



# **1999 Preachers' Study Notes**

## ***A Survey of the Old Testament***

***From the Babylonian Exile to the Incarnation***

**held at the Church of Christ on Green Oaks Boulevard  
in Arlington, Texas**

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The views expressed in the Preachers' Study Notes are the views of the particular and individual authors, and are not necessarily the views of the editors of the Notes, the moderators, the host congregation, other participants and authors, or the **Christian's Expositor**. Each article has the address of the author appended should you desire to respond to the author or seek additional information. The editor of this volume and of the **Christian's Expositor** encourage readers to test all things by the Word of God (1 Thess. 5:21; 2 Tim. 2:15; Acts 17:11). May God bless you in your pursuit of truth.

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# **A Survey of the Old Testament (2)**

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## Foreword

The 1999 Preachers' Study was organized and directed by the Church of Christ on Green Oaks in Arlington, TX, and had as its theme "A Survey of the Old Testament." This study was a continuation of one conducted at the same location in 1997, which focused on the Old Testament books of law and history, concluding with the accounts of Judean captivity. The 1999 study focused on the remaining books of history, the books of poetry, the books of prophecy, and the 400-year period following the close of the Old Testament. Each presentation was instructional and inspiring as Israel's historical and prophetic record was laid open for the audience and put in the context of God's great plan of redemption.

In this book we have preserved the manuscripts of all the presentations in twenty-eight articles. While most of this material was presented orally, for time's sake, some had to be omitted and reserved for the printed page. For those who were there, this book serves as a reminder of the great truths that were presented. For others, it will be a wonderful aid in achieving a better understanding of the context and content of the Old Testament.

Our prayer is that these books—the Old Testament surveys published in 1997 and 1999—will serve as valuable sources of instruction for our readers. Those who take the time to read each article with an open Bible will be rewarded with a better understanding of Old Testament history, prophecy, and poetry and a deeper appreciation for God's scheme of redemption. We further pray that our readers will continue to use these volumes as reference tools for future Old Testament studies.

This is the twelfth consecutive year the **Christian's Expositor** has published the manuscripts from the annual Preachers' Study. It is a project requiring considerable effort and expense, but one that we believe is of great value to the church. We would like to publicly acknowledge Dr. Joe L. Norton for his tireless work in organizing the topics and Martha J. Morris for contributing many hours of editing expertise. Special consideration goes to L. Melvin Crouch, whose fiscal generosity and love for the truth has made this volume a viable project.

Jim Crouch, editor

# Amos

by James D. Orten

The book of Amos is highly relevant to Christians. The prophet's call is certain and his message is clear. At the time, it was directed primarily to Israel and secondarily to the nations around her. But the great principles of how God deals with humans are apparent and applicable to persons of all ages. Perhaps equally important for us, the society in which Amos preached was very much like our own. The country was prosperous, but the wealth was concentrated in the hands of a few so that the rich got richer and the poor got the shaft. The people were highly religious but with a religion that accommodated every sort of lust. Violence and immorality were rampant. Does that sound like America as it heads into the 21<sup>st</sup> century?

## Who was Amos?

Amos is not known outside the book that bears his name. His name, which means something like "burden bearer" is not found in the Bible except here. A longer version of the name is Amaziah, the name of the false priest who opposed Amos' preaching (7:10-13) and apparently got him run out of the country.

The prophet tells us (1:1) that when God called him he "was among the herdsmen of Tekoa." Again, in 7:14, he says, "I was no prophet, neither was I a prophet's son; but I was a herdsman, and a gatherer of sycamore fruit." These brief statements have spawned a wealth of imagination about Amos, most of it suggesting he was a person of little means and no social status. He has been called "the cowboy prophet," the "Salvation Army prophet," and the "backwoods prophet," just to name a few (Smith, p. 27). Tekoa, Amos' home, is considered by some as little more than a shepherd's camp. Such colorful descriptions make for dramatic preaching, but they are probably not justified.

Tekoa, approximately twelve miles due south of Jerusalem and in Judah, not in Israel, was probably not the rude country village that some people make it out to be. It is mentioned a number of times in the Scriptures and several notations are decidedly favorable. For example, it was the home of the "wise woman" whom Joab employed to help bring about a reconciliation between David and Absalom (2 Sam. 14:2), as well as that of Ira, the son of Ikkesh, one of David's thirty "mighty men" (2 Sam. 23:26). Tekoa was one of the cities that Rehoboam, son of Solomon, made into fortresses when Jeroboam and the ten northern tribes revolted (2 Chron. 11:6). But perhaps the best sign that it was a noteworthy place is that Jeremiah uses it as a symbol to Judah in a warn-

ing about their future destruction. "Blow the trumpet in Tekoa, and set up a sign of fire in Beth-haccerem" (Jer. 6:1).

The assumption that Amos himself was a country bumpkin also rests on a thin foundation. Because the word for "herdsmen" in 1:1 suggests a breeder of sheep, Amos probably cared for his own flocks rather than watched the flocks of others. The words translated "herdsmen" in 1:1 and 7:14 are different, one referring to sheep and the other to cattle, which suggests that Amos raised both sheep and cattle. Cattle and sheep were symbols of wealth in ancient Israel, as they still are in most underdeveloped countries. Amos was also a producer or dresser of Sycamore figs. He was certainly an energetic fellow and probably a man of some substance.

### **The Date of Amos' Prophecy**

Amos tells us that his call to preach to Israel came during the reigns of Kings Uzziah of Judah and Jeroboam of Israel. Obviously, this is Jeroboam II since the original Jeroboam, who revolted from Solomon's son Rehoboam and with the ten northern tribes created the Kingdom of Israel, reigned over 200 years earlier. The beginning date of Jeroboam II's reign is debated but only within rather narrow limits. The range seems to be between 804 B.C. (Ellicott, p. 449) and 760 B.C. (Smith, p. 126). The prophet's work is located within an even narrower range which is approximately 780-750 B.C. Amos attempts to pinpoint the date for us by saying it was "two years before the earth quake." The people remembered this great event for many years because Zechariah (14:5) mentioned it 350 years later, noting that it was in the days of Uzziah, King of Judah. This does not help us, however, because there is no independent confirmation of the date of the earthquake. Josephus relates a tradition that the earthquake occurred when Uzziah went into the temple to offer incense in violation of the law of God (2 Chron. 26), but this must be considered a legend rather than fact. If we conclude that Amos' prophecy took place between 770-760 B.C. we should be close to the true date, and we will suffer no lack in what we need to know to understand this prophet.

Unlike Isaiah's ministry which lasted many years, most students think Amos' tenure in Israel was rather short, probably a few years at most. Morgenstern (as quoted in Kelly, p. 19) asserts that Amos gave one one-half hour sermon at a New Year's celebration at Bethel just after dawn in the year 751 B.C., a conclusion that is rich in speculation and short on evidence. He and others who argue for a very short ministry assume that when Amaziah, the priest of Bethel, ordered Amos to leave the country, he did so. Amaziah said, "Go, you seer! Flee to the land of Judah. There eat bread, and there prophesy. But never again prophesy at Bethel" (7:12).

But Amos' answer does not suggest he is ready to pack his bag. "The Lord took me as I followed the flock, and the Lord said to me, Go, prophesy to My people Israel." The phrase, "the Lord took me," is an expression of how strongly he felt God's power. It pictures someone being picked up and moved from one place to another. In Chapter 3:8 he said "The Lord God has spoken! Who can but prophesy?" Amos went to Israel because he was certain God sent him there, and I am sure he did not leave until he felt equally certain God was finished with him.

The eighth century B.C. is sometimes referred to as the Golden Age of Prophecy, because five great prophets walked across the stage of this historical period. Jonah, from Gath-Hepher near Nazareth, preached for approximately 40 years and conducted his successful campaign in Nineveh, capitol of the Assyrian Empire, during the first half of the century. Amos came on the scene before Jonah disappeared and Hosea came a little later than Amos but overlapped with him in the early years of Hosea's ministry. Isaiah's long career began in Judah while Hosea was still preaching in Israel and continued until after Israel was carried away captive to Assyria. Micah, the Moreshethite, preached for about thirty years in Judah, all of it as a contemporary of Isaiah. The preaching of these men covered almost all of the eighth century B.C. As God's patience with the people's sins filled up, He tried more urgently to warn them. Years later Jeremiah told the people, "The Lord has sent to you all his servants the prophets, rising early and sending them, but you have not listened or inclined your ear to hear" (25:4).

### The Society at the Time

The nations of Israel and Judah seemed to be prosperous at the time Amos wrote. Jeroboam had recently regained control of the rich lands of Gilead from Syria (2 Kgs. 14:25), and Uzziah had reclaimed the port of Elath from Edom and the industrial complex at Ezion-geber (2 Kgs. 14:22), both of which produced rich trade. But these victories were temporary and Amos recognized a mirage when he saw one. He tells them they are rejoicing over "LoDebar" which means "nothing" (6:13). Wealth was concentrated in the hands of the elite and the poor were oppressed. The rich had summer and winter houses (3:15) decorated with ivory, but the poor were sold into slavery for the price of a pair of shoes (8:6). Robbery by violence was common and the spoils from it were used to build their fine houses (3:10).

Justice was perverted—Amos said, "You turn justice into wormwood, and lay the righteous to rest in the earth," suggesting that it was a bitter experience for a poor person even to try to get justice in the courts. The privileged class hated a man who walked uprightly, and one who rebuked perverted justice was

abhorred (5:10). Even good people had begun to say, "it is an evil time; it is best to say nothing and look the other way" (5:13). "You afflict the just and take bribes; you divert the poor from justice at the gate" (5:12).

The luxurious and immoral lifestyle that often accompanies wealth was fully developed in Israel. "You drink wine from bowls" (6:6), rather than cups, suggests they consumed large quantities of it. Amos said, "You lie on beds of ivory" and "Eat...calves from the midst of the stall" (6:4). Their music had deteriorated in a manner reminiscent of ours. Some scholars say that the complaint "Who chant to the sound of stringed instruments, and invent to yourselves instruments of music like David," means they made vulgar parodies of David's psalms. Women were not models of purity and motherhood as women then and now are taught to be. The prophet contemptuously called them cows. "Hear this word, you cows of Bashan, who are on the mountain of Samaria, who oppress the poor, who crush the needy, who say to your husbands, 'Bring wine, let us drink!'" (4:1). Bashan was that rich territory that the children of Israel took from King Og under Moses before entering Canaan proper with Joshua (see Num. 32). Because it was good for cattle, the tribes of Reuben, Gad, and Manasseh got permission from Moses to settle there. On the east of the Jordan, it stretched from just under Mt. Hermon south to the Jabbok River. Amos says the women of Israel were like fat cows that wanted nothing but to satisfy their appetites.

From this description, you might think the Israelites were scandalously irreligious, but they were not. They were scandalously impious, but quite religious. They loved their religion: it deified anything they wished to do. Hear Amos' ironic invitation, "come to Bethel and transgress, at Gilgal multiply transgressions; bring your sacrifices every morning, your tithes every three days. Offer a sacrifice of thanksgiving with leaven, proclaim and announce the freewill offerings; for this you love, you children of Israel, says the Lord God" (4:4-5). These people loved their church; it allowed them to do everything they wanted to do.

Bethel in the south and Dan in the north were the places where Jeroboam I set up his calf gods soon after his revolt from Rehoboam (1 Kgs. 12:26-33). He was afraid that the people who returned to the temple in Jerusalem to worship would eventually return their allegiance to the Davidic kings. According to some, the shrine at Bethel, which was the Kings' special place of worship, had come to rival Solomon's temple in splendor.

These people epitomized the evils of idolatry. When men create an idol and a religion around it, they do so because they do not know Jehovah, thus

they can only put into it their own wishes, imaginations, and lusts. David said, "They that make them are like unto them" (115:8). It is not an accident, for example, that the lustful Greeks invented Aphrodite and then decided she wanted to be worshiped with sexual orgies. Then they received back their lusts deified into the wishes of a god. Thus, their religion strengthened and exaggerated their lusts, rather than allow God's divine attributes to lift them up. Humanism, which claims every man is god, does the same for us.

In this type of arrogant, prosperous, self-righteous, violent, corrupt society, the reception that Amos' preaching got from the establishment, described in Chapter 7, is not a surprise, is it?

### Outline of the Contents

- I. 1-2:5, Judgment on the nations around Israel, including Judah
- II. 2:6-6, Judgment on the nation of Israel
- III. 7:1-7:8, Three short visions probably reflecting Amos' call
- IV. 7:9-7:17, Amaziah's attempt to expel Amos' from Israel
- V. 8-9:10, Additional visions and messages
- VI. 9:11-9:15, A message of hope

The prophet's introduction is short and to the point, just two verses. In the first verse he tells us who he is, Amos the herdsman from Tekoa, and what his message is about, which is visions of God. Amos saw his message, he did not simply hear a voice or dream a dream. He tells us to whom his message is directed, which primarily is Israel, although there are brief warnings to all the nations that join Israel. Then he dates his prophecy.

Verse 2 probably is a partial description of his vision. The Lord roars, like a prolonged peal of thunder or a pouncing lion. This arresting sound comes from Mt. Zion, the place the Lord chose to locate His name, the center of worship He set up—not Bethel, Dan or any shrine of idolatry. When the Lord roars from Zion, Amos sees the top of Carmel wither approximately eighty miles away. When God is ready to judge, no nation will ignore Him.

The prophet proceeds to give short warnings of judgment to every nation that touches Israel, including Judah. Three of these nations, Syria, Phoenicia, and Philistia had no historical connection with Jehovah except what they had seen or heard of His dealings with Israel or Judah. If you notice the principles on which these peoples are judged, they are what Ellicott (p. 451) calls "universal conscience" but better what Paul calls natural law (Rom. 2:12-16). Edom, Ammon, and Moab were relatives of Israel but not people of the covenant. They too seemed to have been judged on the basis of natural law. But Judah was held accountable because she "despised the Law of the Lord."

Amos sees every nation as under God's judgment; it is a matter only of whether they are accountable to natural or written law.

The expression "for three transgressions and for four," which introduces the judgment of each nation, is a Hebrew idiom that means "for repeated sins."

Chapter 1:3-5. Damascus, or Syria, was an age-old enemy of Judah and a sometimes confederate and sometimes enemy of Israel. Syria is condemned for her cruelty to Gilead, the land occupied by the three tribes of Israel that settled east of the Jordan and immediately south of Syria. Elisha predicted this rapacious behavior in 2 Kings 8:11-12 at a time of friendship between Israel and Syria. Kir, to which Amos says the people of Damascus will be taken captive, is believed to be the region east of the upper Euphrates River and a part of the Assyrian Empire. 2 Kings 16:9 records a clear fulfillment of this prophecy. "The king of Assyria went up against Damascus and took it, carried its people captive to Kir, and killed Rezin" the king.

Chapter 1:6-8 is a prophecy against the Philistines who lived in the coastal area south of present-day Tel Aviv and toward the border of Egypt. The cities, or city-states, of Gaza, Ashkelon, Ashdod, and Ekron are mentioned which, along with Gath, comprised the land of the Philistines. These were the people that Judges 1:27-28 says Israel did not drive out when Israel was strong and could have done so. Instead they put them to forced labor, and as God predicted they were a thorn in Israel's side forever. When Israel sinned and became weak, the Philistines raided the defenseless border villages with extreme barbarity, selling the captives to Greeks (see Joel 3:4-6) or Oriental tribes probably through the medium of the Edomites. Their punishment was that they would perish as a nation, and they did.

Chapter 1:9-10 pronounces judgment on Tyre, the capital of Phoenicia, which was the coastal land north of Mt. Carmel. Tyre's sins were similar to the Philistines' but with an extra dimension of evil. They had broken the "covenant of brotherhood." This probably refers to the treaty between David and King Hiram of Tyre and later between Solomon and Hiram. Ezekiel 26 gives a full account of Tyre's sins and predicts their utter destruction so that the city, renowned for its commerce, will become a place where fishermen spread their nets. And so it is to this day.

Chapter 1:11-12 relates God's judgment on the nation of Edom. The Edomites were descendants of Esau (Gen. 36:43), Jacob's brother. Their hatred of Israel, which Amos says they held onto forever, dated back to Genesis 27 when Jacob cheated Esau out of his birthright as the eldest son. Jacob and Esau reconciled (Gen. 32), but as is often the case with family feuds, even when the original combatants become older and wiser and want to heal the

breach, the feud is carried on by the children. The short book of Obadiah is devoted to a description of Edom's sins and their impending doom. They not only harassed Israel themselves, but they always sided with Israel's enemies, despite the fact that God had protected them and given them a homeland (Deut. 2:5).

The prophet mentions the cities of Teman, named after Esau's grandson (Gen. 36:11), and Bozrah. In addition to these, Petra was their great fortress and their pride. It has been discovered in a remarkable state of preservation and is open to visitors. The first two cities were marked for destruction, and they were destroyed. The nation of Edom vanished over two thousand years ago, but the physical city of Petra survived, perhaps as a monument to the truth of God's prophecies.

Chapters 1:13-2:3 give Amos' pronouncements against the nations of Moab and Ammon. Their homelands were on the eastern side of the Dead Sea. The Moabites were descendants of Lot, Abraham's nephew, by Lot's oldest daughter, and the Ammonites were his descendants by his youngest daughter (Gen. 19:30-38). God was protective of these tribes, as of Edom, when the Israelites came out of Egypt (Jgs. 11:18). Since Ruth was a Moabitess and David a descendant of her, David had some Moabite blood in his veins. The relationship with these peoples and Israel seems to have been peaceful at first, as evidenced by Naomi's and Ruth's easy travel between the countries, and perhaps more so by the fact that David committed his parents into the care of the King of Moab when he was fleeing from Saul (1 Sam. 22:3-4). David's parents were never heard from again. Some people assume the King of Moab killed them to appease Saul. If this is so, it would explain why David attacked and conquered them after he became king (2 Sam. 8:2).

Ammon was condemned for trying to expand their territory at the expense of Israel and for atrocities to the Israelite tribes of Gilead in the process. Moab was condemned for burning "the bones of the King of Edom to lime." The specific event mentioned here is not known in history. If it refers to the desecration of a grave, that was a serious offense in the ancient world, but it may refer to killing the king of Edom and burning him. The God Amos preached ruled over the Gentile world and held them accountable for the natural laws they knew were appropriate and right.

Chapter 2:4-5 gives a brief but powerful condemnation of Judah. God told the Israelites that they were not given the Land of Canaan because of their own righteousness, but because of the wickedness of those nations (Deut. 9:4-6; Lev. 18:24-28). And he warned them that if they became wicked, they would suffer the same fate. It is now judgment day. Judah and Israel are included in the same judgment scene as six Gentile nations. That whole region



of God's creation had been corrupted, and it will be purged by the fires of war, famine, and desolation that Amos has seen.

But Judah is judged on a different basis. They are called to account because they have "despised the law of the Lord, and have not kept his commandments." They had the covenant, the written law, the house of worship, and their condemnation was that they did not respect these blessings. They polluted the law by also worshiping idols, which is what Amos means by their "lies" that had led them astray. From the days of Solomon, who set up idol shrines for his heathen wives on the eastern end of the Mount of Olives, Israel had never been completely free from this scourge. At times they were actually set up in the temple itself. Now God has had enough.

### **The Thrust of Amos' Message**

In the opening words of his prophecy, Amos tells us his message is for Israel, and he stays true to that purpose. Every nation that joins Israel has come in for a glancing blow as a reminder of God's intention to hold them accountable, but Israel will be his focus. For the next five chapters he reviews Israel's spiritual history. He rehearses how God has blessed them, the view He takes of their sins, the disciplinary measures He has taken in the past to try to reform them, and the punishment He will inflict in the future. Because Amaziah, representing the religious establishment that opposed Amos, says that "the Land" cannot bear his preaching, these sermons were probably preached at several places around the country. What we have are probably summaries of longer sermons and discourses.

Amos opens his message to Israel, in Chapter 2:5-8, with a brief summary of their sins, a prelude to more detailed accounts to come. His first concern is for their social injustices, "they sell the righteous for silver, and the poor for a pair of sandals." Bribes completely perverted justice in the courts, and they ignored God's command not to take their Israelite brethren as permanent slaves. He takes a slap at their immorality, "a man and his father go in to the same maid," which was probably a reference to the prostitutes at their idol shrines.

In the style of Moses and David (Deut. 4:32-24; Ps. 147:19-20), Amos reminds the Israelites of how good God has been to them. God said, "I brought you up from Egypt; I drove out the powerful nations before you; I gave you specific instructions through my prophets. And what gratitude did you show for my goodness? You ordered my prophets not to preach, and you seduced my Nazirites into breaking their vows."

What were God's feelings about their contempt toward His blessings? In one of a few enigmatic passages in the book, Amos says, "Behold, I am weighed down by you, as a cart is weighed down that is full of sheaves" (2:13). This seems to be an expression of God's weariness at dealing with such a rebellious people. God's frustrations signal his imminent judgment. "The most courageous men of might shall flee naked in that day, says the Lord" (2:16).

Chapter 3 probably begins a different sermon, perhaps preached at a different place. Amos opens by trying to arrest their attention. "Hear this word that the Lord has spoken against you, O Children of Israel." There follows a brief reminder of God's goodness toward them, this time as a justification of the punishment to follow. The prophet then goes through a series of seven questions that are arguments to show the inevitability of God's punishment. Two people cannot travel together in the wilderness where Amos lives unless they make an appointment; a lion will not roar unless he is attacking a prey; and Israel cannot sin without God punishing them. "The lion has roared! Who will not fear? The Lord has spoken! Who can but prophesy?" (3:8).

In a dramatic gesture, the prophet invites the heathen nations around Israel to come and serve as witnesses of her sins (v. 9-11). They can testify that Israel's sins are just like theirs, so why should their punishment be different? Amos anticipates the apostle Peter's statement that judgment begins at the house of God (1 Pet. 4:17).

Verses 12-15 describe the destruction of the nation and vividly portray what a pitiful remnant will survive. "An adversary shall be all around the land," pictures the coming of Assyria's army against them. "As a shepherd takes from the mouth of a lion two legs or a piece of an ear, so shall the children of Israel be taken out." The prophet goes on to describe a picture he has probably seen in a vision of how these people, spoiled with wealth, will cling to objects of their profligate life. They are led away captive clinging to the corner of a couch and a part of a bed.

Chapter 4 seems to be another sermon, this time a scathing rebuke of the women of Israel. The prophet contemptuously calls them "cows Bashan." Not the "holy women" of old whom Peter (1 Pet. 3:5) made models of godly behavior, these women were full participants in their husband's profligate lives, even egging them on saying, "Bring wine, let us drink." This is followed by a list of all the things God has done to discipline and try to correct Israel (vv. 6-13). He sent famine, "cleanness of teeth," withheld rain, caused blight and mildew, but each effort is followed with the doleful, "Yet you have not returned to me, says the Lord." Since discipline given out of love has not worked, there remains only punishment. God is not willing that any should

perish, but His patience can be exhausted. The principle of Genesis 6:3, "My Spirit shall not strive with man forever," is applicable here.

Chapter 5 opens with a lament for Israel (vv. 1-3), which is followed by a long call for repentance. Amos knows that hardened sinners need sharp rebuke (Tit. 1:13), but they also need a show of love to draw them. In this vein, Paul taught that mourning the loss of an unrepentant sinner must precede his being disfellowshipped (1 Cor. 5:2). Chapter 5 closes with a discussion of "the day of the Lord." Apparently some Israelites interpreted the military victories discussed above and the country's prosperity to mean God was with them and that these might be tidings of the coming of Messiah. Amos warns them they are in for a terrible surprise. "Woe to you who desire the day of the Lord! For what good is the day of the Lord to you? It will be darkness, and not light." The Messiah will come, as Amos acknowledges in Chapter 9, but there is another day of the Lord for them, a day of judgment, that will come first.

Chapter 6 is a warning against Israel's false sense of security. The nation had won military victories under Jeroboam II, who had regained lost territory east of the Jordan and extended the kingdom northward into Syrian territory. Their military successes had given them confidence that no one could harm them. The prophet says, "Woe to you who are at ease in Zion, and trust in Mount Samaria" (v. 1). Zion often refers to Jerusalem but here it seems a general reference to the Children of Israel. Samaria was the capitol and military stronghold. Amos invites the people to consider Calneh, Hamath, and Gath, city states that had already suffered, or were marked for, destruction, and asks, "are you better than they?" Their ill-placed confidence had caused them to abandon themselves to a profligate lifestyle.

After recognizing their sinful lives (vv. 3-8), God says he hates the pride of Jacob (probably the idols in which they trusted) and their palaces (the immoral acts done within them) and that He will deliver up the city to destruction. Verses 9-10 are mysterious sounding statements that describe the extent of the coming destruction. He pictures ten men hiding in a secret room in a great house, but they will still die. When an uncle comes to burn the bodies (which assumes father and brothers are already dead), he may find one still clinging to life but they dare not call on the Lord lest even the mention of His name stir up His wrath even more. Verse 14 is the clearest statement yet of how the destruction of Israel will come about, "Behold, I will raise up a nation against you, O house of Israel."

With Chapter 7, the style of Amos' revelation changes and he describes three visions that were seen, apparently in close succession. First, he saw the Lord forming great swarms of locusts, reminiscent of Egypt, which he understands will be let loose on Israel "after the king's mowing." The first fruits of

the harvest probably went for taxes, so the locust will destroy everything the people of Israel harvest for themselves. Amos pleads with God not to do it on the grounds that Israel is weak, not strong as they believed, and would be totally destroyed by the plague. God relents at Amos' intervention. We are reminded of the time Israel made her first calf god in Exodus 32. God proposed their destruction at that time also, and Moses pleaded in Israel's behalf.

God relented of the plague of locusts, but his anger was not appeased. Then Amos witnesses what he calls a great "conflict by fire" which passes over Israel. The description seems something like a great prairie fire that destroys everything in its path and even laps up the great deep, which must be a poetic hyperbole. Again Amos prays, this time not for the people's forgiveness but only that God will "cease," which he does, from that specific destruction.

In the third vision the prophet sees God with a plumb line in His hand, standing by a wall that was built with a plumb line. The wall is Israel and the plumb line God's law. The nation was established on God's law and, irrespective of Amos' earnest pleas, it will be so judged. God said, "I will not pass by them anymore" (7:8). Some people see these visions as constituting Amos' call to preach. If that is true, he knows by the third vision that more entreaty for Israel is useless; only true repentance will save them.

Amos may have preached these visions at Bethel as a testimony to the people of his authority from God. If so, they had the opposite effect on the religious establishment. Amaziah the priest of Bethel charges Amos with treason and orders him out of the country. "Go you seer! Flee to the land of Judah. There eat bread" (7:12). That phrase "there eat bread" means, "live by your preaching." One who is motivated by greed tends to think everyone else is the same. Amos counters with the fact that he is not a professional prophet and announces that Amaziah's sons and daughters will die in the coming invasion, his wife will be ravished, and he will die in the land of his captivity.

The prophet sees two additional visions, each of which is the subject of a sermon. In Chapter 8 God shows Amos a basket of summer, i.e., ripe fruit, and asks him what he sees. When Amos answers, God interprets the analogy by suggesting that just as the fruit was harvested when it was ripe, so will Israel be harvested for their sins. "The end has come upon my people, Israel" (8:2). The songs of their temple will be turned to wailing; there will be dead bodies everywhere; they shall be thrown in silence out of their beloved city. Why? Because they have cheated and enslaved the poor and polluted the Sabbath. God will make the sun of their peace and prosperity to go down at noon, and darken the earth on a clear day, or as the margin says "a day of light"—two metaphors for great calamity.

Chapter 9 opens with a vision in which actual judgment begins. Amos sees God standing before the altar, the altar at Bethel, not the true one at Jerusalem. God gives the command to strike the altar in such a way that it, and perhaps the temple itself, will fall on the heads of the worshipers all around. The people flee, but are told that wherever they hide, even in the depths of the ocean, God will find and punish them. This wicked and illegal nation that never had a right to exist, that was ruled for nearly 250 years by nineteen different kings and not a good one in the bunch, will be destroyed never to be seen again. Its people will be sifted like wheat (v. 9), every sinner among God's people shall die (v. 10), but not a single good grain, i.e. righteous person, shall be lost.

God told us (Deut. 13:1-5) how to judge whether a prophet is true or false, i.e. by whether or not his prophecies come to pass. By God's standard, Amos proved himself a prophet of God. It happened in 722-721 B.C. Second Kings 17 records the doleful event: "In the ninth year of Hoshea, the king of Assyria took Samaria and carried Israel away to Assyria, and placed them in Halah and the Habor, the River of Gozan, and in the cities of the Medes" (v. 6). Verse 18 says, "Therefore the Lord was very angry with Israel, and removed them from His sight; there was none left but the tribe of Judah alone."

The book ends with a message of hope. That illegal nation will never rise again, but the house of David, the rightful kings of the nation God chose, will be raised up and the damages to David's house will be repaired. Captives will be brought back, and Gentiles will be called by the name of the Lord when the Messiah comes to claim His own.

So closes a great book by one of God's least known prophets. We might wonder why God chose this particular man from all the thousands of Israel and Judah, passing over trained prophets to have him carry a message to a wayward people. But there are reasons that are not far from the surface of the story. This man, who was not a career prophet, trusted God completely. Unlike Jonah, who was a prophet, when God said, "Go," he did not hesitate. Even before his call, Amos was on intimate terms with God. Like Abraham, a friend of God, and Moses, who spoke with God face to face, Amos felt close enough to Jehovah to plead in Israel's behalf. And God listened. Finally, Amos loved Israel. His intercessions for the nation show his love, and his preaching shows that, more than most, he understood what a blessed thing it was to be a child of Israel, a child of God.

Amos did not save the nation, but his preaching was not in vain. Some of those "good grains of wheat," which God said would not fall to the ground in the sifting, were probably men and women who were moved to repentance by his sincere passion for their souls. 4113 Northeast 141<sup>st</sup> St., Edmond, OK 73034

# Hosea

*by Greg Gay*

The book of Hosea is the first of the final twelve books of the Old Testament known as the Minor Prophets. These twelve books are brief, hence the name "Minor," but they are "Major" in the truths they reveal.

The book begins in the usual way of a book of prophecy with the words: "The word of the LORD that came unto..." (1:1; cf. Joel, Jonah, Micah, Zephaniah, Haggai, Zechariah). These words are significant. The words of Hosea are not just the thoughts and words of Hosea; they are the mind of God revealed and expressed through Hosea.

## **Intimate, Yet Far-reaching Revelations**

The first revelations we see in Hosea are about his personal family (1-3). Hosea is obedient when God tells him to marry and select a woman named Gomer (1:3). As their children are born, God tells Hosea what to name them. The first son is named Jezreel (1:4), the daughter is named Loruhamah (1:6), and the third child, a son, is named Loammi (1:9). As each child is born, God explains that each name is symbolic of something that is going to happen in the future for God's people.

Instead of Hosea and his family living happily ever after, their lives are shattered by sinful choices. Hosea's wife is unfaithful and involves herself in open worldliness. Although Hosea is hurt deeply, he loves her and wants her to return and to be faithful to him. He lovingly entreats her, but she refuses his pleas and sinks deeper and deeper into the mire of sin. Finally, she is in desperate straits. She has debts she cannot pay and is to be sold in order to satisfy her debtors. How ironic! She is an adulteress who has given herself to anyone and everyone; yet, now her affection has no value, and no one will help her and care for her. At God's command, Hosea attends the auction. Hosea indicates a small bid and buys her for fifteen pieces of silver and a measure of barley. He takes possession of the woman who has been the love of his life and the joy of his heart. The woman who has been the source of his greatest joy and the source of his greatest sorrow now belongs to him. We can imagine seeing them as they go home. Hosea and his wife, together again, are starting over.

Hosea's tragic relationship with his wife, along with the symbolic meanings of the names of their children, gives us a picture of God's relationship with Israel and His broken heart because of their unfaithfulness.

The prophecies uttered by Hosea refer to the process of decay that was sweeping toward a climax of destruction for Israel and punishment for Judah. At the same time, Hosea's words give hope for the future as his words point forward to Christ and the redemption we enjoy.

### **Hosea's Lineage**

Hosea gives the name of his father as Beeri. The name Beeri is used twice in the Bible: once as the name of Esau's Hittite father-in-law (Gen. 26:34) and again as Hosea's Israelite father (1:1). Pusey says this name means, "my well" or "welling forth" (p. 19).

Hosea identifies himself with a name that is more common in the Bible than it first appears. The Hebrew word translated Hosea is also translated Oshea (Num. 13:8, 16). This is the name of Joshua before Moses renamed him. Also, the same Hebrew name is translated as Hoshea (KJV) when describing the man who was the last king of Israel (2 Kgs. 15:30). Hosea is named once in the New Testament in Romans 9:25—Osee (KJV) is the Greek form of Hosea. Thayer says the name means "deliverance" (p. 682).

Neither the names of Hosea nor his father help us identify Hosea with a particular tribe. We know nothing more of Hosea's history from this or any other book, nor are we given any indication of his occupation (other than that of prophet).

There are indications that Hosea was a native of the Northern Kingdom because he refers to "the land" (1:2) and "our king" (7:5) when referring to the Northern Kingdom. He also makes numerous mentions of the cities of the Northern Kingdom, including Bethel (4:5), Gilead (6:6), Gilgal (4:5), Mizpah (5:1), Shechem (6:9) and Tabor (5:1). Hailey writes:

He speaks as a native and not as an outsider. His keen insight into the religious, social, and political conditions of his day indicates that he knew in an intimate way the things of which he spoke. His tender love for Israel argues for his being a citizen of the nation whom he addressed (p. 127).

### **Enemies from Within: Division Among God's People**

Hosea identifies the era in which he lived by telling us the kings who were reigning during the time of his prophecy. By this we can determine the approximate dates of his prophecy and the conditions of the nations during this time.

Hosea names four kings of Judah and one king of Israel (1:1). By referring to both Judah and Israel, we know Hosea prophesied during the days of

the divided kingdom. Instead of presenting a united front to the idolatrous nations around them, the Israelites had division and fighting among themselves. Unfortunately, this had been going on for a long time and was not new to the times of Hosea.

There was a split between Israel and Judah as early as immediately following the death of Saul when Israel was ruled by Saul's son Ishbosheth for two years while Judah followed David (2 Sam. 2:10). After these two years of division, the two nations united under David and Solomon (2 Sam. 5:4-5). After the death of Solomon, the tribes divided again with Jeroboam I ruling the northern tribes (1 Kgs. 11:26-39) and Rehoboam, Solomon's son, reigning over the southern tribes (1 Kgs. 11:43).

The land of Israel was divided geographically from east to west just north of Jerusalem. Jerusalem and the area south belonged to the tribes of Judah and Benjamin. The Southern Kingdom is called Judah after the name of the leading tribe. The other ten tribes occupied the area north of Jerusalem and are referred to in Hosea by several names: Israel, Ephraim (after the leading tribe of that division), and Samaria (after the capital city of the Northern Kingdom).

The fact that Hosea names four kings of Judah compared to only one king of Israel could lead us incorrectly to conclude that Israel was enjoying peace during the time of Hosea and that Judah was going through turmoil and chaos. In fact, both kingdoms had many leadership problems during the time of the prophecies of Hosea.

### The Kings of Judah

Hosea prophesied during the reigns of the following kings of Judah: Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah (1:1).

The first king, Uzziah, reigned fifty-two years (2 Chron. 26:3). His son Jotham succeeded him and reigned for sixteen years (2 Chron. 27:1). Jotham's son Ahaz next reigned for sixteen years (2 Chron. 28: 1). The fourth and last king during the time of prophecy of Hosea is Hezekiah, who was the son of Ahaz. He reigned twenty-five years in Jerusalem over Judah (2 Kgs. 18:1-3).

While all of these kings were descendants of David, none of them had complete strength of character in serving the Lord. Uzziah ended up a leper for going into the temple to burn incense upon the altar of incense (2 Chron. 26:21). Uzziah's son, Jotham, was righteous; but during his reign the people were very corrupt (2 Chron. 27:2). Jotham's son, Ahaz, was an open idolater, even to the point of burning his own children in sacrifice (2 Chron. 28:3). Jotham's son, Hezekiah, was righteous; but when he displayed all the treasures



of the kingdom to foreign visitors, Isaiah pronounced that all of those treasures would be taken out of the kingdom because of his action (2 Kgs. 20:17).

### **The Kings of Israel**

The only Israelite king Hosea mentions is Jeroboam; yet, as we examine the Scriptures, we find that several kings reigned over Israel during the time of Hosea's prophecies.

Jeroboam reigned for forty-one years (2 Kgs. 14:23), after which his son Zechariah reigned for six months (2 Kgs. 15:8). Zechariah was slain by Shal-lum, who reigned for only one month (2 Kgs. 15:13) before he was killed by Menahem. Menahem ruled for ten years (2 Kgs. 15:17). When Menahem died, his son Pekahiah reigned for two years (2 Kgs. 15:23) before being slain by Pekah. Pekah reigned for twenty years (2 Kgs. 15:27) before being slain by Hoshea, who ruled Israel for nine years before being overcome by the Assyrians (2 Kgs. 17:1).

While all of these names may be confusing, it soon becomes obvious that none of God's people lived in peaceful, righteous kingdoms in the days of Hosea. In light of the quality of leadership and the frequent changes of leadership, we can easily understand the turmoil that must have existed among the people in Hosea's day. It is during these times of violence at the highest levels of the nations, religious rebellion, and tribal division that Hosea serves as a prophet of God.

### **The Focus of Hosea's Prophecies**

Hosea only reports the changes of kings in Judah's monarchy. This reporting could lead us to conclude incorrectly that Hosea's message is mainly directed to the Southern Kingdom. In fact, his focus includes Judah, but mainly is directed to the Northern Kingdom. Keil mentions the likelihood that Hosea deliberately avoided listing the Israelite kings because the entire Northern Kingdom of Israel was in apostasy by not having allegiance to the kings of Judah who were the descendants of David, God's choice for the throne (p. 12). This point will be helpful when we discuss one of the problem texts of the book dealing with Hosea's wife.

One simple factor supporting a northern emphasis for Hosea's writings is that the Northern Kingdom is named eighty-seven times (Ephraim, 37; Israel, 44; Samaria, 6), while by contrast Judah is named only fifteen times in Hosea. It is as though the Northern Kingdom gets the full brunt of God's scrutiny, while Judah gets but a sideways glance.

## The Date and the Length of Hosea's Prophecies

Hosea prophesied eight centuries before Christ during the time of the divided kingdom of Israel and is joined in that century by the prophets Jonah, Amos, Micah, and Isaiah.

We can calculate the maximum range of Hosea's prophesies by looking at the number of years Judah's kings ruled. The reigns of the kings who are listed total 113 years, providing their reigns are successive years with none overlapping (which is unlikely). It is highly unlikely Hosea started prophesying at the beginning of Uzziah's reign and continued through the end of Hezekiah's. At a minimum, if there were no overlapping reigns, and if Hosea prophesied just one year during the reign of Uzziah and just one year in the reign of Hezekiah he prophesied for thirty-four years. Estimates vary, but Keil reports, "Hosea held his prophetic office for about sixty or sixty-five years" (p. 15).

James Smith suggests an ending date of about 727 B.C. for Hosea's prophesies because the writer makes no mention of the destruction of Samaria (722 B.C.), which he prophesied would come to pass (13:6) (p. 133).

## Enemies from Without

Infighting between Israel and Judah was welcomed by surrounding nations because both Israel and Judah would be weakened by such quarrels. Thus, surrounding nations gained an advantage over these leading powers and received an opportunity to increase their own borders.

William Smith reports that the neighbors of Israel and Judah included: Amalekites, Syrians, Assyrians, Babylonians, Edomites, Hittites, Moabites, Philistines, and Phoenicians (p. 534). Of course, Egypt was a major power and near enough to be either a protector or a threat. Hosea refers to Israel's seeking an alliance with Egypt to avoid Assyrian domination (7:11).

Of the nations listed, Assyria emerges as the strongest rival. Both Israel (2 Kgs. 15:20) and Judah (2 Kgs. 16:8) paid tribute to Assyrian kings in an attempt to prevent their own overthrow. That was not to be effective for Israel. and Hosea predicts of Ephraim, "the Assyrian shall be his king" (11:5).

Hendriksen writes:

The process of inner decay may fell the tree. A violent storm may accomplish the same result. When the two forces cooperate—the one from within, the other from without—the tree is doomed. So it was with Israel during the period 736–722. Inner decay, as we have seen; and now, from without the storm, the growing power of Assyria capturing and annexing nation upon nation (p. 111).

### **Confusion in Worship**

The division between Israel and Judah created confusion in worship for the Northern Kingdom. Jerusalem was God's designated place of worship, but it was in Judah. Jeroboam did not want his people going to Jerusalem lest they rebel against him. Therefore, he devised his own system of worship. He set up two golden calves, one in Bethel (a city at the extreme south end of the Northern Kingdom) and the other in Dan (at the northern end of the kingdom). He also made sacrifices himself and appointed priests of his own choosing instead of honoring God's choice of the tribe of Levi for the priesthood (1 Kgs. 12:25-33).

By the time of Hosea this corrupt system had continued for over two hundred years. Generation after generation of God's people grew further and further away from the Lord. What likely started out as worship of the Lord expressed at the place where the calf statues were located became worship of the calves (i.e., idolatry). Hosea writes:

And now they sin more and more, and have made them molten images of their silver, and idols according to their own understanding, all of it the work of the craftsmen: they say of them, Let the men that sacrifice kiss the calves (13:2).

### **Corruption of All that Is Sacred**

It is difficult to say which contributed more to Israel's downfall: idolatry or poor leadership. Regarding the leadership we can know this: when the leadership of a nation changes frequently and violently, one predictable result is distrust of authority among the citizens. As the leadership churned, the quality of life deteriorated among the people. Spiritual leadership also changed, moving away from God and toward idolatry of various kinds. Yates writes:

The rulers set poor examples for the people. Property had little value, for no person could be sure of his right to keep it. The courts were corrupt. Judges made their living from bribes and excessive fees wrung from helpless people who sought to hold on to their property and their rights. Conspiracies and plots were so common that the people did not dare trust any group. Amos had watched the ease-loving people loll in idleness and luxury. Hosea saw those same people hardened and made criminal by the conditions that surrounded them. Literal bloodshed, highway robbery, murder and organized vice were visible on every hand. The priests who were God's chosen representatives were actually at the head of organized bandit gangs. They were the instigators of rackets. In an unstable world the people

had come to lose their self-reliance. Fear and uncertainty gripped them to render them helpless.

Family life had gone to pieces. Regard for the sanctity of the home and the marriage vow had been lost. The false worship and foreign cults had broken down the old standards of morality and faithfulness...Drunkenness with all its attendant evils was fast breaking down the home life and debauching the minds of the people (p. 55-56).

### **How God Saw Israel**

Hosea's pen turned to many descriptive phrases to describe how God saw Israel. They were a "backsliding heifer" (4:16), not cooperative with God. God's response was that they would be fed as a "lamb in a large place" (4:16), unprotected like a lamb that has left the flock. They were like an adulterous wife (3:1) and "adulterers" (7:4) who were compared to an oven heated by the baker, always inflamed with passion. Their mingling with other nations was like a "cake not turned" (7:8), half-baked, and not fit for God or the other nations. They were a "silly dove without heart" (7:11) seeking favor of surrounding nations, not strong against their enemies. They were a "wild donkey alone by himself" (8:9), an easy prey since they were without protection. They were also "an empty vine" (10:1) with no fruit brought forth to please God. They were as temporary and fleeting as the "morning cloud," as the "early dew that passeth away," as the "chaff that is driven with the whirlwind out of the floor," and as "the smoke out of the chimney" (13:3). Obviously, these phrases do not describe a strong, long-lasting kingdom.

### **Hosea's Purpose**

Hosea's purpose in writing is to reveal God's sorrow and disappointment over Israel's unfaithfulness, the reasons for His sorrow, the punishment for their unfaithfulness, and God's longsuffering and forgiveness should they turn in repentance.

### **Difficulties with Outlining the Book**

The book can be divided into two major sections. Chapters 1-3 deal with how God saw Israel as expressed through the relationship of Hosea with his wife and three children. Chapters 4-14 express God's faithfulness and Israel's unfaithfulness. While chapters 1-3 produce many difficult questions, chapters 4-14 cause commentators the most grief.

The book is difficult to outline and the logical sequence of Hosea's prophecies is difficult to ascertain. These difficulties have been linked with

Hosea's extreme sorrow stemming from his problems with his wife. West writes:

The prophet's diction, moreover, is so abrupt and turbulent as to suggest the outpourings of an intense, passionate personality. His emotional and distraught nature is reflected in short sentences with frequent lack of syntactic connections. The classical cadences of Amos dissolve into shrieks and sobs in Hosea (p. 310).

Hosea is arranged generally in chronological order. The message is especially hard to outline. The rapid change of subject matter suggests that what is now called the Book of Hosea is really a collection of preaching notes from his long ministry (Smith, pp. 134-135).

The remaining chapters of the book (4-14) seem a broken summary of many addresses in which the great truths of a faithless nation, a loving God, a period of expiation and ultimate restoration are presented in ever-varying form (Hazard and Fowler, p. 46).

This prophet is altogether laconic and sententious. But this very circumstance, which anciently was supposed to impart uncommon force and elegance, in the present state of Hebrew literature, is productive of so much obscurity, that although the general subject of this writer is sufficiently obvious, he is the most difficult and perplexed of all the prophets (Jerome; quoted by Horne, p. 262).

The words of upbraiding, of judgment, of woe, burst out, as it were, one by one, slowly, heavily, condensed, abrupt, from the Prophet's heavy and shrinking soul, as God commanded and constrained him, and put His words, like fire, in the Prophet's mouth...he delivers his message, as though each sentence burst with a groan from his soul, and he had anew to take breath, before he uttered each renewed woe...It is in remarkable contrast with this abruptness in the more mournful parts, that when Hosea has a message of mercy to deliver, his style becomes easy and flowing. Then no sign of present sin or impending misery disturbs his brightness (Pusey, p. 16).

### **Hosea's Old Testament Era Prophecies**

The book of Hosea contains 197 verses. James Smith says 111 verses are predictive and forecast 28 distinct events (p. 21). The majority of these prophecies concern the destruction of Israel. Some of Hosea's major prophecies are conveyed with the names of his children. God specified each name and gave each a special significance.

## Jezeel

The first child was named "Jezeel." The significance given is: "for yet a little while, and I will avenge the blood of Jezeel upon the house of Jehu, and will cause to cease the kingdom of the house of Israel" (1:4). This prophecy appears to refer to Jehu's destruction of the family of Ahab in the Valley of Jezreel (2 Kgs. 10:7). Even though Jehu was obeying God in destroying Ahab's house, it appears he was motivated more by his own ambition than out of obedience to God. Therefore, he disobeyed God even as he carried out His commandment (2 Kgs. 10:11, 31). Obviously, what Jehu did was not pleasing to God and Israel was to be punished.

James Smith writes, "The name Jezeel means 'God scatters' in a negative sense and "God sows" in a positive sense. In Hebrew the name Jezeel sounds very much like the name Israel. Israel, the 'prince of God,' would become Jezeel, 'scattered by God'" (p. 211). They would be scattered as a result of losing a battle, as indicated by their bow being broken (1:5). God promised they would cease to exist as a kingdom.

## Loruhamah

Hosea's second child was named Loruhamah. The significance given is: "for I will no more have mercy upon the house of Israel; but I will utterly take them away" (1:6). In this name and its explanation, God promises to scatter Israel among her enemies. Judah is mentioned as being spared, not because of military might, but by the Lord's mercy (1:7).

## Loammi

Hosea's third child was named Loammi. The significance given is: "for ye are not my people, and I will not be your God" (1:9). The third and final message is that God will no longer recognize Israel as a nation, and they will be like foreigners to Him.

This prophecy came true for Israel. They were conquered by the Assyrians in 722 B.C. and dispersed to other areas of the Assyrian kingdom (2 Kgs. 17). They never returned as a separate nation.

Before we leave the children's names, let us notice that they are referenced again in Hosea 1:11-2:1. In these verses, the names are similar, yet completely different in meaning. Israel is not Jezeel ("scattered"), but Jezeel ("sown"). They are not Loammi ("not my people"), but Ammi ("my people"). And God is not Loruhamah ("I will not have mercy"), but Ruhamah ("I will have mercy"). There was to be a restoration of the relationship between God and Israel. Chapters three and fourteen reveal more about this restoration. Israel will seek the Lord, and David will be their king during a time known as

the latter days (3:5). This was fulfilled literally when the Jews were allowed to return from captivity in the days of Ezra and Nehemiah. It also looks forward to the restoration of Israel that would be fulfilled in Christ.

### **Hosea's New Testament Era Prophecies**

Matthew, John, Peter, Paul, and Christ cite Hosea in the New Testament. The validity of the book is therefore without question, even if our understanding of it may give us difficulty. The following verses represent most of the specific New Testament references to Hosea:

Hosea writes: "When Israel was a child, then I loved him, and called my son out of Egypt" (11:1). This is fulfilled in Christ:

And when they were departed, behold, the angel of the Lord appeareth to Joseph in a dream, saying, Arise, and take the young child and his mother, and flee into Egypt, and be thou there until I bring thee word: for Herod will seek the young child to destroy him. When he arose, he took the young child and his mother by night, and departed into Egypt: And was there until the death of Herod: that it might be fulfilled which was spoken of the Lord by the prophet, saying, Out of Egypt have I called my son (Mt. 2:13-15).

Hosea writes: "For I desired mercy, and not sacrifice; and the knowledge of God more than burnt offerings" (6:6). Jesus uses this twice in dealing with identifying the problems of the Jews in his day.

And it came to pass, as Jesus sat at meat in the house, behold, many publicans and sinners came and sat down with him and his disciples. And when the Pharisees saw it, they said unto his disciples, Why eateth your Master with publicans and sinners? But when Jesus heard that, he said unto them, They that be whole need not a physician, but they that are sick. But go ye and learn what that meaneth, I will have mercy, and not sacrifice: for I am not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance (Mt. 9:10-13).

At that time Jesus went on the sabbath day through the corn; and his disciples were an hungred, and began to pluck the ears of corn, and to eat. But when the Pharisees saw it, they said unto him, Behold, thy disciples do that which is not lawful to do upon the sabbath day. But he said unto them, Have ye not read what David did, when he was an hungred, and they that were with him; How he entered into the house of God, and did eat the shewbread, which was not lawful for him to eat, neither for them which were with him, but only for the priests? Or have ye not read in the law, how that on the sabbath days the priests in the temple profane the sabbath, and are blameless? But I

say unto you, That in this place is one greater than the temple. But if ye had known what this meaneth, I will have mercy, and not sacrifice, ye would not have condemned the guiltless (Mt. 12: 1-7).

Hosea writes: "The high places also of Aven, the sin of Israel, shall be destroyed: the thorn and the thistle shall come up on their altars; and they shall say to the mountains, Cover us; and to the hills, Fall on us" (10:8). Jesus uses this in referring to the coming destruction of Jerusalem.

But Jesus turning unto them said, Daughters of Jerusalem, weep not for me, but weep for yourselves, and for your children. For, behold, the days are coming, in the which they shall say, Blessed are the barren, and the wombs that never bare, and the paps which never gave suck. Then shall they begin to say to the mountains, Fall on us; and to the hills, Cover us (Lk. 23:28-30).

John, regarding the wicked in the Day of Judgment, uses the same figure:

And said to the mountains and rocks, Fall on us, and hide us from the face of him that sitteth on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb: For the great day of his wrath is come; and who shall be able to stand (Rev. 6:16-17)?

Hosea writes: "Yet the number of the children of Israel shall be as the sand of the sea, which cannot be measured nor numbered; and it shall come to pass, that in the place where it was said unto them, Ye are not my people, there it shall be said unto them, Ye are the sons of the living God" (1:10). "And I will sow her unto me in the earth; 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" (2:23). This is fulfilled in the salvation of the Gentiles:

And that he might make known the riches of his glory on the vessels of mercy, which he had afore prepared unto glory, Even us, whom he hath called, not of the Jews only, but also of the Gentiles? As he saith also in Osee, I will call them my people, which were not my people; and her beloved, which was not beloved. And it shall come to pass, that in the place where it was said unto them, Ye are not my people; there shall they be called the children of the living God" (Rom. 9:23-26).

Which in time past were not a people, but are now the people of God: which had not obtained mercy, but now have obtained mercy (1 Pet. 2:10).

Hosea writes, "I will ransom them from the power of the grave; I will redeem them from death: O death, I will be thy plagues; O grave, I will be thy



destruction: repentance shall be hid from mine eyes" (13:14). Paul uses this concerning the resurrection:

So when this corruptible shall have put on incorruption, and this mortal shall have put on immortality, then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written, Death is swallowed up in victory. O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory (1 Cor. 15:54–55)?

Hosea writes: "After two days will he revive us: in the third day he will raise us up, and we shall live in his sight" (6:2). This is fulfilled in Christ's resurrection.

From that time forth began Jesus to shew unto his disciples, how that he must go unto Jerusalem, and suffer many things of the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and be raised again the third day" (Mt. 16:21).

As James Smith says on Hosea 6:2:

There is no direct allusion here to the death of Jesus. Nonetheless, Jesus was the second Israel, as Hosea himself will later argue (cf. 11:1). What Hosea promised in metaphor to ancient Israel was re-enacted literally in the life of Jesus. Thus the third day was prophetically, typically and ideally the time for resurrection (p. 238).

### Difficult Questions about Hosea's Wife

There are many difficult questions concerning Hosea, but none more difficult to understand than his relationship with his wife, Gomer. The questions to consider are several, including: Is this a literal marriage with literal children? Was Gomer a harlot before he married her or only in prospect? If she was a harlot, did Hosea know she was a harlot? Was her harlotry literal or figurative?

I believe the marriage to be literal. As Pusey writes, "There is no ground to justify our taking as a parable, what Holy Scripture relates as a fact" (p. 13). Regarding Hosea's marriage and children, McKeating writes:

Such so-called symbolic actions are not uncommon in prophecy. They are better called enacted prophecies. In such enactments the prophet acts out his message as in a little drama, an enacted parable. Other examples are found, e.g., in Jer. 27–28, Is. 20 (p. 76).

Much has been conjectured about the character of Gomer, the daughter of Diblaim (1:3). Some think she was a prostitute before Hosea married her; others think he was to take up with someone he knew would later be unfaithful. While any of these meanings are possible, the likely explanation agrees with what I referred to earlier—that anyone from Israel would be considered "of

whoredoms" simply because of Israel's rebellion. However, Eleanor Daniel makes an interesting observation about various rites in existence at the time:

Fertility rites were common in Hosea's day. Canaanite rites, for example, insisted that a woman had to have sexual relations with a stranger once. Phoenicians commonly prostituted their daughters before giving them in marriage. Among the Amorites, those who wanted to be married sat at the gate for seven days and engaged in prostitution. Therefore, "wife of whoredom" could refer to a young woman ready for marriage who had submitted to the rather commonly accepted bridal rites of initiation. She whom Hosea was to marry would not, then, be an especially wicked exception, but representative of contemporaries in Israel (p. 134).

Regardless of Gomer's background, I believe Hosea took her as wife in the hopes of a happy and fulfilling marriage.

By the time we get to chapter three, Hosea's wife has been unfaithful. However, I believe God knew this unfortunate tragedy would happen in Hosea's life, but that Hosea knew nothing of it when he married. Evidently her life of debauchery led her to ruin and the inability to pay her debts to the point that she was to be sold at auction. At God's command, Hosea bought her, a woman who is described as "yet an adulteress" (3:1) for the price of fifteen pieces of silver and a homer and a half of barley (3:2). This price becomes hauntingly familiar as soon as we learn a homer and a half of barley was worth fifteen pieces of silver, making the total purchase price thirty pieces of silver—the price of a slave (Ex. 21:32) and the price of the betrayal of our Lord (Mt. 26:15).

One difficulty in Hosea involves chapter three. The story of his marriage in chapter one is in the third person (like a biography), but changes to the first person in chapter three (like an autobiography). That raises the issue of whether or not another woman is being considered. I believe it is the same woman, thus prefiguring Israel's being ultimately reconciled to God through Christ.

### **God's Broken Heart, Hosea's Broken Heart**

God wanted Hosea to express to fallen Israel what he had been through with them. What we see in the tragedies that befell Hosea is what God experienced with Israel. Just as what Hosea's wife did (committing adultery) broke his heart, what Israel did to God (abandoning him for idolatry) broke His heart. It would appear Hosea, more than any other Old Testament prophet, writes in empathy of God's sorrow over Israel's fall. Whiston writes of Hosea:

Slowly this man had taken from his own small circle of heartbreak and plunged into the depth of despair and suffering that is in the very heart of the universe. He saw that God is a God of suffering love.

Hosea "dipped his pen into his own heart's blood and thinning it with his tears" penned such words as, "Oh Ephriam, how can I give you up? When Israel was a child I loved him. It was I who taught him to walk. I led (him) with cords of compassion, with the bands of love." He wrote of the steadfast faithfulness of God, of the loving concern of a heavenly Father in contrast to the unfaithfulness of a fickle people" (p. 23).

### **Lessons from Hosea**

We can learn many valuable lessons from Hosea. God is righteous and has standards He expects to be obeyed. Idolatry violates God's righteousness and evokes His justice. However, His mercy is great and He is longsuffering to sinners. Idolatry breaks the trust between man and God in the same way adultery breaks the trust between man and wife. Once committed, idolatry, like adultery, is difficult to forgive. God displays the kind of love that is necessary for a healing relationship. As Daniel writes, "It is blessed, enduring, suffering, forever love that balances judgment with mercy. It is God's kind of love" (p. 140).

### **Fulfillment in Christ**

At the beginning of this article, we left Hosea and his wife leaving the auction, going home to start a new relationship. Their life together is not described in glowing terms. "I said unto her, Thou shalt abide for me many days; thou shalt not play the harlot, and thou shalt not be for another man: so will I also be for thee" (3:3). This is a picture of Israel's state. We could well call them a people "without." Notice the use of the word "without" as we read, "For the children of Israel shall abide many days without a king, and without a prince, and without a sacrifice, and without an image, and without an ephod, and without teraphim" (3:4). Yet, God gives them hope because he says "afterward shall the children of Israel return, and seek the Lord their God, and David their king; and shall fear the Lord and his goodness in the latter days" (3:5)

We are the spiritual fulfillment of that new relationship. We, who were not a people, are in these last days (Heb. 11:2) now a people (Rom. 9:23-26). God, merciful and mighty, extends His mercy and grace to a sin-filled human race through the sacrifice of His Son, Jesus Christ. Christ our King, a descendent of David, now rules upon David's throne forever and ever (Acts 2:29-30).

Hosea's portrayal of Israel looks forward to our salvation. Israel's unbelief provided the opportunity for salvation for the Gentiles (Rom. 11:31), and

God allows those who were without His mercy to access His mercy in salvation (Rom. 11:32). After considering the majestic greatness of God's plan fulfilled for the salvation of all through Christ, Paul writes:

Oh the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! how unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways past finding out! For who hath known the mind of the Lord? or who hath been his counselor? Or who hath first given to him, and it shall be recompensed unto him again? For of him, and through him, and to him, are all things: to whom be glory for ever. Amen (Rom. 11:33-36).

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# Jonah: An Introduction

*by Alan Bonifay*

One of the most controversial books of the Old Testament, Jonah is filled with miracles that offend the rationalistic minds of liberal theologians of modern times. However, more than any other book in the Old Testament, Jonah reveals the universal love of God with which we have become so familiar in the New Testament. Jonah graphically portrays the hard won lesson that Peter declared to Cornelius, "In truth I perceive that God shows no partiality. But in every nation whoever fears Him and works righteousness is accepted by Him" (Acts 10:34-35).

As Jack Lewis observes:

The book of Jonah...is unique in the minor prophets in many ways. It is chiefly a book about a prophet instead of being a collection of oracles of the prophet. Only eight words [in English—AWB] are needed to report Jonah's preaching [only five are required in Hebrew—AWB]. The book is the only latter prophet cast in narrative form, though there are some narrative sections in others...Jonah is the only minor prophet in whose career the miraculous plays a prominent role, the only one whose major activity is on foreign soil, and the only one who preaches exclusively to a foreign people. Jonah is the only Old Testament character represented as taking a trip on the Mediterranean. Jonah is the only minor prophet mentioned by Jesus and is the only Old Testament character likened by the Lord to Himself (p. 39).

## Historical Background

The first verse of Jonah identifies the author as Jonah, the son of Amittai. That this Jonah is identical to the Jonah mentioned in 2 Kings 14:25 is almost beyond question. In both places the prophet's name and that of his father are the same and neither of those names occur anywhere else in the Old Testament record. As E. B. Pusey noted:

It is wholly improbable that there should have been two prophets of the same name, sons of fathers of the same name, when the names of both son and father were so rare as not to occur elsewhere in the Old Testament (1:371).

In the fifteenth year of Amaziah the son of Joash, king of Judah, Jeroboam the son of Joash, king of Israel, became king in Samaria, and reigned forty-one years. And he did evil in the sight of the LORD; he did not depart from all the sins of Jeroboam the son of Nebat, who

had made Israel sin. He restored the territory of Israel from the entrance of Hamath to the Sea of the Arabah, according to the word of the LORD God of Israel, which He had spoken through His servant Jonah the son of Amittai, the prophet who was from Gath Hopher. For the LORD saw that the affliction of Israel was very bitter; and whether bond or free, there was no helper for Israel. And the LORD did not say that He would blot out the name of Israel from under heaven; but He saved them by the hand of Jeroboam the son of Joash. Now the rest of the acts of Jeroboam, and all that he did-- his might, how he made war, and how he recaptured for Israel, from Damascus and Hamath, what had belonged to Judah-- are they not written in the book of the chronicles of the kings of Israel? (2 Kgs. 14:23-28, NKJV).

Clearly, the most prestigious prophet of his day, Jonah aided Israel's king Jeroboam II in his military campaigns to recover the territory Israel had lost to the Arameans. The date of Jonah's ministry to Nineveh probably fell between 780 and 755 B.C., with the greatest probability occurring around 755 B.C. James Smith says:

The date of Jonah's ministry to Nineveh probably fell within the reign of Jeroboam II of Israel, who began to reign as co-regent in 793 B.C. His absolute rule began in 782 B.C. and terminated in 753 B.C. Three Assyrian kings were contemporary with Jeroboam. Adad-nirari III (810-783 B.C.) made a move in the direction of monotheism. Some think this may have been the result of the mission of Jonah. Little is known about his successor, Shalmaneser IV (783-773 B.C.). During the reign of Ashur-dan III (773-755 B.C.) the nation was psychologically prepared to expect a great catastrophe. Serious plagues fell on Assyria in 765 B.C. and again in 759 B.C. A total eclipse of the sun, always viewed with great alarm by the ancients, was visible in Assyria January 15, 763 B.C. Taking all these data into account, Jonah's trip to Nineveh probably fell between 780 B.C. and 755 B.C. (p. 39).

Cunningham Geike points out that from shortly before 800 B.C. until the accession of Tiglath-Pileser in 745 B.C., Assyria was torn with internal strife and by wars with revolting provinces (4:183-184).

J. A. Thompson adds that in addition to quelling internal uprisings the nation was also at war with a powerful country called Urartu near the Caspian Sea (p. 131). Consequently, as Homer Hailey says, "this depressed state of Assyria contributed much to the readiness of the people to hear Jonah as he began to preach to them" (p. 63).

Bob and Sandra Waldron reveal to us just how illusionary Israel's prosperity was during the days of Jeroboam II and the ministry of Jonah in their book, **Till There Was No Remedy**:

Jeroboam II was the third descendent of Jehu's to reign upon the throne. The Bible does not tell much about Jeroboam's deeds. During his rule God continued to "save" Israel from her enemies (2 Kgs. 14:26-27). God sought to show Israel His mercy in order to bring them back to Himself. He explained His purpose, He warned and He exhorted the people through the prophets which He sent to Israel at this time. We have already seen Obadiah and Joel come along. They were the earliest of the writing prophets. Now we will see a second group come along beginning with Jonah and including Amos, Hosea, Isaiah, and Micah.

Jeroboam ruled about twenty-six years before Uzziah began to rule in Judah. Then their rules overlapped for about fifteen years. Under their rules, the territories of Israel and Judah, if combined would have almost equaled the extent of Solomon's empire.

One of the factors that made this expansion possible was that Assyria was in a period of decline between the reign of Shalmaneser III (859-824 B.C.) and that of Tiglath-Pileser (745-727 B.C.). With Assyria weakened, there was no enemy to oppose the expansion of Israel and Judah. God's mercy was with the little countries and He helped them in an effort to bring them back to Him.

Israel prospered—but the prosperity was illusionary. As soon as Jeroboam died, Israel collapsed like a house of cards. The end of Israel is nigh, and it is chilling to realize how quickly the nation went from the prosperity of Jeroboam's day to utter destruction only twenty-five years later (p. 88).

Jonah's ministry in Israel under Jeroboam II probably began just a very short time after the death of Elisha. The book bearing his name was most likely written near the end of his ministry shortly before Amos and Hosea were written. Conditions in Israel looked promising after many bleak years. Nationalistic fervor was running high. Assyria was in a period of decline but still remained a threat to Israel from the north. Assyrian cruelty was already legendary. Graphic and disturbing accounts of their inhumane treatment of POWs have been discovered in ancient Assyrian records especially from the ninth and seventh centuries B.C. (Laetsch, p. 221). Amidst these scenes, God spoke to Jonah during the reign of Ashurdan III (773-755 B.C.) and said, "Arise, go to Nineveh, that great city, and cry out against it; for their wickedness has come up before me" (1:2).



Interestingly, if Jonah was at home when "the word of the Lord" came to him, he was in the village of Gath Hopher, which was about 2.5-3 miles north of Nazareth near the modern day village of El-Meshhed in Galilee. The Pharisees were wrong when they snapped at Nicodemus, saying, "Search and look, for no prophet has arisen out of Galilee," (Jn. 7:52) because Jonah was a Galilean.

### Liberal Criticisms and Conservative Answers

Liberal critics claim that Jonah was written much later than we have said—anywhere from the fifth to the third centuries B.C. They suggest the book was written as historical fiction to counter the "narrow nationalism" of Ezra and Nehemiah by introducing universalistic ideas. Some believe it was written anonymously to counteract the Jewish practices of excluding the Samaritans from worship and of divorcing their foreign wives. To support this view they present three primary arguments:

- Jonah was written in the third person with no claim that Jonah wrote it;
- Numerous Aramaic words appear in the book which would not have appeared in an earlier work;
- Jonah 3:3 says that, "Nineveh was an exceedingly great city" indicating a late date after Nineveh's fall in 612 BC.

However, conservative scholars have refuted these claims, with the following seven arguments:

- The idea that God's inclusion of the Gentiles in His program is not a new one in the book of Jonah (Gen. 9:27; 12:3; Lev. 19:33-34; 1 Sam. 2:10; Is. 2:2; Joel 2:28-32).
- Aramaic words occur in early as well as late Old Testament books. Aramaic is found in Near Eastern texts as early as 1500 B.C. Besides, not all the terms labeled as Aramaic are in fact Aramaic. Several are genuine Hebrew words (Pusey, 1:374). Furthermore, according to Laetsch:

Even if we grant that all these forms are Aramaic, they cannot prove the post-Exilic authorship of the book. As early as Hezekiah's reign Aramaic was the language of diplomats, which even the political and military leaders of Judah understood (2 Kgs. 18:26; Is. 36:11, Syrian-Aramaic). In the native land of Jonah, Northern Israel, the early presence of Aramaic forms and expressions is readily explained by the close proximity of Syria and Phoenicia and particularly by the thirty years of Syrian domination before the rule of Jeroboam II (2 Kgs. 13:1-7, 14-25)...Therefore the presence of Aramaic forms would rather be a strong argument

for identifying the author of our book with the Jonah of 2 Kings 14:25 and dating his book in Jeroboam's reign (p. 219).

- The fact that the book does not say that it was written by Jonah is an argument from silence that cannot be substantiated.
- The use of the third person by the author was a common practice among both biblical and secular writers. Pusey cites the commentaries of Caesar, the Anabases of Xenophen, Barhebraeus the great Jacobite historian of the east, Frederick the Great, Thucydides and Josephus. He also cites biblical examples from Amos, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Haggai, Daniel, Moses, John and Paul (pp. 373–374).
- The argument based on the past tense in 3:3 is particularly weak. Literally it means, "had become." At the time of the incident when Jonah arrived in Nineveh it had already become a large city (Laetsch, p. 234).
- Jonah was a historical prophet (2 Kgs. 14:25), and there are no hints that the book is fictional or allegorical. Jack Lewis observes:

Until recently both Jews and Christians thought of the book as history...Jonah had already been accepted into the book of the twelve by the time of Sirach (Sir. 49:10)...The story of Jonah is appealed to in Tobit 14:4 where Jonah's threat of the destruction of Nineveh is considered to be an unfulfilled prophecy...In 3 Macc. 6:8 Jonah's deliverance is one in a series of God's great acts of mercy of the past that forms a part of the prayer of Eleazar. In his *Antiquities* 9.10.2, Josephus identifies the minor prophet with the prophet of 2 Kings 14:25 and summarizes the book (p. 44).

- Jesus supports the historical accuracy of the book.

But He answered and said to them, "An evil and adulterous generation seeks after a sign, and no sign will be given to it except the sign of the prophet Jonah. "For as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of the great fish, so will the Son of Man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth. The men of Nineveh will rise up in the judgment with this generation and condemn it, because they repented at the preaching of Jonah; and indeed a greater than Jonah is here" (Mt. 12:39–41, NKJV)

### Method of Interpretation

In his *Introduction to the Old Testament*, Charles Pfeiffer opines:

The story of Jonah is neither an account of actual happenings nor an allegory of the destiny of Israel or of the Messiah...it is a fiction—a short story with a moral—like the book of Ruth...or the stories about Daniel...As with Oriental fiction in general (cp. Daniel, Tobit, the

Arabian Nights, etc.), the supernatural is the "piece de resistance" of the narrative... The author of the story utilized ancient myths and folk tales in his story of the fish... Out of such miscellaneous materials the author has composed a charming story intended to teach the lesson clearly expressed at the end of the book, namely, that Jehovah's loving-kindness and compassion are not restricted to the Jews, but extend to the heathen as well (pp. 587f.).

Similarly, Laetsch cites Kautsch-Bertholet:

Every effort to interpret the book literally and the miracles as historical happenings misunderstands completely the real purpose of the author and leads to absurdities altogether foreign to him (p. 216).

These questions clearly point up the major issue facing the student of Jonah—the identity of the genre of literature into which this book fits. Four schools of thought have laid claim to the book. Some believe it is legendary or mythical. They say the book contains an ancient kernel of historical truth that has been expanded and exaggerated by the author. Some espouse the notion that the story is an allegory of Israel's captivity, repentance, and restoration to its land. The most popular view today is that the book is a didactic fiction. Numerous descriptive designations are employed to express this view. It is called a "parable in ethics," "a fiction in poetic dress," "a moral or didactic fable," "a parable," or "a short story with a moral." Fortunately, there are some "dinosaurs" around who believe the book is historically accurate in all its details. James Smith advances and answers numerous arguments presented by those who deny the historical accuracy of Jonah, but the essence of his point is well established in these three. They say:

- (1) The book lacks historical particulars. The author, for example, has not pinpointed the spot where Jonah was ejected from the fish, the specific sins of the Ninevites, or the name of the king of Nineveh. Yet a critic could make this argument against any historical work. No historian relates all the facts about any event. The Book of Jonah does in fact cite a number of very specific details which would be superfluous in a parabolic narrative.
- (2) The book ends abruptly, thus signaling that the author was trying to teach a truth and not necessarily relate true facts. Recognizing the didactic purpose of the book, however, does not prove that the book is unhistorical. An historical episode can be related for didactic purposes.
- (3) If taken as sober history, the behavior of Jonah is incomprehensible. On the other hand, however, would any writer slander a prominent prophet by attributing to him such negative actions? The

account makes sense only if Jonah himself is the author of this material and if he is writing this account as a confession of sinful attitudes and actions (p. 41).

Theodore Laetsch contributes these worthy comments about the historical accuracy of the book:

Even the fact that the story of Jonah's miraculous delivery out of the belly of the fish is absolutely unique in the history of miracles does not argue against its historicity. This unique miracle may have been and, as we shall see, has actually been performed for a very special, unique purpose. It was to prophesy and typify the greatest miracle on earth; that miracle on which our entire Christian faith, the certainty of our redemption, our hope of resurrection and eternal life is founded. In fact, Christ Himself connects his unique rest of three days and three nights in the grave before his resurrection with Jonah's being three days and three nights in the belly of the fish, "as Jonas — so the Son of Man." Christ evidently regarded Jonah 1:17 not as a parable of fiction, but as a historical fact, as historical as His resurrection.

