fallen, and close up the breaches thereof; and I will raise up his ruins, and I will build it as in the days of old: That they may possess the remnant of Edom, and of all the heathen, which are called by my name, saith the LORD that doeth this.—Amos 9:11-12

God will again show mercy upon His people. This promise is quoted in Acts 15:16-18 by James, the leader of the Jerusalem Council. He quotes it in order to prove that God has prophesied that the Gentiles will have a place in His Church. Therefore we know that this promise of God has been fulfilled through the work of our Lord Jesus Christ.

⁷¹ **plumbline** – standard tool for measuring a straight line via a taut string.

This is a characteristic that is common in the prophets. When they pronounce judgment upon the covenant nation, they also announce blessings that will come through Christ. In this way, they remind the reader that the destruction of the covenant nation will not end the Kingdom of God. The theocracy will continue. More than that, it will attain new heights of glory.

Questions for personal reflection and group discussion

1. What is the purpose of the book of Amos?
2. What was happening in the world at the time of Amos?
3. Describe the true spiritual condition of Israel at this time.
4. When is God greatly offended by our “religion”?
5. a. What is a common characteristic in the prophets?
b. What does this accomplish?

26

God’s Indictment of His Unfaithful People

Hosea

Come, and let us return unto the LORD: for he hath torn, and he will heal us; he hath smitten, and he will bind us up.

Hosea 6:1

1. Introduction

A. Author

The author of this book is Hosea, the son of Beerī. Of him we know nothing except what we learn from his book.

B. The Times of Hosea

Hosea tells us that he prophesied in the reigns of Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah, kings of Judah, and Jeroboam II, king of Israel. Jeroboam II must have been the first king of Israel in whose reign he prophesied. But his ministry did not

end there. He probably prophesied until the time of the fall of Samaria. His ministry in the northern kingdom paralleled that of Isaiah in the kingdom of Judah.

The ministry of Hosea (and of Amos, whose work began about the same time as Hosea's) began shortly after the death of Elisha. Hosea and Amos continued God's call to the northern kingdom. At this time Israel was in a period of prosperity and grandeur. Jeroboam II had extended her borders from the Dead Sea to the Euphrates River. But this was also a time of great sin. The outward splendor of the times was a cloak for the inward corruption that was eating at Israel's heart. Despite the present prosperity, the nation was deserving of judgment. And that judgment was beginning to take shape. On the eastern horizon Assyria was beginning to grow into a world empire. And Assyria was the rod that God would use to punish His unfaithful people.

C. Purpose

The northern tribes had been given many opportunities to return to Jehovah. But they had continued in sin, especially the sinful worship of the golden calves at Bethel and Dan. Amos had come to Israel with words of judgment. Hosea's tone is intimate and personal; he brings them a message of God's love. In the light of that love, Israel's unfaithfulness is exceedingly sinful. That sin must be punished. And yet after the punishment will come blessing. The punishment will be a time of refining, and then God will again show His mercy.

The outline of Hosea has two parts.

- | | |
|--|------------|
| I. Hosea's marriage: A parable of God's love | Hosea 1-3 |
| II. Hosea's message: Israel's unfaithfulness | Hosea 4-14 |

2. Hosea's Marriage – chapters 1 - 3

Please read Hosea 1-3.

A. Jewish Marriage

In order to understand Hosea, we first must understand the Jewish culture of marriage in biblical times. Marriages were arranged. The parents of the daughter chose the husband for her; she had no say in it. Each partner was supposed to love by choice. The security of the marriage was not supposed to be based on performance or trying to earn the other's love. In these ways, Jewish marriages were pictures of God's love for His people. His love is undeserved, and it is by His choice: it is unconditional. Nothing can change His love for His people because it is based only on His choice to love.

Marriage was the objective of every woman. To be single in the Old Testament meant that something was radically wrong with you, that your parents could not negotiate a partner for you.

There was a progression to your value as a woman. The most important value was 1) to be married. After this, it was 2) to be fruitful in having children, the more the better, often starting at age 14 or 15. To have no children was a disgrace, seen as a curse of God. Children were a source of economic prosperity, and security in old age. The next source of status was 3) to have many sons, and then 4) for the first born child to be a boy. Girls could be a drain on parents financially, but the more boys, the more status: your family's work potential went up dramatically with each son. A final source of worth in women, although less so than the other factors, was 5) for the husband to truly love his wife.

Biblical love means self-denial. In marriage, each partner chooses to deny every other person the same access to their time, resources, and emotions. This is the same in our relation to God: we give first priority to our God and deny the world access to our affections. When we put other things before Him in our attention, we are breaking our commitment to Him. When we are friends with the world, we are as enemies to God (Jam 4:4)—we are committing spiritual adultery against our God.

B. Relationships Today

What a contrast the model of Jewish marriage in Bible times is with relationships today. Young people in the world are encouraged to find their own spouse, and the basis is rarely spiritual maturity or character. Instead, the center of attention is on feelings of “love,” based on physical, emotional, and sensual attraction. People talk about “falling in love,” and by this their meaning is totally emotional, as if the person cannot control their feelings. When this is the case, of course, people can even more easily fall out of love! Then society's solution is to separate or divorce, so that no one is “unhappy.”

So people of all types focus on packaging themselves to be most attractive: promote strengths and cover up weaknesses. The motive for marrying is to get love, security, and satisfaction. Dating in western countries is a prime example; it has become a selfish activity for personal short-term pleasure. Romantic love becomes a performance based on covering up weaknesses and trying to earn the other's continued interest.⁷²

C. Hosea's Marriage

God told Hosea to marry a very sinful woman, a harlot, and have children who would be known as “children of harlotry.” These children were given symbolic names. The first was named “Jezreel,” a sign that God would destroy the family of Jehu, which was then ruling. The second child was named “Lo-ruhamah,” which

⁷² See *Pathway to Christian Marriage* by John Thompson, available from CHAPEL LIBRARY.

means “that hath not obtained mercy.” This was God’s message that “I will no more have mercy upon the house of Israel; but I will utterly take them away” (Hos 1:6). And when the third child was born, God said, “Call his name Lo-ammi [meaning ‘not my people’]: for ye are not my people, and I will not be your God” (Hos 1:9). The three children thus became God’s message to Israel.

Gomer had all five of the sources of worth for women: she was married, she had multiple children, they were sons, the first born was a son, and her husband loved her in amazing ways. That she threw all this away is amazing. She pictures Israel’s foolish choice of idolatry instead of Jehovah—as much so as Hosea pictures God’s unconditional love.

This object lesson leads to a strong condemnation of Israel’s sin. Israel is personified as a faithless wife who commits adultery continually in spite of her husband’s love. Behind this figure of speech lies a thought that runs through Hosea: Israel is married to God by the covenant at Mount Sinai. She is pledged to be faithful to Him, so all idolatry is spiritual adultery. The idolatrous Israelites, who have never put aside the golden calves of Jeroboam I, but have even worshipped the gods of the heathen, are portrayed by the adulterous wife.

*And I will betroth thee unto me for ever; yea, I will
betroth thee unto me in righteousness, and in judgment,
and in lovingkindness, and in mercies. I will even betroth
thee unto me in faithfulness: and thou shalt know the
LORD...and I will have mercy upon her that had not
obtained mercy; and I will say to them which were
not my people, Thou art my people; and they
shall say, Thou art my God.—Hosea 2:19-23*

This figure provides a beautiful background on which God’s mercy is displayed. God is the loving husband who is willing to receive the adulterous wife back into His love. He promises to receive His people again, even though they must be chastened for their sins. Now Hosea is also commanded to symbolize this. He is told to love the woman even after she commits adultery. When she is sold into slavery, he buys her for half the price of a slave—symbolizing no value or worth in her, but infinite love in God.

This again is fulfilled in the beauty of the gospel of the New Testament. We have no value or worth to offer to God for our salvation. Stained by sin, we cannot earn His favor. He comes to His children by His own choice in unmerited love.

Many commentators believe that this is the same woman Hosea married as recorded in Hosea 1. But now he does not immediately take this woman as his

wife. For a time she is isolated. This is to symbolize the captivity that must overtake Israel before God's mercy will again be manifested.

This is all a picture to Israel of God's love for His people. Another purpose for the experience is so that Hosea can identify with God's own heart toward Israel. Hosea experienced this pain for twenty years!

D. Was Hosea's Marriage Real?

There are two schools of thought about Hosea's marriage. Some scholars believe that he actually married a harlot, or that he married a wife who became a harlot after her marriage. Others believe that this is a prophecy or vision, which was told to the people but never actually occurred.

There are good reasons why some commentators have taken this literally. It reads like history. Even the names of his wife and children are given. One writer says, "The whole account bears the stamp of reality; indeed, only as real history would the prophet's words have any effect. For his domestic experience served as a living mirror of Israel's unfaithful relation to Jehovah" (Robinson).

Nevertheless, there is another side to the story. There are problems raised by this marriage that cannot be ignored. Would not the prophet lose his reputation as a servant of God by marrying a harlot? And, if the children were born about a year apart, would not the lessons of their names lose its effect because of the lapse of time? These questions and others have caused many commentators to conclude that the marriage is an allegory, not an actual fact.

In both views, the lesson of the marriage is the same. It demonstrates the great love of God for His people, and the exceedingly great sinfulness of their unfaithfulness to Him. It provides a backdrop for the message that Hosea proclaims.

3. The Sins of Israel – chapters 4 - 14

A. Condemnation

The latter section of Hosea consists of prophecies uttered by the prophet. There is no clear division of material here, but overall Hosea points to certain sins of Israel. Robinson lists the following sins that Hosea condemns.

1. Lack of knowledge "My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge" (4:6).
2. Pride "And the pride of Israel doth testify to his face" (5:5).
3. Instability "For your goodness is as a morning cloud, and as the dew that goeth early away" (6:4).
4. Worldliness "Ephraim, he mixeth himself among the peoples; Ephraim is a cake not turned" (7:8).
5. Corruption "They have deeply corrupted themselves" (9:9).

6. Backsliding “My people are bent on backsliding from me” (11:7).
 7. Idolatry “And now they sin more and more, and have made them molten images of their silver, even idols according to their own understanding” (13:2).

These sins are like the unfaithfulness of Hosea’s wife. And idolatry is the worst, for it is spiritual adultery. It is breaking God’s covenant with Israel.

B. God’s Judgment and Mercy

Please read Hosea 14.

As the picture of Hosea’s marriage included a beautiful portrayal of God’s love, so the message that Hosea preached included mercy as well as judgment. The emphasis is necessarily on judgment. Israel’s sins must bring judgment from a righteous God:

“They consider not in their hearts that I remember all their wickedness: now their own doings have beset them about; they are before my face.” (7:2)

“For they have sown the wind, and they shall reap the whirlwind” (8:7).

“He shall not return into the land of Egypt; but the Assyrian shall be his king, because they refused to return” (11:5).

And yet even in judgment the mercy of God shines forth:

“Sow to yourselves in righteousness, reap in mercy; break up your fallow ground:⁷³ for it is time to seek the LORD, till he come and rain righteousness upon you.” (10:12)

“How shall I give thee up, Ephraim? how shall I cast thee off, Israel?... mine heart is turned within me, my repentings [i.e., compassions] are kindled together” (11:8).

It is on this love of God for His unfaithful people that Hosea bases his call to repentance. Hosea 14:1-3 contains a beautiful plea to Israel to repent. And after this comes a final promise of forgiveness from the God Who loves His people so much (14:4-9).

Questions for personal reflection and group discussion

1. What is the purpose of the book of Hosea?
2. Describe Jewish marriage in Old Testament times.

⁷³ **fallow ground** – land left unplowed and unseeded during growing season; uncultivated; therefore, with a hard crust that is difficult to penetrate—symbolizing a hard heart.

3. How did Jewish women derive value?
4. Describe biblical love,
 - a. Between two people.
 - b. Between God and man.
5. a. Why does God consider all idolatry as spiritual adultery?
 - b. How did Israel commit spiritual adultery?

27

God's Promise of Judah's Deliverance

Isaiah, Part One

*Come now, and let us reason together, saith the LORD: though
your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though
they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool.*

Isaiah 1:18

1. Introduction

A. Author

The first verse of this book states that it is “the vision of Isaiah the son of Amoz, which he saw concerning Judah and Jerusalem, in the days of Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah, kings of Judah.” This verse is the introduction to the entire book. It states that Isaiah, the prophet of Jehovah who lived in the eighth century B.C., wrote the prophecies that this book contains.

B. Interpretation

1. The View of the Higher Critics

For twenty-five centuries practically no one thought to question this statement. But about two hundred years ago, the Higher Critics began to raise many questions about the Bible. The belief that Isaiah 1:1 is true, and that the prophet Isaiah really wrote this book, was seriously questioned. At first there was only one chapter that was thought to be the product of another author. But soon the entire

second section of Isaiah (ch. 40-66) was said to be the product of a great unknown prophet who lived in Babylon during the time of the Exile. Since nothing was known about him, this prophet came to be called Second Isaiah. Critics acclaimed him as the greatest prophet who ever lived.

At the end of the last century, the Critics decided that Second Isaiah had not written all of chapters 40-66. Now it was claimed that he had written only chapters 40-55. The rest of the book was written by a man who lived in Judah during the time of Nehemiah. He came to be called Third Isaiah. Many Higher Critics have followed this point of view. But no theory has been able to answer all the questions. No theory has been accepted by all the Higher Critics; they violently disagree with one another. But they all agree that Isaiah was not written by one man. They view it as a collection rather than a single work.

2. The Biblical Evidence

We have seen that the Higher Critics are willing to disregard the statement of Isaiah 1:1 concerning authorship. Do they do this because other parts of the Bible support their theories? No, indeed. On the contrary, all the biblical evidence points to the prophet Isaiah as the author of the book that bears his name. Over twenty times the New Testament quotes from this book and names Isaiah as the author of the quoted words. The passage in John 12:37-41 is especially significant. In this passage John says that the unbelief of the people is a fulfillment of Isaiah 53:1, which he calls "the word of Isaiah the prophet." The reason for their unbelief is also found in Isaiah 6:10. Then John adds, "These things said Esaias [Isaiah], when he saw his glory, and he spake of him" (Joh 12:41). John quotes from portions that the Critics attribute to "Isaiah" and "Second Isaiah," and says that the same man, Isaiah, spoke these words. The New Testament knows only one author of the book of Isaiah. That author is the prophet of the same name.

3. Why the Critical View?

With this evidence before us, we might well ask why the Critics think it necessary to devise theories that multiply the authors of the book. The Critics have several rules of interpretation to which they would point. But one main rule underlies all the rest in their view: prediction of the future is impossible. The Critics do not believe that a prophet can foretell the future. Since the second part of Isaiah is clearly a portrayal of future events, they do not believe that Isaiah could have written it. The author must have been a man who lived much later. He did not write actual prophecy. He recorded events that had already happened as if they were still to happen in the future.

Why do the Critics deny that the prophets can predict the future? Because they do not believe that the Bible is the Word of God. They believe that the prophets wrote their own ideas. Of course, no man can foretell the future on his own.

And since they think that the book of Isaiah is the work of man, not God, they do not believe that the prophet Isaiah could have written the predictive passages.

4. The Important Question

This brings us to a very important question. What is the Old Testament? Is it truly God's Word? Is God the author of it? The Christian Church has always insisted that the whole Bible is the Word of God. God is the true author, though He used men to record His Word. To this the New Testament testifies (2Ti 3:16; 2Pe 1:21). And the Holy Spirit, Who dwells in the hearts of all God's people, convinces us that the Bible is the Word of God. Such conviction the Higher Critics seem to lack.

It is important for us to remember the real difference between those who believe that Isaiah wrote the book of Isaiah and those who do not. The view of the Higher Critics is often presented as if it were the only scholarly view. Anyone who believes that Isaiah is actually the author is scorned and considered to be uneducated. But that is not necessarily the case. The Higher Critics view is not the most scholarly. It does not face all the facts. It does not consider that the Bible is the Word of God. When the Holy Spirit witnesses to us that the Bible is God's Word, then we will gladly confess that the New Testament statements about this book are true. We will believe that God spoke through the prophet Isaiah.

C. Isaiah and His Times

Isaiah's ministry in the kingdom of Judah paralleled that of Hosea in the kingdom of Israel. However, Isaiah apparently lived and prophesied longer than did Hosea. When Isaiah began his ministry, the nation was at the height of its prosperity. The reign of Uzziah was the closest approach to the glory of Solomon that Judah had ever experienced. But the outward prosperity was no sign of inward prosperity. The spiritual health of the nation was none too good. While the kings Uzziah and Jotham exercised godly leadership, God held the forces of evil and decay in check. But when Ahaz came to the throne, he led the people of Judah away from Jehovah. He also drew Judah into an alliance with Assyria that was to have disastrous consequences. When Hezekiah came to the throne, he sought to undo his father's folly and lead the people back to God. He was partly successful. But Ahaz had set in motion some forces that could not be reversed. The latter days of Isaiah's ministry were quite a contrast to the prosperity that had marked the beginning of his work. Judah was declining, and God's judgment upon her sin was beginning to appear on the horizon.

There were four national crises, then, that formed the backdrop to Isaiah's message.

1. Israel and its ally Syria attack Judah for not joining their rebellion against

Assyria. God delivers Judah, even with all its sins, because of His promise to David.

2. The Assyrians destroy Samaria in 722 B.C. and deport Israel. Samaria is only 40 miles from Jerusalem, one day's forced march.
3. Hezekiah started spiritual renewal and stopped paying tribute to Assyria, which then attacks Judah in 701 and lays siege to Jerusalem. Jerusalem is miraculously delivered by God.
4. God would use Babylonia to judge Judah some 100 year later. This was all predictive prophecy, because it happened long after Isaiah's time.

D. Purpose

The whole book of Isaiah teaches the grand lesson that salvation is completely a work of grace. The first chapter of Isaiah speaks of redemption.

Come now, and let us reason together, saith the LORD: though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool.—Isaiah 1:18

That is enlarged upon throughout the entire book. At times redemption is expressed in national terms as salvation from hostile nations. But more often redemption is the salvation of man from the penalty and power of sin. And especially in the latter part of Isaiah, the redemption of God's Church is the chief subject of the prophet's message.

The outline of Isaiah is in five parts.

- | | |
|------------------------------------|--------------|
| I. The sins of God's people | Isaiah 1-12 |
| II. The judgments of God | Isaiah 13-27 |
| III. The future of Judah | Isaiah 28-35 |
| IV. The crises of Hezekiah's reign | Isaiah 36-39 |
| V. The blessings of God's Church | Isaiah 40-66 |

E. Biblical Sequence

It is important to remember that we are studying the Old Testament books in the same sequence as their contents took place. This helps us link each book with its historical context. For the Minor Prophets, this sequence is sometimes different from the order in which they appear in our Bibles. However, for the Major Prophets, of which Isaiah is the first, their historical sequence and the order in our Bibles are the same.

Books of the Major Prophets

Isaiah
Jeremiah
Lamentations
Ezekiel

Daniel

F. Sermons

The prophecies of Isaiah cannot be catalogued strictly according to subjects. They are like sermons. As a sermon on sin may and should contain material about salvation from sin, so Isaiah's prophecies include sin, judgment, and salvation. In a sense, many of these prophecies may be considered as sermons preached to the people of Judah. Now, a good sermon has a theme, and Isaiah's prophecies have various themes. On the basis of the themes we can catalogue his prophecies. But we should remember that each section will also contain material on other topics. There is a pattern in each section: 1) condemnation of sin, 2) call to repent, 3) promise of deliverance, 4) a song of praise.

2. The Sins of Judah – chapters 1 - 12

Please read Isaiah 1, 2, 6, and 9.

Isaiah 1 is an introduction to the prophecies of Isaiah. It also introduces us to the sins of Judah, the subject of the remainder of the first section.

Hear, O heavens, and give ear, O earth: for the LORD hath spoken, I have nourished and brought up children, and they have rebelled against me.—Isaiah 1:2

Judah has two major sins that receive special attention: Judah's refusal to repent when chastened by God due to pride, and Judah's formal continuation of religious ceremonies when the hearts of the people were far from God.

Isaiah does not hesitate to spell out the sins by which Judah has provoked God. In addition to lack of repentance and formalism in worship, he points to the practice of foreign customs (2:5-6), idolatry (2:8), oppression of the poor (3:13-15), love of luxurious finery by the women (3:16), greediness (5:8), and love of strong drink (5:11-12).

In the year that king Uzziah died I saw also the Lord sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up, and his train filled the temple... Then said I, Woe is me! for I am undone; because I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips: for mine eyes have seen the King, the LORD of hosts.—Isaiah 6:1, 5

Isaiah does not stand apart from the people in their sins. In the vision of Isaiah 6, he sees the holiness of the Lord. It must have been a truly awesome sight, one that literally took his breath away.

God used this vision to teach us of Himself. "*Sitting upon a throne.*" In the ancient world, the monarch would walk about his throne room, discussing matters with his royal court. Sometimes there would be heated debates about the best way forward. But when the king sat down upon his throne, all discussion was over! The king would then pronounce his final decisions, and no one could speak against them. The king sitting inspired awe and absolute respect for his authority. "*High and lifted up.*" The height of a king's throne spoke of his importance. The more important his kingdom, the more elevated was the throne. "*His train filled the temple.*" The size and length of a royal robe also spoke of the power of the ruler. This train filling the Temple tells us that God has absolute power over all things.

God used this vision not only to teach us of Himself, but to call Isaiah to his prophetic ministry. Notice his immediate response: whenever we see the holiness of the Lord, the magnitude of our sin leaps into our consciousness, and we must confess it. Isaiah begins to do this right away, and also takes his responsibility for the sins of the nation. Thus, when he is told to prophesy to people who will not hear, but will continue in sin until God's judgment falls, he is able to proclaim God's word with a sympathetic heart.

To Isaiah was given the blessed privilege of prophesying about the coming of the Messiah of God more than any of the other prophets. His message included both predictions about the Messiah Himself and descriptions of the glorious Messianic Age that He would usher in. These are found throughout the book of Isaiah, but the reign of Ahaz appears to have been a time when many such prophecies were given to Isaiah to proclaim. The peculiar circumstances of that time provided an apt occasion for such prophecies. During Ahaz' reign, Syria and Israel united to fight Assyria. When Judah would not join them, they turned against her. God sent Isaiah to Ahaz with messages of assurance that Judah would be spared. As a sign to the unbelieving king, God gave the wonderful prophecy of the virgin birth of the Christ (Isa 7:14-17).

But Ahaz had no faith. He preferred to trust in man and called for help from the king of Assyria. This led to other prophecies of punishment for Judah, of the Assyrian captivity of Israel, and of the final destruction of Assyria. Among these are found prophecies of the birth and reign of the Messiah. Isaiah 9:1-7 is a beautiful example of such messianic prophecies. It emphasizes the kingly work of Christ. It shows that God's kingdom will come to its perfect expression in the future, when God sends the eternal King to be born as a man.

The main part of messianic prophecies occur in chapters 40-66. These are the focus of the next lesson.

3. Judgment on the Nations – chapters 13 - 27

Isaiah is primarily interested in Judah—her sins, her judgment, her salvation. But the age in which Isaiah lived was like our own. No nation lived to itself. Judah was involved with many other nations, some of whom were her enemies. Isaiah's prophecies include oracles of judgment against these nations.

The prophecies of Isaiah often speak of the future. Sometimes this is done in general terms, as in Isaiah 24-27. In these chapters, we have a picture of the judgments that God will send upon the earth.

The people of God are involved in these judgments. But they are judged in order that they may be purified from their sins. On the other hand, the judgments that visit the enemies of God destroy them completely.

4. What the Future Holds – chapters 28 - 35

*Therefore thus saith the Lord GOD, Behold, I lay in Zion
for a foundation a stone, a tried stone, a precious
corner stone, a sure foundation: he that believeth
shall not make haste.—Isaiah 28:16*

The future is also presented in more concrete terms, as in the prophecy in Isaiah 28-35. The Lord again clearly points to spiritual pride in the people as the reason for His judgment. He gives them hope, but they will not come:

*Wherefore the Lord said, Forasmuch as this people draw near me
with their mouth, and with their lips do honour me, but have
removed their heart far from me, and their fear toward me is
taught by the precept of men: Therefore, behold... the wisdom
of their wise men shall perish, and the understanding of
their prudent men shall be hid.—Isaiah 29:13-14*

*That this is a rebellious people, lying children, children that will
not hear the law of the LORD... For thus saith the Lord GOD, the
Holy One of Israel; In returning and rest shall ye be saved; in
quietness and in confidence shall be your strength:
and ye would not.—Isaiah 30:9, 15*

The focus in this section is on the relations between Judah and Assyria. Assyria was the dominant power of the day. Judah feared that Assyria would attack her. There was a party in Judah that counseled seeking aid from Egypt. Isaiah denounces the folly and sin of trusting in Egypt. He announces that Assyria will indeed come against Judah, but will be destroyed by the hand of God.