Modern critics seek to weaken the force of Matt. 12:40 by saying that Jesus refers to Jonah only by way of illustration which makes it of no special consequence whether Jonah belongs to the realm of fiction or fact. Or as George A. Smith puts it: "Suppose we tell slothful people that theirs will be the fate of the man who buried his talent; is this to commit us to the belief that the personages of Christ's parables actually existed? Or take the homiletic use of Shakespeare's dramas—'as Macbeth did' or 'as Hamlet said.' Does it commit us to the historical reality of Macbeth or Hamlet?" (*The Expositor's Bible*, vol. 4, p. 683, fn).

Yet the examples quoted are not pertinent, as Theodore Laetsch explains.

(1) There is not the slightest indication in Matt. 12:39–42 that Jesus is referring to a parable or quoting from a drama or that the Pharisees regarded the story of Jonah as a parable or novel.

(2) There is not the slightest indication that Jesus or His opponents regarded Jonah (vv. 39, 40, 41) or the repenting Ninevites as in any manner less historical persons than Solomon or the queen of the South (v. 42) or Jesus Himself, a greater than Solomon and Jonah (v. 41f).

(3) Jesus had been challenged to give His enemies a sign authenticating His claim to a divine mission. He will give them only one sign. As Jonah was in the belly of the fish and was delivered, so Christ. As—so, in like manner. If Jonah's sojourn in the belly of the fish was mythical, then Jesus' burial and three days rest in the grave would,

according to His own logic, be a myth; His "resurrection" not a resurrection but a myth, and His claim to be the divinely sent Redeemer would be - the pen refuses to write it. As Jesus lay in the grave three days, as Jesus rose again, as these are historical facts, so is the three-day captivity of Jonah in the fish's belly and his deliverance not a legendary story, a mere parable, but irrefutable fact, historical truth. Else Christ would never have regarded it as a sign and prophecy of His own burial and resurrection after three days (pp. 217-218).

### Survey of Jonah

Jonah is an unusual book because of its message and its messenger. Unlike other Old Testament books, it revolves exclusively around a Gentile nation. God is concerned for the Gentiles as well as for His covenant people Israel. But God's messenger is a reluctant prophet who does not want to proclaim his message for fear that the Assyrians will respond and be spared by the compassionate God of Israel. Jonah cannot risk allowing God to make such a tragic mistake. Of all the people and things mentioned in the book—the storm, the lots, the sailors, the fish, the Ninevites, the plant, the worm, and the east wind—only the prophet himself fails to obey God. All of these were used to teach Jonah (and hence Israel and even the church) a lesson in compassion and obedience.

The book divides into two major parts: (1) the first commission of Jonah comprising chapters 1 and 2, and (2) the second commission of Jonah comprising chapters 3 and 4. Kyle Yates outlines the book under the rubric of Running:

- Chapter 1 -- Jonah runs from God
- Chapter 2 -- Jonah runs to God
- Chapter 3 -- Jonah runs with God
- Chapter 4 -- Jonah runs ahead of God

He also suggests a slightly more detailed outline:

- 1:1-3 Disobedient
- 1:4-16 Punished
- 1:17-2:10 Preserved
- 3:1-4 Preaching in Nineveh
- 3:5-10 Conversion of the Ninevites
- 4:1-11 Picture of a Narrow Prophet

### **The First Commission of Jonah (Chapters 1-2)**

Chapter 1 records the commission to Jonah (1:1-2), the disobedience of Jonah (1:3), and the judgment on Jonah (1:4-17). Jonah does not want to see God spare the notoriously cruel Assyrians. Jonah believed that to preach a message of repentance to them would be like helping Israel's enemy. In his patriotic zeal Jonah put his country before his God and refused to represent Him in Nineveh. Instead of going 500 miles northeast to Nineveh, Jonah attempts to travel some 2000 miles west to Tarshish on the southwestern coast of Spain. The Bible says Jonah fled "from the presence of the Lord." To stand in the presence of someone is used in the same sense of acting as one's official minister (cp. Gen. 41:46; Deut. 1:38; 10:8; 1 Sam. 16:21f; 1 Kgs. 17:1; 18:15; 2 Kgs. 3:14). To flee from His presence means to refuse to serve Him in this office. In other words, Jonah was attempting to resign his commission as God's prophet. But the Lord uses a creative series of counter-measures to bring Jonah around to the accomplishment of God's will. Jonah's efforts to thwart God's plan are futile. George Robinson said, "When one starts out to baffle God there is bound to be a storm!" (p. 71).

God prepares a "great fish" to preserve Jonah and deliver him on dry land. The fish and its divinely appointed rendezvous with the sinking prophet become powerful reminders to Jonah of the sovereignty of God in every circumstance. While inside the fish, Jonah utters a declarative praise psalm which alludes to numerous psalms racing through his mind (Ps. 3:8; 31:22; 42:7; 69:1). In his unique "prayer closet" Jonah offers thanksgiving for his deliverance from drowning. When he acknowledges that "salvation is of the Lord" (2:9), he is finally willing to obey and be used by God. After he is cast up on the shore, Jonah has a long time to reflect on his experiences during his eastward trek of 560 miles to Nineveh.

### **The Second Commission of Jonah (Chapters 3-4)**

Jonah readily obeys his second commission to go to Nineveh (3:1-4) where he becomes "a sign to the Ninevites" (Lk. 11:30). The prophet is a walking object lesson from God. As he proceeds through the city, his one-sentence sermon brings incredible results. It is the most responsive evangelistic campaign recorded in history. Jonah's words of coming judgment are followed by a proclamation by the king of the city to fast and repent. Because of His great mercy, God "relented from the disaster that He had said He would bring upon them" (3:10).

In the final chapter, God's love and grace are contrasted with Jonah's anger and lack of compassion. He is unhappy with the good results of his

message because he knows that God will now spare Nineveh. God uses a plant, a worm, and a wind to teach Jonah a lesson in compassion. Jonah's emotions shift from fierce anger (4:1), to despondency (4:3), then to great joy (4:6), and finally to despair (4:8). God good-naturedly chides Jonah about the fact that he is more concerned about a plant than he is for hundreds of thousands of people (if 120,000 toddlers are in mind in 4:11, the population of the city must have been upwards of 600,000). Jonah's lack of a divine perspective makes his repentance a greater problem than the repentance of Nineveh (NKJV, "Survey of Jonah," pp. 1029-1030).

### Lessons Learned from Jonah

1. God is everywhere.
2. The path of self-will is always downward.
3. In the hour of distress one turns to the God he has grieved.
4. It is futile to resist the known will of God. God's will will be done.
5. God's love for man is universal.
6. God seeks the salvation of all men.
7. Prophecy is generally conditional in its nature.
8. True repentance may avert a catastrophe that has been threatened.
9. God expects His people to obey His word.
10. God will punish His people if they disobey His word.
11. God wants His people to love all men as He loves them and give themselves to the task of winning them.
12. It is utterly impossible to escape from God.

### Apologetic Problems

So much has been made of the "fish story" in Jonah that one is likely to forget all the other miracles that occur. Jack Lewis says there are "at least four" (p. 40). Eiselen complains that twelve miracles in a mere forty-eight verses is too many and on that basis discredits the book (see Laetsch, p. 217). George Robinson says:

No other story in the Bible has probably caused so much jeering allusion, silly derision, ribald mockery, and blundering exegesis as the "story of Jonah and the whale!" With Moore, "it might almost be said that the sea-monster has swallowed the commentators as well as the prophet." The details of a comparatively trivial incident have been unduly magnified; supreme emphasis being placed on things in which supreme values do not exist (pp. 77-78).

However, since the fish is a point of contention, let us look at it for a moment. The Hebrew is **dag gadol** and is referred to three times in the book (1:17; 2:1, 10). It may be a fish of any species including the whale (cf. Gen.

9:2; Num. 11:22; Neh. 13:16). The term used in the Septuagint is **ketos megalos** which is the term also used in 3 Maccabees 6:8, Josephus' **Antiquities of the Jews** 9.10.2, and Matthew 12:40 for Jonah's fish. **Ketos** is a monster of undefined fish species. Nevertheless, a host of English versions of the New Testament follow the KJV in rendering it "whale." However, the meaning of the word is broad enough that the beast need not be limited to the whale family. The question is not whether a fish can be found large enough to swallow a man whole—Great White sharks that are capable abound, and whales that are capable of the task are also known to exist. The question is whether or not one believes God is capable of performing a miracle and whether or not one believes the Bible is the inspired Word of God (2 Tim. 3:16-17). If the answer is "yes" to both questions, then no problem remains. If the answer to either question is "no," then the entirety of the Christian system and the truth of God's Word are destroyed.

The other great point of controversy surrounds the overwhelming response of the Ninevites to Jonah's preaching. The objection is voiced that such conversion is historically improbable. But history is filled with improbabilities. It is true that the conversion of the Ninevites was short-lived. But so was the repentance of Simon the Sorcerer in Acts 8. To be sure, to date there is no concrete archaeological evidence of such a change of heart in Nineveh. However, neither is there any data that would refute the claim of Jonah. In truth the whole history of Assyria during the period of Jonah is virtually a blank. It is far better to rely on the residual benefits of the overwhelming internal evidence to the veracity of the Word of God than to live in constant fear of the next turn of the archaeologist's spade. 523 Jessie Ave., Manteca, CA 95337



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# Obadiah

## (A warning to those who laugh at the distress of others)

*by Richard Bunner*

Young's Analytical Concordance identifies thirteen men who bore the name Obadiah. Naves Topical Bible gives a similar list identifying the same number of men:

OBADIAH. 1. The governor of Ahab's house. Conceals in a cave one hundred prophets persecuted by Jezebel, 1 Kin. 18:3,4. Meets Elijah and receives a commission from him, 1 Kin. 18:3-16. 2. Head of a family, 1 Chr. 3:21. 3. A descendant of Tola, 1 Chr. 7:3. 4. Son of Azel, 1 Chr. 8:38; 9:44. 5. A Levite, 1 Chr. 9:16. 6. A Gadite warrior who joined David at Ziklag, 1 Chr. 12:9. 7. Father of Ishmaiah, 1 Chr. 27:19. 8. A prince of Judah who instructed the people in the law, 2 Chr. 17:7. 9. A Levite. One of the overseers in the repairing of the temple by Josiah, 2 Chr. 34:12. 10. A descendant of Joab who returned from Babylon, Ezra 8:9. 11. A priest who sealed with Nehemiah a covenant to observe God's law, Neh. 10:5. 12. A gate-keeper of Jerusalem, under Nehemiah, Neh. 12:25. 13. A prophet who prophesied the destruction of Edom, Obad.

As to the person and circumstances of Obadiah, nothing certain can be known since he simply identifies himself as Obadiah (meaning "servant, worshiper of YHWH"). He does not even mention his father's name. The traditional accounts of early writers' trying to identify him with Ahab's pious commander of the castle, or the third captain sent by Ahaziah against Elisha, or an Edomitish proselyte, are worthless and evidently false. These unfounded guesses have merely originated in the desire to know something more about him than simply his name.

### Background of this Prophecy

The prophecy of Obadiah concerns the destruction of the Edomites because of their cruelty to the Jews at the time of the capture of Jerusalem. Edom was another name for the man Esau (Gen. 36:1). The account of how he came to be known as Edom is given to us in Genesis 25.

Now Jacob cooked a stew; and Esau came in from the field, and he was weary. And Esau said to Jacob, "Please feed me with that same red stew, for I am weary." Therefore his name was called Edom. But Jacob said, "Sell me your birthright as of this day." And Esau said,

"Look, I am about to die; so what is this birthright to me?" Then Jacob said, "Swear to me as of this day." So he swore to him, and sold his birthright to Jacob. And Jacob gave Esau bread and stew of lentils, then he ate and drank, arose, and went his way. Thus Esau despised his birthright (Gen. 25:29-34, NKJ).

The story of Jacob and Esau is sad indeed. Two brothers were separated for over twenty years with fear and animosity existing between them. Thankfully, they were reconciled to one another in later years. At first, the tearful reunion recorded in Genesis 34 leaves us with the impression that all is well, and indeed it seems to have been between Jacob and Esau. But such was not to be the case between their descendants.

Genesis 36 gives us a detailed account of Esau's family and its development. When Jacob moved back to the land of Canaan, Esau moved southeastward into the hill country called Seir.

Then Esau took his wives, his sons, his daughters, and all the persons of his household, his cattle and all his animals, and all his goods which he had gained in the land of Canaan, and went to a country away from the presence of his brother Jacob. For their possessions were too great for them to dwell together, and the land where they were strangers could not support them because of their livestock. So Esau dwelt in Mount Seir. Esau is Edom. (Gen. 36:6-8).

Later, Jacob's family migrated to Egypt where they resided for nearly four hundred years.

The following incidents illustrate for us the relationship that developed between the descendants of Esau and Jacob. The first hint of rivalry between the nations of Israel and Edom comes when Moses led the Israelites in a victory song after crossing the Red Sea (Ex. 15:15). This rivalry is confirmed when Israel approached the land of Canaan—when Moses sent an embassy from Kadesh to request a right of passage through Edom to the Promised Land, but the king of Edom refused. This account is recorded in Numbers 20:14-21.

Now Moses sent messengers from Kadesh to the king of Edom. "Thus says your brother Israel: 'You know all the hardship that has befallen us, how our fathers went down to Egypt, and we dwelt in Egypt a long time, and the Egyptians afflicted us and our fathers. When we cried out to the LORD, He heard our voice and sent the Angel and brought us up out of Egypt; now here we are in Kadesh, a city on the edge of your border. Please let us pass through your country. We will not pass through fields or vineyards, nor will we drink water from wells; we will go along the King's Highway; we will not turn aside to the right hand or to the left until we have passed through

your territory." Then Edom said to him, "You shall not pass through my land, lest I come out against you with the sword." So the children of Israel said to him, "We will go by the Highway, and if I or my livestock drink any of your water, then I will pay for it; let me only pass through on foot, nothing more." Then he said, "You shall not pass through." So Edom came out against them with many men and with a strong hand. Thus Edom refused to give Israel passage through his territory; so Israel turned away from him.

Despite the hostility that the Edomites showed, God would not allow Israel to retaliate (Deut. 2:1-6) or to show any animosity (Deut. 23:7). This policy became increasingly difficult as the years went on because of the character of the Edomites. An incident involving Doeg the Edomite (1 Sam. 21-22) greatly grieved David, prompting him to write the fifty-second Psalm:

*To the Chief Musician*

*A Contemplation of David when Doeg the Edomite went and told Saul, and said to him, "David has gone to the house of Ahimelech"*

Why do you boast in evil, O mighty man? The goodness of God endures continually. Your tongue devises destruction, Like a sharp razor, working deceitfully. You love evil more than good, Lying rather than speaking righteousness. Selah

You love all devouring words, You deceitful tongue. God shall likewise destroy you forever; He shall take you away, and pluck you out of your dwelling place, And uproot you from the land of the living. Selah

The righteous also shall see and fear, And shall laugh at him, saying, "Here is the man who did not make God his strength, But trusted in the abundance of his riches, And strengthened himself in his wickedness." But I am like a green olive tree in the house of God; I trust in the mercy of God forever and ever. I will praise You forever, Because You have done it; And in the presence of Your saints I will wait on Your name, for it is good.

This incident may have been what prompted David to subjugate the territory of Edom and make them his servants (2 Sam. 8:14). This dominance lasted until the reign of Jehoram, king of Judah (2 Kgs. 8:20-22). The hostilities of the Edomite people toward Israel continued to exist even at the time of the Babylonian captivity. Comparing the prophecies of Ezekiel, Jeremiah, and Obadiah, it becomes apparent that Obadiah is writing in response to the behavior of Edom during this period in Israel's history.

Israel was being punished by God for her unfaithfulness. The Babylonians besieged the city of Jerusalem repeatedly, taking captives and leaving a weakened state. Finally, the capital was destroyed and all but the maimed, the lame,

and the elderly were taken as prisoners of war. Edom had been very smug and proud over her own security, and had gloated over Israel's devastation. She even participated in the carnage and looting, a reprehensible act. Because of her crimes against Israel and her failure to come to the aid of her brethren, Edom is condemned to destruction; Israel will rise again.

Obadiah probably wrote this prophecy shortly after the destruction of Jerusalem in 586 B.C. When the Babylonian army had completely overpowered the city, Edomite mercenaries joined in the looting of what was left of Israeli wealth. Some of the Jews had managed to escape the city and flee into the mountains. Edomite militias hunted them down while they were vulnerable, killing some and turning others over to the enemy. Hear Obadiah's description:

For violence against your brother Jacob, Shame shall cover you. And you shall be cut off forever. In the day that you stood on the other side In the day that strangers carried captive his forces, When foreigners entered his gates And cast lots for Jerusalem—Even you were as one of them. But you should not have gazed on the day of your brother in the day of his captivity; Nor should you have rejoiced over the children of Judah In the day of their destruction; Nor should you have spoken proudly in the day of distress. You should not have entered the gate of My people In the day of their calamity. Indeed, you should not have gazed on their affliction In the day of their calamity, Nor laid hands on their substance In the day of their calamity. You should not have stood at the crossroads to cut off those among them who escaped; Nor should you have delivered up those among them who remained in the day of their distress (1:10-14).

Obadiah makes two predictions: (1) the conquest and utter destruction of Edom because of their participation in the above mentioned war; (2) the subsequent expansion of Israel and the glory of Zion. The fulfillment of the first of the prophecies was exactly in the manner that Obadiah predicted. He saw first a conquest by the heathen (vv. 1-9, 15-16), then an overthrow by the restored Jews (vv. 17-18). We do not have a historical account of how the people known as the Nabathaeans drove the Edomites out of Scir. There are no records of what was happening in Edom from 588 B.C. to 312 B.C. When we do read about them next, we find that they no longer have their mountain strongholds, but are living exclusively in southern Judah. Most historians conjecture that Nebuchadnezzar overpowered the Edomites when he made his assault against Egypt. The second half of the prediction is easily identified when Judas Maccabaeus overthrew the Edomites at Arabattine (1 Macc. 5:3; Josephus, *Antiquities*, xii. 18). Josephus describes the effect of their reduction by John Hyrcanus in the following words:

Hyrchanus captured the cities Adna, and Marissa, and having subjected all the Idumaeans he allowed them to remain where they were, on the condition of being circumcised and adopting the Jewish customs. And they, from love of their home, submitted to circumcision, and fashioned the rest of their habits and conversation after the manner of the Jews. And that was the time after which they became thenceforward Jews (*Antiquities*, xiii. 9).

Their nationality was gone, but they still hung together as a party and joined the Zealots in their excesses at the time of the Roman War. Simon of Gerasa attacked them. Again, Josephus relates:

Simon went through the whole of Idumea, not only plundering cities and villages, but also devastating the whole country. And as you may see a wood utterly stripped by locusts after they have passed over it, so in the rear of Simon's army there was left a desert. They burnt, they razed, and everything that grew in the country they trampled down or they ate up; and they made the cultivated ground harder than the uncultivated by their marching; and, in a word, not a sign of having existed was left to the places which were plundered (*Wars of the Jews*, iv. 9).

The few remaining Edomites were slain at the capture of Jerusalem, and there was "not any remaining of the house of Esau; for Jehovah had spoken it." The prophecy in verse 17 that Israel would again possess her inheritance seems, at first, to have been literally fulfilled in the restoration under Zerubbabel. A more careful examination of this passage and the remainder of the book portrays to us a picture that is much more grand and glorious than what occurred in the return from the captivity. We cannot help but conclude that the Messianic Age is in view as Obadiah closes his prophecy, "and the kingdom shall be the LORD's." *P.O. Box 22774, Lexington, KY, 40522*

# The Prophecy of Joel

by Melvin Blalock

## I. The Book

Joel is regarded as one of the Minor Prophets, but this is not to suggest that his prophetic work was insignificant. This short book consisting of three chapters (four chapters in the Hebrew Bible) contains some of the greatest prophecies of the Bible. Even the casual student of the Bible recognizes the name of Joel due to Peter's eloquent sermon delivered on Pentecost. Peter pointed to Joel's prophecy regarding those things transpiring and said, "This is that spoken by the prophet Joel..."(Acts 2:16).

## II. The Prophet

The name "Joel" means "Jehovah is God." Almost nothing is known of the prophet himself. All we know of Joel is found in his introduction: "The word of the LORD that came to Joel the son of Pethuel" (1:1). In this opening statement, Joel identifies himself as a prophet by showing that he was speaking for the Lord.

Despite the fact of there being a dozen persons named "Joel" in the Old Testament, the name "Pethuel" is found nowhere else. It has the utility, thus, of dissociating Joel from others of the same name in Hebrew history. The use of expressions like, "son of..." etc. was analogous to our use of second names (Coffman).

## III. Prophet to Judah

[Joel] was commissioned to prophesy to Judah, probably during the reign of Amaziah in Judah and of Joash in the Northern kingdom. His familiarity with the Temple and its services has led to the idea that he was of priestly descent. It seems certain that he was among the earlier writing prophets; in fact he is regarded by some as the earliest (**The Family Devotional Bible**).

## IV. Date

The date of the writing is uncertain and vigorously debated. If Joel did indeed prophesy during the reigns of Amaziah and Joash, this would date his book around 800 B.C. Homer Hailey wrote, "The date of the book is as conjectural as the life of the man himself. It is variously placed from one of the earliest, ca. 900 B.C., to the period after the exile, ca. 400 B.C." Many prominent scholars reckon the date to be around 830 B.C. This is the date to which

Burton Coffman subscribes, while Hailey places it around ca. 800 B.C. Some attempt to place the writing after the Babylonian captivity and give a number of reasons for doing so, but as Coffman states, "Our preference for the early date is definitely influenced by the opinion of Hebrew scholars who placed it so early in the Canon, a fact not easily reconciled with the later dates."

## V. Theme

The prevailing theme of Joel's prophecy is "The Day of the Lord."

## VI. Divisions of the Book In Brief

### A. The Locust Plague

Joel had written his prophecy at a time when natural calamities had fallen upon western Asia; successive plagues of insects, particularly, one of locusts; and a severe drought blighting Palestine and surrounding countries (Ch. 2:23, 25). Joel interprets these plagues as tokens of divine chastenings for the sins of the nation and calls upon the people to repent. He further takes these plagues as an occasion for certain prophecies concerning the destruction of Israel, her restoration, and the certainty of God's judgments upon the world (**Family Devotional Bible**).

1. The devastation of Judah (1:2-20)
2. A harbinger of the Day of the Lord (1:15)
3. An urgent summons to repentance and prayer (2:1-17)

### B. The Day of the Lord. (2:18-3:21)

1. Blessings promised to Israel, a day of terror to her enemies (2:18-32)
2. Judgment on the nations (3:1-16)

### C. Glorification of the People of God and the Blessings in God's Kingdom (3:16-21)

## VII. Joel's Purpose

### A. To warn Judah of the day of the Lord and bring them to repentance.

1. Judah was already a kingdom in crisis due to the locust invasion and severe drought that ensued.
  - a. He challenges anyone in Judah to recollect anything of equal severity.

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? (1:2).



- (1) Various explanations of the locust are given, but the New King James Version provides an interesting translation:

What the chewing locust left, the swarming locust has eaten; what the swarming locust left, the crawling locust has eaten; and what the crawling locust left, the consuming locust has eaten (1:4).

- (2) Joel, in one of his many wonderful metaphors, calls the locusts a strong nation.

For a nation is come up upon my land, strong, and without number, whose teeth are the teeth of a lion, and he hath the cheek teeth of a great lion. He hath laid my vine waste, and barked my fig tree: he hath made it clean bare, and cast it away; the branches thereof are made white (1:6-7).

- b. Joel intends for the people to know that the locusts were a harbinger of the Day of the Lord.

Sanctify ye a fast, call a solemn assembly, gather the elders and all the inhabitants of the land into the house of the LORD your God, and cry unto the LORD, Alas for the day! for the day of the LORD is at hand, and as a destruction from the Almighty shall it come (1:14-15).

- c. Burton Coffman sums up Joel's purpose in his prophecy with the following:

The theme of Joel is quite clearly "The Day of the Lord," an expression applied in scripture, to great visitations of God in the punishment of wicked men, or nations, but also, by extension, to the great and final day of the Eternal judgment. Joel is, in a sense, a source, from which the holy apostles and the Lord Jesus himself derived their holy teachings regarding "That Day," of course, expanding and developing the thoughts through means of their own unqualified inspiration. This makes Joel one of the most important books of the Bible, despite its smallness (pp. 5-6).

2. It should be understood that prophecy often has both a near and a remote fulfillment.
- a. Joel warns them of the nearness of "the Day of the Lord."

- b. It is safe to say that he believed the time was very near and not three thousand years in the future. Coffman writes:

Thus, when one of the ancient prophets referred to "the day of Jehovah," it always referred, not merely to the Final Arraignment and punishment of mankind, but to any lesser judgment that might be imposed upon specific sectors of humanity (or even upon all of it) in the period intervening before that Final Day. For Joel, as for the other prophets, "the day of the Lord" is always at hand. Joel did not mean that the day of the Lord, in its full prophetic sense, of the revelation of Christ...was really to occur in their times. However, Joel did see in that terrible locust plague 'a warning of the day of Jehovah' which was to come.' It was a warning that other occasions of 'the day of Jehovah' were in store for Israel. Historically, it was only a little while before the Assyrians and Babylonians would come and execute "the Day of Jehovah," not merely upon the northern kingdom, but upon the southern kingdom of Israel as well. Thus Joel very accurately foretold future judgments upon Israel, taking the locust disaster as an omen, or an earnest, of an even greater judgment (or judgments) yet to come...

- d. We may correctly conclude that "the Day of the Lord" is not limited to the great and final judgment. Rather, all of the previous judgments are precursors to the "Day of the Lord" when Jesus returns with all of His holy angels.

B. To induce his people to repent.

1. They were told to weep and mourn over their condition (1:8, 13-14).
2. They were told to rend their hearts.

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 (2:13).

Note the words, "Rend your heart, and not your garments." Joel did not object to them showing an outward sign of repentance by rending their garments, but his emphasis was on the heart. Their actions were not to be simply for external show; real repentance is from the heart. We are reminded of the words of the Psalmist,

- "The Lord is nigh unto them that are of a broken heart; and saveth such as be of a contrite spirit" (Ps. 34:18).
3. God can repent of His purpose.
    - a. God had determined evil against them.
    - b. Even at this late time, with their judgment very near, God could be led to change His purpose (repent of the evil He had in store for them). This was conditioned on their repentance.

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. Who knoweth if he will return and repent, and leave a blessing behind him; even a meat offering and a drink offering unto the LORD your God? (2:13-14)

- c. Joel reminds them of something we should never forget: "for he [God] is gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and of great kindness."
- d. Because of man's sins and rebellion, God has brought, and may still bring, evil upon mankind (Is. 45:7; cf. Amos 3:6).

### VIII. Passages of Interest

- A. Following their repentance, God would take away their reproach.

Yea, the LORD will answer and say unto his people, Behold, I will send you corn, and wine, and oil, and ye shall be satisfied therewith: and I will no more make you a reproach among the heathen: but I will remove far off from you the northern army, and will drive him into a land barren and desolate, with his face toward the east sea, and his hinder part toward the utmost sea, and his stink shall come up, and his ill savour shall come up, because he hath done great things (2:19-20).

1. "But I will remove far off from you the northern army" (2:20).

This is a prophetic double entendre, rather than a problem. Not only did the worst locust plagues usually descend on Jerusalem from the north, but, it was also true that Israel's main invaders: Aram, Assyria, Babylon, Persia, Greece and Rome all attacked from the north. What is evidently in view in this passage is that the summary end of the locust plague which resulted from their being carried by strong winds into the seas, is cited as a pledge that the greater judgment of invasion has also been averted. The

use of the military words 'the northern army' precludes the limitation of this to the locust scourge... (Coffman).

2. "His stink shall come up and His ill savour" (2:20). These words likely have a double meaning, applying first to the bad odor resulting from the drowning of millions of locusts, and second to the terrible odor of a battlefield with its unburied corpses of men and horses.

#### B. Prophetic Scriptures of Interest

1. "My people shall never be ashamed" (2:26).

And ye shall eat in plenty, and be satisfied, and praise the name of the LORD your God, that hath dealt wondrously with you: and my people shall never be ashamed. 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; and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, your old men shall dream dreams, your young men shall see visions: And also upon the servants and upon the handmaids in those days will I pour out my spirit (2:26-29).

...even this description of the temporal benefits of God's blessings upon Israel is freighted with intimations of the spiritual benefits accruing to God's people in all ages to come. Paul so interpreted this very verse in Romans 10:11-12, where he spoke of the blessings of believers in Christ, saying, "For the scripture saith, whosoever believeth on him shall not be put to shame; For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek" (Coffman).

"My people shall never be put to shame" was a promise which secular Israel mistakenly assumed to be their unique heritage, overlooking the truth that in every age, God's people are those who do his will. These promises then, both here and in the succeeding verse, did not promise unlimited security and blessing for secular Israel, but to God's true people, the spiritual seed of Abraham (Coffman).

2. "Pour out of my spirit upon all flesh" (2:28-29).
  - a. Peter points to this prophecy by Joel on Pentecost.

For these are not drunken, as ye suppose, seeing it is but the third hour of the day. But this is that which was spo-

ken by the prophet Joel; and it shall come to pass in the last days, saith God, I will pour out of my Spirit upon all flesh: and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, and your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams: and on my servants and on my handmaidens I will pour out in those days of my Spirit; and they shall prophesy (Acts 2:15-18).

- b. This indeed marked the beginning of what may be termed the "Spirit Dispensation."
  - c. All flesh means Jew and Gentile.
  - d. Joel's account uses the word, "afterward." Peter makes it more definite by saying, "in the last days," meaning the last of the Jewish dispensation (E. M. Zerr).
4. "The sun shall be turned into darkness, and the moon into blood" (2:31).

The sun shall be turned into darkness, and the moon into blood, before the great and the terrible day of the LORD come.

- a. Joel alludes to this phenomenon at least three times (2:10, 31; 3:15).
- b. These words are found in several other prophetic utterances. Jesus said these events would accompany the destruction of Jerusalem.

Immediately after the tribulation of those days shall the sun be darkened, and the moon shall not give her light, and the stars shall fall from heaven, and the powers of the heavens shall be shaken (Mt. 24:29).

- c. The fall of great nations and their leaders are often symbolized in the Old Testament as a darkened sun and moon, stars falling, and the heavens shaking. For example, Isaiah gives his strikingly similar description of the destruction of the destruction of Babylon by the Medes (Is. 13:10).

For the stars of heaven and the constellations thereof shall not give their light: the sun shall be darkened in his going forth, and the moon shall not cause her light to shine.

Isaiah also predicts the fall of Edom (Is. 34:4). Ezekiel predicts a similar judgment upon Egypt (Ezek. 32:7-8). Amos

makes this prophecy about the Northern Kingdom (Amos 8:9).

It becomes obvious that this symbolical language is used by sacred writers to portray great calamities including the fall of mighty kingdoms and the dethroning of powerful rulers that result when God interferes in the history of nations (*Contending for the Faith, A Commentary on the Gospel of Mark*, by Carl Johnson).

The same prophetic words are found in the opening of the sixth seal regarding the fall of the Roman Empire (Rev. 6:12-14). An interesting comment from Zerr:

This verse is still figurative but is more specific than the preceding one. It was fulfilled when Jesus was on the cross and the sun was prevented from giving its light for three hours (Mt. 27:45). This was only 50 days before the giving of the Holy Spirit upon the apostles, which would give to the language here the meaning as if it said the event would occur 'just before' the day of the Lord. Terrible is from the Hebrew YARE, one of whose meanings is "to be revered"; and certainly that can truly be said of the day when the Lord gave to the world the kingdom that was to "stand forever."

- d. Could it be the "Day of the Lord" alluded to in this passage is the Day of Pentecost? This seems to be the view of Zerr.
5. "Whosoever shall call on the name of the lord shall be delivered" (2:32).
  - a. The spiritual application of this verse is our deliverance from the captivity of sin. Peter quotes Joel in Acts 2:21, "And it shall come to pass, that whosoever shall call on the name of the Lord shall be saved."
  - b. The deliverance is to be in mount Zion and Jerusalem (Joel 2:32; cf. Is. 2:2-4). Jesus told His disciples, "And that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in his name among all nations, beginning at Jerusalem" (Lk. 24:47).
  - c. The remnant whom the Lord will call.

He came unto his own, and his own received him not.  
But as many as received him, to them gave he power

to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name (Jn. 1:11-12).

Esaías also crieth concerning Israel, Though the number of the children of Israel be as the sand of the sea, a remnant shall be saved (Rom. 9:27).

6. "In those days," Joel writes, "For, behold, in those days, and in that time, when I shall bring again the captivity of Judah and Jerusalem" (3:1).
  - a. The third chapter is concerned with spiritual Israel.
  - b. The third chapter contains Old Testament prophecies concerning spiritual Israel and not secular Israel. Coffman writes,

But in this chapter, one should forget all about secular Israel, the Jewish state, the Hebrew nation, the fleshly Israel, the old Israel, etc. All of the references to Judah, Jerusalem, Zion, "my heritage Israel," etc. are used in a spiritual sense of the church and kingdom of Jesus Christ our Lord. The very first verse of this chapter dates everything in it subsequently to the Day of Pentecost; and that leaves the secular Israel completely out of it. The first section of the chapter, in highly metaphorical language, speaks of the 'true Israel' receiving the forgiveness of sins, and of the judgments of God upon the nations which opposed his purposes (1-7).

7. "Bring the captive again." This is not a direct quote!
  - a. Jesus came to set the captive free.
  - b. This would be a spiritual freedom through the gospel.

The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he hath anointed me to preach the gospel to the poor; he hath sent me to heal the brokenhearted, to preach deliverance to the captives, and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty them that are bruised, to preach the acceptable year of the Lord (Lk. 4:18-19).

8. "The valley of Jehoshaphat" (3:2, 11). Jehoshaphat, when translated, means "Jehovah judges." Homer Hailey writes:

But the "valley of Jehoshaphat" is not to be thought of as a literal place in Palestine, but as an ideal place here where judgment is to be executed. No beginning quotation

mark The point of emphasis is that it is to be a judgment by Jehovah on behalf of His "people" and for His "heritage Israel," whom the heathen had "scattered among the nations." The judgment is indicated as universal, on all nations that had had a part in scattering His people, even to the Roman Empire that God used to destroy Jerusalem. The cruelty of the nations against God's people is expressed in their disposition to scatter the people among the nations, to cast lots for them to be used or sold as slaves, and then to give a boy for the use of a harlot, or a girl for a cup of wine. This low estimate of the value of human life is characteristic of heathen people who have refused to have God in their knowledge. Such a disposition and such conduct must be judged.

Burton Coffman says of the valley of Jehoshaphat that:

This is the same as the place called Armageddon (Rev. 16); and in both cases, it is the place where God will execute his wrath upon evil men; and absolutely no battle of any kind is prophesied as occurring at either site. This judgment of God upon 'all nations' who have persecuted God's people has already taken place in history repeatedly, as witnessed by Tyre, Sidon, Sodom, Gomorrah, Assyria, Nineveh, Babylon, Persian, Greece, Rome, and Jerusalem; and it is still going on!

9. "Beat your plowshares into swords." Joel writes, "Beat your plowshares into swords, and your pruninghooks into spears: let the weak say, I am strong" (3:10). Homer Hailey comments:

Judgment of the nations is decreed by Jehovah; but in the midst of the execution of this judgment Jehovah's people will be secure in Zion...A proclamation is issued to the nations to prepare war. Here God is declaring that the nations themselves will be the instruments of judgment. The seeds of destruction are sown in the forces of destruction. The implements and instruments of peaceful agricultural pursuits are to be converted into implements of war. This is the opposite to the character of the kingdom of God, for in that kingdom its citizens are to convert the implements of war into instruments of peace (Is. 2:4).

The heathen nations who have opposed God and His kingdom, and rejected His word are told to come to the valley of Jehoshaphat: "for there will I sit to judge all the heathen round about" (3:12). Again, Jehoshaphat means Jehovah judges. He indicates



the harvest time has come. It is judgment time. Put in the sickle and reap. This figure is employed extensively in Revelation 14:14-20.

10. "Multitudes in the valley of decision" (3:14).
- The valley of decision is the same as the valley of Jehoshaphat, the repetition heightens the effect. As long as man is on earth he is in the valley of decision (Coffman).
  - The gospel saves the believer and condemns the unbeliever.
11. "Roar out of Zion." Joel writes, "The LORD also shall roar out of Zion, and utter his voice from Jerusalem; and the heavens and the earth shall shake: but the LORD will be the hope of his people, and the strength of the children of Israel" (3:16).
- Remember that his law was to go forth from Zion and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem (Is. 2:1-4).
  - Zion was a particular spot in Jerusalem that was the seat of the government and where David had his head quarters (Zerr).
  - The heavens and the earth shall quake.

Whose voice then shook the earth: but now he hath promised, saying, Yet once more I shake not the earth only, but also heaven. And this word, Yet once more, signifieth the removing of those things that are shaken, as of things that are made, that those things which cannot be shaken may remain. Wherefore we receiving a kingdom which cannot be moved, let us have grace, whereby we may serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear: for our God is a consuming fire (Heb. 12:26-29).

Spiritual Zion is impregnable: strangers will not pass through her as they did physical Jerusalem. The kingdom over which Jehovah reigns from Zion is one that cannot be shaken (Hebrews 12:28); It will stand forever (Dan. 2:44, 7:13-14) (Homer Hailey).

12. "The mountains shall drop down new wine, and the hills shall flow with milk" (3:18).

This verse begins a paragraph concluding the whole prophecy in which there is a metaphorical description of the wonderful blessings available to the children of God in their service of Christ and his kingdom (Coffman).

What is seen in this verse is a picture of universal peace, security, plenty, and tranquility. It is appropriate to remember that even for the Christians the blessings here are not literal, but spiritual. A literal view of this passage is impossible. It is a picture of the spiritual joys in the days of the outpouring of God's Spirit, namely in the days of the present dispensation of the New Testament (Coffman).

### Conclusion

Though the book of Joel is but three chapters in length, it contains among the most important prophecies found in all of God's revelation. We are able to look back in retrospect and identify much of their fulfillment in the New Testament. Joel's theme continually emphasizes the "Day of the Lord." Because of this prophet, our faith should be made stronger and our determination greater in preparation for "that Day." *214 Pearl St., Cleburne, TX 76031*

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## **A New Day Dawns (Isaiah's Messianic Prophecies)**

*by Doug Edwards*

Throughout the course of history, God has raised special men during critical times to accomplish His purposes. When the world was falling into wickedness, God raised Noah to remind that wicked generation of God's ways and to build an ark for the saving of the faithful. God separated Abraham from an idolatrous world to become the father of a group of people who would eventually bring the Savior into the world. God used Moses to lead the children of Israel out of the suffering of Egyptian bondage and to mold them into a holy nation—a kingdom of priests. Likewise, God called Isaiah the prophet to appear on redemption's stage during a critical time in Israel's history.

Isaiah lived and preached some seven hundred years before the coming of Jesus. He prophesied in Judah during the reigns of Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah (1:1). His ministry lasted over forty years, beginning in about the year 740 B.C. (6:1). He was contemporary with Micah and the northern prophets Hosea and Amos. Isaiah was a special man—the man of the hour. He seemed to deal with any class of people, whether they were kings, high government officials, false religious leaders, or even the common people.

We must understand Isaiah's book in light of the threat of Assyrian conquest. The Assyrian king had appeared on the horizon, and this appearance signaled a time of great fear and panic for God's people. The Assyrians had developed a reputation for savage cruelty and ruthless destruction of neighboring peoples. They were known to burn cities, behead victims, and flay many alive. All it took was a mere rumor of an Assyrian attack to strike fear into the hearts of a people.

Behind this physical threat that Assyria presented to their lives was an even greater threat—the removal of God from His throne and the elevation of man. The history of man shows a universal desire to replace God with man. After the flood, men gathered at a plain in Shinar to build a city with a tower that would reach to the heavens. They wanted to make a name for themselves and not to be scattered over the face of the whole earth (Gen. 11:1–9). It was an attempt to reject God and elevate man as the Supreme Being. God ruined their plans by causing them to speak different languages, which in turn caused the different nations to form. With the coming of the Assyrians this old spirit of Babel revived. Man began to exalt himself as he had tried at Babel. The Assyrians had no desire to build a tower to the heavens and gather all of mankind in one spot. What they wanted to do, however, was to conquer the nations

of the world and make them a part of their kingdom. Man would not gather in one spot, but would belong to one kingdom, and that kingdom would exalt man not God.

The coming of the Assyrian Empire signaled that a new order of things was coming and that the old world was passing away. It was a critical time for Israel. Where would Israel stand in this new order? Would she resist this movement and be God's holy nation—a light to the Gentiles—or would she fall into darkness by turning for help to the nations around her? Would she turn to God for help? Or would she learn her lesson the hard way? Man had to learn that salvation (deliverance) cannot come from himself. Man cannot save himself. He must look to God. This was Isaiah's message.

Judah initially failed the test under King Ahaz. When Syria and the Northern Kingdom Israel threatened to invade Judah and remove Ahaz from power, Ahaz rejected the pleadings of Isaiah to turn to God for deliverance and, instead, turned to Assyria for help. Isaiah then told Ahaz that Assyria would conquer his enemies, but Assyria would not stop there—she also would invade Judah, conquering them (Is. 7–8). Assyria succeeded in capturing the fortified cities until she came to Jerusalem. The Assyrians then demanded the surrender of Jerusalem. This time, however, King Hezekiah listened to Isaiah and refused to surrender to the Assyrians, and the city was miraculously spared (Is. 36–37). Thus, Isaiah's ministry was successful. Through the efforts of this faithful servant of God, the city of Jerusalem was spared from the Assyrians. These events are described in chapters 1–35.

Isaiah's book, however, does not end with Jerusalem's deliverance from Assyria. Chapters 40–66 deal with Judah's exile in Babylon and their return to their ancient homeland. When God created Israel as a nation, He set before the people a principle of blessing and cursing (Deut. 28; Lev. 26). Simply put, if Israel obeyed God, she would be blessed. If Israel disobeyed, she would be cursed. As we learn from a study of the historical books of the Old Testament, Israel had a constant problem with idolatry. The book of Judges reveals the problems that came upon Israel because of her looking to the idols of her neighbors. When the kingdom divided after the death of Solomon, the Northern Kingdom was idolatrous from the very beginning. This idolatry brought about her destruction in 721 B.C. by the Assyrians. The Southern Kingdom had problems with idolatry as well, although a few of her kings were good and tried to bring the people out of these evil practices. It was because of her turning from God to idols, and Hezekiah's pride, that Judah was carried off into Babylonian captivity (Is. 39).

God had a purpose for this captivity. The Jews had to be chastised and become a servant in Babylon so that they might see that life comes only from

God. They first had to pass through death in order that they might obtain life. They had to understand that bondage to Babylon, from which Cyrus would free them, was a type of a greater bondage of a spiritual nature by which they were separated from God and that they could only be delivered by One who was a servant of the Lord.

Isaiah's job was to explain to the people the appearance of the Assyrian threat and how they were not to turn to the nations for help. He also explained the upcoming Babylonian exile and their subsequent deliverance. In explaining the role of these two powers in God's plans, Isaiah describes more of the upcoming Messiah and His kingdom than any of the other prophets. He has been nicknamed the "Messianic prophet," which is one well earned. We will now look at some of the Messianic prophecies in this book.

### **Isaiah 9:1-7**

I have selected Isaiah 9:1-7 to use as a text in drawing out the Messianic prophecies in Isaiah. As we read it, we will discover this passage contains several Messianic themes that will be found throughout Isaiah. The passage reads:

Nevertheless, there will be no more gloom for those who were in distress. In the past he humbled the land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali, but in the future he will honor Galilee of the Gentiles, by the way of the sea, along the Jordan—The people walking in darkness have seen a great light; on those living in the land of the shadow of death a light has dawned. You have enlarged the nation and increased their joy; they rejoice before you as people rejoice at the harvest, as men rejoice when dividing the plunder. For as in the day of Midian's defeat, you have shattered the yoke that burdens them, the bar across their shoulders, the rod of their oppressor. Every warrior's boot used in battle and every garment rolled in blood will be destined for burning, will be fuel for the fire. For to us a child is born, to us a son is given, and the government will be on his shoulders. And he will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. Of the increase of his government and peace there will be no end. He will reign on David's throne and over his kingdom, establishing and upholding it with justice and righteousness from that time on and forever. The zeal of the LORD Almighty will accomplish this.

Several important Messianic themes come out of this passage of Scripture. These themes include:

1. A new day will dawn
2. An enlarged nation

3. A time of rejoicing
4. A time of deliverance
5. A time of peace
6. All blessings possible because of the work of the Messiah

These themes are common in the Messianic writings of the prophets. We will now discuss each theme separately and see how they recur throughout Isaiah.

### **A New Day Dawns (vv. 1–2)**

When the Assyrians first attacked Israel, they did so in the northern part of Galilee involving the lands of Zebulun and Naphtali. Dark days followed. Suffering can cause one either to turn to God in repentance or to sink deeper into spiritual darkness. The latter seems to be the case here. This darkness that Isaiah pictures is a spiritual one caused by sin and rebellion. God's Word makes darkness a representation for sin. Since God is light (1 Jn. 1:5), darkness exists where His presence is not found. Darkness, then, is the realm of human pride, rebellion, and disobedience—a place of spiritual ignorance. However, Isaiah foresees a time of change, when the grace of God would dawn in this forsaken area. In the New Testament, Matthew quotes this passage and applies it to the time when Jesus took the gospel into the northern areas of Galilee (Mt. 4:12–17). Thus, Isaiah describes the Christian Age as the dawning of a new day, a time when light overcomes darkness. Surely there could be no greater description of the power of the gospel in a world seemingly controlled by sin.

This figure of a new day dawning, the light dispelling the darkness, occurs several times in Isaiah:

I, the LORD, have called you in righteousness; I will take hold of your hand. I will keep you and will make you to be a covenant for the people and a light for the Gentiles to open eyes that are blind, to free captives from prison and to release from the dungeon those who sit in darkness (42:6–7).

Arise, shine, for your light has come, and the glory of the LORD rises upon you. See, darkness covers the earth and thick darkness is over the peoples, but the LORD rises upon you and his glory appears over you. Nations will come to your light, and kings to the brightness of your dawn (60:1–3).

The Spirit of the Sovereign LORD is on me, because the LORD has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim freedom for the captives and release from darkness for the prisoners, to proclaim the year of the

Lord's favor and the day of vengeance of our God, to comfort all who mourn (61:1-2).

This new day also brings in a new age. Isaiah says, "Behold, I will create new heavens and a new earth. The former things will not be remembered, nor will they come to mind" (65:17). The immediate context indicates this reference is to the Messianic Kingdom and not to heaven (65:17-25). While it is true that Peter refers to a new heavens and a new earth as our heavenly home (2 Pet. 3:13), Isaiah uses this symbolic language to picture the dawning of a new age— the Messianic Age.

### **An Enlarged Nation (v. 3)**

One of Isaiah's favorite pictures of the upcoming Messianic Kingdom is that it would be a realm for all nations. The prophets use the term "nations" to signify Gentiles. These prophecies that picture the Gentiles' coming into the Messiah's kingdom proved to be a little difficult for the Jews of the Lord's day to accept. Isaiah contains several promises of the Gentiles' entering this spiritual body:

In the last days the mountain of the Lord's temple will be established as chief among the mountains; it will be raised above the hills, and all nations will stream to it (2:2).

In that day the Root of Jesse will stand as a banner for the peoples; the nations will rally to him, and his place of rest will be glorious. In that day the Lord will reach out his hand a second time to reclaim the remnant that is left of his people from Assyria, from Lower Egypt, from Upper Egypt, from Cush, from Elam, from Babylonia, from Hamath and from the islands of the sea. He will raise a banner for the nations and gather the exiles of Israel; he will assemble the scattered people of Judah from the four quarters of the earth (11:10-12).

Enlarge the place of your tent, stretch your tent curtains wide, do not hold back; lengthen your cords, strengthen your stakes. For you will spread out to the right and to the left; your descendants will dispossess nations and settle in their desolate cities (54:2-3).

Surely you will summon nations you know not, and nations that do not know you will hasten to you, because of the LORD your God, the Holy One of Israel, for he has endowed you with splendor (55:5).

Nations will come to your light, and kings to the brightness of your dawn (60:3).

Foreigners will rebuild your walls, and their kings will serve you. Though in anger I struck you, in favor I will show you compassion. Your gates will always stand open, they will never be shut, day or

night, so that men may bring you the wealth of the nations-- their kings led in triumphal procession (60:10-11).

"And they will bring all your brothers, from all the nations, to my holy mountain in Jerusalem as an offering to the LORD—on horses, in chariots and wagons, and on mules and camels," says the LORD. "They will bring them, as the Israelites bring their grain offerings, to the temple of the LORD in ceremonially clean vessels" (66:20).

### **A Time of Rejoicing (v. 3)**

With the nation enlarged, joy would be increased, for all in the new holy nation would thrill over their salvation. The prophet uses two figures to describe this joy. First, the rejoicing would be like those who had an abundant harvest and their barns are full and their vats overflow. For those who depend solely on agriculture, an abundant crop means life and food for another year. Harvest, then, is a time of celebrating. Second, conquerors rejoice in the dividing of the spoils of war. Victory is a time of celebrating. Isaiah prophesies in other places of the joy of the Messianic Age:

Behold, I will create new heavens and a new earth. The former things will not be remembered, nor will they come to mind. But be glad and rejoice forever in what I will create, for I will create Jerusalem to be a delight and its people a joy (65:17-18).

You will go out in joy and be led forth in peace; the mountains and hills will burst into song before you, and all the trees of the field will clap their hands. Instead of the thornbush will grow the pine tree, and instead of briars the myrtle will grow. This will be for the Lord's renown, for an everlasting sign, which will not be destroyed (55:12-13).

They will enter Zion with singing; everlasting joy will crown their heads. Gladness and joy will overtake them, and sorrow and sighing will flee away (35:10).

When we look at the New Testament, it is not surprising that we see the Ethiopian going on his way rejoicing after his conversion (Acts 8:39) and Paul reminding Christians that we need to rejoice (Phil. 4:4). Isaiah said that rejoicing would be a characteristic of the Messianic Age.

### **A Time of Deliverance (v. 4)**

Isaiah's picture in verse 4 is that of bondage and oppression. The time will come when those who suffer through bondage will be delivered and experience true freedom. The bondage Isaiah describes here is that of sin. Sin



entrap and makes one a slave (Jn. 8:34). Scattered throughout Isaiah's book, one finds promises of hope for deliverance from the bondage of sin:

"The Redeemer will come to Zion, to those in Jacob who repent of their sins," declares the LORD (59:20).

I, the LORD, have called you in righteousness; I will take hold of your hand. I will keep you and will make you to be a covenant for the people and a light for the Gentiles, to open eyes that are blind, to free captives from prison and to release from the dungeon those who sit in darkness (42:6-7).

Surely he took up our infirmities and carried our sorrows, yet we considered him stricken by God, smitten by him, and afflicted. But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was upon him, and by his wounds we are healed (53:4-5).

### **A Time of Peace (v. 5)**

Isaiah describes a time of peace when every warrior's boot and bloody garment will be destined for burning. They will no longer be needed. Since the Messiah's kingdom is a spiritual body, military attire will not be a part of its strength. The Messiah came to bring peace between man and God (Rom. 5:1). Peace with God produces two natural by-products: peace among men (Rom. 12:17-18) and peace within one's own life (Phil. 4:7). Isaiah uses many symbols to describe the peaceful nature of the Lord's kingdom:

He will judge between the nations and will settle disputes for many peoples. They will beat their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning hooks. Nation will not take up sword against nation, nor will they train for war anymore (2:4).

The wolf will live with the lamb, the leopard will lie down with the goat, the calf and the lion and the yearling together; and a little child will lead them. The cow will feed with the bear, their young will lie down together, and the lion will eat straw like the ox. The infant will play near the hole of the cobra, and the young child put his hand into the viper's nest. They will neither harm nor destroy on all my holy mountain, for the earth will be full of the knowledge of the LORD as the waters cover the sea (11:6-9).

They will build houses and dwell in them; they will plant vineyards and eat their fruit. No longer will they build houses and others live in them, or plant and others eat. For as the days of a tree, so will be the days of my people; my chosen ones will long enjoy the works of their hands (65:21-22).

**All Blessings Possible Because of Messiah (vv. 6-7)**

In verses 6-7, Isaiah describes the reason for our joy; here is the cause for all these blessings within the Messianic Kingdom. It is through the coming of the Messiah and His wonderful work. He will be the son "Immanuel." His names are descriptive of Who and What He is: Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, and Prince of Peace. He will be the fulfillment of God's prophecy to David (2 Sam. 7:12-16) and will reign on David's throne, blessing the world and His kingdom.

Isaiah is full of other references to the Messiah. God allows him to describe the Messiah more than any other of the prophets. The other prophets may have things to say about the Messiah and His kingdom, but God allows Isaiah to describe Him in more detail. Note these references to the Messiah in Isaiah 1-39:

1. Born of a virgin (7:14)
2. He will judge with righteousness and justice (11:1-5)
3. As a king he will reign in righteousness (32:1)
4. He is the stone laid in Zion (28:16)

But it is in chapters 40-66 that Isaiah especially describes the character and mission of the Messiah. Here He is called the Servant. Actually, there are three servants described in this section of Isaiah. First, Cyrus the Persian who will free the captives from Babylonian exile is called a servant (41:2-5, 25; 43:14; 45:13; 46:11; 48:14). Second, Israel as a nation is called a servant (41:8-10; 42:18-25; 43:8-13; 44:1-5; 21:28; 45:4; 48:20-22). Third, the Messiah who delivers from sin is called a servant (42:1-9; 49:1-13; 50:4-11; 52:13-53:12).

Israel had to learn servitude to God during the Babylonian captivity. They had to learn that salvation could only come from God. They, in turn, could only be delivered by One who is a servant to God's ways. They had to see that their bondage in Babylon, from which Cyrus freed them, was a type of an even greater bondage of sin from which only God's Servant, the Messiah, could free them. They could not free themselves—only a servant of God could free them. Isaiah uses the term "servant," not in a degrading, subordinate way, but as one who serves God and accomplishes His will. Hence, it is a term of honor.

**The Servant Songs**

There are four descriptions of the Messiah that are commonly called the "Servant Songs" (42:1-9; 49:1-13; 50:4-11; and 52:13-53:12). These pas-

sages describe the nature and character of Servant, His suffering, and represent Him as a prophet with a worldwide mission.

There is no other passage that so plainly describes the suffering and glory of Christ than that of the fourth song (52:13–53:12). In this well-known section, Isaiah climbs the mountain of truth and eloquence in describing the work of the Messiah. It stands plainly in the background of almost every New Testament treatment of the great events connected with Lord's passion, death, burial, resurrection, exaltation, and second coming. Practically the whole chapter is quoted in the New Testament, either literally or through figurative allusions. This song may be outlined as followed:

- I. The Servant's exaltation (52:13–15)
- II. The Servant's rejection and acquaintance with grief (53:1–3)
- III. The Servant's substitutionary atoning death (53:4–6)
- IV. The Servant's total submission (53:7–9)
- V. The Servant's triumph (53:10–12)

The entire gospel message is found in this section: from Bethlehem to Calvary to heaven and the throne of God. Once we learn the meaning of this passage, we love Jesus even more for His sacrifice, and we appreciate the greatness of our Father.

### **Conclusion**

As we investigate the Old Testament Scriptures concerning the Messiah and His kingdom, may we concur with the words of the Psalmist: "Great are the works of the LORD; they are pondered by all who delight in them. Glorious and majestic are his deeds, and his righteousness endures forever" (111:2–3). May we, as eagles, soar to new heights of spiritual understanding and satisfaction. 104 N. E. 8<sup>th</sup> St., Moore, OK 73160

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# Isaiah

## (Contemporary Prophecy)

*by P. Duane Permenter*

The books we call "the prophets" are so named because they mainly consist of predictions of future events. However, they also contain many historical passages, just as there are also predictions of future events scattered throughout the books we call "historical." The prophets also contain many passages that relate to other subjects, e.g., the nature and attributes of God, the religious and moral duties of man, reproofs of idolatry and other sins, exhortations to the practice of true religion, and advice (including warnings respecting the political state of the country). The prophets, as ambassadors of Jehovah, sent these messages to the kings and princes of the Hebrews. These "prophets," that is, divinely inspired persons, were raised among the Israelites to be the messengers of God's Word (Horne, Vol. II, p. 140). The New Testament writers mention the prophets often, for example: Hebrews 1:1 states, "God, who at various times and in various ways spoke in time past to the fathers by the prophets," and 2 Peter 1:21 states, "for prophecy never came by the will of man, but holy men of God spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit."

Isaiah and the other prophets of yesteryear were preachers of God's Word, much like we are teachers and preachers today. Of course, we do not have the benefit of verbal inspiration, but we can still learn much from them that will help us in our day. Men still commit evil and God still needs spokesmen who will speak up and spare not. Let us begin by looking closely at the work of the prophet as authored by God.

Bible writers used three different Hebrew words to refer to the prophetic work. When the Scriptures mention these inspired men, the English word most commonly used is "prophet." Sometimes the word "seer" is used rather than prophet, but the names are almost interchangeable. Basically, when the word "seer" is used, the passage is speaking of the method of receiving God's Word. As an example of the words being used interchangeably, the Bible says in 1 Samuel 9:9, "Formerly in Israel, when a man went to inquire of God, he spoke thus: 'Come, let us go to the seer'; for he who is now called a prophet was formerly called a seer." The idea conveyed in the Scripture is that a prophet is the spokesman in place of God. True prophets were always God's spokesmen. To illustrate the idea of being a spokesman in the place of someone else, when Moses complained of being slow of speech, the Lord said that his brother Aaron would stand in his place: "See, I have made you as God to Pharaoh, and Aaron your brother shall be your prophet [spokesman]" (Ex.

7:1). Other English words describe these great individuals: watchmen, men of God, servants of the Lord, interpreters, and men of the Spirit. Hester shares six distinguishing characteristics that each of these outspoken men of God possessed:

1. He was influenced and motivated by his "call" to speak in his day.
2. He was conscious of God's authority and on this basis spoke courageously and uncompromisingly.
3. He was a man of the spirit, spending much time in communion with God, often in solitary and lonely places.
4. He was often a rugged individualist who would attract attention. He followed no prescribed order and was independent of ritual and popular custom.
5. He was a faithful and often fierce denouncer of evil practices of the individual and the nation.
6. Many of the prophets in their discourses reveal the future of the nation and the Kingdom of God (Hester, pp. 273-274).

After looking at these characteristics, it is not surprising that Moses promised a continuing line of prophets would exist in Israel (Deut. 18:15-22). The mission of any prophet was to declare the message of the Lord, and their work related to the past, present and future. The prophet often recorded and interpreted the work of the Lord with people in regard to the past. He always called people to repentance in the present and demanded a change of life in the future. These preachers of yesteryear would also remind Israel of the promises of reward for righteous living, and threats of punishment for wickedness. Sometimes their role was to give practical advice and help the political leaders through tough times. It is important to remember that although their work often pointed to the future, the future was not their work exclusively. They also dealt with their own generation. These bulwarks of God stood forth as the revealers of God's will in the great crises of Israel's history. The prophet was an independent and authoritative voice to speak forth the inspired message for the time. The attitude of God's incredible prophets is illustrated by the words of Jeremiah: "His word was in my heart like a burning fire shut up in my bones; I was weary of holding it back, and I could not" (Jer. 20:9).

Isaiah was such a man. The name Isaiah means "Yahweh has saved." In keeping with his name, the basic theme of the whole book is salvation. God's salvation has never at any time been accessible by the strength of men. It is offered only by God's grace. This being true, it follows that our holy God desires holy living in His people. Isaiah expresses God's merciful dealing with people very much like a parent-child relationship; that is, sometimes God

chastens and purges men to make them fit to participate in His program of redemption.

Isaiah wrote all sixty-six chapters. Isaiah's vision is truly an inspired wonder of the Old Testament. He lived and wrote this book halfway between Moses (the great lawgiver) and Jesus Christ (the greatest prophet of all). This Judean prophet employs a richness of vocabulary to describe the Lord's will that no other book in all the prophets utilized. Isaiah exceeds even the Psalmists in his use of the Hebrew language. One expression that must have originated with Isaiah is the phrase, "the Holy One of Israel," which is found no less than twenty-six times within its pages.

Isaiah was an important person in his day. He greatly influenced the southern people, Judah. Isaiah clearly fulfilled his mission from the Lord. Leaders of each generation should make the fulfillment of God's purpose and will their foremost goal. The urgent need for a prophet who would not hold back, but who would cry aloud and spare not, is evident from the many statements made in the historical accounts of the Old Testament and specifically in the book of Isaiah.

For instance, Isaiah chapter one speaks to the pride and arrogance of Judah and her leaders. The elders and judges had taken bribes and oppressed the weak (v. 17). The orphans were abused and left unattended by the people (vv. 17, 23). The magistrates were deaf to the pleas of the widows and the poor (v. 17). Many were guilty of adultery and murder (v. 21). Their kings had become companions of thieves (v. 23). Isaiah chapter two charges the people who had turned to soothsayers and divination rather than to the true and living God (v. 6). The whole countryside was filled with idolatry (v. 8). Ahaz and many Judeans went to the valley of the son of Hinnom, burning their children alive in sacrifice to Molech (Is. 57:5; 2 Kgs. 16:3; 2 Chron. 28:3).

Sin brought great cursing from God upon the people of Judah. Moses had predicted this in Deuteronomy 28. Moses plainly gave Israel the choice of life or death. If the people chose to obey God, then He would bless them. But if they chose to disobey Him, God would curse them, and they would reap the curses outlined in Moses' speech found in Deuteronomy.

Isaiah's book, according to 1:1, deals with the Southern Kingdom after the division that came in Rehoboam's day. Let us begin with Ahaz, the third king under whom Isaiah prophesied.

### **During the Reign of Ahaz**

Ahaz was wicked beyond measure. The Bible sheds a little light on the circumstances of this period of history in 2 Chronicles 28:22-25:

Now in the time of his distress King Ahaz became increasingly unfaithful to the LORD. This is that King Ahaz. For he sacrificed to the gods of Damascus which had defeated him, saying, "Because the gods of the kings of Syria help them, I will sacrifice to them that they may help me." But they were the ruin of him and of all Israel. So Ahaz gathered the articles of the house of God, cut in pieces the articles of the house of God, shut up the doors of the house of the LORD, and made for himself altars in every corner of Jerusalem. And in every single city of Judah he made high places to burn incense to other gods, and provoked to anger the LORD God of his fathers.

Not only did Ahaz turn the people to idol worship he shut down true worship altogether. Judah was in a bad situation because of her sin. The people were suffering some of the curses found in Deuteronomy 28. God had given the enemies, Syria and Ephraim, the upperhand. The devastation caused by these enemies should have caused Judah to look inward to their own lives. The purpose of all the destruction suffered by Judah at the hands of her enemies was to bring her to her knees in repentance, but Ahaz, the disobedient king, paid no attention to Isaiah and the Lord's word and turned further and further away from the truth. God revealed the true condition of Judah in Isaiah 3:9-11:

The look on their countenance witnesses against them, and they declare their sin as Sodom: they do not hide it. Woe to their soul! For they have brought evil upon themselves. Say to the righteous that it shall be well with them, for they shall eat the fruit of their doings. Woe to the wicked! It shall be ill with him, for the reward of his hands shall be given him.

Isaiah avers that Syria and Ephraim were given the victory only because Judah lived in disobedience to God's Word. Isaiah charged the people with their sins to help them understand that it was not the false Syrian gods, but rather the 'Holy One of Israel' who allowed their defeat before Syria. He wrote in 1:4, "Alas, sinful nation, a people laden with iniquity, a brood of evildoers, children who are corrupters! They have forsaken the LORD, they have provoked to anger the Holy One of Israel, they have turned away backward." The Syrian gods had nothing to do with Israel's defeat. God used the evil Syrians to punish Judah just as Moses promised in Deuteronomy 28.

In the first chapter verses 7-9 Isaiah writes:

Your country is desolate, your cities are burned with fire; strangers devour your land in your presence; and it is desolate, as overthrown by strangers. So the daughter of Zion is left as a booth in a vineyard, as a hut in a garden of cucumbers, as a besieged city. Unless the



LORD of hosts had left to us a very small remnant, we would have become like Sodom, we would have been made like Gomorrah.

Judah had stooped so low into the mire of sin that had it not been for God's mercy, the remnant would have been destroyed. Even though the situation was desperate, the Lord still offered an opportunity for the people to repent. Listen to Isaiah 1:19-20, "If you are willing and obedient, you shall eat the good of the land; But if you refuse and rebel, you shall be devoured by the sword"; for the mouth of the LORD has spoken."

In spite of Judah's great wickedness, the Lord still gave them the option of turning to Him to be saved. While Israel continued looking horizontally (earthly) for deliverance, the situation looked hopeless. As long as the people looked to any thing except God, the present danger was impossible to overcome. The inspired record says:

Therefore the LORD his God delivered him [Ahaz] into the hand of the king of Syria. They defeated him, and carried away a great multitude of them as captives, and brought them to Damascus. Then he was also delivered into the hand of the king of Israel, who defeated him with a great slaughter. For Pekah the son of Remaliah killed one hundred and twenty thousand in Judah in one day, all valiant men, because they had forsaken the LORD God of their fathers... And the children of Israel carried away captive of their brethren two hundred thousand women, sons, and daughters; and they also took away much spoil from them, and brought the spoil to Samaria (2 Chron. 28:5-6, 8).

Surely, this was enough evidence to wake up anyone, and make him see that his direction was wrong. But not Ahaz; he just got worse. It is like the sun shining down on clay and wax. The clay hardens and the wax melts. The judgment of God brings some to repentance while hardening others. What makes the difference is the heart of the individual. God remains the same.

Even in this tragic scene, God extended His mercy to ungrateful Judah. It is nothing short of amazing that God sent His prophet to the princes of Israel on their return trip to Samaria and forbade them to take their cousins into slavery. Israel's victory was only realized because God allowed it, yet Israel had killed their brothers in rage. God was not pleased with this action, and He sent His prophet to warn the princes of Israel to release the women and children, allowing them to return home.

The great God of heaven promised that Judah's complete fall would not be at the hands of Syria or Ephraim. The prophet predicted the outcome of the war while the events seemed hopeless. Those who believed God's Word would receive hope. Listen to the preacher in Isaiah 7:4-9:

And say to him: "Take heed, and be quiet; do not fear or be faint-hearted for these two stubs of smoking firebrands, for the fierce anger of Rezin and Syria, and the son of Remaliah. Because Syria, Ephraim, and the son of Remaliah have plotted evil against you, saying, 'Let us go up against Judah and trouble it, and let us make a gap in its wall for ourselves, and set a king over them, the son of Tabel' thus says the Lord GOD: 'It shall not stand, nor shall it come to pass. For the head of Syria is Damascus, and the head of Damascus is Rezin. Within sixty-five years Ephraim will be broken, so that it will not be a people. The head of Ephraim is Samaria, and the head of Samaria is Remaliah's son. If you will not believe, surely you shall not be established.'"

Hailey makes this pertinent comment:

This prophecy looked not only to the fall of Samaria and the Assyrian captivity which occurred a few years later (721 B.C.), but beyond. It looked to the time when Ephraim will not be a people. This was fulfilled after the captivity, when the king of Assyria brought foreigners into the land (2 Kgs. 17:24). This king was Sargon II (Ezra 4:2), who ruled Assyria from 681-668 B.C. (pp. 81-82).

Ahaz decided that Syria and Ephraim's alliance was destined to destroy his kingdom, and he refused to believe Isaiah. Notice that unbelief on Ahaz's part did not make void God's promise of sparing the people. The point is well taken. God was right in the case of Ephraim and Syria in chapter seven, and His being correct on the short-term prophecy brought confidence in the years ahead that the Lord would keep His promise of preserving a remnant until the Messiah would come. It is not by accident that in this same chapter the promise is made of the Messiah's being born of a virgin. God meant what He said, and that truth helps us understand today that God always keeps His promises. Someday, ultimate salvation would be realized in the coming of the Son born of a virgin. What God has promised must come to pass!

Ephraim's (Israel's) fall should have reminded all who lived in Judah at that time that God is not mocked. Judah would not escape God's wrath without repentance. In the creation, God set forth the principle that all seed produces after its kind. Sowing to the wind will result in reaping the whirlwind. Israel sowed wickedness, and they suffered the consequences. This story proves again that if man sows, he will also reap accordingly (Gal. 6:7).

The remnant of Israel must have gleaned hope from these events while evil was all around them. The Holy One of Israel was still in control, and He mercifully spared Judah of total devastation. However, God Almighty warned of future judgment, destruction, and dispersion if they refused to repent. The Lord told Ahaz, through Isaiah, that turning to the Assyrians for deliverance

would mean their eventual downfall. The Father's desire was for His children to look up, and they failed the test. Ahaz disregarded God's will and made the pact with Assyria anyway (2 Kgs. 16:7-9).

Isaiah preached this divine message and warned the people against joining forces with the wicked Assyrians. Again, the Holy One of Israel had it in His heart for His people to turn and place their full trust in Him. Since Ahaz refused the warning of the Lord, no doubt was left as to what would happen. Isaiah 7:17 states plainly, "The LORD will bring the king of Assyria upon you and your people and your father's house—days that have not come since the day that Ephraim departed from Judah." This was the future for Judah because Ahaz refused to trust in the deliverance of the Lord. No doubt was left in any honest heart. Isaiah made it plain that the Assyrians were only pawns in God's hands during this catastrophe. Isaiah explained clearly that God used these wicked men to carry out His righteous purposes.

During the time of God's wrath, it would seem from man's viewpoint that God had forgotten His people. However, Judah had the historical writings of the past to build confidence and sustain them through tough times. God mercifully ordained these prophets for that very reason. The threat of Syria and Israel ended during Ahaz's reign just as Isaiah foretold. This was cause enough to turn people back to God. These events could have and should have caused great revival in the land.

Nevertheless, Ahaz concludes that it was the gods and strength of the Assyrians that gave the victory over Syria and Ephraim. Ahaz led the people further and further away from God as long as he lived.

### **During the Reign of Hezekiah**

In spite of Ahaz's disobedience and unbelief, he had a son who came to power upon the death of Ahaz. You probably remember his name: Hezekiah. He took the throne of Judah at the age of twenty-five. An inspired account of his attitude is found in 2 Kings 18:5-8:

He trusted in the LORD God of Israel, so that after him was none like him among all the kings of Judah, nor who were before him. For he held fast to the LORD; he did not depart from following Him, but kept His commandments, which the LORD had commanded Moses. The LORD was with him; he prospered wherever he went. And he rebelled against the king of Assyria and did not serve him. He subdued the Philistines, as far as Gaza and its territory, from watchtower to fortified city.

Revival had finally come to Judah. Idol worship was on its way out and true worship was restored in the city where God had recorded His name.

The Bible says in the above context that during the sixth year of Hezekiah's reign, Samaria fell to the Assyrians and the king carried Israel away to Assyria. Many godly reforms were occurring in Judah, and the kingdom was blossoming like it had not for many years. Nonetheless, the king of Assyria was angry with Hezekiah for rebelling against his rule and for failing to pay tribute money. The Bible says in 2 Kings 18:13, "And in the fourteenth year of King Hezekiah, Sennacherib king of Assyria came up against all the fortified cities of Judah and took them." Remember in Isaiah 7, God told Ahaz that the pact he made with Assyria would bring on the very thing he was trying to avert during the threat of Syria and Ephraim.

Evidently, Hezekiah was a witness to all this and now felt threatened by the Assyrian attacks. In fact, in one place the Bible speaks of Hezekiah's trying to make peace with Sennacherib, King of Assyria (2 Kgs. 18:14-16). Most of the fortified cities in Judah had been ravaged by the Assyrians, and even the city of Jerusalem was threatened. It looked like Jerusalem, too, might fall prey to Assyria. The words of Isaiah 28:18-19 come to remembrance:

Your covenant with death will be annulled, and your agreement with Sheol will not stand; when the overflowing scourge passes through, then you will be trampled down by it. As often as it goes out it will take you; for morning by morning it will pass over, and by day and by night; it will be a terror just to understand the report.

Hailey makes these pertinent comments:

In these verses Isaiah speaks of the Assyrian army sweeping the land like a mighty flood (Is. 28:2), and now he says that an overflowing scourge would tread the people under foot, thus, giving double emphasis to the hopelessness and terror of the moment (p. 234).

Notice how Isaiah 8:5-8 reads:

The LORD also spoke to me again, saying: Inasmuch as these people refused the waters of Shiloah that flow softly, and rejoice in Rezin and in Remaliah's son; Now therefore, behold, the Lord brings up over them the waters of the River, strong and mighty—the king of Assyria and all his glory; he will go up over all his channels and go over all his banks. He will pass through Judah, he will overflow and pass over, he will reach up to the neck; and the stretching out of his wings will fill the breadth of Your land, O Immanuel."

The army would come to the very city of Jerusalem and no hope would seem available unless the people would change their perspective from horizontal to vertical.

Hezekiah learned the lesson well that Almighty God was in control and that nothing done by man could save Jerusalem. Only trust in the Holy One of

Israel would save, for God is salvation. For nearly forty years, Isaiah had waged war against the idolatrous leadership of Judah, trying to turn enough people to God that destruction might be averted (Hailey, p. 299). It may have seemed to Isaiah that he had failed miserably in his efforts to save Israel. But did he really fail? Hezekiah and the people inside the city of Jerusalem were stricken with terror, thinking the end for them had come. In time, the hearts of the people were turned from earthly deliverance to heavenly. You see, Isaiah's work paid off immensely!

Sennacherib besieged the city in 701 B.C., and the people finally looked to the Lord for redemption from the army of Assyria. It is incredibly ironic that the governor of Assyria stood in the very spot Ahaz had stood earlier when he refused the advice of Isaiah (ch. 7). Ahaz had been told not to bargain with the Assyrian king for deliverance. He refused to heed God's warning. Now, the threat of Assyria, a stronger army, stood at the very gate of Jerusalem and threatened her future.

Isaiah had been preaching his heart out and finally someone listened. That someone was Hezekiah. Hezekiah was now thirty-nine years old, and he was going to need all his strength and wisdom to deal with the circumstances that had arisen in Judah because of the onslaught of the king of Assyria. The king of God's people had to come face to face with an amazing diplomat of Assyria, just as had the former king of Judah. The Assyrian was a vain and arrogant governor who believed that the great king of Assyria had the world by the tail and nothing could stop him. Listen to some of the insults of this egotistical Assyrian recorded in Isaiah 36:

- v. 4 He does not even recognize Hezekiah as a king calling him by his given name.
- v. 10 "Have I now come up without the LORD against this land to destroy it? The LORD said to me, 'Go up against this land, and destroy it.'"
- v. 14 "Thus says the king: 'Do not let Hezekiah deceive you, for he will not be able to deliver you;
- vv. 18-20 "Beware lest Hezekiah persuade you, saying, 'The LORD will deliver us.' Has any one of the gods of the nations delivered its land from the hand of the king of Assyria?' 'Where are the gods of Hamath and Arpad? Where are the gods of Sepharvaim? Indeed, have they delivered Samaria from my hand?' 'Who among all the gods of these lands have delivered their countries from my hand, that the LORD should deliver Jerusalem from my hand?'"

After hearing the message of this blasphemer, Hezekiah's diplomats rent their clothes and carried the message to their king. Hezekiah, hearing this message, also rent his clothes, showing the extreme fear and concern he felt in

his heart. But in spite of everything, Hezekiah, unlike his father, knew who was in control, and he went into the house of God to pray. He was a desperate man and knew that he needed all the help he could get. Therefore, he sent Eliakim to Isaiah to inform the prophet of what had happened and how they felt about the whole situation (37:1-4). Isaiah's response from the Lord was, "Fear not, for he will not come into the city." Listen to the prophet's words: "Surely I will send a spirit upon him, and he shall hear a rumor and return to his own land; and I will cause him to fall by the sword in his own land" (v. 7).

The governor of Assyria, Rabshakeh, returned with more insults and words trying with all his power to destroy the confidence of the people in Jerusalem (37:11-13). After being reminded of all the kingdoms that had fallen at the hand of the Assyrians, Hezekiah returned to the place of prayer and poured out his heart to the God of Israel. Look at the humility of this great king in Judah as he prays to God:

O LORD of hosts, God of Israel, the One who dwells between the cherubim, You are God, You alone, of all the kingdoms of the earth. You have made heaven and earth. Incline Your ear, O LORD, and hear; open Your eyes, O LORD, and see; and hear all the words of Sennacherib, which he has sent to reproach the living God. Truly, LORD, the kings of Assyria have laid waste all the nations and their lands, and have cast their gods into the fire; for they were not gods, but the work of men's hands—wood and stone. Therefore they have destroyed them. Now therefore, O LORD our God, save us from his hand, that all the kingdoms of the earth may know that You are the LORD, You alone" (37:16-20).

Because of the arrogance and pride of Assyria, and the humility of Judah, Almighty God dealt with them both according to His justice and bountiful mercy. The Lord rebuked the king of Assyria and promised Judah that he would in no way attack the city (37:23-24, 33-35). Hezekiah is given two incredible signs that assured Jerusalem of escape from the evil Assyrians. First, the king of Assyria would in no way attack the city, though from the human standpoint he had the strength to destroy it. Second, he would for an unknown reason return to his own land and would be killed by the sword. The Lord's promise was, "I will fight for Jerusalem and deliver her from the Assyrian."

The Holy One God of Israel had spoken, and thus it had to come to pass. Listen to Isaiah 37:36-38:

Then the angel of the LORD went out, and killed in the camp of the Assyrians one hundred and eighty-five thousand; and when people arose early in the morning, there were the corpses—all dead. So Sennacherib king of Assyria departed and went away, returned home,

and remained at Nineveh. Now it came to pass, as he was worshipping in the house of Nisroch his god, that his sons Adrammelech and Sharezer struck him down with the sword; and they escaped into the land of Ararat. Then Esarhaddon his son reigned in his place.

Just one generation before, Ahaz was given the great opportunity of picking his own miracle of assurance for God's deliverance, and he refused the Lord. His son Hezekiah was promised deliverance, and by a great miracle was delivered from the Assyrian threat. Hezekiah learned a great lesson that his father never learned. The proof was plentiful, even for Ahaz, because the Lord supplied all the information needed to make the right decision.

### Conclusion

When the Holy One of Israel speaks, He leaves no loose ends for us to tie. Judah suffered greatly because of her sin, and the sadness of it all is that it did not have to happen this way. The cursing and blessing were plainly set forth by Moses before entering the Promised Land; however, both Israel and Judah chose cursing.

These are not just idle words. What God says will always come to pass. The bottom line is, Judah was not alone in experiencing the wrath of God. Ephraim ceased to exist as the people of God. Syria ceased to be any threat or strong power. The Assyrian Empire dropped out of sight. The God of the Hebrews was not only the God of Judah and Ephraim, but the only true God of the whole creation. The God of Isaiah is the same God of our day, and He has worked just as hard for our salvation as He did for those ancient people. In fact, John 3:16 says, "For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life."

Many people in the present generation will suffer the wrath of the Almighty just as occurred in the days of Isaiah the great prophet. Fortunately, the ironic realization is also the same—no one need be lost. No one must suffer eternally or be turned away at the Judgment. Everyone can find deliverance through God's great mercy found in Jesus Christ! The question is, will we look horizontally for deliverance, or vertically? The revelator wrote, "And the Spirit and the bride say, 'Come!' And let him who hears say, 'Come!' And let him who thirsts come. Whoever desires, let him take the water of life freely" (Rev. 22:17). 4315 Boulder Dr., Midland, Texas, 79707

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# Micah

by *Bennie Cryer*

Six men in the Old Testament were named "Micah." The name means "one who is like God." There seems to be an allusion to this meaning in 7:18. What little we know about this prophet comes from the book itself and from Jeremiah. In the first verse, he identifies himself as "Micah the Morasthite." This informs us, along with verse 14, that he is from a village called Moresheth-gath, a small town on the border between Judah and Philistia about twenty-five miles southwest of Jerusalem. Nothing is known of his parentage. He was probably of the Kingdom of Judah. His call to be a prophet is not recorded. Micah could have been greatly influenced by the prophet Amos who had lived just a few miles from Micah's village and who had preached some fifteen years before Micah. Pseudo-Epiphanius informs us that because Micah rebuked Jehoram for his impieties he was thrown from a precipice and buried at Morathi, in his own country, near the cemetery of Enakim. Such was the courage of this prophet of God. According to 1:1, Micah prophesied during "the days of Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah, kings of Judah."

## The Date and the Social Conditions

Micah could have prophesied from 750 B.C. to beyond 715 B.C. because he began in the reign of Jotham and continued under Hezekiah. **Fausset's Bible Dictionary** states that Micah's period of prophesying was between 756–697 B.C. **The New Unger's Bible Dictionary** believes that it was between 738–690 B.C. Most of the scholars believe his period of prophesying was between forty and fifty years. Since the book is made up of a number of prophecies spoken at different times during the reigns of three kings and made under different circumstances, it was probably written by Micah during the reign of Hezekiah who began to reign around 715 B.C.

Micah probably knew Amos, who was a native of Tekoa, a town about six miles south of Bethlehem. Hosea was born in Bethshemesh, about fifteen miles north of where Micah lived. Isaiah, another contemporary, evidently lived in Jerusalem. Whether or not they all got together at one time is a matter of conjecture, but it must have been comforting and encouraging to have such stalwart men nearby prophesying similar messages.

At the beginning of Micah's prophetic period, the people of Judah were enjoying a period of prosperity brought on by many wise decisions and policies of Uzziah who reigned just before Jotham. The degree of prosperity was the greatest since the days of Solomon's reign. This prosperity was good, but

it also contributed to much of the evil against which Micah was required to prophesy. Idleness, luxury, and oppression were general, and idolatry was prevalent. They did not know that far away, in 753 B.C., a city began to be built called Rome that would have a lot to do with the destinies of Israel and Judah. It is interesting to note that this same kind of prosperity, with its attendant evils, would bring about the decline of the Roman Empire after it also had grown to greatness. By studying this book, we can better understand why the material prosperity of this day has brought many difficulties into our lives and the Lord's church. There are many evils that can easily accompany an individual or a nation that enjoys long periods of prosperity.

At this point we need to consider what the three kings of Judah had done in order to bring about the stunning rebukes of this prophet, the prophecies declaring the destruction of the cities, and the hopes and promises of the future after these things were fulfilled. The acts of Jotham are recorded in 2 Kings 15:32-38 and 2 Chronicles 27:1-9. In summary, the Scriptures say that Jotham "did that which was right in the sight of the LORD...Howbeit the high places were not removed: the people sacrificed and burned incense still in the high places" (2 Kgs. 15:34-35). In other words, Jotham did a good job as King of Judah, but he did a poor job of ridding the land of the idols and pagan altars. This greatly affected the people because they tried to serve Jehovah and the false gods as well. In his reign, the King of Syria and the King of Israel made war against Judah, which continued on into Ahaz's reign.

The Scriptures summarize Ahaz's reign by stating that he

did not that which was right in the sight of the LORD his God...he walked in the way of the kings of Israel, yea, and made his son to pass through the fire, according to the abominations of the heathen...and he sacrificed and burnt incense in the high places (2 Kgs. 16:2-4; cf. 16:1-20; 2 Chron. 28:1-27).

In addition, Ahaz entered into a league with Tiglath-pileser, King of Assyria, to save himself from the attacks of Syria and Israel. When Ahaz went to visit Tiglath-pileser at Damascus, he saw a pagan altar, liked it, and sent Urijah the priest the blueprints for building it. Urijah built it and placed it in front of the brazen altar. When the king returned, he used this new altar to offer sacrifices, and he had the brazen altar moved to another position and altered it. He also wearied or offended both man and God according to Isaiah 7:13. In order to pay his new Assyrian king, he began to strip the temple ornaments of their gold plating, thus further desecrating the house of God.

Hezekiah was the last King of Judah under whom Micah prophesied. The Scriptures summarize his reign this way:

And he did right in the sight of the LORD...For he clave to the LORD, and departed not from following him, but kept his commandments, which the LORD commanded Moses...he rebelled against the king of Assyria, and served him not. He smote the Philistines (2 Kgs. 18:3, 6-7).

He repaired the temple and tore down the pagan places of worship. In addition, he broke into pieces the brazen serpent that Moses had made, for the people had begun to worship it as an idol. Many of his acts are recorded in Scripture (see 2 Kgs. 18; 2 Chron. 29). A statement in Jeremiah 26:17-19 indicates that this reformation of Hezekiah was a result of Micah's preaching. It was during his reign that Shalmaneser, King of Assyria, captured Samaria and took Israel into captivity. It was also during his reign that Sennacherib, King of Assyria, came up against Judah, and Hezekiah began to pay him tribute of gold and silver. He had to undo some of the work he had done in the house of God to come up with the correct amount assigned to him. He attempted to make a league with Egypt (instead of God), but this was not successful. Finally an appeal was made to Isaiah, and that prophet convinced him to rely on God. Consequently, Sennacherib was unsuccessful in taking Jerusalem.

### The Readers

This book of Micah contains messages for both Judah and Israel. Samaria and Jerusalem are both specifically mentioned in 1:1. Not only were these two nations addressed, individual classes of people within the two countries were subjects of Micah's admonitions and promises. It seems that Micah specialized in singling out certain classes of people such as judges, the princes who ruled over the people, the priests, and the false prophets. He seemed to have wanted to make sure they got the message straight from God without any misunderstanding about whom he was talking. Their prejudicial judgments, mistreatment of the poor, and their prophetic lies were all of great concern in Micah's messages. He had a love for the common folks who were being mistreated. Micah divides these social sins in the following ways:

1. To the princes who were becoming richer and more powerful because of their injustices, Micah declared:

Woe to them that devise iniquity, and work evil upon their beds! When the morning is light, they practice it, because it is in the power of their hand. 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 (2:1-2).

Hear, I pray you, O heads of Jacob, and ye princes of the house of Israel; Is it not for you to know judgment? (3:1).

2. To the judges who worked hand in hand with the rich and powerful, Micah declared:  
The heads thereof judge for reward... (3:11).  
That they may do evil with both hands earnestly, the prince asketh, and the judge asketh for a reward: and the great man, he uttereth his mischievous desire: so they wrap it up (7:3).
3. To the priests, Micah made known their sins in 3:11: "The priests thereof teach for hire." Instead of teaching God's Word, they would teach the people the things they wanted to hear.
4. The false prophets did not escape Micah's denunciations. He condemned them for teaching for hire. They would tell the people, "Is not the LORD among us? None evil can come upon us" (3:11). They would preach this in the face of Micah's teaching that Samaria and Jerusalem were going to be destroyed and the people would go into captivity. God describes them as "prophets that make my people err" (3:5).

These four classes of inhabitants of the land are held responsible for the coming judgment of God.

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 forests (3:12).

In addition to these four classes, Micah mentions another important class of very important people: the remnant who remained faithful to God.

I will surely assemble, O Jacob, all of thee; I will surely gather the remnant of Israel; I will put them together as the sheep of Bozrah, as the flock in the midst of their fold: they shall make great noise by reason of the multitude of men (2:12).

Though some were faithful to God, they were carried away into captivity with the wicked. God makes this special promise to them to encourage them and give them hope of returning one day. The prophecy in 2:12-13 refers to the return from the prophesied Babylonian captivity, not to the Messianic kingdom.

### **The Organization of Micah's Prophecy**

The Book of Micah falls into three divisions. Each division is introduced by the word "hear" (cf. 1:2; 3:1; 6:1). Each division begins with rebuke and threatening and ends with promise and hope.

#### **Section One: Chapters 1-2**

- 1:2 5. Jehovah is about to appear to judge Israel for its sins.

- 1:6-7. Samaria will be utterly destroyed.
- 1:8-9. A wave of calamity will sweep onward to Jerusalem.
- 1:10-16. This passage teaches that one town after another in the lowlands will be overwhelmed.
- 2:1-11. Woes are pronounced upon the proud nobles of Judah, whose deeds of violence demand this punishment. They would fain to silence true prophets, and listen to false prophets, but as they have driven their victims from their homes, so will they be driven out into exile themselves.
- 2:12-13. The scattered flock of Israel will one day be gathered and go forth from captivity in a second Exodus.

### Section Two: Chapters 3-5.

- 3: 1-12. This passage contains censures of the rulers, prophets, and priests for abuse of their offices. They are the cause of Jerusalem's impending destruction.
- 4:1-5. This passage contains a message of encouragement. In the last days Jerusalem will be the beginning place for instructing the world.
- 4:6-8. The scattered flock will be gathered; the eternal reign of Jehovah will be inaugurated; the Davidic kingdom will be restored, but it will be a different kind of kingdom (cf. Rev. 3:7).
- 4:9-10. This passage teaches that in the immediate future humiliation and exile are in store for Zion.
- 4:11-13. This passage shows that ultimately Israel will be victorious over the nations that muster to destroy her.
- 5:1. This verse declares that Israel must be reduced to extremity, and her ruler subjected to gross insult.
- 5:2-6. From Bethlehem will come forth a king of David's house, to rule over a reunited nation and repel the Assyrian invader.
- 5:7-9. These verses show that Israel will be a source of blessing to some, but a destructive foe to others.
- 5:10-15. This passage informs them that Israel will be purified, and vengeance will be executed upon the obdurate nations.

### Section Three: Chapters 6-7

- 6:1-8. From that ideal future the prophecy turns to the sad contrast of the present. The people are addressed. Jehovah is dramatically represented as commencing a suit with Israel. He defends His faithfulness to His side of the covenant, and contrasts His real demands with the popular idea of religion.

- 6:9–16. These verses teach that the willful disregard of these requirements calls for punishment. This was not God's fault. He had been faithful.
- 7:1–6. The prophet speaks in the name of the true Israel, lamenting the universal corruption; and in verses 7-10, Micah expresses their determination to bear humbly the punishment, in perfect confidence that Jehovah will one day vindicate His righteousness. In answer is heard the divine proclamation for Zion's restoration in verses 11-13.
- 7:14–17. The prophet prays for this restoration, and Jehovah promises to bring it about. He concludes with an expression of perfect trust in the pardoning mercy and unchanging faithfulness of Jehovah in verses 18–20.<sup>1</sup>

### **Micah's Prophecies Cited in the New Testament**

#### **Prophecy One**

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 going forth have been from of old, from everlasting (5:2).

And they said unto him, In Bethlehem of Judaea: for thus it is written by the prophet, And thou Bethlehem, in the land of Judah, art not the least among the princes of Judah: for out of thee shall come a Governor, that shall rule my people Israel (Mt. 2:5–6; Jn. 7:42).

#### **Prophecy Two**

For the son dishonoureth the father, the daughter riseth up against her mother, the daughter in law against her mother in law; a man's enemies are the men of his own house (7:6).

For I am come to set a man at variance against his father, and the daughter against her mother, and the daughter in law against her mother in law. And a man's foes shall be they of his own household (Mt. 10:35–36; see also v. 21; Mk. 13:12; Lk. 12:53).

#### **Prophecy Three**

Wherewith shall I come before the LORD, and bow myself before the high God? Shall I come before him with burnt offerings, with calves of a year old? Will the LORD be pleased with thousands of rams, or with ten thousands of rivers of oil? Shall I give my firstborn for my transgression, the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul? He hath shewed thee, O man, what is good; and what doth the LORD require

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<sup>1</sup> This outline was adapted from A. F. Kirkpatrick, D.D. *The Doctrine of the Prophets*

of thee, but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God? (6:6-8).

But go ye and learn what that meaneth, I will have mercy, and not sacrifice: for I am not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance (Mt. 9:13).

### Messianic Prophecies

The charges of iniquity and transgressions committed by Judah and Israel and the promise of an impending destruction must have caused a dark, discouraging cloud to hang over the people, especially those who were doing their best to serve God. In 4:1-8, Micah gives them a prophecy about the Messianic hope that God would fulfill in the last days that would begin with the death of Jesus on the cross (cf. Is. 2:1-4). The glorification of Zion would be the beginning place for the worldwide religion of Jehovah (vv. 1-5).

A second Messianic prophecy is found in 5:2-15. Here, Micah discusses the Messiah and His dispensation. The Messiah would arise out of Bethlehem and would feed the flock (vv. 2-4). He would be the peace of His people (vv. 5-6). He would provide power to His people (vv. 7-9). And in this strength and power, God's people would triumph.

### List of Sins Committed by Judah and Israel

- Oppression of the poor (2:2, 8, 9; 3:1-4)
- Unscrupulous use of power (2:1; 3:10)
- Lack of integrity (6:12; 7:2-6)
- Reckless scorn of religion (3:5-8; 5:12-14)
- False prophets (3:5, 7, 9-11)
- Greedy corruption in church and state (7:3)

### What God Expected of Judah, Israel, and Us Today

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? (6:8).

God had already revealed to them what would be good and what He required of them. They thought they could live in wickedness, bring sacrifices before God, and everything would be all right. If that would not satisfy God, they could increase the value of their sacrifices and surely that would appease Jehovah. If it did not, they would offer the supreme sacrifice, one of their children, and, perhaps, this would appease the Almighty.

God would not accept any of these things offered by a corrupt person. Certain sacrifices were necessary and required by God, but He would only accept them if they came from a person who:

1. Acted in a just manner towards his fellow man. He would have to throw away his deceitful scales and weights, etc.
2. Loved mercy. It was not enough for a person to act in a merciful way. He had to also love mercy and be like God in this matter.
3. Walked humbly with his God. He could not hold himself above God and His requirements. He had to conduct himself humbly toward God.

Jesus warned:

Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye pay tithe of mint and anise and cummin, and have omitted the weightier matters of the law, judgment, mercy, and faith: these ought ye to have done, and not to leave the other undone (Mt. 23:23).

Heeding Micah's advice will make us worthy to stand by his side and be identified with the faithful few in the sight of God when His Son comes back for spiritual Israel. *1439 San Rocco Circle, Stockton, CA 95207*



# Nahum

*by Charles A. McConnell*

Neither the Bible nor history reveals much to us about the prophet Nahum. According to **Strong's Bible Dictionary**, his name means "consolation or consoler," and it is said to be "in a sense symbolical of the message of the book, which was intended to comfort the oppressed and afflicted people of Judah" (Eiselen). He introduces himself in 1:1 as "the Elkoshite," indicating that he was from a place called Elkosh. The location of Elkosh is uncertain, but scholars cite two theories commonly. First, some believe Elkosh was the same as Capernaum, the town in Galilee where Jesus spent much time. The word "Capernaum" literally means "village of Nahum," and is, therefore, thought to be the birthplace of the prophet. Second, some believe that Elkosh was the same as "Elkesie," also a village of Galilee.

## **Date of the Prophecy**

In 3:8–10, the prophet makes reference to the destruction of NoAmon, which was the city of Thebes in ancient Egypt. He looks back on it as an event that had already taken place. Since history reveals that the Assyrians captured and plundered NoAmon in 663 B.C., we can assume this to be the earliest possible date of the prophecy. Nahum prophesies against Nineveh. Nineveh was destroyed in 612 B.C. Therefore, Nahum prophesied sometime between 663–612 B.C. Many scholars place the date within ten years of the fall of NoAmon.

## **Nahum's Subject**

The subject of Nahum's prophecy is singular and direct: the "Burden of Nineveh" (1:1). Nahum announces the fate of the wicked city of Nineveh, which was the capital of the Assyrian Empire. F. W. Farrar gives us a vivid description of the general character of the Assyrian rulers and their conquests:

The kings of Assyria tormented the ancient world. They boasted of how "space failed for corpses"; how unsparing a destroyer is their goddess Ishtar; how they flung away bodies of soldiers like clay; how they made pyramids of human heads; how they burned cities; filled populous lands with death and devastation; they reddened broad deserts with the carnage of warriors; they scattered whole countries with the corpses of their defenders; they impaled "heaps of men" on stakes; strewed the mountains and choked rivers with dead bones; they cut off the hands of kings and nailed them on the walls, and left their bodies to rot; they used the captives of many nations to make

brick while in chains; they cut down warriors like weeds and covered pillars with the flayed skins of rival monarchs.

The Bible teaches that God sent Jonah to preach repentance to Nineveh, and the people heeded his warning (Jon. 3). Jonah's mission occurred sometime around 780 B.C., about 130 years before Nahum's prophecy. It is evident that the repentance of the Assyrians was short-lived, and they soon returned to their old sins. Nahum rebukes them for their pride, oppression, idolatry, and their defiance of the living God; and he forecasts the complete destruction of the Assyrian capital, signaling the fall of that great ancient empire. It is evident that Nahum's prophecy addresses two groups: (1) the people of Judah, who had long been the target of Assyrian attack and oppression (note 1:15 in particular), and (2) the people of Nineveh and its inhabitants, sending them a forecast of certain doom.

### **History**

Although Assyria had long been a warring nation, it began a program of world conquest under Tiglath-Pileser III (745-727 B.C.), who invaded the west and deported some of the inhabitants of northern Israel to an area north of Nineveh (2 Kgs. 15:29). Even before this, the hand of Assyria was heavy on the nation of Israel when they exacted tribute from them under Pul, who reigned just before Tiglath-Pileser (2 Kgs. 15:19). Shalmaneser V (727-722 B.C.) began the siege of Samaria, but died before completing this conquest (2 Kgs. 17:3-6, 18:9-12). Sargon II (722-705 B.C.) continued the siege on Samaria. He is mentioned briefly in Isaiah 20:1-6. On an ancient monument, Sennacherib (705-681 B.C.) declared that he had shut up Hezekiah in Jerusalem "as a bird in a cage." Indeed, the Scriptures record that, under Sennacherib, Assyria came up against Jerusalem intending to take it captive; but Hezekiah prayed to God on behalf of Judah, and the Lord miraculously wiped out 185,000 Assyrian warriors (2 Kgs. 18-19). Upon his return to Nineveh, Sennacherib was murdered by two of his sons, and a younger son, Esarhaddon, assumed his throne (2 Kgs. 19:36-37). Esarhaddon (681-668 B.C.) continued to deport the Jews from the Northern Kingdom of Israel (Ezra 4:2). Assurbanipal (668-625 B.C.) holds the distinction of being the last great king of the Assyrian Empire. He was characterized as being a cruel and vicious ruler who led Assyria in the attack that resulted in the fall of Nineveh (cf. 3:8). Upon his death, the empire began to decline. During the reign of Esarhaddon II (620-612 B.C.), Nineveh was destroyed and the empire fell.

When Nahum prophesied, Assyria was at the height of prosperity, having subdued every major foe in its path (2 Kgs. 19:17-18). It would have been

folly to speak of the dominance of the empire coming to an end in such a short time. Ezekiel speaks of the past stature of the Assyrian king and his nation:

Behold the Assyrian was a cedar in Lebanon with fair branches, and with shadowing shroud, and of an high stature; and his top was among the thick boughs. The waters made him great, the deep set him up on high with her rivers running round about his plants, and sent out her little rivers unto all the trees of the field. Therefore his height was exalted above all the trees of the field, and his boughs were multiplied, and his branches became long because of the multitude of waters, when he shot forth (31:3-6).

Nineveh was a thriving commercial city, located at the confluence of the Tigris and Khosr rivers in what is now northern Iraq. It was a cultural center of the ancient world. Sargon II founded a library there that was later expanded and enriched by Asshurbanapal. Sennacherib greatly improved the city during his reign, building broad boulevards, parks, gardens, and a magnificent palace. The city was surrounded by massive defensive walls, and an elaborate system of canals and aqueducts provided water to its inhabitants. Indeed only an inspired man of God could foresee this great city thoroughly laid waste. Isaiah said that God is able to "declare the end from the beginning" (Is. 46:9-10).

### **The Decline of the Empire**

Upon the death of Asshurbanapal, matters began to assume a dangerous trend for Assyria. Egypt rose against its former conqueror; Babylon revolted; and the Medes were becoming a powerful monarchy. These three nations formed a strong confederacy led by Nabopolassar of Babylon and attacked Nineveh. The city was valiantly defended for two years by Assyrian forces, but history reveals that heavy rain and flooding of the Tigris River washed away a large section of the wall surrounding the city. The enemy forced their way within the walls and captured the capital city. According to history, rather than fall into the hands of his enemies, the Assyrian king gathered his wives and his treasure into the palace and set it afire. The town was sacked, and a great number of its inhabitants were massacred. The destruction of the city was complete and remarkably fulfilled Nahum's words:

The horseman lifteth up both the bright sword and the glittering spear: and there is a multitude of slain, and a great number of carcasses; and there is none end of their corpses... And it shall come to pass, that all they that look upon thee shall flee from thee, and say, Nineveh is laid waste: who will bemoan her?... There is no healing of thy bruise; thy wound is grievous (3:3, 7, 19).

### Nahum's Prophecy and Judah

Nahum says nothing concerning the internal conditions of Judah and Jerusalem in his prophecy—he leaves that work to the other prophets of his day, viz., Jeremiah, Habakkuk, and Zephaniah. His single mission was to announce the fall of the nation that had for so long afflicted God's people. There can be no doubt that God had, at times, used the Assyrians to chasten Israel and Judah for their sinful ways. Notice Isaiah 10:5-6:

O Assyrian, the rod of mine anger, and the staff in their hand is mine indignation. I will send him against an hypocritical nation, and against the people of my wrath will I give him a charge, to take spoil, and take the prey, and to tread them down like the mire of the streets (cf. Kgs. 17:5-23).

But Nahum declares in 1:12-13 that Israel would no longer suffer affliction at the hands of the Assyrians and no longer bear the yoke of their oppression. It is probable that Nahum prophesied during Josiah's reign over Judah. Josiah was the last good king to reign over the Southern Kingdom (2 Kgs. 22:2), and he initiated sweeping reforms in Judah in an attempt to bring the nation back to godliness (2 Kgs. 23). It may well be that this is why God chose that particular time to deliver a prophecy that was favorable to the Jews.

### What Can We Learn from Nahum?

Though Nahum's prophecy is brief, covering three short chapters, there are numerous lessons we can glean from it. We will consider three lessons.

1. Nahum says that God is slow to anger, great in power, and will not at all acquit the wicked (1:3). This verse speaks of the longsuffering of God (2 Pet. 3:9). God's patience with mankind is demonstrated in the case of Nineveh. He gave them time and opportunity to repent, sending the prophet Jonah unto them to let them know their fate, unless they changed their course. But we must be ever mindful that, though He is a God of love and longsuffering, He is also a God of justice—He will not acquit (hold guiltless) the wicked.

Nahum says that we serve a good God, one who is a stronghold in times of trouble (1:7). This is a theme that is repeated throughout the Bible (cf. Ps. 62:6-8). Paul describes God "the God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our tribulation" (2 Cor. 1:3). Peter tells us to cast all our cares upon Him, "for he careth for you" (2 Pet. 3:7). Indeed, we serve a good God who is always there in times of trouble, and we must learn to place our trust in Him.

In 2:12-13, Nahum graphically illustrates the divine principle recorded in Galatians 6:7, "God is not mocked, for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap." For so long, Assyria had been the scourge of the ancient world,

leaving death and destruction wherever they went, causing Nahum to describe them as a lion that "did tear in pieces." But now, through the providence of God, Assyria would be humbled. The question is asked in 3:8, "Art thou better than populace?" The answer is a resounding, No. Though NoAmon was a great and populous city in Egypt, they were brought down by the Assyrians, and now a similar fate awaited Nineveh. Because Nineveh had for so long maintained a proud and arrogant spirit in defiance of God, the Lord proclaims through Nahum, "Behold, I *am* against thee, saith the LORD of hosts, and I will burn her chariots in the smoke, and the sword shall devour thy young lions: and I will cut off thy prey from the earth, and the voice of thy messengers shall no more be heard" (2:13).

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# Zephaniah

*by Allen Bailey*

Many and perhaps most are unfamiliar with the Old Testament book of Zephaniah. When first assigned this portion of Scripture, I quickly thought of my twenty-five years of preaching. I do not believe I have quoted one verse from the book of Zephaniah. I began to reflect, and I do not ever remember hearing a sermon from anyone on the book of Zephaniah.

If you are questioning yourself and wondering, "Am I the only one who has not studied the minor prophets?" then rest easy—many of us fall into this category. It is really exciting to delve into new portions of God's Word. George L. Robinson stated in **The Twelve Minor Prophets**:

The book of Zephaniah, though small, is nevertheless, valuable. By many it is undervalued, and by most of us passed by as comparatively barren from our pulpit texts.

Dr. Jack Lewis, formerly a Professor of Bible at Harding College Graduate School of Religion, Memphis, Tennessee, stated:

Some years ago a Draft official said to me, "You are the people that throw away the Old Testament." I quickly denied the accusation, but in general for all we know about the Minor Prophets, we might as well have thrown them away.

Dr. Vernon McGee stood before an audience of about three thousand people and asked for those in the audience who had ever heard a lesson on Zephaniah to please raise their hand. Only two people raised their hand, which aptly solidifies that many religious people have simply not taken the time or opportunity to study this minor prophet. He also stated:

The contents of this book have never been familiar, and I doubt that it has been read very much. I dare say that few have ever heard a sermon on Zephaniah (p. 9).

The book of Zephaniah is easy to find: in the Bible, find Matthew (the first book of the New Testament), and back up four books—there is Zephaniah. Zephaniah is the thirty-sixth book of the Old Testament and contains only fifty-three verses. As one preacher told me, "Most people don't even know where Zephaniah is. If your pages stick together, you could easily pass right over it." Another preacher told me, "Don't worry about anyone asking questions about Zephaniah—few know enough about it to ask any intelligent questions."

It is my hope that this brief overview of this great prophet of the Old Testament will aid us in our understanding of the book and sound the necessary warning found in the book of Zephaniah to the entire world.

### **Brief Overview of the Minor Prophet Zephaniah**

Contained in this short book are two distinct sections: (1) the judgments against Judah, the nations, and Jerusalem; and (2) the joy and deliverance.

#### **Section One**

The people of Judah were "at ease," feeling like they had everything in control and did not need anything. Zephaniah sent them a resounding warning. God was coming to destroy all of them and nothing would escape, not even the birds, beasts, or fish. He delivered to them a major doomsday message that was rapidly approaching. God was going to fiercely attack all the wickedness of the land in an effort to bring them back to true repentance. Their haughtiness, idolatry, and evil in the land would bring God's condemnation. Jerusalem also had impure hearts. Even though King Josiah had successfully removed the idols, the hearts of the people had not changed.

#### **Section Two**

Imagine today if all you hear about the end of the world is gloom and doom, it would be most depressing. Judah and Jerusalem had heard that message, but the conclusion of the message brought hope and cheer to those who would rally back to true repentance. God would gather His people and then punish the Gentile nations and restore Israel and Judah. Blessings awaited those who chose to be faithful and return to the Living God.

This brief overview explains what to expect when you read this great little prophecy. It starts with a stern rebuke and ends with hope to all those willing to do the right thing.

### **Zephaniah's Ancestry**

Zephaniah, unlike any other prophet, major or minor, lays out his ancestry and time of his writing all in one passage. He opens his divinely inspired book with the following message:

The word of the LORD which came unto Zephaniah the son of Cushi, the son of Gedaliah, the son of Amariah, the son of Hizkiah, in the days of Josiah the son of Amon, king of Judah (1:1).

Zephaniah had royal blood in his veins. Beginning with his father, his ancestors included: Cushi, Gedaliah, Amariah, and then Hezekiah. Zephaniah's great, great grandfather was the good and righteous King of Judah, Hezekiah.



### Reign of Josiah

Josiah's reign came after the wicked reigns of Manasseh and Amon. Their combined years of reign were fifty-five years. By the time Josiah's reign was off and running, the wickedness was so terrible that his prophecy served as a serious wake up call. The succession of the reigns were as follows: Ahaz, Hezekiah, Manasseh, Amon, and Josiah.

### Date of the Writing

The time of Zephaniah is easy to know. Zephaniah solved the dating problem by fixing his prophecy "in the days of Josiah the son of Amon, king of Judah" (1:1). Josiah reigned for thirty-one years, from 640–609 B.C. The destruction of Nineveh (612 B.C.) was still a future event. Thus, Zephaniah's prophecy can be dated between 640–612 B.C. Dr. Vernon McGee states:

According to the arrangement of the Hebrew Scriptures, Zephaniah was the last of the prophets before the captivity. He was contemporary with Jeremiah.

Digging a little deeper we can tighten up this timetable even more. The list of sins in 1:3–3:7 indicates a date prior to Josiah's reforms when the sins from the reigns of Manasseh and Amon predominated. It is, therefore, likely that Zephaniah's ministry played a significant role in preparing for the revivals that took place in the reign of the nation's last righteous king. Josiah became king of Judah at the age of eight, and by the age of sixteen his heart had already begun to turn toward God.

Josiah's first reform took place in the twelfth year of his reign (628 B.C., 2 Chron. 34:3–7) when he tore down all the altars of Baal, destroyed the foreign incense altars, burned the bones of false prophets on their altars, and broke the Asherim (carved images) and molten images in pieces.

Josiah's second reform took place six years later (622 B.C.) in the eighteenth year of his reign. This reform was kindled when Hezekiah the priest found the Book of the Law in the temple (2 Chron. 34:8–35:19). If all of these dates and times are accurate, then Zephaniah's prophecy can be dated more precisely as occurring between 630 and 625 B.C.

The evil reigns of Manasseh (55 years) and Amon (2 years), a total of fifty-seven years, had such a profound effect on the Kingdom of Judah that it never fully recovered. Josiah's reforms were too little and too late, and the people reverted to idolatry and false teaching soon after Josiah was gone. As a contemporary of Jeremiah and Habakkuk, Zephaniah was one of the eleventh hour prophets to Judah (*The New Open Bible Study Edition*, p. 1023).

### **The Christ of Zephaniah**

Jesus alluded to Zephaniah on two occasions without ever calling his name (Mt. 13:41; 24:29). Although the Messiah is not specifically mentioned in Zephaniah, it is clear that He is the one who fulfilled the great promises of Zephaniah 3:9–20. He will gather and reign in victory. Zephaniah 3:15 says, “The Lord hath taken away thy judgments, he hath cast off thine enemy: the king of Israel, even the Lord, is in the midst of thee: thou shalt not see evil any more.”

### **Specific Sins of Judah**

- Idolatry. The thing that brought the judgment of God upon the land is very specific it is idolatry.
- Religious syncretism. Zephaniah attacked the nation for worshiping Baal (1:4). These practices were first introduced by Ahaz and Manassch (2 Kgs. 21:3, 5; 23:11; Jer.7:17). Syncretism is the combination and reconciliation of different beliefs and practices in religions.
- Wearing of foreign apparel (1:8). The Israelites had adopted the ways of the pagans.
- Fraud and violence (1:9).
- Refusal to receive correction (3:2, 7).

### **Present Day Applications from Zephaniah**

#### **The Day of the Lord**

“The Day of the Lord” occurs seven times, plus other references are made to it also in this little prophecy of fifty-three verses. Obadiah and Joel, the first of the writings of the Minor Prophets, were also the first to use the phrase “The Day of the Lord”; and now Zephaniah, the last of the written prophets before the captivity, uses the same phrase “The Day of the Lord” more than any of the minor prophets.

Zephaniah discusses the Day of the Lord and describes the coming day of judgment upon Judah as a nation. God is holy and must vindicate His righteousness by calling all the nations of the world into account before Him. The sovereign God will judge not only His own people but also the whole world. The Day of the Lord will have universal impact. To some degree, that day has already come for Judah and all the nations mentioned in 2:14–15. There is an aspect when all the earth will be judged. Zephaniah 3:9–20 speaks of another side of the Day of the Lord. It will be a day of blessings after the judgment is complete.

The goodness and severity of God has been witnessed for hundreds, yea thousands, of years. Realizing when "The Final Day of the Lord" comes that He will judge "the quick and the dead" and bring all of our deeds into the open whether "good or bad," we better prepare ourselves. Our God is an awesome God, and we should honor and respect Him by obeying His every command.

### **A Call to Repentance**

Zephaniah is also written as a call to repentance (2:1-3). God wanted to spare the people, but they ultimately rejected Him. His judgment will be great; but God promises His people a future day of hope and joy. Wrath and mercy, severity and kindness cannot be separated in the character of God. The people of God in every generation including ours must be brought to repentance—a change of ways and a change of mind. Numerous examples are seen throughout the Bible to demonstrate that God requires repentance.

### **Fire of Jealousy**

In Zephaniah 1:18 and 3:8, God demonstrated His "fire of Jealousy." God's jealousy is on a different plane than ours. . In our jealousies we often seek to do evil. God is jealous of those who are His own. The Hebrew word for jealousy carries the meaning of "a religious zeal." He is jealous of mankind. He created man, and He has purchased redemption for him and made it possible for him to be saved. It is not His will that any should perish for God wants all to be saved—He is jealous of mankind. If they do not turn to him and follow him, he will destroy them. The one major factor which the book of Zephaniah makes clear is that God is glorified in judging as well as He is glorified in saving.

### **Constant Necessity of Warning (1:14-16)**

Zephaniah sets all modern prophets an example of how men should be confronted with the stern warning about the corruption that is in this world. We today should never lose courage about warning people of death, judgment, and hell. Those guilty of the works of the flesh will go to hell unless they truly repent of their sins. Remember when Paul was before Felix, he "reasoned of righteousness, temperance, and judgment to come," and Felix trembled. Paul spoke words of warning to him, and we should follow his example to warn people of the judgment to come.

### **Conclusion**

On the whole, Zephaniah is a fierce and grim book of warning about the coming Day of the Lord. Desolation, darkness, and ruin would strike Judah and the nations because of the wrath of God upon sin. Zephaniah looks beyond

judgment, however, to a time of joy when God would cleanse the nations and restore the fortunes of His people, Israel. The book begins with God's declaration, "I will completely remove all things from the face of the earth" (1:2), but it ends with this promise, "At that time I will bring you in and restore your fortunes before your eyes" (3:20).

Most of the readers of this article are acquainted with the New Testament. Jesus gave a stern rebuke in Matthew 23 to the unrighteous scribes and Pharisees. Matthew 23 is known to be the most stinging rebuke recorded in the New Testament. To impress on your mind the message of the minor prophet Zephaniah, let me close with this analogy: Zephaniah is to the Old Testament what Matthew 23 is to the New Testament. *Allen Bailey, 1633 Trinity View, Irving, Texas 75060*

# Habakkuk

## The Righteous Will Live By His Faith

*by Michael Fox*

### **Habakkuk's Prayer (1:1-11)**

For some time, the prayers of this faithful man of God had—from all indications—fallen on deaf ears. He was weary, confused, and, perhaps, a bit heartsick. He had long before grown accustomed to the ungodliness of men. But he could not fathom the growing injustice among God's own people. Time and again the prophet expressed his frustration to God:

How long, O Lord, will I call for help, and Thou wilt not hear? I cry out to Thee, "Violence!" Yet Thou dost not save. Why dost Thou make me see iniquity, and cause me to look on wickedness? Yes, destruction and violence are before me; Strife exists and contention arises. Therefore, the law is ignored and justice is never upheld. For the wicked surround the righteous; therefore, justice comes out perverted (1:2-4, NIV).

Certainly, you and I can appreciate the prophet Habakkuk's prayer. We can relate to the circumstances that compelled his cry; we can honor him for the passion of his heart. Habakkuk's most felt need was not an allusive quest for selfish gratification. His prayer, the object of his passion, was for the honor of God and the defense of His law among His people. From Habakkuk we learn that we may legitimately express our frustration, our doubt, to our God in prayer; but may we ever be careful to question the legitimacy of our frustration!

Although God previously had chosen not to reply to Habakkuk's prayer, this day was the prophet's "lucky" day. God responded to the prophet with remarkable eagerness. Have you ever longed to share a bit of good news with another, and yet for some reason been forced to wait? Perhaps you have just waited for the right question to give you the opportunity. When the opportunity finally came, the news broke from your lips before they could part. In similar fashion, God broke his silence with Habakkuk, and His words betrayed His enthusiasm for His anticipated response to the growing injustice among His people:

Look among the nations! Observe! Be astonished! Wonder! Because I am doing something in your days—You would not believe if you were told. For behold, I am raising up the Chaldeans, that fierce and impetuous people who march throughout the earth to seize dwelling places which are not theirs. They are dreaded and feared. Their jus-

tice and authority originate with themselves. Their horses are swifter than leopards and keener than wolves in the evening. Their horsemen come galloping, their horsemen come from afar; they fly like an eagle swooping down to devour. All of them come for violence. Their horde of faces moves forward. They collect captives like sand. They mock at kings, and rulers are a laughing matter to them. They laugh at every fortress, and heap up rubble to capture it. Then they will sweep through like the wind and pass on. But they will be held guilty, they whose strength is their god" (1:5-11).

God planned to send the Chaldeans—the Babylonians—to subjugate the people of Judah. Poor Habakkuk! He only thought he was confused when he uttered his previous prayer. Following God's ambitious reply, he became the victim of "TMI": too much information. Indeed, perhaps the greatest object of our fears—the inability to see the future—is God's greatest mercy. At once, the prophet left his post as chief advocate for the prosecution and jumped to the defense of Judah. And when he did—and this is significant to Habakkuk's story—his prayer on behalf of the honor of God and the defense of His law became a prayer absorbed in self-centered concern. And, predictably, his faith was consumed by fear.

### **Habakkuk's Rebuttal (1:12-2:20)**

Before we reproach Habakkuk for his fearful and rather coarse rebuttal to God, we pause to observe a wonderful lesson from the prophet's faith, even as it struggled against his fear. In fact, the book of Habakkuk (written just prior to the Babylonian captivity of 606 B.C.) is a wonderful book of instruction for all who would today "walk by faith, not by sight" (2 Cor. 5:7). It is not suited for the novice; instead, it is best directed to the mature, self-assured man who, like Habakkuk, believes he knows what it is to walk by faith. As Habakkuk approached God, notice his initial words:

Art Thou not from everlasting, O Lord, my God, my Holy One? We will not die. Thou, O Lord, hast appointed them [the Chaldeans] to judge; and Thou, O Rock, hast established them to correct. Thine eyes are too pure to approve evil, and Thou canst not look on wickedness with favor... (1:12-13).

The troubled prophet began his prayer neither by questioning God's wisdom nor by making supplication; instead, Habakkuk first affirmed in prayer what he knew about God: His power, His character, His faithfulness. What a magnificent lesson in faith! Faith in trial does not demand blind assumption; it is, rather, an extension of our knowledge. And Habakkuk, when faced with a situation that he could not understand, reflected first upon those truths about God of which he was certain. Too often, when we are faced with a similar di-

lemma, we tend to concentrate on those aspects of our trial that we do not understand. We allow the moment to overcome our faith in God. Like Habakkuk, we need to back up from the trial and stand upon the solid ground of knowledge (cf., Prov. 9:10) The apostle Paul, well acquainted with Habakkuk's experience, understood that the strength of a man's faith rests upon the depth of his knowledge of God's Word (Rom. 10:17).

Only after affirming his trust in God's power, wisdom, and faithfulness, did Habakkuk question God's intention to use the Chaldeans to discipline the nation of Judah:

Why dost Thou look with favor on those who deal treacherously? Why art Thou silent when the wicked swallow up those more righteous than they? Why hast Thou made men like the fish of the sea, like creeping things without a ruler over them? The Chaldeans bring all of them up with a hook, drag them away with their net, and gather them together in their fishing net. Therefore, they rejoice and are glad. Therefore, they offer a sacrifice to their net. And burn incense to their fishing net; because through these things their catch is large, and their food is plentiful. Will they therefore empty their net and continually slay nations without sparing? (1:13-17).

As you can see, Habakkuk's knowledge of God did not eliminate either the actual trial or his initial fear, but it did give him the confidence in God which he expressed at the conclusion of his rebuttal:

I will stand on my guard post and station myself on the rampart; and I will keep watch to see what He will speak to me, and how I may reply when I am reprov'd [or, rebuked] (2:1).

Such admirable humility! Habakkuk affirmed what he knew about God, gave voice to the fear that gripped his spirit, and concluded with anticipation of the Lord's rebuke. His faith was mature enough to understand that any apprehension of God's wisdom was to his own reproach, and not to God's.

Then the Lord answered me and said, "Record the vision and inscribe it on tablets, that the one who reads it may run. For the vision is yet for the appointed time; it hastens toward the goal, and it will not fail. Though it tarries, wait for it; for it will certainly come, it will not delay. Behold, as for the proud one, his soul is not right within him; but the righteous will live by his faith" (2:2-4).

After first reaffirming the inevitability of the Chaldeans' conquest, God did not disappoint Habakkuk's expectation of rebuke: "Behold, as for the proud one, his soul is not right within him; but the righteous will live by his faith" (2:4).

When I was a younger man, my walk of faith often led to disappointment and despair. I can recall daily analyzing my life, struggling to find God's "purpose" in my trials. Seemingly, each time I found the answer, within days I found a flaw in my reasoning. Something else happened to make a mockery of my deductions. With wisdom a brother admonished, "Beware the interpreter of God's providence." All the while, confident I was "walking by faith"—in reality—I was walking by sight. A man of faith does not attempt to understand the rationale behind every difficult trial, but, knowing God's character, chooses to trust Him and to submit to His revealed will.

The remainder of chapter two is an expansion of what God promised Habakkuk of the Chaldeans in 1:11: "But they will be held guilty, they whose strength is their god." The Chaldeans' own injustice would not go unpunished. Habakkuk, however, in his fear, did not hear.

### **Habakkuk's Determination (3:1–19)**

With tender resignation and a determined spirit, Habakkuk prayed once more: "Lord, I have heard the report about Thee and I fear" (v. 2a). It is a tragic misperception that faith always dispels fear. While many allow fear to hinder courageous works of faith, the great men of God, like Habakkuk, press on in spite of their fear. How did Habakkuk press on in spite of his fear?

First, he submitted himself to God's will (3:2b). "O Lord, revive Thy work in the midst of the years, in the midst of the years make it known." Habakkuk neither prayed for deliverance nor elimination of the trial; he prayed, instead, for God's will to be done. Fear has its origins in self-centered concern; to dispel fear, hold tightly to the work. With this prayer, "Revive thy work..." Habakkuk returned to the spirit of his initial prayer. And yet—so tender is this yet fearful, he adds, "In wrath remember mercy."

Second, he rehearsed God's faithfulness (3:3–15). In verses three through fifteen of chapter three, the prophet forced himself to recall the faithfulness and power of God in the deliverance of His people. Reminding ourselves of God's abiding care in the past gives us the courage to face present trials. Perhaps this is one reason Paul encouraged the Philippians: "Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God" (Phil. 4:6).

Third, he made the decision to forge ahead, trusting in God in spite of his fear (3:16–19). I envy those of you who are about to hear the final words of Habakkuk for the first time; they are among the most beautiful of all inspired literature. Their beauty rests not merely in the words themselves, but in the profound depth of faith that they convey to the reader:



I heard and my inward parts trembled, at the sound my lips quivered. Decay enters my bones, and in my place I tremble. Because I must wait quietly for the day of distress, for the people to arise who will invade us (3:16).

Have you ever been this frightened? Have you ever been so frightened that your lips quivered, your bones trembled? I have. So had Habakkuk. Imagine, if you will, that you are Habakkuk. A "fierce and impetuous people" are poised at your borders. And God has given you into their hands. Imagine! Yet, in spite of his fear, listen to the determination of the prophet:

Though the fig tree should not blossom, and there be no fruit on the vines, though the yield of the olive should fail, and the fields produce no food, though the flock should be cut off from the fold, and there be no cattle in the stalls...(3:17).

In other words, in spite of any personal implications—even if the world about him were to crumble—Habakkuk declared:

...yet I will exult in the Lord, I will rejoice in the God of my salvation. The Lord God is my strength, and He has made my feet like hinds' feet [the feet of swift antelopes], and makes me walk on my high places [places of greatest fear] (3:18-19).

Habakkuk's resolve echoed Job's similar declaration, "Though He slay me, I will hope in Him" (Job 13:15a). May we determine today to become men and women of faith like Habakkuk, occasionally fearful but always faithful, content to "rejoice [if for no other reason, than] in the God of our salvation"! *P.O. Box 9144, Auburn, CA 95604*

# Survey of Jeremiah and Lamentations

*by Carl M. Johnson*

Jeremiah has been called the "Weeping Prophet," the "Martyr Prophet," and "God's Iron Pillar." We know more about Jeremiah than any other prophet in the Old Testament because of the self-disclosing nature of his writings. "His biography is a living sermon, and his book is a mini-bible. Saints throughout the ages have been challenged and inspired by his deeds and words" (Smith, p. 177).

We had better pay attention to Jeremiah. He was the prophet through whom God staged a showdown with Judah. Jeremiah's job was a nasty one. It is never very pleasant to talk plainly with people about their sins and to warn them that judgment day is coming. Yet his message, uttered in the midst of social and religious conditions strikingly similar to our own, has an astonishing timeliness for our age (Banowsky, p. 63).

## **The Prophet Jeremiah**

There are seven other men in the Bible in addition to the author of this prophecy who wear the name Jeremiah. While there is little agreement upon what the name Jeremiah means, the most common meanings assigned to the name are: "Jehovah appoints," and "Jehovah establishes" (Smith, p. 178; Freeman, p. 242; Coffman, p. 5).

Jeremiah was the son of Hilkiah a priest of Anathoth, a village about three miles north of Jerusalem. It is probable that Hilkiah was the high priest who found the book of the Law in the temple, and played such a significant role in the reformation of 621 B.C. (cf. 2 Chron. 34:9).

There is no evidence that Jeremiah had either been trained for the priesthood or had officiated in such a capacity. But as a result of accompanying his father to the temple from time to time, he no doubt observed the responsibilities the priests traditionally exercised in connection with the Law, and the flagrant manner in which they disregarded them (cf. 8:8) (Harrison, p. 34). While failing to point out the people's obligations to God under the covenant relationship, the priests actually supported the pagan worship that flourished under Manasseh and Amon (cf. 2 Kgs. 21:1-22). It is not surprising, consequently, that Jeremiah held the priests greatly responsible for the spiritual decay of Judah.

Jeremiah was predestinated to his office before his birth and ordained to be a prophet of God (1:5). He began his ministry around the age of twenty, in

the thirteenth year of the reign of Josiah (627 B.C.), and continued it for about forty years. His lengthy ministry came to its close in Egypt sometime after the destruction of Jerusalem (586 B.C.) in the period of the Babylonian exile.

Jeremiah was sent to pursue a nation that was running away from God. "He became the very legs of the 'hound of heaven,' flinging himself and all the powers of his being into the task of reclaiming the nation of Israel for the purposes of God" (Guest, p. 17). He condemned the corrupt life and practice of his people, warned them against the consequences of sin, and pleaded with them to turn to God and save themselves. In later years he had to kindle their hopes and undergird their faith when they faced the certainty of exile. Still later he encouraged and kept together as far as possible the remnant of those left in Jerusalem in the confusion and desolation of a ravaged community. He did not go with the exiles to Babylon, though he wrote them and sought to encourage them in the hope of mercy in the future. He lived among the people in the ruined city until forced to go with them into Egypt. We have no record of his latter years, though the tradition is that he died as a martyr in Egypt. Another tradition says that he was taken to Babylon where he died (Hester, p. 288).

Christians have always had a fascination with Jeremiah because of the close similarity that exists between his life and the life of Jesus Christ. In fact, on one occasion when Christ took a sampling of public opinion from His disciples by asking "Whom do men say I am?" (Mt. 16:13), they replied, "Some say ...you are Jeremiah..." (Mt. 16:14). It is hardly surprising that some mistook the "man of sorrows" for the "weeping prophet." Both men cried for the same reason—the sinfulness of their people, which was going to result in their destruction (cf. 9:1; Lk. 19:41). Neither man knew the joys of matrimony and a home. Both came quickly into conflict with the powers that be. Jeremiah's uncompromising condemnation of iniquity brought him rejection and suffering as it did to Christ, and Jeremiah actually compared himself to a lamb or an ox led to the slaughter (11:19). Both men made the temple at Jerusalem a center for their teachings, and on the memorable occasion when Jesus cleansed the temple He quoted in part Jeremiah's denunciation in 7:11 as having finally become a reality (Mt. 21:13). Each was a lonely man who found strength to carry on through intimate communion with God. In fact, many have felt that Jeremiah's finest contribution to Christianity was not his public message but his private life with God.

Michelangelo has painted Jeremiah, an old man, bewildered and broken, sitting on the ruins of the devastated city, his noble head leaning sorrowfully on his hands and bowed down so that he cannot see the miserable failure of his preaching. Yet he has not failed. His immediate reward was scorn, persecu-

tion, and ingratitude. But he will stand forever as a mighty cornerstone in that foundation of the prophets upon which is reared the majestic building of the church of God (Banowsky, p. 70).

### **A Chronology of the Major Events in Jeremiah's Lifetime**

#### **I. During the Reign of Josiah**

- A. 627—Jeremiah called to be God's prophet. Death of Assurbanapal, the last great king of Assyria.
- B. 621—Discovery of the book of the Law. King Josiah's great reformation begins.
- C. 612—Nineveh, capital of Assyria, falls to Babylon.
- D. 609—The Egyptian army marches north to bolster collapsing Assyria. Josiah intercepts it at Megiddo and is killed. On his return from Assyria, Pharaoh Necho deposes the new king, Jehoahaz, placing Jehoiakim on the throne.

#### **II. During the Reign of Jehoiakim**

- A. 605—Egyptian forces routed at Carchemish by Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon.
- B. 604—Nebuchadnezzar subdues Syria, Judah, and Philistine cities.
- C. 598 Alliance with Egypt brings the Babylonian forces down on Judah again.
- D. 597—King Jehoiakim dies. Jerusalem falls to Babylon after a two-month siege. The new king, Jehoiachin, is deported with others to Babylon. His uncle, Zedekiah, is put on the throne.

#### **III. During the Reign of Zedekiah**

- A. 588—Under pressure from the pro-Egypt party, Zedekiah breaks faith with Babylon. Jerusalem under siege for eighteen months.
- B. 586—The Babylonian army breaks into Jerusalem. The people are deported; the city plundered and burned. Three months later, governor Gedaliah is murdered. Jeremiah is taken to Egypt.

### **Jeremiah, the Book**

With the exception of Psalms, Jeremiah is the longest book in the Bible by word count. Its fifty-two chapters also yield more biographical detail about Jeremiah's life than is available for any other character in the Old Testament—including Moses, Abraham, and David. The book is a mixture of literary forms: prose and poetry, taunt and lament, biography and history, and acted parable. The parables Jeremiah acted out were not so bizarre as those of Ezekiel, but they were nonetheless strange. Among his "props" were a dirty girdle, a pottery jar, a cup of wine, and an ox yoke. To drive home his point he

offered wine to a group of teetotalers, buried a stone beneath the pavement before a government building, and purchased a plot of ground in the midst of the siege of Jerusalem (Smith, p. 181).

Because Jeremiah's prophecies are not arranged in chronological order, this book has been called the "most confused in the Old Testament" (Smith, p. 185). For example, his prophecies under Josiah (1-20) are followed by a prophecy in the period of Zedekiah (p. 21), the last king of Judah, whereas there were actually three kings whose reigns intervened between Josiah and Zedekiah. Again, chapters 35-36 precede in time chapters 27-34 (Freeman, p. 239). Some authorities, including C. F. Keil, believe Jeremiah arranged his book topically according to subject matter (p. 29). Merrill Unger suggests that it is because the book was written in several stages (p. 571), as the book itself indicates, that it is not arranged in strict chronological order. The first twenty-three years of Jeremiah's prophecies, which were dictated to Baruch, were destroyed by Jehoiakim. Subsequently, they were rewritten with additions (36:32). Later prophecies were no doubt dictated to Baruch who, at the close of Jeremiah's ministry in Egypt, probably gathered and edited the entire collection. Chapter 52, which is practically identical to 2 Kings 24-25, if it was adopted from the historical records in Kings, could have been added as a conclusion to the book at the direction of Jeremiah.

The first chapter gives an account of the call of the prophet. Chapters 2-35 contain his prophecies relating to Jerusalem and Judah. Chapters 36-45 are made up of biographical accounts. In chapters 46-51, there are several brief prophecies concerning foreign nations. Chapter 52 is a historical appendage dealing with Zedekiah.

There is very little doubt about the authenticity of Jeremiah. Keil says:

Jeremiah's prophecies bear everywhere so plainly upon the face of them the impress of this prophet's strongly marked individuality, that their genuineness, taken as a whole, remains unimpugned even by recent criticism (p. 30).

The Hebrew text of Jeremiah differs widely from that of the Septuagint, the latter being about one-eighth shorter. Also, the prophecies concerning the foreign nations (pp. 46-51) are inserted after 25:13 in the LXX (the Greek Septuagint). It has been suggested by Driver that the existing Hebrew text and the Hebrew text from which the LXX translation was made, represent two different recensions of Jeremiah's original writings.

It is impossible to know the precise reasons for the divergences between the Hebrew text and the LXX. I do not believe, however, that they represent two different recensions of Jeremiah's original writings, as Driver

contends. Whatever the reasons motivating the LXX translators to omit approximately one-eighth of the Hebrew text, its omission cannot reflect upon the authenticity of the present Hebrew Masoretic text. On the contrary, the LXX translators are subject to question inasmuch as elsewhere they are sometimes careless and untrustworthy in the transmission of the Old Testament text. Moreover, many of the omissions are unimportant words that occur repetitiously. Other reasons for the omissions may have been theological. Young suggests, for instance, that the LXX translators, being Alexandrian Jews, may have been influenced by Greek philosophical ideas, which caused them to delete certain portions of the Hebrew text (Freeman, pp. 248–249).

Keil makes this observation about the Septuagint version of Jeremiah:

The proofs of self-confidence and arbitrariness on the part of the Alexandrian translator being innumerable, it is impossible to concede any critical authority to his version—for it can hardly be called a translation—or to draw from it any conclusions as to a Hebrew text differing in form from that which has been handed down to us (pp. 32–33).

### Outline

#### I. Prophecies Under Josiah and Jehoiakim (1:1–20:18).

- A. The prophet's call and commission (1:1–19).
- B. The sin and ingratitude of the nation (2:1–3:5).
- C. Prediction concerning devastation from the north (the Chaldeans) (3:6–6:30).
- D. The threat of Babylonian exile (7:1–10:25).
- E. The broken covenant and the sign of the girdle (11:1–13:27).
- F. The drought; the sign of the unmarried prophet; the warning about the Sabbath (14:1–17:27).
- G. The sign of the potter's house (18:1–20:18).

#### II. The Later Prophecies Under Jehoiakim and Zedekiah (21:1–39:18).

- A. Nebuchadnezzar, God's instrument to punish Zedekiah and Jerusalem (21:1–29:32).
- B. The future Messianic kingdom (30:1–33:26).
- C. Zedekiah's sin and the loyalty of the Rechabites (34:1–35:19).
- D. Jehoiaquim's opposition and destruction of the prophetic scroll (36:1–32).
- E. Jeremiah in jail during the siege (37:1–39:18).

#### III. Prophecies After the Fall of Jerusalem (40:1–45:5).

- A. Ministry among the remnants in Judah (40:1–42:22).
- B. Ministry among the fugitives in Egypt (43:1–44:30).
- C. Encouragement to Baruch (45:1–5).

**IV. Prophecies Against the Heathen Nations (46:1–51:64).**

- A. Egypt (46:1–28).
- B. Philistia (47:1–7).
- C. Moab (48:1–47).
- D. Ammon, Edom, Damascus, Arabia, Elam (49:1–39).
- E. Babylon (50:1–51:64).

**V. Historical Appendix (52:1–34)**

(Events of the fall and captivity of Judah, Archer, pp. 347–348).

**Highlights in Jeremiah's Message**

- The fountain and the cistern (2:13).
- The ineradicable stain of sin (2:22).
- The futile search for a righteous man (5:1).
- The old paths are best (6:16).
- The lost opportunity (8:20).
- The tearful call to repentance (9:1).
- The depravity of the human heart (17:9).
- The clay and the potter (18).
- The false shepherds (23).
- How to find God (29:13).
- The New Covenant (31:31–34).

## The Lamentations of Jeremiah

Lamentations is a series of dirges in the form of an acrostic, written as if for a national funeral, portraying the capture and destruction of Jerusalem.

### Author

The book does not expressly state its author, but there has been an early and consistent tradition that Jeremiah composed it. This tradition is reflected in the title of the book in the Septuagint. This introduction is also included in the Septuagint: "And it came to pass, after Israel was taken captive, and Jerusalem made desolate, that Jeremias sat weeping, and lamented with this lamentation over Jerusalem, and said..." Ante-Nicene fathers, such as Origen and Jerome, attributed authorship to Jeremiah. If Jeremiah was not the author, whoever wrote Lamentations must have been a contemporary of his and witnessed the same pitiless destruction of Jerusalem by its Babylonian conquerors.

### Composition of the Book

In the Hebrew Scriptures, chapters one, two, and four are written in the form of acrostics (each have twenty-two verses, and each verse begins with one of the twenty-two letters of the Hebrew alphabet in order). The first three verses begin with **aleph**, the second three with **beth**, and so on throughout the chapter. Chapter five has twenty-two verses, but no acrostic.

### Synopsis of the Book

- The ruin of Jerusalem and misery of the exiles, because of their sins (chapter one).
- Jehovah, the ancient defender of Israel, has given up His people to their awful fate (chapter two).
- Jeremiah's grief over the afflictions of his people—his trust in God, and his own persecution (chapter three).
- The former glory of Israel contrasted with their present misery (chapter four).
- A prayer for mercy (chapter five).

### Key Verse

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 (1:12).



Verse twelve has become a classic expression of grief as traditionally translated. If the phrase, "Is it nothing to you," is interpreted as a question, the sense of the phrase is, "Does this not affect you at all?" This question would refer to the agony of Jerusalem's recent experiences and the lesson the careful observer can learn. If the phrase is interpreted as a wish, however, the verse would begin, "May it never happen to you." This verse is a striking parallel to the lament of Christ over heedless Jerusalem (Mt. 23:37f; Lk. 13:34f). 1400 Northcrest Drive, Ada, OK 74820, carlmj@compworldnet.com

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# Daniel

## Setting, Structure, and Purpose

*by Ron Courter*

Our responsibility is to focus on the book of Daniel so that our associations with the book will fit it into the larger chronology of the Bible events and cause us to reflect upon the book and its place in the redemptive scheme. The Bible is very generous to us in establishing the setting of the book and its time. It is only the critic who refuses to accept the power of God to predict who has a problem with the authorship and date of the writing. Otherwise, the diversity of the events in the first part of the book (historical narrative) and the nature of the latter part of the book (apocalyptic literature and visions) fit well with one author and one purpose. The use of two languages (Aramaic and Hebrew) finds an unstrained explanation in one author. When we survey the book of Daniel, we find the author focuses upon the Gentile world in the early chapters, and in the latter part focuses upon the people of God, as encompassed in the nation of Israel.

### **The Book and Its Historical Setting**

In the third year of the reign of Jehoiakim king of Judah came Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon unto Jerusalem, and besieged it (1:1).

- A. Jehoiakim, king of Judah; Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon.
  - 1. Chronologically, we could say this is where Daniel begins.
  - 2. Redemption-wise, we realize these circumstances go back into years of unrepented sin, even though God had sent His servants the prophets to turn the people from sin.
- B. The book of Daniel reveals its span through the events and times of Daniel's life. We see him in the beginning of the book interacting with king Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon and it is stated he continued until the days of Cyrus (1:21). Again, Daniel 6:28 speaks of Daniel's prospering in the reign of Darius and Cyrus the Persian. Daniel 9:1-2 reveals Daniel has survived the seventy years of the captivity (see also 10:1; 11:1). One keeps pace best with the book of Daniel by thinking of two historical settings. One period is the time of the captivity under the Babylonian rule and the other is the time of Cyrus and the Medo-Persian period. The following passages give information on this time. Jeremiah 29:1-10 speaks of the words of Jeremiah to the captives in Babylon. The period of captivity is noted as seventy years in Jeremiah 29:10, 25:11 (see also 9:1-2). We learn from Daniel 5:31 that Darius the Median took the kingdom of

Babylon. 2 Chronicles documents the carrying away of God's people into Babylon, until the time of the Kingdom of Persia, and this was a fulfillment of the seventy years of punishment (2 Chron. 36:20–21). Furthermore, 2 Chronicles 36:22–23 tells of the proclamation made by Cyrus king of Persia permitting the return of God's people to Judah. The details of this return are given to us in Ezra:

Now in the first year of Cyrus king of Persia, that the word of the LORD by the mouth of Jeremiah might be fulfilled, the LORD stirred up the spirit of Cyrus king of Persia, that he made a proclamation throughout all his kingdom, and put it in writing, saying, Thus saith Cyrus king of Persia, the LORD God of heaven hath given me all the kingdoms of the earth; and he hath charged me to build him an house at Jerusalem, which is in Judah. Who is there among you of all his people? His God be with him, and let him go up to Jerusalem, which is in Judah, and build the house of the LORD God of Israel, (he is the God,) which is in Jerusalem.

This declaration then puts us into the post-exilic books of the Bible. It is well to recall in passing that Isaiah prophesied of the work of Cyrus long before it happened and actually spoke of Cyrus by name (Is. 44:24–45:7).

- C. What readings from the Bible could be especially helpful in understanding the setting of the book of Daniel? The early part would be aided by reading Habakkuk, 2 Kings 21–25, 2 Chronicles 33–36, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel. The latter part would be aided by examining Ezra, Nehemiah, Esther, Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi. The reading of Habakkuk is not so much a time factor, as sharing a problem common to Daniel's time.
- D. Lest we lose our sense of bearing in the continuity of Bible events remember the northern kingdom had fallen over a century before (2 Kgs. 18:9–12). Verse 10 reads, "And at the end of three years they took it: even in the sixth year of Hezekiah, that is the ninth year of Hoshea king of Israel, Samaria was taken."

This fall was not without anticipation, as prophets warned. Isaiah 7:8–9 states Ephraim would be shattered and the head of Ephraim would be Samaria. Now, Judah alone was primarily the geographical house of God and in reality had been for a number of years, as the faithful had fled from the northern sinfulness (2 Chron. 11:13–14). But even the object lesson of the destruction of their physical kin, miraculous deliverance from foes (Is. 26:10) and some temporary revivals did not stop Judah's trek of sin to captivity (Ezek. 23:11, 18, 31–33). The only answer left for the God of holiness and righteousness was to sweep the house of idolatry by the captivity of His people. This captivity would come by the nation of Babylon,

whom we see was a rising power. Recall the incident in 2 Kings 20 when Hezekiah received a visit and present from Babylon. It reads:

Then came Isaiah the prophet unto king Hezekiah, and said unto him, What said these men? And from whence came they unto thee? And Hezekiah said, They are come from a far country, even from Babylon. And he said, What have they seen in thine house? And Hezekiah answered, All the things that are in mine house have they seen: there is nothing among my treasures that I have not shewed them. And Isaiah said unto Hezekiah, Hear the word of the LORD. Behold, the days come, that all that is in thine house, and that which thy fathers have laid up in store unto this day, shall be carried into Babylon: nothing shall be left, saith the LORD.

Hezekiah should never have shown all the wares of his place. It is well to remember when you are asked for change in the street never to show your wallet. Hezekiah's sin or folly (or both) led Isaiah to say that not only the treasures would be taken, but also "And of thy sons that shall issue from thee, which thou shalt beget shall they take away; and they shall be eunuchs in the place of the king of Babylon" (Is. 39:6-7). Daniel 1:3 reads, "And the king spake unto Ashpenaz the master of his eunuchs, that he should bring certain of the children of Israel, and of the king's seed and of the princes."

- E. Let us attempt to pull together some details of the situation surrounding the opening verse of Daniel 1:1. Who is this Jehoiakim, king of Judah? We learn from 2 Chronicles 36:1 that Jehoahaz, the son of Josiah, was made king of Judah. Most people are familiar with Josiah's reign and revival in Judah. But the lot had already been cast in the reign of Manasseh (2 Kgs. 21:10-15; 24:3), who followed Hezekiah's day and had molded a spiritual climate in Judah that would demand punishment to provoke repentance.

Jehoahaz was controlled by Egypt (2 Chron. 36:3). Eliakim, the brother of Jehoahaz, was made king, and his name was changed to Jehoiakim (2 Chron. 36:4). This is the Jehoiakim of Daniel 1:1. "In his days Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon came up, and Jehoiakim became his servant three years: then he turned and rebelled against him" (2 Kgs. 24:1).

- F. 2 Chronicles 36:5-7 informs us of the following facts:
1. He reigned eleven years, and his reign was characterized by evil.
  2. Nebuchadnezzar bound him in fetters and carried him to Babylon.
  3. This constitutes the first group of captives and holy vessels carried by Nebuchadnezzar, and this corresponds with Daniel 1:2-7.