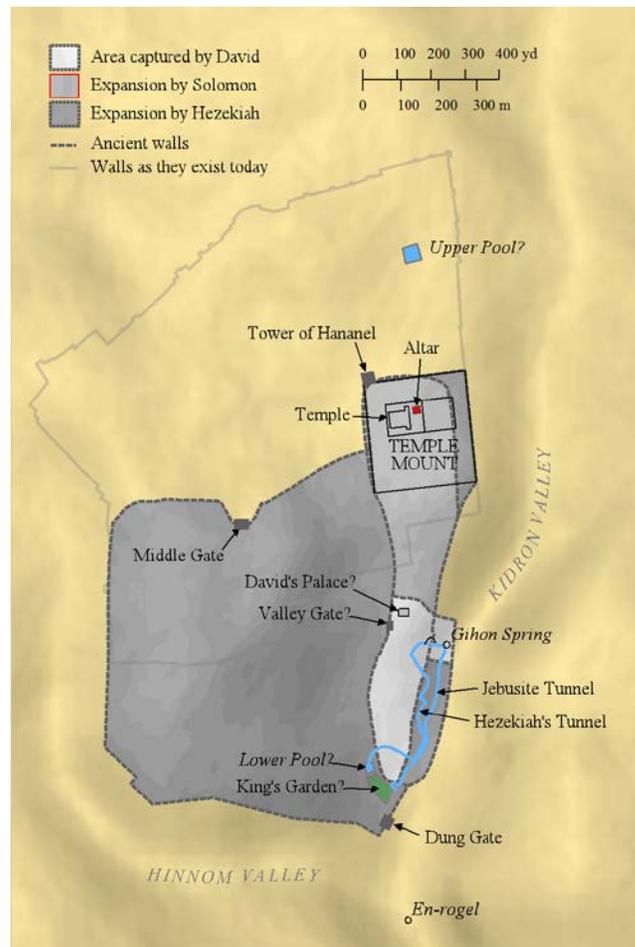
While the enemies of God's people face total destruction, the future of the people of God is pictured in glowing terms.

And the ransomed of the LORD shall return, and come to Zion with songs and everlasting joy upon their heads: they shall obtain joy and gladness, and sorrow and sighing shall flee away.—Isaiah 35:10

5. The Reign of Hezekiah – chapters 36 - 39

Isaiah 36-39 is a historical section that forms a bridge to the last section of Isaiah (covered in the next lesson). These chapters tell of two events, both of which also are recorded in Kings. First is the miraculous destruction of Sennacherib's 185,000 man army (Isa 37:36; 2Ki 19:35), which is the fulfillment of the prophecy against Assyria contained in the previous section. Hezekiah had extended the fortifications of Jerusalem during this time.

Then comes Hezekiah's sickness, his prayer, and the miraculous extension of his life for 15 years. This probably occurred before the invasion of Sennacherib, but it is told last so that it can form an introduction to the second part of the book. Isaiah 40-66 assumes that Israel is in captivity in Babylon and will be delivered. But that captivity had not yet occurred when Isaiah wrote. So the story of Hezekiah's sickness is told, with emphasis on the messengers from Babylon. Chapter 39 ends with a prediction of the Babylonian captivity, and thus prepares for the rest of Isaiah.



Expansion of Jerusalem

Questions for personal reflection and group discussion

1. Describe the times in which Isaiah lived.
2. What is the purpose of the book of Isaiah?
3. What are Judah's two major sins?
4. How does God describe pride in Isaiah 2:11 and 5:21?
5. Why is the Higher Critics' view of the authorship of Isaiah a denial of the inspiration of the Bible?

God's Promise of Messianic Salvation

Isaiah, Part Two

*All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned
every one to his own way; and the LORD hath
laid on him the iniquity of us all.*

Isaiah 53:4-6

*So shall my word be that goeth forth out of my mouth: it shall
not return unto me void, but it shall accomplish that which I please, and it shall
prosper in the thing whereto I sent it.*

Isaiah 55:11

1. Introduction

A. Isaiah's Beautiful Message

The second section of Isaiah (ch. 40-66) ranks among the most sublime literature in all the sacred writings. For breadth of vision, for beauty of expression, and for presentation of New Testament truths, these chapters from Isaiah's pen stand out in all the Old Testament.

His contribution to the message of redemption is profound. Even if we did not have the New Testament, there is enough of the gospel of Christ here to meet man's need of the good news. It is still true, for example, that we go to Isaiah when we want a clear, beautiful, expressive description of Christ's substitutionary sacrifice at Calvary. Isaiah, more than any other Old Testament writer, speaks directly to the New Testament Christian.

In this part of Isaiah, there is much prophecy that is fulfilled in the New Testament. Because of this, we could be tempted to assume that these chapters have no connection with the times in which Isaiah lived. Nothing could be more misleading. These prophecies play an important part in the development of the the-

ocracy. They are a link between Israel in the days of Hezekiah and the Church of Jesus Christ.

B. Isaiah's Pertinent Message

Joseph A. Alexander⁷⁴ points out four sins of which the people of Judah were guilty: idolatry, formalism, spiritual pride, and unbelief. The first two of these sins had to do with the ritual of worship.

- 1) *Idolatry* was a perversion of the worship of the true God.
- 2) *Formalism* was a misuse of the ritual arising from the idea that God would accept anyone who carried out the ritual, even if his heart was not in it.

The second set of sins revolved around the fact that Israel was the covenant nation.

- 3) *Spiritual pride* was evidenced by the prevalent belief that all Gentiles would be damned and all Jews would be saved—in spite of their continuing sin and lack of repentance.
- 4) The particular form of *unbelief* that was very common was the thought that the Kingdom of God was doomed to destruction. Men saw that Israel must be punished for her sins. They thought that the Kingdom of God was inseparably connected to the covenant nation, and that God's purposes were being defeated by the sins of His people.

The latter prophecies of Isaiah deal with these four sins and errors. Both idolatry and formalism are denounced, and the punishment of those who indulge in them is set forth. And throughout the section there is clear expression of the fact that apostate Israel will be punished, but the true worshippers of God will be blessed. Not only so, but God proclaims that the spiritual Kingdom of God will be separated from the physical nation when the Messiah comes, and will become the source of great blessing for God's true people.

C. Isaiah's Messianic Message

This section of Isaiah meets the needs of the people of Isaiah's time. But at the same time it looks forward to the blessings of the Messiah's reign. In this way Isaiah is God's instrument in preparing His people for the great change that was to take place in the theocracy. In Isaiah's time, the nation was beginning its final decline, and the Exile was clearly visible on the horizon. The Spirit of God enabled

⁷⁴ **Joseph Addison Alexander** (1809-1860) – American biblical scholar; born in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, the third son of Archibald Alexander. He graduated from Princeton University and, from 1838, served in professorships at Princeton Theological Seminary.

Isaiah to look beyond the Exile and to bring hope to His people through the glorious picture of the Messianic Age.

2. The Salvation of True Israel – chapters 40 - 43

Please read Isaiah 40-42.

This passage, beginning with the beautiful “Comfort ye, comfort ye my people, saith your God” of Isaiah 40:1, speaks to the true Church, the “spiritual Israel” within the sinful nation. Spiritual Israel consists of all those who had true faith in God. The nation of Israel, consisting of all its citizens, was blessed by God to enjoy outward prosperity and safety as a nation when they obeyed God’s Law, as specified in the National Covenant made at Mount Sinai. But now we see the difference between spiritual and unspiritual, inward and outward, belief and unbelief, faith and no faith. Only those with true faith in God would be saved from their sins. All the people of God, whether in the Old Testament or the New, are saved by faith. The Church consists of all men and women of faith throughout all ages.⁷⁵

The comfort of the Church lies in the coming of God, Who will “come with strong hand, and his arm will rule for him...He shall feed his flock like a shepherd...and shall gently lead those that are with young” (Isa 40:10-11). This God is the One before Whom all the nations are as nothing, and the idols of the heathen as less than nothing. Therefore Israel may rest assured that, although the heathen would seek to overthrow God’s Church, they shall not succeed. Israel’s comfort lies in the assuring voice of God,

Thou art my servant; I have chosen thee, and not cast thee away. Fear thou not; for I am with thee: be not dismayed; for I am thy God: I will strengthen thee; yea, I will help thee; yea, I will uphold thee with the right hand of my righteousness.—Isaiah 41:9-10

In Isaiah 42 we learn of the Servant of Jehovah. He is here introduced as the Savior of mankind, Whose work will be accomplished with the greatest patience and tenderness. But He is also the head of Israel, and the sinful nation has been unfaithful to its head. Therefore, the prophet turns to denunciation of Israel’s sin. But he does not stop here, for the nation of Israel contains the spiritual Israel that is the delight of Jehovah, and so the prophet breaks out with promises of protection and deliverance. “When thou passest through the waters, I will be with thee; and through the rivers, they shall not overflow thee (Isa 43:2). As God once delivered the Israelites from Egypt, now He will destroy Babylon for their sake. But above all He will redeem from sin those who have faith. “I, even I, am he that

⁷⁵ See *The True Israel of God* by L. R. Shelton, Jr.; available from CHAPEL LIBRARY.

blotteth out thy transgressions for mine own sake; and I will not remember thy sins” (Isa 43:25).

3. The Exile and Restoration – chapters 44 - 48

Please read Isaiah 44-45.

*Look unto me, and be ye saved, all the ends of the earth:
for I am God, and there is none else.—Isaiah 45:22*

In Isaiah 44-48, the restoration from the Babylonian Exile is clearly in view. We have in these chapters a marvelous prediction that Cyrus is to be like a shepherd of God who will “perform all my [i.e., Jehovah’s] pleasure: even saying to Jerusalem, Thou shalt be built; and to the temple, Thy foundation shall be laid” (Isa 44:28). Even the heathen rulers are under the sovereign hand of God. As a sign of God’s sovereignty, Isaiah foretells the defeat of Babylon’s idols and the fall of that great and wicked city. These predictions are held before the sinful nation to call her to repentance.

But since God has uttered predictions before and Israel would not hearken, and since Israel now will not turn from her sin, God will put her in the fire of adversity. Israel will suffer because of her sins, but will come out of exile with rejoicing.

4. The Servant of Jehovah – chapters 49 - 53

Please read Isaiah 52-53.

In Isaiah 42 we were introduced to the figure of the Servant of Jehovah, Who will save mankind. In Isaiah 49-53 this figure is brought to the fore several times. Each time we learn more about Him, until the fullest description of the Servant and His work is presented in Isaiah 53. In Isaiah 49 the Servant is told by God that His work will not be limited to the salvation of people of faith in Israel. He is also to be a light to the Gentiles, “that thou mayest be my salvation unto the end of the earth” (Isa 49:6). In Isaiah 50, the Servant speaks of His sufferings, but with no indication of the reason for those sufferings.

This leads us to the greatest “Servant” passage: Isaiah 52:13-53:12. This passage is a song consisting of five stanzas of three verses each. Each stanza is essential to the full understanding of the passage. The thought may be best understood if we set forth the teaching of these stanzas in order.

1. The Servant will be exalted in spite of His great suffering, which is for the salvation of the nations (Isa 52:13-15).
2. The Servant is rejected by men who see no beauty in Him (53:1-3).

3. The Servant suffers as a substitute who bears our sins and purchases our salvation (53:4-6).
4. The Servant's suffering extends even to a substitutionary death (53:7-9).
5. The Servant through His suffering will justify His people and receive His own exaltation (53:10-12).

This passage presents to our gaze the work of the Servant of God, Jesus Christ. There is none other to whom this can refer. One might almost think that it was written by someone who stood at the foot of the cross, rather than by one who lived centuries before. Even today, with the wealth of New Testament teaching at our disposal, we turn to this passage when we want to describe the work of Christ. Here we see that God enabled Isaiah to bridge the gap of time and to present to the ancient Church of God the assurance that Jehovah would provide perfect salvation for His people.

5. The Blessings of the Church – chapters 54 - 56

Please read Isaiah 55.

This wonderful prophecy of Christ naturally leads the prophet to a description of the blessings that He will bring to His Church. Immediately he turns to a description of the glories that will come to the Church, and the confidence that God's people may have: God will never forsake them.

For a small moment have I forsaken thee; but with great mercies will I gather thee.—Isaiah 54:7

Then the prophet utters a word of invitation which shows that the Servant will open the doors of the Church to the entire world in free grace.

Ho, every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters, and he that hath no money; come ye, buy, and eat; yea, come, buy wine and milk without money and without price.—Isaiah 55:1

No more shall there be a distinction between Jew and Gentile. All who love God, whether Jew or Gentile, shall be blessed; and all who disobey God, whether Jew or Gentile, shall be punished.

6. God's Dealings with the Jews – chapters 57 - 59

Please read Isaiah 59.

Isaiah again turns to the relationship of God to the Jews. He spares nothing to demonstrate that the sinful nation will be destroyed. The Jews are especially guilty of hypocrisy. They perform the religious ceremonies, yet continue to engage in all sorts of evil practices. As a result, God turns away from them.

Behold, the LORD's hand is not shortened, that it cannot save; neither his ear heavy, that it cannot hear: But your iniquities have separated between you and your God, and your sins have hid his face from you, that he will not hear.—Isaiah 59:1-2

Therefore destruction will rush upon them. But for the true spiritual Israel, the Church of God within the wicked nation, “the Redeemer shall come to Zion, and unto them that turn from transgression in Jacob, saith the LORD” (Isa 59:20).

7. Character of the Messianic Age – chapters 60 - 66

Please read Isaiah 60.

Isaiah ends his prophecy by portraying the blessings that await God's people in the coming age. In that age God will greatly glorify Zion, causing all the nations to come to her. The Servant will be the One through Whom this will be accomplished. It is through His ministry that blessing comes to Zion, greater blessings than ever seen before on the face of the earth. As an example, God tells them that in that time,

It shall come to pass, that before they call, I will answer; and while they are yet speaking, I will hear.—Isaiah 65:24

At the same time, however, the Messianic Age will be a time of destruction for the enemies of God. And the prophet must face the fact that Israel as a nation has broken the covenant God made with her. The Jews therefore are rejected, although God's blessings upon His people are presented in the picture of the new heavens and the new earth.

8. Conclusion

These latter chapters of Isaiah's prophecy bring us closer to the New Testament than any other comparable portion of the Old Testament. Indeed, we might say that they place us in the New Testament. We need not be at all amazed that Christians have found these chapters so precious. Martin Luther said that every Christian, at any cost, ought to memorize Isaiah 53. God marvelously used Isaiah, the son of Amoz, graphically to present the truth that the Old Testament exists to point men to the New.

Isaiah's message also points to the future of the Kingdom of God. In his day, Judah was declining. The captivity was drawing near. Isaiah predicted the Exile. He realized that it would mean the destruction of Israel as a nation. But he was not pessimistic about the future of God's kingdom. Within the nation Israel, he recognized a godly minority who were the true people of God. They were the Kingdom of God within the covenant-breaking nation. They would not be destroyed. And some

day, in God's time, through the line of David continued in them, the Messiah would come to bring the Kingdom of God into a new and glorious era.

Questions for personal reflection and group discussion

1. Define the sin of formalism.
2. How did the following sins show themselves?
 - a. Spiritual pride
 - b. Unbelief
3. a. What is "spiritual Israel"?
b. How does it differ from the nation of Israel?
4. Regarding the Servant of Jehovah in Isaiah 42,
 - a. Who is He?
 - b. What will He accomplish?
5. Describe the relationship between God and heathen rulers.
6. Describe the character of the messianic age.

29

God's Promise of Mercy after Judgment

Micah

He hath shewed thee, O man, what is good; and what doth the LORD require of thee, but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God?

Micah 6:8

1. Introduction

A. *The Prophet*

This book is the work of Micah, a resident of Moresheth-gath, a village about 20 miles southwest of Jerusalem. He should not be confused with the other prophet Micaiah (for Micah and Micaiah are different forms of the same name),

who prophesied to king Ahab on the eve of the battle against Ramoth-gilead (1Ki 22:8). Micah prophesied in Judah during the reigns of Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah. He was a contemporary of Isaiah, although he began his ministry slightly later than did Isaiah and probably ended his ministry somewhat earlier. Thus he faced the same types of situations as Isaiah.

B. The Nature of the Book

The book of Micah is probably a condensation of the messages that Micah proclaimed throughout his ministry. The book is composed of three messages, each of which begins with the word “Hear” (Mic 1:2; 3:1; 6:1). In each part the same general themes occur. There is a denunciation of Israel’s sin, a warning of judgment that is to come as punishment for that sin, and a promise of mercy after the judgment has been fulfilled. But each part has a different emphasis. The first section emphasizes judgment, with only a short promise of mercy at the end. The second emphasizes the blessings that will come in the latter days, when “the mountain of the house of the LORD shall be established in the top of the mountains, and it shall be exalted above the hills; and people shall flow unto it” (Mic 4:1). The third part places the emphasis upon a call to repentance.

2. Themes

Read Micah 4 and 7.

A. The Sins of Judah

Micah preached to the same people as did Isaiah. He therefore held before Judah and Israel the same sins that Isaiah unveiled. Biting denunciation of the sins of the people came from Micah’s lips. Hear his charge of oppression:

And they covet fields, and take them by violence; and houses, and take them away: so they oppress a man and his house, even a man and his heritage...The women of my people have ye cast out from their pleasant houses; from their children have ye taken away my glory for ever.—Micah 2:2, 9

Hear his denunciation of the perversity of the people:

If a man walking in the spirit and falsehood do lie, saying, I will prophesy unto thee of wine and of strong drink; he shall even be the prophet of this people.—Micah 2:11

The grasping prophets of the times are pictured:

Thus saith the LORD concerning the prophets that make my people err, that bite with their teeth, and cry, Peace;

*and he that putteth not into their mouths, they even
prepare war against him.—Micah 3:5*

Nor does he spare wicked shopkeepers and the rich who are quick to do evil.

*The heads thereof judge for reward, and the priests thereof teach
for hire, and the prophets thereof divine for money: yet will
they lean upon the LORD, and say, Is not the LORD among
us? none evil can come upon us.—Micah 3:11*

Where sin is found in Judah, Micah is there to denounce it. However, God seems to have kept him separate from political matters. Isaiah was the prophet to the kings; Micah is called to reprove the people.

B. God's Judgment on Sinful Judah

Micah not only points out their sin, he also warns of the judgment of God upon Israel and Judah because of their sins.

*Therefore I will make Samaria as an heap of the field, and
as plantings of a vineyard...For her wound is incurable;
for it is come unto Judah; he is come unto the gate
of my people, even to Jerusalem.—Micah 1:6, 9*

*Therefore shall Zion for your sake be plowed as a field, and
Jerusalem shall become heaps, and the mountain of the
house as the high places of the forest.—Micah 3:12*

This is the first prophecy that Jerusalem will be destroyed, which must have been a shock to the people. They had understood that God would preserve the Temple no matter what (1Ki 9:3). Although the prophecy of Micah contains great strains of mercy, there is no indication that God's mercy will overlook the sins of His people. God is holy. His holiness requires punishment of sin. Before the final mercy is sent, both Israel and Judah must receive their just punishment.

C. The Latter Days

In the fourth chapter of Micah, we have a beautiful picture of the blessings that will spring forth from the Messianic Age. This picture is presented in Old Testament language. It speaks of Zion and Jerusalem. But the thoughts it presents are New Testament thoughts. The Kingdom of God is for all people. God will judge all nations. Peace shall be universal. God will bring together the outcasts of the world. This is the Kingdom of Christ—a kingdom that is not of this world. It is a kingdom of joy and blessing and peace that reaches to the spiritually poor and needy of all nations. It is the goal toward which the Old Testament theocracy always presses.

The first verses of Micah 4 are also found in Isaiah 2:2-4. It is most probable that Micah originally uttered these words, and that Isaiah quoted them, using them as a text for his prophecy. From this we learn that the words of the prophets were recognized as the Word of God, and could be quoted as authoritative and binding.

D. The Birth of Christ

The best-known prophecy from Micah is that in Micah 5:2.⁷⁶

But thou, Bethlehem Ephratah, though thou be little among the thousands of Judah, yet out of thee shall he come forth unto me that is to be ruler in Israel; whose goings forth have been from of old, from everlasting.

This prophecy of the birthplace of Christ led the Magi to Him many centuries after it was first spoken. In it we see that the Messiah is human, because His birthplace is mentioned. We also see that He is divine, because He is eternal.

From this prophecy, Micah develops his picture of what Messiah will do. “And he shall stand and feed [His flock] in the strength of the LORD...And this man shall be the peace” (Mic 5:4-5). Through the work of the Messiah, the blessing of God shall come upon the people of God.

E. The Call to Repentance

The prophet of God is not satisfied simply to uncover sin, to warn of judgment, and to promise mercy. As a true servant of the God Who loves Israel, he must call to repentance. That call is touching. It comes from the very mouth of God, pleading with His sinful people to consider His works on their behalf. “O my people, what have I done unto thee? and wherein have I wearied thee? testify against me” (Mic 6:3). This leads to the question of how God’s people shall come before Him. Does He seek many offerings and great actions of atonement?

He hath showed thee, O man, what is good; and what doth the LORD require of thee, but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God?—Micah 6:8

This is one of the grandest, most sublime statements of the nature of true religion that we find anywhere in Scripture.

⁷⁶ See *Prophecies and Fulfillments Concerning the Messiah* for a list of all Old Testament prophecies about the Messiah and their exact fulfillments in the New Testament, complete with Scripture texts; available from CHAPEL LIBRARY.

3. Purpose

We can now see that an outline of Micah is difficult to make. The best we can do is show the various emphases of each section.

- | | |
|--|-----------|
| I. Prophecy emphasizing judgment | Micah 1-2 |
| II. Prophecy emphasizing the reign of Christ | Micah 3-5 |
| III. Prophecy emphasizing repentance | Micah 6-7 |

The purpose of Micah's short book is to show God's complaint against the sin of Israel and Judah, to warn of the judgment that will come because of this sin, and to point beyond the judgment to the salvation that God will provide through His Messiah.

Questions for personal reflection and group discussion

1. What does each section of Micah emphasize?
2. Why can mercy not remove punishment?
3. What is the purpose of Micah?

30

God's Picture of the Universal Savior

Jonah

But I will sacrifice unto thee with the voice of thanksgiving; I will pay that that I have vowed. Salvation is of the LORD.

Jonah 2:9

1. Introduction

A. Author

This book was written by the prophet Jonah, the son of Amittai. Although it does not make this claim, it everywhere bears marks of being the record of a personal experience. The Jews considered it the work of a prophet. In fact, the only

people who have denied that Jonah wrote this book have been the Higher Critics, who start with the assumption that God cannot do miracles, and therefore must find another explanation for the testimony of the book.

The author, Jonah, is also mentioned in 2 Kings 14:25, where we learn that he prophesied that Jeroboam II would restore the ancient boundaries of Israel. From this we conclude that the prophet lived and reigned during the middle of the eighth century B.C. Many commentators believe that the trip to Nineveh came rather late in the prophet's career, and that the book was written shortly after the trip ended.

B. Purpose

The book of Jonah is unique among the Minor Prophets. It records very little actual prophecy. Rather, it deals with the history of the prophet. But the history of Jonah's mission to Nineveh is prophetic history. The story is designed to bring out two lessons.

1. The mission to Nineveh resulted in repentance on the part of the heathen. This was intended to teach Israel that God did not always limit his grace to the nation of Israel. In this way it pointed forward to the day when the gospel of grace would break all national barriers and go to all men.

2. Another purpose of the book of Jonah is "to show that Jonah being cast into the depths of Sheol and yet brought up alive, is an illustration of the death of the Messiah for sins not his own, and of the Messiah's resurrection."⁷⁷ This purpose is closely connected to the first. It is through the death and resurrection of Christ that the gospel goes to all nations.

There are many miracles in Jonah: the calming of the storm, the great fish at just the right moment, swallowing Jonah alive, surviving for three days, spewing Jonah out near Nineveh, the Ninevites listening to him, the Ninevites repenting, the gourd growing, the gourd dying, the east wind.

The outline of Jonah has four parts.

- | | |
|------------------------|---------|
| I. Jonah's punishment | Jonah 1 |
| II. Jonah's prayer | Jonah 2 |
| III. Jonah's preaching | Jonah 3 |
| IV. Jonah's petulance | Jonah 4 |

⁷⁷ Young, E. J., *An Introduction to the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co.; 1952).

2. Jonah's Disobedience

Please read Jonah 1 and 2.

The book of Jonah opens with a startling picture. God calls a prophet to preach—and the prophet runs away! Tarshish was probably in Spain, the end of the known world. Jonah was trying to get as far away from God as he could. How can this action of Jonah be explained? Jonah himself answers in Jonah 4:2,

I pray thee, O LORD, was not this my saying, when I was yet in my country? Therefore I fled before unto Tarshish: for I knew that thou art a gracious God, and merciful, slow to anger, and of great kindness, and repentest thee of the evil.