- G. The nation of Babylon was revealing her strength as a world power, for we are informed in 2 Kings 24:6-7 that Egypt did not come out of her land thereafter, and Babylon reigned over the area from the river of Egypt unto the river Euphrates.
- H. Jehoiachin was the next to reign, but very briefly, and the result was holy vessels and people being carried to Babylon again (2 Kgs. 24:8-16). This second band of captives probably included Ezekiel (Ezek. 1:2; 40:1). It is significant to remember the city of Jerusalem stood for a number of years after Daniel and Ezekiel were taken captive to Babylon. We gain tremendous insight into these years of intrigue from the book of Jeremiah.
- I. Zedekiah is now made king by the king of Babylon, and his reign of evil lasted for eleven years (2 Kgs. 24:17-19). Zedekiah rebelled which results in the final siege of the city of Jerusalem and Judah is fully overcome, with the last band of captives and vessels being carried to Babylon (2 Kgs. 24:20-25:15). Jeremiah 39:1-2 reads, "In the ninth year of Zedekiah king of Judah, in the tenth month, came Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon and all his army against Jerusalem, and they besieged it. And in the eleventh year of Zedekiah, in the fourth month, the ninth day of the month, the city was broken up." Ezekiel 33:21 reads, "And it came to pass in the twelfth year of our captivity, in the tenth month, in the fifth day of the month, that one that had escaped out of Jerusalem came unto me, saying, The city is smitten."

The Bible gives us more than ample information to understand the historical setting of the book of Daniel. Furthermore, the atmosphere of this time can be understood in detail by reading and studying the book of Jeremiah. The period abounds with arguments over the meaning of scriptures (Ezek. 12:22-28), political alliances (Ezek. 17:12-21), and attempting to sway people by patriotic fervor. (For example, read Jer. 25:1-11; 36:1-8; 45:1-5; 46:1-12).

1. Jeremiah 25:11-14 speaks of the seventy years of captivity to come.
2. Jeremiah 26:18 speaks of how Micah the Morasthite in Hezekiah's day spoke of the city being destroyed.
3. Jeremiah 26:20 speaks of Urijah's words against the city and how Jehoiakim and his fellows brought Urijah back from Egypt and killed him (vv. 21-23). Ahikam labored to preserve Jeremiah's life at this time (v. 24).
4. The book of Jeremiah contains a number of exchanges and messages relating to the last three kings of Judah and the word of the LORD by Jeremiah. For example read Jeremiah 21 and 22. It includes messages

to the captives in Babylon after the second group was carried away. (Please read Jeremiah 29.)

### The Book and Its Purpose

- A. The captivity of Judah by Babylon raised spiritual dilemmas, both for the heathen world and the people of God. Daniel, as a book, largely fits into the redemptive plan at this point to shed light on these dilemmas.
1. The heathen nations acted as if they had no idea they were mere instruments in the providential hands of the one and only true God (Ezek. 20:9-26; 21:18-23; Is. 10:11, 13). It never occurred to them that their successes came, not because of their own power and the power of their gods, but because of the sin of God's people and the consequent punishment. Hence, in victory, these rulers were lifted up with pride and concluded their gods were superior to the God of Israel.
  2. The preceding thought is vividly expressed in the words of Isaiah 10:5-19, which focuses upon the role of Assyria in being the punitive hand of God. Furthermore, these nations in their carnality went beyond the punitive measures in their actions than God intended and their motivation was self-centered.
  3. There runs throughout the Old Testament a constant tension of the above mentioned dilemma. We are constantly reminded of it in the phrase that speaks of "profaning the name of the LORD." Israel was chosen and separated by the LORD's wisdom to preserve the truth of the one true God of heaven and earth. But when sin entered the nation of Israel, especially idolatry, without repentance and all its consequences upon human behavior, God in his holiness had to punish the nation for her sin. This punishment was carried out by the hands of the heathen nations as God's instruments of punishment. This led the heathen to glorify in his mind his lifeless gods over the true God of heaven and earth and for these heathen rulers to be raised up in pride of self, so the God of heaven and earth was not glorified.
  4. Hence, man in his carnality cultivated a false sense of religious achievement by their gods and a false sense of achievement by their personal power. Habakkuk 1:11 reads, "Then shall his mind change, and he shall pass over, and offend, imputing this his power unto his god." The book of Daniel has clear examples of this wrong. Daniel 4:30 reads, "The king spake, and said, Is not this great Babylon, that I

have built for the house of the kingdom by the might of my power, and for the honor of my majesty?" Daniel 5:3-4 reads,

Then they brought the golden vessels that were taken out of the temple of the house of God which was at Jerusalem; and the king and his princes, his wives, and his concubines, drank in them. They drank wine, and praised the gods of gold, and of silver, of brass, of iron, of wood, and of stone.

Therefore, the captivity created an interesting dilemma in perception that God could not ignore. By overrunning Israel, the heathens thought their idols had great strength. The heathens were very aware that in overrunning Israel they were not simply overrunning another nation like them in religious concepts. Lamentations 4:12 reads, "The kings of the earth, and all the inhabitants of the world, would not have believed that the adversary and the enemy should have entered into the gates of Jerusalem." Ezekiel 36:2 reads, "Thus saith the Lord God: Because the enemy hath said against you, Aha, even the ancient high places are ours in possession" (see also Psalm 79:1, 10). This difficulty would never have arisen if God's people had been faithful.

The ironic twist in this dilemma of perception was God had to act also to make *His own people* realize He was the LORD. Ezekiel 11:10 reads, "Ye shall fall by the sword; I will judge you in the border of Israel; and ye shall know that I am the LORD." This point is made with much regularity in Ezekiel's writings (Ezek. 6:10, 13; 12:15-16; 22:15 16; 23:49; 24:24, 27).

5. Daniel is found in the courts of the Gentile rulers to proclaim the power of the one true God of heaven and earth, in spite of the fact those identified as God's people or nation are under the hand of a heathen ruler. He is there to refute the conclusions of the heathen rulers regarding their gods and their personal power or strength. We will return to this point later, but for the moment let us note a passage or two to reveal Bible support for the above statements. Daniel 2:27-28 reads,

Daniel answered in the presence of the king and said, The secret which the king hath demanded cannot the wise men, the astrologers, the magicians, the soothsayers, shew unto the king; But there is a God in heaven that revealeth secrets, and maketh known to the king Nebuchadnezzar what shall be in the latter days. Thy dream, and the visions of thy head upon thy bed, are these....



Daniel basically tells the king your wise men are attempting to deal with things out of their league. These incidents bring to mind Isaiah 48:5. "I have even from the beginning declared it to thee; before it came to pass I shewed it thee: lest thou shouldest say, Mine idol hath done them, and my graven image, and my molten image, hath commanded them." The purpose of the revelation given and the deliverance given is to leave no doubt that neither human might nor idols is the key to heathen governments' being over the children of God. Daniel 4:17 reads, "This matter is by decree of the watchers, and the demand by the word of the holy ones, to the intent that the living may know that the *most High ruleth in the kingdom of men, and giveth it to whomsoever he will, and setteth up over it the basest of men.*" Again, verse 25 reads, "That they shall drive thee from men, and thy dwelling shall be with the beasts of the field, and they shall make thee to eat grass as oxen, and they shall wet thee with the dew of heaven, and seven times shall pass over thee, *till thou know that the most High ruleth in the kingdom of men, and giveth it to whomsoever he will.*" Daniel 3:16-18 reads,

...we are not careful to answer thee is this matter. If it be so, our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the burning fiery furnace, and he will deliver us out of thine hand, O king. But if not, be it known unto thee, O king, that we will not serve thy gods, nor worship the golden image which thou hast set up.

This absolutely amazing expression of conviction reminds us of the words of Jesus. "And fear not them which kill the body, but are not able to kill the soul: but rather fear him which is able to destroy both soul and body in hell" (Mt. 10:28).

6. We would overlook a significant point in passing if we did not mention the tremendous importance of personal conviction interacting with God's power and truth. We see this in the statement of these three men. What if there had not been men of such conviction? Recall Daniel's conviction in Daniel 1:8. "But Daniel purposed in his heart that he would not defile himself with the portion of the king's meat, nor with the wine which he drank; therefore he requested of the prince of the eunuchs that he might not defile himself."
- B. God reveals his will to Daniel so the Gentile rulers will recognize the power of the God of Israel is indeed superior to their gods. Furthermore, God confirms this message by miraculously delivering Daniel and his fellows; thus, the God of Israel is proven superior to all others. The early

part of the book with its historical narrative fulfills this purpose and answers the dilemma of the Gentiles' view of the captivity. The position of Daniel and his fellow faithful captives and God's mode of support are consistent with God's revelatory process and confirmation of His message. We are reminded of Acts 4:29-30, when we consider the position of these men and their role. "And now, Lord, behold their threatenings: and grant unto thy servants, that with all boldness they may speak thy word, By stretching forth thine hand to heal: and that signs and wonders may be done by the name of thy holy child Jesus."

- C. The second aspect of the spiritual dilemma raised by the captivity relates to the people of God. Will the faith of the faithful (the remnant) be sufficient to see why the present hardship has befallen the nation lest their circumstances overwhelm them (Ezek. 11:13) and they, too, lose hope in the cause of the righteous? Will they remember the reason for the circumstances as taught, for example, in the words Psalm 89:30-34?

If his children forsake my law, and walk not in my judgments; If they break my statutes, and keep not my commandments; Then will I visit their transgressions with the rod, and their iniquity with stripes. Nevertheless my loving kindness will I not utterly take from him, nor suffer my faithfulness to fail. My covenant will I not break, nor alter the thing that is gone out of my lips.

The faithful are faced with the following situation. God had promised the throne of David would be established forever (2 Sam. 7:12-17; 1 Chron. 17:11-15), and the book of Daniel must face the problem of assuring the faithful that God is faithful. The throne of David appears to be usurped by Gentile rulers, and they need assurance that the throne of David shall be forever. Lamentations 2:9 reads, "Her gates are sunk into the ground; he hath destroyed and broken her bars: her king and her princes are among the Gentiles: the law is no more; her prophets also find no vision from the LORD." Again, "The breath of our nostrils, the anointed of the LORD, was taken in their pits, of whom we said, Under his shadow we shall live among the heathen" (Lam. 4:20; see also Ezek. 17:12; 19:9 and Lam. 5:16). In the midst of this terrible time of captivity, they need to be aware that this is due to the iniquity of the nation, and the captivity is the chastening by God with the rod of men and with the stripes of the children of men. The despair is evident, as Lamentations 4:18 reads, "They hunt our steps, that we cannot go in our streets: our end is near, our days are fulfilled; for our end is come." Please read Psalm 137:1-9. They also need assurance that God's mercy shall not depart and that the throne of David will be a reality forevermore. They need assurance that permits them to reach spiritual and faithful conclusions, so they will carry on (Ezek.

11:16-21). The book of Daniel serves this purpose specifically in the latter part of the book with the series of visions that contrast the comings and goings of Gentile kingdoms, "... shall the God of heaven set up a kingdom, which shall never be destroyed: and the kingdom shall not be left to other people, but it shall break in pieces and consume all these kingdoms, and it shall stand forever" (2:44). Again:

As concerning the rest of the beasts, they had their dominion taken away: yet their lives were prolonged for a season and time. I saw in the night visions, and behold, one like the Son of man came with the clouds of heaven, and came to the Ancient of days, and they brought him near before him. And there was given him dominion, and glory, and a kingdom, that all people, nations, and languages, should serve him: his dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and his kingdom that which shall not be destroyed (7:12-14).

The book of Daniel serves also to answer the dilemma of the perceptions that arise from the captivity, both for the heathen world and the faithful of God. The combination of historical narrative and the series of visions are united by divine wisdom to fulfill this purpose. Daniel is used by God to assure the people of God that when the fig tree will not blossom God will cause it to bloom in due season. Truly, God will remember His covenant (Ezek. 16:60; 20:33-34, 41; 21:27). Therefore, sustain your faith in His promises for He is faithful, and the just shall live by faith. We will use the words of Habakkuk to express the doubts that the book of Daniel counteracts and the faith it cultivates by the visions that reveal the history of the nation of Israel in its latter part.

When I heard, my belly trembled: my lips quivered at the voice: rottenness entered into my bones, and 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 labor 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. The LORD God is my strength, and he will make my feet like hinds' feet, and he will make me to walk upon mine high places... (Hab. 3:16-19).

The practical assurance needed by the faithful is accomplished in the captivity when Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego were delivered from the fiery furnace by Nebuchadnezzar's decree. "Therefore I make a decree, That every people, nation, and language, which speak any thing amiss

against the God of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego shall be cut in pieces, and their houses shall be made a dunghill: because there is no other God that can deliver after this sort" (3:29). Ironically, the faith of the faithful is now protected by a powerful heathen government during the captivity. A similar twist of irony manifests itself when Daniel is delivered from the den of lions under Darius and the Medo-Persian Empire.

Then king Darius wrote unto all people, nations, and languages, that dwell in all the earth; Peace be multiplied unto you. I make a decree, That in every dominion of my kingdom men tremble and fear before the God of Daniel: for he is the living God, and steadfast for ever, and his kingdom that which shall not be destroyed, and his dominion shall be even unto the end. He delivereth and rescueth, and he worketh signs and wonders in heaven and in earth, who hath delivered Daniel from the power of the lions. So this Daniel prospered in the reign of Darius, and in the reign of Cyrus the Persian (6:25-28).

Lest one might be led to think this is a typical politician's statement with no bite recall 6:24.

- D. The less practical (time-wise), but necessary, assurance to the faithful in the captivity that righteousness would be established as promised, lay in the visions of Daniel. By a series of visions, Daniel learns of the providential developments essential to the establishment of the Messianic kingdom and the promised throne of David that would be forever. They are given without apology, as God gives the realistic struggle of agony the faithful would encounter before the everlasting kingdom would become a reality. Also, God presents the bittersweet truth of the judgment that would befall God's chosen nation due to their rejection of the truth preached by His prophets and His Son. The fulfillment of these visions would develop a divine case for the Messianic Kingdom that could be denied only by those who literally refuse to bow before divine teaching.

The force of the fulfillment of these visions reminds us of the words of Ezekiel 33:33, "And when this cometh to pass, (lo, it will come,) then shall they know that a prophet hath been among them." Furthermore, once fulfilled, they became unmovable historical proofs that the Lord is reigning, that his kingdom is divine in every aspect, and the subjects of the kingdom can grasp their identity. How chilling, but assuring, to hear the closing words of the book of Daniel: "But go thou thy way till the end be: for thou shalt rest, and stand in thy lot at the end of the days:" then to step forward a few centuries and hear Jesus say, "When ye therefore shall see the abomination of desolation, spoken of by Daniel the prophet, stand in the holy place, (whoso readeth, let him understand)" (Mt. 24:15). It would

be hard to say that Daniel did not "stand tall" again at the end of the days of the nation of Israel, and his words served again to preserve the saints.

- E. The book of Daniel places the sovereignty of God on the world's stage in a way that no other book does. If there were ever a time in history the heathen world might entertain the thought of the superiority of their gods over the God of Israel, it was in Daniel's day. No other book in the Old Testament gives a greater detailed account of heathen nations in relation to God's people. The truth of the one God of heaven and earth is declared to the Gentile world, while they appear to hold rule over the people of God. Daniel is placed to evangelize in this hostile arena at what seems like the most unlikely of times. But it is here Daniel reveals neither heathen gods nor heathen civilizations are in control. To the remnant, the message is God does not cast off forever and that the power of human institutions are never lasting, but the God of heaven is everlasting. Human power, no matter how massive it may appear, is never the final director of history when it comes to the things of the Spirit and eternity. God is, and God is the rewarder of them that diligently seek Him (Heb. 11:6).
- F. Passage after passage reinforces the thought that the Most High reigns over the kingdoms of men. Incident after incident made the heathen ruler recognize there is no god like the God of the Hebrews. The early part of the book with its historical narrative can be summarized and remembered by recalling the conversation between Pilate and Jesus. John 19:10-11 reads:

Then saith Pilate unto him, Speakest thou not unto me? Knowest thou not that I have power to crucify thee, and have power to release thee? Jesus answered, thou couldest have no power at all against me, except it were given thee from above: therefore he that hath delivered me unto thee hath the greater sin.

### The Book and Its Structure

- A. Daniel 12:4 reads, "But thou, O Daniel, shut up the words, and seal the book, even to the time of the end: many shall run to and fro, and knowledge shall be increased." The unity of a single writer seems evident to all, except the critic who cannot see God powerful enough to predict the future. The book seems naturally to fall comfortably in time, continuity, and purpose to be that of one author. The book has both historical and personal references to Daniel. Ezekiel speaks of Daniel (Ezek. 14:14, 20; 28:3). Jesus speaks of Daniel in Matthew 24:15 and Mark 13:34. The most reasonable time for the writing of the book is in the span of time between

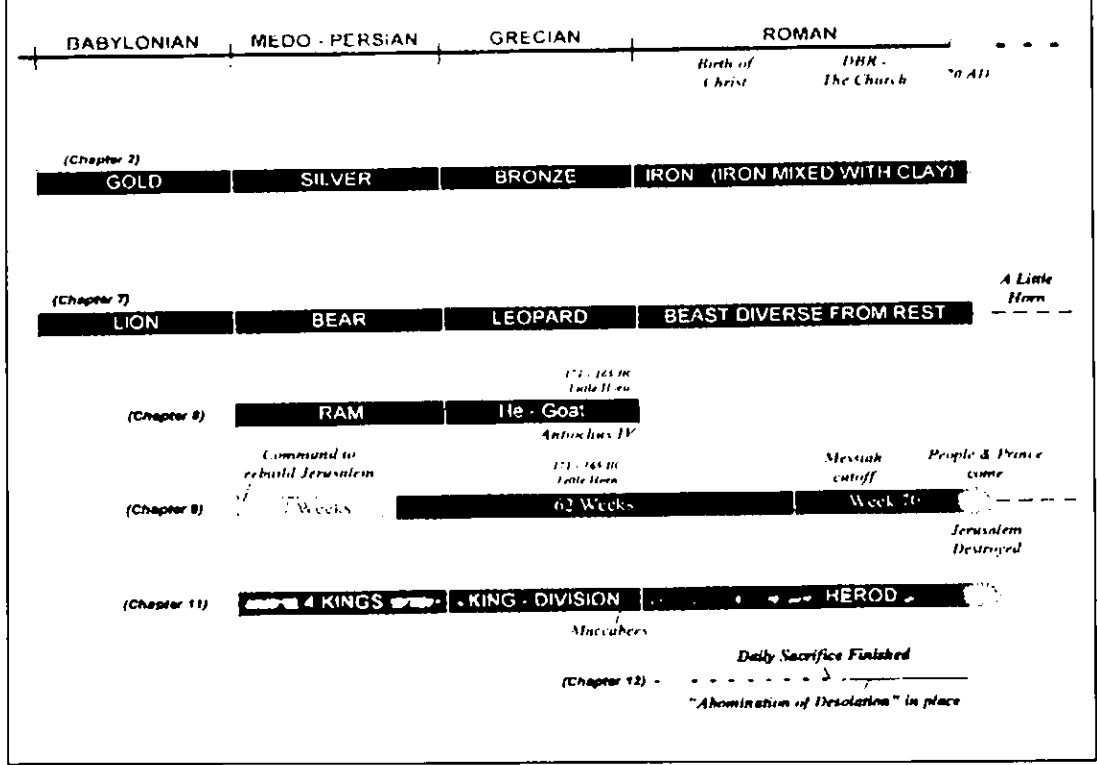
538–528 B.C. The ten-year period following the fall of Babylon would seem the most likely time for the completing of the book.

- B. The fact the book is written in two languages does not deem the necessity of two authors, but rather a discernment regarding the nature of the contents. The Aramaic and Hebrew connection fits the message. The language division follows with Hebrew from Daniel 1:1–2:4, then Daniel 2:4–7:28 in Aramaic, and then Hebrew from Daniel 8:1–12:13. The early portions deal with the Gentile world and emphasize the sovereignty of God over heathen gods and Gentile kingdoms. The latter portion deals with the special concerns and struggles of God's people. It teaches them how world empires relate to the eternal kingdom of God. It reveals the nation of Israel is not all Israel, and as sin has been punished in her ranks, it will finally claim her and the unfaithful.
- C. The first six chapters are largely historical in narrative, while chapters seven through twelve are largely apocalyptic and revelatory in nature. There is a large degree of imagery, but enough is revealed for didactic purpose and enough explained that sufficient lessons can be gleaned without surrendering to endless speculation. The first part of the book prepares for the second part, and the second part, as different as it is, periodically looks back meaningfully to the first part to let us see one unified book.
- D. Chapter two lets the Gentile ruler know what is, what shall be, and who is the final director. Also, it lays a foundation that is drawn upon when the book turns its attention more fully to the circumstances of God's children and the Messianic Kingdom.
1. Chapter two is fundamental to chapters seven and eight, while chapters seven and eight develop more fully the outline of the kingdoms found in chapter two. The interaction of chapters two and seven are especially helpful to the Bible reader. Chapter two's meaning is definitely expanded in regards to the fourth kingdom in chapter seven.
  2. Chapter two's meaning is definitely expanded in regards to the second and third kingdoms in chapter eight.
  3. Chapter two's meaning is definitely expanded in regards to the second, third, and fourth kingdoms in chapters eleven and twelve.
- E. The following charts demonstrate the structural outline of the latter part of the book. Hopefully, this will allow the reader to see the interrelationship of the visions. Let us share a few comments regarding the chart entitled *Parallels and Overlaps in the Book of Daniel*.
1. Many commentaries attempt to make the Grecian kingdom the fourth, by dividing the Medes and the Persians into two empires. You do not

find evidence for such throughout the book of Daniel, and the Medo-Persian Empire is symbolized as one in the book.

2. The little horn of chapter seven and chapter eight are not the same for they come into existence in different empires.
  3. We have presented the king of Daniel 11:36 on the chart as Herod. This could be incorrect without affecting the other information given. Basically, we have leaned toward Herod, as we see the chapter following the history of the nation of Israel until its end in 70 A.D., and the description seems to fit Herod and the circumstances of his family.
- F. The chart entitled The Four Visions tries to depict the interrelationship of the visions.
1. We have limited the last vision as taking us to the end of the nation of Israel in A.D. 70. The reason for this view is largely founded on the words of Daniel 10:14: "Now I am come to make thee understand what shall befall *thy people in the latter days*: for yet the vision is for many days."
  2. The tenth chapter is a chapter of interlude and preparation for the vision given in chapter eleven and part of chapter twelve. The wondrous, but bittersweet vision in chapter nine had led to Daniel's state of mourning and seeking. It is not unusual in apocalyptic literature to have interlude and transitional information given between visions.
- G. The third chart entitled Former Days-Latter Days desires to depict two points of interest and significance in the study of Daniel.
1. It is important to notice the use of the terms "former days" and "latter days." The "former days" we understand are being used by the writers to speak of the time prior to the destruction of Jerusalem and the period of the captivity. The term "latter days" is used to speak of the time of the restoration after the captivity and the rebuilding of Jerusalem through the last days of the nation of Israel.
  2. Today, views that typically speculate about Christ's coming and reigning upon this earth and the fabulous stories regarding the anti-christ have a huge gap in the Scriptures. We see no reason to entertain such a gap; in fact, we believe a careful reading reveals no such gap.
- H. We do think an overview of the general structure of a book like Daniel is beneficial in preparing for a detailed study of the contents of the book. In fact, it should permit the student to evaluate his conclusions more realistically with the total thrust of the writer.

### Parallels and Overlaps in the Book of Daniel





## THE FOUR VISIONS

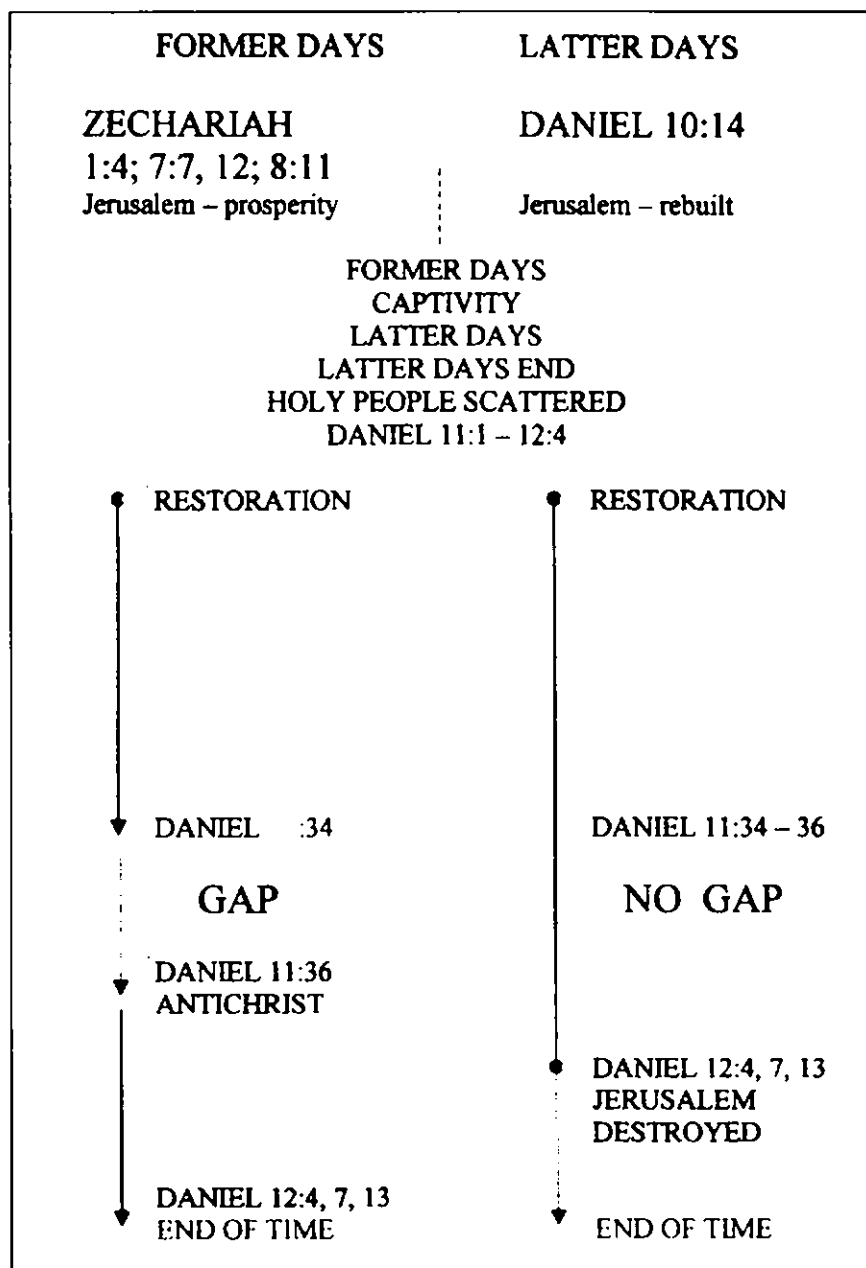
### EVENTS WITHIN THE PERIOD OF ISRAEL'S RESTORATION

DANIEL 7 – RECALL DANIEL 2  
4 BEASTS – 4 METALS  
THE ETERNAL KINGDOM

DANIEL 8 – 2 BEASTS  
2-7-8 GENTILE WORLD POWERS

DANIEL 9 – The 70 Weeks  
CITY REBUILT  
MESSIAH COMES  
CITY DESTROYED  
DANIEL DISTRESSED

DANIEL 10 – 12  
RESTORATION  
DESTRUCTION  
DANIEL 10:14  
“...thy people”  
“...latter days”  
people scattered  
FINISHED



## Chapter Outlines

### Daniel 1

The historical facts and setting of the book are given to further our understanding of the things to follow. It reveals these captives did not leave their God at home and it reveals their God protected them away from home.

Verses 1-7: The setting

- 1 2 Jerusalem falls into the hand of the Babylonian king
- 3 7 The king arranges for some of the best to be schooled

Verses 8-16: Daniel's faithfulness

- 8 9 Background for the appeal
- 10 13 The appeal
- 14-16 The answer

Verses 17-21: God's help and exam day

- 17 God tutored.
- 18 19 The king's test
- 20 Top grades
- 21 Daniel's life continued into the days of king Cyrus

### Daniel 2: The Protector Becomes the Revealer

We have the king's dream, the threat, and the interpretation. The dream of the four kingdoms and the Messianic kingdom are sometimes called the calendar prophecy.

- 1-3 The king loses sleep over a dream and seeks help
- 4-13 The king's request, the wise men's response and plea and the king's angry decree of death
- 14-16 Daniel's appeal
- 17-18 Daniel and his fellows desire God's help
- 19 23 God answers and Daniel's recognition of God's power
- 24 25 Delaying and preparing
- 26 The king gets the point
- 27 30 Daniel clarifies the source
  - a) Not the wise men of men
  - b) The true God of heaven
  - c) Not Daniel's own understanding.
- 31-35 The actual dream
- 36 45 The interpretation
- 46-49 The king's response and reward

**Daniel 3: God—The Protector Controls the Elements**

- 1 7 An image made and an image revered
- 8-12 The accuser speaks and the trio is noted
- 13 18 The king's charge and the trio's response
- 19 23 The king's fury, the fire's fury, and the trio in the fire
- 24–27 The king's surprise, the king's call, and the official inspection
- 28 29 The king's declaration of God's power to protect
- 30 The trio's promotion

**Daniel 4: God—The Humbler of the Lofty**

Verses 1 18: Nebuchadnezzar's troubling dream

- 1 3 The king recognizes more than he understands
- 4–7 A troubling dream and no human help
- 8 9 Daniel is addressed
- 10–17 The dream is reviewed
- 18 The king desires Daniel to interpret the dream

Verses 19- 27: Daniel's interpretation

- 19 Daniel is perplexed and hesitant due to the message of the dream
- 20 22 The tree is thee
- 23 The tree is cut, but the stump remains rooted
- 24 The meaning is
- 25 You will fall from your lofty seat
- 26 You will return when you learn of God's power
- 27 Examine yourself and repent

Verses 28 33: The king glorifies himself once too often

- 29–30 The king speaks too well of himself
- 31 The king has lost his boast
- 32–33 The king's maddened state

Verses 34 37: The king learns and the king confesses that the Most High rules over the kingdom of men

- 34–35 The king's recognition of the Most High's power
- 36 The king is restored
- 37 Pride is no hedge against the God of heaven and His sovereignty

**Daniel 5: God—The Preserver of His Glory**

Verses 1–4: The king's irreverent party and incorrect honor

Verses 5–9: A handwritten message changes the mood

- 5 The hand and the writing
- 6 The sobered king

Verses 10-16: The calling for Daniel and his arrival

10-12 The queen singles out Daniel for the answer

13-16 The shallow king speaks to Daniel

Verses 17-23: Daniel's stern charge

17 My purpose is truth, gifts of thee I need not

18-21 A reminder to the king of things that he already knew

22-23 The king's behavior is rebuked

Verses 24-30: The hand, the judgment, and the charge

24-28 Interpretation of the written message

29 A reward of little significance

30 Belshazzar's death

Verse 31: A change in government

### **Daniel 6: God—The Controller of the Beasts**

Verses 1-3: Daniel's position in Darius' reign

1-2 Daniel, one of three presidents

3 Daniel, head of the three

Verses 4-8: An undiscerning king helps evil men

4 The motive for the decree

5 The enemy's unrealized compliment

6-8 A deceitful plan

Verse 9: Self-glory is blinding

Verses 10-18: The observation, the charge, and the sentence

10 Daniel's prayer habits, or should we say "life-habits"?

11-13 The enemies watch and the enemies speak

14 The king realizes he was dubbed

15 The appeal without honor to law's honor for self-gain

16-18 Daniel placed in the lion's den and the king's plight

Verses 19-28: Daniel's miraculous deliverance and the lion's meal

19-20 The king's early cry

21-23 Daniel's reply and deliverance

24 The king turns the tables

25-27 The king's recognition of the living God

28 Daniel's continual success in the new kingdom

**Daniel 7: God and the Saints—Victory Over Worldly Powers**

Verse 1: Daniel's vision during Belshazzar's first year as king

Verses 2–8: The world scene

- 2 Tumult
- 3 Four beasts
- 4 The first like a lion with eagle's wings
- 5 The second like a bear with a raised side
- 6 The leopard with four fowl wings and four heads
- 7 The fourth beast terrible: iron teeth, stomping feet and ten horns
- 8 The little horn of intriguing interest

Verses 9–12: The true controller and judge of world powers

- 9 The thrones positioned and the judgment setting described
- 10 The judging
- 11 The defiant beast is judged
- 12 The world kingdoms of the giant image lose their power

Verses 13–14: The Messianic and everlasting kingdom does rule

- 13 The Son of man comes by cloud to the Ancient of Days
- 14 The kingdom is given

Verses 15–16: Daniel's state and the seeking of interpretation

Verses 17–18: The general interpretation of the beasts and assurance

- 17 These four beasts are four kings
- 18 Be assured the saints will not be denied

Verses 19–22: The review focusing on the fourth beast

- 19 The fourth beast: appearance and actions
- 20 The ten horns reviewed: description of the horn that arose
- 21 The little horn battles the saints and is very strong
- 22 The beast's time is determined by God

Verses 23–27: The interpretation of the fourth beast

- 23 He is the fourth kingdom and forceful indeed
- 24 The ten horns are ten kings; the little horn will subdue three kings
- 25 The little horn will act as his own authority
- 26 The boundaries are set and will be manifest in due season
- 27 The people of the everlasting kingdom shall obtain their victory

Verse 28: Daniel ponders this awesome scene of struggle and victory

**Daniel 8: The Ram, He-goat, Little Horn, and the Persecution**

Verse 1: The time of Daniel's vision

Verses 2-4: The ram with two horns

- 3 A ram with two horns of unequal length
- 4 The ram pushed west, north, and south and did as he determined

Verses 5-8: The he-goat from the west came speedily

- 5 The he-goat had a notable horn
- 6 The he-goat attacks the ram
- 7 The he-goat overwhelms the ram
- 8 The he-goat was great, but the great horn is broken and four conspicuous horns are observed

Verses 9-12: A little horn arises out of them of terrible disposition

- 9 The little horn grows; affects the south, east, and pleasant land
- 10-12 It grows and is very antagonistic toward the truth of heaven

Verses 13-14: The duration of the period is asked

- 13 How long shall be the vision?
- 14 Two thousand, three hundred days until the sanctuary is cleansed.

Verses 15-18: Interpretation is sought by Daniel

- 15-17 He meets the interpreter; he is told the vision is for the end time.
- 18 Daniel's condition

Verses 19-26: Daniel is informed

- 19 Awareness of what shall be in the last end of the indignation
- 20 The ram with two horns is the Media and Persia kings
- 21 The he-goat is the king of Grecia
- 22 The broken horn falls; four kingdoms of lesser power come forth
- 23 The little horn is a king from these days of the kingdom
- 24 He will be destructive and cause the people of God to suffer
- 25 He will be forceful, but broken without hand
- 26 The vision is true—no question about its truth

Verse 27: Daniel's condition from the vision's scenes

**Daniel 9: The King Is Coming; The Jewish Theocracy Is Going**

Verses 1-2: The time of the vision and the study of the books

Verses 3-19: Daniel's prayer: recognition of sin and his petition

- 3 Daniel's earnest attitude for prayer
- 4 Daniel addresses the LORD
- 5 We have sinned by departing from thy precepts

- 6 We listened not to the prophets
- 7-8 Why Israel was confused and ashamed
- 9 God the one who bestows mercy
- 10-11 Israel sinned and the result is not a secret
- 12-15 Their troubles are the judgment of sin
- 16-19 Daniel's petition for mercy and forgiveness

Verses 20-23: The response from heaven

- 20 21 Gabriel arrives about the time of the evening oblation
- 22-23 Gabriel tells of coming to give Daniel understanding

Verses 24-27: The seventy weeks are determined

- 24 The message is for a duration of seventy weeks, and six objectives are fulfilled with the "cutting off" in the seventieth week
- 25 The beginning of the seventy weeks is identified, and the time until the Messiah is stated
- 26 The Messiah will be cut off, and the city's destruction will come.
- 27 The covenant will stand, but the desolation will come

### **Daniel 10: The Prelude to More Information**

It is helpful to realize the tenth chapter is actually an introduction to the vision depicted in chapters 11-12

- 1 The time of the vision and the contents revealed a great conflict. The message was true, and it concerned a great war. The message was true and one of great conflict
- 2-3 Daniel's state, as he reflected on the vision

Verses 4-9: Another vision

- 4 Time and place is given
- 5-6 The man in the vision is described
- 7 Daniel alone sees the vision, as the others flee
- 8 The vision affects him greatly
- 9 He heard a voice

Verses 10-13: The heavenly messenger declares his purpose

- 10 Daniel is touched by a hand
- 11 Daniel is addressed and stands
- 12 The messenger comes due to Daniel's appeal to understand.
- 13 The messenger has been hindered

Verse 14: What shall befall "*thy people*" in the latter days (in the future)

Verses 15-17: Daniel's response to the messenger

- 15 His body position and lack of speech



16-17 He is helped to speak and declares his helpless state

Verses 18-19: Daniel is strengthened

Verses 20-21: Messenger promises to reveal details of the conflict of empires

### Daniel 11: The latter Days of the Jewish Nation

This section tells of the conflicts between Israel and the Medo-Persian, the Grecian, and the Roman Empires.

... it is found to be a complete account, in the form of a continuous historical narrative, of the second period of Jewish national existence, from the reign of Cyrus (when the vision was given) to the destruction of Jerusalem by the Roman armies under Titus (Mauro, p. 118).

A rejection of the above viewpoint is presently beyond our novice scrutiny and seems very comfortable to the setting and scope of the book. It is admitted there are some phrases of great difficulty for us in the latter parts of chapter eleven and twelve, but not of such nature to cast reflection upon letting the setting of the book control the boundaries of the interpretation.

- 1 Daniel's heavenly help
- 2 The four kings of Persia and the latter antagonizes the Greeks
- 3-4 The Grecian empire and its struggles

Verses 5-35: The conflicts of the kings of the south and of the north

- 5 The southern king's strength
- 6 A marriage of death
- 7-9 The southern king still prevails
- 10-12 More trouble, but still prevailing while losing strength
- 13-16 The king of the north will prevail and control Palestine
- 17 The intrigue and plotting to control is not fruitful
- 18 The northern king reaches out, but then is stopped
- 19 He begins to lose heavily in his dominion
- 20-21 Life is sometimes, short and replacements are not always better
- 22-28 The vile person will conquer and reek havoc in Judea
- 29-35 The vile person will be turned back, yet Judea will suffer

Verses 36-39: Is this not another king in Israel?

- 36 The king will be forceful in getting his way.
- 37 He resists even the true God of heaven.
- 38 He will honor the god of men.
- 39 He will establish his power with others of great power.

Verses 40-43: Another empire (prophesied before in Daniel's visions)

- 40 The king of the north is not the old king of the north.

- 41 The king of the north will conquer many and control the land  
42 He will prevail over Egypt.  
43 He will not stop with Egypt, but also the Libyans and the Ethiopians will see his presence.

Verses 44-45: Is this not more about the king in Israel?

- 44 He will be violent in protecting himself.  
45 He will be well situated, but will pass the way of all the earth.

### **Daniel 12: The Scattering of the Lord's People**

The trouble will come and the vision will be complete with the breaking and scattering of the holy people. Yes, the faithful will obtain their reward.

- 1 There is going to be a time of woe that will bring the nation to its knees in destruction. (Note the vision of chapter 11 actually continues until 12:4).  
2-3 There is destruction and there is a resurrection. Do not forget righteousness shines eternal.  
4 Daniel preserve the vision, for the knowledge contained therein will be needed.  
5-6 The question of focus: How long to the end of these wonders?  
7 The nature of the time is announced, and the event of scattering signals the end of the contents of the vision.  
8 Daniel does not understand and seeks a better understanding of the end.  
9 The answer is not immediate, but he is told the words are complete and the end is determined.  
10 The answer is still not given, but the end result for righteousness and unrighteousness is noted.  
11-12 Daniel is now answered and the events that signal this is the time mentioned.  
13 Daniel will go the way of the earth, but will fulfill his portion at the end.

### **Daniel—A Legend in his Time**

We have spoken of the Book of Daniel and given its historical setting from the Bible. We have made an effort to note the global thrust of its purpose to the heathen of the day and to the faithful of that day. Furthermore, there are few books that can be so meaningful and supportive of our faith today. We have glanced at the structure of the book with the hope it can be at least a beginning for the student and lover of the book. But before we leave this

introduction with the reader, let us glean a little from such a great harvest field by thinking about this man Daniel.

You have to ponder this young man in his teens, taken from his homeland and to our knowledge spending the rest of his years in Babylon. He is probably in his eighties when he pens this book. There are few lives that can speak of living through so many spiritual decisions in such a unique setting, as Daniel in the captivity. What other book interacts so definitively with other nations under the Law of Moses like the book of Daniel? What other book found among the prophets has so unique a message, as the book of Daniel? There are few voices even among "the inspired by the Holy Spirit" that can deliver such a unique message of faith to our day as the book of Daniel.

Indeed, Daniel appears to be a "legend in his time." Ezekiel 14:14 reads, "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." Verses 16 and 18 simply speak of these three men, and then in verse 20 again it reads, "Though Noah, Daniel, and Job, were in it, as I live, saith he LORD God, they shall deliver neither son nor daughter; they shall but deliver their own souls by their righteousness." Daniel was Ezekiel's contemporary, but he is mentioned along with Noah and Job. Consider the comparison made in Ezekiel 28:3, which indirectly reflects how Daniel was viewed.

Let us simply highlight a few features of Daniel's person that demand our reflection, as we pass through this unique time and observe this unique man of God.

Daniel 1:8 speaks of the fact that Daniel purposed in his heart not to defile himself with the portion of food granted to them by the king. Just consider the circumstances under which Daniel was even conscious of his spiritual obligation and the wise and reasonable appeal he made to get his captors to even consider his request. We do not often find such awareness in less threatening situations or such purposing in even settled environments. Where else do you learn such wisdom as how to appeal to those who ask you to do what is contrary to your faith?

Daniel's attitude was always indicative of knowing the degree of respect essential to the situation spiritually. Daniel 4:19 reads,

Then Daniel, whose name was Belteshazzar, was astonished for one hour, and his thoughts troubled him. The king spake, and said, Belteshazzar, let not the dream, or the interpretation thereof, trouble thee. Belteshazzar answered and said, My lord, the dream be to them that hate thee, and the interpretation thereof to thine enemies.

How often do we not turn men on to the truth, because we shut them off with our attitude and then praise ourselves by imputing their motives? Daniel reveals that discernment that fulfills, "some have compassion making a difference and others save with fear, pulling them out of the fire; hating even the garment spotted by the flesh" (Jude 22–23). But compare the words of Daniel 4:19 with the words of Daniel in 5:22–23.

Daniel's ethical demeanor would have stood out in any environment and does so all the more when you place yourself in the pressured circumstances he faced. Daniel 5:17 reads, "Then Daniel answered and said before the king, Let thy gifts be to thyself, and give thy rewards to another; yet I will read the writing unto the king, and make known to him the interpretation." Yes, the king later rewarded Daniel, but the ethical question had been settled and the reason for all behaviors were made clear.

Daniel's reputation was absolutely without question for his behavior was ever single and clear to all men. Daniel 6:5 reads, "Then said these men, We shall not find any occasion against this Daniel, except we find it against him concerning the law of his God." What an unparalleled statement of Daniel's decision making and character. We recall what was said of David's behavior being more wise than all the servants of Saul, "so that his name was much set by." Daniel's enemies knew there was only one way to bring reproach upon Daniel, and that was to make a law that would conflict with his faithful obedience unto the God of heaven. They knew Daniel would not disappoint them, for they knew he would obey God rather than man. Daniel's reputation brings to mind the apostle Paul's writing, "Moreover he must have a good report of them which are without; lest he fall into reproach and the snare of the devil" (1 Tim. 3:7).

Daniel's life breathed of the spiritual discipline that is seen in regularity and in actions that manifest internal commitment. It is the kind of predictability of life that brings confidence in the person and greater glory to God. Daniel 6:10 reads, "Now when Daniel knew that the writing was signed, he went into his house; and his windows being open in his chamber toward Jerusalem, he kneeled upon his knees three times a day, and prayed, and gave thanks before his God, as he *did aforetime*." It is difficult to find a godly life, that had to so constantly function in the pressure-packed world of heathen politics, that comes anywhere close to the life of Daniel. Daniel blends being neither cowardly nor defiant, while maintaining a constant life of spirituality and faithful obedience in an environment filled with numerous pitfalls. There are few who can maintain the spiritual awareness necessary to walk such a path without much stumbling.

These traits were not lost on heaven, for heaven declared he was greatly beloved. Possibly no scene is more touching than the events nestled in the end of chapter twelve of Daniel. Daniel was ever reaching, but ever content with the assurance of God. Daniel heard the things that had been given to answer his previous discomfort and yet it was unclear. Hence, he raised the question what shall be the end of these things? The firm, but kind response of heaven was, "Daniel, go your way now, for it is closed and sealed until it happens." Then after heaven replies again with words hard to understand there is a wondrous comment to Daniel. "But go thou thy way till the end be: *for thou shalt rest, and stand in thy lot at the end of the days*" (12:13). There is no doubt Daniel was a great savor of faith among the faithful in his days, but not only then. We find centuries later at the end of his people as God's nation his words again gave life to those who understood. Jesus, in preparing the people for the destruction to come said, "When ye therefore shall see the Abomination of Desolation, spoken of by Daniel the prophet, stand in the holy place, (whoso readeth, let him understand:) Then let them which be in Judea flee into the mountains..." (Mt. 24:15-16).

### Conclusion

Forth-teller and foreteller he was, but ever so unique. An evangelist in the heathen courts of royalty functioning as living proof of the living God. God's forth-tellers in Old Testament days largely spoke in their day to God's people in that day with some glance or glimpse of the future. While Daniel's words are best understood in the setting of their time, they seem to be more marked for God's people not so much then, as later. They seem more to glance at the then and stare at the now (the Messianic Kingdom) and have been proven true.

The kingdom of God surely never seemed in more doubt than what it did in Daniel's day. But ironically what forth teller presents to us the width and the depth of the kingdom more grandly? What book in the pages of inspiration declares more fully that government and human civilizations with their wondrous progression are all for naught, if the God of heaven and His revelation are not given their due place. Without recognition of the Divine and His word, the evolution of destructive forces are cultivated by the wisdom and pride of men. This eventually will be reaped in the collective culture of any group of people and bring upon them a harvest of evil and chaos. The only salvation from such and the only deliverance from such is found in the kingdom of Christ.

Daniel declared the sovereignty of God when men were sure they were sovereign. Daniel declared the eternal kingdom when men were sure their kingdom was forever. Daniel revealed the other dimension of the history of

men that is most significant, but would be totally left out without the revelation of heaven. Daniel's words of the passing kingdoms have come to pass and make us confident our hope will never pass, but be realized. Daniel's words have taught us effectively to be conscious of the governments of men, but not too conscious of them nor too expecting of them. Daniel's life teaches us conviction, compassion, courage, and where our trust must be to stand in the end. Finally, Daniel's life of telling the word and living it faithfully manifests to us how faithful lives effectively declare the word once in time for all times. We cannot help but think when it says, "...behold, there came wise men from the east to Jerusalem, Saying Where is he that is born King of the Jews? For we have seen his star in the east, are come to worship him" that this awareness was the fruit of the Word of God faithfully spoken by Daniel centuries before. Therefore, let us learn, "So then neither is he that planteth any thing, neither he that watereth; but God giveth the increase. Now he that planteth and he that watereth are one: and every man shall receive his own reward according to his own labour. For we are labourers together with God..." (1 Cor. 3:7-9). Yes, the child of God will stand as he falls, but let it be realized never by his own power; but by his faith in the One who, so to speak, told Daniel. "Enough is enough, take your rest and be assured the righteous will stand at the end, which by the way marks the beginning." 7120 Banks St., Waterford, MI 48327

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# Daniel

## The Prophecies: Chapters 5-12

*by Terry Baze*

The book of Daniel deals with the will of God and the destinies of men. Its purpose is to show God's providence in controlling and directing the course of human history for the accomplishment of His Divine plan. The almighty power of the God of heaven is far superior to that of all the kingdoms of this world. God alone is the supreme ruler of the universe, and all rulers and nations are temporal in nature and subservient to Him. Daniel has two specific messages to deliver:

1. God is sovereign in the kingdoms of the world, and His eternal kingdom is greater than them all. God will judge, defeat, and overthrow the Gentile world powers of which Nebuchadnezzar, Belshazzar, Darius, and Cyrus are in Daniel's day the chief representatives.

2. Daniel delivers a message of consolation and hope concerning the future deliverance of God's people, Israel, through the coming Messiah and His everlasting kingdom. Couched within this hope is also the prediction concerning God's final judgment on Israel, thus ending their usefulness to Him as His instrument in bringing about the Messianic Kingdom.

Near the end of Israel's seventy-year exile into Babylonian captivity, God reveals to Daniel the future of the history of the world as it relates to His purposes, as well as the future destiny of His chosen people. The book of Daniel predicts the history of the Jews from the end of the Babylonian captivity to their final destruction in A.D. 70. Through Daniel, God reveals the return of His people from Babylon to Judea and speaks concerning the restoration of Jerusalem and the temple. The Mosaic system is again set in motion. Approximately 350 years of world history follows, bringing Israel to the time when the infamous Antiochus Epiphanes attempts the extinction of Judaism. Nearly two hundred years later, in the days of the Roman Empire, the Messiah comes and the church manifests the kingdom of God on earth. In one more generation of time, the Roman army led by Titus destroys Jerusalem. The future hope of Israel lies in the Messiah and His kingdom, and national Israel no longer remains exclusively as the elect of God. The Messianic kingdom encompasses all nations. A fitting summation of Daniel's message is found in Psalms 2:1-12:

Why do the nations rage and the people plot a vain thing? The kings of the earth set themselves, and the rulers take counsel together



against the LORD and against His Anointed, saying, "Let us break their bonds in pieces and cast away their cords from us." He who sits in the heavens shall laugh: the LORD shall hold them in derision. Then He shall speak to them in His wrath, and distress them in His deep displeasure: "Yet I have set My King on My holy hill of Zion." "I will declare the decree: the LORD has said to Me, 'You are My Son, today I have begotten You. Ask of Me, and I will give you the nations for Your inheritance, and the ends of the earth for Your possession. You shall break them with a rod of iron: you shall dash them to pieces like a potter's vessel.'" Now therefore, be wise, O kings; be instructed, you judges of the earth. Serve the LORD with fear, and rejoice with trembling. Kiss the Son, lest He be angry, and you perish in the way, when His wrath is kindled but a little. Blessed are all those who put their trust in Him (NKJV).

"Daniel, then, may be said to teach the sovereignty of God in His dealing with human kingdoms" (Young, p. 372). "The basic theme of this work is the overruling sovereignty of the one true God, who condemns and destroys the rebellious world powers and faithfully delivers His covenant people according to their steadfast faith in Him" (Archer, p. 377).

### **Structure**

The structure of the book of Daniel is quite interesting. According to its subject matter, the book may be divided into two sections, each consisting of six chapters. The first part is primarily historical, and the second part contains the apocalyptic or predictive sections.

The first chapter is introductory to the whole book; chapters 2–6 describe some marvelous events in the history of Daniel and his three companions in their relations with the rulers of Babylon; and chapters 7–12 narrate some visions of Daniel concerning the great world-empires, especially in relation to the kingdom of God (**International Standard Bible Encyclopedia**).

It is important to note, however, that the first section is not devoid of predictions, nor the latter of historical statements. There is perhaps a better way to view the book than this traditional approach. The book of Daniel is written in more than one language. Daniel 2:4b–7:28 is written in Aramaic. The rest of the book is written in Hebrew.

#### **The linguistic approach:**

Chapters 1–2:4a	Introduction (in Hebrew)
Chapters 2:4b–7:28	Aramaic (referring to Gentiles)
Chapters 8–12	Hebrew (referring to Jews)

The devices of enclosing the main body of a composition within the linguistic form of a contrasting style so as to heighten the effect of the work was commonly employed in the construction of single, integrated writings in the corpus of Mesopotamian literature (Harrison, pp. 1109–1110)

The Aramaic section is appropriate for the prophet's message concerning the future history of the Gentile kingdoms, as Aramaic was the commercial and diplomatic language of that time. There seems to be a chiasmic (reverse parallel) structure to the Aramaic section:

**2:4–7:28 Prophecies related to Gentiles (Aramaic)**

- 2:4b–49 (A) Prophecy of four world empires
- 3:1–30 (B) God's power to deliver his servants (fiery furnace)
- 4:1–37 (C) God's judgment on a proud ruler (Nebuchadnezzar)
- 5:1–31 (C) God's judgment on a proud ruler (Belshazzar)
- 6:1–28 (B) God's power to deliver his servants (lion's den)
- 7:1–28 (A) Prophecy of four world empires

The Hebrew section is exclusively directed to the Hebrew people. In this section there is a normal parallel structure:

**8:1–12:13 Prophecies related to Jews or Israel in relation to the Gentile kingdoms (Hebrew)**

- 8:1–27 (A) Antiochus and his effect on the Jews
- 9:1–27 (B) The end times and the Jews
- 10:1–11:45 (A) Antiochus and his effect on the Jews
- 12:1–13 (B) The end times and the Jews

Yet another interesting point to be made is that in chapter 7 the narrative passes over from the third person to the first person. "If the reader will read the book carefully, he will be deeply impressed with the remarkable manner in which the various parts of the book interlock and depend upon one another" (Young, p 362). The first part of the book prepares the reader for what is to follow in the second section, and the second section looks back to the first. Chapter 7 develops more fully what is introduced in chapter 2. Chapter 8, likewise, develops more fully what is found in chapter 2, yet neither chapters 7 nor 8 can be fully understood without chapter 2. Chapter 2 also prepares the way for the visions in chapters 9–12, and all of these chapters are based upon the earlier revelation in chapter 2.

### Criticism

The authenticity of the book of Daniel was denied by virtually no one until the 17th century. Since that time, various attacks upon the genuineness of

the book have been based upon: (1) the predictions, (2) the miracles, (3) the text, (4) the language, and (5) the historical statements.

Within chapters 5-12, the primary arguments leveled against the book of Daniel are as follows:

### **1. The Language**

- A. "The Aramaic of Daniel is called in question, yet the Aramaic found in the book agrees in almost every particular of orthography, etymology and syntax, with the Aramaic of the North Semitic inscriptions of the ninth, eighth, and seventh centuries B.C., and of the Egyptian papyri of the fifth century B.C., and that the vocabulary of Daniel has an admixture of Hebrew, Babylonian and Persian words similar to that of the papyri of the fifth century B.C.; whereas, it differs in composition from the Aramaic of the Nabateans, which is devoid of Persian, Hebrew, and Babylonian words, and is full of Arabisms, and also from that of the Palmyrenes, which is full of Greek words, while having but one or two Persian words, and no Hebrew or Babylonian" (ISBE, vol. II, p 785).
- B. "There are objections based on the presence of three Greek names of musical instruments. Many objections raised a hundred or more years ago against the genuineness of Daniel do not seem nearly as weighty today as they once did. The Greek inscriptions at Abu Simbal in Upper Egypt dating from the time of Psamtek II in the early part of the sixth century B.C., the discovery of the Minoan inscriptions and ruins in Crete, the revelations of the wide commercial relations of the Phoenicians in the early part of the first millennium B.C., the lately published inscriptions of Sennacherib about his campaigns in Cilicia against the Greek seafarers to which Alexander Poly-histor and Abvdenu had referred, telling about his having carried many Greeks captive to Nineveh about 700 B.C., the confirmation of the wealth and expensive ceremonies of Nebuchadnezzar made by his own building and other inscriptions, all assure us of the possibility of the use of Greek musical instruments at Babylon in the sixth century B.C." (ISBE, vol. II, p 785).
- C. Some critics object to the fact that there are a number of Persian words found in the text. This objection is easily explained since some of the words were actually from Babylonian origin. Others are actually from the Medes, who carried Israel captive in the eighth century; therefore it would have been natural for Hebrews to have become familiar with and perhaps even to adopt some of the language.

Furthermore, most of these terms had no suitable Hebrew equivalent, and it would have been natural for Daniel to incorporate these into his native language.

## **2. The Chronology**

- A. Daniel is said to have lived until the first year of Cyrus the king (1:21). Yet in 10:1 he is said to have seen a vision in the third year of Cyrus, King of Persia. First, the text of 1:21 does not say that Daniel died in the first year of Cyrus, but it implies that he held his position until Cyrus' reign. Daniel may have possibly been in retirement from the position spoken of when he received the vision in 10:1. Daniel 6:28 says, "So this Daniel prospered in the reign of Darius and in the reign of Cyrus the Persian." This statement gives no indication that Daniel died in the first year of Cyrus reign. Even if Daniel did die in Cyrus' first year of reigning over Babylon, 10:1 may have reference to Cyrus' third year of reigning over Persia, not Babylon.
- B. Another chronological objection is based on Daniel 6:28, where the Bible says that Daniel prospered in the kingdom of Darius the Mede and in the kingdom of Cyrus the Persian. This statement is reconciled by archaeological and historical evidence showing that Darius reigned only in the sense of a sub-king under Cyrus. This verse portrays Daniel as prospering during the reigns of two contemporary rulers, one being subordinate to the other, not in the consecutive reigns of two independent kings. Premillennialists attempt in vain to make these kingdoms separate world powers in order to fit their unscriptural views of Daniel's visions.
- C. In Daniel 8:1, Daniel is said to have seen a vision in the third year of Belshazzar the king. Belshazzar was king of the Chaldeans while his father was king of Babylon, just as Cambyses was king of Babylon while his father, Cyrus, was king of the entire Medo-Persian Empire.

## **3. The History**

One of the primary objections made to the genuineness of Daniel is regarding the supposed non-existence of Darius the Mede and Belshazzar the Chaldean.

- A. Belshazzar. The existence of Belshazzar as king, who is called the son of Nebuchadnezzar, was disputed for many years. This alleged historical discrepancy has been cleared up by archaeological discoveries. According to Daniel 5:30, he was the Chaldean king under whom Babylon was taken by Darius the Mede. Belshazzar was

whom Babylon was taken by Darius the Mede. Belshazzar was not literally the son of Nebuchadnezzar, but this expression refers to nothing more than the fact that he was the royal successor of Nebuchadnezzar. Nebuchadnezzar was, in fact, his grandfather, while Nabonidus was Belshazzar's father. The Babylonian records indicate that Belshazzar became co-regent in the third year of Nabonidus' reign (553 B.C.) and continued in that capacity until the fall of Babylon (539 B.C.). Belshazzar died on the fateful night in which Darius took Babylon.

- B. **Darius the Mede.** Darius the Mede is said to be the son of Ahasuerus (Xerxes) (Dan. 6:1; 9:1; 11:1). He received the government of Babylon upon the death of Belshazzar the Chaldaean (Dan 5:30-31; 6:1) and was made king over the kingdom of the Chaldaeans. From Daniel 6:28 we infer that Darius was king contemporaneously with Cyrus. There is no mention of Darius the Mede outside of the Book of Daniel, but there are good reasons for identifying him with Gubaru, or Ugbaru, who is said in the Nabonaid-Cyrus Chronicle to have been appointed by Cyrus as his governor of Babylon after its capture from the Chaldaeans.

### **Chapter 5**

Nearly twenty-five years have passed since the events of chapter 4 and over seventy years since chapter 1. Belshazzar the king throws a great feast inviting many dignitaries. During the feast a miraculous hand appears and writes a message on the wall. When no one else is able to discern the meaning of the writing, Daniel is summoned and interprets the writing as a warning of impending doom to Belshazzar and his kingdom. Belshazzar, the last of the Chaldaean kings of Babylon, is killed that very night and Babylon passes from Chaldaean rule, to rule by Darius the Mede. The Medo-Persian kingdom becomes the preeminent world power, fulfilling the first part of the vision of chapter 2 revealed through Daniel.

Recent archaeological findings have provided historical evidence for Belshazzar and identified him as the son of Nabonidus and grandson of Nebuchadnezzar. Conservative scholars generally agree that Belshazzar shared a co-regency with his father, especially in His father's absence from Babylon. This explains how Belshazzar could offer Daniel the position of third ruler of the kingdom after having interpreted the writing on the wall for the king (5:16).

### Chapter 6

Darius the Mede takes the throne after Belshazzar is deposed. Some of Daniel's envious rivals devise a plan whereby they might destroy him. Darius is convinced by these rivals to make a decree that no one can pray to anyone except him for a period of thirty days. Knowing Daniel would violate the decree, they lie in wait to catch him praying to God and then report him to the king. Reluctantly the king has Daniel thrown into a den of lions as the predetermined punishment for violating the decree. God miraculously rescues Daniel from harm, and Darius declares God as Sovereign of the universe.

### Chapter 7

In the first year of Belshazzar's reign Daniel has a vision of four beasts, each of which represents the same four world powers depicted by the image of chapter 2. This particular vision enlarges the information revealed in chapter 2. Especially is this true of the fourth beast, which represents the Roman Empire. It is stated in chapter 2 that in the days of the fourth kingdom God would set up His everlasting kingdom. The New Testament clearly reveals the fulfillment of this prophecy. Chapter 7 details further history of the fourth kingdom and its effects on the kingdom of God.

The majority of denominational dogma relative to premillennialism and the book of Daniel view the four beasts as representing the Babylonian, Mede, Persian, and Greek Empires. This view causes the little horn of chapters 7 and 8 to be one and the same person, Antiochus Epiphanes, who is seen as a type of the Antichrist. The fact that the fourth world empire is Rome rather than Greece, and that the Medo-Persian empire is considered in the visions as one empire rather than two separate ones, is easily proven. First, according to Daniel 2:44 and the witness of the New Testament, the kingdom of God came during the days of the Roman Empire, not the Greek empire. Secondly, the vision of chapter 8 makes it abundantly clear that the ram with two horns is one kingdom comprised of both the Medes and Persians (8:3-4, 20).

The vision in chapter 7 is recorded in verses 2-14. Daniel asks for an interpretation of the vision and the interpretation is given in verses 16-17. To this point, the vision of the four beasts agrees with the interpretation given of the vision of chapter 2: The Babylonian empire will fall and be succeeded by three more world powers; and during the fourth world empire (Roman) God will set up His everlasting kingdom on earth.

It is important to remember that this is still the Aramaic section of the book. There is little question that the context of these verses demands that the kingdom of God encompasses more than the Jewish nation. The kingdom,

then, referred to in this passage is the church. The scope of this vision takes us beyond that of the visions recorded in the Hebrew language beginning at chapter 8, which detail the future of Israel.

There seem to be three eras implied in the explanation of the fourth beast. First, the Romans become the ruler of the known world. Secondly, at some point, the Roman kingdom is divided into ten kingdoms, as represented by the ten horns on the beast in the vision. Finally, a little horn rises, uprooting three of the previous ten horns. This little horn speaks against God and makes war with the saints. In time God intervenes and destroys the fourth beast entirely, resulting in the saints receiving the kingdom.

### **Who are the ten kings?**

Daniel uses kings and kingdoms interchangeably making it difficult to determine with certainty whether the ten horns represent ten literal kings (in the case of Rome, ten emperors), or ten literal kingdoms; or perhaps the ten horns are symbolic, representing the total dominion of Rome, regardless of the exact number of kings or kingdoms. Within the immediate context, 7:17 says, "Those great beasts, which are four, are four kings which arise out of the earth." "Kings" here obviously represent kingdoms. Also, Daniel 8:20 says, "The ram which you saw, having the two horns-- they are the kings of Media and Persia." The kings mentioned here are actually kingdoms. Yet, the interpretation given in 7:24 says, "The ten horns are ten kings who shall arise from this kingdom," implying that kings, not kingdoms are referred to.

If one takes the position that the ten kings are ten Roman emperors, then he is likely to believe that the little horn is either Domitian (McGuiggan), or Vespasian. In either case, the kingdom of God is said to be set up during the days of these kings (emperors). On the other hand, if one believes the ten kings represent ten kingdoms into which the Roman empire was later divided, then the kingdom of God was established before the ten kingdoms came into existence. Verses 15–18, which are part of the interpretation of the vision, seem to indicate that the kingdom was established before the ten kings, or kingdoms, came into being. From this view, there are generally two schools of thought:

1. The little horn arising from the ten kingdoms is the papacy (Alexander Campbell; Albert Barnes; Adam Clarke; B.W. Johnson); or
2. The little horn arising from the ten kingdoms is the Antichrist (F.J. Young; Keil; virtually all premillennialists).

The first of these views supposes that the ten kingdoms are a record of the past history of the Roman Empire, with the little horn representing the history

of the Catholic Church. The latter view is the premillennialist view that looks to a future fulfillment of a ten world power alliance that will give rise to the Antichrist.

Daniel 7:17 (“Those great beasts, which are four, are four kings which arise out of the earth,”) and 7:24 (“The ten horns are ten kings who shall arise from this kingdom”) make it virtually impossible to conclude with certainty whether or not these are literal kings or kingdoms. There are other considerations that may shed light on the issue. In Daniel 7:8, we find, “I was considering the horns, and there was another horn, a little one, coming up among them, before whom three of the first horns were plucked out by the roots, And there, in this horn, were eyes like the eyes of a man, and a mouth speaking pompous words.” The little horn is said to come up from “among them” (the ten kings). Nowhere are these ten kings spoken of as appearing consecutively. They are always spoken of as a unit. They are said to “arise from” the Roman Empire, indicating it already existed before the kings appeared.

Furthermore, the little horn is said to be different from the other ten horns in Daniel 7:24, “The ten horns are ten kings who shall arise from this kingdom. And another shall rise after them; he shall be different from the first ones, and shall subdue three kings.” Also, he is said to subdue three kings. There doesn't seem to be any evidence that Domitian subdued three previous Roman emperors. Neither does there seem to be any substantial difference between Domitian and other Roman emperors. In fact, McGuiggan describes Domitian as being a virtual second Nero in his commentary on Revelation.

One's view of these matters is dependent on his perception of how far reaching the book of Daniel extends historically. For McGuiggan, Daniel prophesies until the overthrow of Domitian, the eleventh emperor of Rome. The Premillennialist sees Daniel prophesying until the end of the world, as we know it, taking us to the Day of Judgment. The Premillennialists incorporate the judgment passages of chapter seven with those of chapter twelve and conclude they are speaking of the same event. Albert Barnes, Adam Clarke, and others see the papacy in the little horn of Daniel seven. The key element in understanding this interpretation is Daniel 7:25, which says, “He shall speak pompous words against the Most High, shall persecute the saints of the Most High, and shall intend to change times and law. Then the saints shall be given into his hand for a time and times and half a time.” This is said to agree with the Revelation passages which mention the “time and times and half a time” or the equivalents thereof (Rev 11:2–3; 12:6; 14:13:5). Without going into a long discussion of the details, this position believes the dominion of the papacy came to an end at the time of the French Revolution in the 18th century. A



major problem with this view is found in verse 11, which speaks of the beast being slain. Verse 26 says his dominion is consumed and destroyed forever. Seeing as how the papacy is still alive and in many parts of the world, doing well, this writer finds it difficult to accept all the details of the traditional amillennial historical chronological view.

In keeping with the apocryphal nature of the language in this vision, it would seem that the ten kings are symbolic of all that the Roman Empire would become. Whether in regard to empirical Rome, papal Rome, or any other world power, the little horn represents any who would rear its pompous head to wage war against God, His people, or the truth. This becomes more apparent in the following section, where the identity of the little horn in chapter 8 is different than the little horn here in chapter 7.

### **Chapter 8**

Daniel sees a vision of a ram and a male goat fighting one another. This conflict symbolizes the Medo-Persian Empire being destroyed by Greece under Alexander the Great. After the death of Alexander, his kingdom is divided into four parts. From these four horns comes a little horn that represents Antiochus Epiphanes. He magnifies himself to the point of opposing God. He attempts to exterminate Judaism and replace it with Hellenism. In his endeavor to do so, he attacks Jerusalem and destroys the temple, putting an end to the sacrifices. He further desecrates the temple and sets up idol worship in the place of true worship to the one and only God of heaven. According to Daniel's vision, the oppression is to continue for 2300 days, after which the sanctuary will be cleansed.

This "cleansing of the sanctuary" takes place under Judas Maccabeus on December 25, 165 B.C. These events are all recorded in the books of 1 and 2 Maccabees. The Vulgate includes these first two books of Maccabees (there were four written), and they were pronounced canonical by the Council of Trent in 1553, and included in Catholic translations of the Bible as well as Protestant versions of the Apocrypha. 1 Maccabees provides a brief view of the reign of Alexander the Great and the dividing of his kingdom among his successors after his demise. "Having thus explained the origin of the Seleucid Dynasty, the author proceeds to give a history of the Jews from the accession of Antiochus IV, king of Syria (175 B.C.), to the death of Simon (135 B.C.). The events of these 40 years are simply but graphically related and almost entirely in the order of their occurrence" (ISBE). 1 Maccabees was commonly used in the early Christian church as is evidenced by the many quotations and references from it in the writings of Tertullian, Clement of Alexandria, Hippolytus, and Origen, each of whom died by A.D. 254.

The 2300 day period, if taken literally, means there is a period of persecution against the Jews by Antiochus which is to last nearly six and a half years. If the 2300 days are symbolic, they likely indicate that the persecution is to be cut short by God. The time period is less than seven years, seven being a symbol for complete extermination of the Jewish religion. History reveals that Antiochus, upon hearing of an extremely wealthy city in Persia, traveled there in hopes of replenishing his forces in order to quell the Jewish rebellion led by the Maccabees. He was defeated, however, and soon afterward died of a terrible stomach ailment fulfilling Daniel 8:25, which predicts, "but he shall be broken without human means."

It is because of the transgressions of Israel that Antiochus comes "to oppose the daily sacrifices; and cast truth down to the ground" (Dan. 8:12). Also, Daniel 11:31 corroborates this passage, saying, "And forces shall be mustered by him, and they shall defile the sanctuary fortress; then they shall take away the daily sacrifices, and place there the abomination of desolation." This terrible event in the history of the Jewish nation was a precursor or type of the final destruction of Jerusalem that occurred at the hands of the Roman general Titus and his army in A.D. 70, which likewise is foretold in a vision seen by Daniel (9:26–27; 12:11). Daniel's response to this vision is recorded in 8:27, which says, "And I, Daniel, fainted and was sick for days: afterward I arose and went about the king's business. I was astonished by the vision, but no one understood it."

### The little horn of chapter 8

Therefore the male goat grew very great: but when he became strong, the large horn was broken, and in place of it four notable ones came up toward the four winds of heaven. And out of one of them came a little horn which grew exceedingly great toward the south, toward the east, and toward the Glorious Land...Because of transgression, an army was given over to the horn to oppose the daily sacrifices: and he cast truth down to the ground. He did all this and prospered (Dan. 8:8–9, 12).

The little horn of chapter 8 is different than the one in chapter 7. The one in chapter 7 emerges from the fourth beast (Rome), while the one in chapter 8 arises from the third beast (Greece). The little horn of chapter 7 arises out of the ten horns, while the little horn of chapter 8 grows out of one of four horns. The period of oppression by the horn of chapter 7 is 3½ years, yet the period of oppression by the horn of chapter 8 is 2300 days. The little horn of chapter 8 is clearly Antiochus Epiphanes. The little horn of chapter 7 is definitely not Antiochus Epiphanes.

Since the little horn of Daniel 7 and the little horn of Daniel 8 are different, it is certainly not unreasonable to suppose that such language is highly symbolic and can refer to anyone who would wage war against God, His people, or the truth. Any power that would attempt to overcome the kingdom of God will be overthrown by virtue of Daniel 2:44 which reads, "And in the days of these kings the God of heaven will set up a kingdom which shall never be destroyed: and the kingdom shall not be left to other people: it shall break in pieces and consume all these kingdoms, and it shall stand forever."

### Chapter 9

It is likely that since Daniel reveals the events of this chapter as occurring during the "first year of Darius," that it has been approximately twelve years since the vision of chapter 8. While reading from Jeremiah, Daniel understands the seventy years of Babylonian captivity are nearing their end. While Daniel's chief concern is the end of the seventy years, God dispatches Gabriel to reveal to Daniel that He has ordained seventy times seven to carry out His complete purpose for the Jews, which is not simply restoring fallen Jerusalem, but in restoring fallen man to Him through the promised Messiah. At the end of this period, Jerusalem and her temple will once more be destroyed, signaling the end of the Jewish nation as God's instrument to bring salvation to the world.

After Daniel confesses both his own sins and those of his people, the angel Gabriel appears relaying to him the seventy-week prophecy. Commentators have long been perplexed by this brief, yet penetrating prophecy. "This is one of the grandest prophetic passages, and yet, if there ever was an exegetical crux, this is it. Some interpreters despair completely of arriving at any certainty in their exposition, being overawed by the multiplicity of existing interpretations" (Leupold, p. 403). The conclusion of Daniel's prayer is as follows:

Now therefore, our God, hear the prayer of your servant, and his supplications, and for the Lord's sake cause Your face to shine on Your sanctuary, which is desolate. O my God, incline Your ear and hear: open Your eyes and see our desolations, and the city which is called by Your name: for we do not present our supplications before You because of our righteous deeds, but because of Your great mercies. O Lord, hear! O Lord, forgive! O Lord, listen and act! Do not delay for Your own sake, my God, for Your city and Your people are called by Your name (9:17-19).

Daniel speaks of the temple and the city being desolate, and prays for their restoration for God's namesake. The temple and city were rebuilt and

restored (Ezra, Nehemiah) only to be laid waste again by Antiochus Epiphanes (chapters 8 and 11). The temple would be rebuilt again and finally destroyed in A.D. 70 by the Romans. The prophecy is recorded in Daniel 9:24-27:

Seventy weeks are determined for your people and for your holy city, to finish the transgression, to make an end of sins, to make reconciliation for iniquity, to bring in everlasting righteousness, to seal up vision and prophecy, and to anoint the Most Holy. Know therefore and understand, that from the going forth of the command to restore and build Jerusalem until Messiah the Prince, there shall be seven weeks and sixty-two weeks; the street shall be built again, and the wall, even in troublesome times. And after the sixty-two weeks Messiah shall be cut off, but not for Himself: and the people of the prince who is to come shall destroy the city and the sanctuary. The end of it shall be with a flood, and till the end of the war desolations are determined. Then he shall confirm a covenant with many for one week, but in the middle of the week he shall bring an end to sacrifice and offering. And on the wing of abominations shall be one who makes desolate, even until the consummation, which is determined, is poured out on the desolate (Dan. 9:24-27).

A key to understanding the passage is verse 24. "Seventy weeks are determined for your people and for your holy city, to finish the transgression, to make an end of sins, to make reconciliation for iniquity, to bring in everlasting righteousness, to seal up vision and prophecy, and to anoint the Most Holy." The six things listed here all have to do with the work of the Messiah. The first three things pertain to the great work of redemption Christ accomplished on the cross by restraining, sealing, and covering sin. Jesus was manifested to put away sin. The last part of the verse mentions the righteousness that Jesus' atonement procured, and also reveals that He was the fulfillment of the Old Testament prophets. The prophecy, then, predicts the first advent of Christ and His atoning sacrifice.

The seventy sevens (or weeks) are divided into three time periods. The first period consists of seven sevens, or forty-nine, which prophesies concerning the return of God's people to Jerusalem and the restoration of the city and the temple (v. 25). It may mean that within forty-nine years the temple and city will be rebuilt, but more likely, the seventy sevens is a symbol indicating that God's purpose for Israel is not fulfilled in the rebuilding of Jerusalem and the temple. These things will be accomplished only as a part of God's ultimate work of presenting the Messiah to rebuild the relationship between God and man that was destroyed by sin.

The second time period is made up of sixty-two sevens, or 434, and is a prophecy from the time Jerusalem and the temple were restored to the coming

of the Messiah to carry out His redemptive work. After the sixty-two sevens the Messiah would be cut off, i.e., Jesus would be crucified. Verse 26 also tells us that after this time Jerusalem would be destroyed once again. It was because of transgression that the temple had been destroyed by the Babylonians and for the same reason it would be destroyed again by Antiochus (8:12); but the Messiah was coming in order to bring an end to transgression (v. 24).

The final period is one seven. In the middle of this seven the sacrificial system is brought to an end ("he shall bring an end to sacrifice and offering"). This very likely coincides with the Messiah's being "cut off" after sixty-two weeks (v. 26). After the sacrificial system is brought to an end the abomination of desolation occurs. According to Jesus' words in Matthew 24, the abomination of desolation refers to the destruction of Jerusalem. The "prince" who is to come, after the Messiah is cut off (v. 26), is likely referring to a demonic spirit like those mentioned in Daniel 10:13, 20. The context makes it fairly clear that this is a prophecy of the Roman army's coming to destroy Jerusalem in A.D. 70. Verse 27 says, "Then he shall confirm a covenant with many for one week; but in the middle of the week he shall bring an end to sacrifice and offering. And on the wing of abominations shall be one who makes desolate, even until the consummation, which is determined, is poured out on the desolate." The "he" in this verse is probably a reference to the Messiah of verse 26. The same "he" who confirms a covenant is the one who brings an end to sacrifice and offering. The switch from "he" to "one" who makes desolate probably means that the "one" is Rome. It is important to note, however, that this consummation is determined and carried out by God.

Regardless of how one understands the seventy sevens, the prophecy deals with the decree given to rebuild Jerusalem all the way to the destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70. It begins with a desolate Jerusalem and ends with Jerusalem lying desolate.

## Chapter 10

The tenth chapter serves as an introduction to the final two chapters of the book. Daniel's last recorded vision occurs during the "third year of Cyrus king of Persia." The date is likely around 537 B.C. and after the order had been given by Cyrus for the restoration of the Jews (Ezra 1:1-3). It is likely that the first procession of Jews returning to Jerusalem had already left Babylon. We can only surmise the occasion for Daniel's mourning, but he had mourned with fasting for three weeks. At the end of three weeks a supernatural being appears to Daniel. Some suppose this Being to be none other than the pre-incarnate Son of God Himself. This theophany leaves Daniel bereft of any strength, full of fear and trembling. The heavenly messenger comforts Daniel

stating, "Now I have come to make you understand what will happen to your people in the latter days, for the vision refers to many days yet to come" (Dan. 10:14).

Verse 14 is the key verse in the passage, for it goes a long way in determining the extent and meaning of the vision in the final two chapters. It is not said here that Daniel will be made to understand what will happen to the nations of the world in the last day. He does not tell Daniel that this vision will be of the end of time on earth. He does not speak of an Antichrist, a millennium, or the rapture. He simply tells Daniel that he will have him to understand "what will happen to your people in the latter days." This statement agrees with the premise made earlier, when considering the structure of the book of Daniel, that these words are written in Hebrew and, therefore, pertain to the Jews. This vision is consistent with other visions in the book in that it repeats the message of a previous vision, yet it gives much more detail. The vision of chapter seven, for example, presents the same message as the vision in chapter two, only in much more detail. The vision recorded in chapters 11–12 will give detail to those in chapters eight and nine.

### **Chapter 11**

Herein lies a very detailed account of the history of the wars between Syria (Seleucids) and Egypt (Ptolemics). The detail is such that many critics demand a late date for the writing of Daniel, insisting that there is no way that so many detailed historical facts could have been predicted in advance. The apocalyptic nature of the visions is dropped in this chapter. The symbolism of statues and beasts is replaced by straightforward literal references to kings and kingdoms. While chapter ten focused on the spiritual warfare in the heavens behind the scenes of human history, this chapter deals with the earthly human struggles occurring between kings and nations. The theme of God's sovereignty is again prominent: while kings confer, making promises and commitments (yet are lying all the while, v. 27), and the daughter of the king of the South is given in marriage to the king of the North in hopes of gaining an alliance (v. 6), and all manner of politics are taking place; God's purposes are still being carried out. Kings assert themselves, seek their own interests, and even oppose God and His people, yet they are accomplishing what God has purposed.

Alexander the Great defeats the Medo-Persians and is successful in his efforts to take over the known world. After Alexander's sudden demise, his kingdom is divided into four parts. All of this is found in the vision of chapter eight. The vision here in chapter eleven is primarily concerned with the effects of Alexander's divided kingdom on the people of God. Therefore, the vision

deals with the kingdoms to the north and south of Palestine - the Seleucids and the Ptolemies. The vision chronicles the wars between the two kingdoms, climaxing with the vicious attacks of Antiochus Epiphanes (the little horn of ch. 8) on the Jews. The details of his persecutions against Israel are discussed in comments on chapter 8.

There is much debate and confusion over the last several verses of the chapter. First, there is disagreement over where the discussion of Antiochus Epiphanes ends. Some think that verse 36 begins a discussion of someone other than Antiochus. Others believe that verse 39 ends the narrative concerning Antiochus and verses 40–45 speak of someone else. The second problem concerns the identity of the new player in the vision, if, in fact, there is one. Still others contend that the whole chapter speaks of Antiochus. The most popular arguments are that these verses refer to either Antiochus, some facet of empirical or papal Rome, Herod the Great, or the Antichrist.

Since we have already identified the time frame as being limited to the history of the Jewish nation as God's instrument for bringing salvation to the world through the Messiah, there is no need to pursue the mistaken idea that the Antichrist and the end of time is somehow involved in this prophecy.

In attempting to identify the one spoken of in verses 36–45, it is almost useless to consult commentaries as they contradict one another extensively. There seems to be little credence to any view other than that these verses refer either to Antiochus Epiphanes or to Rome. Detailed arguments for and against either view could be presented at this juncture, yet it is highly doubtful the issue could be settled satisfactorily. The description of the character portrayed in these verses is similar in many respects to the little horn of chapters 7 and 8. It has already been shown that the little horn in chapter 8 is Antiochus Epiphanes, while the little horn of chapter 7 is a product of Rome. In pursuing the similarities of Antiochus and Rome, remember that both of them desecrated the temple: Antiochus in 168 B.C. and Rome in A.D. 70. They are both major players in the visions Daniel receives relative to the future of Israel.

Remember that the background of Daniel goes back to the Babylonian captivity. At that time Jerusalem was destroyed and the temple desecrated. God tells Daniel that Jerusalem and her temple will be rebuilt and even provides the time frame for her restoration. But alas, she will be rebuilt only to be destroyed again. We know that the final destruction of Jerusalem and her temple occurred in A.D. 70 by the hands of the Romans. Approximately 235–240 years before that, Antiochus Epiphanes persecuted the Jews extensively and in his efforts to eradicate the Jewish religion, he desecrated the temple by making a sacrifice to a pagan god there on the altar. This blasphemous act is referred to as the abomination of desolation. It makes little difference whether this was

a type or shadow of what was to occur in A.D. 70, or if Jesus simply used the same language to describe the events of A.D. 70. The major point to be made is that the language of 10:14, and the very purpose of the book of Daniel, leads one to the conclusion that the events of chapter 12 take us to the destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70. Perhaps some of the language used in the vision enables us to understand these events as a type or shadow of the final judgment. However one understands the final verses of chapter 11, it is critical to interpret the passage consistently with the overall purpose of the vision.

### Chapter 12

One's view of eschatology, whether it be premillennial, amillennial, or preterist, usually determines one's interpretation of these verses, as well as the final six to ten verses of chapter eleven. One's view of the purpose of Daniel and the final verses of chapter eleven also will determine how one understands this chapter. Many premillennialists and amillennialists alike interpret the chapter as a vision of the end of time on earth and the final judgment for all mankind.

The first verse of the chapter reads, "At that time Michael shall stand up, the great prince who stands watch over the sons of your people; and there shall be a time of trouble, such as never was since there was a nation, even to that time. And at that time your people shall be delivered, every one who is found written in the book" (12:1). The people spoken of here are the Jews. This verse speaks concerning their deliverance. The final deliverance of the Jews did not take place in 168 B.C. when Judas Maccabees overthrew the Seleucids. Their deliverance took place when the Messiah came (9:24-26).

The phrase "there shall be a time of trouble, such as never was since there was a nation, even to that time" is quoted by Jesus in Matthew 24:21, referring to the destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70. How are we to tie together the deliverance of the Jews, a resurrection, and the destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70? This resurrection mentioned in verse 2 would be for some a resurrection to life, and for others a resurrection to shame and contempt. When Jesus took His seat at God's right hand on the throne of David, Israel was delivered from the kingdoms of the world, God fulfilled His promises to Israel, and through submission to they were resurrected to life. This is also the message of Ezekiel 37 and the valley of the dry bones. Those who rejected the Messiah, however, were resurrected to shame and contempt.

The language in verse 3 ("Those who are wise shall shine like the brightness of the firmament, and those who turn many to righteousness like the stars forever and ever") is similar to that in 11:33, 35. Also, consider the words in 12:10. The verses just mentioned are found below:



And those of the people who understand shall instruct many: yet for many days they shall fall by sword and flame, by captivity and plundering (11:33).

And some of those of understanding shall fall, to refine them, purify them, and make them white, until the time of the end: because it is still for the appointed time (11:35).

Many shall be purified, made white, and refined, but the wicked shall do wickedly; and none of the wicked shall understand, but the wise shall understand (12:10).

There is little, if any, argument concerning Daniel 11:33–35. Most scholars understand these verses as referring to the days of Antiochus Epiphanes. It certainly is no stretch, then, to see 12:3, 10 as applying to the destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70, for the two events were very similar in nature.

An interesting note is that in 11:35, these are said to be refined, purified and made white “until the time of the end: because it is still for the appointed time.” This tells us that the persecutions of Antiochus Epiphanes upon the Jews were not “the time of the end” of the Jewish nation. This “end” of the Jewish economy occurred at A.D. 70. In 12:10, those who are “purified, made white, and refined” are the same as those in verse 2 who are resurrected to life. These are the Jews of whom it is said, “the wise shall understand” i.e., those that accept Jesus Christ as the Messiah.

The question is asked in verse 6. “How long shall the fulfillment of these wonders be?” The answer is given in verse 7, “it shall be for a time, times, and half a time: and when the power of the holy people has been completely shattered, all these things shall be finished.” Yet another reason this passage is not referring to Antiochus Epiphanes’ persecution of the Jews lies in the fact that in chapter 8 the question was asked how long the desecration of the temple would last and the answer given was 2300 days. Daniel 8:13–14 reads:

“How long will the vision be, concerning the daily sacrifices and the transgression of desolation, the giving of both the sanctuary and the host to be trampled under foot?” And he said to me, “For two thousand three hundred days: then the sanctuary shall be cleansed.”

In this passage, the answer is not 2300 days, but “a time, times, and half a time.” The apocalyptic equivalent of “a time, times, and half a time” is 1260 days, or 42 months (Rev. 11:2–3). “A time, times, and half a time” is also the time period mentioned in Daniel 7:25 regarding the dominion of the little horn over the church.

The phrase in verse 7, “all these things shall be finished” refers to the “time of the end” in verse 4. The “end” pointed to is the end of the Jewish na-

tion as the instrument of God in bringing about the promised Messiah. While Jesus took His seat on the throne of David and the kingdom began on Pentecost in A.D. 33, God, in His mercy, gave the Jews a generation of time to hear the gospel and obey it before He punished them for their rejection of the Messiah. In A.D. 70 God used Titus and the Roman army to end His completed work with Israel, in bringing salvation to the world through Jesus Christ. The question asked in verse 6 ("How long shall the fulfillment of these wonders be?") and the answer given in verse 7 ("it shall be for a time, times, and half a time: and when the power of the holy people has been completely shattered, all these things shall be finished") seem to indicate that from the time of this vision until the destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70 would be "a time, times, and half a time." for it was at the destruction of Jerusalem when the power of the holy people was "completely shattered" and all these things were finished.

In verse 9 the angel said, "Go your way, Daniel, for the words are closed up and sealed till the time of the end." This statement implies that these things would not take place until the far distant future from the days which Daniel received these visions. These words are essentially repeated in the final verse of the chapter. "But you, go your way till the end: for you shall rest, and wilt arise to your inheritance at the end of the days."

It appears that the question of verse 8, "My lord, what shall be the end of these things?" is answered beginning at verse 10, "Many shall be purified, made white, and refined, but the wicked shall do wickedly: and none of the wicked shall understand, but the wise shall understand." This verse corresponds with verse 3 and is discussed with comments on that verse.

Verses 6-8 have shown that from the time Daniel received this vision until the destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70 would be "a time, times, and half a time." Verse 11 states, "And from the time that the daily sacrifice is taken away, and the abomination of desolation is set up, there shall be one thousand two hundred and ninety days." While the "time, times, and half a time," or 1260 day period will come to an end in A.D. 70, a period of 1290 will begin. In chapter 8, a 2300-day period commenced from the desecration of the temple by Antiochus Epiphanes until the sanctuary was cleansed. Perhaps the 1260-day period symbolizes that the duration of the persecution will be limited. This would explain the same symbol being used both here in regards to the destruction of Jerusalem and in chapter 7 as it refers to the persecution of the church by the little horn. The 1290, then, stands for that which is greater than 1260. The 1335 days mentioned in verse 12 ("Blessed is he who waits, and comes to the one thousand three hundred and thirty-five days") seems to be "the end of the days" spoken of in verse 13. These days are when Daniel is to receive his inheritance and seem to point toward his final reward in heaven. It almost

seems as if the 1260 days represents the time of Daniel's vision to the end of the Jewish dispensation, the 1290 days represents the Christian era, and the 1335 represents the final consummation of all things. These final verses of Daniel, especially the 1290 and the 1335 days, have stumped bible scholars for centuries, and this writer does not presume to have solved the perplexity of this almost mysterious text.

### **Conclusion**

Jerusalem and her glorious temple had been destroyed and the Babylonians had forced the Jews into exile for seventy years. This was God's punishment upon His people for their rebellion against Him. The righteous prophet and statesman Daniel is deeply concerned about the future of his people and seeks God's will concerning their future. Daniel is assured that they will return to Jerusalem in order to rebuild both the city and the temple. God chooses to reveal to Daniel, not only the immediate future of Israel, but also the entirety of their future relating to God's purposes for them as a nation. This involves many generations of time and includes the rise and fall of a number of world powers.

God first reveals to Daniel the history of the world from the time of Daniel, who is living under the reign of the great Babylonian empire, to the time when God will set up His everlasting kingdom during the days of the fourth world empire (Rome). In between, the Medo-Persian Empire will overthrow the Babylonian empire, and later the Greeks will rule the world after conquering the Medo-Persian Empire. Finally, the days will come when Rome rules the known world. During the days of the Roman Empire, the Messiah is to come and sit on the throne of David to rule His everlasting kingdom. God shows Daniel that no matter how great the powers of the world, they would come and go, but His kingdom is supreme and will remain forever.

Second, through a series of visions, God reveals to Daniel the history of Israel. There are visions of both horror and consolation. One of the awful events predicted is that one day the temple shall be desecrated once again and Israel will undergo severe persecution. The awful deeds of Antiochus are to be short lived, and the sanctuary would soon be cleansed. Antiochus attempts to exterminate Judaism, but God has a remnant who shall be spared and He will continue His plan for the Jews to bring about the Messiah. God, therefore, thwarts Antiochus' plans, once more showing that He is sovereign in carrying out His purposes using the kingdoms of men. What a comfort it would be to the faithful few among the Jews in the days of Antiochus Epiphanes, to know that even though many of the Jews forsake the truth and act wickedly against

the covenant (Dan. 11:30–32), the Messiah will come to “confirm the covenant” (Dan. 9:27).

The Messiah would “cause the sacrifice and the oblation to cease,” and the sanctuary subsequently to be destroyed in A.D. 70 (Dan. 9:27). While on the surface the destruction of Jerusalem might appear to be a thing of horror to the Jews, as it was in the days of Antiochus’ reign of terror, yet the Messiah would “make an end of sins, and bring in everlasting righteousness” (Dan. 11:24), thus bringing deliverance to Israel. It would then become clear that Israel’s perceptions of a material temple and legal sacrifices were not so absolutely necessary to salvation as they had thought them to be! Through the promised Messiah, God’s plans and promises would be kept to Israel. In spite of centuries of confusion, despair, and hopelessness, God had not forgotten His people. The Messiah, a descendant of David, would become king of Israel by taking His rightful place on the throne of David. In fact, He would become King of all kings, as He would set up His universal, everlasting kingdom.

The destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70 took place by the foreordained purpose of God. God had successfully used the nation of Israel to accomplish His purpose of saving the world through the Messiah. God graciously and patiently extended salvation to the Jews for a whole generation, through the preaching of the gospel of the Messiah. Those who rejected God’s eternal plan suffered the wrath of God in the destruction of Jerusalem. God’s Spirit left the temple and the Jewish system at the cross; and yet, in general, the Jews still looked to the sacrificial system as God’s plan for them, in spite of the fact that the ultimate sacrifice of His Son had been offered at Calvary. By destroying Jerusalem in A.D. 70, God showed once and for all that this system had been fulfilled and was no longer a part of His plan.

God is in control and all the nations of the world exist only for His purposes and by His providence. God can provide His people with spiritual comforts in the worst of times: therefore let us never cast away our hope and confidence in Him. *309 Academy St., Farmerville, LA 71241*

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# Ezekiel

by Johnny Elmore

Ezekiel was a Hebrew prophet of the Exile. What we know about him is mostly from the book that bears his name. When Jehoiachin, king of Judah, surrendered to Nebuchadnezzar in about 597 B.C., as recorded in 2 Kings 24:10–17, Ezekiel was evidently a part of the sad company of Hebrews who were taken into the land of Babylon. The Hebrews settled by the River Chebar (Ezek. 1:3) at a place called Telabib (Ezek. 3:15). According to scholars, the “river” was actually an irrigation canal that ran through the heart of lower Mesopotamia.<sup>1</sup> Jeremiah told the exiles that the captivity would be long (Jer. 29:28) and that they should build houses, dwell in them, plant gardens, eat of them, marry and raise families “that ye may be increased there and not diminished” (Jer. 29:5–6). Archeological evidence implies that they did that ultimately, for tablets found near the Ishtar Gate indicate that Jehoiachin was referred to as king of Judah, even in exile, and was fed from the royal storehouse.<sup>2</sup>

Ezekiel was a younger contemporary of Jeremiah and Daniel, who was taken to Babylon in 605 B.C. We learn from Ezekiel 1:3 that Ezekiel was a priest, the son of Buzi, but beyond that we have no direct information. However, we know that the first deportation of captives to Babylon consisted of the nobility, the men of war, and the craftsmen (2 Kgs. 24:14–16). Since Ezekiel was none of these, some have inferred that his presence meant that he was part of the aristocracy of Jerusalem, thus a member of the house of Zadok and that his familiarity with the Temple ritual makes it probable that he had officiated as priest in the national sanctuary.<sup>3</sup> Others say that if he was thirty years of age when he entered the priestly office, as is likely (Num. 4:3), he must have been about fourteen years of age when Josiah died and could not have exercised the priestly functions at Jerusalem.<sup>4</sup> We do know also that he lived in his own house (Ezek. 8:1) and that he had a wife (Ezek. 24:18).

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<sup>1</sup> Joseph L. Gardner, ed., *Reader's Digest Atlas of the Bible* (Pleasantville: The Reader's Digest Association, Inc., 1981), p. 145.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>3</sup> John Skinner, *The Book of Ezekiel, The Expositor's Bible*, ed. W. Robertson Nicoll (London: Hodder And Stoughton, 1895), p. 3.

<sup>4</sup> F. C. Cook, *The Bible Commentary, Proverbs—Ezekiel, Barnes' Notes*, ed. J. M. Fuller (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1966), p. 299



Before we study about Ezekiel's call to the prophetic office, let us consider the factors that made a prophet in exile a necessity. For a good while, Israel had simply been a pawn in the hands of the two great powers, Assyria and Egypt. Then the Northern Kingdom came to an end in 722 B.C. at the fall of Samaria. Its inhabitants were transported into Media although some had been carried away before that. Judah was a nominal dependency of the great Assyrian empire, but was torn between both Assyria and Egypt, as Assyria experienced internal problems. Then a new threat appeared in the form of the Scythians, who defeated the Medes and ravaged Western Asia for about twenty-eight years. They threatened Egypt and may have reached Philistine territory when they withdrew. Their withdrawal from the general area of Palestine was followed by the great reformation under "good king Josiah." Josiah's successful crusade against idolatry and false worship may have given him the confidence that the Lord's hand was with him and induced him to try to stop the Egyptians in their effort to possess Syria. Josiah's subsequent defeat and death seemed to cause the people to think that exclusive reliance on Jehovah as the guardian of the nation had been tried and had failed. At any rate, it was the signal for a great outburst of idolatry as men invoked every form of deity and worship to save the nation.

One historian wrote: "Hand in hand with the restoration of idolatry went its concomitants: vice, adultery, the oppression of the stranger, the orphan, the widow, the bribing of judges, dishonesty, deceit, exorbitant usury, harsh mistreatment of insolvent debtors, and murder."<sup>5</sup> After the death of Josiah and the imprisonment of his favorite son who had ruled in his place only three months, another son, Eliakim, renamed Jehoiakim, took the throne. Meanwhile, the great Assyrian empire fell almost overnight under the combined efforts of Media, Babylonia, and Elam. Jehoiakim gave himself over to debauchery and riotous living. Egypt thought the death of Nabopolassar would give them an easy victory over the new king of Babylonia, but Nebuchadnezzar, the young prince of Chaldea, defeated the Egyptians, freeing Judah from the overlordship of Egypt. Nebuchadnezzar gave Jehoiakim the choice between subjection and annihilation, while Egypt encouraged him to resist the Chaldeans, promising help and other false allurements. Jeremiah had preached that the only course of safety lay in accepting the supremacy of the Chaldeans, but Jehoiakim refused to pay tribute to Chaldea and made an alliance with Egypt. That sealed the fate of the nation of Judah as she, too, was being called to account for her sins against Jehovah. Because Nebuchadnezzar was preoccupied with Phoeni-

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<sup>5</sup> H. Gratz, *Popular History of the Jews*, (New York: Hebrew Publishing Company, 1930), p. 181.

cia and Tyre, Judah escaped with small raids for a time, but then Jehoiakim died and his son Jehoiachin took the throne. He persisted in the folly of resisting Nebuchadnezzar. He was dethroned after a reign of only one hundred days, and he and his family were sent into exile. Ten thousand inhabitants of Jerusalem were transplanted to Babylon. Until the very end, the people believed that the temple would protect them and the nation, but the temple itself was plundered and its treasures taken. The reason the nobility, artisans, and soldiers were taken into captivity was to keep Judah, as rash and defiant as they ever were, from influencing the new king, the youngest son of Josiah, who called himself Zedekiah, to rebel and go to war.<sup>6</sup>

### The Exile

The Exile was not one single event but something that occurred over a period of time. The Assyrians repeatedly invaded the Northern Kingdom from 734–722 B.C., taking captives to the East. The same thing was repeated in Judah, with the Chaldeans taking Daniel and others to Babylon in 605 B.C. Contrary to the advice of Jeremiah, Zedekiah rebelled against the king of Babylon and the climax was reached in 587 B.C., when the Chaldeans captured Jerusalem and burned the temple. Zedekiah's sons were killed before his eyes and his own eyes were put out. Most of the people remaining in Judah were taken to Babylon along with Zedekiah, where he died (2 Kgs. 24–25).

When the temple was burned and the kingdom of Judah was crushed, many must have come to think that Jehovah was not equal in might to the gods of Babylon. Some gave up their faith and were assimilated into the society of the heathen. Others put their hopes in false prophets, who predicted that Jehovah would soon restore the land to the people of Judah. However, Jeremiah and Ezekiel taught their people that Jehovah allowed the captivity as chastisement for their idolatry and immorality. The Exile was Jehovah's school of discipline for his rebellious people. The temple ritual and worship ceased, but devout Jews continued to keep Jewish dietary laws, live clean lives, and pray and fast.

### Ezekiel, The Man

Some scholars have referred to Ezekiel as "the most influential man that we find in the whole course of Hebrew history."<sup>7</sup> Undoubtedly, the preaching (or writing) of Jeremiah and the efforts of Josiah to restore Israel profoundly influenced Ezekiel. Surely he must have dreamed of a return to Jerusalem and

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

<sup>7</sup> Kyle M. Yates, *Preaching from the Prophets*, (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1942), p. 176.

the life he once had there, as did every patriotic Jew. Ezekiel was a priest before he became a prophet. For eleven years, some of these ten thousand exiles of the upper class were living in a concentration camp while many of their loved ones were carrying on in Jerusalem. For five of those years, the captives had no prophet to help or give any encouragement. Then Jehovah laid His hand upon Ezekiel and called him to be a prophet to the lonely exiles.

### **Ezekiel's Call**

In dramatic fashion, Ezekiel tells us about his call to service. Without paying attention to the impressive details and grandeur of that first vision (Ezek. 1), let us note the revelation of Jehovah on the throne above the firmament. As Ezekiel dwells on the details of the vision, the fire, the cherubim, and the wheels, he hardly dares to lift his eyes to the One on the throne; but when he does, he falls on his face. A voice from the throne called Ezekiel to become a prophet to the children of Israel. Jehovah warned him that he was not to be afraid of the rebellious nation to whom he was sent, "though briars and thorns" be with him and he should "dwell among scorpions." He said, "And thou shalt speak my words unto them, whether they will hear, or whether they will forbear: for they are most rebellious" (Ezek. 2:1-7).

In vision the prophet saw a roll of a book spread before him, and heard the command to "eat this roll, and go speak unto the house of Israel." Ezekiel tells us, "Then did I eat it; and it was in my mouth as honey for sweetness" (Ezek. 2:8-3:3). The roll was sweet, not because the message was cheering and encouraging, but because it contained the words of Jehovah. Although the people were "impudent and hardhearted," Jehovah promised to make Ezekiel's forehead "as an adamant harder than flint." The prophet described his feelings under the influence of the Spirit. He was bitter and hot within as he came to the captives at Telabib. Fortunately for him, and probably for the captives, he did not begin preaching at once, but sat among them for seven days bewildered by his experience. As the effects of the ecstasy wore off, he was able to see his mission with more clarity.

### **Ezekiel's Mission**

The fearful responsibility laid upon him as a prophetic watchman soon became apparent to Ezekiel. From the tenor of his writing, we learn that his mission was to destroy false hopes of an early return to Jerusalem, to preserve the teachings of the psalmists and prophets, to preserve Israel's soul in Babylon, and to give hope for the future of Israel. At the end of his seven days of astonishment, Jehovah spoke to him and gave a charge that every preacher and teacher should read and take to heart. Read that charge in Ezekiel 3:16-21,

and then read Ezekiel 33:1–20 to see how one great period of Ezekiel's prophetic life was passed.

After this direful charge, the prophet seemed to himself to be carried out in spirit to a certain plain where Jehovah appears to him precisely as before. Jehovah commands him to shut himself up in his house, to be as a man bound with ropes, unable to move about freely. Also, his tongue will cleave to the roof of his mouth, until he receives a message from Jehovah, and then his mouth will be opened to declare it. This state of intermittent muteness continued until the siege of Jerusalem began and was finally removed when news of the capture of the city was brought.

### **Ezekiel's Ministry Before the Fall of Jerusalem**

Before the fall of Jerusalem, the people at home and those in captivity clung to hope that the kingdom would be restored. They could not believe that Jehovah would permit the heathen to destroy it. They regarded the temple superstitiously as though it could and would save them (Jer. 7:4, 14). They did not consider that their crimes, idolatry, theft, adultery, and cruelty would negate their covenant with Jehovah, just as many today think that "belonging to the church" will save them, although they are "reprobate to every good work." Jeremiah in Jerusalem and Ezekiel in Babylonia warned their people of the approaching destruction of Jerusalem and the complete collapse of the kingdom. In a series of figures, Ezekiel tried to disabuse their minds of the false hopes of a speedy return to their own nation. He is warning that Jerusalem, because of unparalleled wickedness, is to be given up to famine and sword.

### **Four Signs of Coming Judgment on Judah**

In chapters 4–5, Ezekiel must show how Jehovah will cleanse the land of Judah of idolatry. The revelations to the people begin as the prophet gives the figures and then explains, one after the other. In the first one, he drew a picture of Jerusalem on a tile. He represented it as besieged by an army, and then placed an iron pan between himself and the city, representing the wall around it. He then set his face against it, showing the siege by the Chaldeans. In the next figure, he was to lie on his left side 390 days, representing by a day for a year, the division of the nation by Jeroboam to the final overthrow of the city of Jerusalem. Next, he was to lie on his right side forty days, each day representing a year to indicate forty years from some definite period to the same time in the overthrow of Jerusalem. This was possibly reckoned from the covenant that the people made with Josiah to serve God, but afterwards violated it.

The next figure was the sign of the defiled bread. Ezekiel was to prepare bread of coarse material and of a limited quantity, and it was to be baked with dung, which would render it unclean to a Jew, the idea being that the whole life of Israel was to become unclean until its inward state was made worthy of religious privileges. The limited food and water also pictured the distress the inhabitants of the city of Jerusalem would suffer.

The next illustration was drawn from the barber's trade. With a razor he shaved off his hair and beard and disposed of it so as to represent the city of Jerusalem at the end of the siege.

One third was burned in the fire in the midst of the city; a third part was smitten with a knife, and a third part was to be scattered to the wind. One historian stated that "of the remainder which constituted the kingdom of Judah, the greater part perished by the sword, famine and pestilence, a smaller part was led into captivity, and a small fraction fled to Egypt or remained in the country, fearful of the fate which was awaiting it."<sup>8</sup> How literally was the prophecy of Ezekiel fulfilled (Ezek. 5:12). A small amount of hair was also to be bound up in his skirts and then burned, and this was the remnant to be spared.

### **Two Messages of Coming Judgment**

The sixth chapter sets forth with clarity the sins and the punishment to be inflicted for them upon Israel. The ten tribes had been gone for more than a century so the prophet speaks of the remaining seed of Abraham as "Israel." The seventh chapter continues the doleful strain, concluding with the decree, "Make a chain: for the land is full of bloody crimes, and the city is full of violence" (Ezek. 7:23).

### **A Vision of Coming Judgment**

As Ezekiel sat in his house in the midst of the elders, the hand of Jehovah seized him by the hair and lifted him between earth and heaven over mountain and plain and brought him to Jerusalem. In prophetic vision, God showed him all the crimes and sins practiced by the people still remaining in Jerusalem. He was instructed to dig in the wall, where he found a door and entered in to discover secret idolatry practiced by seventy men. He also saw women near the temple weeping in devotion to Tammuz, a Babylonian deity. Then he saw about twenty-five men, evidently priests, worshipping the sun, or Baal. In chapter 9, seven men, a perfect number, appear, six with slaughter weapons, and

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<sup>8</sup> Gractz, pp. 206-207

the seventh with a writer's inkhorn to select the true Israel by a mark on their foreheads. The first act of judgment is a massacre of all those not having the mark, without distinction of age, rank, or sex (vv. 5-11). The second act is the destruction of Jerusalem by fire, symbolized by the scattering of burning coals over the city (10:1-2).

All of this shows that Jehovah would not dwell among such profane, idolatrous people and that he was forsaking Jerusalem and the temple. After a scene much like the one in the opening vision, the glory of God is ready to leave Jerusalem (vv. 15-18). In the eleventh chapter, the twenty-five idolaters received judgment, and while Ezekiel prophesied, Pelatiah, evidently a councilor or an important man, fell down dead, causing Ezekiel to exclaim: "Ah Lord God! Wilt thou make a full end of the remnant of Israel?" (v. 13). Jehovah vindicates His justice by reminding Ezekiel that Israel felt that the land was given as a permanent possession, although from the beginning Jehovah set before them a blessing and a curse. Because of their iniquity, it was time for the curse, but even though they were losing their homeland, Jehovah promised, "Yet I will be to them as a little sanctuary in the countries where they shall come" (v. 16). Then the glory of Jehovah left the temple and the city and went to the "mountain which is on the east side of the city," (the Mount of Olives), and disappeared.

A. M. Morris makes a good case that this is a type of Jesus, the glory of God (Lk. 2:29-32), forsaking the fleshly seed of Abraham, and giving them up to the Romans, as their city and temple were burned to the ground. He shows that the glory of Christ is transferred to us through his word (2 Cor. 3:15-18), and that the glory of God that Israel rejected in the days of Christ will return to them when they turn to the Lord Jesus Christ.<sup>9</sup>

### Signs, Parables, and Messages of Judgment

Someone said that Ezekiel thought in figures, and it does seem that he was fond of symbols. From the twelfth to the twenty-fourth chapters of this book, there are various illustrations and many predictions of the overthrow of the nation. He seems to have acted out his prophecies, explained them, and then made them predictive of similar things occurring in Jerusalem. He dug through a wall, carrying his baggage in the twilight, with his face covered so that he could not see the ground. This represented the king leaving Jerusalem in that manner and being brought to Babylon, "yet shall he not see it, though he shall die there" (12:13). This is a striking prophecy, for we read in 2 Kings 25:7

<sup>9</sup> A. M. Morris, *The Prophecies Unveiled or Prophecy, A Divine System*, (Rosemead: The Old Paths Book Club, 1952), pp. 191-194

that, true to Ezekiel's prediction, the Chaldeans blinded Zedekiah and brought him in brass fetters to Babylon. Do these prophecies have an application today, as some are teaching? Jehovah denounced that sentiment in verses 27-28: "Son of man, behold, they of the house of Israel say, The vision that he seeth is for many days to come, and he prophesieth of the times that are far off. Therefore say unto them, Thus saith the Lord God; There shall none of my words be prolonged any more, but the word which I have spoken shall be done, saith the Lord God."

In the next few chapters, Ezekiel performed many symbolic actions and related parables to show the capture and destruction of Jerusalem. He denounced the prophets who daubed with untempered mortar and the prophetesses who hunted for souls (ch. 13). Jehovah informed Ezekiel that even though Noah, Daniel, and Job should be in the city of Jerusalem, they would escape with only their lives; it would not save the city (ch. 14). He compared Jerusalem to a worthless vine, good only for fuel (ch. 15). She is a wanton harlot and will be humiliated in the presence of her lovers (ch. 16). The covenant-breaking king of Judah shall not escape (ch. 17). Jehovah denounced the old proverb that "the fathers have eaten sour grapes and the children's teeth are set on edge" by showing that "the soul that sinneth, it shall die" (18:2, 20). From chapters 19-23, the prophet continues his denunciations of sin in Jerusalem, and his oft-repeated warning of destruction by Babylon. Samaria and Jerusalem are both vile harlots. This was his final message before the terrible crisis.

In 589 B.C., as the king of Babylon began to besiege Jerusalem, Ezekiel was commanded to write the name of the day. Later the Jews learned that Jehovah gave Ezekiel knowledge of something happening hundreds of miles away. One day Ezekiel received a revelation that must have tested him severely and caused him much pain. The desire of his eyes is taken from him in the death of his wife, and Ezekiel is forbidden to mourn. He had to explain his strange conduct to the people, who were presently to have a similar experience (ch. 24). From that day forward, he ceased to predict the future of Israel, because the calamity was upon them, and he was dumb to Israel, as a prophet, for nearly three years, or until word was brought that "the city is smitten" (33:21-22).

### **Judgment on Gentiles**

Before Ezekiel begins the hopeful teaching about the restoration of Israel to divine favor in their own land, the prophet describes the judgments that are to fall upon the proud nations around them. A. M. Morris, in his great book, writes: "We should not mistake that these nations were blessed as they blessed

Abraham and cursed as they cursed him. Was this an arbitrary 'blessing' or 'curse'? In no wise, rather Abraham believed in and worshiped the true God. **As peoples and nations were like-minded, God consistently blessed them; and as they turned away from the worship of God to idols, He cursed them.**

The same rule held true with Abraham's fleshly descendants, and their history is a mournful testimony to the fact that "righteousness exalts a nation but sin is a reproach to any people."<sup>10</sup>

In chapters 25–32, Ezekiel denounced the Gentile nations around Israel and foretold their doom. The nations mentioned are Ammon, Moab, Edom, Philistia, Tyre, Sidon, and Egypt. What was the reason for their downfall? Jehovah said, "Because the enemy hath said against you, Aha, even the ancient high places are ours in possession" (Ezek. 36:2). However, the reason is not just the fact that they rejoiced and clapped their hands when Israel's temple was destroyed, but also their attitude toward God. Remember, the attitude of the world towards God determined the prosperity or adversity of the nations. Nebuchadnezzar was the chosen rod the Lord used to chastise these nations. I will not comment on these chapters except to say that it is appropriate that these predictions should follow the downfall of the chosen people because they show that God will punish sin. The judgment of the nations began in Jerusalem, at the house of God, just as it did six centuries later, according to 1 Peter 4:17, but the ungodly and the sinner deserved even worse punishment and received it.

### The Restoration of Israel

At this point in time, the last king of Israel was in captivity, the sheep were scattered, the cities of Judah were in ruin, the capital was lying in waste, the temple had been plundered and burned to the ground, and thousands of the golden vessels of the house of the Lord were in a heathen temple in Babylon. Ezekiel's speech to Israel had been restored and from Ezekiel 33:21 to the end of the book, he speaks to the captives in Babylon. He describes the restoration of Israel and their happy future (ch. 33–48).

In chapter 34, the shepherds, i.e., the leaders of the nation—the kings, princes, judges, priests, and false prophets—are denounced. False shepherds must give way to the second David. In Ezekiel 34:15, Jehovah promises to be their Shepherd, but in verses 23–26, He makes it plain that the Messiah is to be the Shepherd in charge of His flock. We are all familiar with the figure of Jesus as the Good Shepherd. This is also the first prediction concerning the

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 10.



king since the prediction he made concerning Zedekiah in Ezekiel 21:25-27. There he denounced Zedekiah saying, "Remove the diadem, and take off the crown," and "it shall be no more, until he come whose right it is; and I will give it him." At that time, the last earthly king was blinded, his sons, and thus his heirs, were dead; now the Lord Jesus Christ was the only One whose right it was to sit on the throne. Ezekiel 37:4 states, "And David my servant shall be king over them; and they all shall have one shepherd: they shall also walk in my judgments, and observe my statutes, and do them." David had been dead for many years, so the prophet could not have meant the second king of Israel, but his more illustrious son, Jesus.

In chapter 35, Edom is predicted to be in perpetual desolation because of their hatred of Israel, which is the same as hatred against God. In chapter 36, Israel is contrasted with all the enemies of God because the mountains of Israel were to be reoccupied, the land tilled and sown, and the nation recovered, all of which happened after the seventy years' captivity. Chapter 37 is a thrilling picture of a resurrection in the valley of dry bones, a pretty straightforward picture of a revival of the nation of Israel. In the same chapter, Ephraim and Judah were represented as two sticks that would become one stick, one people, under David. Surely we can see that this was accomplished in Christ when He came to earth and sought out the lost sheep of the house of Israel, with the Gentiles to be blended with them into one harmonious family.

In chapters 38-39, there is one continuous prophecy about Gog, of the land of Magog, referred to by one commentator as a "sustained prophetic parable."<sup>11</sup> These chapters provide fodder for sensational premillennialists because the same expression is found in the book of Revelation (20:8), and because this prophecy immediately follows a chapter in which God's people are represented as united in one fold under the care of His servant, David. Forcing a literal fulfillment of these chapters causes some ridiculous, impossible conclusions, such as an army more than fifty times greater than any army ever assembled on earth with the intention of "spoiling" the nation of Israel. Then, when the great army is defeated, their weapons will furnish the nation of Israel with fuel for seven years "so that they shall take no wood out of the field" (Ezek. 39:10). Jehovah asks if Gog is the one "of whom I have spoken in old time by my servants the prophets," but no prophet prior to this time ever spoke or wrote of Gog or Magog, but they did speak of heathen, idolatrous nations and their efforts to overthrow Jehovah and His truth. Therefore, we must conclude, especially since this prophecy is to be "after many days" and

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<sup>11</sup> J. F. Jardiner, *The Book of the Prophet Ezekiel, Volume II, The Layman's Handy Commentary Series*, (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1960), p. 65.

"in the latter years" (Ezek. 38:8), that Ezekiel was prophesying of the great spiritual war between God and paganism that has continued through the centuries in which God and His righteous cause will be the victor.

### **The Restoration of Israel in the Kingdom**

The fortieth through the forty-eighth chapters of this book, to be taken as one continuous prophecy, contain a vision of the temple, various ordinances for the temple, the Levites, and the prince, as well as a new division of the land. Since the old temple lay in ruins, he could not have referred to the present. The temple was rebuilt and the nation reestablished, but the second temple was not like the one Ezekiel described, and there was no attempt to divide the land. The only way this prophecy could be understood literally would be to suppose that it speaks of something yet in the future. However, that would necessitate the resumption of animal sacrifices, among other things, and that would completely negate the sacrifice of Christ (Heb. 9:26). In this vision, the glory of God returned to the city and the temple, showing that God's favor would return to Israel upon repentance and restoration of their land and city. In that, it must have been helpful to fleshly Israel. But these things have a figurative meaning—the high mountain, the temple of God, the enlarged capital, and the life-giving waters flowing from the sanctuary and are therefore helpful to spiritual Israel.

### **The Responsibility of the Individual**

Ezekiel emphasized the freedom and responsibility of each individual. That was revolutionary in a day when it was believed that a man had religion only as a member of the nation. He attacked even more sharply than Jeremiah the proverb by which the generation in exile excused themselves and laid the blame on their fathers (Ezek. 18:2). As a general principle, Ezekiel announced that "the soul that sinneth, it shall die" (Ezek. 18:20–21). He taught that no man is necessarily bound by the conduct of his ancestors; he is free to choose for himself. He can reject his father's sins, and he can reject his father's righteous life. Jehovah will judge the father and the son separately. He also taught that no man is necessarily bound by his own conduct in the past. He cannot rely on his past goodness, and he should not despair because of his past sins. He is free to turn away from his own past.

### **A New Heart and A New Spirit**

Ezekiel pleaded with people to turn from sins and make for themselves a new heart and a new spirit (Ezek. 18:31). In such an effort they could expect Jehovah's help, for He said: "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?" (Ezek. 33:11). Ezekiel recognized that what the people needed was not nominal religion, but a heart of loyalty and obedience to Jehovah, and he announced: "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" (Ezek. 11:19-20). *419 K Southwest, Ardmore, OK 73401*

# Haggai

*by Ryan Connor*

The book of Haggai is the first of the trio of books at the end of the Old Testament. By a slim margin Haggai's ministry did precede that of Zechariah—a short period of two months. They were workers together for God with a shared purpose. Ezra describes, in short, the history of this prophetic movement in two verses of Scripture:

Then the prophet Haggai and Zechariah the son of Iddo, prophets, prophesied to the Jews who were in Judah and Jerusalem, in the name of the God of Israel, who was over them. So Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel and Jeshua the son of Jozadak rose up and began to build the house of God which is in Jerusalem; and the prophets of God were with them, helping them (Ezra 5:1–2, NKJV).

## The Date

Haggai dates each of his prophecies. Therefore, the events of this book may be dated more accurately than perhaps any other book in the Bible. Darius, mentioned in the first two prophecies, was the Persian king who began to rule in 522 B.C. and removed the ban on the rebuilding of the temple (ISBE, vol. 1, p. 867). Haggai 1:1 says, "In the second year of King Darius, in the sixth month, on the first day of the month, the word of the LORD came by Haggai the prophet."

## The Historical Setting

It was September 520 B.C. With the feast of the new moon (Num. 10:10) on the horizon, mixed feelings filled the hearts of the people. So far, it had been a bad year. They had worked hard and planted much. Yet, the harvest fell far below their expectations. Drought and a dryness that soaked up even the dew left the soil stale and parched. They had looked for much, but indeed it came to little.

The spring rains had not fallen. Crops had dried up and withered. Olive orchards and vineyards were almost destitute of fruit. With empty pockets and hearts full of disappointment and discouragement, the people were coming into Jerusalem to worship. But what was there for them in Jerusalem? The city had only been partially restored. The walls still lay largely in ruins. And what about the temple? Its past glories were now only a haunting memory in the minds of the older people. As they saw it, the Jerusalem that had at one time existed was to be no more.

The two leaders of the people, Zerubbabel the governor of Judah and Joshua the high priest, had gathered together with a third man, Haggai the prophet. The prophet had called the meeting. He directed their attention to the people in the city. Then he said, "Thus speaks the LORD of hosts, saying: 'This people says, "The time has not come, the time that the LORD's house should be built" (1:2).

Sixteen years earlier, the first group of captives had returned from Babylon according to the decree of Cyrus. Rebuilding the house of the Lord at Jerusalem is stipulated three times as the main purpose of that decree (Ezra 1:2-4). The small group who decided to return to Jerusalem had fully intended to rebuild the temple. Ezra records, "Then the heads of the fathers' houses of Judah and Benjamin, and the priests and the Levites, with all whose spirits God had moved, arose to go up and build the house of the LORD which is in Jerusalem" (Ezra 1:5).

But what actually happened? This small group, referred to as the remnant of the people, did return to Jerusalem. They cleared away the rubble and began the physical reconstruction of the temple. First, they cleared off enough of the debris to erect an open-air altar and offered sacrifices to God (Ezra 3:1-4). Second, the leaders "began work and appointed the Levites . . . to oversee the work of the house of the LORD" (Ezra 3:8). When the foundations were completed, they celebrated (Ezra 3:10-13). Discouragement fell upon the initial efforts of the people. Some shouted for joy, others wept, realizing that this second temple would only be a poor substitute and would pale in comparison to what had once stood so grand and glorious in Solomon's day.

Months went by, adding up to years. Weariness and downward momentum had combined with the unfriendly opposition of the Samaritans and other inhabitants of the land to arrest the work of rebuilding the temple entirely. At the time of Haggai's first prophecy, the temple had not been worked on for fifteen years. Suddenly, a voice of stinging rebuke questions the people, "Is it time for you yourselves to dwell in your paneled houses, and this temple to lie in ruins?" (1:4).

### The Prophet

The prophet Haggai is a man of single purpose. As Jack P. Lewis states, "Haggai is in reality a man of one idea and that idea is: The temple must be completed! An age revolting against institutional worship and drunk on the idea of 'spiritual worship' should not attempt to whittle Haggai down to its size" (p. 68). The temple was the center of religious life in the prophet's mind. Another writer says, "His discourses move entirely around this temple-building" (Orelli, p. 282). The open-air altar standing amid the temple ruins

would not do (2:14). God was not pleased, and He did not receive the glory He deserved (1:8).

What is outstanding about this prophet is the success of his ministry. About three weeks after his first message the people are fast at work. "Haggai's might," says Homer Hailey, "was not in a dynamic personality, but in the power of God's Word" (*Messiah of Prophecy*, p. 214). Twenty-six times, Haggai expresses that his message is from the Lord. The phrase "says the Lord" is used twenty times, and the phrase "the word of the Lord" is used six times. Hailey explains that the expression "by Haggai" (1:1; 2:1) indicates that Haggai is the instrument of Jehovah by which the word is announced (*Commentary*, p. 303).<sup>1</sup> He is declared to be "the LORD's messenger" (1:13).

Haggai's family line is omitted from the divine record. He is designated simply as "the prophet" in Ezra's account (5:1, 2; 6:14) and in the book that bears his name. Concerning his name, H. E. Freeman says,

The meaning of the name Haggai is uncertain. It is usually held to mean "festival" or festive," from *Hag*, "a feast," with the adjectival suffix *ai*. From this some infer that the prophet was born on a feast day, while others believe his name to be indicative of the joyful character of his predictions. Still others consider the name an abbreviation for "feast of Yahweh" (cf. 1 Chron. 6:30) or, taking it literally as it stands, "my feast" (p. 328).

From 2:3, we infer that Haggai had seen the former glory of the temple before the fall of Jerusalem in 586 B.C. This would make Haggai an old man of eighty years, at least. James Smith says, "Jewish tradition states that he spent most of his life in Babylon" (p. 478). He must have been in the first group of exiles who returned with Zerubbabel. Freeman observes, "He seems to have been the senior of Zechariah, for when they are mentioned together Haggai's name always appears first" (p. 328).

Haggai has been described as "the prophet of divine shaking," "the matter-of-fact prophet," "the master builder," "the goad of God," and most imaginatively, Pfeiffer calls Haggai "a steam-engine in trousers" (Smith, p. 479). Scripture calls Haggai "the LORD's messenger" (1:13).

### The Nature of the Book

Among the prophets, the book of Haggai is second only to Obadiah in brevity. Thirty-eight verses divided into two chapters constitute the entire book. The book may be broken down into four sections, each containing a

<sup>1</sup> Marginal reading, "Lit by the hand of..."

distinct prophecy. The first prophecy, delivered on the first day of the sixth month and directed to Zerubbabel the governor and Joshua the high priest, is a rebuke and call to action (1:1-15). The second, delivered the following month, is both consolation for the lack of outward glory and the promise of greater glory than ever imagined for the temple in the future (2:1-9). The third prophecy, delivered on the twenty-fourth day of the ninth month, deals with two questions concerning the law and the symbolic application to obedience and blessing (2:10-19). The fourth and final prophecy, delivered later that same day, is directed toward Zerubbabel, establishing him as the seal of the Lord, thus fixing the hope of Israel once again in the Davidic line (2:20-23).

The book of Haggai is far less poetic than that of his counterpart, Zechariah. Instead, the language is "prosaic, which stems no doubt from the practical purpose of his preaching." Freeman comments, "His message is simple and direct, his short poignant sentences being exactly what his ministry of restoration required." Haggai spoke in a way that seems to mirror his times. Zechariah characterized his age as "the day of small things" (Zech. 4:10). In harmony with the occasion, he spoke in a meager and starved style. Stuhlmüller says, "We judge the achievement of Haggai, not by the beauty of his style but by the effectiveness of his preaching" (p. 15).

By the time Haggai vanished from the scene, whether by death or retirement, the work on the temple was moving along at a good pace. The temple was completed four and a half years after the start of Haggai's ministry, according to Ezra 6:15. We should like to think that this prophet lived to see the fruits of his faithful service.

### **Outline of the Book**

In an effort not to reinvent the wheel, the following outline is borrowed from **The Wycliffe Bible Commentary** with little modification. The numbered headings are the only addition to the original outline.

- I. First address to the leaders of the people.
  - A. Rebuke of indifference, 1:1-4.
  - B. Call to serious reflection, 1:5-6.
  - C. Israel's chastenings from God, 1:7-11.
  - D. Obedience of the nation, 1:12-15.
- II. Second address to the people during the Feast of Tabernacles.
  - A. Encouragement for building, 2:1-5.
  - B. Promise of future glory, 2:6-9.

- III. Third address to the priests.
- A. Clean and unclean in Levitical matters, 2:10-14.
  - B. The application of these truths, 2:15-19.
- IV. Fourth address to Zerubbabel the governor.
- A. God's future blessing for Zerubbabel, 2:20-23.

### Key Passages

#### The Right Time to Build (1:2-8)

In his first address, Haggai makes two arguments concerning the complacency of the people. He hammers the people's question of whether or not the right time had come to build the temple. First, he shows the folly of this excuse with a rhetorical question (1:2-4). Second, he asks them to reflect on how they have fared by allowing the temple to lie in ruins (1:5-7). Then Haggai calls Zerubbabel and Joshua, as leaders of the people, to action (1:8).

Apparently, the people were excusing themselves from building the temple by suggesting that the time had not come, *the time that the LORD's house should be built*. It did not seem to them like the right, or "fit time," to work on the temple (Orelli, p. 284). Scholars suggest many possible reasons for this rationale. The people may have thought that Jeremiah's seventy years of captivity were not yet complete (Jer. 25:11-12; 29:10). Hailey offers this as a possibility, but with disinclination explains, "This would serve only as a subterfuge; the real reason is to be found somewhere else" (p. 304). John T. Willis offers five possible reasons that work on the temple had gone undone for so long:

- They were afraid of the Samaritans (2:4-5).
- They were more concerned with their own interests than with doing the Lord's work (1:4).
- They soon got into the habit of procrastinating.
- They were stingy with their possessions.
- The Jews did not feel that the work of rebuilding the temple was important enough to require serious effort on their part.

Laetsch adds to this list the plain condemnation: "Shameful selfishness!" (p. 388). Haggai seems to agree, condemning the people (specifically, Zerubbabel and Joshua) for selfish behavior (1:4, 9). Other reasons might be suggested, but only to further speculation.

Haggai employs a rhetorical question to sack the people's contrived excuse. Smith notes, "The use of the rhetorical question is a favorite device of this prophet. He uses it five times in the book" (p. 480). This tactic must have



convicted the hearers on the spot. How could they say that it was not the time to build the temple, while they found plenty of time to build their own homes with elaborate, cedar-paneled walls? This elaborate cedar paneling is the very reason that David was inspired to build God a house in the first place (2 Sam. 7:1-2).

### The Latter Glory of the Temple (2:6-9)

The feast of tabernacles interrupts the recently renewed work on the temple. It seems that the initial discouragement felt by the people at the completion of the temple foundation sixteen years ago arises again, especially in the hearts of the older people who had seen the glory of the first temple built under the reign of Solomon (2:3). Accordingly, the prophet Haggai finds it necessary to speak words of encouragement to the people. He assures the people, "The glory of this latter temple shall be greater than the former" (2:9).

The prophecy of greater glory for the latter temple, accompanied by the coming of the "Desire of All Nations" and the giving of peace, is most significant. Did Haggai predict a glorious temple in a material sense, filled with the wealth of the Gentile nations? Did he see the Messiah "suddenly come to His temple" (Mal. 3:1) to bring the glory of the divine presence into its courts? Or did Haggai see the elect of God coming into the church of Christ, the antitypical temple, to receive the peace of God that only comes through the Prince of Peace?

To apply this prophecy to the Messiah himself seems to be a forced interpretation. This view is favored in the NKJV by Capitalizing the phrase "Desire of All Nations." One problem with this interpretation pointed out by most modern commentators is grammatical (Laetsch, Hailey, etc.). The verb rendered "shall come" is plural, while the feminine noun rendered "desire" is singular. T. V. Moore explains that this construction can only be properly construed when it is a noun of multitude,—"a collective noun (p. 75). Hence, the ASV renders, "the precious things of all nations shall come."

Another problem for this interpretation is the context. The next verse seems to point to the physical beauty of the temple: "'The silver is Mine, and the gold is Mine,' says the LORD of hosts." Moore also notes, "The LXX, and the older versions, know nothing of this interpretation" (p. 76). The LXX translates the noun as τὰ ἐκλεκτα, "the elect, or chosen" (Laetsch, p. 391). And the simple fact of matter is that Christ has never been the desire of all nations. Isaiah says:

And as a root out of dry ground.  
He has no form or comeliness;  
And when we see Him,  
There is no beauty that we should *desire* Him (Is. 53:2, ital. mine).

The New Testament sheds light on this prophecy in Hebrews 12:25–29. Here the church is clearly in view. The whole Jewish system, including the physical temple, is about to “vanish away” (Heb. 8:13; 10:25). The shaking of all nations, of heaven and earth, the sea and dry land is to happen once more, and from this shaking the temporal things will be removed, “that the things that cannot be shaken may remain.”

This connection takes Haggai’s prophecy farther away from the material temple and political events going on in his day. Instead, the prophet looks ahead to the time when the church will finally be established, and the elect out of all nations will come into it and find peace. Orelli correctly says,

The world-embracing transformation here set before the view, was brought about by Jesus Christ, who opened His Father’s house to the heathen. In this the chief point is not, that within the precincts of this temple founded by Zerubbabel, Jesus sounded forth the peaceful message of the gospel, and by His presence adorned this house more gloriously than all the sacredness of the Old Covenant had done, although even this was important in the carrying out of prophecy and fulfillment; the most important point was, that in Israel and from Israel, Christ established for all nations the most glorious scene of the worship of the true God. Of course the temple of stone had to give place to a spiritual one (p. 294).

### **The Davidic Hope Preserved in Zerubbabel (2:20–23)**

In Haggai’s fourth and final address, the shaking of heaven and earth appears again with a more political emphasis: the throne of kingdoms—strength of the Gentile kingdoms—chariots. The upheaval of the nations around the remnant will not prevent the Davidic hope from being realized. Reminiscent of Daniel 2, the prophet speaks of “a kingdom that shall never be destroyed.”

Through Zerubbabel the Lord will preserve the hope of Israel. Zerubbabel’s grandfather, Jeconiah (or Jehoiachin) was rejected as the Lord’s signet ring, according to Jeremiah 22:24. Here the prophet Haggai restores to Zerubbabel the honor that his grandfather had lost. With this encouragement, the chosen Zerubbabel will go on to finish the temple in record time—four and a half years after the work had begun, the temple was finished by the hand of Zerubbabel in 515 B.C. (Ezra 6:14–16).

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# **Zechariah**

## **The LORD Remembers!**

*by Art Lynch*

Zechariah was a prophet who began his prophetic work within a couple of months of the prophet Haggai. Haggai prophesied in the sixth month of the second year of Darius (Hag. 1:1) while Zechariah's prophetic work took place in the eighth month of Darius's reign (Zech. 1:1). The two are mentioned together in the book of Ezra, and they prophesied during the time of the rebuilding of the temple. Most of Haggai's book and a good portion of Zechariah's were concerned with the work of rebuilding the temple so the worship of God could be resumed at Jerusalem as the law had specified.

### **Contemporary Events**

Though the Bible mentions more than thirty men named Zechariah, we have no difficulty identifying him who was the prophet. He tells us he was the son of Berechiah, the son of Iddo the prophet (1:1). Some believe that his father must have died young, and thus, Zechariah was associated with his grandfather, for he is spoken of by Ezra as the "son of Iddo" (Ezra 5:1, 6:14). He was not only the grandson of a prophet, and a prophet himself, he was also a priest. He was the head of his grandfather's house, and the priest thereof, in the days when Joiakim the son of Joshua was the high priest (Neh. 12:10, 12, 16). Most chronologists date the arrival of Nehemiah at Jerusalem at about 444 B.C., and he remained there twelve years till 432 B.C. This could indicate the prophet Zechariah lived to a ripe old age. Joshua was the high priest during the time of Ezra when Zechariah began to prophesy. Eliashib was the high priest in 432 B.C. when Nehemiah was called from Jerusalem (Neh. 13:4, 6), and Eliashib was the grandson of Joshua (Neh. 12:10). It was during the days of Joaikim that Zechariah is mentioned as a priest, a period which could have extended through most of the intervening ninety years from the beginning of Zechariah's prophecy during the reign of Darius (2:4).

### **Haggai and Zechariah—Similar, Yet Different**

Some commentators have thought that the Zechariah, son of Barachiah, alluded to by Jesus in Mathew 23:35 is the same as the writer of the book, but I would not agree with this conclusion. It is more reasonable to accept that Jesus spoke of Zechariah the son of Jehoiada (2 Chron. 24:20-22) who actually suffered the fate of being put to death in the temple as Jesus described. Potentially, one of the copyists at a later time could have caused the mix-up.

Haggai provides most of the background for the study of Zechariah since they were contemporaries and thus shared in many of the things of Israel at the same time. Haggai was also the one who came from Babylon under the leadership of Zerubbabel, and the primary object of the first portion of his prophecy was to inspire the people to complete the restoration of the temple.

The visions and prophecies of Zechariah are not times filled with symbols and poetic language. There are more references to Christ the Messiah than are found in the books of the other Minor Prophets, or in any of the Major Prophets, with the exception of Isaiah. Zechariah has been compared with the Book of Revelation due to its apocalyptic style and nature.

### **Summary of the Themes**

Zechariah is a book that begins with the picture of humanity—their frailties, weaknesses, and sins. God would not continue to reward evil with good. In the book of Zechariah, one can see the following pictures:

1. The captivity experienced by God's people.
2. The sin practiced by the people of God.
3. The work of God's people in rebuilding the temple.
4. The hope that would come through the Messiah.
5. The ultimate salvation of God's people.

God always has and always will bless His people when the time is right—based on His time, not ours. The visions of Zechariah were designed to take away any obstacle preventing the people from seeing the coming Messiah.

As children of faith, we should understand that when the fullness of time comes, God will act. He always has. No road or path continues for very long in a completely smooth state without a few bumps, ruts, and potholes. So it was with the children of Israel. Trials are for a season, but by no means are they justification for one to linger in doubt of God's ability or goals. Therefore, as Zechariah says, "Despise not the day of small things," for it is from such that God has always built greater things. "For God's promises are yea and in Him Amen, to the glory of God through us" (2 Cor. 1:20). The Lord remembers. In looking at the prophecies of Zechariah, we see the theme of building something for God. Too often, we are more interested in how we can build more for ourselves. This same mindset can be seen in God's people of old, even as it sometimes can be seen today with His people under the New Covenant. Zechariah, in all of his visions and prophecies, refers to the components of building.

## God Loves and Rewards Builders with Blessings!

### Section 1: Chapters 1-8

#### A. The man, the time, and situation (1:1-6)

1. **The man and the time (1:1).** They had ceased working on the house of God! It was appointed by God through the Prophets and other Jews of Judah and Jerusalem to stir up the people and get them back to the work of the Lord.

Then ceased the work of the house of God which is at Jerusalem. So it ceased unto the second year of the reign of Darius king of Persia (Ezra 4:24).

Then the prophets, Haggai the prophet, and Zechariah the son of Iddo, prophesied unto the Jews that were in Judah and Jerusalem in the name of the God of Israel, even unto them (Ezra 5:1).

2. **The LORD's view of His people and cry for repentance (1:2-6).**

They said, Turn ye again now every one from his evil way, and from the evil of your doings, and dwell in the land that the LORD hath given unto you and to your fathers for ever and ever: And go not after other gods to serve them, and to worship them, and provoke me not to anger with the works of your hands; and I will do you no hurt. Yet ye have not hearkened unto me, saith the LORD; that ye might provoke me to anger with the works of your hands to your own hurt (Jer. 25:5-7).

I will bear the indignation of the LORD, because I have sinned against him, until he plead my cause, and execute judgment for me: he will bring me forth to the light, and I shall behold his righteousness (Mic. 7:9).

Even from the days of your fathers ye are gone away from mine ordinances, and have not kept them. Return unto me, and I will return unto you, saith the LORD of hosts. But ye said, Wherein shall we return? (Mal. 3:7).

And he arose, and came to his father. But when he was yet a great way off, his father saw him, and had compassion, and ran, and fell on his neck, and kissed him (Lk. 15:20).

Wash you, make you clean; put away the evil of your doings from before mine eyes; cease to do evil; Learn to do well; seek judgment, relieve the oppressed, judge the fatherless, plead for the widow (Is. 1:16-17).

O Israel, return unto the LORD thy God; for thou hast fallen by thine iniquity (Hos. 14:1).

- B. Zechariah starts by providing a brief reminder of God's displeasure toward their fathers. He reminds them that former prophets had called upon their fathers to repent and turn from their evil ways, but they had refused to hearken (1:1-6). This was the reason for their current distress and despair. Zechariah exhorted them to change their minds and their ways in repentance. He writes, "The LORD hath been sore displeased with your fathers" (1:2). The word "displeased" comes from the Hebrew word **quatsaph**, which means "to crack off, to burst out in rage." Therefore, the Lord was ready to crack off or burst out in rage against their fathers! The next verse reads, "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" (1:3). The proper plan of action for Israel was clear: repent and the Lord would receive them. This was a consistent theme for Israel, and God's children of today still need to hear this same refrain.
- C. **The eight night visions (1:7-6:8).** The eight visions point out the need to finish God's temple. The foundation was built, but the work had remained unfinished for sixteen years. Haggai said the people were doing great! Or, so they thought! There were no problems at all with their own houses; just problems with God's house.

Included within the eight night visions are some prophecies of the Messiah. In 3:8, Zechariah speaks of the "Branch." These visions are dated the twenty-fourth day of the eleventh month of the second year of Darius (1:7). This was about three months after the introductory message (1:6), two months after Haggai concluded his prophecy (Hag. 2:10, 20).

Let us examine some of Zechariah's visions:

1. **The rider among the myrtle trees and horses (1:7-17).** Zechariah saw a red horse among the myrtle trees, and behind him other horses. The prophet inquired what this meant, and an angel promised to show him its meaning. The man on the horse explained they were those whom Jehovah sent to and fro in the earth. As Satan goes to and fro in the earth (Job 1:7; 1 Pet. 5:8), so does God's protection for His people, viz. for those whom He had appointed to reestablish Jerusalem. God declared He had "returned to Jerusalem with mercies; my house shall be built in it, saith Jehovah of hosts and a line shall be stretched forth over Jerusalem" (1:16). The vision concluded with God's promise of prosperity and comfort for Zion and His assurance

that He would continue to choose Jerusalem, the city where His house was being built. (Think about the church and Christ!)

- a. Verses 8–11 convey the thought of providing a conducive building environment. This was essential. Without a safe place to begin and continue construction, the building process would be difficult at best and potentially impossible!

Think about going from captivity with no safety to a situation of freedom. After being attacked and carried away captive, just think of how reassuring the proposition offered would have appeared!

- **Salvation point:** God is always watching out for mankind!

- b. Verses 12–17 contain a question conveying God's concern for His people—He responds to the welfare of His people. Consider God's memory and foresight in light of seventy years of human suffering and captivity.

2. **The four horns and the four craftsmen—building (1:18–21).** The four horns were symbolic of the enemies who had surrounded Judah. The warnings of the enemies indicate war, battle, destruction. The enemies are destroyed by the builders (smiths). (An important principle is evident here: there is power through building, especially spiritually.) The four carpenters (or smiths) represent the power by which the enemies are to be destroyed. There have been speculations as to what four powers are symbolized by the four carpenters. There is no occasion known to history where the restored people ever faced four different enemies at the same time. The meaning seems rather to be that God will protect His people, and that He will protect them in the work of completing the temple even though they had neglected this effort for many years due to threats from their enemies.

The lesson for Israel is that God will protect the faithful. The children of God must be faithful since the enemies of God are everywhere! It is His plan to protect builders and workers everywhere! There is no reason for the child of faith to fear—just work for God!

- **Salvation point:** God is always willing to protect his workers!

- a. Verses 18–20 contain the vision.
- b. The nations that were the instruments of havoc and destruction shall now be the object of destruction and judgment. Those nations that previously harmed Israel would now be rewarded according to their works! Recall Romans 12:19, "Dearly beloved,



avenge not yourselves, but rather give place unto wrath: for it is written, Vengeance is mine; I will repay, saith the Lord." The writer of Hebrews says: "For we know him that hath said, Vengeance belongeth unto me, I will recompense, saith the Lord. And again, The Lord shall judge his people. It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God" (10:30-31). Keep in mind the past experiences of Israel and the impact of captivity!

- **Salvation point:** God's safety is safe indeed, and God is with you!
3. **The man of measurement for Jerusalem—building (2:1-13).** In the third vision, Zechariah saw a man with a measuring line describing a wider circumference for Jerusalem. The young prophet is assured, "Jerusalem shall be inhabited as villages without walls, by reason of the multitude of men and cattle therein" (2:4). God promised to be the glory in the midst of her. This seems not to be limited to the immediate blessings that would follow completion of the temple, but also looked forward to the Messianic kingdom: "Sing and rejoice, O daughter of Zion: for, lo, I come and I will dwell in the midst of thee, saith Jehovah. And many nations shall join themselves to Jehovah, in that day and shall be my people: and I will dwell in the midst of thee, and thou shalt know that Jehovah of hosts hath sent me unto thee" (2:10-11). God speaks further on the theme of safety for His people. Notice the drastic difference between the human and the divine way of thinking. (Also notice the shadow given here-- the church is a city/kingdom without walls).
    - **Salvation point:** Do what's right by God's standards and others will notice and obey!
    - a. Verses 1-5 contain the vision.
    - b. Jerusalem's tomorrow will be better than today. Therefore, do the best you can today, even through the temple of old is remembered to be so much greater).
  4. **Joshua examined, clothed, and admonished (3:1-10).** The fourth vision presents Joshua, the High Priest, before the Angel of the Lord with Satan at his right hand to oppose him. Good and evil were present (cf. Deut. 30:15). Satan only shows up for one purpose! Clad in filthy, dirty clothes, Joshua seems to symbolize the uncleanness of Judah without the spiritual cleansing of God. God commanded them to remove the filthy garments from him to clothe him with "rich apparel" (3:4). They set a clean mitre ("turban" in the Hebrew, a form of royal headdress worn by kings) upon his head. This signified

Joshua's right and authority to serve as God's High Priest, an office then being restored, until "I will bring forth my servant the Branch" (3:8). This authority and right were qualified (as God frequently does in delegating authority) by this divine stipulation: "If thou wilt walk in my ways, and if thou wilt keep my charge" (3:7). We have no reason to believe God has ever set anyone in such a position of service unconditionally.

- a. Verses 1-5 present the elements of acquittal and forgiveness. Look at Judah: from the mire of sin and captivity to the realm of royalty!
- b. Verses 6-10 present the meaning of the vision and the future. God would negate Satan's accusations by meshing together His mercy and justness by the cross.

- **Salvation point:** There are only two choices for humans—God and Satan; we must chose! Without God, we are filthy in sin!

5. **The lampstand of gold and the two olive trees (4:1-14).** In Zechariah's fifth vision, he sees a golden lampstand (candlestick) with seven pipes to each lamp, and two olive trees by it, one on the right side and the other on the left. Candlesticks give light to all. God provides the light. This symbolized the divine glory of the restored people, supported "not by might, nor by power, but by my spirit, saith Jehovah of hosts" (4:6). Since, according to the angel's explanation, Zerubbabel is a key figure in the vision, the "two anointed ones" are most probably Zerubbabel, the governor, and Joshua, the High Priest. They were the political and spiritual leaders of God's people who were being restored to their home in Jerusalem. Further, the completion of the temple and the restoration of God's order of things gave assurance His people would continue to be a people supported "not by might but by God's spirit." (This also calls to mind the symbolic merger of Priest and King in Christ's work and life!)

- a. Verses 1-3 present the vision.
- b. Verses 4-10 present the meaning of the vision.
- c. Verses 11-14 present the interpretation of the olive trees.

- **Salvation point:** God's Spirit is the glory fuel for Gods people!

6. **The flying scroll (5:1-4).** The sixth vision (5:1-4) of a flying roll ten by twenty cubits (plans for building - 30 x 60 ft) which contained upon it curses against the ungodly is the shortest of the visions. The

God of the temple will surely punish all who fail to obey Him or who engage in wickedness.