Because he feared that Nineveh would repent and therefore God in His mercy would not destroy the city, he ran away.

Jonah is a picture of the Israelites of his day. The Jews were sure that God's kingdom and the nation of Israel were identical. The feeling that the Jews and only the Jews could receive God's blessings was strong and growing stronger.

In addition, the Jews hated the Assyrians. They were known for being the cruelest of the ancient powers. They purposely made being conquered so blood-curdling, that you would never rebel and have to face another Assyrian army. Jonah lived on the frontier with Damascus. He probably saw firsthand the terrible, unspeakable suffering that the Assyrians brought on the Syrians just before this. Now the Assyrians were a threat to Israel and Judah. Therefore, destruction of Assyria would have been the best possible news.

Jonah's actions after God spared Nineveh, which may almost be described as a childish temper tantrum, show how strong these feelings were. But it was precisely this way of thinking that needed to change. The Jews had to learn that the Kingdom of God could come to both Jew and Gentile alike, and that God receives glory in salvation for all men from sin. It was to destroy their erroneous thinking that God sent Jonah to Nineveh.

3. The Sign of Jonah

The story of Jonah and the great fish (it was probably not a whale) has been the object of a great deal of ridicule. Unbelievers have pointed to it as an example of things in the Bible that they believe cannot be true. The rescue of Jonah from death by drowning was a miracle, and unbelievers are certain to stumble over it. But it is precisely this miracle that is of utmost importance in the book of Jonah. Jesus pointed to it and applied it to Himself, "For as Jonah was three days and three nights in the whale's belly; so shall the Son of man be three days and three

nights in the heart of the earth” (Mat 12:40). The experience of Jonah is a type that points us to the death and resurrection of Him Who would save both Jews and Gentiles. Not only is the credibility of Jonah at stake, so is the deity of Christ and the inerrancy of Scripture. The God of the Bible performs miracles, the chief of which is to save lost sinners by grace through faith, giving new spiritual life where there was only death in sin before. Because Christ declared Jonah’s experience as factual truth, all of Christ’s teaching is only as true as Jonah.

4. The Repentance of Nineveh

Please read Jonah 3 and 4.

When Jonah finally went to Nineveh and proclaimed God’s message there, the results were startling. All Nineveh, from the king to the lowliest peasant, repented in sackcloth and ashes.

So the people of Nineveh believed God, and proclaimed a fast, and put on sackcloth, from the greatest of them even to the least of them...And God saw their works, that they turned from their evil way; and God repented of the evil, that he had said that he would do unto them; and he did it not.—Jonah 3:5, 10

The whole city mourned and the people turned from their evil ways. There is evidence that this repentance was only temporary, and that after a short time Nineveh returned to its old ways. But there is no doubt that the repentance was real.

Jesus also pointed to this repentance. He said to the scribes and Pharisees, “The men of Nineveh shall rise in the judgment with this generation, and shall condemn it: because they repented at the preaching of Jonah; and behold, a greater than Jonah is here” (Mat 12:41). The reaction of the heathen Ninevites to the preaching of Jonah stood in contrast to the stark unbelief of Israel, both in the time of Jonah and in the time of Christ.

“But it displeased Jonah exceedingly, and he was very angry” (Jon 4:1). These words mean that Jonah was greatly offended at God. God was not meeting his expectations! Jonah required of God that He should judge the Ninevites, not forgive them. When our expectations—of God, circumstances, or others—are not met, we tend to react with selfish, sinful anger. One key to walking in self-control is to yield our expectations back to God, to trust everything in our life into His capable hands. This is the meaning of Matthew 16:24: “If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me.” Notice God’s tender responses to Jonah in 4:9-11. Even in the midst of these conflicts among empires and the struggle of the covenant nation, God is faithfully teaching us how to walk with Him in peace and joy.

Notice especially 4:11, “should not I spare Nineveh, that great city, wherein are...also much cattle?” People have eternal souls, and God receives much glory in their salvation. But God also cares about all His creation. He notes the “much cattle” in Nineveh, and tenderly spares them as well.

Questions for personal reflection and group discussion

1. What is the purpose of the book of Jonah?
2. Why did Jonah run away from God?
3. Explain the sign of Jonah as it relates to Christ.
4. Using Matthew 12:41, what does the Ninevites repentance say about “this generation” to whom Jesus spoke?

31

God’s Guarantee of Covenant Faithfulness

Obadiah

*For the day of the LORD is near upon all the heathen: as
thou hast done, it shall be done unto thee: thy reward
shall return upon thine own head.*

Obadiah 1:15

1. Introduction

A. Author

There are many Obadiah's mentioned on the pages of the Old Testament. But the writer of Obadiah, except for his very brief prophecy, is completely unknown. We do not even know when he lived. Some conservatives believe that he was the earliest of the writing prophets, living in the days of Elisha, while others put him near the fall to Babylon. It seems certain that Jeremiah quoted from him, so he must have lived and prophesied before the final Exile.

If we could identify exactly the invasion of Judah to which Obadiah refers in the opening verses, we could date the book more precisely. But there are several invasions that could explain Obadiah's words. Both the identity and the time of this prophet therefore remain a mystery.

B. Purpose

The short prophecy of Obadiah deals with the judgment that will come upon Edom because of Edom's hatred to Judah in Judah's time of need. But Obadiah's vision is not limited. He sees the coming punishment of Edom as part of the Day of the Lord in which all the nations will be punished and God's people will be blessed. By the use of this specific example, Obadiah again reminds the people that God is faithful both to bless His covenant people and to punish their enemies.

2. Contents

Please read Obadiah.

Obadiah begins by predicting doom to the proud inhabitants of the rocky citadel Petra, the capital of Edom, which was populated by the descendants of Esau, the brother of Jacob. The reason for the punishment to come is clear. First, when the Israelites were approaching the Promised Land after their wilderness wanderings, they asked permission of their brothers to cross through Edom. This the Edomites refused (Num 20). Later, when Judah was invaded and the invaders were spoiling the land and the people, Edom would not help. On the contrary, Edom cheered the invaders on and helped to make life miserable for the Jews. As a result, God says,

For the day of the LORD is near upon all the heathen: as thou hast done, it shall be done unto thee: thy reward shall return upon thine own head.—Obadiah 1:15

Obadiah connects the punishment of Edom with the Day of the Lord. This is the day when the nations, that is, the heathen, are punished. But that same day of Jehovah is a time of blessing to God's people.

But upon mount Zion shall be deliverance, and there shall be holiness; and the house of Jacob shall possess their possessions. And the house of Jacob shall be a fire, and the house of Joseph a flame, and the house of Esau for stubble, and they shall kindle in them, and devour them; and there shall not be any remaining of the house of Esau; for the LORD hath spoken it.—Obadiah 1:17-18

The covenant faithfulness of God shall abide upon His people to the end. The people of God shall be blessed, but the enemies of God shall be destroyed.

Questions for personal reflection and group discussion

1. What is the purpose of the book of Obadiah?
2. a. How are the nations of Israel and Edom related?
b. Why were they enemies?

32

God's Warning from Nineveh's Destruction

Nahum

The LORD revengeth, and is furious; the LORD will take vengeance on his adversaries, and he reserveth wrath for his enemies. The LORD is slow to anger, and great in power, and will not at all acquit the wicked.

Nahum 1:2-3

1. Introduction

A. Author and Date

Of Nahum, the author of this little book, we know practically nothing. He is simply called Nahum the Elkoshite. "Elkoshite" probably refers to the town from which he came, but no one knows for certain where that village was located.

In 664-663 B.C., Thebes—or No-amon, the capital of Egypt—was conquered by the Assyrians. Nahum mentions this fall of No-amon as historical fact in Nahum 3:8. And in 612 B.C., the fall of Nineveh, which Nahum predicted, came to pass. Nahum therefore must have prophesied sometime between 664 and 612 B.C., during the reign of Josiah.

B. Background

Behind this prophecy of Nahum lies a long history of Assyrian oppression of the people of God. Assyria is first mentioned as a power to be feared in 738 B.C., when Menahem, king of Israel, paid tribute to the king of Assyria. During the reign of Pekah, the Assyrians invaded Israel and took the people of Naphtali captive. Also during the reign of Pekah, Ahaz, king of Judah, called upon the Assyrians for aid when he was attacked by Israel and Syria, after he refused to join their rebellion against Assyria. In 722 B.C., the Assyrians came down upon Israel, captured Samaria, and took the people of the northern kingdom into captivity. In 701 B.C., the Assyrians under Sennacherib again invaded Palestine. This time it was the remaining kingdom of Judah that felt their wrath. Hezekiah had to give a great ransom to purchase peace. And that peace was only temporary, for in a short time the forces of Sennacherib returned. But this time God destroyed the Assyrians in a great miracle: their army of 185,000, encamped outside Jerusalem, was destroyed in one night (2Ki 18:13-19:36).

The destruction of Sennacherib's army did not destroy Assyria. It remained on the horizon, always a potential source of trouble. Nahum's word about the fall of Nineveh arises, humanly speaking, out of years of misery.

C. Purpose

The prophecy of Nahum sets forth the coming downfall of Nineveh as a demonstration of God's justice and as a comfort to the oppressed covenant nation. In this book, we see a practical expression of God's covenant faithfulness, as He destroys the proud enemy of His people.

Nahum contributes to the redemptive message in two ways: first, by highlighting the sinner's desperate condition and warning sinners of every age not to trifle with God. And secondly, his message is a comfort to the saints, in the certainty of God's unfailing plan and purpose to redeem His people.

The outline of Nahum has three parts.

- | | | |
|---------------------------------------|---------|---------|
| I. A psalm praising God's justice | Nahum 1 | |
| II. A description of Nineveh's ruin | Nahum 2 | |
| III. An explanation of Nineveh's ruin | | Nahum 3 |

2. Contents

A. The Honor of God

Please read Nahum 1.

At first reading, the book of Nahum seems to be a narrow rejoicing at the downfall of an enemy. It seems to be motivated by petty patriotism. But on closer

examination, we see that Nahum rises to much greater heights. His entire discourse is based upon the honor of God. The key to Nahum's thought is found in Nahum 1:7-8,

The LORD is good, a strong hold in the day of trouble; and he knoweth them that trust in him. But with an overrunning flood he will make an utter end of the place thereof, and darkness shall pursue his enemies.

God is a God of mercy and justice. He will provide shelter for His people, but will scatter His enemies.

B. The Destruction of Nineveh

From his psalm in chapter 1, the prophet turns to a description of the fall of Nineveh. In stark, strong language he pictures the desolation that will overtake her. And the reasons why God thus deals with Nineveh are listed in Nahum 3. It is obvious from this that the repentance in Jonah's day, about 100 years earlier, was short-lived. Nineveh was a city, and Assyria a nation, that deserved the wrath of God.

C. The Message to God's People

In Nahum, there is little said about Judah. Yet the covenant nation is mentioned. The destruction of Nineveh is presented as the cause of Judah's safety. The great enemy has been destroyed. The prophet's name, which means "comfort," aptly describes the message he brings to the people of God. Nineveh, after all, is only one of the enemies of God's kingdom. And like Nineveh, all the enemies shall be destroyed, and the covenant people shall find safety in God Himself. However strong the enemies may appear, they can never overthrow the Kingdom of God. Even the gates of hell shall not prevail against it (Mat 16:18).

Questions for personal reflection and group discussion

1. Why was the fall of Nineveh so important to the Jews?
2. What is the purpose of the book of Nahum?
3. How does it contribute to the redemptive message?
4. Why did God destroy Nineveh?

God's Warning of Coming Wrath

Zephaniah

*The LORD hath taken away thy judgments, he hath cast out
thine enemy: the king of Israel, even the LORD, is in
the midst of thee: thou shalt not see evil any more.*

Zephaniah 3:15

1. Introduction

A. Author and Times

Zephaniah, the author of this prophecy, identifies himself by tracing his ancestry back to the fourth generation. This is unusual since the prophets usually named only their fathers. The genealogy shows that Zephaniah's great-great-grandfather was Hezekiah, the great and good king of Judah. Zephaniah was of the royal line and would have had easy access to the palace.

Zephaniah prophesied in the reign of Josiah. Josiah, remember, inherited the corruption and idolatry of the two previous reigns, those of Manasseh and Amon. He also inherited many problems due to the fact that the previous kings had made enemies of foreign nations. There was little that Josiah could do about the problems of foreign policy. Indeed, he died in a battle that was due, at least in part, to the position that he held as a vassal of Assyria. He did something about the religious situation, however. He inaugurated sweeping reforms that removed the outward evidences of idolatry from the land. Yet he could not change the hearts of his people, and therefore his reforms were effective only as long as he reigned.

We do not know whether Zephaniah prophesied before or after the reforming work of Josiah began. In either case, his message of God's wrath against sin would be used by God to further Josiah's reforms.

B. Purpose

Zephaniah is God's voice proclaiming the doom that will come upon the nation. He also pictures the great day of God's wrath, and promises God's people that they will be delivered.

In this he brings the theological balance that is always needed when proclaiming the truth. God is holy (Lev 11:44) and God is love (1Jo 4:8). He has wrath toward sin, and mercy for sinners. Men can only understand the good news of salvation from sin in Christ, when they first understand that they are sinners and justly condemned by the holy God. God's wrath against sin and His love for so many sinners are both truths of the gospel. Both must be presented when proclaiming God's good news, just as Zephaniah did in his prophesies so long ago.

The outline of Zephaniah is in three parts.

- | | |
|---------------------------------------|-------------------|
| I. The warning of coming judgment | Zephaniah 1:1-2:3 |
| II. The recipients of coming judgment | Zephaniah 2:4-3:7 |
| III. The results of coming judgment | Zephaniah 3:8-20 |

2. Contents

A. The Day of Jehovah

Please read Zephaniah 1.

Zephaniah's opening words point to the theme of his message. "I will utterly consume all things from off the land, saith the LORD" (Zep 1:2). The prophet goes on to proclaim what this means for Jerusalem and Judah. Both man and beast will be consumed. The idols and those who worship them will be destroyed, and all the wicked will be searched out and punished. From this picture of the coming judgment in Judah, Zephaniah turns to the great Day of Jehovah, which he describes in language that is beautiful and forceful.

That day is a day of wrath, a day of trouble and distress, a day of wasteness and desolation, a day of darkness and gloominess, a day of clouds and thick darkness, A day of the trumpet and alarm against the fenced cities, and against the high towers.—Zephaniah 1:15-16

The judgment of God, which is coming, leads the prophet to call the nation to repentance:

Seek ye the LORD, all ye meek of the earth, which have wrought his judgment; seek righteousness, seek meekness: it may be ye shall be hid in the day of the LORD'S anger.—Zephaniah 2:3

B. Judgment on the Nations

With judgment declared for the theocratic nation, God also turns to the surrounding heathen nations, whose sin before Him is also great. Nineveh is especially marked out as a city that will receive the judgment that it so richly deserves. But God does not stop there. Judah must not think that God will judge only the heathen. Again the prophet points to the sins of Jerusalem, sins that are as great as those of Nineveh. Therefore, the judgment of God will be poured out on all the nations.

C. God's Blessing on His People

Please read Zephaniah 3.

The judgment of God will mean destruction for the heathen. But when the judgment of God falls on the covenant nation it will act like a purifying fire, which will leave a small but pure remnant. The nation will be destroyed, but this remnant will continue the Kingdom of God.

In that day shalt thou not be ashamed for all thy doings, wherein thou hast transgressed against me: for then I will take away out of the midst of thee them that rejoice in thy pride, and thou shalt no more be haughty because of my holy mountain. I will also leave in the midst of thee an afflicted and poor people, and they shall trust in the name of the LORD.—Zephaniah 3:11-12

In that day the daughter of Zion will sing, because God is with her and He will save. This was and is a source of great hope for God's people.

Questions for personal reflection and group discussion

1. What is the purpose of the book of Zephaniah?
2. Describe the theological balance needed when proclaiming God's truth.
3. How is God's judgment different upon the heathen and His own people?

34

God's Explanation of Coming Punishment

Habakkuk

Behold, his soul which is lifted up is not upright in him: but the just shall live by his faith.

Habakkuk 2:4

1. Introduction

A. Author and Date

Of Habakkuk we know nothing except his name. We cannot even tell precisely when this prophecy was uttered. In Habakkuk 1:5-6, God speaks of “raising up the Chaldeans” (the race of people who lived in Babylon). Some interpret this to mean before Babylon began to extend its empire, during the reign of Manasseh just before the Babylonians overthrew the Assyrian empire. Others understand this to mean just before the Babylonians invaded Judah. Either way, Habakkuk’s messages are more personal, baring his soul before God.

The outline of Habakkuk has two parts.

- | | |
|-------------------------------------|--------------|
| I. Habakkuk’s conversation with God | Habakkuk 1-2 |
| II. Habakkuk’s prayer to God | Habakkuk 3 |

B. Purpose

Habakkuk’s short prophecy answers two philosophical questions. It presents beautifully the absolute righteousness of God in His government of the nations. He is a God Who punishes iniquity without partiality. God’s delay in punishing the wicked must never cause His people to doubt His justice. Though it may seem to men that the great King is acting unfairly, the course of events will prove the righteousness of His government. It is this absolute righteousness and justice of God that gives the Christian true comfort and confidence in Him.

2. Contents

A. Habakkuk's Questions and God's Answers

Please read Habakkuk 1-2.

1. Why is sin often unpunished?

Habakkuk has been called a philosopher. If a philosopher is one who asks questions about life and wants to understand why things happen as they do, then Habakkuk is a philosopher—but one with personal anguish. He looks at his people; he sees the sinfulness of the nation; and he cries out to God. “O LORD, how long shall I cry, and thou wilt not hear? even cry out unto thee of violence, and thou wilt not save” (Hab 1:2). This reflects the tendency of all men: when we have a real need and God does not seem to answer our prayers, we question God’s love, or His wisdom, or His strength and power. We think somehow He doesn’t care, doesn’t understand, or cannot provide what is needful.

This especially shows itself in matters of justice, when there is a sin without repentance and there does not seem to be an immediate consequence of chastening or punishment. We tend to think that we have gotten away with something, or that we are clever, or “lucky,” or that our promises to do better next time in order to escape consequences have persuaded God to ignore our sin. Or if it is the sin of others that is not punished, we think that somehow God is unfair, unjust, or too lenient.

But God answers Habakkuk:

Behold ye among the heathen...for I will work a work in your days, which ye will not believe, though it be told you. For, lo, I raise up the Chaldeans, that bitter and hasty nation, which shall march through the breadth of the land, to possess the dwelling-places that are not theirs.—Habakkuk 1:5-6

God is not to be trifled with; He does not play games. Every sin has consequences. These are in three categories.

First, sin with true repentance (of true believers): the penalty of death for their sins has been laid upon Jesus Christ in His terrible agonizing death at the cross of Calvary. The punishment has been paid. Christians must never sin and casually repent, thinking that it was not so bad. The consequence of every sin is terrible.

Second, Christians can sin and not repent right away. Then God brings chastening, often in unexpected ways, and sometimes after delay—as a test of our maturity and faith. He will always chasten our unrepentant sin, because He loves us and desires to restore fellowship with us.

Third, those who are without Christ sin. Sometimes they are sorry for it and sometimes not. But sorrow for having to endure difficulties caused by sin is different from true repentance (where the true believer grieves over offending his God).⁷⁸ For those without Christ, sin *always* has consequences in the form of major and horrific punishment. But here is the issue: God often delays those consequences. But why? The delay is from His tender mercy. The fact is, life on this earth is the only heaven those without Christ will ever know. Each day is a gift from God that men might seek Him. But a day of reckoning is coming. Then every sin will be accounted for, and an eternity of horrific consequences awaits those without Christ.

2. *Why do the wicked prosper?*

God's answer to Habakkuk's first question solves one issue for him, but it raises another problem that is even greater. The Chaldeans were wicked and man-centered. Habakkuk asks how God can use the wicked Chaldeans to punish the people of God, who by comparison are more righteous. This the prophet cannot understand. It is a similar question to "Why do the innocent suffer?" or "Why do bad things happen to good people?" Most people think that the more moral or "good" they are, the more they will be outwardly blessed of God, even if they sin now and then. But on earth, even in the New Covenant, it does not work that way. "Relative righteousness" is never the issue. If you want to understand God's justice, you have to include eternity. As we have said, when those without Christ sin, there is an eternity of suffering awaiting them, and perhaps difficulty on earth as well, even if delayed. For the people of God, there is indescribable joy awaiting in eternity, and when they trust and obey Him on earth, He blesses them with His inner peace and joy, even in the midst of suffering.

So Habakkuk asks his second question of God:

Thou art of purer eyes than to behold evil, and canst not look on iniquity: wherefore lookest thou upon them that deal treacherously, and holdest thy tongue when the wicked devoureth the man that is more righteous than he?—Habakkuk 1:13

Unlike many, Habakkuk is reverent and respectful in these questions. He knows that when he does not understand God's ways, the problem is with him and not with God.

So again, God graciously answers—and this answer has echoed and re-echoed down through the centuries.

⁷⁸ See *The Doctrine of Repentance* by Thomas Watson (1620-1686) and *Marks of True Repentance* by Jonathan Dickinson (1688-1747); both available from CHAPEL LIBRARY.

Behold, his soul which is lifted up is not upright in him; but the just [righteous] shall live by his faith.—Habakkuk 2:4

In these words we find a contrast. The wicked are proud and puffed up, and the result of this pride will be destruction. But the true people of God live by faith, and their faith will be rewarded with life—even eternal life.

3. *“The just shall live by faith”*

Habakkuk 2:4 is one of the most theologically important truths in the Old Testament, right alongside Genesis 15:6 and others. It is quoted by Paul three times in the New Testament. In Romans 1:17 and Galatians 3:11, it testifies to God’s free grace in the salvation and justification of sinners. In Hebrews 10:38, it supports the doctrine of the perseverance of the saints until they enter into glory. Significantly, the verse became the rallying cry of the Reformation.⁷⁹

“The just shall live by faith” is the answer to the prophet’s problem. The wicked, proud Chaldean nation cannot last; it too will be punished for its sin. Only those who are righteous by faith shall live before God. What a comfort to those true people of God in Judah! Those who trust in Jehovah shall never be moved.

4. *The Chaldean punishment*

The fate of the Chaldeans is expressed in a series of woes. God recounts their various sins and pronounces woe upon those who commit them. The multiplication of Judah’s sins led the sovereign and omnipotent God to use Babylon as His instrument to punish Judah. “The LORD is in his holy temple: let all the earth keep silence before him” (Hab 2:20).

But the sins of Babylon will not be overlooked by God. God will visit upon Babylon the punishment that is her due, in His perfect timing.

B. Habakkuk’s Psalm

With the prophet’s questions graciously answered by God, and with new confidence in God Himself, Habakkuk breaks out in praise to God for His goodness and wisdom. This last chapter of his prophecy is a beautiful psalm about confidence in God, which is even furnished with musical instructions for singing. It is the only such psalm found in the prophets.

Finally, in answer to the prophet’s prayer that God will revive His work, he sees a vision of God coming and fighting against His enemies. The prophet is aware of what lies ahead, yet he has learned to trust in God through all circumstances:

⁷⁹ **the Reformation** – the Protestant Reformation of the 16th century led by Luther, Calvin, Zwingli, Knox, and others, which sought to return some of the erroneous beliefs and practices of the Roman Catholic Church to the truths of the Bible.

I trembled in myself, that I might rest in the day of trouble: when he cometh up unto the people, he will invade them with his troops... Although the fig tree shall not blossom, neither shall fruit be in the vines; the labour of the olive shall fail, and the fields shall yield no meat; the flock shall be cut off from the fold, and there shall be no herd in the stalls: Yet I will rejoice in the LORD, I will joy in the God of my salvation.—Habakkuk 3:16-18

“That I might rest in the day of trouble” is the quest of every man and woman on the face of the earth. The only way to this blessed rest is through faith in God.

Questions for personal reflection and group discussion

1. What is the purpose of the book of Habakkuk?
2. What do we tend to think about God,
 - a. When our prayers seem to go unanswered?
 - b. When sin seems to go unpunished?
3. Why do the wicked prosper?
4. Why is Habakkuk 2:4 so important?

35

God’s Punishment of Sinful Judah

Jeremiah

But this shall be the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel; After those days, saith the LORD, I will put my law in their inward parts, and write it in their hearts; and will be their God, and they shall be my people.

Jeremiah 31:33

1. Introduction

A. Author

This prophecy is the work of the prophet Jeremiah, whose name it bears. Jeremiah was a priest from the village of Anathoth in Benjamin, about five miles

north of Jerusalem. We read nothing of his service as a priest. He was called to be a prophet at an early age, and served Jehovah in this capacity for some fifty years. The prophecies that make up the book were probably written at various times during his ministry.

B. The Times of Jeremiah

Jeremiah began his prophetic ministry during the thirteenth year of the reign of Josiah, and he continued to prophesy until Jerusalem had fallen. Even after this he prophesied to the miserable group that remained in Judah and later fled to Egypt.

Jeremiah's ministry covered the period in which Judah declined and went into captivity. Judah had already been ravaged by the Assyrians in the days of Ahaz and Hezekiah. In Hezekiah's time, God destroyed the Assyrian army of Sennacherib, and Judah had a time of peace. But the sins of Manasseh again brought punishment at the hand of the Assyrians. Manasseh was taken captive into Assyria, but later was returned to his throne. The reign of Manasseh was a turning point for Judah. He led the people into open idolatry and the people willingly followed. Manasseh's reign was both long and disastrous. God swore that he would punish Judah because of the sin of Manasseh.

When Josiah came to the throne, he inaugurated a reform. But this godly young king, though he gave himself diligently to his reforms, was unable to change the hearts of his people. He did curb open idolatry. He did restore the worship of Jehovah in the Temple. But he could not change the people; they were hardened in their sins. It was during the reforms of Josiah that Jeremiah began his labors. He aided the young king by his vigorous preaching and his bold exposure of the sins of all classes of people. But it had little effect. The untimely death of Josiah saw the work of reformation unfinished. Judah's heart was wicked and rebellious, and the punishment of God was sure to come.

The death of Josiah signaled the beginning of Judah's time of troubles. From that time on, the nation was under the control of either Egypt or Babylon. Judah's troubles were compounded by her constant plotting and rebelling against her masters. This rebellion finally brought the destruction of Jerusalem in 586 B.C.

From the days of Josiah, Jeremiah had proclaimed that Judah would be taken captive by a nation from the north. Later he made it clear that Babylon was the nation. When the Babylonians were at the gates of Jerusalem, Jeremiah continually counseled surrender. When Jerusalem was finally taken, Nebuchadnezzar carried into captivity all but the poorest and lowliest inhabitants of the land. He appointed Gedaliah to rule as governor over those who remained. But he was assassinated, and many of those who were left decided to flee to Egypt. Jeremiah

prophesied against such action, but the people would not listen. They even carried Jeremiah with them. Jeremiah probably died in exile in Egypt.

C. The Character of the Prophet

Jeremiah has often been called the weeping prophet. Certainly no other prophet had more cause for weeping. Not only did Jeremiah experience a great deal of suffering, he was obliged to contend for half a century with a people who named the name of Jehovah but would not hearken to His word. At times he became discouraged—he says, “Oh that I had in the wilderness a lodging place of wayfaring men; that I might leave my people, and go from them! for they be all adulterers, an assembly of treacherous men” (Jer 9:2).

Jeremiah never turned aside from his task, however. Knowing from the beginning of his ministry that punishment must surely come upon his nation, he refused to bring any message that would please his listeners. Nor would he allow others to preach peace to this people who would receive the wrath of God. He was “an iron pillar, and brasen⁸⁰ walls against the whole land” (Jer 1:18). Yet despite the fact that his message was rejected and he was despised, Jeremiah never ceased sympathizing with the people. He stood before them as the servant of God, who was both stern and tender. Like the God in Whose name he spoke, Jeremiah embodied both love and justice.

D. Purpose

The prophecies of Jeremiah were given to the people of Judah, and to us, to show clearly that the terrible calamities that befell Judah and ended her existence as a nation were God’s punishment against her sin. While Jeremiah also looks forward to a future time of blessing and to the coming of the Messiah, the theme of punishment for sin is central in his prophecies. But God, along with judgment, promises restoration. His purpose in judgment is to cleanse them from their sin, that they again might fellowship with their God.

The outline of Jeremiah has six parts.

I. Jeremiah’s call	Jeremiah 1
II. Jeremiah’s early prophecies	Jeremiah 2-20
III. Jeremiah’s predictions of Judah’s future	Jeremiah 21-33
IV. Jeremiah’s experiences as a prophet	Jeremiah 34-44
V. Jeremiah’s prophecies against the nations	Jeremiah 45-51
VI. Jeremiah’s summary of Judah’s downfall	Jeremiah 52

⁸⁰ **brasen** – made of brass, one of the strongest building materials of the time.

2. The Prophet's Call – chapter 1

Please read Jeremiah 1.

Jeremiah received his call to be a prophet when he was a young man. Like Moses, he felt himself to be inadequate for the task. But God supplied that which he lacked.

Then the LORD put forth his hand, and touched my mouth. And the LORD said unto me, Behold, I have put my words in thy mouth. See, I have this day set thee over the nations and over the kingdoms, to root out, and to pull down, and to destroy, and to throw down, to build, and to plant.—Jeremiah 1:9-10

At the time of his call, God gave Jeremiah two visions. One taught him that God is faithful and would do for Jeremiah all that He had promised. The other taught him that Judah would be punished by a nation from the north.

Jeremiah was given no easy task. He was to stand before the nation and to proclaim the righteous judgment of God. But he did not stand alone. “And they shall fight against thee; but they shall not prevail against thee: for I am with thee, saith the LORD, to deliver thee” (Jer 1:19).

3. Jeremiah's Early Ministry – chapters 2 - 20

Please read Jeremiah 2, 3, and 18.

The prophecies of Jeremiah were uttered during the reigns of four kings. These prophecies are not arranged in chronological order, but we do have many of the prophecies that Jeremiah uttered during the reign of Josiah collected in Jeremiah 2-20. These prophecies were spoken long before the destruction of Jerusalem. They tell us what kind of message Jeremiah preached in the early days of his ministry.

Jeremiah did not spare the feelings of the people. He attacked sin wherever it was found. His indictment of all Judah is graphic:

For my people have committed two evils: they have forsaken me, the fountain of living waters, and hewed them out cisterns, broken cisterns, that can hold no water.—Jeremiah 2:13

A cistern is a hallowed out place in rock, where rain water collects as a water supply. But a broken cistern had a crack that rendered the cistern useless. The people had forsaken abundant living waters (Joh 4:10) for a useless broken cistern. The people forsook God's blessed ways for totally useless outward religion.

Importantly, Jeremiah deals with false teachers during most of his ministry. His predictions of the fall of Judah were not understood or accepted. The people preferred to have their ears tickled with good news. There were prophets who opposed Jeremiah, and told the king and the nation what they wanted to hear: that God would defend Jerusalem and all would be safe.

A wonderful⁸¹ and horrible thing is committed in the land; The prophets prophesy falsely, and the priests bear rule by their means; and my people love to have it so: and what will ye do in the end thereof?—Jeremiah 5:30-31

Then the LORD said unto me, The prophets prophesy lies in my name: I sent them not, neither have I commanded them, neither spake unto them: they prophesy unto you a false vision and divination, and a thing of nought, and the deceit of their heart.—Jeremiah 14:14

When two “teachers” each teach something different, how do we discern who is telling the truth? In the Old Testament, God protected His truth by condemning false prophets to death (Deu 18:22). If events did not happen according to their predictions, they were stoned! Today, God has given us His truth in His written Word. By thorough, conservative study of God’s Word, we can interpret the Scriptures accurately according to what God intended the words to mean.⁸² Those whose teachings stray from God’s intended meaning, are false teachers and to be rejected (2Pe 2:1-3). We must compare what is taught with the Word of God—and therefore we must know God’s Word well (1Jo 4:1; Act 17:11).

Jeremiah points time and again to the punishment that will certainly come upon Judah because of her sin. Jeremiah 4 contains a description of the punishment to come. Jeremiah adds:

Thus saith the LORD, Behold, a people cometh from the north country, and a great nation shall be raised from the sides of the earth... O daughter of my people, gird thee with sackcloth, and wallow thyself in ashes: make thee mourning, as for an only son, most bitter lamentation: for the spoiler shall suddenly come upon us.—Jeremiah 6:22, 26

In the midst of the struggle against sin, God continues to instruct the people. In one of the most beautiful passages in Scripture, God again plainly tells us what He desires:

⁸¹ **wonderful** – incredible; amazing.

⁸² See *Methods of Bible Study*, course MB1-2 available from Mount Zion Bible Institute, which teaches the literal-grammatical-historical method for Bible interpretation.

Thus saith the LORD, Let not the wise man glory in his wisdom, neither let the mighty man glory in his might, let not the rich man glory in his riches: But let him that glorieth glory in this, that he understandeth and knoweth me, that I am the LORD which exercise lovingkindness, judgment, and righteousness, in the earth: for in these things I delight, saith the LORD.—Jeremiah 9:23-24

While Jeremiah concentrates upon the punishment that Judah will receive, he also strikes a note of promise. In the distant future there is hope of restoration:

And it shall come to pass, after that I have plucked them out I will return, and have compassion on them, and will bring them again, every man to his heritage, and every man to his land.—Jeremiah 12:15

At times God instructed Jeremiah to present some of his messages in symbolic form. Actions like the burial of the loincloth along the Euphrates in Jeremiah 13, and the destruction of the clay bottle in Jeremiah 19, served to drive home to his hearers the message given by God.

4. Judgment by the Babylonians – chapters 21 - 33

Please read Jeremiah 26-32.

A. Judgment

The third section of Jeremiah contains a series of prophecies in which the prophet announces that the Chaldeans (Babylonians) would be God's weapon of judgment. These prophecies were originally delivered at various times in the reigns of Jehoiakim and Zedekiah, and are gathered in this section because of the similarity of content.

The people had gone so far into sin, that God would no longer accept their repentance, even if they were to do so (Jer 15:1, 6). Sin is written on their hearts so deeply, that judgment is the only way out. Judgment has two purposes: 1) to show God's complete rejection of all sin, and 2) to purify them so that He can bless them and fellowship with them again. Because He is holy, He cannot bless when sin is present.

Therefore, in various ways God tells the kings and the people that they will be taken into captivity by the Chaldeans. King Zedekiah and his servants will be captured and killed, and the city taken and destroyed by fire.

In the light of the predictions of judgment, Jeremiah uttered the words that were so distasteful to many of the rulers of Jerusalem:

*Thus saith the LORD; Behold, I set before you the way of life, and the way of death. He that abideth in this city shall die by the sword, and by the famine, and by the pestilence: but he that goeth out, and falleth to the Chaldeans that besiege you, he shall live, and his life shall be unto him for a prey.*⁸³—Jeremiah 21:8-9

Yet Jeremiah's words again proclaimed hope for the future. Judah's punishment was sure, and she would be completely removed out of the Promised Land. But God had made covenants with Abraham and David. Abraham's seed would be a blessing to all nations, and David's line would be on the throne. Most importantly, the Messiah must be born in the land, and die for His people's sins. Therefore, her exile would not be permanent. Jeremiah brought this word from Jehovah:

These nations shall serve the king of Babylon seventy years. And it shall come to pass, when seventy years are accomplished, that I will punish the king of Babylon, and that nation, saith the LORD, for their iniquity, and the land of the Chaldeans, and will make it perpetual desolations.—Jeremiah 25:11-12

They shall be carried to Babylon, and there shall they be until the day that I visit them, saith the LORD; then will I bring them up, and restore them to this place... For I will restore health unto thee, and I will heal thee of thy wounds, saith the LORD.—Jeremiah 27:22; 30:17

God graciously tells them of the punishment of their enemies, and the restoration to their own land after 70 years. God's purpose in judgment was not to destroy His people, but to chasten and purify them in order to restore them to Himself. The captivity is only for a specified time, and God tells them some details so that they will recognize the restoration as from Him when it comes.

In the course of these prophesies, Jeremiah famously confronted the false prophet Hananiah, who had contradicted everything Jeremiah was saying on behalf of God about the coming captivity. Jeremiah boldly proclaimed him a liar, and predicted his death (Jer 28:15-17). This was the measure of a true prophet: he spoke the truth from God, and what he said would happen, comes to pass.

On another occasion, when the city of Jerusalem was still standing and many of those who had been exiled during Jehoiachin's reign expected to return shortly to Jerusalem, Jeremiah wrote them a letter. Don't expect for your generation to return, he said. Build houses and plant vineyards, because,

⁸³ prey – spoil; plunder; i.e., his life shall be as if he had stolen it after the battle was over.

For thus saith the LORD, That after seventy years be accomplished at Babylon I will visit you, and perform my good word toward you, in causing you to return to this place.—Jeremiah 29:10

While it may not come in the hearers' lifetime, the promise of return is clear. Even in God's wrath, He speaks tenderly to the people a message of hope.

B. Hope

Jeremiah also looked beyond the return from exile. He saw in the future a time when God would bless His people abundantly. Although the blessing is pictured in terms of material prosperity, there are many indications that this is a picture of spiritual prosperity. The great blessing of God is this:

Behold, the days come, saith the LORD, that I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel, and with the house of Judah... I will put my law in their inward parts, and write it in their hearts; and will be their God, and they shall be my people... for they shall all know me, from the least of them unto the greatest of them, saith the LORD: for I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more.—Jeremiah 31:31, 33, 34

This New Covenant is the final covenant mentioned in the Old Testament. It is perfectly instituted in the New Testament⁸⁴ at the Last Supper.⁸⁵ Notice its terms.

"My law in...their hearts": Not slavish efforts to keep the Law; rather, at regeneration, God gives His Holy Spirit to indwell believers so that they may grow to think like God thinks—resulting in joyful obedience.

"All shall know me": A blessed privilege to know God in our daily experience of life.

"I will be their God": God again commits Himself to lead, protect, and guide His people, just as He did to the nation at Mount Sinai.

"They shall be my people": God gives us the capacity to honor and worship Him.

"All will know me": We no longer need another prophet besides Jesus to represent God to us, or an earthly priest to represent us to God: all true believers have direct access to knowledge of and fellowship with God.

"I will remember their sins no more": Here again sin is the issue. It separated man from God in the Garden in Genesis 3 and has caused man to stumble ever

⁸⁴ **Testament** – “covenant”; see Mat 26:27-28; Heb 8:6-13; 10:12-20; 12:22-24.

⁸⁵ **Last Supper** – meal in the upper room with Jesus and His disciples the night before His death, in which He gave bread and wine, telling the Church these represented His body and blood, and to remember Him regularly in partaking of this new ordinance.

since. The Old Testament sacrifices were only temporary coverings of sin in anticipation of the finished work of Christ (Rom 3:25). In the New Covenant sealed in Christ's blood, representing His death, burial, and resurrection, His people's sins are permanently put out of God's sight, never to be brought against them again in judgment.

Jeremiah, like other prophets, saw that the future blessing of God should come through One Whom God would send:

In those days, and at that time, will I cause the Branch of righteousness to grow up unto David; and he shall execute justice and righteousness in the land.—Jeremiah 33:15

By this prophecy, Jeremiah takes the promise that God gave to David and clearly connects it with the Messiah Who is to come.

Jeremiah is rightly called the weeping prophet and a suffering servant. He grieved over the people's sins and suffered imprisonment at their rejection. No one except the Lord Jesus was ever treated with more contempt by Israel. So when God gave wonderful prophecies about the future of God's people, they must have caused his heart to rejoice. He had to proclaim the destruction of the nation that had been the Kingdom of God, but he also looked forward to a new and better manifestation of the theocracy. He saw the blessings of the coming Kingdom of Christ.

5. Historical Narratives – chapters 34 - 44

Please read Jeremiah 39-40.

A. Before Jerusalem's Fall

The story of the fall of Jerusalem before the armies of Nebuchadnezzar (586 B.C.) is told in the books of Kings and Chronicles. But Jeremiah gives us information about the last days of Jerusalem that is not contained in those historical books. Much of the material in Jeremiah deals with the troubles that came to Jeremiah because of his faithfulness to the word which he had received from God. He tells us how King Jehoiakim burned the prophecies that he had written and sought to kill him. He records how he was imprisoned several times because the message he proclaimed was counter to the hopes of the princes of Jerusalem. He tells of the advice from God that he gave to King Zedekiah. But Zedekiah would not listen, and therefore the king suffered greatly when the city was taken and he was captured by the Chaldeans.

B. At Jerusalem's Fall

It is important to note the theological significance of the events the day Jerusalem fell. The people had always thought that they were above harsh judgment because they maintained an outward form of religion. They thought this was enough to satisfy Jehovah. But they failed to understand that God's holiness required obedience motivated by a heart of love for Him. They loved the world, but gave only lip service to their God. They failed to see the extent of the horror of their sin—they thought compromise would be acceptable to God as long as they kept up the outward form of religion. This did not please God then, and neither does it now. The judgment on Jerusalem showed the extreme height of two things: God's holiness and His hatred of the sin of outward religion.

When the walls of Jerusalem were breached by the Babylonians, all the people rushed into the Temple. They thought that since God's name was there, He would stop the enemy from entering that sacred place. They failed to understand that God had handed them over to the Babylonians to execute His judgment upon them. So when the enemy entered the city, they went straight to the Temple and even into the Most Holy Place, and removed the Ark of the Covenant. The people had broken their covenant with God; now they were to suffer the full extent of the consequences. All their false beliefs that God would protect them, even without their heart repentance, were crushed. From this point forward, God does not chasten them anymore.

C. After Jerusalem's Fall

Jeremiah also gives us a more detailed account of the events that occurred after the destruction of Jerusalem. He tells how Gedaliah was made governor, how he was slain by some of the remaining Jews, and how fearful the Jews were of Nebuchadnezzar's wrath. They asked Jeremiah what they should do. He told them to remain in Judah, but they had determined that they would go to Egypt. They forced the prophet to accompany them there. Jeremiah's experiences in Egypt were no happier than his ministry in Judah. He announced that Nebuchadnezzar would capture Egypt and slay the Jews there. And when he sought to call the Jews away from their idolatry and back to Jehovah, they scorned his words and declared openly their blatant intention to continue worshipping idols.

6. Prophecies against the Nations – *chapters 45 - 51*

It was Jeremiah's sad duty to preach to the people of Judah and warn them of the destruction that was to overtake them. They had to be told again and again that this was God's method of punishing them for their constant sinfulness. God

had purposed to use the heathen nations to destroy the covenant nation that had rebelled against its God.

But Jeremiah's prophecies were not limited to Judah. He also spoke to the nations around Judah and predicted God's judgment upon them. The same Babylonians who were to punish Judah would also punish these nations. And at the end of this section of prophecies against the nations, Jeremiah unleashes a prediction of punishment against Babylon that is far more severe than any of the others. Although the Chaldeans have been used of God to punish other nations, that does not mean that they will not be punished. God's wrath will also be poured out upon them. As Babylon destroyed other nations, so Babylon will also be destroyed.

7. A Historical Review – *chapter 52*

Please read Jeremiah 52.

Jeremiah closes his book with a survey of the events surrounding the fall of Jerusalem. This survey in Jeremiah 52, in almost identical language, is also found in Kings. It is appended as a kind of historical proof of the truth of the prophecies that Jeremiah brought to the children of Judah.

Questions for personal reflection and group discussion

1. Describe the times in which Jeremiah prophesied.
2. What is the purpose of the book of Jeremiah?
3. What do we learn about the people from the illustration of the cistern?
4.
 - a. What did false prophets do?
 - b. What motivates false prophets and false teachers?
 - c. How could the people know that they were false?
 - d. What results when people follow false teachers?
5. As declared in Jeremiah 9:23-24, what does God desire from us?
6. Do you think our times are similar to the times in which Jeremiah lived? Why or why not?

Note: Jeremiah has many beautiful and important verses that are great encouragements, including 5:20, 6:14, 7:23-24, 9:23-24, 10:10, 14:20-22, 15:16, 17:9, 23:5-6, and 29:11-14. We encourage you to become familiar with these, even to memorize some or all of them over time.

Covenant Nation Mourns Its Destruction

Lamentations

*It is of the LORD'S mercies that we are not consumed,
because his compassions fail not. They are new
every morning: great is thy faithfulness.*

Lamentations 3:22-23

1. Introduction

Please read Lamentations 1.

A. Author

While the book of Lamentations does not mention its author, the common tradition of the Jews and of the Christian Church is that it was Jeremiah. He certainly had a heart of sorrow for his city and his people, a trait displayed prominently in the book. The work was composed shortly after the fall of Jerusalem in 586 B.C.

B. Its Place in the Canon

In the English Bible, Lamentations is placed after Jeremiah. The Hebrews, however, include Lamentations in the Writings because it is one of the Five Rolls (Megilloth) read at the Jewish holy days. Lamentations is read at the fast commemorating the fall of Jerusalem. This use of Lamentations explains why a book written by a prophet is found in the Writings.

C. The Form of the Book

Lamentations is written as an acrostic poem. Chapters 1, 2, and 4 have 22 verses each. The verses begin with the 22 letters of the Hebrew alphabet in order. Chapter 3 has 66 verses. It is composed of 22 groups, each group beginning with a different Hebrew letter in sequence, and containing three verses that begin with that same letter. The last chapter also has 22 verses, but there is no alphabetic or-

der. This acrostic form is a mark of Hebrew poetry that served a good purpose: it helped the Hebrew reader to memorize the book more easily. By this form the meaning of the book was more fully grasped.

D. Purpose

Jeremiah wrote Lamentations to express the deep sorrow of the people of God when the covenant nation was destroyed, and to show the reason for this suffering.

2. Contents

This book consists of five separate lamentations.⁸⁶ In each there is the same sorrow and mourning. But in each we find a different emphasis. In each lament, the author points up a different aspect of the sorrow surrounding the fall of Jerusalem.

Lamentations 1 expresses with sad beauty the sorrow of captive Zion.

How doth the city sit solitary, that was full of people! how is she become as a widow! she that was great among the nations, and princess among the provinces, how is she become tributary!—Lamentations 1:1

Is it nothing to you, all ye that pass by? behold, and see if there be any sorrow like unto my sorrow, which is done unto me, wherewith the LORD hath afflicted me in the day of his fierce anger.—Lamentations 1:12

Lamentations 2 shows that this great suffering is from God.

How hath the Lord covered the daughter of Zion with a cloud in his anger, and cast down from heaven unto the earth the beauty of Israel, and remembered not his footstool in the day of his anger!—Lamentations 2:1

In Lamentations 3, the author, speaking for Zion, bemoans his condition and expresses hope in the mercy of God.

I am the man that hath seen affliction by the rod of his wrath... For the Lord will not cast off for ever: But though he cause grief, yet will he have compassion according to the multitude of his mercies... Let us search and try our ways, and turn again to the LORD. Let us lift up our heart with our hands unto God in the heavens.—Lamentations 3:1, 31-32, 40-41

⁸⁶ **lamentation** – song, poem, or writing of grief, deep sorrow, and regret.

Lamentations 4 is a graphic description of the horrors of the siege of Jerusalem.

The tongue of the sucking child cleaveth to the roof of his mouth for thirst: the young children ask bread, and no man breaketh it unto them.—Lamentations 4:4

They that be slain with the sword are better than they that be slain with hunger: for these pine away, stricken through for want⁸⁷ of the fruits of the field. The hands of the pitiful women have sodden their own children: they were their meat in the destruction of the daughter of my people.—Lamentations 4:9-10

Lamentations 5 is a plea to God for mercy.

Remember, O LORD, what is come upon us: consider, and behold our reproach.—Lamentations 5:1

Thou, O LORD, remainest for ever; thy throne from generation to generation. Wherefore dost thou forget us for ever, and forsake us so long time? Turn thou us unto thee, O LORD, and we shall be turned; renew our days as of old. But thou hast utterly rejected us; thou art very wroth against us.—Lamentations 5:19-22

Questions for personal reflection and group discussion

1. a. Who wrote Lamentations?
b. Why was he especially qualified to do so?
2. What is unusual about the form of Lamentations?
3. What is the purpose of Lamentations?

⁸⁷ **want** – lack.

God's Assurance of Blessing after Punishment

Ezekiel

*Say unto them, As I live, saith the Lord GOD, I have no pleasure
in the death of the wicked; but that the wicked turn from
his way and live: turn ye, turn ye from your evil
ways; for why will ye die, O house of Israel?*

Ezekiel 33:11

1. Introduction

A. Author

This book is the work of the prophet Ezekiel, who was a priest, the son of Buzi. In 597 B.C., during the reign of Jehoiachin, Ezekiel was taken to Babylon along with the nobles and upper classes of the people. There he lived along the river Chebar, in a town called Tel-abib. After he had lived there for five years, he was called of God to be a prophet. At that time he was thirty years old, the age at which Levites began their service to the Lord. He continued his prophetic labors for a period of at least twenty-two years.

Ezekiel was a contemporary of Jeremiah and Daniel. Daniel was taken to Babylon in the first captivity (606 B.C.) and served in the palace of the Babylonian monarchs. Jeremiah remained in Jerusalem until after its destruction and prophesied to the Jews there. Ezekiel was the prophet whom God sent to the Jews who had gone into captivity in Babylon.

B. Ezekiel's Style

Although all the prophets brought the word of the living God, God instructed each in a unique manner. The style of Ezekiel is particularly distinctive. In the first place, God uses symbolism more than in any other prophet. Ezekiel does not simply bring the word of God, he acts it out. The siege of Jerusalem is not simply proclaimed, it is portrayed by a miniature city built on a tile (Eze 4). The exile of

the inhabitants is acted out by Ezekiel himself (Eze 12). In addition to these symbolic actions, the prophecy of Ezekiel contains many visions. The vision of the valley of dry bones is probably the best known (Eze 37). Even a casual survey of the book will impress the reader with the great amount of symbolism it contains.