- a. Verses 1–2 contain the vision.
- b. In verses 3–4, the judgment of God's wrath is symbolized.

▪ **Salvation point:** Evil always results in punishment!

7. The woman in the ephah (measuring container, basket) (5:1–11). The seventh vision is considered by some to be part of the preceding one. The prophet saw an ephah containing a woman, the mouth of which was covered by a talent of lead. The angel explains that they were bearing her away to build her house in the land of Shinar. This obviously shows us "wickedness" being removed from Judah to that place in Babylon where once the tower of Babel was built and from which God's people have just come. Wickedness is to have no place among God's people. In Babylon it was a part of the worship to be carried out.

- a. Verses 5–7 contain the vision.
- b. In verses 8–11, we see wickedness put in its place.

8. **The four chariots and horses from between the mountains observe the world (6:1–15).** The final vision from Zechariah shows four chariots coming out from a mountain of brass (or copper) and drawn by red, black, white, and grizzled horses. These are used to convey the winds of heaven, and the fourth was given permission to go to and fro in the earth. The command is given for Joshua the High Priest to be crowned and for God's message to be given to him. In that message of promise, Joshua would "build the temple of Jehovah." We also have a prophecy of the coming Messiah: "he shall bear the glory and shall sit and rule upon his throne" (6:13). Thus, the prophet urges the completion of the temple as a necessary step toward God's fulfilling His promises regarding the coming of Him who would rule in the holy temple of Zion—the Lord Jesus Christ.

- a. Verses 1–3 contain the vision.
- b. Verses 4–8 describe God's care for His people.
- c. Verses 9–11 describe Joshua's crown and its nature.
- d. Verses 12–15 describe the branch and the future of the temple.

- D. **The question of fasting, worship, and obedience (7:1–8:23).** Chapters seven through fourteen of the book of Zechariah contain a series of four prophecies delivered in the fourth year of Darius. In the first prophecy

(7:1–8:23), some Jews come from the region of Babylon to inquire of the priests at the temple concerning the fasts that had been observed during the years of the captivity. Now that Jerusalem was occupied again and the temple nearing completion, should they continue the special fasts that had been started elsewhere? God uses the opportunity to remind them that He had spoken earlier to His people: "Execute true judgment, and show kindness and compassion every man to his brother; and oppress not the widow, nor the fatherless, the sojourner, nor the poor; and let none of you devise evil against his brother in your heart" (7:9–10). But the people did not heed the word spoken by former prophets; rather, their hearts became as stone.

1. The inquiry regarding their present practice (7:1–3).
2. The LORD's response (7:4–14).
  - a. A question of authority and the issue of obedience (vv. 4–7).
  - b. The people had failed to submit to the LORD's way (vv. 8–12).
  - c. The LORD's judgment was due to this disobedience (vv. 13–14).
3. More regarding the question of fasting; Israel's future (8:1–18). God's wrath was brought upon them, and their land was desolate. Chapter eight continues as Jehovah's promises: "I am returned unto Zion," (8:3) and He gives assurance of His divine protection for His people, bringing them "from the east country; and from the west country; and I will bring them, and they shall dwell in the midst of Jerusalem." (8:7–8) Jerusalem was therefore to be the center of their worship as it had been before the captivity. The remainder of the prophecy gave assurance of their joy in God's appointed fasts, and promises that many people will come to join with them if they remain faithful.
  - a. Zion would not be forgotten (vv. 1–8).
  - b. Lift your hand with diligence for the LORD is now working to bless His people (vv. 9–17).
  - c. The blessing of obedience would bring joy, not fasting, and this would reach all people (vv. 18–23).

## Section 2: Chapters 9–14<sup>1</sup>

- A. The first message: the welfare of the disobedient heathen forces or nations and the coming Messiah with its consequences (9:1–11:17). Most scholars

<sup>1</sup> These messages concerning future events came after the rebuilding of the temple

consider this message to be a reference to the conquest of Alexander the Great. God's people are told to rejoice and are assured that their king would come to Jerusalem riding upon a colt, the foal of an ass (9:9). Then follows additional prophecies of the conquests that would occur during the period between the Old and the New Testaments. The continued blessings of God for His people are assured.

1. The judgment of the LORD on the heathen powers (9:1-8).
2. The Messiah is coming (9:9-17).
3. Preparatory changes and the results of the Messiah's victory (10:1-11:17). In this section, we have another prophecy of sadness and wailing.

- a. The grief from wickedness (11:1-3).

Open thy doors, O Lebanon that the fires may devour thy cedars. Wail, O fir-tree, for the cedar is fallen, because the goodly ones are destroyed: a voice of the roaring of young lions! For the pride of the Jordan is laid waste.

- b. The fruit of woe from acceptance of the false shepherds (11:4-17). Verses 12-13 make clear that the unhappy subject of this prophecy is the rejection of Christ by the Jews and His betrayal for thirty pieces of silver.

- B. The second message: a look at Israel's grief and glory (12:1-13:9). The final series of prophecies (12:1-14:21) are primarily Messianic prophecies that foretell the coming of the kingdom of the Lord Jesus Christ. In the first part (12:1-9), the preservation of Jerusalem against her enemies is assured. Verse ten foretells the piercing of the Messiah.

1. Jerusalem under siege (12:1-3).
2. Jerusalem is delivered by the LORD (12:4-9).
3. Spiritual deliverance by the graciousness of the LORD and the change of disposition (12:10-14).
4. The fountain of redemption flows forth (13:1-6). Verse one gives assurance of the coming salvation to the people as the opening of a fountain, and verse six foretells the Savior's suffering, "wounded in the house of my friends."
5. The remnant is preserved, even though the Shepherd is smitten (13:7-9).

- C. The Day of the LORD (14:1-21). In chapter fourteen, the Savior is foreseen coming upon the Mount of Olives. This chapter, like much of the book of Revelation, has given rise to much speculation. It obviously pic-

tures the Lord coming in judgment. However, the message is clear. God will utterly reject and cast out all that is wicked, impure, or unholy from among His people. Whether it refers to Christ as the final great judge at the end of time, or the destruction of Jerusalem, or some other time of cleansing and judgment soon after the time of Zechariah, its general message is the same. "There shall be no more a Canaanite in the house of Jehovah of hosts" (14:21).

1. Jerusalem attacked or judged (vv. 1-2).
2. The Lord's people are delivered (vv. 3-7).
3. Salvation available for all (vv. 8-11).
4. The destruction of the enemies of the Lord's people (vv. 12-15).
5. Jerusalem, the place of holiness (vv. 16-21).

### **Conclusion: Better Days Ahead!**

In closing, let us look at a few of the prophecies that seem to refer to our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

### **Zechariah's Prophecies Referenced in the New Testament**

1. Zechariah 9:9; referenced in Matthew 21:4 and John 12:15.
2. Zechariah 11:12; referenced in Matthew 26:15, 27:9.
3. Zechariah 12:10; referenced in John 19:37 and Revelation 1:7.
4. Zechariah 13:7; referenced in Matthew 26:31 and Mark 14:27.

### **Additional Prophecies on Horsemen**

1. Zechariah 6:1-8; referenced in Revelation 6:2.
2. Zechariah 4:3; referenced in Revelation 11:4.
3. Zechariah 4:2-10; referenced in Revelation 1:12.

This is a wonderful book for those who sometimes wonder about the perspective of God and His ability to be in control of all things in the world! May we never forget the goodness of our God throughout the years of Zechariah the prophet!

# Malachi

by *Wayne McKamie*

Little is known of the personal history of Malachi. He tells very little of himself, evidently content to be known as a voice, a messenger for God. It is even difficult to establish whether we know his name. The name "Malachi" occurs nowhere else as a proper name. The word means "messenger of God." The Hebrew **Mal'ack** means "a messenger"; "Malachi" means "my messenger" in 3:1. Jerome and Calvin regarded the word as a title, although most commentators regard it as a name. The Septuagint uses the name "Malachias."

The precise date of Malachi's ministry is uncertain; but from the subject matter, it may be established that he prophesied at some time during the period of Nehemiah and Ezra. Several dates help establish this time.

- It was after the Exile.
- Jerusalem was captured in 586.
- In 536, Cyrus granted the rebuilding of the temple.
- In 520, Haggai and Zechariah worked.
- In 458, the Jews returned under Ezra.
- In 444–445, Nehemiah returned, rebuilt the walls, and instituted reforms.
- In 430–433, Nehemiah returned to Israel.
- In 390, plus or minus a few years, Malachi came.

The message of Malachi, called the "burden of the word of the Lord," reminds the reader that a few decades before Malachi's time the nation had suffered a tremendous defeat at the hand of their enemy. The leaders were carried into captivity, leaving the land to be cared for by a few poorly-prepared descendants of Jacob. Spiritual conditions were deplorable. Those conditions are addressed specifically by the Lord through Malachi. Each address is followed by strong exhortations to repent.

In 1:1–2:9, God charges His readers with having doubted His love for His people. The heaviest hand falls on the priests who were allowing multiple evils to go unchecked. God addresses the people for their impiety in 2:10–16 – they were only going through the motions with no heart at all in their worship. Chapters 2–4 introduce the impending Day of the Lord. This is in response to the people's question, "Where is the God of Justice?" The remainder of the prophecy is an answer to that question.

An analysis of Malachi's prophecy shows one single prophecy with the three divisions just noted. Within the prophecy are three major appeals. In chapters one and two, Malachi appeals to Israel to return to God in view of His

great love for them. He appeals for a return in view of a future judgment that would begin with the great and terrible day of the Lord (chs. 3-4). Malachi's major argument is that motive gives value to the deed - if the motive is wrong, the deed is nothing.

This single prophecy of three divisions employs a style unique to Malachi. In this style God makes an affirmation, He poses Israel's question, and He responds with a refutation of the question: a statement, a question, an answer. This dialectic appears seven times. An example of the method appears in the opening verses.

I have loved you, saith the Lord. Yet ye say, Wherein hast thou loved us? Was not Esau Jacob's brother? saith the Lord; yet I loved Jacob. And I hated Esau... (1:2-3).

Following is a list of other examples of this affirmation-objection-rebuttal method:

- You have despised my name (1:6-7).
- Judah has been without faith (2:10-16).
- You have wearied the Lord with your words (2:17).
- You have turned aside from my statutes (3:7).
- You have robbed me (3:8).
- Your words have been stout against me (3:13).

Today we recognize this style as the Socratic method. Socrates, a master of this dialectic method, would ask the questions and in turn answer the questions himself. This is an effective method of teaching if one has the skill of Socrates or the inspiration of the "Hebrew Socrates" Malachi. This Semitic or Hebraic method became popular after the time of Malachi. It may well be that the characteristic peculiarity of his style marked a transition from the free discourse of the prophets to the schools of the scribes.

Malachi's voice is the true voice of prophecy, a voice carrying the "burden" of the Lord. He speaks to his day and to its sins. He has a clear insight into the real needs of the time. He speaks to a people who were through with formal idolatry, but who now were steeped in formalism. The priests, who were chief in this trespass, no longer bothered to place fresh bread on the Lord's Table (1:7). Their sacrifices were not only blemished, but they were the least and the leavings of the flock. (1:8). The majesty of God was despised. His law was so slacked that divorce among God's people and marriage of foreign wives were passed off with a wink. The priests were ignorant of God's law (2:7-8), and they were allowing the people to do what they would. Perjury, oppression (3:5), and robbery of God Himself (3:8-9) were commonplace and acceptable. The people doubted God's love and justice;



they had grown weary in well doing and had turned "every man to his own way." Worship was a hypocritical farce. Malachi saw the sins of the people and had the nerve to call them to account. It was the exact lesson needed.

The prophet had great zeal for the law of God. He saw the keeping of the ordinances of the law as crucial to their salvation. He saw ritual law as the way that Israel could maintain their distinctiveness and separation from all other nations. Israel's attitude toward God's law could not be a matter of indifference. It was the only way out of the pretentious period they were in and the only way to succeed in the long battle with heathenism they were about to encounter. The book of Malachi assures us that there was no antagonism between the law and the prophets. The lesson of the age, indeed of all ages, was that if the law of God is misused, if the people forge fetters out of what was designed for support, the fault lies in the people—not in the law, not in the prophet, not in God.

Malachi, with true prophetic breadth of view, looked beyond the bounds of Judaism and Jerusalem to a time when the Lord suddenly would come to His temple, a time when men from every nation would fear and worship God. This closing prophecy demands special notice (and work!). The coming of the "Day of the Lord" is the crowning Messianic word of Malachi. While 1:11 and 4:2 generally are understood as Messianic, a more sure word is found in 4:5: "Behold I will send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the Lord." Also, consider 3:1-4

Behold I will send my messenger, and he shall prepare the way before me: and the Lord, whom you seek, shall suddenly come to this temple, even the messenger of the covenant, whom ye delight in: behold, he shall come, saith the Lord of hosts. But who may abide the day of his coming? and who shall stand when he appeareth? for he is like a refiner's fire, and like fullers' soap: And 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. Then shall the offering of Judah and Jerusalem be pleasant unto the Lord, as in the days of old, and as in former years.

Before the coming of the Lord to His temple, a messenger, Elijah (John the Baptist), would be sent from God to prepare the way for the coming King (Mt. 11:10; Mk. 1:2; Lk 7:27). To recognize John as the forerunner is to recognize Jesus as the Lord, the angel (messenger) of the covenant. To recognize the time and place of the Harbinger is to recognize the coming of the Lord to His temple on Pentecost (Joel 2:28-32; Acts 2:14-21; Zech. 6:12-13, Eph. 2:19-20; 1 Cor. 3:16; 2 Cor. 6:16). That great and terrible day of the Lord would usher in the Christian dispensation, a time of mercy and a time of judgment (Jn. 9:39). The Lord would come as a refiner and purifier to try the

hearts of man and to begin the work of judgment that will be completed when He comes again. This work is now in place under the supervision of the King Himself. Under this new law, the offering of God's people is once more satisfying to the Father.

In Malachi's parting words, he commends to them the Law of Moses as the standard and safeguard of both conscience and conduct. With this, he closes the book; and in doing so, he closes a long series of prophetic writings in a manner worthy of the prophets who had gone before.

### **Practical Lessons from Malachi**

- Respect for God must be greater than for an earthly ruler or father.
- God will not accept inferior sacrifices.
- Insincere worship is an insult to God.
- Formality, ritualism, and ceremonialism serve to soothe the conscience while hardening the heart.
- When man withholds what belongs to God, he closes the windows of heaven's blessings.
- God hates divorce.
- God expects marriages to produce children faithful to Him.
- The Fatherhood of God and the brotherhood of man is the will of God.
- God does not change in His basic opposition to sin or in His basic quality of mercy.
- Impatience often leads to false accusation and mistrust of God.
- Victory will come for the righteous; destruction will come for the wicked.

The value of Malachi's prophecy for our day is often questioned. Why study a book that is over two thousand years old? This word from God still lives for us today. While secular literature gives insight into the time of the writer, and while it may be interesting, prophecy is written for our "learning and admonition" (Rom. 15:4). The words of Malachi are "the burden of the word of the Lord to Israel by Malachi." Revelation and inspiration! And—even though Israel was backslidden and apostate, they still knew truth. They knew what it was. They knew the plan, the system, the organization, and the priesthood. They knew truth; but they did not have truth. Malachi contains a powerful message for today. *1921 McKamie Rd., McGregor, TX 76657*

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# Nehemiah

by Mike Criswell

It has been almost 150 years since Jerusalem fell to the Babylonians. The year is 444 B.C. Babylon no longer rules the world. Persia reigns supreme. But in spite of Cyrus' goodness, in spite of Zerubbabel's efforts with the Temple, in spite of Ezra's reforms and an ill-fated attempt to rebuild the wall thirteen years earlier, God's city still lies in ashen ruins. Its people are unorganized and scattered. Derelict and discouraged they desperately need a deliverer. Enter on the scene... Nehemiah.

## Distress (1:1–11)

- A. Nehemiah hears of Ezra's attempt to rebuild the walls (Ezra 4:6–23).

And they said to me, "The survivors who are left from the captivity in the province *are* there in great distress and reproach. The wall of Jerusalem *is* also broken down, and its gates *are burned* with fire." So it was, when I heard these words, that I sat down and wept, and mourned *for many* days; I was fasting and praying before the God of heaven (1:3–4).

- B. Nehemiah is overcome with grief.

- C. Nehemiah acknowledges his own sins and his people's sins.

## Decree (2:1–10)

- A. Twentieth year of Artaxerxes I, month of Nissan (March/April, 444 B.C.)

- B. Nehemiah is the king's cupbearer – an honorable position.

- C. The king realizes Nehemiah's distress and inquires about the matter.

And [I] said to the king, "May the king live forever! Why should my face not be sad, when the city, the place of my fathers' tombs, lies waste, and its gates are burned with fire?" Then the king said to me, "What do you request?" (2:3–4).

- D. The king grants permission, supplies, timber, and an army escort. "And the king granted them to me according to the good hand of my God upon me" (2:8).

## Discretion (2:10–3:20)

- A. Nehemiah knows there will be opposition to his work.

When Sanballat the Horonite and Tobiah the Ammonite official heard of it, they were deeply disturbed that a man had come to seek the well-being of the children of Israel (2:10).

B. Nehemiah surveys the wall and city by night.

Then I arose in the night, I and a few men with me; I told no one what my God had put in my heart to do at Jerusalem; nor was there any animal with me, except the one on which I rode... And the officials did not know where I had gone or what I had done; I had not yet told the Jews, the priests, the nobles, the officials, or the others who did the work (2:12, 16).

C. Nehemiah approaches the officials and sets forth his plan. "So they said, "Let us rise up and build." Then they set their hands to *this good work*" (2:18).

**Delegation and Division of Labor (3:1-32)**

A. Nehemiah does not try to do it all himself.

B. He organizes the people by families and by hometown.

C. The entire wall is planned to go up simultaneously.

D. He gets the hierarchy involved to set an example.

Then Eliashib the high priest rose up with his brethren the priests and built the Sheep Gate; they consecrated it and hung its doors. They built as far as the Tower of the Hundred, and consecrated it, then as far as the Tower of Hananel (3:1).

E. The wall became an effort for both male and female. "And next to him was Shallum the son of Hallohesh, leader of half the district of Jerusalem; he and his daughters made repairs (3:12).

**Discouragement, Defense, and Determination (4:1-23)**

A. Opposition to rebuilding begins in earnest and defense is necessary.

B. Throughout the ordeal Nehemiah remains constant in prayer.

C. He arms his people and positions them for work and war.

D. Sanballat and Tobiah are the major antagonists.

Now Tobiah the Ammonite was beside him, and he said, "Whatever they build, if even a fox goes up on it, he will break down their stone wall"... Now it happened, when Sanballat, Tobiah, the Arabs, the Ammonites, and the Ashdodites heard that the walls of Jerusalem were being restored and the gaps were beginning to be closed, that they became very angry (4:3, 7).

1. Sanballat, governor of Samaria—North

2. Arabs—South
  3. Ammonites—East
  4. Ashdodites—West
- E. When surrounded and the outlook is not good, try the up look!
- And I looked, and arose and said to the nobles, to the leaders, and to the rest of the people, "Do not be afraid of them. Remember the Lord, great and awesome, and fight for your brethren, your sons, your daughters, your wives, and your houses" (4:14).
- F. At one point fatigue began to affect the workers. "Then Judah said, "The strength of the laborers is failing, and *there is* so much rubbish that we are not able to build the wall" (4:10).
- G. Through Nehemiah's skill and encouragement the job went on. "So we built the wall, and the entire wall was joined together up to half its *height*, for the people had a mind to work" (4:6).

### Distraction (5:1–19)

- A. In the midst of building, Nehemiah discovers internal abuse.
1. Many were poverty stricken— especially farmers with large families.
  2. Some were being forced to mortgage their land to buy grain.
  3. Others were borrowing money to pay the royal tax.
  4. Still others were selling their children into debtors' servitude.
- B. The rich class and nobles were exploiting the poor.
- C. Nehemiah is outraged and corrects these abuses.
- D. People over projects!

Then I shook out the fold of my garment and said, "So may God shake out each man from his house, and from his property, who does not perform this promise. Even thus may he be shaken out and emptied." And all the assembly said, "Amen!" and praised the Lord. Then the people did according to this promise (5:13).

### Defamation (6:1–19)

- A. Unsuccessful in their attempts Sanballat, Tobiah, and Geshem now try to defame Nehemiah. But not before they try to make a deal!
- Sanballat and Geshem sent to me, saying, "Come, let us meet together among the villages in the plain of Ono." But they thought to do me harm (6:2).
- B. "Ono?" "Oh No!" says Nehemiah.

So I sent messengers to them, saying, "I *am* doing a great work, so that I cannot come down. Why should the work cease while I leave it and go down to you?" (6:3).

- C. At this Nehemiah is accused of planning a revolt and proclaiming himself king.

I sent him this reply: "Nothing like what you are saying is happening; you are just making it up out of your head" (6:8, NIV)

- D. Next Sanballat hires a false prophet to try to intimidate Nehemiah and scare him into hiding.

### **D-Day, October 2, 444 B.C. (Elul = 6<sup>th</sup> month of religious year, 12<sup>th</sup> of civil)**

So the wall was completed on the twenty-fifth of Elul, in fifty-two days. [must have been started on 3<sup>rd</sup> of Ab, July/August 444 B.C.] When all our enemies heard about this, all the surrounding nations were afraid and lost their self-confidence, because they realized that this work had been done with the help of our God (6:15-16).

### **Development (7:1-12:26)**

- A. The captives are returned to Jerusalem.  
B. The people are registered—urban development and planning.  
C. The "Water Gate" breakout!

[Ezra] read [the Law] aloud from daybreak till noon as he faced the square before the Water Gate in the presence of the men, women and others who could understand. And all the people listened attentively to the Book of the Law...and they...confessed and worshiped the LORD their God (8:3; 9:3).

1. New Year's Day celebration and revival (1<sup>st</sup> of Tishri - civil calendar) - Feast of Trumpets celebrated
  2. Succoth is celebrated
  3. Confession of sins on the 24<sup>th</sup> day of Tishri (1<sup>st</sup> civil month)
- D. Eighty-four officials lead in making a covenant with God.

All these now join their brothers the nobles, and bind themselves with a curse and an oath to follow the Law of God given through Moses the servant of God and to obey carefully all the commands, regulations and decrees of the LORD our Lord (10:29).

- E. Jerusalem is repopulated with one out of every ten families.  
F. Outside villages are also restored.

**Dedication (12:27–13:3)**

- A. The wall is dedicated with great celebration and joy.
- B. Ezra and Nehemiah “walk the walls” with two choirs of singers.
- C. Temple responsibilities are appointed.
- D. Ammonites and Moabites are excluded from the congregation.

**Departure (13:4–31)**

- A. Around 432 BC Nehemiah completes his twelve-year term as governor.
- B. He returns to Persia to have governorship reinstated.
- C. While he is gone the people, led by the High Priest, lapse into sin.

But during all this I was not in Jerusalem, for in the thirty-second year of Artaxerxes king of Babylon I had returned to the king. Then after certain days I obtained leave from the king (13:6).

- D. When he returns (c. 428) he has to correct their abuses.
  - 1. Tobiah: popular with some of the people and who was related by marriage to the High Priest, had taken up residence in one of the Temple storerooms. Nehemiah had to throw him out!
  - 2. Sanballat's daughter had married Elishab's (the High Priest) grandson. Nehemiah expelled the newly weds from the city!
  - 3. The Levites were not being supported and were being forced to seek secular employment.
  - 4. Something “fishy” was happening on the Sabbath! They were buying and selling with pagan merchants on this day of rest.
  - 5. The case of “a match not made in heaven!”

Moreover, in those days I saw men of Judah who had married women from Ashdod, Ammon and Moab. Half of their children spoke the language of Ashdod or the language of one of the other peoples, and did not know how to speak the language of Judah. I rebuked them and called curses down on them. I beat some of the men and pulled out their hair. I made them take an oath in God's name and said: “You are not to give your daughters in marriage to their sons, nor are you to take their daughters in marriage for your sons or for yourselves (13:23–25).



**Chronology of Ezra and Nehemiah**

- 538 B.C. Cyrus' Liberation Decree (Ezra 1:1)
- 536 B.C. First return of the Jews under Zerubbabel
- 535 B.C. Foundation of Temple laid (Ezra 3:8-10)
- Work ceases for 16 years due to opposition (Ezra 4:1-5)
  - Haggai and Zechariah encourage completion of project
  - Work begins in 2<sup>nd</sup> year of Darius I (Ezra 4:24)
- 516 B.C. Temple completed (Ezra 6:15)
- Hiatus of some 58 years between Ezra 6 and Ezra 7
  - Events of Esther occur during this period
  - King Xerxes (Ahasuerus) reigns (Ezra 4:6, Est. 1:1)
- 458 B.C. Artaxerxes commissions Ezra (Ezra 7:1)
- Temple worship restored,
  - Dissolution of mixed marriages
  - Failed attempt to rebuild Jerusalem's walls (Ezra 4:8-23)
  - 12 years pass between end of Ezra and beginning of the book of Nehemiah
- 444 B.C. Nehemiah commissioned by Artaxerxes (Neh. 1:1)
- Nehemiah surveys Jerusalem by night (Neh. 2:11)
  - Wall is built in 52 days (Neh. 6:15).
  - Reforms instituted (Neh. 12:44-13:3)
  - Nehemiah's 1<sup>st</sup> governorship lasts 12 years (Neh. 5:15)
- 432 B.C. Nehemiah completes first term as governor
- 432 B.C. Returns to Persia to have governorship renewed (Neh. 13:6)
- During his absence community relapses into sin
  - Levite, marriage, and Sabbath abuses occur
  - Malachi's ministry addresses these abuses (Mal. 1:1ff)
- 428-423 B.C. Nehemiah's second governorship and reforms (Neh. 13:4-31)

## Chronology of Ezra and Nehemiah

Reign of	Reign of	Reign of	Reign of	Reign of	Reign of
Cyrus (539-529)	Cambyses (529-522)	Darius I (Hystaspes) (521-486)	Xerxes I (Ahasuerus) (486-465)	Artaxerxes I (464-424)	Darius II (Nothus) (423-404)
First return under Zerubbabel. Altar rebuilt and temple foundation laid. Opposition sets in.	Opposition to the rebuilding continues.	Temple finally completed in 516 B.C. after sixteen years delay. Ministries of Haggai and Zechariah.	Persecution again sets in. Events of Esther	Ezra commissioned in 458 B.C. to restore Jewish worship. Failed attempt by Ezra to rebuild walls! Nehemiah commissioned in 444 B.C. to rebuild walls. Additional opposition.	Second term of Nehemiah as governor ends under this ruler. Ministry of Malachi.
Ezra 1-3	Scriptures Silent	Ezra 4: 6 <sup>1</sup>	Ezra 4:6	Ezra 7: 10 Nehemiah Ezra 4:7-23 <sup>2</sup>	Neh. 12:22

<sup>1</sup> Between Ezra 6 and 7 there is a 58-year hiatus in which the events of Esther occur. During the midst of this time Xerxes (Ahasuerus) reigns. Ezra 4:6 falls chronologically into this period.

<sup>2</sup> The opposition and persecution recorded in Ezra 4:6-23 is out of chronological order. The writer's intent is to simply give an overview of hardships endured from the beginning of the project till the end. Verse 24 continues the account that leaves off in verse 5.

## Chronology of Nehemiah

Reign of Artaxerxes I, 464 - 424 B.C.

 Reign of Darius II,  
423-404 B.C.

457 B.C.

445 B.C.

445-432 B.C.

432 B.C.

Failed attempt to rebuild walls by  
Ezra

Nehemiah hears of the failed attempt and is commissioned to go and build the walls.

Nehemiah's first governorship spanning twelve years

Nehemiah's second term

Nehemiah's second term continues and ends c. 407 B.C.

Ezra 4:8-23

Nehemiah 1-12

Nehemiah 13

Nehemiah 13

## Similar Themes in Nehemiah and Malachi

Sins Opposed	Nehemiah	Malachi
Priestly Corruption	13:4, 28	1:6, 2:1-9
Foreign Marriages	13:23	2:11
Tithing Abuses	13:10-12	3:8-10
Sabbath Violations	13:15	4:4

## The Prayer Life of Nehemiah

Chapter 1:4	Fasting and prayer when he hears of Jerusalem's plight.
Chapter 2:4-5	Prayer before he answers the king
Chapter 4:4	Prayer when ridiculed by Sanballat
Chapter 5:19	Prayer to ask God for favor
Chapter 6:9, 14	Prays when faced with the schemes of his enemies
Chapter 13	Constant prayer while instituting his final reforms

# Ezra—Restoration Principles

*by Ronny F. Wade*

Ezra was descended from the line of the later high priests. His father, Seraiah, was the grandson of Hilkiah, high priest in the reign of Josiah. He was especially distinguished for his knowledge of the Scriptures, "a ready scribe in the law of Moses." He is thought to be the author not only of the book of Ezra, but of the Chronicles as well. Some believe that he assembled the books of the Old Testament that had been written before his time, to comprise the early canon of Hebrew Scripture. Others contend that it was in connection with his activities that the Jewish synagogue came into prominence. But, perhaps, his greatest contribution is to be found in his efforts to restore a respect for and an observance of the Law of Jehovah among the Jewish people. Of him it is recorded, "For Ezra had prepared his heart to seek the law of Jehovah, and to do it, and to teach in Israel statutes and judgments" (7:10). His steps were ordered of the Lord "according to the good hand of his God upon him" (7:6).

Over fifty years had passed between the dedication of the second temple (515 B.C.) and the arrival of Ezra in the land of Palestine in 457 B.C. During that time, the Jews were not a very prosperous group. Their city had no walls and was open to attack from enemies. They had lost their spirit, and attempts to remain separated from the people about them had failed. Mixed marriages were common. Back in Babylon and other parts of the Persian Empire there were many Jews who still remembered Jerusalem as the city of the King, the center of religious life and spiritual hopes. Such a man was Ezra, a dedicated Levite who had devoted his life to a study of God's Word. Ezra appealed to the king for help in making it possible for a fresh company of exiles to return to Palestine. In Ezra 7:11-26, we learn that the king granted his request, whereupon he assembled those Jews who volunteered to join him in this great undertaking. Ezra was allowed to take with him offerings for the temple, sent both by the king and the Jewish community. The money was to be used to purchase sacrificial animals, with any excess being used as he saw fit (7:17-18). In addition, he was authorized to appoint magistrates to teach the law of God and the laws of the king to any who might not know them (7:26). This also included the power to enforce the law by imprisonment, confiscation of property, banishment, or even death.

About eighteen hundred men and their families responded to Ezra's invitation (Ezra 8:1-14). This large group fasted and prayed before beginning their journey that would consume the better part of four months (8:23). In Jerusalem Ezra bore the title, "Scribe of the law of the God of heaven" (7:12). Soon

after their arrival, their treasures were brought to the temple and offered in special sacrifice on the altar in the temple court. What a great day it was! With one voice they declared, "the hand of our God was upon us, and he delivered us from the hand of the enemy and from ambushes by the way" (8:31).

But problems would soon arise. The general populace was not very enthusiastic about those measures that were so close to the heart of this man of God. As a people, they were prosperous, but not as spiritually minded as they should have been. Many of them, including both priests and Levites, had taken foreign wives (9:1). As far as Ezra was concerned, marriage was not merely for social purposes, but it was an arrangement that involved obedience to the law of God. Of the Gentile nations God had said, "You shall not make marriages with them, giving your daughters to their sons or taking their daughters for your sons" (Deut. 7:3). Intermarriage, as with Solomon (1 Kgs. 11:1-8), was a prelude to idolatry, the very sin that had resulted in the Babylonian Exile.

Ezra, driven by contrition, poured out his soul to God in confession and penitence (9:6-15). As the people gathered around, Shecaniah suggested that they all put away their foreign wives and their children (Ezra 10:2-3), to which Ezra added his voice of approval (10:5). A decree was then issued for all the people to assemble at Jerusalem within three days under penalty of confiscation of goods and excommunication (10:7-8). The crowd, however, was too large to accomplish their purpose, and as a result a divorce court was established with arrangements being made for the Jewish men to put away their foreign wives and children (10:9-44).

The actions of Ezra in this matter were governed by his zeal for purity of Jewish life and faith. He was dedicated to establishing and maintaining that purity at all costs; it mattered not to him that certain people resented his determination to do what God required.

From Nehemiah 8:1, we learn that Ezra brought with him from Babylon "the book of the Law of Moses," which he publicly read from a pulpit of wood. Along with his reading, there was an explanation. From this reading, and the following instruction, the people learned of their neglect and failures in obeying the commandments of God. (Neh. 8:14-18).

Later, in Nehemiah 9, we learn that the people separated themselves from all foreigners and confessed their sins. Again, Ezra read the law (9:4) and uttered a prayer in which he traced the mercies of God to His people. Just what was this law that Ezra brought to Jerusalem? It certainly was not a new law, since it professed to go back to the days of Joshua (Neh. 8:17). It is referred to as "the Law of Moses" and was regarded by the Jews of Babylon as the revelation of God's will that had been given to Moses at Mount Sinai. This law was

received by the Palestinian Jewish community in solemn covenant before God (Neh. 10), and it became the basis of restoration efforts to re-establish its teachings. To restore is to bring something back to its original state or position by rebuilding or repairing. The attempts of Ezra at restoration were aimed at reestablishing the ancient order and rescuing it from the clutter of human error and apostasy. The restoration principle is based on the belief that such a restoration can, and indeed must, be based upon the Word of God, an objective and unchanging standard of authority.

Throughout the Old and New Testaments, the Divine Order is given great importance. "For because you did not do it the first time, the Lord our God broke out against us, because we did not consult Him about the proper order" (1 Chron. 15:13). "Also the burnt offerings were in abundance, with the fat of the peace offerings and with drink offerings for every burnt offering. So the service of the house of the Lord was set in order" (2 Chron. 29:35). "But if anyone is hungry, let him eat at home, lest you come together for judgment. And the rest I will set in order when I come" (1 Cor. 11:34). "Let all things be done decently and in order" (1 Cor. 14:40). "For though I am absent in the flesh, yet am I with you in spirit, rejoicing to see your good order and the steadfastness of your faith in Christ" (Col. 2:5). "For this cause left I thee in Crete that thou shouldest set in order the things that are lacking and ordain elders in every city" (Tit. 1:5).

These Scriptures teach us that God has an order and that man can and must follow that order. When Ezra stood before the people in Nehemiah 8, he read from the law of God. The restoration that followed was based on that law. All restoration, regardless of when it occurs, must be based upon God's Word. Note what happened in this situation:

1. The Word of God appealed to reason (8:1-3). "Those who could understand." The Word of God is suited to rational beings. It appeals to our reasoning capacity. Revelation implies knowing the things of God (1 Cor. 2:10). Faith is based on testimony (Rom. 10:17), and supported by objective evidence (Heb. 11:1).

2. The Word of God demanded reverence (8:4-6). "The people stood up." It had been a long time since they had heard it; hence they gave it reverence. So should we. We never regard it as the word of men, but as it is in truth the Word of God (1 Thess. 2:13).

3. The Word of God demanded diligence (8:7-8). The sense of Scripture was given, so that they could understand. The importance of diligent study, so that all can understand, cannot be stressed enough (2 Tim. 2:15).

4. The Word of God brought joy (8:9–12). Ezra called on the people to refrain from mourning and weeping and to celebrate “because they understood the words which had been made known to them.” It is a joyful experience to know and understand the truth. Truth is the key to freedom (Jn. 8:32).

5. The Word of God compelled action and amendment (8:13–18). If truth means anything, it means that we must act upon it. Ezra and the people found that the Israelites were to live in booths during the feast of the seventh month. This feast had not been practiced for hundreds of years (v. 17).

Could such a religious observance that had been perverted or lost to the memory of the people ever be restored to its former practice? This is exactly what happened. Verse 15 tells us that the people gathered branches and made booths and lived in them, all according to the Law of God.

### **Our Present Situation**

Almost two hundred years ago our forefathers in the faith broke with the bonds of denominationalism and planted on this continent a church fashioned according to the divine pattern found in the New Testament. Our own history demonstrates the sad truth that second, third, and following generations can forget the commitment of their fathers and eventually abandon the concept of restoration altogether. Each generation must be taught anew: the need for restoration, the concept of restoration, the value of restoration, how to achieve restoration, and how to maintain restoration. Some feel that once a thing is restored, there is no need for further concern. Such, however, is not the case.

### **Reasons Why We Need to be Reminded about the Commitment to Restore the Faith**

1. It is man's nature to forget great truths and events of the past. Judges 2:1–2 tells us “there arose another generation after them, that knew not Jehovah, nor the work he had wrought for Israel...” Peter even suggested that some would forget that they had been cleansed from old sins (2 Pet. 1:9). Often second and third generations do not hold to religious principles with fervor equal to that of their forefathers.

2. There is ever a tendency to compromise and mix truth with popular and attractive error. Regarding the Samaritans it was said, “They feared the Lord, yet served their own gods according to the rituals of the nations from among whom they were carried away” (2 Kgs. 17:33). Often people select from denominational and sectarian practices the things that they like, and then try to conform them to the teaching of the Scriptures.

3. It is easy to drift away from principles that are exclusive and unpopular. Apostasy never occurs in a night. Like a glacier, there will be years of slow movement before the danger is apparent. Hence, we must give the more earnest heed lest we drift away "from the things we have heard" (Heb. 2:1). The most difficult time to address an apostasy is when it is in its early stages. Few are able to see the danger at that time. However, since changes in action are usually preceded by changes in attitude, it is mandatory that these be confronted as early as possible.

4. People, like moving water, often seek the course of least resistance. J. W. McGarvey opposed instrumental music. However, he became silent and compromised. Why? Because no one would listen. Rather than stand firm and pay the price for loyalty, he, along with many others, let worldly currents flow through the church, undermining the truth and the divinely ordered way.

5. There is a tendency for the familiar to become commonplace and even contemptible. The value of "the old paths" must be constantly set forth. Often people seek the excitement of change, for change's sake. This often leads to questionable practices, ending in error. Every change seemed simple and innocent at first. Even changes that involve no wrong, but fail to have a substantial basis for being implemented, set a dangerous precedent that can become the springboard for later apostasy.

6. Faith and conviction are not inherited from one's family. Faith comes by hearing the Word of God (Rom. 10:17). We need to teach our children *why* we serve God as we do, so that their faith can be their own.

### **What Great Lessons Can We Learn from Ezra's Restoration Experiences?**

1. A thing is not obsolete just because it is ancient. If it is a part of God's plan, it still serves His purpose and meets man's need. Everything that meets the test of God's will must be restored to its place in our lives. If an item fails to meet such a test, it must be removed.

2. We cannot improve on God's way. He has always sanctified those elements and items He wants man to accept. Only what He has sanctified has a place in His scheme. Note the example of Nadab and Abihu, Cain, and many others. We need to content ourselves to practice His will and His will alone.

3. Both forms and attitudes are important to God. The thing practiced is important, and so also is the spirit in which it is practiced or rendered.

4. God has established an inseparable link between daily life and public service or worship. Because both are offered to God, each must be compatible with the other (Rom. 12:1-2; Jas. 1:27). Daily life prepares us for worship and



makes that worship acceptable. It is also worship that strengthens and equips us for life each day. *P.O. Box 10811, Springfield, MO 65808*

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# Esther

by *Jerry L. Dickinson*

The book of Esther is the only book in the Bible where the name of God is not mentioned. It is obvious, however, that He is in the shadows, moving people and events to fulfill His purposes and plans. Some have questioned whether the book should be included in the canon of Scripture at all, but the Jews have always held the book of Esther in high esteem and call it Megillah ("The Volume") by way of eminence.

## Authorship

There is no way to be certain who wrote the book of Esther. Josephus ascribes the authorship to Mordecai, while others believe Ezra was the writer. The book contains purely Persian names and words, and its Hebrew style closely resembles that of Ezra, Nehemiah, and Chronicles, books that most scholars believe were written by Ezra.

## Date

Statements made about the extent of the king's dominion agree with statements made in Herodotus' History about the Persian King Xerxes, and were true of no other Persian monarch. Ahasuerus was an official name of Persian kings, and it seems certain that Xerxes is the king referred to in the book of Esther. Xerxes reigned from 486–465 B.C. The following chart illustrates when the events in the Book of Esther took place:

- 606 B.C. Babylon conquers Judah
- 597 B.C. King Jehoiakim taken captive
- 586 B.C. Jerusalem destroyed by Nebuchadnezzar
- 536 B.C. Return from captivity
- 516 B.C. Temple rebuilt
- 478 B.C. Esther becomes Queen of Persia
- 473 B.C. Plot by Haman against the Jews
- 457 B.C. Ezra returns to Jerusalem
- 444 B.C. Rebuilding of walls by Nehemiah.

The chart shows that Esther appeared about forty years after the Temple was rebuilt and about thirty years before the wall was rebuilt. Xerxes died before the return of Ezra and Nehemiah. His son, Artaxerxes, commissioned Ezra to return to Jerusalem. It is most likely that Esther and Mordecai, behind the scenes, were an important influence that moved Artaxerxes to allow the Jews under Ezra to return to finish the work of restoring Jerusalem. Surely,

God, though not mentioned by name, was involved in all the events recorded in this history.

### Characters and Poignant Passages

*Xerxes (Ahasuerus)* is the Persian monarch who ruled from India to Ethiopia over 127 provinces, in which all the Jews lived at that time. He had a palace in the city of Shushan, which was located two hundred miles southeast of Babylon. A great feast of 180 days is held in Shushan to celebrate the greatness of his kingdom. At the end of this feast he calls for his first wife, the Queen, to come display her beauty before all his lords.

*Vashti*, the Queen, refuses to come and appear before the king and his lords. It is not clear why Vashti refuses to come. If she refused because of moral indignation at being asked to expose herself before a bunch of drunken men, she is certainly to be commended. Because of this refusal, however, the king's lords clamor for the king to divorce her and dethrone her as Queen lest all the women in Persia get the idea that they, too, can refuse an order by their husbands. In his anger, Xerxes divorces Vashti and removes her as Queen. Later he regrets his decision, and a plan is implemented to find a replacement for the Queen.

*Mordecai* is a Jew who was born in captivity in Babylon. When the Jews were given the opportunity to return to Jerusalem, he obviously decided to stay in Persia. He is a man of station, sitting in the king's gate, which means he is a man who has access to the king and the king's business. When he hears about the plan to find a replacement for Vashti, he decides to enter his cousin in the contest.

*Esther* is the daughter of Mordecai's uncle. Both her parents had died and Mordecai had raised her as his own daughter. Actually, her Hebrew name is Hadassah (meaning, "myrtle"), and the name Esther (meaning, "star") is Persian. One of the great difficulties of the book of Esther is understanding why Mordecai would offer Esther to a heathen king as his wife. Some have suggested that God had somehow moved him to do this, but there is no indication of this in the story at all. It seems to me, really, that here is the greatest lesson to be learned from the story. Mordecai, as he first appears in the story, is a man who is little concerned with the ancient law of his people. Otherwise, he would never have given his adopted daughter in marriage to a heathen monarch. But God's providence and concern extends not only to the Jews who have returned to Jerusalem, but to these Jews in Shushan as well. Even though Mordecai and Esther seem oblivious to God and His purposes, God is aware of their plight and will not allow His eternal purpose of bringing the Messiah

through the chosen seed to fail. God overrules the events transpiring, and Esther is chosen to be Queen of Persia.

*Haman* bursts on the scene next and unfolds his pernicious plan to exterminate all the Jews in the world. The name "Haman" means, "the illustrious one," and he certainly craved power, fame, and glory. He was an Agagite, a descendent of the Amalekite kings. In Deuteronomy 25:17 we are told how the Amalekites "feared not God" and laid wait for Israel when they were in the wilderness, and that God's judgment was upon them because of it. Haman has conned Xerxes into signing a decree that states that everyone in the kingdom should bow to Haman as he walks by. Mordecai refuses to do it. This meeting of Jew and Agagite is the meeting of fire and water. Mordecai the Jew refuses to do obeisance to Haman, the Agagite. Infuriated, Haman again cons the king into giving him the power to exterminate all the Jews. Lots are cast, and in eleven months the extermination would be carried out.

"*If I perish, I perish!*" are the marvelously unforgettable words of Esther in answer to the request of Mordecai for her to intervene to the king. As soon as Mordecai discovers that the decree for exterminating his people has been signed, he sits in sackcloth outside the city gate. Esther sent a messenger to inquire what the problem is, and Mordecai informs her of Haman's plot, asking her to request King Xerxes to change the decree. Esther sends word back to Mordecai informing him that she would be risking her life if she appears before the king without being summoned. The risk is too great.

"*Who knows whether you have come to the kingdom for such a time as this!*" That is Mordecai's answer to Esther, and she is so moved by these words that she tells him that she will approach the king. "If I perish, I perish!" are her courageous and noble words. She does approach the king, and he holds out his scepter, which means she is welcome though not summoned. Instead of making a request for her life and the life of her people, she requests that the king and Haman attend a feast she will prepare. They come, but again she defers begging for the life of her people. Instead she requests that the king and Haman attend another feast she will prepare the next day. On his way home Haman passes by Mordecai, who again refuses to bow to him. Infuriated, Haman goes home, calls his friends together and relates to them and his wife how great he is and how much the king and queen delight in him. But, he concludes pathetically, it is all of little value as long as that Jew Mordecai is alive. How pitiful! He has everything in the world he wants, but because one person will not grovel at his feet he is miserable. How pathetic!

*The king could not sleep.* Sleepless nights have many causes. The remembrance of recent sin, great sorrow or worry, overwork, too many irons in the fire—all these can cause long and sleepless nights. Earlier this day Haman had

told his wife and friends about Mordecai's refusal to give him the honor he thought he was due. They counseled him, since he was the king's favorite, to ask the king to have Mordecai killed immediately. Why wait eleven months when all the Jews were to be killed? Have Mordecai taken out of the way now if he is causing this much consternation. Sure, thinks Haman.

Why not? He has workers work all night constructing a gallows seventy-five feet high where he plans to hang Mordecai come morning. Early the next morning he arrives outside the king's door, waiting anxiously to demand the death of Mordecai. But King Xerxes cannot sleep this night. How interesting and revealing that a man who, in kingly rule, commands 127 provinces cannot command an hour's sleep! He calls for the Royal Chronicles to be read, and it just so happens that the reader reads of a plot against the king's life some time before. And it was Mordecai who revealed the plot and saved the king's life! "What has been done to reward Mordecai?" asks the king. "Nothing," is the reply. The king learns that Haman is outside, allows him to enter, but before Haman can ask for the death of Mordecai, the king asks Haman what reward should be given to a man the king delights to honor. Haman, thinking the king means him, answers that such a man should be arrayed in royal attire and led on a horse through the streets while everyone honors him.

*"Honor Mordecai according to your answer."* Can you even begin to imagine how Haman felt when he heard the king utter those words? Has there ever been such a procession before? Or since? This procession through the Persian capital, conducted by the great and proud Amalekite prince, in honor of the despised Jew, is perhaps the most remarkable that ever took place in history. Haman goes home and covers his face in shame, but before he can even take a breath, servants are at the door bidding him to that other feast Queen Esther has invited him to along with the king. At last, during the feast, Esther tells the king about the plot to take her life and the life of all her people. "Who has presumed to do such a thing?" asks the king "That wicked Haman!" answers the queen, to the dismay of the still shaken Haman. The king goes outside to cool off, and when he walks back in Haman is lying on the queen's couch, pleading for his life. The king is even more enraged when he sees Haman on the couch with his queen. One of the king's servants tells the king that Haman has erected a gallows on which to hang Mordecai, and the king, in his wrath, commands Haman to be hanged on the gallows instead. What awful irony—impaled on the very gallows he had prepared for Mordecai!

*Esther approaches the king again.* This time she asks the king to set aside the decree. Persian law, however, forbade a decree of the king to be changed. Xerxes, nevertheless, appoints Mordecai Prime Minister, and the wealth of Haman's house is forfeited to Esther. Not only so, but permission is given for

the Jews to prepare to defend themselves on the day appoints for their extermination. They did, and five hundred were slain by the Jews in the capital and seventy-five thousand throughout the empire. Not only that, but in the meantime we are told that many people of the land became Jews, and the fear of the Jews was upon them. The Feast of Purim (lots) was instituted to commemorate this marvelous deliverance. The fact that the feast has been kept continuously since then until the present day among the Jews is proof in and of itself of the veracity of the history recorded in the book of Esther.

### Lessons from the Book of Esther

**1. God is in control.** Note how God was behind the scenes controlling events and making sure that even the most seemingly unimportant and obscure details worked together to his ultimate plan and goal. I cannot say it better than Alexander Raleigh, in his book *Esther*, page 66:

God's providence, therefore, is minute and particular. It concerns all that happens—all that men think, and do, and are. Human freedom is untouched, and yet divine will is perfectly wrought; and if only we are on the side of that divine will as far as we know it, submitting and conforming our own will to the will of God, then we may be entirely sure that providence is on our side. The smallest things in life are the object of divine regard. The hairs of our head are all numbered, our tears are kept by God as men keep the choicest wines, our sighs are heard, our steps directed, our 'goings out' and our 'comings in' are preserved from that time forth, when we give ourselves truly to Him, on through life to its ending, and even for evermore.

Daniel declared in Daniel 2:21 that God removes kings and sets up kings. In Daniel 7:6, speaking of Alexander the Great, it is recorded that he was "given dominion." It was not the military prowess of Alexander that conquered the world—it was God who gave him dominion as a part of a greater plan. Psalms 50:10–11 declares the wondrous truth that the cattle on a thousand hills are the Lord's. Even Jesus taught the profound truth that not one sparrow dies but that God knows it. And Jesus affirms that we are of more value than many sparrows. God is in control of even the minutest details and events in this world. We cannot begin to comprehend the far-reaching effects of the sovereignty of God.

This is my father's world,  
Oh let me ne'er forget,  
That though the wrong seem oft so strong,  
God is the ruler yet.

**2. His purposes fail not.** Mordecai in essence tells Esther, "If you do not ask for help, then help will come from some other place." Mordecai was right! God always raises up someone to be the instrument through which He will fulfill His purpose and plan. Isaiah tells of God's plans regarding the Assyrians in Isaiah 14:24-28, and emphasizes the fact that God "hath purposed and who shall disannul it?" Romans 8:28 and Ephesians 3:11 declare that everything works together and culminates in fulfilling the eternal purposes of God. His purposes fail not!

God moves in a mysterious way  
His wonders to perform,  
He plants his footstep in the sea,  
And rides upon the storm.  
Blind faith is sure to err  
And scan His work in vain;  
God is His own interpreter  
And he will make it plain.

**3. We are part of the eternal progression.** Like Esther and Mordecai, we are a part of the eternal progression toward the fulfillment of God's ultimate plan. Mordecai and Esther formed a highway for God to complete His plan of preserving the Jewish race another 400 years to the coming of the Lord. It had nothing to do with them, per se, inasmuch as it was God's plan. It had nothing to do with them, that is, except as they chose to do the right thing at the propitious moment. As Mordecai put it, "Who knows when that moment may come? Who knows, when by God's providential provisions, we come to the kingdom for such a time as this?" Over and over in the Scriptures we see people becoming a part of the great progression. Ruth and Boaz, by acting honorably and doing what duty demands, became a highway for God to bring the Messiah, in due time, into the world. Joseph, on his deathbed, told his family, "I die, but God will surely visit you" Note the significance of the words, "I die...but God." Joseph's words convey the message, "I am going to die, but God and God's great work will proceed." Joseph understood that he was but a part of God's plan. Thank God for Joseph, and all those who have submitted and conformed to God's plan and will.

### Conclusion

From the book of Esther we learn that God is concerned about His people, and His providential care for them is detailed and minute. He is in every facet of our lives, though He may be hidden from our view. Some day we will look back like Joseph and declare, "Now I know that it was God" (Gen. 45:8). Do your duty! Submit to the will of God in every part of your life. Do what you

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know is right, and you may perceive later that God used your fidelity to accomplish a far greater good than you ever could have imagined. 1308  
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# Introduction to Hebrew Poetry

*by Smith Bibens*

## Outline

### Introduction:

- The Poetic Books/Wisdom Literature
- Poetry in the Bible

### 1. Poetry Defined

- 1.1 Lexical and Practical Definitions
- 1.2 Creative Use of Language
- 1.3 Figurative
- 1.4 Evocative and Emotive

### 2. Creative Use of Language in Poetry

- 2.1 Rhyme
- 2.2 Alliteration
- 2.3 Assonance
- 2.4 Acrostics
- 2.5 Meter
- 2.6 Paronomasia
- 2.7 Onomatopoeia
- 2.8 Concrete Language
- 2.9 Parallelism
  - 2.9.1 Synonymous
  - 2.9.2 Antithetical
  - 2.9.3 Synthetic
  - 2.9.4 Climactic

These features are lost in translation.

### 2.10 Figurative Language in Poetry

These features survive translation.

### 3. Sub-genres of Hebrew Poetry

- 5.1 Hymn
- 5.2 Messianic Psalm
- 5.3 Lament
- 5.4 Song of Thanksgiving
- 5.5 Other genres

### Conclusion

This article is designed to introduce students to that section of the Old Testament known as the Poetic Books. In our English Bibles they are five in number: Job, Psalms, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, and Song of Solomon (Canticles).

The books of the Hebrew Bible are arranged differently. Chart 1 contrasts the arrangement of the Hebrew Old Testament with the English Old Testament. Our arrangement is based on the Septuagint translation (c. 250–200 B.C.) via the Latin Vulgate translation (c. A.D. 400 A.D.).

The arrangement of the Hebrew Bible is that of the Massoretes. However, their arrangement of the Old Testament follows the traditional arrangement that predates the time of Christ. The Massoretes were a group of Jewish scribes centered at Tiberius in Palestine who were leaders in transmitting the Hebrew text.

The Massoretes are so named because of their acknowledged dependence upon the authoritative traditions (Massorah) concerning the text...They are perhaps best known for their system of vowels and accents that they devised for the Hebrew text. It will be remembered that all the Hebrew letters in the Hebrew text are consonants. Thus the Old Testament was first written without vowels. Although this may seem strange and crude to us, it was sufficient for the many centuries in which Hebrew continued as a spoken language. When eventually Hebrew was no longer spoken, the danger was eminent that the proper pronunciation of the words of the text would likewise disappear. To meet this danger, the Massoretes, on the basis of their well-kept traditions, inserted vowel points above and below the lines of the text. It must be emphasized, however, that they did not bother the text itself—they only added a means by which to insure the correct pronunciation of the text.

In prosecuting their work, the Massoretes provided a special system of poetic accentuation for three books: Job, Proverbs, and Psalms. This system, which differs from the system used in the rest of the Old Testament, uses accents (in addition to vowel pointing) to highlight the poetic rhythm of these books. This fact helps to remove any doubt about whether or not it is proper to consider these books as works of poetry.

The Massoretes called the books of Job, Proverbs, and Psalms "The Book of Truth." In Hebrew, the first letter of the title of Job, Proverbs, and Psalms spells the word 'emeth, "truth." The other two books of poetry, Ecclesiastes and the Song of Solomon, were included in another sub-group of the **Ketubim** ("Writings") called the **Five Megilloth** ("five scrolls"). This sub-group consists of Song of Songs, Ruth, Lamentations, Ecclesiastes, and

Esther. This grouping was arranged for reading at the major Jewish festivals through the year: Song of Solomon (Passover), Ruth (Pentecost), Lamentations (Fast of the Ninth of Ab, commemorating the destruction of both Temples), Ecclesiastes (Feast of Tabernacles), and Esther (Purim).

Three of the five poetic books also constitute what is called the wisdom literature of the Old Testament: Job, Proverbs, and Ecclesiastes. Truly, several of the Psalms are "wisdom psalms"; and much of Psalms and Song of Solomon is written in a style similar to Job, Proverbs, and Ecclesiastes—specifically they all use *parallelism*. Therefore, it is also correct to refer to these five books as the Wisdom Literature of the Old Testament. I usually use the comprehensive title, "Poetry and Wisdom Literature of the Old Testament."

Interest in the poetry of the Bible *as poetry* is a late development. Scholars have long known of its existence, but most of the work in identifying and studying biblical poetry as poetry has occurred since the mid-1700s. This does not mean that there has been no recognition of the fact that poetry exists in the Old Testament. Both Josephus and Philo, desiring to show that Hebrew literature was not inferior to pagan literature, reference the poetry of the Old Testament (Davies, p. 659). Prior to the groundbreaking work by Robert Lowth in the eighteenth century, several Jewish rabbis during the Middle Ages, as well as some Christian writers, wrote on parallelism and Hebrew poetry (Davies, pp. 653-654).

Through the Middle Ages, however, and well into the nineteenth century, the study of the literary substance of the Bible was not a major area of study. However, as a written work, the Bible contains a variety of literary genres: poetry, prose narrative or history, oratory, epistles, et al. Just because the Bible was inspired by God through the Spirit does not mean the Bible possesses no literary features or qualities (2 Tim. 3:16-17; Jn. 16:13). Quite the contrary, the Bible is the greatest piece of literature in the world, especially so since it is God-inspired. Looking at the Bible as a piece of literature is one dimension of Bible study that is sadly overlooked. Poetry in the Bible is a case in point. It is expedient to study the poetry of the Bible, as well as the other types of literature found in Scripture, for it is a great help to a proper hermeneutic of Scripture (Yoder, p. 4).

There has always been poetry in the Bible, but the recognition and appreciation of biblical poetry in Western scholarship dates from the eighteenth century. This recognition arose, in part, due to the interest in Germany and England (and elsewhere) in translating the Bible from the original languages. Once scholars in these areas got away from being tied to the Latin Vulgate of the Roman Catholic Church, their eyes were opened to the beauties of the Bible's

poetic pieces. The work of an Anglican bishop and fellow at Oxford University in the eighteenth century especially was instrumental in opening eyes to the beauty of Hebrew poetry. Bishop Robert Lowth gave a series of lectures in 1753 on Hebrew poetry. In this series, he identified one of the predominant features of Hebrew Poetry—parallelism. This is the most pronounced and important feature of Hebrew poetry.

**Poetry in the Old Testament.** Roughly forty percent of the Old Testament is comprised of poetry (the actual figure varies from scholar to scholar). This being true, it becomes apparent that there is more poetry in the Old Testament than just here in Job through Song of Solomon. The book of Lamentations is entirely poetic; it is an example of "lament," of which there are other examples in Scripture. "Much of the prophecy of the Old Testament is in the form of Hebrew verse" (Carhart, p. 22). The Book of Isaiah is mostly written as Hebrew poetry. Some of the most sublime poetry in the Old Testament lies outside the poetic books in passages like Exodus 15 (Song of Victory over Pharaoh), Deuteronomy 32–33 (Song of Moses and Moses' Parting Blessing), Judges 5 (Song of Deborah and Barak on the Defeat of Sisera), and 2 Samuel 1 (Lament of David for Saul and Jonathan).

**Poetry in the New Testament.** No one doubts the presence of poetry in the Old Testament, but what about the New Testament?

Naturally it would be strange if the poetic inspiration which runs like a tide through...the Old Testament should altogether cease under the clearer spiritual dispensation of the New Testament. The fact is that it does not cease, but under every fundamental rule of poetic utterance, save that of rhyme, the New Testament is seen to be rich in imaginative vision, in religion touched by emotion, and in poetic expression (Schenk, p. 666).

The New Testament does not include large sections of poetry; however, there are several passages generally regarded as poetic. One such passage is Philippians 2:6–11.

Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death—even death on a cross! Therefore God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

**Luke.** The Gospel of Luke gives us our best examples of poetry in the New Testament. Luke records the poetic utterances of Elizabeth (1:42–45, Beatitude), Mary (1:46–55, Magnificat), Zacharias (1:68–79, Benedictus), and Simeon (2:29–32, Nunc Dimittis).

**The Teaching of Jesus.** “When one comes to the words of Jesus, he discovers that in a very true sense His speech answers to the requirements for Hebrew poetry” (Schenk, p. 667). We shall note some examples later.

### Poetry Defined and Illustrated

The first question we need to answer is, “What are the differences between poetry and prose?” Consider some lexical definitions.

**Prose** *n.* [[ . . . <L *prorsa* (*oratorio*), direct (speech) < *prorsus*, forward, straight on < *proversus*, pp. Of *provertere*, to turn forward . . . ]] **1.** the ordinary form of written or spoken language, without rhyme or meter; speech or writing, sometimes, specif., nonfictional writing, that is not poetry **2.** dull, commonplace talk, expression, quality, etc. (**Random House College Dictionary**).

**Poem** *n.* [[ . . . < Gk *poiema*, one who makes, poet < *poiein* to make . . . ]] **1.** an arrangement of words written or spoken: traditionally, a rhythmical composition, sometimes rhymed, expressing experiences, ideas or emotions in a style more concentrated, imaginative, and powerful than ordinary speech or prose: some poems are in meter, some in free verse. . . . (**Random House College Dictionary**).<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *Poieo*, (Strong's, 4160) appears frequently in New Testament (576 times) and is generally translated “to make, to do” etc.; *ποίημα*, (Strong's, 4161) from which we get “poem” appears in two passages of the New Testament. Thayer defines *poiēma*, “that which has been made, a work” (Thayer 527). The word appears in Romans 1:20 and Ephesians 2:10. The word group that these words belong to is used in the LXX Old Testament and New Testament of the creative activity of God, though not exclusively (Kittel, TDNT, 895ff)

**Romans 1:20** For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even His eternal power and Godhead, so that they are without excuse

**Ephesians 2:10** For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them

**Ποιητής**, is translated “poet” in Acts 17:28—“for in Him we live and move and have our being, as also some of your own poets have said, ‘For we are also His offspring.’” (A quote from Cleanthes’ *Ode to Zeus*). In the other places it is used in the New Testament it is translated “doer(s)” —Rom 2:13; Jas 1:22–23, 25; 4:11

Less formal yet useful definitions of poetry are offered by poets and scholars.

Poetry is emotionalized experience. It is universal truth in thought or feeling, transmuted by the imagination into fitting images, and expressed in beautiful, and usually patterned, language (Sanders, p. 4).

Poetry is the language of the imagination and the passions (William Hazlitt, "On Poetry in General," 1818, quoted in Sanders, p. 5).

All the authors I have read after agree that a precise definition of poetry is difficult, but we can note some qualities of poetry and reach some definite ideas of its nature. Drawing from the foregoing definitions and other material, allow me to highlight a few of the distinguishing characteristics of poetry. Some of these features are common to both English and Hebrew poetry, while others are more common in one or the other.

First, which do you think would be harder to write, poetry or prose? Obviously, good poetry. As the very etymology of the word suggests, there is a creative process that takes place in writing poetry, above and beyond the effort required to write ordinary prose. In poetry "one word is made to carry the burden of twenty."

Good poets...use language with economy and compression for immediate and intense effects....Good poetry blends sense and sound in ways which evoke images and extend your imagination, memory, and experience beyond the physical limits of your own life (Shaw, p. 1131).

Both prose and poetry are constructed of the same basic construction materials—words. One builder may take brick, mortar, lumber, and drywall to build a functional, but aesthetically unappealing, structure. Another builder may create a beautiful edifice of the same materials.

Poetry is a language phenomenon—a way of saying things. Whether to teach, preach, or simply thrill, to paint, inform, or spellbind, this is not the language of over-the-counter existence, although many of the words are the same. A new blend of sound and sense is here, rich in connotation, imagery, impression, music, and offering new problems in semantics (Shaw, p. 1132).

Therefore, poetry is distinguished by the creative usage of language. We shall look at this feature in greater detail shortly.

Second, poetry is rhythmical. Poetry resolves itself into patterns and regular cadences, while prose tends to avoid this. Sometimes much of the time in English poetry—rhythm is accomplished through meter or cadence. The term "meter" refers to the pattern of stressed and unstressed syllables in a line, or

verse, of a poem. There are a number of different forms of meter in English verse. Consider this stanza from Byron's "The Destruction of Sennacherib"<sup>2</sup>—

The Assyrian came down like a wolf on the fold, *a*  
 And his cohorts were gleaming in purple and gold; *a*  
 And the sheen of their spears was like stars on the sea, *b*  
 Where the blue wave rolls nightly on deep Galilee. *b*

Look at one line, marked for oral interpretation:

. . . / . . . / . . . / . . . /  
**And the sheen/ of their spears/ was like stars/ on the sea**

Similarity of sounds (rhyming, assonance, alliteration) also contributes to the rhythm of poetry. This is why poetry lends itself so easily to song. This rhythmic quality also helps poetry to be memorable. It is easier to memorize poetry than prose.

Third, poetry, like music, is evocative, i.e., it is rich in emotion. Poetry is often coupled with music (Psalms), for they speak the same language—the language of the heart. Poetry has a power to stir us emotionally, to move us to action, to rekindle the memories of experiences we have enjoyed or not enjoyed. One writer defined poetry as "the language of passion" (Carhart, p. 4). "It is in the use of the emotional element that poetry differs chiefly from prose, for although emotion is present in prose, it is there properly subordinated to reason, while in poetry it is one of the dominant elements" (Sanders, p. 7). Poetry tends to deal with strong emotions—love and hate, joy or sadness, attraction and revulsion. "The mind is most likely to give off poetry when highly wrought by love, triumph, or anger" (Dungan, p. 333).

Good prose will share some of these characteristics with poetry, but usually not to the same degree or quality. In particular, oratory is closer to poetry than historical narrative. A study of the speeches delivered by fine orators will bear this out.

## Creative Use of Language in Poetry

### Rhyme

Rhyme is perhaps the most distinguishing characteristic of poetry in our modern minds. Yet, rhyme, as a similarity of sounds or repeated sounds, did not come into use until the seventh century A.D. Moreover, rhyme is nearly impossible to translate. **The Encyclopedia Judaica** says, "While rhyme cannot be said to be characteristic of biblical poetry...it appears often enough to

<sup>2</sup> This line is a *quatrain*; the rhyme scheme is *aabb*, the meter is *anapestic tetrameter*.

merit attention" (Mullenberg, p. 680). Mullenberg cites passages such as Lamech's song (Gen. 4:23-24), Isaiah 41:11-13, and Isaiah 53:6 as examples. Additionally, Davies gives Job 10:8-11; 16:12.

### **Alliteration**

Alliteration is the use of the same or similar sounds at the beginning of words or syllables and in stressed positions. When the repeated sound is a consonant, it is called "consonance." When the repeated sound is a vowel sound, it is called "assonance." "It is usually impossible to imitate these in English translation, so we lose the beauty of in the transfer from Hebrew to the receptor language" (Bullock, p. 37). Also, alliteration can be seen in some word pairs that occur in Scripture: **tohu waw bohu**, "without form and void" (Gen. 1:2); **sason we-simhah**, "joy and gladness" (Is. 22:13; 35:10; Jer. 7:34); **'anan wa-'arafel**, "clouds and thick darkness" (Ezek. 34:12; Joel 2:2; Zeph. 1:15; Ps. 97:2); **hod we-hadar**, "splendor and majesty" (Ps. 21:6; 99:6; 104:1).

### **Acrostics**

The alphabetic acrostic poem appears several times in the poetic section of the Old Testament. Acrostic poems appear in Psalm 9, 10, 25, 34, 37, 111, 112, 119, 145, and Proverbs 31:10-31. The alphabetic acrostic was used to facilitate memorization (Bullock, p. 38).

### **Meter (Rhythm)**

"Meter or rhythm in literary composition denotes the recurrence of accented and unaccented syllables in a regular order" (Davies, *ISBE*, p. 653). Meter is very important to understand if one is studying English poetry. In Gerald Sanders, *A Poetry Primer* (which is an excellent primer), one finds a helpful introduction to poetic meter in respect to Old Testament English poetry.

This is one area of Hebrew poetry that is highly controverted among scholars, but it is not germane to our reading of the Old Testament in translation. I would refer you to articles in the *International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, *Encyclopedia Judaica*, and Peterson and Richard's *Interpreting Hebrew Poetry* for more information on meter in Hebrew poetry.

### **Paronomasia**

"Paronomasia refers to the use of the same word in different senses or words of similar sound to produce a particular effect" (Mullenberg, p. 680). It is "a play upon the sound and meaning of words" (Bullock, p. 37). It is a pun. In Amos 8:2, the prophet sees a basket of summer fruit (**kelub qayis**), whereupon the Lord took the consonants (q and s) and pronounced the "end" (**qes**) on Israel.



## Onomatopoeia

This is "the use of words whose sounds imitate or suggest the meaning they seek to portray... Psalm 29 reproduces the sound of a rolling thunderstorm" (Mullenberg, p. 680).

## Concrete Language

Concrete language is used in poetry to force the reader to participate, to make the story subjectively real, and not just objectively correct. Consider the contrast in these two sentences:

He was unutterably sad, terribly confused and weakened by grief.

He stood silently, his forehead wrinkled, his eyes slowly filling with tears, leaning against the doorjamb with his knees gradually buckling under him.

In the first sentence, the situation is analyzed and the reader is told how to react. In the second sentence, the situation is observed in detail, letting the picture evoke its own emotional response. The first sentence uses abstract concepts, such as "unutterably" or "weakened"; the second sentence uses concrete descriptions—"wrinkled," "buckling." The hallmark of concrete language is detailed description and evocative imagery—the use of words that appeal to the senses. Concreteness is aided by parallelism as well.

## Parallelism

The most obvious element of pattern in Hebrew poetry is the use of parallelism. When Robert Lowth did his groundbreaking work on Hebrew poetry, he described parallelism as its predominant feature, and most scholars concur with this judgment. Unlike meter, it does not disappear when a work is translated into another language. Parallelism is a form of repetition or recurrence of thought in symmetrically constructed sentences (Davies, p. 653). One writer describes parallelism as "thought rhyme." Instead of similarity of sound, Hebrew poetry (in common with Canaanite, Babylonian, Assyrian, and Egyptian poetry) depends on repetition of thought. Hebrew parallelism is designed to be concrete, to be memorable, and to enhance the figurative language (metaphors, similes). Sanford Calvin Yoder, a Mennonite scholar whose book *The Poetry of the Old Testament* is second to none, says of parallelism:

Hebrew poetry differs fundamentally from modern poetry in that it concerns itself not with sound rhymes but rather rhymes of thought. Most modern writers of verse give attention to sound endings at the end of the lines.... This is not always true of the poetry of the Hebrew; in fact, most of the time it is not true. In Hebrew poetry we find what is called the "balanced sentence," where the thought of one sen-

tence "rhymes" with or "balances" the thought of the preceding one...this "rhyming of thought" lends itself to as many different forms as the "rhyming" of sounds (Yoder, p. 10).

Lowth originally described three types of parallelism: synonymous, antithetical, and synthetic. Building on his work, other scholars have added to these classifications.

**Synonymous.** The thoughts of the two lines are identical or similar. In Lowth's words, "When a proposition is delivered; and is immediately repeated, in whole or in part, the expression being varied but the sense entirely or nearly the same" (Berlin, p. 156). Simply put, the same thing is repeated in other words. But we must not look for precise equivalence in the lines - the second line of synonymous parallelism often gives a subtly different view in comparison to the first; not just a simple restatement or paraphrase.

Why do the nations rage,  
And the people plot a vain thing?  
The kings of the earth set themselves,  
And the rulers take counsel together,  
Against the LORD and against His Anointed, saying  
"Let us break Their bonds in pieces  
And cast away Their cords from us."

He who sits in the heavens shall laugh;  
The LORD shall hold them in derision (Ps. 2:1, 3-4).

The heavens declare the glory of God;  
And the firmament shows His handiwork.  
Day unto day utters speech,  
And night unto night reveals knowledge (Ps. 19:1-2).

The earth is the LORD's, and all its fullness,  
The world and those who dwell therein.  
For He has founded it upon the seas,  
And established it upon the waters (Ps. 24:1-2).

A disciple is not above his teacher,  
nor a servant above his master (Mt. 10:24).

**Antithetical.** Lowth said: "[The] lines correspond with one another by an opposition of terms and sentiments" (Davies, p. 156). The second line is a contrast or opposite of the first line. This is common in Proverbs.

They have bowed down and fallen;  
But we have risen and stand upright (Ps. 20:8).

The young lions lack and suffer hunger;  
But those who seek the Lord shall not lack any good thing (Ps. 34:10).

The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge.  
But fools despise wisdom and instruction (Prov. 1:7).

A wise son makes a glad father,  
But a foolish son is the grief of his mother (Prov. 10:1).

Hatred stirs up strife,  
But love covers all sins (Prov. 10:12).

And why do you look at the speck in your brother's eye,  
but do not perceive the plank in your own eye? (Mt. 7:3).

**Climactic (a.k.a. Stair-like).** The second line expands and reinforces the first; the thought progresses, usually repeating a phrase. This category has been added since Lowth's time.

Give unto the LORD, O you mighty ones,  
Give unto the LORD glory and strength (Ps. 29:1).

What the chewing locust left, the swarming locust has eaten;  
What the swarming locust left, the crawling locust has eaten;  
And what the crawling locust left, the consuming locust has eaten  
(Joel 1:4).

**Emblematic.** Like the preceding, this category has been added since Lowth's time. One line is figurative while the other one is literal.

The LORD is my shepherd;  
I shall not want (Ps. 23:1).

My soul thirsts for God, for the living God.  
When shall I come and appear before God? (Ps. 42:2).

For as the heavens are high above the earth,  
So great is His mercy toward those who fear Him (Ps. 103:11).

Let all those who hate Zion  
Be put to shame and turned back.  
Let them be as the grass on the housetops,  
Which withers before it grows up,  
With which the reaper does not fill his hand,  
Nor he who binds sheaves, his arms (Ps. 129:5-7).

**Synthetic.** This was one of Lowth's original three categories. This category seems to be sort of a catchall for whatever does not fit under the preceding categories. "When the thought of the second line does not agree with the thought of the first line nor is in contrast with it but builds it up or completes it, the arrangement is called synthetic parallelism" (Yoder, p. 10).

"Also called constructive or epithetic. In this the second member adds something fresh to the first, or else explains it" (Davies, p. 654). Since Lowth's time, a great deal of differentiation has occurred with this class of parallelism. Three different types of synthetic parallelism are noted below.

Completion. The thought of the first line is completed or answered, or in some cases, a statement is made and then a question is posed.

For the Lord is the great God,  
And the great King above all gods (Ps. 95:3).  
How can a young man cleanse his way?  
By taking heed according to your word (Ps. 119:9).  
For in death there is no remembrance of You;  
In the grave who will give you thanks? (Ps. 6:5)

Comparison. This is identified by use of the word "than."

For a day in your courts is better than a thousand.  
I would rather be a doorkeeper in the house of my God  
Than dwell in the tents of wickedness (Ps. 84:10).

Reason. One line makes a statement; the next provides the reason.

Blessed be the Lord,  
Because He has heard the voice of my supplications (Ps. 28:6).

## **Figurative Language**

Another character of poetry is figurative language, which aids concreteness in poetry. Figures of speech are "short cuts to the transmission of accurate ideas and exact images, conveying to us a definite impression of something which is likely to be unfamiliar, through a swift allusion or resemblance to an image already within our consciousness" (Sanders, p. 15). Among the more common figures of speech include figures of comparison (metaphors and similes) and figures of association (synecdoche and metonymy).

### **Simile**

Similes are easily recognized by the use of the words "like" or "as." One thing is compared or likened to another. The simile is a figure of speech based on resemblance.

As vinegar to the teeth and smoke to the eyes,  
So is the lazy man to those who send him (Prov. 10:26).  
Like one who takes away a garment in cold weather,  
And like vinegar on soda,  
Is one who sings songs to a heavy heart (Prov. 25:20).

## Metaphor

Stronger than simile, one thing is stated to be another or spoken of as if it is another. Still based on resemblance (comparison), it is, however, stated as representation.

While the *Simile* gently states that one thing is like or resembles another, the *Metaphor* boldly and warmly declares that one thing IS the other. When the *Simile* says "All flesh is AS grass" (1 Pet. 1:24), the *Metaphor* carries the figure across at once, and says "All flesh IS grass" (Is. xl. 6) . . . The *Simile* says "All we like sheep," while the *Metaphor* declares "we are the sheep of His pasture." While, therefore, the word "resembles" marks the *Simile*: "represents" is the word that marks the *Metaphor* (Bullinger, p. 735).

Examples of metaphor would include the following:

All flesh is grass,  
 And all its loveliness is like the flower of the field.  
 The grass withers, the flower fades,  
 Because the breath of the LORD blows upon it;  
 Surely the people are grass.  
 The grass withers, the flower fades,  
 But the word of our God stands forever (Is. 40:6-8).  
 The LORD is my Shepherd (Ps. 23:1).  
 He shall cover you with His feathers,  
 And under His wings you shall take refuge;  
 His truth shall be your shield and buckler (Ps. 91:4).

God, feathers? But once you have seen a mother hen at the first sign of danger collecting her yellow fuzz-ball chicks under her wings, the image becomes crystal clear. Compare the simile used in the New Testament:

O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the one who kills the prophets and stones those who are sent unto her! How often I wanted to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but you were not willing (Mt. 23:37).

## Hypocatastis (Gk., "putting down underneath")

Stronger still than a mere metaphor. Bullinger says:

As a figure it differs from *Metaphor*, because in a metaphor the two nouns are both named and given; while, in *Hypocatastis*, only one is named and the other is implied, or as it were, is put down underneath out of sight. . . . If *Metaphor* is more forcible than *Simile*, then *Hypocatastis* is more forcible than *Metaphor*, and expresses as it were the superlative degree of resemblance (Bullinger, p. 744).

For dogs have surrounded Me;  
The congregation of the wicked has enclosed Me.  
They pierced My hands and My feet (Ps. 22:16).

Every plant which My heavenly Father has not planted will be uprooted (Mt. 15:13).

Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up (Mt. 25:26).

### Metonymy and Synecdoche

These figures are very common in the poetic literature.

The glory of the LORD shall be revealed,  
And all flesh shall see it together (Is. 40:5).

Put away from you a deceitful mouth,  
And put perverse lips far from you (Prov. 4:24).

### Sub-genres of Hebrew Poetry (outline only)

- Hymn. The hymn has characteristic features. It opens with a summons to praise, usually followed by an address to the congregation.
- Royal (Messianic) Psalm.
- Lament.
- Song of Thanksgiving.
- Other genres.

### Conclusion

Clearly, poetry is a significant part of our religious experience as God-fearing and worshiping people. About forty percent of the Old Testament is in poetic form. The psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs we sing are poetry. I have learned some valuable lessons from this study.

- When prose writing takes advantage of some of the same creative uses of language as good poetry, it is improved. Each of us, I am sure, wants to do the very best job we can in communicating truth as effectively as possible with emotional and life-changing impact. That is one of the benefits I believe, I have gained from this study.
- The Example of Jesus as a Teacher
- The Imperative of Recollection and Memorization

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# Job

*by Raymond Fox*

The book of Job is about suffering. What can we conclude about the character and nature of God in view of the ever-present existence of suffering in our world? Although the problem of suffering is secondary to the book of Job, the narrative of Job's experience still stands as the clearest and most readable explanation of why God must permit the existence of suffering. Suffering enters the scene as a necessary element in a world in which man has free moral choice. The two themes, free moral choice and the existence of suffering, really represent two perspectives of what is happening in the life of Job. From God's perspective Job's trials are a vindication of man's free will, proof that man can serve God from a free heart. From the earthly perspective of Job and his friends, the problem is the existence of suffering in a world created by an all-powerful and just God. Their vision is limited because they do not understand what is really happening behind the scenes in heavenly realms. We, however, enjoy the privileged perspective the narrative provides us, seeing the suffering of Job is the result of Satan's accusation that man is not free.

The wonder of the book of Job is that it represents a certain sophistication beyond the times in which it was written. It was most likely written during the patriarchal period, around the time of Abraham. Consistent with patriarchal culture, Job, the father of an extended family, offers sacrifices for his children. Not until much later, after Moses received the law from Mt. Sinai, did priests serve as the only class of people allowed to offer sacrifices. Some agnostic critics have claimed the book is of much later origin, from the time of the captivity in Babylon or the restoration after the captivity; however, the suffering the nation of Israel experienced during the captivity was far different from Job's suffering. The people of Israel suffered because of their sin whereas Job suffered in spite of his innocence. Although ancient in origin, Job's message reaches far beyond the primitive times in which he lived. The message of the book is not just about one man, Job, because the implications of its truth touch the existence of every human being who has ever lived. The principal question of the book is whether it is possible for man to choose freely to serve God. As Satan, the antagonist of the story, put it, "Does Job fear God for nothing?" Satan claims that the only reason man serves God is that God blesses and protects him (1:10-11). Human beings, Satan claims, are irreparably egotistical in their service to God, interested only in what they can get in return. This is not true honor. True honor is given to a person because he deserves honor and not because the person honoring him hopes to get something in return.

### Job's Story

Job's character is central to the argument of the book. The central question of the book is, "Why do the righteous serve God?" Job is the case in point. The opening paragraph declares Job as "blameless and upright," a man who "feared God and shunned evil" (1:8). The life of Job is precisely the kind of case Satan needs in order to oppose the possibility of man's sincere and free relationship with God. If Satan can prove that, in the case of a true model of righteous service to God, such a man's devotion to God is not from purely spiritual motives, then he refutes the possibility of God's creation offering genuine worship. Worship would be just a sham, a shell covering man's corrupt, irredeemable, carnal nature. Man would not be spirit, only flesh. Man then would not in reality be the image of God. When Satan raises the question, "Does Job fear God for nothing?" he is, in reality, accusing (the name "devil" means "accuser") mankind of being incapable of worship and accusing God of deceiving Himself into thinking His creation really worships Him. Satan was attacking the very heart of man's relationship to God.

Thus, God gives Satan the chance to test His creation in order to establish the truth forever. The fact is that God must provide Satan this opportunity in order to vindicate the free moral choice of mankind. What happens in the life of Job is not some curious game or a bet played out for the entertainment of celestial beings. The free moral choice of man is at stake. Satan also has a personal stake in the challenge. Satan is one of the "sons of God," created beings, angels, who in fact have free moral choice. Much later Jude wrote about "the angels who did not keep their positions of authority but abandoned their own home" (Jude 6), and the Apostle Peter wrote of angels "who sinned" (2 Pet. 2:4). The created beings of heaven have free moral choice, too. They make the choice to serve God. Their choice, however, is not as free as man's because they are in the compelling presence of God in heaven. Nonetheless, there are some who rebel and choose not to serve God. Imagine! Here is Job, a righteous man, a much holier being than Satan ever hoped to be. The angels can never make such a free choice as Job makes. Because man is freer to decide to serve God, man's choice to honor God is an act of higher honor than the angels are capable of offering. The angels are compelled by the incomparable power of God's immediate presence to worship Him. Furthermore, when they rebel, their rebellion is ever more fantastic. No wonder Satan attempts to prove that Job's adoration of God is from impure motives. In response to Satan's challenge, God allows Job to suffer to vindicate His creation. Make no mistake about it, God allows suffering, not as a whim, not as a game, but to vouchsafe the free will of man.

When Satan begins to tempt him, Job's loss is incredibly profound and swift: first, his oxen and donkeys are stolen, and his servants brutally killed; second, a horrific fire consumes his sheep and more servants; next, more enemies strike, stealing his camels and murdering more servants; finally, a terrible wind destroys the house where his children were dining, killing them all, all happening within a brief moment, giving Job no chance to recover. But to Satan's frustration, "In all this, Job did not sin by charging God with wrongdoing" (1:22). Satan must try again. Next he robs Job of the only possession he had left, his health, attacking Job's body with painful sores from the top of his head to the bottoms of his feet, so complete was his suffering. Although Job's wife demands that he curse God and die, still, "in all this, Job did not sin in what he said" (2:10). Satan's only hope is that with the interminable passage of time Job's patience will wear down, causing him finally to deny God as Satan himself had done. Remarkably, what Satan does not realize is that the more he strips Job of what he possesses, the freer Job is to make a pure decision, free from material motivations, to trust God. Satan is making it easier for God to vindicate Job's freedom.

Job's question is, why? Why was he suffering? What had he done? "Why is light given to those in misery, and life to the bitter of soul, to those who long for death that does not come, who search for it more than for hidden treasure?" (3:20-21). Now, as if to add to his suffering instead of alleviating it, three of Job's friends come to visit him. At first, for seven days and nights, they remain in stunned silence upon seeing Job's tremendous agony. Eliphaz the Temanite is the first to speak in an attempt to console Job by explaining what is happening to him. Of course, Eliphaz in reality has absolutely no idea why Job is suffering. His actual ignorance, however, does not stop him from thinking he understands. His view is that Job is suffering because of some sin he has committed. With blind irony, Eliphaz says, "Consider now: Who, being innocent, has ever perished? Where were the upright ever destroyed? As I have observed, those who plow evil and those who sow trouble reap it" (4:7-8). Job is suffering, Eliphaz thinks, because he has sinned. God is punishing Job; and to have his life restored, he must discover the sin and repent. But here before Eliphaz' eyes is living evidence that this argument could not stand. Job answers him, "But now be so kind as to look at me. Would I lie to your face? Relent, do not be unjust; reconsider, for my integrity is at stake. Is there any wickedness on my lips? Can my mouth not discern malice?" (6:28-30). Job wants to justify himself, but he will later discover that one does not need to justify himself to God. God knows who we are.

Bildad the Shuhite and then Zophar the Naamathite follow Eliphaz in their attempts to convince Job that the root of his problem is sin and that he must

repent. For three cycles of conversations, the majority of the book's content is occupied by these friends each taking three turns to try to convince Job of his sin. These friends show how common this viewpoint is: that only the wicked suffer. Even in the time of Christ, concerning a blind man whom Jesus was about to heal, his disciples asked him, "Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?" (Jn. 9:2). Even today this is the first reaction to tragedy, "What have I done to deserve this?"

Job is not a stupid man but a very careful thinker. He easily refutes their arguments and grows only more frustrated in his search for the answer to the question of why he is suffering. Job knows he is not perfect, but the degree of his suffering does not correspond to the righteous life he has sincerely tried to live. The repetitious nature of his friends' arguments serves to graphically emphasize the limited understanding of human beings and the wearying hubris of not admitting ignorance but stubbornly continuing in fallacious views of human existence.

When these three seemed finished, a fourth friend, a younger man named Elihu, who had politely waited, now no longer can contain himself and presents another perspective to Job's quest for the answer to his suffering. He criticizes his friends for not being able to answer Job's questions and criticizes Job for trying to justify himself before God. Job's complaint that he does not understand why he is suffering implies that what is happening to him is not just. Elihu quotes Job as saying, "I am innocent, but God denies me justice" (34:5). On a certain momentary level, viewed outside the context of God's ultimate justification of His children, what is happening to Job is not just. Even God had said to Satan that Job, "still maintains his integrity, though you incited me against him to ruin him without any reason" (2:3). Yet on a more profound level, considering the final end of things, God is justifying the righteousness of Job by allowing him to prove his integrity for all time. Unfortunately, Job does not see justice from his limited vantage point in time. "Though I cry, 'I've been wronged!' I get no response; though I call for help, there is no justice" (19:7).

Elihu tells Job that God, the Almighty Creator, does not have to justify His actions to man. Because of our limited sight, we walk by faith in accepting the righteousness of the only righteous and true God, although His ways to us are inscrutable. "God's voice thunders in marvelous ways; he does things beyond our understanding" (37:5). Elihu's argument to Job is that God is by nature just. "It is unthinkable that God would do wrong, that the Almighty would pervert justice" (34:12). God is the Creator of the universe; He has defined the universe and, therefore, defined justice. As the Creator, God cannot but be just.

Elihu is absolutely correct in his reasoning with Job. At the same time, however, he does briefly fall into the trap of explaining to Job what God is doing in his life. Elihu thinks that perhaps God is disciplining Job because he trusts too much in riches (36:17) and that suffering is a way to draw Job back from the darkness of sin. Elihu's attempt at explanations, however, is ever so fleeting while he devotes the majority of his speech to defend the essential justice of God's character. Elihu's speech in fact leads us directly to the response that Job finally receives from God because Elihu introduces what God Himself will tell Job.

It is now Jehovah's turn to answer Job. When God finally does speak to Job, His answer is powerful, majestic, and at the same time, terrifying. From a mighty storm, a whirlwind, Jehovah speaks. "Where were you when I laid the earth's foundation? Tell me, if you understand" (38:4). Jehovah demands that Job explain to Him all the creative power and complexity that brought this world into existence and maintains it. Job is demanding explanations from the Almighty Creator of the universe. What right does the creature have to require answers from the Creator? The Creator speaks marvelous things into existence; therefore, why should the Creator have to explain anything to the creature? How can Job, the finite creature, demand of the infinite Creator an explanation for something that appears, from his limited earthly perspective, to be unjust? Jehovah's speech is magnificent!

Job is awestruck. "I am unworthy," he answers to Jehovah. "How can I reply to you?" (40:3). "Surely I spoke of things I did not understand, things too wonderful for me to know" (42:3). In a moment Job suddenly discovers that all his complaints and questioning represent nothing more than pride. He never curses God. He never gives up on God. He never does even accuse God of evil. But he falls to the common human error of not realizing the limits to his understanding, failing to recognize the sovereignty of God over His creation. He does, however, continually trust in Jehovah's power to answer and to redeem him from suffering. "I know that my Redeemer lives!" (19:25) Remember that in his primitive day, Job does not have the benefit of the miracles and resurrection of Jesus to prove the power of God to redeem. His decision to continue to serve God is intellectually founded upon God's existence and the logical necessity of God's justice.

It is of great importance to take note that God never does explain to Job what is really happening. God never says to him.. "Listen Job, this is what is going on. One day Satan came to me and said..." If God were to explain to Job that his motives are being tested, he would contaminate Job's pure service; and Job's self-examination, growth, and maturity would be stalled. To try to

understand is not our responsibility. Our responsibility is to react in faith and honor God for the only infinite Creator that He is.

In the end God punishes Job's three friends, Bildad, Eliphaz and Zophar, for speaking what they do not know about God (42:7-8). He does not, however, criticize Elihu. Elihu has spoken the truth about Jehovah. To Job, Jehovah restores double what he has lost. Job's material restoration is not the rule and certainly not a promise to all who are faithful. Countless faithful have died because of their faith. Others have died without "receiving the promises" (Heb. 11:13). By restoring Job's wealth, however, Jehovah demonstrates his ability to justify the just.

### **The Message of the Book of Job**

As readers of Job's biography, we enjoy a distinct privilege that Job did not have since we can see behind the scenes and consider the scope of Job's struggles. The window of heaven has been opened for us. We can understand the grand scale of what was really at stake in Job's trials: the vindication of man's free moral choice to serve God. God did not create us as robots, programmed to do His will. He did not predestinate some to do His will and others to reject Him. God has given to all, to every human being, the dignity of choice. Contemplate for a moment this dignity and self-respect that God offers us. The humiliation of being prisoners or slaves is that others rob the imprisoned and the enslaved of choices and thus take away the possibility for self-respect and dignity. We are not slaves in God's sight. God has given us the dignity of free will. We are most like our Creator when we choose to do what is right. God could have made us in His spiritual image but without free will; but in such a scenario, we would have never been able to offer Him sincere worship. What the experience of Job proves is why free choice and suffering exist side by side in all human experience. In God's plan for man, the dignity of free moral choice is most important, so important in fact that God is willing to allow us to suffer in order to vouchsafe our free will. If the existence of suffering bothers us, as it bothered Job, think for a moment what other possible worlds God could have created that might have eliminated the need for suffering.

For instance, imagine a world in which there is free moral choice but no temptation to sin. Clearly, in this actual world in which we live, the influences in favor of making the wrong decision are very powerful and the suffering that results from wrong decisions is very real. God did not ask Adam and Eve not to eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil and then make it impossible for them to eat of it, erecting, say, an insurmountable wall around the tree. Take away temptation and you take away the consequent suffering. Adam and

Eve, without temptation, would never have had to leave the original paradise; however, the fact was the tree was pleasing to look at and delicious to eat. A world without temptation would in reality be a world without genuinely free choice. For choice to be real, there must exist alternatives, and those alternatives have to be appealing on some level. If you had to make a choice between spending your vacation in Hawaii or in the middle of the Sahara desert, the choice would not really be a free choice between two alternatives because one of the alternatives is not appealing or tempting in the least. Temptation does not come from God, but He must permit it in order for our choice to be real and free.

Next, imagine a possible world in which there is sin and temptation but no suffering. In our world sin clearly causes suffering, even among the innocent. While the alcoholic himself suffers physically because of his drinking, his innocent children also suffer from his irresponsibility, his anger, and physical abuse that drinking creates. The populations of countries run by greedy, self-serving officials suffer famine and disease because of the sin of their leaders. So imagine a world in which suffering from sin is not possible. Such a world would require God's constant intervention. Bullets would become soft before reaching their target. Deceit, greed, and fraud would somehow leave the world unchanged. The laws of nature would have to be extremely flexible so that if a person jumped off a cliff without a parachute, he would fall gently to the ground. Sometimes a rock would be hard and at other times it would be soft, as when thrown at someone's head. Such an environment might be pleasurable, but it would not promote the qualities God wants us to have. There would be no fortitude, no courage, no kindness, no generosity, and no love of the "agape," self-sacrificing kind. The development of such qualities requires suffering. The experience of Job teaches that decisions are only the freest when we suffer in some way to make them. The story of Job makes us wonder what decisions we would make if we had to deny ourselves to live the Christian life.

Next, imagine the possibility of a world in which there is free choice, temptation, and suffering, but people suffer immediately for their sins. Job's complaint about the world in which we live was that the wicked do not always seem to suffer for their evil deeds whereas the innocent suffer unjustly. What would the world be like, however, if we were to suffer some consequence each time in the very moment that we sin? Such a system would be similar to touching a flame and immediately feeling the negative consequences, the pain of the burn. We would just react, respond without contemplation, acting only out of immediate self-interest, not much different from Pavlov's dogs. We would love God only because of inborn drives of self-protection and not be-

cause we have made a deliberate choice in the face of attractive alternatives. But this is the very sort of world that Job and friends thought existed. Job was crying for immediate justice, and his friends claimed that only the wicked suffer. In fact Satan himself claimed that man serves God hoping for some immediate material return. Fortunately, contrary to what Satan thought, God created us as the only moral creatures on earth capable of contemplating, considering, and evaluating alternatives, instead of just reacting in a stimulus-response manner.

The world in which we actually live is the best of all possible worlds. This world permits the free moral choice of man because alongside choice there is temptation and suffering, even the possibility of the temporary suffering of the innocent, and delayed justification and reward for the righteous. When the reward for doing good or the consequences of doing evil are delayed, the choice is freer. As one anonymous author writes, "To do right solely because it is right would scarcely be possible if the act were at once rewarded and the choice never costly." In this regard Jesus teaches in the parable of the "unjust judge" (Lk. 18:1-8) that if God were to answer our every request immediately and always to our pleasing, He would not find faith on the earth. Faith comes from waiting. When God delays His answer, He creates faith in us. The fact of delayed justification was one of the truths that bothered Job the most; yet it served to make Job's decision to remain faithful to God such a honorable and glorious one. (This same truth shows the utter repugnancy of what is called today, "the prosperity gospel," taught by certain blindly materialistic "pastors.") The ultimate punishment of the wicked one day will vindicate the justice of God. People who deny a final judgment and the possibility of eternal life for the redeemed have no way to deal with the suffering of innocent people and the temporary escape of the wicked. To them the universe is a wholly unjust place, and they have no remedy to save them from absolute pessimism. We, however, trust in God's justice and hope in His redemption. We also profoundly understand something that Job in his day could not completely understand because now we have the death of God's Son to assure us how just and mercifully God really is. When Jesus died on the cross, God was demonstrating how far He was willing to go to be just.

In view of the experience of Job, we can conclude from our humble human perspective that this world in which free moral choice exists side by side with suffering is the best possible world. This world has the power to create children for Jehovah who genuinely worship Him from the depths of their hearts. God values our free moral will so much that He is willing for us to suffer in order to make us into His image.



## Helping the Suffering

A secondary lesson we learn from the experience of Job is how to deal with suffering, not just our own suffering but the suffering of others. Certainly Eliphaz, Bildad, and Zophar wanted to alleviate the suffering of their friend Job. Their mistake was to try to explain to Job why he was suffering. Explanations can be consoling only if they are the truth. Job's friends spoke of things they did not know and served only to confuse Job and increase his frustration. The truth is there are many reasons for suffering. Some people do suffer consequences of their sin immediately. Such cases of suffering do not bother us as much. What bothers us is that while some people die of cancer after having stubbornly refused to quit smoking, others who smoke for years do not die of cancer, and still others who have never smoked and who have lived a healthy life die of cancer at an early age. Others who are innocent suffer because of the sins of family members or of enemies or of people completely unknown. Others suffer simply because we live in a world in which suffering is a necessary element. What we cannot do is speculate why a certain person in a certain place is suffering when the reasons are not clearly apparent. The story of Job teaches us that it is not our place nor within our knowledge to explain to people why they are suffering, no matter how much they might want us to.

What we can do is help people survive and live in the midst of suffering. We can weep with those who weep. We can bear their burdens. We can help them find new purpose when they suffer the loss of their purpose.

We can help them through their fear and doubts by giving them confidence in God's righteousness, not by explaining their suffering but by sharing Jesus Christ with them. Jesus is the proof of God's justice and mercy. Jesus came to show us that God suffers with us. Christ's arms and legs were not bionic. When the Innocent One suffered on the cross, His muscles screamed out in agony and His body wretched with pain. Furthermore, He was the Innocent One who suffered not for His own sins but on account of the sins of others. When the "man of sorrows" died on the cross, we learned that God understands what we experience and He is ready to heal us in due time. Our faith in Him is that He can turn our suffering into victory, just as He did in the case of Job - if not now, then later.

Therefore, the question we should struggle to answer is not, "Why do we suffer?" The question should be, "How should we live in the midst of suffering?" How should we react to suffering? Pain can either drive us away from God because He allows such misery or it can drive us to depend on God, realizing the nature of human freedom, the dignity God gives us, and the fact that this life is not all there is—that there will be a place without pain. That place,

heaven, will be a place where the children of God will worship Him freely, yet no longer in the face of sin, temptation, and suffering.

You may not think the book of Job necessarily applies to your life at this moment of time since you may not be suffering to any great degree. The book, however, is relevant to us even when we are enjoying a comfortable life because it has the power to call into question why we serve God. Read the book from the standpoint of allowing it to interrogate you and your reasons for serving God. If Satan made the same accusations in your case that he made in Job's case, would they be true? *753 Saucito Ave., Salinas, CA 93906*

# Psalms

by L. G. Butler<sup>1</sup>

To many people the Psalms are perhaps the most familiar and beloved of all the books in the Bible. Quotes from the Psalms are used in birthday cards, get well and sympathy cards, inspirational calendars and plaques; they are read at funerals, at bed sides of critically ill persons; and they have inspired multitudes of sermons and songs throughout the ages.

The title, "Psalms" in the English Bible, comes from an anglicized Greek word *Psalmos*, which is used in the Septuagint to translate a Hebrew word meaning "song" or "instrument of music." Vine defines the word as follows: "*psalmos*... primarily denoted a striking or twitching with the fingers [on musical strings]; then, a sacred song, sung to musical accompaniment, a psalm" (Vine, p. 497). In Rabbinic literature, they are sometimes referred to as "songs of praise" (Bromiley, vol. 3, p. 1030).

## Structure of the Book

The book of Psalms is actually a collection of one hundred fifty individual psalms situated almost directly in the middle of the Bible. In marked contrast to other books of the Bible there are no chapters; instead, each Psalm is an individual song.<sup>2</sup> These songs range in length from two verses (Ps. 17) to 176 verses (Ps. 119), with the most frequent length about eight to ten verses.

In the original Hebrew manuscripts, this long collection of 150 psalms was divided into five sections: Book 1 (1-41); Book 2 (42-72); Book 3 (73-89); Book 4 (90-106); and Book 5 (107-150). Each of these major sections closes with a brief prayer of praise. Many modern translations of the Bible, including the NKJV, retain this five-fold division (Lockyer, p. 885).

Through poetic form the Psalms exemplify Solomon's observation that "A word fitly spoken is like apples of gold in pictures of silver" (Prov. 25:11). Add to the beauty of the language, the depth of content and emotion, and the Psalms can touch us profoundly, deep within.

Our understanding of the Psalms and their potential to "teach and admonish"<sup>3</sup> us, can be enhanced by an increased understanding of their origins.

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<sup>1</sup> With assistance from Bryan Morrison

<sup>2</sup> As such, references should be, for example, "Psalm 22", not "Psalms chapter 22."

<sup>3</sup> See Col. 3:16.

## Authors

The question of who wrote the Psalms may at first appear to be very simple, but a closer look suggests otherwise. Although many people tend to think of David when they think of the Psalms, evidence in the brief descriptions appearing before many of the Psalms attributes them to several different people. These include Moses, David, Asaph, Solomon, the sons of Korah, Heman, and Ethan. About fifty of the Psalms have no author identified at all. The matter is further complicated in that at least some modern critics question whether David even wrote any of them (Bromiley). A discussion of some of the issues related to the authorship follows, along with information about each author.

### Moses

Psalms 90, a prayer, is attributed to Moses, whom we know as a prominent leader among the children of Israel around 1500 B.C. While he is best known as the author of Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy, the Scriptures also record: "Then sang Moses and the children of Israel this song unto the LORD, and spake, saying I will sing unto the LORD..." (Ex. 15:1). The words of the song are recorded in verses 2-19. It is not clear whether Moses composed the song, although the content and words suggest he may have.

### David

Seventy-three of the Psalms are attributed to David. However, some critics challenge whether or not he actually was the author of the Psalms that bear his name. Skeptics claim that the Hebrew word (*ladavid*) could be translated "to David," "for David," "about David," or "by David." There is a lot of discussion on this interpretive matter. Some people believe that one who lived the life that David did (i.e., with so much sin) could not possibly have penned the words to the Psalms. Unger summarized reasons supporting the view that David was the author of those attributed to him.

This position, despite the contention of negative criticism, is indicated by the following reasons: (1) David's name is famous in the OT period for music and song and is closely associated with holy liturgy (2 Sam. 6:5-15; 1 Chron. 16:4; 2 Chron. 7:6; 29:30). (2) David was especially endowed by the Holy Spirit (2 Sam. 23:1-2; Mk. 12:36; Acts 2:25-31; 4:25-26). (3) David's music and poetical gifts appear indelibly interwoven on the pages of OT history. He is called "the sweet psalmist of Israel" (2 Sam. 23:1). He was a skilled performer on the harp (1 Sam. 16:16-18). He was the author of the masterful elegy written upon the deaths of Saul and Jonathan (2 Sam. 1:19-27). He is referred to as a model poet-musician by the prophet Amos (Amos 6:5). (4) Much internal evidence in the psalms themselves

points to David's authorship. Most of the songs attributed to him reflect some period of his life, such as Ps. 23, 51, and 57. In line with this evidence of Scripture, a number of the psalms indicate Davidic authorship. The common expression *ledavid* is normally construed as indicating Davidic authorship. (5) Certain psalms are cited as Davidic in Scripture in general. Acts 4:25-26 so cites Ps. 2. Acts 2:25-28 so cites Ps. 16; Rom 4:6-8 cites Ps. 32. Acts 1:16-20 thus refers to Ps. 69, as does Rom. 11:9-10 (cf. Acts 1:20 with Ps. 109:6-20; also Matt 22:44; Mark 12:36-37; Luke 20:42-44; Acts 2:34 with Ps. 110:1).<sup>4</sup>

It appears that the personal tragedy<sup>5</sup> and pain that David experienced, including his human frailty and reliance on God, may have uniquely qualified him to write the Psalms. For a more in-depth discussion of this issue, see "Psalms" in Bromiley, 1979, vol. 3.

### Asaph

Twelve of the Psalms are attributed to Asaph (Ps. 50; 73:1-80:19). Although he is not nearly as well known as David, Moses, and Solomon, he held a very important position as one of the "chief musicians" during David's reign. He was a Levite, the son of Berechiah, and a descendent of Gershom (1 Chron. 6:39-43).

After David was appointed king, one of the first things he did was bring the Ark of the Covenant to Zion (1 Chron. 16:1-4). "David then appointed certain of the Levites to minister before the ark of the LORD, and to record, and to thank and praise the LORD God of Israel" (1 Chron. 16:4). "Then on that day David delivered first this psalm to thank the LORD into the hand of Asaph and his brethren" (1 Chron. 16:7).

In fact, Asaph's descendants would remain faithful to God for many generations. Several hundred years later, the children of Israel returned from Babylonian exile with the prophets Nehemiah and Ezra to reestablish the worship in Jerusalem. The children of Asaph were involved as the singers, just as their forefathers had done for David. "The singers: the children of Asaph, an hundred twenty and eight" (Ezra 2:41). The following passages also speak of the musical activity of the sons of Asaph during the period of rebuilding:

And when the builders laid the foundation of the temple of the LORD, they set the priests in their apparel with trumpets, and the Levites the sons of Asaph with cymbals, to praise the LORD, after the ordinance

<sup>4</sup> The New Unger's Bible Dictionary Chicago: Moody Press, 1988

<sup>5</sup> Including having his father-in-law (1 Sam. 19:8-20) and one of his sons (Absalom) (2 Sam. 15) attempt to kill him.

of David king of Israel. And they sang together by course in praising and giving thanks unto the LORD; because he is good, for his mercy endureth forever toward Israel. And all the people shouted with a great shout, when they praised the LORD, because the foundation of the house of the LORD was laid (Ezra 3:10-11).

Of the sons of Asaph, the singers were over the business of the house of God. For it was the king's commandment concerning them that a certain portion should be for the singers, due for every day (Neh. 11:22-23; cf. 12:46-47).

## Solomon

And Solomon's wisdom excelled the wisdom of all the children of the east country, and all the wisdom of Egypt. For he was wiser than all men; than Ethan the Ezrahite, and Heman, and Chalcol, and Darda, the sons of Mahol: and his fame was in all nations round about. And he spake three thousand proverbs: and his songs were a thousand and five (1 Kgs. 4:30-32).

It should not be surprising that at least two psalms (Ps. 72 and Ps. 127) are inscribed by him (although "Ps. 72 may be a prayer for Solomon rather than by him," cf. Bromiley, 1979).

## Heman

According to the title, one psalm (88) was written by Heman the Ezrahite. He was one of the three appointed by David to attend to singing in the worship. His family was also directly involved in the singing and worship.

All these were the sons of Heman the king's seer in the words of God, to lift up the horn. And God gave to Heman fourteen sons and three daughters. All these were under the hands of their father for song in the house of the LORD, with cymbals, psalteries, and harps, for the service of the house of God, according to the king's order to Asaph, Jeduthun, and Heman. So the number of them, with their brethren that were instructed in the songs of the LORD, even all that were cunning, was two hundred fourscore and eight (1 Chron. 25:5-7).

## Ethan

One psalm (89) is entitled, "a contemplation of Ethan the Ezrahite."<sup>6</sup> He was one of the singers appointed by David, along with Asaph and Heman. "So

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<sup>6</sup> Ezrahite "may be derived from Zerach, instead of Ezra, seeing that there were an Ethan and a Heman who were descendants of Zerach, head of a Judahite family (1 Chron. 2:6). There were also an Ethan and a Heman who were Levites (1 Chron. 15:17)" (*International Standard Bible Encyclopaedia*, Electronic Database, BibleSoft, 1996).

the singers, Heman, Asaph, and Ethan, were appointed to sound with cymbals of brass" (1 Chron. 15:19). Hence, he was a contemporary of David.

### Sons of Korah

Ten psalms<sup>7</sup> are ascribed to the sons of Korah. It is not altogether certain whether the original word in the title should be translated "of" or "for" the sons of Korah.<sup>8</sup> The "sons of Korah" appear to be descendants of the infamous Korah mentioned in Numbers 16. Korah, years before, had led an uprising against Moses and Aaron. When they rebelled, the wrath of God was shown as the earth opened up and swallowed them. Fire rained down from heaven and Korah, along with over 150 priests, were consumed. However, the Scriptures note, "Nevertheless the children of Korah did not die" (Num. 26:11). "Apparently, some of the descendants of Korah survived to become ministers of music in the tabernacle during the time of David" (1 Chron. 6:31-37) (Lockyer, p. 624). One scholar pointed out that the involvement of Korah's descendants in God's work is comforting: people can benefit by learning that even though their parents rebelled against God, the children were not precluded from serving well. The Psalms written by these men attest to the fact that they were involved in valuable service.

### Dates

Based on the information about the authors, we are able to date many of the Psalms. Psalm 90 by Moses would have been written around 1500 B.C., while those by David and his contemporaries (Heman, Ethan, and Asaph) would have been written around 1000 B.C. The content of other Psalms can help suggest a date. Psalm 137, for example, appears to have been written during (or shortly after) the Babylonian captivity (cf. vv. 1, 4, 8). While authorities differ regarding dating, the evidence suggests that they were composed over nearly a thousand-year period, with over half being written during David's lifetime. Due to the timeless quality of the Psalms it is probably not that important to spend much time on this issue.

### Audience

Many Psalms are addressed directly to God (e.g., Ps. 69, 71, 83, 88, 90), others to the children of Israel (e.g., Ps. 134), and some to all people of all

<sup>7</sup> Psalms 42, 44-49, 84-85, 87. Note that the title of Psalm 88 reads, "A Psalm of the sons of Korah ..." and "A Contemplation of Heman the Ezrahite." Could it be that Heman was one of the "sons of Korah?"

<sup>8</sup> For a discussion of this issue, see Bromiley, vol. 3, pp. 1032-1033.

nations (e.g., Ps. 117), calling on all creation to praise the Lord (e.g., Ps. 148). But in a larger sense, all of the Psalms are for all people (Ps. 148)—all who hurt, grieve, are anxious, are pondering the meaning of life, are staggering under the weight of sin (Ps. 51), or who long for words to express the deepest feelings and longings of the heart. While initially written and compiled for use in Israel's worship, the Psalms have such enduring quality that in the New Testament, Christians were instructed:

Speaking to yourselves in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord (Eph. 5:19).

Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom: teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord (Col. 3:16).

Is any merry? let him sing psalms (Jas. 5:13).

How is it then, brethren? when ye come together, everyone of you hath a psalm... (1 Cor. 14:26).

Even today many songs in our hymnals include psalms or psalm-based songs.

### The Authors' Purpose

While it is impossible to know for sure each author's purpose with great certainty, often it is possible to infer the purpose by looking at the various types of psalms. One useful framework identifies six different types of Psalms (Bromiley, vol. 3, pp. 1034-1035):

1. *Psalms of Praise, or Hymn*. Examples include Ps. 8, 29, 33, 104, 111, 113, 148.
2. *Individual Song of Thanksgiving*. Examples include Ps. 30, (34?), 66, 116, 138.
3. *Individual Lament*. Examples include Ps. 6, 13, 31, 39.
4. *Communal Lament*. Examples include Ps. 12, 44, 74, 79.
5. *Royal Psalms*, so named because it is thought that these were used on royal occasions. Examples include Ps. 2, 18, 20, 35, 40, 45.
6. *Wisdom Psalms*. Examples include Ps. 1, 32 (?), 37, 49, 119.

### Praise/Worship

It is interesting to note that of the 119 times the word "sing" appears in the Bible, seventy are in the Psalms. The word "praise" appears 158 times in the Psalms alone. The central role of God's majesty and sovereignty is reflected in that the word "LORD" is used 779 times in Psalms alone, an average of 5.193 times per Psalm.<sup>9</sup> From the first Psalm through the Psalms of ascent<sup>10</sup>

<sup>9</sup> The number of occurrences was determined by a computer search



(Ps. 120–134), the call to praise rises in crescendo, climaxing as it were in Psalm 148 with a call to all creation to “praise ye the LORD!”

### **Edification/Instruction**

As noted earlier, the Psalms were used for “teaching and admonishing one another” (Col 3:16).

### **Admonition (Warning)**

Admonishing one another with the Psalms (a putting in mind) is required (Col. 3:16) (cf. Vines, p. 13). Psalms 1, 15, 49, and 119 are especially poignant.

### **Help us find words when words fail us**

Often we have feelings we cannot identify and grope for better understanding. Poetry, especially the Psalms, can help. Allow me to offer a personal example. One night I was reading Psalm 102 to my wife, Priscilla, who, at the age of fifty-seven years, had to go into a long-term care facility. She had battled Parkinson's disease for over twenty years and had been in a care facility for more than three years. Parkinson's was taking its toll. When I finished reading, she said, “That is how I feel.” On inquiry I learned she referred to verse 24, which reads: “I said, O my God, take me not away in the midst of my days: thy years are throughout all generations.” Persons, especially when younger, who have a life-threatening illness or other major life circumstance, feeling their life being shortened, may find comfort, as my wife did, to know that “a man after God's own heart”<sup>11</sup> had similar feelings. Then, with increased assurance, they may pray: “Please, O Lord, don't take me away while I am so young.”

### **Cultural and Social Conditions**

Given the long period over which the Psalms were written (a thousand years or more), the cultural and social conditions varied. During Moses' time, the children of Israel were a nomadic people wandering in the Sinai Peninsula, recently released from slavery in Egypt.

During the days of David, Asaph, Heman, and Ethan, Israel was a developing nation, surrounded by warring tribes who frequently raided their villages, or outright attacked them. It is no wonder that David spoke so much about his enemies and his reliance on God in such troubled times. To get a feel

<sup>10</sup> Thought to be Psalms the people sang as they ascended the hill to worship in Jerusalem, known as “Songs of Degrees” in the KJV.

<sup>11</sup> That is, the psalmist David, Acts 13:22.

for the times, read about a small village, Keilah, situated about eighteen miles southwest of Jerusalem, recorded in 1 Samuel 23:1-6. Try to envision yourself living there as you read the description. Even though the town had gates and bars (v. 7), they would wake up to find their grain—on which they depended for food—had been robbed from the threshing floor (v. 1). Again, read of David seeking refuge in a cave (1 Sam. 22:1). Then read Psalm 142 to gain insight into his feelings. People living today with bars on their windows and awaking (or coming home) to find their property vandalized or stolen, or go to bed not knowing whether they may be raped or killed before morning, perhaps share feelings similar to those expressed by David.

During Solomon's time (Ps. 72, 147), there appeared to be mostly great prosperity, exultation with the magnificent new temple, and peace with the surrounding nations. Later, during the exile (Ps. 137), the children of Israel who survived the destruction of the temple and Jerusalem found themselves in a foreign land with broken hearts as they remembered their devastated homeland and the cruelty exhibited to their slain relatives. Some authorities feel that some of the Psalms were written after the exile during the period of rebuilding.

### Major Prophecies and Their Fulfillment in New Testament<sup>12</sup>

Many prophecies of the coming of Jesus appear in the Psalms. Consider the following chart for a list of some of these prophecies. It appears noteworthy that when man's weakness and needs are laid bare in the Psalms, Messianic hope is given through these prophecies.

Prophecy	Psalm	New Testament
Thou art my Son	2:7	Acts 13:33
Made a little lower than the angels	8:5	Heb. 2:6-10
Not leave soul in hell	16:10	Acts 2:27; 13:35-37
Trusted in the Lord	22:8	Mt. 27: 42-43
Delight to do thy will	40:7-8	Heb. 10:7
Familiar friend lift up his heel against	41:9	Jn. 13:18
Throne last forever	45:6	Heb. 1:8
Zeal of thine house consumed me	69:9	Jn. 2:14, 17
After order of Melchizedek	110:4	Heb. 7:17
Stone which the builders rejected	118:22	Mt. 21:42
Blessed be he that cometh in the name of the Lord	118:26	Mt. 21:9

<sup>12</sup> See Alexander and Alexander, 1973, pp. 329.

### Summary and Conclusion

In many ways, the shortest psalm (117) appears to capture the essence of the whole collection:

O praise the LORD, all ye nations: praise him, all ye people. For his merciful kindness is great toward us: and the truth of the LORD endureth forever. Praise ye the LORD (vv. 1-2).

It begins and ends with the admonition to "praise the LORD," as does the whole book of Psalms. The middle of this psalm, like the collection as a whole from Psalms 1-150, helps us (all nations, all peoples of all time) more honestly face (and own) our deepest fears, needs, and failures in light of God's truth, tempered by His great mercy. Then, as we begin and close each day, and ultimately our life, may we sing forth from the bottom of our hearts: "Praise ye the LORD!" "Praise ye the LORD!" 4503 53<sup>rd</sup> St., Lubbock, TX 79414

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# Proverbs

## Modern Wisdom From Ancient Writings

*by Taylor Joyce*

A quotation from the book of Proverbs was cited recently in support of an argument being made before the U. S. Supreme Court. Attorneys for the city of Chicago and the state of Illinois were arguing a case that began in 1995 with the arrest of forty-four year old Sam Wardlow. Eight Chicago police officers in four patrol cars had been dispatched to investigate narcotics sales in the eleventh police district. Officers in one of the cars saw Wardlow near the front of 4035 W. Van Buren. When Wardlow saw them, he took off running. The officers were able to catch him, and when a pat-down search revealed that Wardlow was carrying a Colt .38 caliber revolver loaded with five rounds, the officers placed him under arrest. Because of a prior felony conviction, Wardlow was charged with illegally carrying a weapon.

At trial, the defendant asked the judge to throw out the evidence, arguing that since the police had no reason to suspect him of having committed a crime, the search was unconstitutional. The judge ruled that the search was legal and the evidence admissible in the trial. The judge said the police had good reason to be suspicious of someone who runs from them in a high-crime area, where drug dealing is common. Wardlow was convicted and sentenced to two years in prison.

On appeal, the conviction was overturned with both an appellate court and the Illinois Supreme Court declaring the search unconstitutional. The state then appealed to the U. S. Supreme Court. In their argument before the high court Richard Devine, Cook County State's Attorney, and James Ryan, Attorney General of Illinois, stated their belief that unprovoked flight was indicative of culpability. They said that notion could be traced to Biblical times, specifically the book of Proverbs: "The wicked flee when no man pursueth, but the innocent are as bold as a lion" (28:1).

The uninformed frequently and casually dismiss the words of scripture as outdated simply because the last of those words were written two thousand years ago. Some of the book of Proverbs was probably written almost three thousand years ago. But as the above citation indicates the truth it contains is just as modern as tomorrow. Truth is eternal, and even ancient truths never become obsolete.

### **Authorship and Dates**

The authorship of the book of Proverbs in its entirety is often attributed to Solomon. However, there are indications in the book itself that other authors were involved in collecting the proverbs and probably also in composing some of them. The book begins with the declaration: "The proverbs of Solomon, son of David, King of Israel" (1:1). It is the first Old Testament book in which the author's name appears at the very beginning. Topics introduced in the first nine chapters are discussed at length, and several verses may be related to the same theme.

Beginning with chapter 10 there is a noticeable difference in structure. Two-line proverbs make up the bulk of this section, and the proverbs rarely bear any relationship to what went before or comes after. Since context is often crucial in interpreting written text, the lack of context in this section increases the difficulty of understanding the meaning. This section begins with the words, "The proverbs of Solomon" (10:1). Even though the structure is different, the authorship is the same. Since Solomon lived during the tenth century B.C. (961-922), these portions of the book would be quite ancient.

The next section begins with "Incline your ear, and hear the words of the wise" (22:17). Toward the end there is another similar statement: "These also are sayings of the wise" (24:23). There is no indication as to the identity of these wise men. Chapter 25 hints at yet another group of compilers: "These also are proverbs of Solomon which the men of Hezekiah king of Judah copied" (25:1). This collection would have been made two centuries after the death of Solomon (715-686 B.C.).

Chapter 30 is declared to be "The words of Agur son of Jekei of Massa" (30:1). Chapter 31, including the much-quoted description of the ideal woman, is introduced as "The words of Lemuel, king of Massa, which his mother taught him" (31:1). Of Agur and Lemuel, nothing is known except what is said of them here. It should be noted that some scholars think Agur and Lemuel are names that also apply to Solomon, but their reasons seem more ingenious than logical.

Since Solomon is described in scripture as the wisest man who ever lived and the author of three thousand proverbs (1 Kgs. 4:32; 10:23-24), there is no reason to doubt that most of the content of this book came from his hand.

### **The Term Defined**

**Webster's New Collegiate Dictionary** defines a proverb as "a brief popular epigram or maxim, adage." In modern usage a proverb is usually thought of as a short, pithy saying that has a moral or states a truism. The

meaning of the word as used in the Bible seems to be quite different. According to the authors of the Pulpit Commentary, the word is "derived from a root meaning 'to be like,' and therefore has primarily the meaning of comparison, similitude..." (vol. 9, p. ii). These and other authors consider the word *parable* to be a synonym of *proverb*.

The same authors suggest that there are four kinds of proverbs in this book.

1. *Metaphorical proverbs* enunciate some moral truth under a figure drawn from nature or life. They cite as examples: "In vain is the net spread in the eyes of any bird" (1:17); "Go to the ant, thou sluggard" (6:6); "Let a bear robbed of her whelps meet a man, rather than a fool in his folly" (17:12).

2. *Enigmas* are obscure questions that need thought to elucidate them, like the words of Agur: "Who hath ascended up into heaven, or descended? who hath gathered the wind in his fists? who hath bound the waters in a garment? who hath established all the ends of the earth: what is his name, and what is his son's name, if thou canst tell?" (30:4).

3. *Parabolic proverbs* present truths and things in allegorical shape, e.g. "Wisdom hath builded her house, she hath hewn out her seven pillars" (9:1).

4. Finally, there are *didactical proverbs* that give precise instruction on points of morals, religion, or behavior. Numerous examples are found throughout the book, especially in the first nine chapters. Examples would be: "Hear instruction, and be wise, and refuse it not" (8:33); and "Train up a child in the way he should go: and when he is old, he will not depart from it" (22:6).

### Purpose

The purpose and a general overview of the content of Proverbs are contained in the first six verses of the first chapter:

The proverbs of Solomon the son of David, king of Israel; to know wisdom and instruction; to perceive the words of understanding; to receive the instruction of wisdom, justice, and judgment, and equity; to give subtilty to the simple, to the young man knowledge and discretion. A wise man will hear, and will increase learning; and a man of understanding shall attain unto wise counsels: to understand a proverb, and the interpretation; the words of the wise, and their dark sayings (1:1-6).

The terms used in this passage have slightly different shades of meaning, but the bottom line is the author wanted the recipient of these words to "apply thine heart to understanding" (2:20); "to my knowledge" (22:17); and "to instruction" (23:12). The emphasis is on the reception of the wise counsel herein

given and to the practical application of these principles in everyday life. Clearly Solomon had a high regard for common sense and discretion and encouraged his readers to obtain a good education and to use their God-given intelligence to the glory of its Giver. For the person who takes Solomon's advice seriously, a sense of the divine will permeate every aspect of life, even the secular and mundane.

In view of the author's stated purpose it is not surprising that the book draws a sharp contrast between the wise and the foolish. As a note in **Thompson's Chain Reference Bible** suggests, Proverbs is "a collection of moral and religious maxims containing instruction concerning right living... a sharp contrast is drawn between Wisdom and Folly, Righteousness and Sin."

Among the characteristics attributed to the wise are the following: they limit their speech (10:19); they are soul winners (11:30); they listen to advice (12:15); they receive instruction (19:20; 21:11). It is not surprising that Solomon declares, "Wisdom is the principle thing; therefore get wisdom: and with all thy getting get understanding" (4:7). It has been suggested that *get wisdom* means *buy wisdom* since the Hebrew word carries the idea of a commercial transaction. A similar idea is repeated in 23:23: "Buy the truth, and sell it not." There is a price to be paid in terms of open-minded investigation, diligent study, and prayer (James 1:5).

In contrast with the wise, Solomon characterizes the fool as trusting in himself (12:15); turning a deaf ear to instruction (1:7); not profiting from discipline (17:10); acting on impulse (14:29); "making a mock at sin" (14:9); and almost impossible to change (26:11; 27:22). In this connection it would be well to note how the word fool is defined in **Unger's Bible Dictionary**, p.375:

The word is used in Scripture with respect to moral more than to intellectual deficiencies. The "fool" is not so much one lacking in mental powers, as one who misuses them... In Scripture the "fool"... is the person who casts off the fear of God, and thinks and acts as if he could safely disregard the eternal principles of God's righteousness (Ps. 14:1; 92:5-6; Prov. 14:9).

While the usual contrast in this book is between the wise and the foolish, sometimes it is between the simple and the fool. Wisdom personified cries at the gates of the city, "O ye simple, understand wisdom: and, ye fools, be ye of an understanding heart" (8:5). Let it be noted that the simple in this verse are not simpletons. As Morgan points out when the King James used this word "it did not mean one devoid of intelligence. The literal meaning of the word refers to having an open mind" (**Great Chapters of the Bible**, p. 359).

The frequent use of the word son has led some to conclude that Solomon originally intended this instruction for Rehoboam, his fleshly descendant.



Even though this may have been a part of Rehoboam's training, there is no reason to think it was only designed for him. In a general sense it might be better to think of this as a book that contains "what every boy should know." Ray Stedman viewed this as a text book to enable parents to carry out their responsibility for training their children as required in Deuteronomy 6:1-6. He said that while the acquisition of knowledge may be continued in school, it must start at home, adding:

We want our children to know the names of the natures of things.  
This is the beginning of science.

We want them to know how to count and to reason, and there you have the foundation of mathematics.

We want them to learn the relationships of cause and effect why one thing does this, and another does that --and there you have philosophy.

We want them to learn how to enjoy themselves, so there you have the arts and crafts and sports.

We want them to learn how to exert their influence properly upon other people, and there you have social sciences coming in.

We want them to learn how to use their imagination, which brings up the whole realm of literature and drama.

We want them to learn how to behave themselves responsibly, how to take responsibility for their own actions and not to blame them on somebody else, and there you have the humanities.

And above everything else—that which no school can ever impart—we want our children to learn how to handle failure and guilt. Nothing plagues human beings more than the sense of failure and the terrible agony of guilt. Therefore the one thing that Christian parents ought to be responsible for, above all else, is to learn how to handle failure and guilt, and to teach their children how to handle it also (from a manuscript by Ray C. Stedman copied from the internet).

Stedman suggests that Proverbs "is the book, more than any other in the Scriptures, which teaches us how to raise children."

Whether or not one agrees with Stedman, there is without doubt great value here for the Christian of every chronological age, there being no less than thirty-five direct quotations from this book or allusions to it in the New Testament (e.g., Rom. 12:16-17; 2 Cor. 9:7). And it should also be noted that Proverbs is not just a book for reading. It is a call to action. The words *path* and *way* and their plurals occur almost one hundred times. There are paths to be avoided, but "he that *walketh* in his uprightness feareth the Lord" (14:2).

### Hebrew Parallelism

Numerous authors have noted the usage of a literary device known as parallelism in Proverbs. This device is found in the literature of many cultures, but it is especially featured in Hebrew poetry. To quote again from the Introduction to Proverbs in the Pulpit Commentary: "Parallelism (is) the balancing of thought against thought, corresponding in form and often in sound, so that one line is an echo of the other. The second member is either equivalent to the first, or contrasted with it or similar to it in construction" (p. xxiv).

These authors distinguish between five different kinds of parallelism and provide examples of each.

1. "The simplest species is the *synonymous*, where the second hemistich merely repeats the first, with some little alteration of words, in order to enforce the truth presented in the former.

"He that is slow to anger is better than the mighty;  
And he that ruleth his spirit than he that taketh a city' (16:32).

"Jesus used this type of parallelism in the model prayer in teaching his disciples to pray, "Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven" (Mt. 6:10). The second sentence merely explains the first, declaring that the kingdom of heaven is any place that the will of God is done as it is in heaven. That explains why it is still appropriate for twenty-first century Christians to pray this prayer. Even though the kingdom came to Jerusalem two thousand years ago, it did not immediately go to the "uttermost parts of the earth." And as long as there are places on earth where the will of God is not being done, it will always be scriptural to pray, "Thy kingdom come."

2. "The *antithetic* presents in the second member a contrast to the first, bringing forward a fact or an idea which offers the other side of the picture.

"The labor of the righteous tendeth to life:  
The increase of the wicked to sin' (10:16).

"This, according to the authors is, the most common type found in Proverbs.

3. "*Synthetical* proverbs are such as contain two different truths...connected by some feature common to both.

"The fear of the wicked, it shall come upon him;  
And the desire of the righteous shall be granted (10:24).

The idea of the future is here the connecting link.

4. "Yet another type is "the *integral* proverb, where the second line completes the thought that is only begun in the first.

"The eyes of the Lord are in every place,  
Keeping watch upon the evil and the good (15:3).

5. "The fifth sort of proverb is named the *parabolic*, which is, perhaps, the most striking and significant of all, and capable of manifold expression. Herein a fact of nature or in common life is stated, and an ethical lesson grounded upon it. The comparison is sometimes introduced by particles.

"As vinegar to the teeth, and as smoke to the eyes,  
So is the sluggard to them that send him (10:26)."

The **Pulpit Commentary** authors also discuss the *numerical* proverb where a certain number is stated in the first line, which is usually increased by one in the second. They suggest that the climax formed in this fashion gives additional force to the sentence. An illustration of this type is found in these words:

There be six things which the Lord hateth,  
Yea, seven which are an abomination unto him (6:16).

There are several features of the book that are of special interest. The much admired description of the virtuous woman in the last chapter is written as an acrostic in which each verse begins with one of the twenty-two letters of the Hebrew alphabet, in the usual alphabetical order. This description is in sharp contrast with other references to women in Proverbs. Woman is elsewhere portrayed as the temptress of youth (6:24-26). As Fosdick said:

Despite its high estimate of womanhood, even the Book of Proverbs, in the many passages where it condemns harlotry, habitually lays the initial responsibility on the woman, as though man were only the poor victim of her wiles (p. 127).

There are also passages that represent home-life as spoiled by a contentious, jealous, and extravagant wife (21:9, 19). Fosdick offers another interesting comment:

The Old Testament reveals a strong sense of her worth as property, so that even in the late and beautiful description of a wife and mother in the Book of Proverbs, the commercial method of estimate is not excluded—"Her price is far above rubies" (p. 105).

The book omits any reference to the Jewish hope of a coming Messiah. When God's name is recorded, it is usually in the form of Jehovah rather than Elohim, and this is thought to be intentional in order to stress God's infinite qualities.

Other peculiarities include the following: The name of Israel is not found anywhere in the book; none of the Jewish religious festivals are mentioned; there is no mention of the Sabbath, paying of tithes, or idolatry. It is thought

these omissions were designed to enable the book to have an appeal and influence outside the Jewish community. It dealt with those universal qualities of morality which all good men, whether Jew or Gentile, could understand and value.

There is much said about relationships—180 different kinds of people are named. The right and wrong uses of the tongue are discussed in about one hundred verses.

Chapter 30 contains a series of foursomes; four generations each of which is characterized by a particular kind of wickedness; four insatiable things "that are never satisfied"; four things that are "too wonderful for me"; four intolerable things which the earth "cannot bear"; "four things which are little upon the earth, but they are exceeding wise"; and "four that move with stately bearing" (30:29, NIV).

### **Discipline for Children**

The variety of content and the limitations of time and space preclude a detailed exposition of this book. However, since the training of children is of such universal interest and since that topic is dealt with at great length in Proverbs, perhaps a brief survey of its teaching on this matter will suffice to show the richness of wisdom and knowledge contained therein. Note the following passages:

He that spareth his rod hateth his son: but he that loveth him chasteneth him betimes (13:24).

Foolishness is bound in the heart of a child; but the rod of correction shall drive it far from him (22:15).

Withhold not correction from the child: for if thou beatest him with the rod, he shall not die. Thou shalt beat him with the rod, and shalt deliver his soul from hell (23:13-14).

The rod and reproof give wisdom: but a child left to himself bringeth his mother to shame (29:15).

Correct thy son, and he shall give thee rest; yea, he shall give delight unto thy soul (29:17).

All of these fly in the face of modern theories about child raising. From Dr. Spock on down the notion has been given wide currency that childrearing requires a hands-off policy. Despite empirical evidence to the contrary, the theory suggests that spanking a child for bad behavior only encourages the child to engage in violent behavior as he grows older. The theory is that abstaining from corporal punishment will somehow help the child develop a sweet disposition and grow up to be a well-rounded adult. Religious instruc-

tion should also go out the window right along with the discipline. It is thought to take away the child's freedom to choose if the parent instills religious principles in his impressionable mind.

Samuel Coleridge, English poet, provided an excellent answer to that equivocation. A friend of Coleridge expressed the belief that children should not be provided religious instruction, stating that the child should have an open mind when he is old enough to choose his faith. Coleridge made no verbal response but invited his friend into the backyard to look at his garden. Noting that a part of the garden was badly in need of attention, the visitor said, "Why, you have nothing here but weeds!" The poet responded, "I didn't wish to infringe in any way upon the liberty of this plot of ground, so I gave it a chance to express itself and choose its own product." The guest got the point, and so should we.

Solomon says, "Train up a child in the way he should go: and when he is old, he will not depart from it" (22:6). The word *train* may be understood in two different ways. In verb form, it is the term used for breaking and bringing into submission a wild horse by a rope in the mouth. If this is the meaning of the word here, it would indicate that training involves more than mere instruction; that forceful discipline is a part of the educational process.

On the other hand, in Solomon's time the word was indicative of the action of the midwife in placing the juice of chewed or crushed dates in the mouth of an infant to stimulate the sensation of sucking. When placed in the mother's arms the child would begin feeding at her breast. Viewed in this light the word refers to creating a thirst and suggests that parents have the duty to inspire within their children an appetite for the things of the spirit. Jesus promised, "Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness: for they shall be filled" (Mt. 5:6).

The King James Version states that a parent is to "train up a child *in the way he should go*." This presupposes that the parent is familiar with the right way, since no one can teach another what he does not himself know. But there is another possible translation of this sentence—"train up a child *according to his way*." The Amplified Bible incorporates both meanings—"Train up a child in the way he should go (and in keeping with his individual gift or bent), and when he is old he will not depart from it."

This would require the parent to recognize that each child is unique and that the training must be adapted to the individual tendencies and temperaments of each child. Special parenting skills will be required to find out what is in each child and to determine how best to tailor life's lessons to the personality and characteristics of that child. Even when discipline is called for, it too

must be administered "according to his way." Deffinbaugh said, "A child who has disobeyed because he did not listen carefully to instructions should be disciplined differently from a child who understood directions perfectly, but willfully did what he wanted" (p. 2).

The final clause says, "When he is old, he will not depart from it." A misunderstanding of this statement has brought much grief to parents of wayward children. Because of the way it has been explained, many parents have been led to believe that if their children went wrong, it was due to the parents' failure to bring them up properly. This misunderstanding is based, first of all, on a failure to recognize the difference between a proverb and a promise. All things being equal, the outcome stated in a proverb may indeed come to pass. On the other hand, the outcome stated in a promise will invariably come to pass.

A second thing to be considered is that the Bible nowhere teaches the doctrine of the impossibility of apostasy. To say that a child properly reared cannot possibly go astray is to avow something that is contrary to the teaching of the entire Bible. This doctrine is no more repugnant when it is taught by our religious neighbors than when it is taught by some of our own brethren.

To be sure, parents will always have the duty to train their children appropriately. There will always be a need "to bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord." It will always be appropriate to adapt the training to the individual needs and propensities of each child. Therein lies the best hope of successful parenting. But just like Moses, when a child is "come to years," he must make choices. God willing, he may decide to "forsake not the counsel of thy mother" (1:8). But being a free moral agent, he may, like the prodigal, decide to wander into a far country, in spite of his parents training in righteousness during his formative years.

### **Lessons from Solomon**

While there is much to learn from and admire about Proverbs, we must conclude that its author did not practice what he preached. Deffinbaugh said:

It is tragic to observe that in spite of all that Solomon wrote concerning women, they were the cause of his downfall... This was not the only instance of Solomon's failure to heed his own counsel. After all the Proverbs he wrote on child-rearing he failed to raise a son who was wise (p. 7).

As noted in Thompson's Chain Reference Bible, "Solomon was a guidepost, rather than an example. He pointed the way to Wisdom, but in the latter part of his life he did not walk in it; hence his son, Rehoboam, followed his example, rather than his counsels and became a foolish and evil ruler."

In spite of Solomon's own failure to heed the advice he gave to others, many have found the teaching invaluable in the formation of their character and conduct. One such was William Jennings Bryan, a U. S. Congressman, Secretary of State, and three-time Democratic presidential nominee. He is perhaps best remembered for his role in the Scopes trial about evolution in Dayton, Tennessee, in 1925. He was noted for his oratorical skills and for his wisdom, which he attributed to some advice given him by his father before William left home for college. At his preacher father's urging, he determined to read through the book of Proverbs once a month for a year. He made the reading of Proverbs a habit throughout his freshman year and later concluded that this had been one of the major influences in his life.

The thirty-one chapters that make up this book lend themselves well to such a reading plan—a chapter a day. The person who seriously desires to acquire wisdom can do no better. *1713 Savannah Drive, Fort Smith, AR 72901*

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# Song of Solomon

by *Glen Osburn*

The title which this short poem assigns itself is, "The Song of Songs, which is Solomon's." If there is any book in the Bible which found a place in it by a mistake or misjudgment of those who put the inspired book together, it must be this; for it is so totally unlike all the rest that it is difficult to see what connection it can have with the general design of the whole. Many interpreters have affected to find in it a parabolic meaning, and even a foreshadowing of the love of the Church of Christ; while others have regarded it as nothing more than a love-song with a very obscure connection of thought. According to either view it has afforded little edification to the great majority of Bible readers; and unless some significance can be found in it hereafter which has not yet been pointed out, it will continue to be but little read, and of but little practical value (J. W. McGarvey, *A Guide to Bible Study*, 1897, pp. 75-76).

Some are thought to have questioned its inclusion in the canon because of (1) its descriptions of the physical body, (2) the absence of the name of God, and (3) the New Testament contains no direct reference to this book (Smith, p. 825). Some early Christians considered this book dangerous:

Jerome once wrote a letter to his disciple Paula to give her a Bible reading plan for her daughter's proper education. She should start with the Psalter, then proceed to Proverbs, Ecclesiastes and Job. The Gospels should come next, then Acts and the Epistles. She should then study the prophets, the Pentateuch and the Old Testament historical books. "When she has done all these she may safely read the Song of Songs but not before; for, were she to read it at the beginning, she would fail to perceive that, though it is written in fleshly words, it is a marriage song of a spiritual bridal. And not understanding this she would suffer from it" (Smith, p. 827).

Origen and Jerome tell us that the Jews forbade the Song to be read by any until he was thirty years old. (*Commentary Critical and Explanatory on the Whole Bible*, 1871, Robert Jamieson, A. R. Fausset and David Brown.)

Rabbi Akiba is reported to have said: "He who trills his voice in chanting of the Song of Songs in the banquet-halls and makes it a secular song has no share in the world to come" (Smith, p. 827). Adam Clark said, "I advise all young ministers to avoid preaching on Solomon's Song" (p. 849).

### **The Name of the Book**

The book is called the Song of Songs, or in the Latin "Canticles of Canticles" (Douay Bible). The Hebrew title, Shir Hashshirim, "The Song of Songs" (1:1), may mean "the greatest or sweetest of all songs," in the same way that "King of kings" (1 Tim. 6:15; Rev. 17:14) means "supreme king."

### **The Author**

After David's adultery with Bathsheba and the murder of her husband Uriah the Hittite, King David married Bathsheba. To them was born a son, Solomon, who was to inherit the throne of Israel. According to 2 Samuel, Solomon's other name was "Jedidiah," "Beloved of Yahweh" (2 Sam. 12:24-25).

Solomon's accession to the throne, his prayer to God for wisdom, his great wealth, his building of the temple, his prayer of dedication of the temple, and God's response are well documented, as well as his later falling away (1 Kgs. 1-11; 2 Chron. 1-9). Let us look back to the young, humble Solomon and his prayer to God.

In Gibeon the LORD appeared to Solomon in a dream at night; and God said, "Ask what {you wish} me to give you." Then Solomon said, "You have shown great lovingkindness to Your servant David my father, according as he walked before You in truth and righteousness and uprightness of heart toward You; and You have reserved for him this great lovingkindness, that You have given him a son to sit on his throne, as {it is} this day. "Now, O LORD my God, you have made your servant king in place of my father David, yet I am but a little child; I do not know how to go out or come in. "Your servant is in the midst of your people which you have chosen, a great people who are too many to be numbered or counted. "So give your servant an understanding heart to judge your people to discern between good and evil. For who is able to judge this great people of yours?" It was pleasing in the sight of the Lord that Solomon had asked this thing. God said to him, "Because you have asked this thing and have not asked for yourself long life, nor have asked riches for yourself, nor have you asked for the life of your enemies, but have asked for yourself discernment to understand justice, behold, I have done according to your words. Behold, I have given you a wise and discerning heart, so that there has been no one like you before you, nor shall one like you arise after you. "I have also given you what you have not asked, both riches and honor, so that there will not be any among the kings like you all your days. "If you walk in My ways, keeping My statutes and commandments, as your father David walked, then I will prolong your days." Then Solomon awoke, and behold, it was a dream. And

he came to Jerusalem and stood before the ark of the covenant of the Lord, and offered burnt offerings and made peace offerings, and made a feast for all his servants (1 Kgs. 3:5-15, NASB).

Now God gave Solomon wisdom and very great discernment and breadth of mind, like the sand that is on the seashore. Solomon's wisdom surpassed the wisdom of all the sons of the east and all the wisdom of Egypt. For he was wiser than all men, than Ethan the Ezrahite, Heman, Calcol and Darda, the sons of Mahol; and his fame was {known} in all the surrounding nations. He also spoke 3,000 proverbs, and *his songs were 1,005* *He spoke of trees, from the cedar that is in Lebanon even to the hyssop that grows on the wall; he spoke also of animals and birds and creeping things and fish.* Men came from all peoples to hear the wisdom of Solomon, from all the kings of the earth who had heard of his wisdom (1 Kgs. 4:29-34, NASB; emphasis mine, g.o.).

Of these 1,005 songs, we only have three: Psalm 72, Psalm 127, and the Song of Songs. Note that this Song contains the names of 18 plants and 13 animals.

Most commentators assign the date of the Song to the early part of King Solomon's reign (970-950 B.C.). At the time of the writing there were only "sixty queens and eighty concubines" (6:8); later there were "seven hundred wives, princesses, and three hundred concubines" (1 Kgs. 11:3). Solomon's early godly years were followed by a spiritual decline and an extended time in his life when he was not walking with God. Toward the end of his life, he apparently returned to close fellowship with God. Ecclesiastes seems to have been written toward the end of Solomon's life to give testimony of the king's searching for meaning in life. His conclusion is that life only makes sense when God is at the center of all we undertake (Eccl. 12:13-14).

### Ways to view the Book

#### A collection of songs or poems

Some think the book is not a unit but rather a collection of wedding songs used at wedding festivals and are still used today in some middle eastern countries. You can obtain contemporary CDs of these wedding songs. The difficulty of tracing the logical connection between the different parts of the poem, even in the Hebrew text, have contributed to the Song's being considered an anthology of love songs, perhaps by different authors, rather than a single work by one author writing with a unified plan.

But the "Song of Solomon" does seem to have a plot that develops. It is not likely that a collection of isolated poems would provide a story that coa-

lesces such as this. The unity of the book is demonstrated by the fact that Solomon's name is prominent throughout the Song (1:1, 5; 3:7, 9, 11; 8:11, 12), and by the recurrence of similar words, illustrations, and figures throughout its pages (2:16 and 6:3; 2:5 and 5:8). Furthermore, the bride's family—her mother and brothers—are consistently mentioned, but never her father (1:6; 3:4; 8:2).

### **A Love Ballad**

This view makes the Song an "epithalamium" (ep-i-thal-a-mium), or marriage song, recording the love and marriage of Solomon and his queen.

### **A Drama**

"It is not a drama in the theatrical sense, since the theater was not a Semitic institution, but a development somewhere between lyrical poetry and drama" (Bullock, C. Hassell, **An Introduction to the Old Testament Poetic Books**, 1979, p. 232). It would be something like a dramatic reading with identifiable speakers or, in this case, singers. "Origen (c. AD 250) first suggested that the Song should be interpreted as a marriage song in the form of a drama. Franz Delitzsch gave strong support to this view in the mid-1800s" (**The Wisdom Literature & Psalms**, James F. Smith, p. 823).

### **Summary of the Story**

Because of the difficulty of determining who is speaking, the plot is difficult to follow. Several speakers appear in the Song, though where each one enters is not always clear, especially in the English translation, which does not give the number and gender of the speakers as does the Hebrew. Some newer English translations provide this distinction (e.g., NASB, NIV, NKJV).

Unger, in his "Bible Handbook," summarized H. A. Ironside's description of the plot in the following way:

King Solomon had a vineyard in the hill country of Ephraim, about 50 miles North of Jerusalem (8:11). He let it out to keepers (8:11) consisting of a mother, two sons (1:6), and two daughters—the Shalamite (6:13), and a little sister (8:8). The Shalamite was "the Cinderella" of the family (1:5), naturally beautiful but unnoticed. Her brothers were likely half brothers (1:6). They made her work very hard tending the vineyards, so that she had little opportunity to care for her personal appearance (1:6). She pruned the vines and set traps for the little foxes (2:15). She also kept the flocks (1:8). Being out in the open so much, she became sunburned (1:5).