In the second place, Ezekiel places a great deal of emphasis on the giving of the message by God. Time and again he begins a prophecy with the words, "The word of Jehovah came unto me, saying, Son of man..." Not only does Ezekiel emphasize that God speaks, but the title which God gives him indicates that he is simply the human servant of the divine master. This repeated introduction adds authority to the words that Ezekiel brings.

C. Purpose

The prophet Ezekiel had two tasks. Before the fall of Jerusalem, the exiles were filled with a false optimism. They were sure that they would soon return to Jerusalem. Ezekiel is sent to correct this idea by insistently preaching that Jerusalem is going to be destroyed because of her sin. After these words were fulfilled and the city had been razed, the optimism of the exiles gave way to an equally strong pessimism. As their mood changed, Ezekiel's message changed. Now God gave him a promise of hope for the future. The purpose of this book is to show that God is righteous and will punish the sins of His people, and also that God is faithful to His covenant and will fulfill all His promises. Throughout, they will "know that I am the Lord" (6:7; 7:4; etc.), a phrase repeated often throughout the book.

To accomplish this purpose, Ezekiel intermingles five principal themes:

- 1) the glory and holiness of God
- 2) the sinfulness of the nation
- 3) the necessity of judgment
- 4) restoration made possible by the Messiah
- 5) individual responsibility (18:4).

Notice how this matches the principal themes of the gospel: 1) God is perfect and holy, 2) man has sinned, 3) man's sin condemns him to death, 4) Christ came to pay the penalty for sin, 5) man is responsible to repent and believe upon Christ.⁸⁸ There is one God and one truth embodied in His Word. It has not changed because God Himself never changes.

The outline of Ezekiel is in just two parts.

- I. Messages of judgment Ezekiel 1-32
- II. Messages of hope Ezekiel 33-46

⁸⁸ See *Free Grace Broadcaster* 198 "The Gospel"; available from CHAPEL LIBRARY.

2. Ezekiel's Call – chapters 1 - 3

Please read Ezekiel 1-3.

God called Ezekiel to the prophetic office after he had been in captivity for five years. The call of Ezekiel, like that of Isaiah, involved a vision of God. But Ezekiel's vision is pictured much more fully than Isaiah's. Ezekiel saw a great cloud and out of it came four living creatures. These are later identified as cherubim, that is, a special class of angelic beings. They are strange and wonderful in appearance, and with them go wheels that are equally strange and wonderful. But these creatures merely prepare the way for the appearance of Jehovah, Whose glory is so great that merely seeing it causes Ezekiel to fall upon his face. Then he is called to the prophetic office. Like his contemporary Jeremiah, Ezekiel is given to understand that his work will not be easy:

And he said unto me, Son of man, I send thee to the children of Israel, to a rebellious nation that hath rebelled against me: they and their fathers have transgressed against me, even unto this very day.—Ezekiel 2:3

After seven days, God again spoke to the new prophet and explained the solemn duty that was his, using the symbol of a guard or watchman.

Son of man, I have made thee a watchman unto the house of Israel: therefore hear the word at my mouth, and give them warning from me. When I say unto the wicked, Thou shalt surely die; and thou givest him not warning, nor speakest to warn the wicked from his wicked way, to save his life; the same wicked man shall die in his iniquity; but his blood will I require at thine hand. Yet if thou warn the wicked, and he turn not from his wickedness, nor from his wicked way, he shall die in his iniquity; but thou hast delivered thy soul.—Ezekiel 3:17-19

Jesus Christ passed this responsibility to all true Christians when He gave us the Great Commission:

Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world. Amen.—Matthew 28:19-20

3. Fall of Jerusalem

A. *Its Destruction* – chapters 4 - 14

Please read Ezekiel 6, 11, and 14.

God gave Ezekiel many different ways to portray the destruction that must befall Jerusalem. He seldom preached without using visual aids or casting his message in some graphic form. God told him to take a tile and to build on it a model of the city of Jerusalem. Around the city he was to depict the various instruments of war, thereby showing that Jerusalem would be besieged (Eze 4). He was told to cut his hair, then to divide the cut hair into three parts. One part was to be burned, the second cut by the sword, and the third scattered to the winds (Eze 5). Thus Ezekiel showed what would happen to the inhabitants of Jerusalem.

The prophet also presented the reason for this destruction of the holy city. In Ezekiel 8-11, he was lifted up and carried to Jerusalem. This may have been a vision, or God actually may have transported him. God showed him the awful idolatries and abominations practiced by the citizens of Jerusalem. Even in the very Temple of God such iniquity was practiced. For this reason God would punish the city.

Ezekiel was also shown the punishment (Eze 9). God sent a man with an ink-horn through the city to mark those who were the true worshippers of God. Then six men went through the city to destroy all who were not marked. These men were undoubtedly angels, and they symbolized the destruction that occurred historically when the Babylonians captured Jerusalem.

Once again, the prophet was told to puncture the optimistic dreams of his fellow captives in Babylon. Whereas they looked for a speedy return to Jerusalem, Ezekiel portrayed to them a man beginning a long sad journey. This was a picture of what would happen to the dwellers of Jerusalem (Eze 12). Although Jerusalem had not yet fallen, the time of her repentance was past. Jerusalem was doomed to destruction; nothing could save the city. She was worse than was Sodom in the time of Abraham. Indeed, “though these three men, Noah, Daniel, and Job, were in it, they should deliver but their own souls by their righteousness, saith the Lord GOD”⁸⁹ (Eze 14:14).

The punishment that the prophets had foretold is now certain. In a vision, Ezekiel sees God’s glory departing from His holy city, first from the Most Holy Place (10:18), then to the Temple court, then to the Mount of Olives (11:23)—the

⁸⁹ **the Lord GOD** – combined title for God appearing 210 times in Ezekiel. *Lord* is “Adonai” and means Master; and *GOD* is God’s name, “YHWH” or Jehovah—the great, self-existent “I AM” (Exo 3:14-15).

place where enemy armies camped when attacking the city. In the midst of this, God promises His presence to them (11:16), their return to the land (11:17), and the New Covenant:

And I will give them one heart, and I will put a new spirit within you; and I will take the stony heart out of their flesh, and will give them an heart of flesh: That they may walk in my statutes, and keep mine ordinances, and do them: and they shall be my people, and I will be their God.—Ezekiel 11:19-20

B. Reasons for Jerusalem's Fall – chapters 15 - 23

Please read Ezekiel 16:1-15, 16:59-63, 18, and 20:1-44.

Ezekiel announced to the exiles not only that Jerusalem would be destroyed, he told them repeatedly the reason for this destruction. The figure of an adulterous woman is frequently used in the Bible to portray the sin of idolatry and departing from God. Ezekiel uses this figure several times. By this comparison, Israel is placed in the worst possible light. God redeemed Israel when she was utterly helpless in Egypt. He gave her blessing upon blessing. Ezekiel 16:6 is also a picture of the experience of every believer. We were lost in our sins, covered with our own blood in the judgment of God, without hope in the world. Then God, in His great mercy, rescues us from our plight, and dresses us in the white robes of Christ's righteousness (Eph 2:1-5; Rev 7:14).

And when I passed by thee, and saw thee polluted in thine own blood, I said unto thee when thou wast in thy blood, Live.—Ezekiel 16:6

Now, even after all this, Israel went aside to other gods. Instead of trusting in Jehovah, she put her trust in alliances with foreign nations. Even the punishment of her adulterous sister, Samaria, did not turn her from her wicked way. Having departed from God, she must now be punished.

The Jews in Ezekiel's time tried to evade responsibility by placing the blame for their sad situation on the sins of their fathers. They used a parable, "The fathers have eaten sour grapes, and the children's teeth are set on edge" (Eze 18:2). Thus they tried to blame their evil situation on the sins of their fathers. But God would not permit such evasion of responsibility. He declares,

As I live, saith the Lord Jehovah, ye shall not have occasion any more to use this proverb in Israel. Behold, all souls are mine; as the soul of the father, so also the soul of the son is mine: the soul that sinneth, it shall die.—Ezekiel 18:3-4

These people were sinners. They had not departed from the sins of their fathers. Because of this, God's wrath was upon them.

C. Final Prophecy of Destruction – chapter 24

Ezekiel began his ministry four years before the final siege of Jerusalem by Nebuchadnezzar. On the day that the siege began, God announced it to Ezekiel, and he announced it to the people. It was portrayed by another sign:

Also the word of the LORD came unto me, saying, Son of man, behold, I take away from thee the desire of thine eyes with a stroke: yet neither shalt thou mourn nor weep, neither shall thy tears run down... So I spake unto the people in the morning: and at even my wife died; and I did in the morning as I was commanded.—Ezekiel 24:15-18

Ezekiel was not to mourn for his wife when she died. This was to teach the exiles how they should act when the news of Jerusalem's fall reached them.

Thus Ezekiel is unto you a sign; according to all that he hath done shall ye do: and when this cometh, then shall ye know that I am the Lord GOD.—Ezekiel 24:24

They were not to weep and wail as if something terrible had fallen upon people who did not deserve it. They were to accept the sober judgment as those who receive what they deserve, in quiet acceptance from the hand of their all-wise God.

This too is a lesson for us today. Every difficulty that happens to men is deserved for their sin—the fact is, all of us deserve hell itself. Christians must learn to walk by faith in joy for the blessed hope of heaven they have received, no matter what happens on this earth, without ever despairing their situation.

4. Prophecies against the Nations – chapters 25 - 32

In his book, Ezekiel also included prophecies that he spoke against the nations around Judah. Because of their hatred of God's people, they too shall be destroyed. Tyre and Egypt especially were singled out by the prophet. The words that Ezekiel uttered against Tyre are very much like those that describe the fall of Babylon in Revelation 17-18.

5. Messages of Hope

Ezekiel's ministry changed when Jerusalem fell. That change was marked by a second announcement that God had set him as a watchman over Zion. Now Ezekiel was to bring messages of hope to the depressed and disheartened exiles.

A. A New Shepherd – chapters 33 - 35

Please read Ezekiel 33-34.

Therefore, O thou son of man, speak unto the house of Israel; Thus ye speak, saying, If our transgressions and our sins be upon us, and we pine away in them, how should we then live? Say unto them, As I live, saith the Lord GOD, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked; but that the wicked turn from his way and live: turn ye, turn ye from your evil ways; for why will ye die, O house of Israel?—Ezekiel 33:10-11

The people ask “How should we then live?”—and the rest of the book is a call to repentance. The issue is never just getting out of bad circumstances. The issue is always repenting from sin in our hearts to follow after God. The only reason God continues to bless the earth with food, water, and air to breathe, is to give time still today for this call to repentance.

One of the causes of Israel’s plight lay in the failure of her kings and priests to lead the people in the paths laid out by God. Therefore Ezekiel is told to prophesy against them.

Son of man, prophesy against the shepherds of Israel, prophesy, and say unto them, Thus saith the Lord GOD unto the shepherds; Woe be to the shepherds of Israel that do feed themselves! should not the shepherds feed the flocks?—Ezekiel 34:2-3

These shepherds have led Israel astray, but now Israel shall be led aright, for God Himself promises to be the Shepherd of Israel.

For thus saith the Lord GOD; Behold, I, even I, will both search my sheep, and seek them out... Thus shall they know that I the LORD their God am with them, and that they, even the house of Israel, are my people, saith the Lord GOD. And ye my flock, the flock of my pasture, are men, and I am your God, saith the Lord GOD.—Ezekiel 34:11, 30-31

B. New Life for Israel – chapters 36 - 39

Please read Ezekiel 36-37.

God used Ezekiel again to proclaim the essence of salvation.

And I will sanctify my great name, which was profaned among the heathen, which ye have profaned in the midst of them; and the heathen shall know that I am the LORD, saith the Lord GOD, when I shall be sanctified in you before their eyes.—Ezekiel 36:23

A new heart also will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you: and I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and I will give you an heart of flesh.⁹⁰ And I will put my spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes, and ye shall keep my judgments, and do them. And ye shall dwell in the land that I gave to your fathers; and ye shall be my people, and I will be your God.—Ezekiel 36:26-28

Again, this is the language of the New Covenant (34:25; 37:26-27) that Jesus Christ inaugurated at the Last Supper and implemented at Pentecost, when the promised Holy Spirit came to indwell God's people, and to give them hearts to love Him and follow after Him.

The vision of the valley of dry bones is well known (Eze 37). It was given to encourage those who had given up hope. All men without Christ are dead in their sins, incapable of life, just like these dry bones. But God promised to breathe new life into His people:

And ye shall know that I am the LORD, when I have opened your graves, O my people, and brought you up out of your graves, And shall put my spirit in you, and ye shall live, and I shall place you in your own land: then shall ye know that I the LORD have spoken it, and performed it, saith the LORD.—Ezekiel 37:13-14

This is the new birth, which theologians call "regeneration." It is all God's work. This is the message that Nicodemus should have known, when he did not understand Jesus' words in John 3, "Ye must be born again." It is the same message we must understand today.

In connection with this vision, God gave another sign. Two sticks, representing Israel and Judah, are miraculously joined together in Ezekiel's hand. This is a sign that God will join the two kingdoms so that they will be one again. We might think that these promises referred to the return from exile. But there is another promise added.

And David my servant shall be king over them; and they all shall have one shepherd: they shall also walk in mine judgments, and observe my statutes, and do them.—Ezekiel 37:24

⁹⁰ **out of your flesh** – *flesh* here means "body."

heart of flesh – *flesh* here means alive, soft, responsive.

This promise refers to Christ, the king Who reigns on the throne of David (Joh 10; Heb 13:20). Thus we know that God is speaking of a spiritual restoration of His people—a restoration that began at Pentecost (Act 2:1-4).

The promise of new life for the Church of God is followed by a prophecy about Gog and Magog. These represent nations that will come against the renewed Israel, but will be destroyed by God. This prophecy has been interpreted by some as a prediction of an alliance of modern nations that will fight against the Jews. But it is closely connected to the previous vision: the people of God have been renewed, and immediately there are enemies who seek to destroy them. Satan is always attacking the Church of God, but God will destroy His enemies. By means of the symbolism of these nations warring against the renewed Israel, Ezekiel presents the truth that the gates of hell shall not prevail against the Church of God.

These prophecies draw our attention again to the Kingdom of God. We are reminded that destruction of the covenant nation is not the end of God's kingdom. Only outwardly shall the theocracy fall. It will still continue in the small group of pious Israelites who really love Jehovah. It will lie dormant for some time, so that many will think that God's kingdom has been destroyed. But in the fullness of time, God will make it clear to all men that His kingdom yet lives: He will send His king, Jesus Christ, to establish the spiritual theocracy that will continue until the end of time. The Kingdom, which once was limited to the nation of Israel, will spring to renewed life in the Church of Jesus Christ throughout the entire world.

C. The New Temple – chapters 40 - 48

The final vision of Ezekiel is very long. It is an elaborate description of a temple, its services, its location in the land, and the arrangement of the twelve tribes around it. This temple cannot be the Temple of Solomon, nor the second Temple that was built after the return from captivity. The temple of Ezekiel's vision is much larger than either of those. And there are important differences. There is no Most Holy Place. There is no Ark of the Covenant. The priests are limited to the family of Zadok instead of the house of Aaron. And there is no mention of a high priest. In fact, to take Ezekiel's description of the temple literally leads to many difficulties.⁹¹ What then does this vision mean?

⁹¹ Orthodox Jews today have plans to rebuild this temple on the Temple Mount, Mount Zion in Jerusalem. They expect to wait until an act of God makes the site available, which is currently occupied by the Dome of the Rock, the second most holy place in Islam. If and when this temple is built, they plan to reintroduce sacrifices according to the Law. This reflects their totally missing the coming of their Messiah, Who has given Himself once for all as the ultimate sacrifice for the sins of His people (Heb 10:10).

We must remember that it is a vision. It was never intended to be taken literally. It is a symbol, designed to teach a lesson.

So the spirit took me up, and brought me into the inner court; and, behold, the glory of the LORD filled the house.—Ezekiel 43:5

That lesson is contained in the last words of the prophecy: “The LORD is there” (Eze 48:35). This vision pictures, in the language of the Old Testament, the great truth that God dwells in the midst of His people. It presents in Old Testament form the great glory of New Testament Christianity—that God dwells in the hearts of His people. This is certainly a message of hope. Although Jerusalem was destroyed, those who truly loved God could look forward to a day when Jehovah again would dwell in the midst of His people, in the New Covenant. In that hope they could wait and watch.

Questions for personal reflection and group discussion

1. When and where did Ezekiel prophesy?
2. What is the purpose of the book of Ezekiel?
3. How does Ezekiel’s responsibility as a watchman reflect the Christian’s?
4. Why does it not work to blame our problems upon our parents or others?
5. What is God’s answer to “How should we then live?”
6. What does God expect of spiritual leaders?
7. Is the destruction of the covenant nation also the end of the theocratic kingdom? Why or why not?

PART FIVE

THEOCRATIC
TRANSITION

38

**Covenant People under
Gentile Dominion**

Daniel

*And all the inhabitants of the earth are reputed as nothing:
and he doeth according to his will in the army of heaven,
and among the inhabitants of the earth: and none can
stay his hand, or say unto him, What doest thou?*

Daniel 4:35

1. The Period of Theocratic Transition

A. Background

The beginning of the Exile brings us to a new period in the history of the Old Testament: the period of theocratic transition. In our study, we have traced the history of Israel as the covenant nation. We have seen her redeemed from Egypt by the hand of God. We have seen her established as the covenant nation at Sinai

and given the land of Canaan. We have seen the fulfillment of ancient promises when David became the theocratic king. But we have also seen Israel's sinfulness: her idolatry and spiritual adultery, her outward religion and spiritual pride, and her final apostasy. We have seen how these sins led to the division of the kingdom, and finally to the downfall and captivity of both the northern and southern kingdoms.

God had warned Israel that sin would bring punishment, even the punishment of exile. But God had also promised, as announced by the prophets, that He would restore His people to their land, renew them by His Spirit, and erect His kingdom under the Messiah.

B. Purpose of the Exile

The Exile is not the end of the theocracy. This is not the period of theocratic termination, but of theocratic *transition*. The Exile had a purpose. It was designed to remove from Israel the sin of idolatry and prepare a people who should receive the fullness of God's covenant promises in Christ.

“The exile forms a great turning point in the development of the Kingdom of God, which He had founded in Israel. With this event, the form of the theocracy established at Mount Sinai comes to an end, and then begins the period of the transition to a new form that was to be established by Christ, and actually has been established by Him.”⁹²

The Exile performed two great tasks. *First*, the time of captivity winnowed the chaff of idolatry out of Israel. The Jews have not committed outward idolatry since the Babylonian captivity. *Second*, the period of waiting aroused in them a sense of expectancy. They began to long for the coming of the Messiah. The prophets had often spoken of the Messiah, but the people had paid little attention. But now the Temple, which lacked the real presence of God, reminded them constantly that their religion lacked God's presence. Now they began to look forward earnestly to the coming of the Messiah.

C. Under Gentile Rule

In Daniel we witness firsthand the beginnings of the times of the Gentiles (Luk 21:24). No longer was Israel to be an earthly kingdom under God's direct rule. This stage in the development of the theocracy was past. It had served its purpose and was never to be restored. When the exiles returned to Jerusalem and established again a Jewish state, the theocratic nation was not restored. Only a small remnant returned, and this group was still under the control of non-Jewish

⁹² Keil, C. F. and Delitzsch, F., *Commentaries on the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co.; reprinted).

powers. Although the Temple was rebuilt and the walls of Jerusalem restored, things were never the same. Sacrifices were offered as of old, but now there was no Ark of the Covenant in the Most Holy Place, and no real presence of God in the sanctuary. The Day of Atonement could no longer be celebrated. Though for a time God proclaimed His words through prophets, prophecy ceased after the work of Nehemiah was completed.

Now God gives power to Gentile nations to run the world according to their own will and wisdom, although He is still sovereign and in control behind the scenes. He is using it all for the good of His people and His purposes. Everything ends up exactly as He wills. This is much more than foreknowledge of what men decide will happen: it is God actively ordering and directing the independent decisions of sinful men for His glory.

A period of waiting commenced, to last until God would bring the next step in His kingdom. This period of waiting prepared Israel for that which was to come. Not a restoration of the national theocracy, but the arrival of the spiritual theocracy in Christ—this was God's plan for His people.

D. The Babylonian Spirit

Jerusalem is a picture of God and His work upon the earth; Babylon is a picture of the world system of corruption and power among men. Satan is the real king of this Babylonian world system; *the devil uses the world to entice the flesh*, to cause men to abandon God, to seek personal fulfillment from worldly possessions, status, or pleasure—independently from God.

The heart of the Babylonian spirit is pride: the unity of men for the glory of man. It first showed itself at the Tower of Babel (Gen 11). It shows itself in most human governments bent on maintaining power and collecting wealth. Pride is a desire to be like God, to be in control, to do what you think is best. All greed, sensuality, and brutality is driven by pride. The human heart needs nothing to feed its pride. It is the default condition of every man, apart from God's grace.

E. History

In order to place the events recorded in the books we are about to study, we need to review some important dates and to learn some new ones.

Time Line of the Captivity

722 B.C.	Samaria fell to Assyria; end of the kingdom of Israel
625	Assyrian empire fell to Babylon
606	First Babylonian exile in the reign of Jehoiakim <i>Daniel taken</i>
597	Second Babylonian exile in the reign of Jehoiachin <i>Ezekiel taken</i>
586	Third Babylonian exile in the reign of Zedekiah <i>Destruction of Jerusalem</i>
538	Babylonian empire fell to Medo-Persia <i>The night Daniel prophesied to Belshazzar</i>
536	First return of Jews under Zerubbabel by Cyrus' decree
458	Second return of the Jews under Ezra
445	Third return of the Jews under Nehemiah

2. Introduction to Daniel

A. Language

The Old Testament is composed of books that were originally written in Hebrew. In Daniel, however, about sixty per cent of the book is written in Aramaic (Dan 2:4 - 7:28), the language used by the Babylonians for international communication. Aramaic, being the language of the Babylonian empire, is used in those sections that deal primarily with world empires. Hebrew, the language of God's people, is used in those sections that deal primarily with the Kingdom of God.

B. Author

This book was written by the man whose name it bears. We find evidence for this in the book itself. In Daniel 8-12, the author refers to himself as "I, Daniel." In Daniel 12:4, he is told to preserve the book in which these words are written. Jesus has reference to Daniel 9:27 and 11:31 when He speaks of the "abomination of desolation, spoken of by Daniel the prophet" (Mat 24:15). All the biblical evidence points to Daniel as the author.

We have seen in our previous study of the Old Testament that men do not always accept what the Bible teaches about the authorship of Old Testament books.

So it is with Daniel. Many commentators try to place the book of Daniel at a later date. They say that it was written in the Maccabean period. This period runs from about 165-63 B.C. The name *Maccabean* refers to a family of high priests who became the leaders of a rebellion that won independence for the Jews, in the period between the Old and the New Testaments. This late date would mean that Daniel could not have been the author.

Why do some deny that Daniel wrote this book? Their denial is based upon the idea that predictive prophecy is impossible. These men believe that they must be able to explain everything that happens, and therefore that God cannot work miracles or reveal what will happen in the future. Some may admit that God can present broad outlines of the future, but deny that He can give the details. In either form, this is a denial of God's sovereignty. God's revelation of future events is based upon His control of future events. Men deny that God reveals the future because they do not believe that He is in control.

When one studies the book of Daniel, he is brought face to face with some remarkable prophecies. Several visions trace broadly the future history of the Gentile empires. The last vision is most specific. The history of Antiochus Epiphanes, a king who ruled in Syria from 175-164 B.C., is presented in great detail. While this king is not mentioned by name, the description is so clear that all scholars agree that the prophecy speaks about him. This leaves only two alternatives. Either one believes that Daniel was given this revelation about Antiochus in advance, or else one must insist that this account was written after Antiochus lived. The Critics take the latter view. But those who believe that God controls the future gladly confess that He can and does predict the future, as Scripture testifies.

C. Daniel

The author of this book is also its chief character. Daniel is an outstanding figure. Even in his lifetime, he was so highly regarded that Ezekiel pointed to him as an example for the other Israelites (Eze 28:3). Daniel was taken into captivity in 606 B.C. He was a child of noble birth, perhaps of royal parentage. He was educated to serve in the court of Nebuchadnezzar. He became the most learned man in Babylon and rose to a position of great honor. After Nebuchadnezzar's death, he seems to have lost favor, but was restored to a position of honor just before the death of Belshazzar. He continued in this high position under Darius and Cyrus, the Medo-Persian rulers.

Daniel was a youth of perhaps fifteen to eighteen years of age when carried to Babylon. He was still active when the seventy years of captivity ended. He did not return with the exiles, but remained at the court. His last vision came two years after the first group of exiles returned to Jerusalem. At this time he was an old

man approaching the age of ninety. His life spanned a dark period in the history of Israel, but throughout his life he was a faithful servant of God.

A common tendency of godly men is to withdraw from the ungodly in the world. But Daniel is thrust into the middle of it. As a sort of “prime minister,” he was responsible for carrying out humanistic rule. He had to quickly determine what is essential for God, and what is non-essential. And to be true to his God, he had to become committed to the essentials. This is a primary lesson from Daniel, because it is the same for us in the world today.

D. Purpose of the Book

The Exile had ended the national existence of God’s people. The Jews were captives, controlled by Gentile rulers. This time of exile must have caused the pious Jews to wonder if God’s plan had failed. Were the promises to Abraham and David to be forgotten? The book of Daniel provides convincing proof that they were not forgotten. God’s plan does not fail. God is still sovereign. He rules over the world rulers, and He guides the course of history so that His purposes will be fulfilled.

The outline of Daniel has two parts

- | | |
|--------------------------------------|-------------|
| I. God’s control of Gentile empires | Daniel 1-7 |
| II. The future of the Kingdom of God | Daniel 8-12 |

Interestingly, chapters 2 through 7 form a concentric symmetry. Chapters 2 and 7 concern the world. Chapters 3 and 6 concern righteous individuals, chapters 4 and 5 concern pagan kings.

E. Miracles

Anyone who has read the book of Daniel must admit that miracles play an important part in the book. There are miracles that show God’s omnipotence (almighty power) and those that show His omniscience (knowledge of all things). While there are miracles throughout the Old Testament, yet when we study the Bible carefully, we discover that there are four periods when miracles abound:

- The time of the Exodus
- The days of Elijah and Elisha
- The time of Daniel
- The time of Christ and the apostles in the New Testament.

These clusters of miracles come at important points in the history of the theocracy. The first and fourth periods come when a new form of the Kingdom is being established: the national theocracy in Israel and the spiritual theocracy in the Church. The second and third come when the Kingdom is endangered by the forces of Satan: the false worship of Baal and the heathen power of Babylon. By means of miracles, the theocracy is established and the Kingdom is protected.

This point is important in our study of the book of Daniel. We must not think of the miracles and visions in this book as mere curiosities. They played an important part in the divine plan of redemption. Even as God used mighty signs and wonders to deliver Israel from the bondage of Egypt, so now He used miracles and visions to show clearly that He alone is God. The miracles of the book of Daniel help to achieve the purpose of the book: to display God's sovereignty to Israel and the Gentile nations.

3. Contents

Please read Daniel 1-6.

The contents of the book of Daniel may be classified into three groups. There are 1) events that show God's care of His people in their captivity, 2) accounts of God's control of the heathen rulers, and 3) visions about the future.

A. *God's Care of His People*

The events that display God's protection of His people are very familiar. They are found in Daniel 1, 3, and 6. By means of these incidents, the captive Israelites were reminded that God had not changed. He still protected and blessed those who were faithful to His covenant.

1) *The King's Meat*

In Daniel 1, Daniel himself is immediately confronted with a major challenge to his commitment to God. When he asked to be exempted from the king's prescribed diet, he knew that he was stepping into a death sentence. Kings in the ancient world ruled absolutely—anyone who incurred the monarch's displeasure for any reason, or who stepped out of line in any way, was subject to immediate death. God gave Daniel grace to think wisely and to stand apart by faith. Daniel proposed a creative alternative to the king's order, wisely discerning that the purpose was not conformity, but health. In Daniel's case, God opened the official's heart to receive him.

But Daniel purposed in his heart that he would not defile himself with the portion of the king's meat...therefore he requested of the prince of the eunuchs that he might not defile himself. Now God had brought Daniel into favour and tender love with the prince of the eunuchs.—Daniel 1:8-9

This is a wise and good approach anytime we are facing conflict with authority: discern his purpose, find an alternative to accomplish both his purpose and what we believe to be needful, and propose it with humility.

More broadly, all the people of God must come to the place where honoring God is more important than anything else. If you learn this principle, you can

glorify God anywhere. Today, we have a compromising society. People regularly throw out the Word of God when it crosses their desires and becomes inconvenient. If you don't honor God as more important than anything else, you will not make it in walking with the Lord while dispersed in an ungodly society. People's approval must mean nothing. Your whole life must be given to representing and honoring God, in love and humility.

2) *The Fiery Furnace*

In Daniel 3, we have a good illustration of not compromising with the world. Nebuchadnezzar built a huge idol to himself and tested loyalty by having all men bow to it. There were probably thousands of people present, but when all bowed, three remained standing (Daniel must have been elsewhere). God wonderfully protected the three Hebrews in the fiery furnace that followed.

In societies today, there is a cultural norm that centers on the Babylonian spirit of worldly pleasures and personal gain. Those who won't go along are considered the "dangerous" ones. God's people must be prepared to stand alone in these situations, and trust God to meet all their needs.

3) *The Lion's Den*

In Daniel 6, the court officials envied Daniel's position and influence. They were bothered by his high standards of morality or ethics. When you do not compromise, you prick the consciences of those who do. These officials knew how to get to Daniel: they would make it so he had to compromise or suffer the consequences. While a clear testimony of faith is always important, the key part of this incident is not Daniel's testimony. You won't bring people to God because of your testimony: it is always God Who is working to open hearts and change minds. In this case, God moved the heart of the Persian ruler and brought great glory to Himself. The key to Daniel's success was his prayer life.

Then these men assembled, and found Daniel praying and making supplication before his God.—Daniel 6:11

B. God's Control of World Rulers

In caring for His people, God overruled some of the plans of the world rulers. There are two striking accounts that show directly how God controls even the greatest rulers of world empires. One of those is an account of God's justice and then His mercy (4:29-37). Nebuchadnezzar, warned in a dream of the humiliation that awaited him, nevertheless continued in his pride. As God had declared, he became like a beast. He was affected with a disease known as lycanthropy, in which the sufferer thinks that he is an animal and acts like it.

Nebuchadnezzar continued in this existence for a considerable length of time, until he prayed and confessed that God is truly sovereign. His confession is most beautiful:

I blessed the most High, and I praised and honoured him that liveth for ever, whose dominion is an everlasting dominion, and his kingdom is from generation to generation: And all the inhabitants of the earth are reputed as nothing: and he doeth according to his will in the army of heaven, and among the inhabitants of the earth: and none can stay his hand, or say unto him, What doest thou?—Daniel 4:34-35

After this, God restored Nebuchadnezzar to his throne. Many commentators understand this as the time when God mercifully saved Nebuchadnezzar.

The other incident, in chapter 5, concerns Belshazzar, who ruled as coregent with his father Nabonidus during the last days of the Babylonian empire. In the midst of drunken reveling, a hand appeared and wrote on the wall. Daniel interpreted the writing to speak of judgment. Belshazzar knew of Nebuchadnezzar's pride and God's unusual judgment upon him. Yet Belshazzar was guilty of even more pride and purposely profaning the drinking cups from the Temple. That very night the judgment fell when the Medes captured Babylon and slew Belshazzar.

O thou king, the most high God gave Nebuchadnezzar thy father⁹³ a kingdom... But when his heart was lifted up, and his mind hardened in pride, he was deposed from his kingly throne... till he knew that the most high God ruled in the kingdom of men, and that he appointeth over it whomsoever he will. And thou... hast not humbled thine heart, though thou knewest all this; But hast lifted up thyself against the Lord of heaven.—Daniel 5:18-23

C. Visions about the Future

1) Future Kingdoms

The visions in this book are all closely connected. They all deal with the period from the time of Daniel to the time of Christ. Two of them are especially close. The dream of Nebuchadnezzar (Dan 2) and the vision of Daniel (Dan 7) both deal with the great Gentile world powers that will arise. Babylon, Medo-Persia, Greece, and then Rome are presented in symbols. Nebuchadnezzar's dream about a great

⁹³ **thy father** – reference to an ancestor, not a biological parent.

statue of various metals presents the outward glory of these empires. Daniel's vision about the beasts that arise from the sea shows their internal characteristics. Each vision ends with a picture of the Kingdom of God triumphing over the kingdoms of men.

These two visions teach a common lesson. They show that no world power is lasting. Each has its day of glory, then sinks under the hand of God in favor of another. And each in its turn becomes less glorious and more vicious. In striking contrast to these is the Kingdom of God. It is eternal and universal. It judges the wickedness of the heathen, and establishes righteousness in the earth.

Notice especially Daniel's prayer after receiving from God the dream and its interpretation (2:20-23). Thanksgiving is an important part of our prayer life, in order to give God the glory He is due and to protect against drifting into pride:

Blessed be the name of God for ever and ever: for wisdom and might are his: And he changeth the times and the seasons: he removeth kings, and setteth up kings: he giveth wisdom unto the wise, and knowledge to them that know understanding.—Daniel 2:20-21

2) Antiochus Epiphanes

In Daniel 8-12, the emphasis shifts from God's control of the heathen empires to the future of the Kingdom of God. It is in this section that the most detailed prophecies are to be found. In Daniel 8 and 10-12, we have two visions that are quite similar. Both deal with Persia and then Greece. Both focus our attention on a figure in history who was a great persecutor of the Jews, Antiochus Epiphanes. The first of these visions is general; the second is very specific.

During the period between the Old and New Testaments, the Greek general Alexander the Great conquered the known world. When he died (323 B.C.), four of his powerful generals divided his empire among themselves (8:5, 21). Their descendants ruled until conquered by Rome. The Ptolemies controlled Egypt in the south and the Seleucids controlled Syria in the north—and Palestine was caught in the middle between them. Antiochus Epiphanes was the Seleucid ruler in Syria from 175 to 164 B.C. He sought to expand his power to the east and south, bringing him into conflict with the Ptolemies. They confronted each other in Palestine and caused great suffering among the Jews. Antiochus eventually won control of Jerusalem.

Why is our attention called to this man? It is for two reasons. Antiochus tried to wipe out the worship of Jehovah and to establish a Grecian worship in Judea. He built an altar to Zeus in the Temple in Jerusalem, and sacrificed a pig on it. His terrible persecutions and blasphemous actions provoked a revolt that won temporary independence for the Jews. It also brought about a reaction that

turned the people back to God in great numbers. In this way, God used Antiochus to prepare for the coming of Christ.

Antiochus is also important because he is a type. In his hatred of the true God and fury against those who worship Jehovah, Antiochus pictured the antichrist, whom Paul describes as he who “opposeth and exalteth himself against all that is called God, or that is worshipped; so that he as God sitteth in the temple of God, shewing himself that he is God” (2Th 2:4). The prophecy about Antiochus in Daniel 10-12 leads into a prophecy about the antichrist. In this prophecy, we learn of the final destruction of the antichrist and the complete triumph of the Kingdom of God.

3) *The Coming of Christ*

Daniel 9 is the keystone of the second section of Daniel. In this chapter we have a clear promise of the coming of the Messiah. God shows Daniel, through his study of Jeremiah, that the time of captivity is nearly over. This leads to a penitential prayer in which he confesses the sins of Israel (9:4-19).

Then he receives a vision. He is told of God’s decree of seventy weeks:

Seventy weeks are determined upon thy people and upon thy holy city, to finish the transgression, and to make an end of sins, and to make reconciliation for iniquity, and to bring in everlasting righteousness, and to seal up the vision and prophecy, and to anoint the most Holy.—Daniel 9:24

Commentators interpret these seventy weeks either as a literal period of time or symbolically. In either case, during the period of the vision of the seventy weeks, Jerusalem will be rebuilt, the Messiah will come and carry out His work of redemption, and the city will be destroyed. This vision points directly to the coming of Christ.

There are key Christological texts in Daniel as well. Christ is the stone cut without hands that smashes the kingdoms of this world (2:34). He is the Son of man Who receives the everlasting kingdom from the Ancient of days (7:13-14). He is the Messiah that would be cut off but not for Himself (9:26), a reference to His atoning death. Most commentators agree that the fourth person in the fiery furnace was the pre-incarnate Christ (3:25). And Daniel 12:2 is the classic Old Testament text on the resurrection (see 1Co 15):

And many of them that sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt.

4. Value

The book of Daniel supplied a need for Daniel and his people. In a very dark hour, it was a ray of light. It assured them that God was still sovereign. The world empires, which seemed so strong, were really under God's control. He was bringing to pass His own will. The Kingdom of God was still coming. The Messiah would appear.

This book is also helpful to us. Sometimes the future of the Church seems dark. All the world seems to be against her. Yet, as we read Daniel, we are reminded that God is still on the throne. He *has* sent the Messiah, as He promised. And He is still guiding His covenant people toward the final victory, when Christ shall return to judge the living and the dead. All the hosts of hell cannot prevent that victory nor prevail against God's Church.

Questions for personal reflection and group discussion

1. What was the purpose of the Exile?
2. During the "times of the Gentiles,"
 - a. Who makes the day to day decisions?
 - b. Who is ultimately in control?
3. Describe the Babylonian spirit in the world system.
4. What lesson from Daniel is primary for us today also?
5. What is the purpose of the book of Daniel?
6. What do we learn from Nebuchadnezzar's pride, its consequences, and his restoration.
7. What is the significance of the "seventy weeks"?

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Covenant People under Divine Protection

Esther

For if thou altogether holdest thy peace at this time, then shall there enlargement and deliverance arise to the Jews from another place; but thou and thy father's house shall be destroyed: and who knoweth whether thou art come to the kingdom for such a time as this?

Esther 4:14

1. Introduction

A. Inspiration

As we read the book of Esther, it is noticeably different than other books. Not once in the book is God mentioned. There is no record of any worship except one mention of prayer and fasting. Because of this, some dispute the right of the book of Esther to a place in the Old Testament.

However, just as we would not admit that every book that uses the name of God is inspired, so we cannot flatly declare that a book which does not use His name is not inspired. In Esther, we do see the providence of God⁹⁴ displayed in striking ways. The Jews have never been accused of corrupting the Word of God, and they have always accepted Esther as inspired by God. Christ accepted the Jewish Bible as the Sacred Scriptures, and Esther was in the Jewish Bible. These factors establish the book as the revelation of God. Both the content of the book and the judgment of history lead us to this conclusion.

⁹⁴ **providence of God** – God's...most holy, wise, and powerful preserving and governing all His creatures and all their actions. (*Spurgeon's Catechism*, Q. 11) See *God's Providence* by Charles Spurgeon, or course *GRA God Reigns over All*; all three available from CHAPEL LIBRARY.

In the Hebrew canon, the book of Esther is placed in the Writings. Within the Writings, Esther is included in that division known as the Megilloth, or the Five Rolls, which consists of the books that are read at the five feasts of the Jewish year. Esther is read at the feast of Purim, because the story of Esther tells how the Purim festival came to be instituted.

B. Author and Date

It is most probable that the author of Esther was one of the Jews who had not returned to Judea, but remained in Persia, where the events of Esther took place. Some ascribe the book to Ezra, and some to Mordecai. It is not necessary for us to know the author in order to accept a book as inspired, because God Himself guided the author.

The Persian ruler who took Esther as his queen is known to us as Xerxes, who ruled over the Persian empire from 485-465 B.C. This places the events of this book in the same time as those recorded in Ezra. The first return to Jerusalem had occurred under Zerubbabel, but Ezra had not yet led his group back to Judea. The book itself was written after the death of Xerxes, probably sometime during the last half of the fifth century B.C.

C. Purpose

To understand the purpose of the book of Esther, we must consider the times in which these events took place.

Cyrus had issued his edict allowing the Jews to return to their land, but only a small minority had chosen to go. Among this remnant, the flame of zeal for the theocracy still burned brightly. However, most of the Jews had settled themselves in the heathen lands. Their zeal for the Kingdom of God was only a dying ember, if it had not altogether been extinguished. They had no desire to leave their homes and businesses. Their religion occupied a secondary place in their lives. The punishment of exile had removed the sin of outward idolatry from among the Israelites; but, for this majority, the punishment had not truly turned their hearts back to Jehovah.

This people had forsaken Jehovah. They had been faithless to His covenant. This probably explains why the book of Esther makes no mention of the name of God or any public worship. But God is faithful even when His people are faithless. He Who visits the sins of the fathers upon the children to the third and fourth generation, also shows lovingkindness unto thousands of generations of those who love Him and keep His commandments (Exo 34:7; 20:6). So in the book of Esther we see how God providentially protected His covenant people from destruction, even though they had departed from Him.

The characters in the book are those who had not returned to Jerusalem. But the events that took place had great significance for those who had returned. That little band led by Zerubbabel, now residing in Judah, was still in the Persian empire. The decree of Cyrus did not free the Jews. It only permitted them to remove themselves to that part of his empire from which they had been deported. So the danger that the Jews faced affected also the remnant in Judah—from which the Messiah was to come.

Therefore, the book of Esther directly contributes to the further development of God's kingdom. The struggle between the Jews and their enemies originates in the curse in the Garden of Eden: the struggle between the seed of the woman and the seed of the serpent (Gen 3:15). Satan conspires to destroy God's people and, during the Old Testament, to prevent the Messiah from coming. In the flesh, Christ came through Israel (Rom 9:5). God's preservation of the Jewish people was necessary for Christ to come. The work of Esther influenced the whole future of the Kingdom of God!

The outline of Esther has four parts.

- | | |
|---|-------------|
| I. The deliverer of the Jews crowned | Esther 1-2 |
| II. The extermination of the Jews planned | Esther 3-4 |
| III. The enemy of the Jews killed | Esther 5-8 |
| IV. The victory of the Jews celebrated | Esther 9-10 |

2. Contents

Please read Esther 1-8.

A. *The Workings of Providence*

In much of the Old Testament, we see God working in a supernatural way. But in Esther we see how He works in and through the natural events of daily life.⁹⁵ We call this the providence of God.

In this book we may trace how many events—large and small, good and evil—work together to carry out the purposes of God. The king makes an unusual request of his queen. She refuses to do as he commands. The king's counselors advise a divorce and the choice of a new queen. The king is pleased to choose Esther. What a strange combination of circumstances brings this Jewish girl to the Persian throne!

Haman was an Agagite, a descendant of Agag, the king of the Amalekites, descendants of Amalek, grandson of Esau. The Amalekites attacked the Hebrews as

⁹⁵ See *Confidence in God in Times of Danger* by Alexander Carson, a detailed account of God's workings in providence in the events of Esther; available from CHAPEL LIBRARY.

they exited Egypt and became enemies of Israel. God instructed Saul to completely destroy the Amalekites.

Thus Haman had a deep-seated hatred of the Jews. He had great wealth and honor as a chief advisor to the king. But he is filled with wrath when just one (Mordecai) will not bow to him.

And when Haman saw that Mordecai bowed not, nor did him reverence, then was Haman full of wrath...wherefore Haman sought to destroy all the Jews.—Esther 3:5-6

This is a picture of the flesh: no matter how much we have in this world, it is never “enough.” There is no satisfying the restless cravings of our flesh. Our only satisfaction is in God alone.

Haman’s response is not to take vengeance on just Mordecai, or even a few Jews, but to utterly destroy the entire population of the Jewish people worldwide. And when the wicked Haman plots this destruction, it is again a strange set of circumstances that foils his plot: the opportunity that Mordecai gets to be of service to the king by informing him of a plot against his life, the failure to do anything to honor Mordecai at the time, a sleepless night for the king (6:1-4), a call for a reading of the history of the kingdom, the discovery of Mordecai’s past assistance in that very reading, and the honor heaped upon Mordecai at a time when it was most necessary. God arranges and links strange events to bring His purposes to pass!

Mordecai appears to be a man like Nehemiah. He was a godly man, but was prevented from returning to Judah because of his position at the palace. He believed in Jehovah, and he believed that Jehovah would save His people. The thought of God’s providence is clearly seen in his challenge to Esther:

For if thou altogether holdest thy peace at this time, then shall there enlargement and deliverance arise to the Jews from another place; but thou and thy father’s house shall be destroyed: and who knoweth whether thou art come to the kingdom for such a time as this?—Esther 4:14

Esther’s response also shows her growing understanding. She is not fatalistic, but entrusts herself into God’s hands:

Go, gather together all the Jews that are present in Shushan, and fast ye for me...and so will I go in unto the king, which is not according to the law: and if I perish, I perish.—Esther 4:16

B. The Defeat of Evil

The entire Bible shows how Satan and his evil forces will be defeated. The story of Esther is one historical example of this defeat of evil. Haman, the villain of the story, is surely an evil character. He is altogether self-centered, and he will stop at nothing to accomplish his goals. He is contrasted to Mordecai, the godly Jew, who will not give worship to any man, even when everyone else bows to Haman. Haman will not rest until he is avenged of this insult to his pride. His influence with the king makes it possible for him to further his evil purposes.

Yet Haman is defeated. By the workings of God's providence, Mordecai's past comes to light and the tables are turned. Haman is hanged on the very gallows he had prepared for Mordecai. The Jews are enabled to defend themselves and to defeat their enemies. Mordecai ascends to the place of honor that Haman had held. And God is glorified: many come to know Him.

And in every province, and in every city, whithersoever the king's commandment and his decree came, the Jews had joy and gladness, a feast and a good day. And many of the people of the land became Jews; for the fear of the Jews fell upon them.—Esther 8:17

As we live our lives in this world, we think God is reacting to circumstances just like we do. We think that when men sin, God is noticing and adjusting His plans accordingly. But God knows everything that will happen throughout time: He has ordained it to be as it will be. He has no surprises; He does not "learn" anything new. He is never frustrated by the sinful decisions of men. God does not ordain sin, but He permits it as part of the curse and uses it in accomplishing His purposes for good. He is acting before events occur, not reacting to them as they occur. He is weaving many things together for them to work out at just the right time according to His wisdom. There is a lot more happening in each of our lives than we choose for ourselves. It is not random. Nothing is meaningless. Everything is according to God's will for His ultimate glory and the good of His people (Rom 8:28).

Therefore, we can know that God is always working on behalf of His people, even when circumstances may seem their darkest. Let us turn to and trust in our great and sovereign God!

Questions for personal reflection and group discussion

1. What is the purpose of the book of Esther?
2. How do the events of Esther fit into the development of the theocracy?

3. What is “providence”?
4. a. How does providence work?
- b. What should this mean for Christians?

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Covenant People Return to Their Land

Ezra–Nehemiah

*For Ezra had prepared his heart to
seek the law of the LORD, and to do it,
and to teach in Israel statutes and judgments.*

Ezra 7:10

*And Ezra blessed the LORD, the great God. And all the
people answered, Amen, Amen, with lifting up their
hands: and they bowed their heads, and worshipped
the LORD with their faces to the ground.*

Nehemiah 8:6

1. Introduction

When the Jews arranged the books of the Old Testament, they united the two books of Ezra and Nehemiah into one. Though these books clearly have different authors, they deal with the same story, have the same purpose, and combine to present a finished narrative. We too will find it profitable to deal with them together.

A. Authors

We are confident that the books of Chronicles and Ezra were written by Ezra, the priest who was also a scribe of the Law of God. In the last few chapters of Ezra, the author speaks of himself in the first person singular.

However, Ezra did not write Nehemiah. In that book we find the author of Nehemiah speaking of himself in the first person singular. Therefore, each of these

books was written by the man whose name it bears. In each the author is also the main character.

Since Ezra and Nehemiah wrote the books that bear their names, two matters are clear. First, these books were written about the middle of the fifth century B.C. They are some of the last books to be included in the canon of the Old Testament. Second, Ezra was a priest. Nehemiah was an official in the Persian court. Neither of them was a prophet. Their works are therefore included in the historical books, and in the Writings in the Hebrew Bible.

B. Purpose

The Exile had ended the theocratic nation. But God had not cast off His people whom He loved. He gathered a remnant from among the heathen and brought them back to the land that He had given them. Through this group, He prepared the way for the next step in the development of His kingdom: the coming of Christ. Ezra and Nehemiah show us how God re-established His people in their land and guided their life by His holy Law.

Ezra and Nehemiah are key in redemptive history. The prophecies of the Messiah required the observance of the ceremonial Law (Mal 3:1). There also must be a distinction between Gentiles and Jews, because salvation would come through the line of Abraham and David. Therefore, there had to be a Jewish state if there was to be a Christ. Only after these things could Christ come. The Lord used three key people to bring this to pass:

- Zerubbabel leads in rebuilding the temple
- Ezra leads in rebuilding the people
- Nehemiah leads in rebuilding the wall.

2. Ezra

The outline of Ezra has four parts.

- | | |
|---------------------------------------|-----------|
| I. Return under Zerubbabel | Ezra 1-2 |
| II. Restoration of Temple and worship | Ezra 3-6 |
| III. Return under Ezra | Ezra 7-8 |
| IV. Reforms led by Ezra | Ezra 9-10 |

A. Background

The words of the prophets had come to pass. Israel and Judah had continued in sin, and the prophetic predictions of punishment had been fulfilled. But the words of the prophets had not ended there. Jeremiah had said,

These nations shall serve the king of Babylon seventy years. And it shall come to pass, when seventy years are accomplished, that I will punish the king of Babylon, and that nation, saith the LORD, for their iniquity.—Jeremiah 25:11-12

And long ago through Isaiah, God had spoken of Cyrus, saying,

He is my shepherd, and shall perform all my pleasure: even saying to Jerusalem, Thou shalt be built; and to the temple, Thy foundation shall be laid.—Isaiah 44:28

And this word of God was also fulfilled. Seventy years after the captivity of Judah, Babylon was conquered by Cyrus, the Medo-Persian king.

Time Line of the Remnant's Return

- 625 B.C. Assyrian empire falls to Babylon
- 609 Babylon conquers Judah
 - 606 first deportation of Jews to Babylon†
- 586 Jerusalem falls to Babylon
 - Temple destroyed, third deportation*
- 559 Cyrus II reigns over Persia, defeated the Median Empire
 - 538 defeats Babylonian Empire
 - Persia is supreme for two centuries
 - 536 Jews return under Zerubbabel†
- 522 Darius I reigns over Persia
 - 516 Temple completed*
- 486 Ahasuerus reigns over Persia
 - 484-465 Esther and Mordecai serve in his court
- 465 Artaxerxes I reigns over Persia
 - 458 Jews return under Ezra
 - 445 Jews return under Nehemiah
- 331 Alexander the Great defeats Persia

† Some date the seventy years of captivity from 606, the year of the first deportation to Babylon, to 536, the year of the first return of Jews to Jerusalem.

* Some date the seventy years of captivity from 586, the year of the final fall of Jerusalem and the destruction of the Temple, to 516, the year of completion of the second Temple.

B. Return under Zerubbabel – chapters 1 - 2

Please read Ezra 1.

Cyrus issued a decree permitting the Jews to return to the land of Judah. But the response to the decree was not overwhelming. Many of the exiled Jews were content to remain in the land of captivity. They had no wish to leave their homes and businesses, or the new land of their birth. But there was a godly minority who longed to return to Jerusalem and re-establish the worship of Jehovah according to His Law. And so, in the year 536 B.C., Zerubbabel led about fifty thousand men, women, and children back to Judah and Jerusalem.

C. Rebuilding the Temple – chapters 3 - 6

Please read Ezra 3 and 6.

Back in Judah, the returned exiles began the work of rebuilding the Temple. All did not go well. At first the half-breed Samaritans wished to join them. But when the Jews rejected the help of those who did not truly worship Jehovah, the Samaritans became their enemies. They harried the Jews in every way possible. They were so successful in their efforts that work on the Temple ceased. But the prophets of God, Haggai and Zechariah, stirred up the people. In the reign of Darius, the work began again—and in the year 516 B.C., the Temple was completed and dedicated.

And the children of Israel, the priests, and the Levites, and the rest of the children of the captivity, kept the dedication of this house of God with joy.—Ezra 6:16

For the LORD had made them joyful, and turned the heart of the king of Assyria unto them, to strengthen their hands in the work of the house of God, the God of Israel.—Ezra 6:22

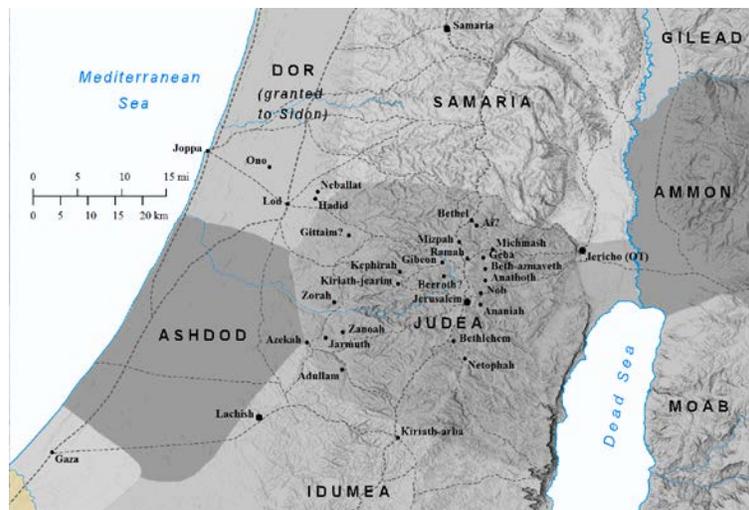
The rebuilding of the Temple and the re-establishment of the ancient sacrifices were important events in the lives of these people. But these events did not signify the rebirth of the covenant nation. The old order of things was not to be restored. There was no theocratic king ruling in Jerusalem. The Jews were still very much under the control of the heathen rulers. And when the Temple was dedicated, the glory of God did not fill the Most Holy Place as it had done in the past. God's purposes do not move backward. These people were not to restore the theocratic nation, but to prepare for the coming of the theocratic King, Jesus Christ.

D. Return of Ezra – chapters 7 - 8

For Ezra had prepared his heart to seek the law of the LORD, and to do it, and to teach in Israel statutes and judgments.—Ezra 7:10

Blessed be the LORD God of our fathers, which hath put such a thing as this in the king's heart, to beautify the house of the LORD which is in Jerusalem.—Ezra 7:27

Almost eighty years after the first group of exiles returned, Ezra led a second group back to Jerusalem. He had sought the Lord, had learned God's Law, and knew that proper worship was essential in order for the people to be blessed by God. He and his group brought an offering for the Temple in Jerusalem from the Jews who did not return and from the Medo-Persian ruler. In addition, Ezra carried a letter from King Artaxerxes ordering all the treasurers in that part of his kingdom to give to Ezra whatever he needed for the worship of God. God's blessing was resting on His covenant people.



The Remnant in Judea

E. Reforms of Ezra – chapters 9 - 10

Please read Ezra 9.

The Exile had been God's punishment upon Israel for her sin. Through exile, Israel was purified from her tendency to commit idolatry. But the people were not free from sin. In fact, the returned exiles fell into one of the grievous sins that had afflicted their forefathers: they married heathen women of the surrounding nations. Ezra was horrified when he learned of this. He fasted and prayed for the people. And then he began a reformation movement that resulted in the complete

separation of the people from their foreign wives. None of this was easy. But the covenant people of God nevertheless were called to be separate from the world.

Overall, God used Ezra to establish significant reforms that He used as a blessing to His people.

1. Purity in worship: As God made the people willing, Ezra faithfully taught the people His Law. It would be of no good to return to the land and drift into the same idolatry again. Ezra hated every sin because he knew how much God hated it: he had seen God's severe judgments upon it.

2. Jewish tradition indicates that Ezra may have contributed to the organizing of synagogues during the Babylonian captivity. While the origin of synagogues is considered to be ancient and obscure, during the Babylonian captivity these meeting places came to represent centers of Jewish worship and culture in order to help the people preserve their heritage. In the synagogues the people learned the Law. This continued into Jesus' time.

3. Jewish tradition indicates that Ezra may have contributed to establishing the "school of scribes." The people had learned Aramaic during the Exile; most could not understand Hebrew. But the people needed to know the Law, which was written in Hebrew. The scribes read the Hebrew Scriptures, and explained in Aramaic to the people. They quickly became teachers of the Law as well. This also continued into Jesus' time.

4. Ezra is also believed to have established the Sanhedrin, the "great synagogue." This was an assembly of priests for the purpose of keeping the priests and priesthood pure. It was ruled over by a high priest. This also continued into Jesus' time.

5. Finally, Ezra traditionally is considered to have been used of God to write or compile First and Second Chronicles, Ezra, and perhaps the last part of Nehemiah. These inspired accounts are invaluable to the people of God.

3. Nehemiah

The outline of Nehemiah has two parts.

I. The rebuilding of the walls Nehemiah 1-7

II. The reforms of Ezra and Nehemiah Nehemiah 8-13

A. Nehemiah Rebuilds the Wall – chapters 1 - 7

Please read Nehemiah 1, 2, and 4.

The opening scenes of the book of Nehemiah give us insight into the character of its author. Nehemiah was cup-bearer to the king, a very important position that sipped the king's drink before he did to ensure it was not poisoned. It was

highly compensated, so that he could not be tempted by bribes. Because of his important position in the court, Nehemiah had remained in Persia. Yet he had the welfare of Jerusalem and the returned exiles at heart. Then news came to him,

The remnant that are left of the captivity there in the province are in great affliction and reproach: the wall of Jerusalem also is broken down, and the gates thereof are burned with fire.—Nehemiah 1:3

When this news came, Nehemiah was extremely sad. He gave himself to fasting and prayer. And he could not hide his sadness from the king. Those close to the ancient monarchs had to be always happy, so as not to distract the king. Those violating this requirement were removed or even executed.

Wherefore the king said unto me, Why is thy countenance sad... Then I was very sore afraid... So I prayed to the God of heaven.—Nehemiah 2:2-4

Notice: Nehemiah prayed. In the midst of the conversation, he prayed a short prayer asking God's help. The Lord desires for us to have extended times of prayer (1Th 5:17), as Nehemiah does in 1:4-11 and throughout this book. And God desires us to call upon for help, even in short prayers in the midst of our needs.

When Nehemiah explained the cause of his concerns, the king sent him to Jerusalem to remedy the situation. After surveying the city, Nehemiah saw that, in order to become firmly established in the land, the first need was for security. He revealed to the elders his plan for rebuilding the walls. The people, led by the priests, willingly joined in the work.

So built we the wall; and all the wall was joined together unto the half thereof: for the people had a mind to work.—Nehemiah 4:6

They which builded on the wall, and they that bare burdens, with those that laded, every one with one of his hands wrought in the work, and with the other hand held a weapon.—Nehemiah 4:17

In what place therefore ye hear the sound of the trumpet, resort ye thither unto us: our God shall fight for us.—Nehemiah 4:20

Again the work of reconstruction aroused enmity. Tobiah and Sanballat, heathen leaders of nearby peoples, conspired to stop the work. They at first requested a meeting, but Nehemiah knew God's priorities and refused to be distracted.

Tobiah and Sanballat then threatened an armed attack, but Nehemiah provided defenses and armed the builders, and the work continued—the picture of a sword in one hand and a mason's trowel in the other portrays the defensive and offensive parts of the spiritual life. The enemies tried to trick Nehemiah, but their plans failed.

Unfortunately, the rebuilding of the walls was not the only work that needed to be done. There were sins among the people that must be dealt with. Nehemiah even had to pause in the building of the walls to deal with those who were unjustly treating the poor.

Yet in just fifty-two days, the rebuilding of the walls was completed! Jerusalem was again secure from its adversaries.

Nehemiah showed amazing self-control, purpose, and resolve. In this he is an example to all men everywhere. For a man to “take up his cross” (Mat 16:24) means not doing all the other things you could be doing when you are doing the will of God instead. God had determined to provide the people security through the wall around the city. The revival that comes next depends upon the wall being completed. To accomplish this mission given to him by God, Nehemiah had to exercise great self-control. “Take up your cross” finds its purpose in “follow Me”!

B. Reforms of Ezra and Nehemiah – chapters 8 - 13

Please read Nehemiah 8 and 9.

And [Ezra] read therein...from the morning until midday, before the men and the women, and those that could understand; and the ears of all the people were attentive unto the book of the law.—Nehemiah 8:3

And Ezra blessed the LORD, the great God. And all the people answered, Amen...and they bowed their heads, and worshipped the LORD with their faces to the ground.—Nehemiah 8:6

The work of Ezra and Nehemiah continued after the walls were rebuilt. The people needed to be reminded again of the importance of God’s Law for them. This was done at a great service, where all the people gathered with their children to hear Ezra read the Law of Moses and explain it to them. The people were tired from the building, but all stood when Ezra began to read—and he read for more than four hours. The people said “Amen,” which means “I agree with all my heart.” The revival had come!

As a result of this reading of the Law, two significant events took place. The people learned about the Feast of Tabernacles. This feast had been neglected for generations. But now it was celebrated again. They recounted all the great works of God on behalf of the nation—and the nation’s sins.

Nevertheless for thy great mercies’ sake thou didst not utterly consume them, nor forsake them; for thou art a gracious and merciful God. Now therefore, our God, the great, the mighty, and the terrible God, who keepest covenant and mercy, let not all the trouble

*seem little before thee, that hath come upon us...since
the time of the kings of Assyria unto this day.
Howbeit thou art just in all that is brought upon us; for
thou hast done right, but we have done wickedly...
And because of all this we make a sure covenant, and
write it; and our princes, Levites, and priests,
seal unto it.—Nehemiah 9:31-33, 38*

This service led to a full-scale confession of sin, after which they formally renewed their covenant with Jehovah. The people promised not to mingle with the heathen, to observe the Sabbath faithfully, and to provide offerings for Jehovah according to the Law.

What does spiritual life look like in practice? It is a people freely giving their hearts to God moment-by-moment, in heart-felt love and joy. Christianity is not bringing God into our world; it is our dying to our selfishness in order to enter His world. There is a new vision: glorifying God and serving people. In this, the motive in life is to take up your cross and follow Him.

Nehemiah returned to Persia, to the court of the king. How long he remained there is not known. But he did return to Jerusalem again, and there discovered that the people had gone back on their covenant promises. Precisely the things they had promised to do were not being done. Tobiah, the heathen leader, had been given a place of honor in the city, the Sabbath was being broken, and the offerings were not being brought to the house of God. Nehemiah had to exert his authority to put an end to these sins.

This is the reason God gave local churches to His people (Heb 10:24-25). They embody the blood-bought Bride of Christ. We all need the accountability of like-minded souls gathered around us, where we can worship God together as He has prescribed, participate in the Lord's Supper and baptism, and hear the regular faithful preaching of His infallible Word.

4. Summary: The Redemptive Theocracy

The story of Ezra and Nehemiah brings us to the conclusion of the inspired history of the ancient Jews. The history of the Bible is the record of the rebuilding of the theocracy that replaces the first one. Since sin not only destroyed that original theocracy (Gen 3), but also plunged mankind into a state of sin and misery resulting in eternal death, the second theocracy must necessarily be a *redemptive* theocracy. It must restore man to his proper relationship to God by destroying both sin and the effects of sin. This redemptive theocracy developed in a process over time.

The giving of the first promise of redemption in the Garden of Eden (Gen 3:15) lit the flame of the theocracy in a world suddenly darkened by sin. For some centuries the flame was small, carried by the line of Seth, and limited at one time to the family of Noah (Gen 6-8). But the flame received new fuel in the patriarchal period. The promise to Abraham that the theocracy would be established with him and his children (Gen 12:2-3) both protected the flame from the blasts of unbelief and limited its glow to Abraham's family.

Again there was a time when the theocratic flame burned low. The centuries of bondage in Egypt threatened to extinguish it (Exo 1). But instead, the powerful work of God—redeeming His chosen people from bondage and forming them into a nation—fanned the dying spark into a lively flame (Exo 19-20). And the continued work of God throughout the days of Moses and Joshua added fuel to that flame, so that a truly theocratic nation was firmly established in the Promised Land at the time of Joshua's death (Jos 18).

Yet it seems to be necessary, in the wise providence of God, that every forward step in the development of the theocracy must be prefaced by a time of darkness. In the days of the judges, the flame burned low indeed. The revival under Samuel (1Sa 7:4-5) was threatened by the selfish rule of Saul (1Sa 9-31). But suddenly the flame of the theocracy burned again, more brightly than ever before, in the theocratic kingdom under David and Solomon (2Sa 1 - 1Ki 11).

If only the glories of such a time could remain! But the all-pervasive influence of sin ever tends to reduce that theocratic flame. The sins of Solomon and his successors brought the theocratic nation slowly but surely down to destruction (1Ki 12 - 2Ch 35). Finally it came—the Babylonian captivity (2Ch 36), the end of the theocratic nation.

Was the flame of the theocracy extinguished? Was the work of God destroyed? No! Even in the darkness of the Exile the flame burned on—tiny but unextinguished. The nation, which had been for so many centuries the home of the theocracy, had perished. But the theocracy did not die with it.

“Except the LORD of hosts had left unto us a *very small remnant*, we should have been as Sodom, we should have been like unto Gomorrah” (Isa 1:9). But God did leave that remnant. Out of the ruins of the captive nation, He restored to Judah and Jerusalem a godly minority, who again established a Temple and again lived by His Law. The flame grew in size once more, though it flickered. Ezra, Nehemiah, and the prophets after the Exile labored with the sinful descendants of the godly remnant. And when after this time the voice of God ceased, when four hundred silent years followed each other with no prophets in the land, never a word from Jehovah—the flame seemed sure to go out. But it never did. A godly

remnant ever continued, looking forward to the day when the promises of God would be fulfilled and the Messiah of God would come.

That day dawned—the great and glorious day when God sent His own Son into the world to establish His kingdom in a new and wonderful form. That, of course, unfolds in the factual history of the New Testament. It is also the day of glory—the fruition, the apex—to which the entire Old Testament points. Praise to Jehovah, the great LORD God Almighty—Jesus Christ, Immanuel, the Messiah and Savior, God Incarnate, has come!

Questions for personal reflection and group discussion

1. What is the purpose of these books?

Ezra

2. What prophecies show that God was ordering the actions of Judah, Persia, and Babylon at this time?
3. a. What hindered the building of the Temple?
b. How did it eventually come to pass?
4. Was the return to Jerusalem the rebirth of the covenant nation?
Explain your answer.
5. Describe specific ways in which God used Ezra.

Nehemiah

6. With enemies threatening, how did the workers do their work?
7. Explain how the meaning of “‘Take up your cross’ finds its purpose in ‘follow Me.’”
8. What evidences of revival showed among the people?
9. What does spiritual life look like in practice?
10. To what does the entire Old Testament point?

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God's Call to Faithful Service

Haggai

The glory of this latter house shall be greater than of the former, saith the LORD of hosts: and in this place will I give peace, saith the LORD of hosts.

Haggai 2:9

1. Introduction

A. Author

This short book contains a summary of the prophecies uttered by Haggai. We know little about this prophet. He was probably born in Babylon and returned to Palestine with the first band of exiles. His ministry is dated very clearly. He prophesied in the second year of Darius the king (Hag 1:1; 2:1; 2:10). This is considered by conservative commentators to be 520 B.C. His words are directed primarily to the rulers of the people: Zerubbabel the governor and Joshua the high priest.

B. Purpose

The message of Haggai centers on the rebuilding of the Temple. By his rebukes for failure to finish the Temple and his promises of God's blessing that would attend the resumption of the work, Haggai inspired the exiles to labor faithfully for God. That such inspiration was necessary is clear from the history found in the books of Ezra and Nehemiah.

The outline of Haggai has two parts.

- | | |
|--|----------|
| I. Rebuke for failure to rebuild the Temple | Haggai 1 |
| II. Blessings connected with rebuilding the Temple | Haggai 2 |

C. Biblical Sequence

As we have described previously, the sequence of some of the Minor Prophets in history is different from the order of their books in our Old Testament. For the post-exilic Minor Prophets, however, the sequence is the same.

Pre-exilic Minor Prophets

Hosea

Joel

Amos

Obadiah

Jonah

Micah

Nahum

Habakkuk

Zephaniah

Post-exilic Minor Prophets

Haggai

Zechariah

Malachi

2. Contents

Haggai's book is composed of four prophecies, all delivered in the same year (520 B.C.). These cover two main subjects as in the outline.

A. Call to Build

Please read Haggai 1.

When the exiles had returned to their native land, they immediately began to rebuild the Temple. The altar was built and the foundation was laid. But the opposition of their hostile neighbors dimmed the enthusiasm of the people. They said, "The time is not come, the time that the LORD's house should be built" (Hag 1:2).

Notice something here that has application to us today. God did not exhort them. He did not send a prophet to them at first. When the people failed to finish the work of rebuilding, God simply withheld His blessing from them. He just blocked them from pursuing their other interests—houses, farms, food, savings, etc. The lesson for us is that we must stay tuned in our walk with God. He is always working to guide us in His ways, and communicating with us about our walk with Him. When our experience becomes lean and narrow, we need to turn to God with whole hearts to seek Him by faith. The longer we wait to do so, the more difficult it will be for us.

When they did not repent and turn, then God answered through Haggai, "Is it a time for you, O ye, to dwell in your ceiled [paneled] houses, and this house lie waste?" (Hag 1:4).

Now therefore thus saith the LORD of hosts; Consider your ways. Ye have sown much, and bring in little; ye eat, but ye have not enough; ye drink, but ye are not filled with drink; ye clothe you, but there is none warm; and he that earneth wages earneth wages to put it into a bag with holes.—Haggai 1:5-6

This divine call did not fall on deaf ears. God put it on the hearts of the people to obey.

And the LORD stirred up... the spirit of all the remnant of the people; and they came and did work in the house of the LORD of hosts, their God.—Haggai 1:14

Within a month after Haggai brought his message, the work on the Temple was resumed.

B. Glory of the Rebuilt Temple

Please read Haggai 2.

When the foundations of the second Temple were laid, it was so much smaller than the first that the “ancient men, that had seen the first house, when the foundation of this house was laid before their eyes, wept with a loud voice” (Ezr 3:12). This dimmed the enthusiasm for building. It seemed obvious that the second Temple would never be as glorious as the first. Therefore God asks: “Who is left among you that saw this house in her first glory? and how do ye see it now? is it not in your eyes in comparison of it as nothing?” (Hag 2:3).

What seems obvious, however, is sometimes not true.

The glory of this latter house shall be greater than of the former, saith the LORD of hosts: and in this place will I give peace, saith the LORD of hosts.—Haggai 2:9

This promise of God is a spiritual promise. The glory will not be an earthly glory; God is not speaking of great splendor and beauty. The second Temple was made glorious because the Messiah, Jesus Christ, appeared in it. In the first Temple God came in the cloud of glory that dwelt between the cherubim. But in the second Temple, God came in the person of Jesus Christ. This was the greatest glory that the Temple could possibly have.

Blessings do not come proportionate to size and expense. That is the way of men, but not of God. Often His most precious blessings come in small packages, and may seem insignificant in the eyes of the world—such as biblically loving relationships, peace, and joy (Gal 5:22-23). But while the world restlessly and selfishly pursues outward “success,” God’s people actually know real blessings on this earth, and glory in the life to come.

C. Promise of Prosperity

God spoke again through Haggai. The prophet used a question about the Levitical law of uncleanness to explain why Israel had not been blessed. Her sin in failing to rebuild the Temple had polluted all her life. But now since the Temple was being built, God promised to send them abundant harvests. Here we see a spiritual law in operation. Obedience to God's commands brings blessing; disobedience brings chastening or punishment. These were the terms of the National Covenant. In mercy and grace, God is pleased to honor its terms in this new generation, even though their fathers had broken that covenant in their idolatry and spiritual pride.

D. Line of David

The final prophecy is short. God tells Zerubbabel, the governor of the people, His plan to shake the kingdoms of the world and overthrow the might of the wicked. And He promises,

In that day, saith the LORD of hosts, will I take thee, O Zerubbabel, my servant, the son of Shealtiel, saith the LORD, and will make thee as a signet: for I have chosen thee, saith the LORD of hosts.—Haggai 2:23

The authority of a king was represented in a signet ring, which bore his official seal and was affixed to official decrees. This is another promise that the line of David (of which Zerubbabel was the representative) would continue forever. This prophecy was finally fulfilled in Christ. The theocracy that came to its highest Old Testament expression in David, the theocratic king, will come to its ultimate eternal expression in the great Son of David, Jesus Christ.

Questions for personal reflection and group discussion

1. What is the purpose of the book of Haggai?
2. Why would the glory of this Temple be great?

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God's Promise of Future Glory

Zechariah

*Not by might, nor by power, but by my
spirit, saith the LORD of hosts.*

Zechariah 4:6

1. Introduction

This book contains the prophecies of Zechariah, the son of Berechiah. Ezra calls him the “son” of Iddo, but he was probably Iddo’s grandson. Zechariah was possibly a priest. He was a contemporary of Haggai, beginning his prophetic labors just two months after that prophet. Ezra gives both prophets credit for stirring up the remnant in Jerusalem to rebuild the Temple.

The outline for Zechariah has three parts.

- | | |
|-------------------------------------|----------------|
| I. Visions of judgment and blessing | Zechariah 1-6 |
| II. The necessity of obedience | Zechariah 7-8 |
| III. The future glory of Zion | Zechariah 9-14 |

2. Contents

A. *Call to Return*

Please read Zechariah 1.

The first words of Zechariah’s prophecy may well be considered the theme of the book.

*Therefore say thou unto them, Thus saith the LORD of hosts;
Turn ye unto me, saith the LORD of hosts, and I will turn
unto you, saith the LORD of hosts. Be ye not as your
fathers, unto whom the former prophets have cried,
saying, Thus saith the LORD of hosts; Turn ye
now from your evil ways, and from your evil*

doings: but they did not hear, nor hearken unto me, saith the LORD.—Zechariah 1:3-4

B. Visions in the Night

Three months after the above prophecy was given, Zechariah had a series of visions. One vision introduced the others. He saw riders on horses. They were led by a rider on a red horse, who is identified as the angel of Jehovah, that is, the Lord Jesus Christ appearing before His incarnation. These riders report that the earth is at peace. But Jerusalem is still troubled. How long will this continue? God answers that the nations will be destroyed and “the LORD shall yet comfort Zion, and shall yet choose Jerusalem” (Zec 1:17).

Please read Zechariah 2 and 3.

God continues to beckon them to come to Him. “Come forth, and flee from the land of the north, saith the LORD (Zec 2:6). God is telling the remnant: It is comfortable in Babylon, but My glory is in Jerusalem. The right place to be is not where it is comfortable, but in the place of God’s glory.

Then Zechariah sees seven visions that portray what will happen:

1. A vision of four horns that are broken by four smiths. This pictures the future overthrow of the four world empires of which Daniel spoke.

2. A man with a measuring line measuring Jerusalem. This teaches that Jerusalem will be so enlarged that walls will not contain it.

3. Joshua the high priest clothed in filthy garments (Zec 3), which represent sin. He is standing in filthy garments in the very presence of God! This cannot be! The devil is there accusing him. Joshua is responsible to ensure spiritual purity, but is not up to the challenge in his own strength. A “brand plucked out of the fire” (3:2) is something worthless, cast off and set to be destroyed, yet nevertheless saved. So God clothes him with rich apparel. This teaches that the priesthood is to be cleansed so that it will typify the Messiah. It teaches us that all spiritual work is God’s work: we are totally dependent upon Him.

4. A golden lampstand fed by pipes from two olive trees. The lampstand is the Church, and the trees are the Spirit of God. From this comes the promise: “Not by might, nor by power, but by my spirit, saith the LORD of hosts” (Zec 4:6).

5. A flying roll, which symbolizes that God will punish sinners.

6. An ephah containing a woman named Wickedness being borne away to Shinar. This symbolizes that God will remove iniquity from His people.

7. Four chariots, which are the winds of heaven. These symbolize the judgments of God.

These visions combine to show clearly that 1) God is going to destroy the nations who oppress Israel, 2) He will purify Israel by removing her sin and punishing her sinners, and 3) He will bring about a new and glorious state for His people. To these visions is connected a prophecy: Joshua the high priest is crowned. The meaning of this action is explained as a prophecy of the Messiah:

*He shall build the temple of the LORD; and he shall bear the glory,
and shall sit and rule upon his throne; and he shall be a
priest upon his throne: and the counsel of peace
shall be between them both.—Zechariah 6:13*

C. Obedience Is Better

Please read Zechariah 7 and 8.

The visions and prophecies of Zechariah are interrupted by the record of men of Bethel who came to the priests with a question. They have faithfully held a fast annually commemorating the destruction of Jerusalem. Shall they continue? This brings a word from Jehovah. "When ye fasted and mourned in the fifth and seventh month, even those seventy years, did ye at all fast unto me, even to me?" (Zec 7:5).

The fasts of these people were not acceptable before God because they fasted only outwardly and did not humble their hearts before Him. These people were guilty of formalism. In this we see the seeds of the sins of formalism and hypocrisy that Jesus rebuked in the Pharisees (Mat 23). So now God rebukes these people by His prophet, and tells them that He wants obedience and godliness, not formal fasting.

D. Deliverance of Zion

The heathen powers had always been a source of trouble for Israel. Even now Israel was under the control of the Persian rulers. But God promises that He will overthrow the heathen. He will send His king.

*Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion; shout, O daughter of Jerusalem:
behold, thy King cometh unto thee: he is just, and having salvation;
lowly, and riding upon an ass, and upon a colt the foal of an ass.
And I will cut off the chariot from Ephraim, and the horse from
Jerusalem, and the battle bow shall be cut off: and he shall
speak peace unto the heathen: and his dominion shall be
from sea even to sea, and from the river even to
the ends of the earth.—Zechariah 9:9-10*

It is evident that this is a promise of Christ (Mat 21; Mar 11; Luk 19:30ff.; Joh 12:14ff.), and therefore that this whole promise is spiritual. Christ's kingdom is

not of this world. The enemies of His Church are spiritual powers of wickedness. These, the most dangerous of all enemies, He has overcome—and now He gives peace to Zion and rules the world spiritually. The prophets speak in Old Testament language, but they frequently give us beautiful pictures of eternal truths.

The fact that the prophets at times use Old Testament language to express truths also found in the New Testament has significance. The Kingdom of God is repeatedly spoken of as Israel, Zion, or Jerusalem. But this does not mean that we should equate the theocracy with the nation of Israel. For many centuries, from the Exodus to the Exile, the nation of Israel was the earthly expression of the Kingdom of God. But it was not always so. The theocracy existed before Israel was born, and the theocracy continued after the covenant nation was destroyed. And in New Testament times it has come to expression as the Church, the Bride of Christ. The Jews of Jesus' time failed to realize that the prophets, while speaking in Old Testament language, could refer to a higher form of God's kingdom. They expected the Messiah to come and re-establish the nation of Israel as the ruler of the world. When Jesus spoke of a spiritual kingdom, they rejected and crucified Him. It was, however, of Christ and His spiritual kingdom that the prophets spoke.

In contrast to this blessing that will come upon Zion is the story of the shepherds. God, the good Shepherd, relates what He has done for Israel. He has destroyed her enemies, even three world powers that ruled over her. But Israel repaid Him with ingratitude. The final blow came when He asked the people to show whether they appreciated His work by paying Him. "So they weighed for my price thirty pieces of silver" (Zec 11:12). This was the price of a slave—a sign of contempt. Therefore God rejected them and gave them a false shepherd who would not take care of them. Matthew tells us that this prophecy was fulfilled when Judas was paid thirty pieces of silver for betraying Christ (Mat 26:15; 27:3). So we see that future blessings on Zion are not thereby blessings on the nation Israel. Israel has been rejected for her continual ingratitude, which came to a climax when she rejected Christ. She has been given over to false shepherds who led her away from the truth of God. The pictures of God's blessing upon Zion are fulfilled in the Church of Jesus Christ.

E. God's Victories for His People

The entire book of Zechariah is difficult to interpret. Some reliable commentators have confessed their inability to explain the book. This is due to the symbolism and to the rapidity with which the symbols shift. The last prophecy, which is entitled "The burden of the word of the Lord for Israel," is very difficult. Perhaps it is best to consider it as three separate visions with a common theme. These visions deal with happenings at the end of time. Because of the way in which the

prophets group together everything after Christ, they may have some partial fulfillment in the Church. But they are also intended to picture the final judgment. In Zechariah 12, we see Jerusalem besieged by her enemies but saved by God. In Zechariah 13, we see that Israel is purified and refined by suffering, and a remnant is saved. In Zechariah 14, there is a picture of the nations fighting against and taking the city, and then going up to Jerusalem to keep the Feast of Tabernacles.

All these visions have the same basic thought. The people of God will always have enemies. God uses these enemies to purify His Church. But the enemies can never be finally victorious. God Himself will fight for His people, and they shall be saved, and they shall have spiritual victory in Him.

3. Purpose

Zechariah, like Haggai, sought to encourage the people in their tasks. He shows them the punishments coming to sinners and calls upon them to repent of their sins. But especially he holds before their eyes the glories of the messianic future, so that they may see what God has in store for His people. So the book served to encourage the people of Zechariah's time, and shows us how God's blessing is given to His people in all ages.

Questions for personal reflection and group discussion

1. What is the theme of Zechariah?
2. What is the overall message of Zechariah's seven visions?
3. To what is the Kingdom of God equated,
 - a. In the Old Testament?
 - b. In the New Testament?
4. What is the purpose of the book of Zechariah?

God's Demand for Full Repentance

Malachi

But unto you that fear my name shall the Sun of righteousness arise with healing in his wings; and ye shall go forth, and grow up as calves of the stall.

Malachi 4:2

1. Introduction

A. Author

This book declares that it is “the burden of the word of the LORD to Israel by Malachi” (Mal 1:1). Concerning this statement, there have been two schools of thought. Since Malachi means “my messenger,” some have thought that this was simply a title or a name taken by the writer when he wrote this book. Others have insisted that “Malachi” is the prophet’s proper name. Since none of the other Major or Minor Prophets are anonymous, it seems likely that Malachi is the name of the prophet.

B. Date

Malachi was the last of the Old Testament prophets. He does not date his prophecies, but the similarity between the conditions apparent in Malachi and those set forth in Nehemiah make it clear that Malachi prophesied in the days of Nehemiah. Many scholars think that this prophecy was given during the interval when Nehemiah was absent from Jerusalem (Neh 13:6).

The outline of Malachi has two parts.

- I. The sin of Israel Malachi 1-2
- II. The call to repentance Malachi 3-4

C. Theme: Drifting

Please read Malachi 1-2.

For the people in Jerusalem at the time of Malachi, the remnant has returned to the land, the Temple has been rebuilt, and there has been a revival of true worship and obedience to the Law of God. It has been about 100 years since the rebuilding of the Temple, and 10 to 15 years since the revival recorded in Nehemiah 8. With all they had learned about their sins and responsibilities as a result of the deportation and captivity, and all they had learned about God and His righteous Law, you would think the tone for true godliness was set for many years to come.

But the people began to drift away. They were still subject to the Persian kings, with no prospect of their own king to sit on David's throne. They thought that they were not experiencing the blessing that God had promised and that they deserved. They grew more and more impatient with God. They began to doubt His Word and His ability to keep His promises. They began to think that God owed them blessings because of their outward obedience, and that religion was a way to manipulate God to get what they wanted and deserved. This was spiritual pride yet again (*see* Isaiah).

But how is it possible to come so far away from God in such a relatively short time? At the revival, the people knew that God had been blessing them—and they began to relax. They thought that with God's blessing, their spiritual life would be maintained automatically by God, and He would bless them more and more.

This is the problem of "drifting." Drifting occurs gradually over some years. You begin with a small compromise, and you continue to add other small compromises, until you come to a place where you are far away from where you started.

Why do people drift? People drift through bad habits in their thinking. You get accustomed to these compromises until you no longer notice them. At first, your conscience may signal that your compromise is different and wrong. When you press on anyway, ignoring your conscience, it becomes seared (1Ti 4:2) and quiet. The compromise becomes habitual; you begin to do it without thinking. Then comes a new way to compromise a bit more, and the drifting continues.

The world, the flesh, and the devil all operate through compromise. For the world, it is peer pressure to fit in and join the crowd, to be "normal." For the flesh, it is desire to be accepted by men, and it is expediency of convenience. For the devil, he knows that compromise is often more effective in causing a fall to temptation than head-on confrontation—though he uses that also whenever it has good probability of success.

Drifting is not the response God wants us to have. The life of faith is sustained by *overcoming* (Rom 12:21). Each true believer must continually overcome doubt, compromise, and temptation in their daily experience.

In this case, God was still doing some chastening as the people sinned day-to-day. They began to grow cold in their love to God, and replace it with selfish ambition for success, comfort, and pleasure. They let their conduct slide. Those trying to follow the Law stood firm at first, but their circumstances were still hard. They presented a pure animal as their offering, for example, but then sacrificed a lame one (1:14).

There are two ways to leave the faith one professes to believe: through sudden sin, like David, or through slowly drifting. Drifting is far more dangerous, because it is almost imperceptible, in very small steps. You come to a place of great danger, but don't realize the harm you are in.

Why is it so easily unnoticed? Because it happens by neglect, by not paying attention. You continue in the vocabulary of your religion, but the reality is no longer there. Our conscience can become so adaptable, that we will not be convicted by small changes.

That is why we cannot look to any man or institution of men to define standards today. The whole world system is spiraling downward all the time. Instead, to avoid drifting, we must always look only to the Word of God as the standard for our conduct and beliefs. God does not change (Mal 3:6). He has given us His Word, which also does not change. One small compromise may not be major sin, but it is still sin. The devil will claim that it is so small that it is silly even to take notice of it. And then he will bring another small compromise, and the process of drifting begins. When we compromise, we are not defeated: we must only confess it as sin, repent, and return to God's ways. Compromise always must be avoided, because it always leads to more compromise. In the end, you can have the vocabulary of spirituality, but without the reality.

Therefore, God sent the people the last of His Old Testament prophets: Malachi. With precise logic, he exposes the worthless religion and arrogance of the people. The blame for their lack of blessing was their own spiritual deadness, not God's unfaithfulness or injustice. In this, Malachi exposes the human condition that so desperately needs the gospel.

2. Contents

A. Sins of Israel

Malachi begins his message by showing that God loves Israel. "Was not Esau Jacob's brother? saith the LORD: yet I loved Jacob, and I hated Esau" (Mal 1:2-3).

God's love for Jacob is shown by the fact that Judah has been restored from her captivity, but Edom has been utterly destroyed.

Then Malachi turns to the sins of the people. The prophet warns the priests and the people of their specific sins. He does this in a unique style. He makes a point, then presents an objection, and then answers the objection. This procedure is used seven times. Here is an example:

*Will a man rob God? Yet ye have robbed me. But ye say,
Wherein have we robbed thee? In tithes and offerings.
Ye are cursed with a curse: for ye have robbed me,
even this whole nation.—Malachi 3:8-9*

Malachi particularly attacks the priests, because they lead the people astray. The priests bring for sacrifices animals that are not fit. Their worship is formal. God even condemns them for carrying on the sacrifices. And their sin is the greater because they are not faithful to their office and have broken the covenant God made with Levi.

*For the priest's lips should keep knowledge, and they should
seek the law at his mouth: for he is the messenger of
the LORD of hosts. But ye are departed out of the
way...saith the LORD of hosts.—Malachi 2:7-8*

The people likewise have sinned against God. One of their chief sins was divorce. The people put away their wives in order to marry foreign women. Because of this, God will not receive their offerings nor hear their prayers. "Therefore take heed to your spirit, and let none deal treacherously against the wife of his youth" (Mal 2:15).

B. Call to Repentance

Please read Malachi 3-4.

This state of the people's drift into sin could not last. God declared that it would not; He Himself would change it.

*Behold, I will send my messenger, and he shall prepare the way before
me: and the Lord, whom ye seek, shall suddenly come to his temple,
even the messenger of the covenant, whom ye delight in...But who
shall stand when he appeareth? for he is like a refiner's fire...
he shall sit as a refiner and purifier of silver: and he shall
purify the sons of Levi, and purge them as gold and
silver, that they may offer unto the LORD an
offering in righteousness.—Malachi 3:1-3*

This was fulfilled when God appeared in the form of Jesus Christ and took away the sins of His people, and gave to them His righteousness.⁹⁶

The call to repentance includes a call to deal faithfully with God. They have robbed God by failing to bring their tithes to Him. He pleads with them to repent: to turn unto Him and bring in their tithes. Then He will pour out such a blessing, “that there shall not be room enough to receive it” (Mal 3:10).

These words of God through Malachi did not affect everyone. But there were some whose hearts were touched.

Then they that feared the LORD spake often one to another: and the LORD hearkened, and heard it, and a book of remembrance was written before him for them that feared the LORD, and that thought upon his name.—Malachi 3:16

These are the true people of God. In the Day of Judgment, He promises to bless them. “But unto you that fear my name shall the Sun of righteousness arise with healing in his wings” (Mal 4:2).

Remember ye the law of Moses my servant...Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the LORD: And he shall turn the heart of the fathers to the children, and the heart of the children to their fathers, lest I come and smite the earth with a curse.—Malachi 4:4-6

Those closing words of the Old Testament look both backward and forward. They point back to the Law of Moses, God’s Word, by which His people must guide their lives. These words also point forward to the coming of Christ, Who will restore the covenant relations between fathers and sons. This last promise of the Old Testament is the first promise of the New Testament (Luk 1:17). The last Old Testament prophet predicted that Messiah would come, and John the Baptist, the next prophet, announced His presence! Since they prepare the way for Christ, they are like a bridge between the two Testaments. They direct our eyes to the coming of the Christ of God.

3. Purpose

Malachi obviously preached to a sinful people. By unveiling their sins, by calling them to repentance, by prophesying of the blessings found in Christ, he

⁹⁶ See *The Exchange between the Sinful and the Sinless* by Horatius Bonar (1808-1889), and *Jesus, Substitute for His People* by C. H. Spurgeon (1834-1892); both available from CHAPEL LIBRARY.

sought to turn them again to God. In a real sense he was seeking to prepare the way for the coming of Christ by preparing the hearts of men to receive Him.

Malachi's message is as relevant today as it was then. Today, many denominations and congregations suffer the same kind of spiritual death: an outward form of religion that feeds spiritual pride, and the presumptuous arrogance that all is OK when in fact we are far from God and His ways. Many have drifted to this place of danger. The preachers of today, who fulfill the role of prophet in proclaiming the Word of God to His people, must expose the same error, proclaim the same warning, and prescribe the same remedy.

4. Conclusion

Malachi is the last of the prophets. With Malachi we come to the end of our study of the Old Testament.

A. *The Ways of God*

In studying the Old Testament, one of the great impressions upon our minds is the ways of God. He uses its people, its events, and its places to teach us about Himself, about mankind and our need of a savior, about His unfolding plan of redemption, and about His ways of dealing with men. How does God deal with men?⁹⁷

1. *God uses people.* He uses *their* choices to accomplish *His* purposes and to teach us about His ways. He used Moses' mother to demonstrate His love, Pharaoh to demonstrate His power, Sarah to demonstrate His sovereignty, Gideon to demonstrate His courage, Job to demonstrate His patience. He always uses people—people who are under pressure. He could have built a boat without Noah. He could have given the giant a heart attack without David. He could have cleared Canaan without the Israelite army. But His purpose is to change lives, so He works through people.

2. *God works through what exists.* He used reeds for a basket, a river for a bath, Absalom's hair in a tree, and a rock in a slingshot (and water at a wedding, and five loaves and three fish). God can create anything at any time, but He chooses rather to use what exists in people's lives. Each of our personalities, backgrounds, circumstances can be used. He made us different from one another, in order to use each one of us differently.

3. *God creates impossible odds.* Consider a baby afloat on the river Nile, Elijah on Mount Carmel pouring water over the sacrifices, Hezekiah besieged by 185,000 fearsome warriors, Daniel in a den of lions, Sarah in old age. When the odds seem

⁹⁷ The list of ten insights in God's ways of dealing with men is abstracted from message 715-A by Russell Kelfer of Discipleship Tape Ministries; San Antonio, Texas; www.dtm.org.

overwhelming, then the Deliverer comes. In this way, His name receives all the glory.

4. *God uses simplicity.* Only God would harden Pharaoh's heart in order to bring plagues. Only God would build a huge boat on dry land. Only God would march around a city with rams' horns. And only God would have used a cross to save the world. God's solution to problems is found in simplicity. He has declared this to us in His Word: repent, trust, and obey.

5. *He always uses and astonishes His enemies.* The very things they plan to destroy us, God uses to deliver us: conflict on Mount Carmel, a son sold by his brothers, Samson in Dagon's temple (and later, an angry mob crying "Crucify Him!"). "Ye thought evil against me; but God meant it unto good, to bring to pass, as it is this day, to save much people alive" (Gen 50:20). He did it with Job and Joseph, Paul and Jesus. The things the devil designs for destruction, God uses to make us useful for His purposes.

6. *God's timing is always perfect.* The Midianites came right on time for Joseph, the rains for Noah, the king's dream for Mordecai, the ram at Abraham's sacrifice of Isaac. When the time is right, God acts—and not a moment sooner or later.

7. *God always accomplishes His purpose.* He turns a cross to a crown, a threat to a triumph, and a prison to an epistle. God has never failed once to do what He planned. "There failed not ought of any good thing which the Lord had spoken...all came to pass" (Jos 21:45). That is our God. Nothing seemed right to the Israelites when without water, to David when pursued by Saul, or to the spies at Kadesh (or the disciples as Jesus' enemies led Him away). But by faith we know that God will do what He said He will do.

8. *God always brings glory to His name.* This is why God created us. "I have created [them] for my glory" (Isa 43:7). We should know that we are most useful when God is most glorified.

9. *God uses the process as well as the plan.* God could have short-circuited the forty years in the desert for Moses or his forty years in the palace, the Hebrews' forty years in the wilderness or seventy years in exile, or the Ark's time with the Philistines. The process to God is as important as the program.

10. *God takes full responsibility for the outcome.* His sovereignty is the key. "The battle is not yours, but God's" (2Ch 20:15). Our part as men of His creation is to praise and follow Him.

For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, saith the LORD. For as the heavens are higher than the

earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts.—Isaiah 55:8-9

B. The Old and the New

The Old Testament ends with a comma, not a period. There is more to be added. The Old Testament requires the New Testament to complete it. What is the connection between the end of the Old Testament and the beginning of the New?

The end of the Old Testament shows why Christ had to come. In the Old Testament, we have seen the Kingdom of God develop. It has developed within the borders of Israel, but we have seen how the children of Israel failed to keep God's covenant. Their sin was so great and so persistent that God finally destroyed the nation in order to preserve His justice and holiness. The future hope of the Kingdom of God no longer rests in Israel. The Kingdom must take a new and better form, and Christ is the answer. In Him, the Kingdom of God comes to its perfect expression.

The end of the Old Testament helps us to understand the circumstances at the beginning of the New Testament. Throughout the Old Testament, we have seen how susceptible Israel was to the sin of idolatry. It was that sin that led to her captivity. The Exile proved to be a furnace of affliction which purged that particular sin from Israel. After the Exile, we find no more traces of idolatry. However, the Exile did not turn Israel's heart back to Jehovah; it simply turned her sin inward. In the Exile, the Jewish tendency to pride and to limit salvation to the Jews became stronger.

With this growing nationalism there sprang up a spirit of formalism. Their claim to God rested on their descent from Abraham, not on their faith. Worship lost its vigor. It was outward, not from the heart. Hypocrisy began to flourish. Religion was often divorced from ethics. The Jews combined a formal worship of Jehovah with lives that were utterly void of godliness. This is the picture of the Jewish character that we find in Malachi and in Nehemiah. And this character persisted during the four hundred silent years. When Christ arrived, it had developed into Pharisaism. The Pharisees were Christ's worst enemies. They were responsible, at least in part, for His execution.

Yet even in this we see the hand of God, for the death of Christ at the hands of wicked men was the means whereby the Kingdom of God was eternally established. Through His death and resurrection, Christ now reigns in heaven from whence He shall come to initiate the perfect, eternal Kingdom of God in that new heaven and new earth, where only righteousness dwells.

What an amazing unfolding of God's covenant of redemption. Let us fall at the feet of our great God, and give all glory, honor, and praise to Him. ❧

Questions for personal reflection and group discussion

1. What is “drifting”?
2. How do each of these use compromise:
 - a. The world?
 - b. The flesh?
 - c. The devil?
3. What is the key to avoiding drifting?
4. How did the priests sin?
5. What is the purpose of Malachi?
6. How does the end of the Old Testament prepare for the beginning of the New Testament?

A complete series of study guides is available for the Old Testament Survey, suitable for group, individual, or correspondence study. See ChapelLibrary.org or contact Mount Zion Bible Institute at the same address for more information.

Prophecies of the Messiah and Fulfillments

*From the tract "Prophecies and Fulfillments Concerning the Messiah"
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	<u>Prophecy</u>	<u>Fulfillment</u>
To be born in Bethlehem	Mic 5:2	Mat 2:1-6
To be born of a virgin	Isa 7:14	Mat 1:18-25
To be a prophet like Moses	Deu 18:15, 18-19	Joh 7:14-17, 40-46
To enter Jerusalem in triumph	Zec 9:9	Mat 21:1-9
To be betrayed by one of His followers	Psa 41:9	Mat 26:14-16, 47-50
To be tried and condemned	Isa 53:8	Mat 27:1-2
To be silent before His accusers	Isa 53:7	Mat 27:12-14
To be smitten by His enemies	Mic 5:1; Isa 50:6	Mat 26:67
To be mocked and taunted	Psa 22:7-8	Mat 27:39-43
To die by crucifixion	Psa 22:14, 16-17	Mat 27:31
To suffer with transgressors and pray for His enemies	Isa 53:12	Mat 27:38
To be given vinegar and gall	Psa 69:21	Mat 27:34
They were to cast lots for Messiah's garments	Psa 22:18	Mat 27:35
His bones were not to be broken	Num 9:12; Exo 12:46	Joh 19:31-36
To die as a sacrifice for sin	Isa 53:5-6, 8, 10-12	Joh 1:29
To be raised from the dead	Psa 16:10	1Co 15:4-8
To be now at God's right hand	Psa 110:1	Mar 16:19
To sit on the throne of David	Isa 9:6-7	Luk 1:32-33
To reign over all the earth	Psa 72:8, 11	Heb 1:8
To come in the clouds of heaven	Dan 7:13-14	Mat 24:30

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