One day a handsome stranger came to the vineyard. It was Solomon disguised. He showed an interest in her, and she became embarrassed

concerning her personal appearance (1:6). She took him for a shepherd and asked about his flocks (1:7). He answered evasively (1:8) but also spoke loving words to her (1:8-10) and promised rich gifts for the future (1:11). He won her heart and left with the promise that some day he would return. She dreamed of him at night and sometimes thought he was near (3:1). Finally he did return in all his kingly splendor to make her his bride (3:6-7) (*Unger's Bible Handbook*, pp. 299-300).

Because the story is hard to follow, others have suggested different plots, and, therefore, different interpretations of the Song. Another popular view of the plot is put forward by Arthur G. Clarke:

There lived at Shunem (also known as Shulem) a humble family consisting of a widowed mother with two or more sons and a younger virtuous daughter, the maiden of the Song. The family seems to have had a double occupation. Besides shepherding flocks they had the care of certain vineyards, which they may have owned or held simply as tenants.

During the course of her duties in caring for the young of the flock the maiden became acquainted with a shepherd youth. They met one day about noon while resting their flocks at a woodland spot near the girl's home. It was here under the shade of a certain tree, which became a trysting place, that the shepherd first declared his love and found to his joy a response in the maiden's heart. Mutual vows of fidelity appear to have been exchanged.

According to Eastern custom, upon the death of their father the maiden's brothers, who were older, had assumed responsibility with the mother for arranging in due course their sister's marriage. The brothers did not look with favor upon the growing intimacy of the young couple and made efforts to hinder their communion. The purpose, no doubt, was to protect their sister's reputation and that of the family. The mother seems to have taken a more lenient view, not only encouraging the young people but later on at the same hallowed spot confirming the lovers' vows by a more formal pledge of betrothal.

One lovely spring day the maiden sets out to visit a nut garden in a favorite valley. She desires to enjoy the sight of the fresh verdant of the beautiful countryside. Suddenly and quite unexpectedly she comes upon King Solomon with his retinue returning from an excursion to his northern territories where he possessed gardens and vineyards. The king's observant eye lights upon the damsel and, struck by her unusual beauty, his too-susceptible heart immediately determines to make her a member of his already large harem. It is probable that she turned to flee, but by royal command is seized and committed to the care of the court ladies, then conveyed to a royal

residence or, as some think, to the king's pavilion at a nearby encampment....It is not at all unlikely that it is then that Solomon has her taken to Jerusalem where she is handed over to the care of the women. Amid the splendors of the royal palace the king renews his attentions. The Shulamite is first promised gifts of jewelry, and when this offer fails in its purpose she is later offered advancement in station among the ladies of the court circle. Her resolve, however, is unshaken. She preserves her maidenly dignity and remains loyal to her betrothed shepherd-lover from whom she has been unwillingly separated. All the king's blandishments, offered inducements, and all the luxuries of court life mean nothing to the pure soul of this country maid. Her thoughts constantly dwell upon her absent beloved. Her heart is full of him and him only.

Solomon comes at last to realize the utter failure of his importunate advances. It is something new in his experiences with the fair sex. Impressed by such virtue and constancy he grants permission to the Shulamite to return home. Joyfully she sends word to her beloved to come and escort her there. To this invitation the shepherd eagerly responds.

The story ends with a touching description of the homeward journey. Readers are permitted to overhear, so to speak, snatches of the lovers' conversation as they near home. They pass familiar spots and recall past experiences... (R. J. Kidwell & Don DeWalt, **Bible Study Textbook Series**, pp. 311-313.)

According to this theory, the scope of the book is to give us an example of virtue in a young woman who encountered and conquered great temptations, and was eventually rewarded. J. W. McGarvey accepts this view, saying:

King Solomon takes (the Shulamite) into his court and attempts by flattery and magnificent promises to separate her from her lover, to whom, however, she remains faithful and is at last restored. The book is a beautiful tribute to true and constant love, which no wealth can dazzle and no power can overawe. It is also a refreshing picture of the virtues to be found among the common people in an age of the greatest splendor and of growing corruption in the court of Solomon. The spiritual lessons of the book are not to be found in mystical allusions to Christ and the Church, but in the purity and constancy of love, lessons needed in no age more than our own (J. W. McGarvey, **A Guide to Bible Study**, 1897, pp. 75-76).

Are the shepherd-lover and Solomon different people, or are we to understand that they are one and the same? F. C. Cook takes the position that:

there is but one lover in the Song, and one object of his affection, without rival or disturbing influence on either side. The beloved of

the bride is in truth a king, and if she occasionally speaks of him as a shepherd, she intimates (vi, 2, 3) that she is speaking figuratively. Being herself a rustic maiden of comparatively lowly station she, by such an appellation, seeks to draw down him "whom her soul loveth" (i. 7, iii. 1-4), though he be the king of Israel, within her narrower circle of thoughts and aspirations (*The Bible Commentary*, F. C. Cook, p. 117).

Agreeing with this view, Keil & Delitzsch state: "The course of the exposition will show that the shepherd who is distinguished from Solomon is nothing else than a shadow cast by the person of Solomon" (p. 8).

### **The Song of Songs: An Outline**

- Courtship: Falling in Love (1:2-3:5)
- Wedding Day: United in Love (3:6-11)
- Wedding Night: Physical Love (4:1-5:1)
- Marital Reality: Struggling in Love (5:2-6:13)
- Marital Delight: Growing in Love (7:1-8:7)
- Marital Homecoming: Reviewing a Love (8:8-14)

Others have outlined the book based on the three "adjurations" of the book (2:7; 3:5; 8:4). Still others have simplified it to Pre-marriage, Marriage, and Post-marriage love.

### **Ways of Interpreting the Book**

#### **Symbolic View**

Some view the book as a symbolic allegory (not based on fact); others view the book as being symbolically typical (based on fact).

#### **The Jewish Allegorical View**

The Rabbinical view of the Song depicts God's love for Israel his wife. In contrast to the purity, joy, and vitality of the early love of Solomon and Shulamite, the book of Hosea gives us the striking contrast of latter-day Israel as the unfaithful and adulterous wife of God.

Still another allegorical view of the Jews is that the Song portrays the history of Israel from the Exodus to the age of Messiah (*Chaldee Targum* [oldest Jewish commentary], cited by Smith, p. 826).

#### **The Christian Allegorical View**

Many Christian commentators interpret the Song of Songs as a picture of the church as the bride of Christ (Clarke). To support this interpretation,

commentators cite several passages in the New Testament that show a correlation between the relationship that Christ has with the church and that a husband would have with his wife. Paul writes to the Corinthians, "For I am jealous for you with a godly jealousy; for I betrothed you to one husband, so that to Christ I might present you [as] a pure virgin" (2 Cor. 11:2, NASB). The figure of a woman typifying the ordinary believer is used in Romans 7:1-4:

Do you not know, brethren (for I am speaking to those who know the law), that the law has jurisdiction over a person as long as he lives? For the married woman is bound by law to her husband while he is living; but if her husband dies, she is released from the law concerning the husband. So then, if while her husband is living she is joined to another man, she shall be called an adulteress; but if her husband dies, she is free from the law, so that she is not an adulteress though she is joined to another man. Therefore, my brethren, you also were made to die to the Law through the body of Christ, so that you might be joined to another, to Him who was raised from the dead, in order that we might bear fruit for God (NASB).

Ephesians 5:22-33, noting especially verse 32, is often cited to show that an allegory exists between the relationship that Christ has with His church and that a husband is to have with his wife:

Wives, {be subject} to your own husbands, as to the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife, as Christ also is the head of the church, He Himself {being} the Savior of the body. But as the church is subject to Christ, so also the wives {ought to be} to their husbands in everything. Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself up for her, so that He might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, that He might present to Himself the church in all her glory, having no spot or wrinkle or any such thing; but that she would be holy and blameless. So husbands ought also to love their own wives as their own bodies. He who loves his own wife loves himself; for no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, just as Christ also {does} the church, because we are members of His body. For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and shall be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh. **This mystery is great; but I am speaking with reference to Christ and the church.** Nevertheless, each individual among you also is to love his own wife even as himself, and the wife must {see to it} that she respects her husband (NASB; emphasis mine, g.o.).

The assumption is made that since the husband/wife, Christ/church allegory exists, and since the Song of Solomon is about the husband/wife relationship, the subject of the Song must be prophetically speaking of Christ



and the church. In the Song of Solomon the King is given as a picture of Christ while the Shulamite maiden pictures the believer who is seeking a closer, more intimate relationship with Jesus. But there are some problems with this view.

The allegorical method of interpreting the book reigned supreme until the middle of the nineteenth century. Then the tide began to turn, primarily due to two reasons. First, a more sophisticated and biblical attitude toward human sexuality began to emerge. Second, the discovery of similar love poems in the countries surrounding Israel has caused scholars to realize that this type of literature was common to the region and the time. This diminished the likelihood that some special system of interpretation was intended for this particular love book. Third, the increasing realization that this method was totally subjective. Interpreters were more apt to find their own idea in the text than to discern the author's intent (Smith, p. 828).

Examples of allegory are presented by Smith:

"My beloved is to me a bag of myrrh, that lies between my breasts (1:13) is said by the Jewish commentators Rashi and Ibn Ezra to represent the Shekainah glory of Yahweh that stood between the cherubim in the Holy of Holies. The interpretation of 1:13 in Christian circles was that the bag of myrrh is Christ, and the woman's breasts are the Old and New Testament.

Another classic example of allegory is 7:2a which reads "Your navel is a rounded bowl that never lacks mixed wine." According to some allegorists, this represents the sanctuary of a church where the communion "wine" is always present (Smith, p. 827).

John Waddy records that some have believed the phrase "I am black but comely" (1:5) means "black with sin but comely through conversion," and "the 'fourscore concubines' (6:8) are heresies that have plagued the church" (p. 96).

The main problem with this view is that the writer of the Song does not infer that the book is to be understood in such an allegorical way. We must consider the intent of the author when interpreting the meaning of a biblical book. Please note that when the book of Revelation was written, a book filled with symbols, it was prefaced by a statement asserting that it was to be understood symbolically (Rev. 1:1).

### Literal

If you take the book literally, and this writer does, its design comes to orchestrate a celebration and exaltation of the virtue and honor of pure married love. John Waddy adds his belief that "it is a veiled protest against polygamy"

(Waddy, p. 96). The key passage becomes 8:7: "Many waters cannot quench love, nor will rivers overflow it; if a man were to give all the riches of his house for love, it would be utterly despised" (NASB).

The literal purpose of the book has often been twisted by those who are not prepared to read frank and intimate expressions of love. This book undercuts the two main perversions of biblical sexuality: asceticism and lust. Asceticism views sexuality as an evil to be avoided; lust makes it the hub of life. Song pronounces the divine "it is good" upon sexual attraction which leads to lifelong commitment and fidelity...If God created sexuality, why should the church stumble at the presence in her inspired canon of a song extolling the dignity and beauty of human love and sexual attraction (Smith, p. 831)?

God could have used medical terms or slang in speaking of sex. But medical terms cause a sense of awkwardness, and we react negatively to slang. God avoided both by expressing these delicate things in the language of poetry, symbols. Symbolism says more than medical or slang ever could, but without creating awkwardness or evoking negative reactions (Joseph C. Dillow, *Solomon on Sex*, p. 9).

Even if *Canticles* is merely a collection of songs describing the bliss of true lovers in wedlock, it is not thereby rendered unworthy of a place in the Bible, unless marriage is to be regarded as a fall from a state of innocence. If *Canticles* should be rejected because of its sensuous imagery in describing the joys of passionate lovers, portions of *Proverbs* would also have to be excised (Prov. 5:15-20). Perhaps most persons need to enlarge their conception of the Bible as a repository for all things that minister to the welfare of men. The entire range of man's legitimate joys finds sympathetic and appreciative description in the Bible. Two young lovers in Paradise need not fear to rise and meet their Creator, should He visit them in the cool of the day (*International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, Electronic Database, ©1996 by BibleSoft).

## Conclusion

I concur with an observation made about Song of Solomon by Jack Cottrell:

That sex remains essentially good even in the fallen world is clearly seen in a much-misunderstood Old Testament book, the Song of Solomon. Many Christians, laboring under the Augustinian error, have assumed that this Hebrew poem cannot be taken literally, because then it would have to be understood as actually talking about sex! Thus they have transformed the poem into a prophetic allegory depicting the spiritual love that Christ has for His church.

The fact is that this inspired book *is* about sex. It depicts, as one writer has said, "the intimate feelings and accents of married love." Even if it is intended to represent Christ's spiritual love for His bride, it still presents a positive view of the physical love between husband and wife.

The Song of Solomon, written mostly as a dialogue between bride and bridegroom, is not simply a blushing, grudging approval of marital sex. It is a virtual celebration of the delights of sexual passion and pleasure; it shows that a husband and wife can lovingly enjoy each other's bodies with the blessing of God (**Tough Questions—Biblical Answers, Part One**, 1985, p. 21).

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# The Book of Ecclesiastes

*by Wayne Fussell*

The book of Ecclesiastes is one of the most fascinating books in the word of God. Many feel that it is a puzzling book. Some consider it a melancholy book. One man told me, "It depresses me to read Ecclesiastes."

## The Author

Solomon is without doubt the author of the book. He was the most famous and powerful man in the world of his day. His wisdom and literary attainments were unequalled by any other. Though the book does not name Solomon, the things the writer says about himself best fit Solomon. Consider the first verse of the book: "The words of the Preacher, the son of David, king in Jerusalem." Solomon fits this description because he was truly the "son of David" and a "king in Jerusalem." Ecclesiastes 1:12 clinches the fact that Solomon is the author. "I the Preacher was king over Israel in Jerusalem." This has to refer to Solomon, for he was the only son of David who was the king over Israel in Jerusalem. (Rehoboam was a grandson of David who ruled over Judah in Jerusalem, but he did not rule Israel in Jerusalem.) Other passages suggest him by description:

I communed with mine own heart, saying, Lo, I am come to great estate, and have gotten more wisdom than all they that have been before me in Jerusalem: yea, my heart had great experience of wisdom and knowledge...So I was great, and increased more than all that were before me in Jerusalem: also my wisdom remained with me...And moreover, because the preacher was wise, he still taught the people knowledge; yea, he gave good heed, and sought out, and set in order many proverbs (1:16; 2:9; 12:9).

Solomon's personal history best fits the book. His great wisdom, wealth, and building projects fit the profile of the author. He was blessed with everything a person could want.

And God gave Solomon wisdom and understanding exceeding much, and largeness of heart, even as the sand that is on the sea shore. And Solomon's wisdom excelled the wisdom of all the children of the east country, and all the wisdom of Egypt. For he was wiser than all men...And he spake three thousand proverbs: and his songs were a thousand and five...And there came of all people to hear the wisdom of Solomon, from all kings of the earth, which had heard of his wisdom (1 Kgs 4:29-34).

Now the weight of gold that came to Solomon in one year was six hundred threescore and six talents of gold...Moreover the king made a great throne of ivory, and overlaid it with the best gold...And all king Solomon's drinking vessels were of gold...So king Solomon exceeded all the kings of the earth for riches and for wisdom. And all the earth sought to Solomon, to hear his wisdom, which God had put in his heart...And the king made silver to be in Jerusalem as stones (1 Kgs. 10:14-27).

These passages reveal that Solomon had an income of 666 talents of gold per year. One talent equaled 12.5 pounds; thus, his income was over four tons of gold. According to present day values, that would be about forty million dollars a year.

### **Date of Writing**

Assuming that Solomon is indeed the author, this would place the date of the book around 945 B.C. Solomon reigned from 970-930 B.C. We believe Solomon wrote Ecclesiastes near the end of his life and reign.

### **Purpose and Design**

The purpose of the book is suggested in the following passages: "What profit hath a man of all his labour which he taketh under the sun?" (1:3) "I sought in mine heart to...see what was that good for the sons of men, which they should do under the heaven all the days of their life" (2:3). Thus, the theme asks a question: What is the chief good, goal, or purpose in life? Solomon explores this theme through his experience, observation, reasoning, etc.

Throughout Ecclesiastes, Solomon affirms that all earthly life is vanity (empty, futile). The experiences of Solomon prove this. This book is a dramatic autobiography of his experiences and reflections as he searched for satisfaction in life.

The general thesis of the book is Solomon, the king of Israel, proclaims that life viewed from the earthly perspective is brief, empty, and meaningless. "I have seen all the works that are done under the sun; and, behold, all is vanity and vexation of spirit" (1:14). "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" (2:11). Thus, the book teaches the right relationship to this earth life. It leads away from love and interest in this world to God. The book shows the vanity (emptiness, uselessness) of all things when looked at solely from an earthly perspective. We might call Ecclesiastes "The Preacher's Search For Meaning."

Solomon could not find happiness and meaning in a worldly, sensuous life. Solomon saw earthly life at its best, yet his soul was never satisfied. He tried to find satisfaction in turning to a materialistic philosophy (1:12-18), but it all was empty. He turned to the pleasures of building (2:4), gardening (2:5), cattle breeding (2:7), art collecting and music (2:8). He tried wealth (ch. 6), and the enjoyment of a reputation (ch. 7), but he found all these vain and futile. He also tried every kind of sinful pleasure, such as sexual immorality. All was vanity and vexation of spirit (literally, "feeding on wind").

It is not a book Christians should ignore. In our materialistic society, there is a great need to understand its basic message. In our youth-oriented society, it is of special value as its message appears directed to the young.

The book contains *goads* and *nails*. "The words of the wise are as goads, and as nails fastened by the masters of assemblies, which are given from one shepherd" (12:11). A goad is a sharp stick used to prod lazy or reluctant beasts to move. The words of the wise man are designed to goad or prod our thinking. Words of the preachers ("masters of the assemblies") are given to nail or anchor our lives. These words come from the One Shepherd Himself, the Lord of heaven.

In this book we will find statements that prod our thinking and exhortations that provide stability and direction for living!

### Wisdom/Poetic Literature

Ecclesiastes belongs to wisdom and poetic literature. The Bible contains several different types of literature. The different kinds of literature serve different didactic functions. Wisdom/Poetic Literature is practical direction for obtaining substantial wholeness out of the brokenness of natural life. We see this in the books of Job, Psalms, Song of Solomon, Proverbs, and Ecclesiastes. Ecclesiastes affirms that the meaning for life is not in life, but in the One who gives life.

There were three classes of teachers in ancient Israel. Jeremiah names them in 18:18: "...for the law shall not perish from the priest, nor counsel from the wise, nor the word from the prophet..." *Prophets* spoke for God to Israel. *Priests* taught the law and maintained worship in the temple. *Wise men* gave sage counsel and advice about life. Theirs was a practical wisdom for godly living. Their wisdom was a gift from God—not just wisdom obtained from books and schools. This was the kind Solomon had (1 Kgs. 3:10-12). He was the wisest of the wise men.

Prophets spoke from the point of divine revelation while wise men spoke from reason's point of view, drawing their lessons from experience and obser-

vation. (We hasten to add that God guided the wise men who wrote scripture to give us a true and heavenly approved record of their findings.)

### **Introduction to the Book (1:1-3)**

Verse one: "The words of the Preacher, the son of David, king in Jerusalem." Solomon calls himself **qoheleth** (ko-heh-leth), or The Preacher. The term was translated "Ecclesiastes" in the Septuagint translation and means "the preacher or public speaker." Thus, the writer was a public speaker (an excellent one as we will see), a son of David, and a king in Jerusalem. Someone has suggested that the book may be one of Solomon's lectures that God chose because He deemed it profitable for all men.

From 1 Kings 11:1-13 we learn that Solomon became alienated from God. "For it came to pass, when Solomon was old, that his wives turned away his heart after other gods: and his heart was not perfect with the LORD his God, as was the heart of David his father" (1 Kgs. 11:4). Some of the preliminary conclusions expressed throughout the book may have been those drawn from his experiences while he was still alienated from God and searching for meaning. We conclude from reading chapter twelve that Solomon repented before his death, and so Ecclesiastes was no doubt penned toward the end of his life.

Verse two: "Vanity of vanities, saith the Preacher, vanity of vanities; all is vanity." The word "vanity" is used thirty-seven times in the book and means "emptiness; something transitory, unsatisfactory." This verse contains one of the themes and purposes of the book, *the vanity of all earthly things*. The book shows the disillusion and disappointment in what this world has to offer. It removes us from the love and interest of this world (1 Jn. 2:15-17).

Verse three gives us the question Solomon was trying to answer in the book: "What profit hath a man of all his labour which he taketh under the sun?" In other words, is there any value or profit for all the things we do on this earth? "Under the sun" is another key phrase. It is used twenty-five times and is important in understanding the message of the book. Solomon, in his dissertation, is looking at things from an earthly standpoint.

### **Chapter One**

In chapter one, we see how the preacher began his search for meaning in life. In verses 4-11, he saw the futility in the cycles of nature and life. He saw a world of general routine and unending monotony. "One generation passeth away, and another generation cometh: but the earth abideth forever" (1:4). He is observing how transitory man's life is. Though living today, he is quickly

replaced. His point is that man, the noble creature, quickly passes away while the crude materials continue. "The sun also ariseth, and the sun goeth down, and hasteth to his place where he arose...and there is no new thing under the sun" (1:5, 9). Solomon's point is that *nothing seems to change*.

Verse eight: "All things are full of labour; man cannot utter it: the eye is not satisfied with seeing, nor the ear filled with hearing." Solomon's point is that *nothing seems to satisfy*.

Solomon begins his search for meaning by using human wisdom (1:12-18). Having already been blessed with great wisdom from God, he used this wisdom to search out the value of human wisdom. He concluded that trying to find the life's answers in human wisdom is "feeding on wind" (1:17). Such wisdom was the source of much grief and sorrow (1:18). I do not believe we are to take his words as an indictment against all wisdom. There is a God-given wisdom for which one should seek (Prov. 2:1-9; Jas. 1:5). This kind of wisdom can bless one's life (Prov. 3:13-18). Solomon's words are, however, an indictment against *human* wisdom. *Human wisdom is a wisdom that seeks to understand life but leaves God out of the picture*. It is a wisdom that can only leave one gasping for the wind.

## Chapter Two

In the second chapter, we read of his efforts to explore the value of mirth, pleasure, wine, folly, the acquisition of wealth and great accomplishments. "I sought in mine heart to give myself unto wine, yet acquainting mine heart with wisdom; and to lay hold on folly, till I might see what was that good for the sons of men, which they should do under the heaven all the days of their life" (2:3).

*He made many things*. "I made me great works; I builded me houses; I planted me vineyards; I made me gardens and orchards, and I planted trees in them of all kind of fruits: I made me pools of water, to water therewith the wood that bringeth forth trees" (2:4-6).

*He acquired whatever he desired*, such as servants, livestock, silver, gold, treasures, singers, and "the delights of the sons of men" (2:7-8). (The *New American Standard Version* renders this last phrase, "and the pleasures of men—many concubines.") "But king Solomon loved many strange women... Solomon clave unto these in love...And he had seven hundred wives, princesses, and three hundred concubines: and his wives turned away his heart" (1 Kgs. 11:1-3).

*None of these experiments brought happiness*. "Therefore I hated life; because the work that is wrought under the sun is grievous unto me: for all is vanity and vexation of spirit" (2:17).



*The Preacher accepted life.* He tried life, found it vain, and hated it; yet he accepted it, and so should we. "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 labour. This also I saw, that it was from the hand of God" (2:24). This is a conclusion he drew six times in this book (2:24a; cf. 3:12-13; 3:22; 5:18-19; 8:15; 9:7-9). Note carefully: The Preacher is not promoting the fatalist view of "Let's eat, drink, and be merry, for tomorrow we die." He is saying to enjoy what you do and what God has given you. The will of God is that man should take life where he finds it and make the most of it.

*The ability to enjoy one's labor is a gift from God.* "This also I saw, that it was from the hand of God" (2:24). No one can truly enjoy life without God. For the first time, the Preacher has introduced God into the picture. Up to now, he has looked at life "under the sun" without God. He has sought for meaning through wisdom, folly, madness, pleasure and wealth. He could only conclude that "under the sun" all is vanity and a feeding on wind. But now, with God giving wisdom and knowledge and joy to a man, one can enjoy the good in his labor. Purpose and meaning for life is now possible. Thus, dependence on God for the enjoyment of life is established.

### **The Preacher's Observations**

In chapters one and two, Solomon bases his conclusions on experience. In chapters 3-6, he offers his observations. Consider some of his observations:

*All things serve God's divine purpose which man cannot always explain.* "To every thing there is a season, and a time to every purpose under the heaven: A time to be born, and a time to die..." (3:1-8). Solomon illustrates the constantly changing cycles of life by fourteen common examples of life. He neither recommends nor condemns any of the practices; rather he stresses one fact that today's positive act will be balanced by tomorrow's negative act. (As surely as one is born, just that surely one day he will die.) This is a part of God's inexplicable purpose for man.

### **What the Preacher Saw**

*Solomon saw the injustice and oppression of men.* He saw injustice in the courts of justice. "And moreover I saw under the sun the place of judgment, that wickedness was there; and the place of righteousness, that iniquity was there" (3:16). He also saw that God allows injustice to test the sons of men (3:18-21).

*Solomon saw the vanity of skillful and selfish work and concluded that it only breeds envy in others.* "Again, I considered all travail, and every right

work, that for this a man is envied of his neighbour. This is also vanity and vexation of spirit" (4:4).

*He saw the vanity of being alone* (4:7-12).

*He saw the vanity of popularity even of a king on his throne* (4:14-16).

*He saw the importance of proper worship* (5:1-7). "Keep thy foot when thou goest to the house of God, and be more ready to hear, than to give the sacrifice of fools: for they consider not that they do evil" (5:1). He advised that the worshiper conduct himself carefully, listen closely, and worship correctly. He warned about offering "the sacrifice of fools" and being rash with one's vows or promises (5:1-3).

*Solomon offered comfort regarding oppression.* He concedes the fact that oppression does occur, yet the preacher says, "Do not marvel." He says one should not be surprised even when there is oppression of the poor and perversion of justice (5:8).

*He offered caution regarding riches.* Riches are vanity because they are unable to truly satisfy (5:10-12). He warns about riches kept or hoarded to one's hurt (5:13-17). Solomon's counsel: Live the simple life; work hard; enjoy the fruit of your labor as a gift from God.

### **Counsel for Better Living**

Chapter 7:1-14 places emphasis on the word "better." "A good name is better than precious ointment; and the day of death than the day of one's birth" (7:1). In other words, honor is better than luxury, and one's death-day is better than his birthday. He declares that a funeral is better than a party; rebuke of the wise is better than the song of fools; the end is better than the beginning; patience is better than pride; the present is better than the past; wisdom is better than wealth; and resignation is better than indignation.

### **Counsel for Balanced Living**

In 7:15-29, it appears the Preacher is counseling against extremism. Solomon advises that we should avoid excesses in our lives. The Greeks had this motto: "Nothing in excess." Aristotle said that virtue is "the fine art of holding the middle between extremes." Paul urged, "Let your moderation be known unto all men" (Phil. 4:5).

*Be not over much righteous* (7:16). There is a righteousness to be avoided (self-righteousness). It is righteousness born of pride and arrogance (Lk. 18:10-14). The Pharisees were a classic case of being "overly righteous." In Matthew 23:1-33, Jesus condemned their hypocrisy.

*Be not over much wicked (7:17).* This is not saying that a little wickedness and folly is ever acceptable to God! Just because we know we will sin and act foolishly from time to time, we must not just give over to a life of wickedness and folly (cf. Rom. 3:23; 6:1-2).

*Do not believe or pay attention to everything people say (7:21-22)* (i.e., do not be overly sensitive to what folks say to you or about you).

### **Wisdom to Endure Life's Vanities (Chapters 8-9)**

In chapter 8, Solomon offers wisdom for enduring the governments of men. He says to submit to authorities for God's sake (8:2-3) (i.e., be a good citizen).

In chapter 9, he offers wisdom for enduring the inevitability of death. Death happens to all. It happens to both the righteous and the wicked (9:1-3). *When we die, we know nothing of what is going on here on earth.* "For the living know that they shall die; but the dead know not any thing, neither have they any more a reward; for the memory of them is forgotten. Also their love, and their hatred, and their envy, is now perished; neither have they any more a portion for ever in any thing that is done under the sun" (9:5-6). Those who teach that man has no immortal spirit that survives the death of the body have abused these verses. They fail to see that all of these phrases are modified by the qualifying phrase "under the sun." "The dead know not anything...*under the sun.*" "They have no more reward...*under the sun.*" "The memory of them is forgotten...*under the sun.*" "Their love, hatred, envy is perished...*under the sun.*" "They have no more portion...*under the sun.*"

The doctrine that the spirit of man ceases to exist beyond death contradicts several plain passages: 2 Timothy 1:10; Luke 16:19-31; Revelation 6:9-11; Ecclesiastes 12:7.

### **More Wisdom to Endure Life's Vanities (Chapters 10-11)**

In chapter 10, Solomon shows the harm of folly. He says that folly mars the finest of reputations (10:1). He also declares that folly often manifests itself in government (10:5-7).

In chapter 11, he shows *the value of benevolence*. Verses one and two are parallel, encouraging kindness and hospitality. "Cast thy bread upon the waters: for thou shalt find it after many days. Give a portion to seven, and also to eight; for thou knowest not what evil shall be upon the earth." He encourages benevolence without expecting anything in return. (When you cast bread on the water, you don't expect to see it again.) If one is needy, help him, expecting nothing in return.

Solomon, however, declares that when one gives without expecting anything in return, there are benefits of such benevolence. It provides blessings for the future—"for thou shalt find it after many days" (11:1).

### **The Conclusion of the Whole Matter (11:9–12:13)**

It seems that Solomon wrote the first eleven chapters of the book of Ecclesiastes just to write the words of these verses, which reveal the results of all his experiments.

He begins by urging 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" (11:9). Solomon assures young people that God wants them to have a good time. He wants them to be joyful, to do things that are pleasing. He declares that even with all its vanities, life is still worth living. Life is better than death.

While Solomon says, "enjoy life," he further warns, "Don't lose sight of the judgment." He hastens to qualify his recommendation to enjoy life by saying, "Know thou that for all these things God will bring thee into judgment." He is saying, "You will have to give an account for what you do. God will judge both the righteous and the wicked" (3:17; 12:14). Therefore, be selective in what you do to have fun! God has created man with the energy to enjoy life, especially when he is young. As long as that energy is directed in the right channels, youth is to be a time of great joy!

Along the same vein, the Preacher advises the young to *remove sorrow and evil*. "Therefore remove sorrow from thy heart, and put away evil from thy flesh: for childhood and youth are vanity" (11:10). Scholars say we have a parallelism here: You remove sorrow from your heart as you put away evil from your flesh. Sorrow comes because of evil and deprives one of the joys he should have in his youth. Enough sorrow comes without our help. Make sure that what we do does not add to it through youthful indiscretions. Youth, while short, can be a wonderful time of life. The key is to heed the next admonition, which has already been alluded to in references concerning the judgment and that is to...

### **Remember thy Creator (12:1–7)**

"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" (12:1). Solomon reminds young people that there are difficult days ahead. He calls them "evil days," the evil days of old age.

In verse two, he describes further the "evil days" in figurative language. "While the sun, or the light, or the moon, or the stars, be not darkened, nor the clouds return after the rain." He says to remember the Lord in the springtime of life - in the prime and prosperity of life. Remember Him while you have the world by the tail and a downhill pull. He uses the figure of clouds returning after the rain. This is a fitting description of the return of trouble. One problem is solved and another looms on the horizon.

Solomon warns young people of a time when age and death catch up to us. The Preacher uses various figures to depict the body in old age and death (12:3-7). He describes the process of growing old with some very interesting figures.

Then Solomon uses the beautiful language describing death. "Or ever the silver cord be loosed, or the golden bowl be broken, or the pitcher be broken at the fountain, or the wheel broken at the cistern. Then shall the dust return to the earth as it was: and the spirit shall return unto God who gave it" (12:6-7). This language compares life to a golden lamp bowl suspended by a silver cord. The cord snaps, the bowl crashes to the floor, and spills its light-emitting oil. (Light is a symbol of life.) The second phrase pictures life as a pitcher of water that breaks and the life-giving water runs out. The last phrase pictures life as a wheel or windlass that draws water out of the well which collapses. God made the body of man out of dust and to dust it shall return. Not so the spirit; the spirit returns to God.

### **The Theme Restated**

"Vanity of vanities, saith the preacher; all is vanity" (12:8). This theme is repeated throughout the book. You find it in the Prologue (1:2). It is stated prior to describing his search for meaning (1:14). It is repeated throughout the course of his search: the vanity of pleasure (2:1); the vanity of industry or labor (2:11, 22-23; 4:4); the vanity of human wisdom (2:15); the vanity of all life (2:17); the vanity of leaving an inheritance (2:18-21). It is found throughout his words of counsel and wisdom: the vanity of earthly existence (3:19-21); the vanity of acquiring riches over family (4:7-8); the vanity of political popularity (4:16); the vanity of many dreams and many words (5:7); the vanity of loving abundance (5:10); the vanity of wealth without the gift of God to enjoy it (6:2); the vanity of wandering desire (6:9); the vanity of foolish laughter (7:6); the vanity of injustice in this life (8:14); the vanity of the days of darkness (11:8); the vanity of childhood and youth (11:10).

The theme, however, must be remembered in its context. Solomon is referring to the vanity of life "under the sun." Life is viewed from the earthly perspective.

### The Epilogue

"And moreover, because the preacher was wise, he still taught the people knowledge; yea, he gave good heed, and sought out, and set in order many proverbs. The preacher sought to find out acceptable words: and that which was written was upright, even words of truth. 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" (12:9-10). The Preacher declares his ongoing work. He continued to teach others, and to seek for knowledge, truth, and righteousness. He warns the young man that there is no end to the writings of men. One could study them indefinitely and never find the answer to life's most pressing problems.

### The Grand Conclusion

"Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter: Fear God, and keep his commandments: for this is the whole duty of man. For God shall bring every work into judgment, with every secret thing, whether it be good, or whether it be evil" (12:13-14). This is Solomon's conclusion after a long, painful, and disappointing search for meaning, purpose, and happiness in life without God. Not finding it "under the sun," he was driven back to the teaching of his father, David (Ps. 115:11; 78:7). In this glorious conclusion, he lays down the gauntlet, raises the white flag, and surrenders to the power and leadership of God.

His conclusion, after many experiments with life, is to "fear God and keep his commandments." To fear God is to revere God, to hold Him in awe, to live in dread of displeasing Him. To keep His commandments is to reverently obey God. "This is the whole duty of man." "Duty" is in Italics in the **King James Version**, which means the word is not in the original text. The **New King James Version** renders it, "This is man's all." This makes one a whole man. This is man's reason for being, his prime directive for his existence.

### The Basis for this Conclusion

"For God shall bring every work into judgment, with every secret thing, whether it be good, or whether it be evil" (12:13). What a climax to this great book! In view of the coming Judgment, when every work will be judged, we should fear God and keep His commandments, for "this is the whole purpose of life" and the key to true happiness! 6126 Land O' Trees, Shreveport, LA 71119

# The Period Between the Testaments

## Jewish History, 420–5 B.C.

*by Jim Crouch*

While many Bible students have a general concept of the history of the Old Testament, there are few who possess a good understanding of the important events of the Inter-Testamental Period. There are a couple of obvious reasons for this: the information regarding this period is not as easily obtained as opening the Bible; and, since there is no evidence of inspired writings during this time, many assume that a knowledge of this period is unimportant. Therefore they do not pursue an understanding of this period.

The Old Testament Scriptures close with the Jews under Persian rule and just beginning to get re-settled in the land of Palestine; the New Testament opens in a totally different world with the Jews well-settled within Palestine and abroad, and under Roman rule. Jewish society itself is vastly different in the New Testament—synagogues, special interest groups (e.g., Pharisees, Sadducees, Herodians, Essenes), specialized religious positions (e.g., lawyers, chief priests, scribes), and new holidays (e.g., Feast of Purim, Feast of Dedication), confront the Bible student for the first time in the Gospels. In addition, the society itself is more urban, urbane, and mobile. With such far reaching political, economic, social, and religious changes having taken place, a student is wholly unprepared to understand and to appreciate properly the New Testament in its historical context without a basic knowledge of the four hundred years separating the testaments.

The intervening years between the testaments are often called "the silent years." However, these years were hardly "silent;" indeed, they were alive with activity and changes that served to shape the world of the New Testament. These years were "silent" in the sense that there is no evidence of inspired prophets or writings arising during this period.<sup>1</sup> Of primary interest to us is how these years shaped Jewish society; of secondary interest is how these events shaped the Mediterranean and Near Eastern worlds—in short, an under-

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<sup>1</sup> Some regard the books written during these intervening years as canonical (e.g., Catholics). The principle reason they were excluded by early Christians (and continue to be excluded by most groups claiming Christianity) is because they were not included in the Jewish canon. In other words, the Jews themselves did not (and do not) regard them as inspired writings. However, it is interesting to note that even the books themselves testify to the fact that they were written without divine guidance and acknowledge that no divine guidance was available during this period (cf. 1 Macc. 4:46; 9:27; 14:41). Josephus also states that no inspired writings were prepared during these years (*Contra Apion*, 1:8).

standing of the silent years gives us the historical background needed to put the New Testament into a proper historical context.

### Primary Sources

Although no inspired writings survive from the period of 420 B.C.<sup>2</sup> to the opening scenes of the New Testament, there are historical writings from the period. For the periods of Persian and Greek domination (420–175), we rely upon Josephus (a Jewish historian), Herodotus (a Greek historian), Xenophon (a Greek historian), and the surviving inscriptions and government annals in Persia, Mesopotamia, Egypt, and Greece.

For the Maccabean and Roman periods (175–5), we rely upon Josephus and Jewish Apocryphal books. The Jewish Apocrypha, comprising fourteen books that are regarded as generally accurate, though not inspired, was written during this period. Of special value are the books of the Maccabees. Of these, the book of 1 Maccabees generally is regarded as the most factual and free of embellishment. First Maccabees begins with an explanation of how the Greeks, under the leadership of Alexander the Great, came to control Palestine, and ends with the death of Simon Maccabeus (175–135).<sup>3</sup> Second Maccabees begins with the attack upon the temple by Heliodorus and ends with the victory of Judas Maccabeus over Nicanor (175–160).<sup>4</sup>

Josephus, a Jewish historian of the first century, wrote two works—**The Antiquities of the Jews** and **The Jewish Wars**. These works cover a period from 170 B.C. to 70 A.D., thus including nearly half of the Inter-Testament Period. The first six chapters of **The Jewish Wars** contains an overview of the Maccabean Period—Josephus uses this as an introduction and segue for discussing the events that led to the relationship between Rome and Jerusalem. In **The Antiquities**, Josephus devotes two books to the discussion of the Jews from the conflicts with Antiochus Epiphanes to the acquisition of Palestine by the Romans (175–63). Josephus claims to rely on 1 Maccabees as a principle source for the period from 175–135, and upon the histories of Strabo and

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<sup>2</sup> Unless otherwise noted, all dates are B.C. (before Christ).

<sup>3</sup> First Maccabees identifies the Romans as friends and references the history of John Hyrcanus, leading to the conclusion that the book was written sometime during the first century B.C. The tone of the book suggests that the author was a Palestinian Jew, orthodox in beliefs.

<sup>4</sup> Second Maccabees claims to have been based on the work of Jason of Cyrene written not long after 160 B.C. (Jason's work has not survived). This book also was written by a Palestinian, orthodox Jew, but it contains many exaggerations and miraculous claims causing much of its content to come under suspicion. Various dates for 2 Maccabees have been offered, ranging from the end of the second century to the end of the first century B.C.



Nicolas of Damascus for the period from 135–63. Unfortunately, these latter histories have not survived to our time.<sup>5</sup>

### **Nebuchadnezzar's Dream: Daniel 2**

In Daniel 2, King Nebuchadnezzar had a dream and desired someone to tell him the interpretation of it. The only problem was that he could not remember what the dream was about. Finally, Daniel, a Hebrew captive, was summoned. Through God's aid, Daniel was able to reveal the dream and its interpretation. Nebuchadnezzar had envisioned a great image that had a head of gold, chest and arms of silver, belly and thighs of brass, and lower legs and feet of iron mixed with clay. The interpretation of the dream was as follows:

Each metal represented a foreign empire that would rule over Judah until the kingdom of God would be established upon the earth. The head of gold, Daniel said, represented the Babylonian Empire. The next empire that ruled the land, overthrowing Babylon, was the Medo-Persian; this empire was represented by the silver chest and arms. The next great empire belonged to the Greeks, rising to preeminence when Alexander the Great crushed Persia; this empire was represented by the brass belly and thighs. The next and last great empire that ruled over the land before the establishment of the Kingdom of God belonged to the Romans; it was represented by the iron and clay of the lower legs and feet. Daniel says that in the days of this last empire, the Kingdom of God would be established upon the earth and would never be destroyed. This happened, as Daniel prophesied, during the days of the Roman Empire, and is recorded in Acts 2.<sup>6</sup>

The history of the period between the testaments involves the history of these latter three world kingdoms, for all three held sway over Palestine in turn during this period. Following Greek dominance and preceding Roman rule, there was a brief, but significant period of Jewish freedom. The purpose of this paper is limited in scope to the effect of each empire on the land of Palestine and the Jewish nation in particular.

### **Medo-Persian Rule (539–331 B.C.)**

The center of the Medo-Persian Empire was due east of the land of Babylon and due south of Media, roughly one thousand miles east of Palestine. The period of Median supremacy over Palestine lay between the years of 539

<sup>5</sup> Riggs laments that, though *The Antiquities* is the fullest record of Jewish history, it is not nearly as well written as Josephus' later work, *The Jewish Wars* (p. 7).

<sup>6</sup> Other prophecies from Daniel regarding this period are found in chapters 7–11.

(when King Cyrus overthrew the Babylonian Empire) and 331 (when the region was conquered by Alexander the Great of Greece). Before discussing the relationship between Persia and Palestine, a brief historical introduction is in order.

In 612, the Medes and Babylonians joined forces to overthrow the city of Nineveh and the Assyrian Empire. In the midst of the conflict, after victory was assured, the Medes pulled back and Nabopolassar of Babylon completed the task.<sup>7</sup> The Babylonians, under the leadership of Nebuchadnezzar, quickly began annexing the western provinces that previously had been under Assyrian sway. This included Samaria and led to the annexation of Judea (605-586). Meanwhile, the Medes were satisfied to establish themselves in the lands east of Babylon.

As far as history has preserved, Cyrus' political career began in 559 when he inherited the small kingdom of Anshan, a tributary to the Median Empire. When he came to the inferior throne, Nabonidus was the Babylonian king and Astyages was the Median king. In 550/49, Cyrus successfully revolted against Astyages and the Median capital, and thus became heir to the regions controlled by the Median Empire (viz., lands in Assyria, Mesopotamia, Syria, Armenia, and Cappadocia).<sup>8</sup>

Cyrus' success left four great world powers—Medo-Persia,<sup>9</sup> Babylon, Egypt, and Lydia. With speed and shrewd calculation, Cyrus set his sights on reducing the number of world powers to one. The first of these to fall was Lydia, which was centered in Asia Minor and controlled all of Greece. Croesus, King of Lydia, had consulted an oracle, which informed him that by crossing the Halys River to engage Cyrus in battle he would "destroy a great empire"—unfortunately, Croesus failed to inquire which empire would be destroyed (it ended up being his own).

By late 539, with his position in Asia Minor and in the lands east of Media having been secured, Cyrus turned his sights on Babylon, which he took without a battle. Cyrus led his armies into southern Mesopotamia and, in a calculated move, conquered the outlying towns that were poorly defended and

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<sup>7</sup> There is no record of why the Medes pulled out of the conflict. Some suggest there were problems back home that demanded immediate attention, or perhaps there were disagreements between the Medes and Babylonians in respect to how the battle should be brought to a conclusion (cf. Pfeiffer, p. 11).

<sup>8</sup> Some of these claims were in conflict with those of the Babylonians.

<sup>9</sup> The Medo-Persian Empire was made up of both Medes and Persians, as the name suggests. In Cyrus' day, the central power was focused in Media (Cyrus was a Mede), but in time the seat of authority would shift toward Persia.

met with little resistance. Realizing the inevitable, Nabonidus fled Babylon, leaving his son Belshazzar in charge. Because of the inept and unpopular rule of Nabonidus, most Babylonians actually welcomed the Median invasion. Cyrus' general, Gobryas (Darius in the Old Testament), marched into the city without resistance on November 13, 539 and had Belshazzar slain. Gobryas was subsequently made satrap of Babylon under Cyrus. When Cyrus finally arrive at Babylon a few days later, he pronounced peace on the city, and allowed it to continue under its own religious and social customs.<sup>10</sup> In so doing, Cyrus' subjects tended to be loyal.

The Babylonians, similar to the Assyrians before them, had the custom of taking captive the leading citizens of the cities they captured in an attempt to weaken the city against future uprisings and to acquire political leverage. Part of Cyrus' plan of normalcy included the return of all captive peoples to their homelands, along with their respective gods (images).<sup>11</sup>

Cyrus was kindly disposed toward the Jews who were being held in captivity, having a high regard for their religious ideals and practices. The Jews had no image of Yahweh that needed to be restored to Palestine, but there were temple furnishings that had been confiscated by Nebuchadnezzar—these were returned to Palestine with Cyrus' blessing, along with encouragement that the Jerusalem temple be restored.

In the first year of King Cyrus, the king issued a decree concerning the temple of God in Jerusalem: Let the temple be rebuilt as a place to present sacrifices, and let its foundations be laid. It is to be ninety feet high and ninety feet wide, with three courses of large stones and one of timbers. The costs are to be paid by the royal treasury. Also, the gold and silver articles of the house of God, which Nebuchadnezzar took from the temple in Jerusalem and brought to Babylon, are to be returned to their places in the temple in Jerusalem; they are to be deposited in the house of God (Ezra 6:3-5).

Many of the Jews who had been held in Babylon chose to return to Palestine under Cyrus' blessings and mercies. However, many others decided to

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<sup>10</sup> For the portion of Cyrus' own account of his capture of Babylon that survives, see *The Ancient Near East*, Pritchard, pp. 206-207 (ANET 315-316).

<sup>11</sup> The Assyrians transported captives to other captured cities, and repopulated the cities from which captives had been taken, thus, shuffling the population and making it difficult for cities to organize uprisings. Under this type of plan, the Kingdom of Israel was deported from Samaria to be scattered throughout the Assyrian Empire, and those transported to Samaria intermarried with those left behind, thus giving birth to the Samaritan race (2 Kgs. 17:23-24). The Babylonians tended to deport a smaller percentage of the population and housed them around Babylon under their watchful eye.

remain in Babylon or other parts of the friendly Medo-Persian Empire. They had been held captive there for nearly two full generations; thus, it was the only home that many of these Jews had ever known (cf. Mordecai and Esther).

This left only Egypt as a rival power. In 530, while campaigning along the eastern frontier, Cyrus was unexpectedly wounded in a skirmish and died soon afterwards. Cambyses, his son, succeeded him and made the reacquisition of Egypt his primary project, in keeping with his father's plans. Cambyses was successful and remained in Egypt for many years, adopting the Egyptian customs and making inroads into northern Africa. Hearing of problems at home, Cambyses began making his way back to Media in 522, but never arrived—he injured himself and died.<sup>12</sup> After a short period of conflict, Darius I, son of Hystaspes, a Persian, took the throne.

In the meantime, the work of rebuilding the temple in Jerusalem met with several obstacles—the Samaritans opposed the process through political subterfuge and physical force, and there was a short period of confusion while Darius, the new king, confirmed Cyrus' decree allowing the rebuilding process (cf. Ezra 6:7–8). Darius was a tremendous organizer who brought inward stability to the Medo-Persian Empire. However, toward the end of his reign, both the Greeks and Egyptians revolted, and he was unable to hold these western frontier nations. Darius was succeeded by his son, Xerxes I (Ahasuerus in the Hebrew). He squelched the rebellion in Egypt, but suffered a back-crushing defeat against the Greeks. The sole references to Xerxes I in the Old Testament are in Ezra 4:6 (where it is noted that Judah's neighbors filed a formal complaint with Xerxes I against the Jews), and the events recorded in the book of Esther.

Palestine remained under Persian Rule from 539–331, roughly ninety of these years after the close of the Old Testament writings. Insofar as history bears out, these latter years, while quite eventful for Persia, Greece, and Egypt, were relatively uneventful in respect to the Jewish nation (at least there are virtually no historical records from Palestine or records telling of events involving Palestine). The Jews were treated well by the Persians, both within the Persian Empire as well as in the land of Palestine.<sup>13</sup> Naturally, they were not a free people—they were still a part of the Persian Empire. But they were free to live in their own land, and worship the God of heaven, as long as they

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<sup>12</sup> Herodotus says Cambyses injured himself accidentally while mounting a horse; Persian records suggest suicide.

<sup>13</sup> The good relations between Persia and the Jews was likely due to the far-reaching influence of people like Mordecai, Esther, and Nehemiah who served in authoritative positions within the Persian Empire during the fifth century B.C.

recognized the supremacy of the Medo-Persian Empire and obeyed its laws. This friendly relationship continued until this empire began to weaken and fold in the middle of the fourth century under the conquests of Alexander the Great.

It should be noted that the Persian religion, Zoroastrianism, recognized a single supreme good (Ahura Mazda, "the wise lord"), and feared a single great evil (Angra Mainyu, "the hostile spirit") that stood in opposition. Their beliefs were much more dualistic than those of the Jews, and their beliefs in spirit beings was also much stronger. There has been much speculation concerning the degree to which Persian beliefs impacted Jewish beliefs and writings during the Inter-Testament Period (the Jewish Apocryphal books, written during the Persian and Greek periods, are much more dualistic than the other Old Testament writings).

During this period, the breach between the Jews and the Samaritans widened and solidified. At the end of his book, Nehemiah records the excommunication of the grandson of the High Priest Eliashib. He had married the daughter of Sanballat the Samaritan, and apparently he refused to dissolve the marriage (Neh. 13:28). Josephus records that Sanballat warmly received his daughter and son-in-law, Manasseh.<sup>14</sup> This Manasseh, being a religiously minded individual, convinced Sanballat to allow him to build a temple on Mount Gerizim and to establish Jewish worship there based on the Jewish law.<sup>15</sup> This rival temple, which still exists to this day, proved to separate the Jews and Samaritans for good.

It also may have been during this period that the institution of synagogue worship developed. The time and history surrounding its origin are unclear, but by the first century it was a common, significant part of Jewish culture. We might speculate that it had its origin in the period of Babylonian exile when many Jews were separated from Judea and the temple lay in ruins. The synagogue provided a means for smaller groups of Jews to gather to hear the law read and taught, and to engage in non-sacrificial forms of worship, including the study of Scripture and singing. The synagogue became a powerful influence in Jewish culture. In time, the average Jew only visited the temple on festival occasions and visited the synagogue for all other spiritual needs.

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<sup>14</sup> Josephus records the dates for Sanballat's governorship in Samaria as 336-331 B.C. It is possible that he is off on his dates by about a century, or it is possible that this is a different Sanballat whose daughter also married a descendant of a Jewish priest and was excommunicated.

<sup>15</sup> *Antiquities*, XI 8. Cf. H. H. Rowley, "Sanballat and the Samaritan Temple," *BJRL* 38 (1955-56), pp 166ff.

### The Greek Empire (331–198 B.C.)

The Greek city-states had been under Persian rule since 546. They had often made unification attempts in an effort to overthrow Persian encroachments. At times they had been successful, but full unity could never be achieved; thus, success was always short-lived. The Persians would bribe one city (e.g., Athens) into an alliance against the other cities, thus playing the cities against one another and weakening any Greek alliance.

The person to bring unification to Greece was an unlikely ruler in the province of Macedonia named Philip. Philip (382–336) was named regent of Macedonia in 359, and soon received the title of king. One by one, he convinced (by force, if necessary) the city-states to ally with him in the Hellenic League. By 338, all of the city-states were allied except for Sparta. With all of Thrace, Greece, and Macedonia under his control with united goals, he began preparing an army for battle against the weakening Persian position. However, before his plans could be realized, he was assassinated in 336 by his bodyguard, Pausanias.<sup>16</sup> His throne and his cause were taken up by his twenty-year-old son, Alexander.

When Alexander ascended the throne, there was some weakening of the Grecian coalition, with some unwilling to lend support to a leader of Alexander's age and lack of experience. They soon found that Alexander was not one to be tested. When the city of Thebes slaughtered a Macedonian garrison, Alexander completely destroyed the city and sold its citizens as slaves. Acts such as this convinced the Grecian city-states that Alexander, though young, was not one to be crossed. By 334 Alexander had reconfirmed the Hellenic League. Having accomplished his first goal, Alexander began making arrangements to carry out his father's plan to overthrow the Persian Empire.

Alexander immediately traveled to Asia Minor by way of the Hellespont with a large, well-trained army. He first captured Troy, and remained there for a respite and final planning (Alexander claimed to be a descendant of Achilles). He then marched his army through Asia Minor, "liberating" Persian-held cities as he went, often against the will of the citizens. When Halicarnasus refused to be liberated by Alexander, he ordered the city burned to the ground. Darius, not taking Alexander as a serious threat, sent a small army of Persians and Greeks against Alexander—in a close battle, Alexander emerged victorious and slaughtered the Greek mercenaries as traitors. In 333, he met and defeated Darius himself at Issus, convincing the Persian ruler to retreat to his homeland for reorganization and reinforcement of his troops.

<sup>16</sup> Plutarch's *Life of Alexander*, x 4; Diodorus xvi 94.1–4

By 332, Alexander had reached Tyre and there fought a tough, seven-month battle. In 331, he marched southward along the coast through Samaria and Judea, receiving no resistance. Tradition states that, as Alexander passed by Jerusalem, he was met by a group of priests bearing gifts. He was so impressed by the character of these Jews, that he granted favorable conditions for the Jews. Josephus claims that Alexander even offered a sacrifice at the Jewish temple following the instructions of the High Priest Jaddua.<sup>17</sup> By summer of that year, Alexander had conquered Egypt, where he founded a great city to his honor, Alexandria.

In the spring of 330, Alexander then marched eastward into the heart of the Persian Empire. He met the full Persian army just east of the Tigris River in Gaugamela, in the plain of Arbela. By the end of the year, the Persian army had surrendered in defeat and the Persian Empire, then ruled by Darius III, came to an end. Alexander's thirst for conquest was still not quenched. He continued his march eastward through modern Iran, Afghanistan, and into West Pakistan. Here, his army, exhausted from their travels and battles, convinced him to turn back toward home (some 3000 miles away!). History pictures a worn and depressed young man who arrived back in Mesopotamia, weeping because there were no more worlds for him to conquer.

Alexander would never return to Greece. While in Persia, Alexander grew bitter and suspicious. He died in Babylon in 323 from a fever speculated to have been associated with heavy drinking. In a short reign of only twelve years, he accomplished more militarily than any man before or since—He conquered nearly the entire known world. However, he did not live long enough to consolidate all the nations he had conquered into a political union. Since there was no one forceful enough to succeed him, his empire became fragmented as quickly as it had formed. Even so, he imposed upon the Near and Middle East a cultural unity that would last for more than a thousand years.

### The Significance of Hellenism

We should pause here to consider the significance of Hellenism in the lives of the Jewish people. Throughout the career of Alexander the Great, the Jews were treated quite well. He granted them the benefits of citizenship in Alexandria and other prominent Greek cities. Externally, everything was going fairly smooth, but life was far from peaceful internally.

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<sup>17</sup> *Antiquities*, XI.8.4–5. The accuracy of this account has been disputed, however, the fact that early writers do not dispute Josephus' account suggests, at least, that the relationship between Greece and Palestine began well.

Alexander did not conquer lands merely for political advantage—he was a strong believer in colonization, turning the whole world into Greek city-states under his control. He was educated at the feet of Aristotle from the age of thirteen, and the Greek ideals of this great philosopher were thoroughly engrained in Alexander. He regarded the Greek way of life as the only way of life. In many ways, he considered himself a missionary whose calling was to spread the Greek ways to those not yet enlightened. In his train, he brought Greek philosophers and scientists to the Near Eastern world, leaving them to carry out their tasks in each city that he conquered. The Greek way of life that Alexander spread was called Hellenism.

In many ways, Hellenism was directly opposed to the Jewish way of life: the Greek culture was centered in a fast-paced city life (life in the *polis*), while the Jewish culture was centered upon the farm and family unit. To the Greeks, life was an adventure to be enjoyed to the fullest. Pleasures of all kinds were not only considered desirable, but legitimate. As a result, Greeks excelled in sporting events, contests, arts, music, poetry and literature. Everywhere Alexander traveled, new Greek cities were built with stadiums, gymnasiums, theaters, temples, and market places to facilitate the Greek way of life. Manners and customs of the Greeks were vastly different from that of the Orientals. The dress was gaudy, with large collars and wide-brimmed hats to draw attention to one, and high emphasis was placed on fashion and style. Less obvious, yet more insidious, was the fact that Greek culture was based entirely on reason, leaving little to no room for faith.

Devout Jews considered the Greek customs to smack of conceit, egotism, and even evil. This new way of life was accepted by most of the people who lived under the control of the Greek Empire. The big question was, "Could the Jews accept Hellenism, and, at the same time, remain loyal to their faith?" Some of the Jews determined that they could. They became known as "Hellenists" or "Hellenistic Jews." However, others believed they could not accept the Greek culture, and rejected it at all cost—even death. This diversity of belief would prove to be a great thorn for the unity and development of the Jewish nation.

### **A Divided Empire: Life After Alexander**

Alexander's goal was to unify east and west in a stable, prosperous empire. He took the first steps by befriending Persian leaders after defeating them in battle, and even selected Statira, the daughter of the last Persian king, to be his wife. He encouraged his generals to make marital and business contracts with defeated nations. He established several Greek cities that would adopt and propagate the Greek language and culture in their respective regions. But



the ball scarcely got rolling before Alexander's early demise. After his death, there was no logical successor (Alexander had not planned to die at such a young age) and no man powerful and influential enough to manage the vast, burgeoning empire. Alexander's only heirs were a mentally deficient half-brother and a yet unborn child by his wife Roxana.

In the years that followed, there was a struggle for control among Alexander's military generals.<sup>18</sup> After seven years of struggle, four generals emerged and the Greek-controlled world was divided as follows:

Lysimachus	Northern (Thrace, Armenia)
Seleucus	Eastern (Syria and east) <sup>19</sup>
Ptolemy	Southern (Egypt)
Antigonus	Asia Minor
Antipater	Western (Macedonia)

The years immediately following this division of political power were restless. Within five years, civil war had broken out in Greece leaving all of Alexander's heirs dead. On the eastern front, Antigonus drove Seleucus from Babylon, extending his ruling portion to all of Asia, with aspirations of uniting all of Alexander's kingdom under his own rule. Lysimachus, Seleucus, and Cassander<sup>20</sup> joined forces and defeated Antigonus at Gaza (313), returning Babylon to Seleucus. The understanding had been that, after defeating Antigonus, Palestine would be awarded to Ptolemy. However, since Ptolemy failed to participate in the battle against Antigonus, the feeling was that Seleucus deserved to be awarded the land of Palestine instead, leaving Ptolemy to control southern Syria and Phoenicia to Ptolemy. This led to open dispute, since Ptolemy had already marched his army through Palestine, subjugated the cities as his own, and had begun collecting tribute.

The two kingdoms that had material effect on the Jews were the Seleucids (Syria and east) and the Ptolemies (Egypt), with Palestine lying between these two powers, caught in the middle of the land wars between the two. The unfortunate position of Palestine is outlined in the apocalyptic language of Daniel 11, with the Ptolemies termed the king of the south, and the Seleucids the king of the north.

<sup>18</sup> I,est Alexander's only legitimate son someday claim the right of succession, Cassander murdered Roxana and her son soon after his birth

<sup>19</sup> The division of Alexander's kingdom is prophesied in Daniel 8 (the four horns). Initially, Seleucus was a lieutenant under Ptolemy's direction, thus making four major divisions. Within a short time, however, Seleucus gained enough power to break away from Ptolemy's control.

<sup>20</sup> Antipater ruled in Greece proper, but died in 318 and was succeeded by his son, Cassander

**The Jews Under the Ptolemies (331–198)**

After the death of Alexander and division of rule was distributed to various generals, the land of Palestine fell to Ptolemy I (Soter), whose headquarters were in Egypt. Josephus records how Ptolemy marched his army through Jerusalem to the temple on the pretense of making a sacrifice, only to turn his military strength against the city to force its submission. He then deported a considerable number of Jews to Alexandria as a sign of force. At first, Ptolemy's treatment of the Jews was harsh; however, he soon came to appreciate their qualities.

The greatest difficulty for the Jews under the Ptolemies was the tax burden. The Ptolemies introduced tax farming to Palestine. Tax farming involved opening up the privilege of collecting taxes to the highest bidder. The high bidder could then collect as much in taxes as possible, as long as he paid the Ptolemies the amount he had agreed to give in tribute. Any shortage was considered a personal debt owed by the tax collector; any overage was the tax collector's profit.

Ptolemy I relinquished rule to his son Ptolemy II (Philadelphus) in 285, and died four years later. Ptolemy II was responsible for many advances during his reign (285–247). Under his leadership, the famous Pharos Lighthouse was erected. Also, he was responsible for building the great library in Alexandria, which contained more than 500,000 volumes. This library was the greatest center of learning in this part of the world for many centuries.

The Jews in Alexandria were given full rights as foreign citizens of the city, and they soon comprised a large portion of the city's non-Greek population. Within two generations, the Alexandrian Jews, rather than speaking their own Semitic dialect, were favoring Greek. In order to accommodate this transition, around 260 the Old Testament was translated from Hebrew into Greek. The Pentateuch was completed fairly quickly, with the remainder of the Old Testament Scriptures translated over the next several years.<sup>21</sup> This was an important accomplishment. Most of the world (including most Jews outside of Palestine and many Jews within Palestine) was speaking the Greek language. The translating of the Old Testament into Greek was therefore important for

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<sup>21</sup> A legend is preserved in the *Letter of Aristeas* that Ptolemy II had invited Jews from Jerusalem to translate the Old Testament Scriptures as a prized addition to the Alexandrian library, and that the seventy-two scribes selected, working independently, produced identical translations over a seventy-two day period. In actuality, the translation was made for the benefit of Greek speaking Jews in Alexandria.

the Jews. In addition, it allowed most of the world to learn of the God of heaven, and to appreciate the teachings of the Law of Moses.<sup>22</sup>

In 281, Seleucus was murdered and was succeeded by his son Antiochus I. The first conflict between the Seleucids and Ptolemies broke out in 275 with neither side victorious and a stalemate declared in 271. War broke out again in 261 when Antiochus II took the Seleucid throne, and ended in a formal truce in 252. As a token of the truce, Antiochus II took Berenice, daughter of Ptolemy II, as his wife (cf. Dan. 11:6). But problems developed because Antiochus, who was already married to Laodice, deposed her and her son in order to marry Berenice. Laodice poisoned Antiochus in 246 and had Berenice and her young son murdered. She then pronounced her own son, Seleucus II, the new ruler of the Seleucid kingdom.

By this time, Ptolemy III was ruling in Egypt, and naturally sought to avenge his sister's murder. He invaded the Seleucid kingdom, inflicted heavy damage, and returned with great wealth. Peace was restored again in 240. Seleucus II died in 226, and after a struggle for the throne, Antiochus III (223–187) took control of the Seleucid throne. This ruler became known as Antiochus the Great, for he attempted to recover much of Alexander's kingdom under his own rule.

In 218, Antiochus marched his troops through Phoenicia nearly to Egypt itself before encountering Ptolemy IV (221–203). Antiochus suffered a tremendous defeat and had to withdraw into Syria. But after the death of Ptolemy IV, who had no heir of ruling age, Antiochus again marched through Palestine and attacked. Over the next few years, Antiochus defeated the southern army and officially gained control of the entire southern stretch of land from Syria to the Egyptian border (198).<sup>23</sup>

### **The Jews Under the Seleucids (198–165 B.C.)**

Some in Judea, disenchanted with Egyptian control and heavy taxation, welcomed a change of control and assisted the Seleucids under Antiochus in the transition. Antiochus, in turn, granted the Jews many of the same privileges that they had enjoyed under the Ptolemies and gave them a slight tax reduction. The Sanhedrin elders gave Antiochus an official welcome; Antiochus responded by granting tax exemptions to these leaders and religious

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<sup>22</sup> Interestingly, the majority of Old Testament quotes in the New Testament are from the Septuagint, including the quotes made by Jesus Himself. This lends credence to the practice of translating the Scriptures into the common language of the people.

<sup>23</sup> Josephus, *Antiquities*, XII.3.3

freedom to the region. It appeared that the Jews would perhaps be even better off under the Seleucids, but the next thirty years would prove otherwise.

While Antiochus had been laying his plans for control of the Ptolemaic kingdom, Rome was under siege by the Carthaginian army led by Hannibal. Looking as if Hannibal would win an easy, though extended, war, Philip V, King of Macedonia, made an alliance with Hannibal that gave Greece control of the Adriatic region (215). Unfortunately for the Greeks, Hannibal was defeated by the Romans under the leadership of Cornelius Scipio Africanus at Zama (202). Meanwhile, the Roman colonies of the Aegean were asking for help against the invading Greeks. Rome was mindful of Greece's alliance with Carthage and their attack on Roman territories during the war, and turned their attention eastward. In an effort to spread disunity among the Greeks, the Romans promised freedom for the city-states in 198, and were then able to defeat Philip V soundly at Thessaly, restricting him to his home Macedonian province (197).

These western battles are pertinent to our study because Antiochus the Great became involved. When Hannibal was defeated at Zama (202), he sought, and was granted, exile in Syria under Antiochus. Here, he attempted to stir Antiochus against Rome. By 194, some of the Greek city-states (the Aetolian League) had grown dissatisfied with the restrictions placed upon them by the Romans and invited Antiochus to bring his army westward to free them from Roman oversight. In 192, Antiochus arrived in Greece with his armed forces and declared himself ruler of Euboea and part of Thessaly. In 190, the Roman fleet arrived and destroyed the Syrian fleet at Thermopylae. Cornelius Scipio (Asiaticus), commander of the Roman forces, then pursued Antiochus into Asia and routed his army at the Battle of Magnesia. In the resulting Peace of Apamea, Antiochus agreed to renounce claims to all lands west of the Taurus range, not to recruit any soldiers from Greece or the Aegean territories, to surrender his elephants and what remained of his naval fleet, and to pay an indemnity of 15,000 talents over the next twelve years. Several choice youths were taken to Rome as hostages to be held in lieu of payment of debts, including Antiochus' younger son, Antiochus IV.<sup>24</sup>

The debt levied against Antiochus was the greatest known to ancient history, and presented a tremendous burden on the weakened Seleucid empire, especially with some of the wealthier cities surrendered as a result of the treaty with Rome. In an effort to gain funds to pay the debt, Antiochus attempted to rob some of the temples in the cities still under his control. While engaged in

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<sup>24</sup> 1 Macc. 1:10; 8:6-8, Josephus, *Antiquities*, xii.10.6

this sacrilegious activity in Susiana (formerly Elam). Antiochus was killed by the enraged citizens (187).

Antiochus the Great was succeeded by his elder son, Seleucus IV "Philopater," who now inherited the unenviable task of raising large sums of money to continue the yearly installments to Rome. The only feasible way to do this was to raise taxes on all the cities still held under Seleucid rule (cf. Dan. 11:20). But the hard years for the Jews began in 175, when Antiochus Epiphanes took the throne (175-168).

Antiochus IV "Epiphanes"<sup>25</sup> was the younger son of Antiochus III. He had grown up in Rome, held there as a hostage in lieu of payments owed by the Seleucid Empire. The payments had fallen into arrears, yet after twelve years the Romans agreed to release Antiochus on the condition that Seleucus' younger son, Demetrius, would take his place. The arrangements were made and Antiochus was released. While Antiochus and Demetrius were away, Seleucus IV "Philopater" was murdered by his chancellor, Heliodorus, who pronounced himself king in the name of Seleucus' younger son (also named Antiochus). On his way home, while Antiochus IV was spending some time in Athens enjoying the beauty of the fatherland and making political alliances, he received word of the death of his brother. With the help of borrowed troops, Antiochus defeated the usurper Heliodorus and took control of the Seleucid empire, pronouncing himself king in 175.

Antiochus Epiphanes (meaning "the great appearance," nicknamed "Epimanes," "madman," by Orthodox Jews) was passionately devoted to the Hellenistic culture, and his ambition was to propagate its philosophy upon all the subjects of his kingdom. This ambition was sparked further by the cultural division within his empire that tended to hinder his political and military goals. The Greek culture had already given rise to tremendous changes in the Jewish culture outside of Judea, and within Judea proper the people were divided over the nature of Hellenism, some thinking it evil, others thinking it to be progressive and harmless.

When Antiochus began his reign, Jerusalem was governed by the High Priest, Onias III, a strict, orthodox Jew, opposed to Hellenism. To Antiochus, the High Priest office was a political office; to the orthodox Jew, it was a religious office. As king, Antiochus naturally wanted a sympathetic Hellenist ruling Judea who would be loyal to him and carry out his plan of Hellenizing the land. Therefore, when Jason, Onias' brother, promised to collect a higher

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<sup>25</sup> The relationship of Antiochus to Palestinian Jews is prophesied in remarkable detail in Daniel 8 (the little horn) and Daniel 11 (the northern king)

tribute from the people (Antiochus needed money), he deposed Onias and appointed Jason as High Priest in 174. To the Jews, giving this spiritually significant office to the highest bidder was deplorable.

Jason encouraged Hellenism in Judea. A gymnasium was built in Jerusalem, where the Jewish children exercised and danced in the nude, according to the Greek culture; the children received Greek names to replace their Jewish names; and Antiochus gave his Jewish followers the title of Antiochites, seeing himself as their cultural father. Jason further enraged the orthodox Jews by sending a gift of three hundred talents of gold to Tyre during their celebration in honor of their protector deity, Heracles (174).<sup>26</sup> Officially, he dedicated his gift to Antiochus personally and not to the pagan deity, yet this seemed only a semantic point.

In 171, Jason sent his usual tribute to Antiochus by the hands of Menelaus. But when Menelaus arrived in Antioch, he negotiated with Antiochus to pay an even higher annual tribute and to adopt an even more rigorous Hellenization program in exchange for the High Priest office. Antiochus agreed.<sup>27</sup> This further enraged the people, for Menelaus was of the tribe of Benjamin and, therefore, had no right to the priesthood. The High Priesthood had truly become a puppet position open to the highest bidder.

In 170/169, war erupted once again between the Ptolemies and the Seleucids. This was a politically dangerous matter for Antiochus, as his treaty with Rome required him not to attack any Roman territory, and Egypt had been adopted as such. Therefore, he had to make sure that his fight was defensive in nature. As the battles continued, he had a need for more revenue. In a move that still further enraged the orthodox Jews, Menelaus invited Antiochus to enter the temple and remove any treasures he desired. The sacred vessels and dedications extracted equaled a sum of around 1800 talents of gold.

By spring, though the battles had largely gone his way, Antiochus became impatient. He pushed into Egypt and laid siege to Alexandria. Little to his knowledge, the Romans had recently finished a third confrontation with Carthage and had received a request for help from their Egyptian friends. By the time Antiochus arrived in Alexandria, a Roman army, led by Lucius Popillius Laenas, was awaiting his arrival. Laenas and Antiochus were old friends from when Antiochus had spent time in Rome, but Laenas, instead of greeting Antiochus' outstretched right hand with his own, placed in it a senate decree ordering him to withdraw from Egypt immediately. When Antiochus said that

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<sup>26</sup> Heracles was the Greek counterpart to Melqart, the chief deity of Tyre.

<sup>27</sup> 2 Macc. 3.4; 4.23

he would need some time to think about it. Laenas proceeded to draw a circle on the ground around Antiochus and told him not to step outside that circle until he had made his decision. Antiochus was forced to bow to the Roman order. Laenas then agreed to shake his hand.

Meanwhile, news reached Jerusalem that the Romans had confronted Antiochus and that he had been executed. At once, the orthodox Jews began to celebrate; Jason reappeared on the scene to depose Menelaus, only to find out later that the reports were false. When Antiochus heard of this, he viewed the situation as a political uprising and a personal insult. From that time forward, he determined to stamp out the worship of Yahweh and to bring the Jews under his subjection.

Antiochus sent Philip, one of his generals, to occupy the city of Jerusalem. He attacked the city on a Sabbath, knowing the Jews would not fight on this holy day. Thousands of Jews were slaughtered in this siege. A systematic attempt was made to "Hellenize" the city by force. The altars to Yahweh were torn down, and they were replaced with altars of the Greek gods and of Antiochus under the figure of Zeus. Swine were sacrificed in the temple courtyard. The worship of Yahweh, circumcision, Sabbath observance, and the keeping of feast days were outlawed with death as the penalty. These laws were carried out with the utmost cruelty: men and women who circumcised their children were made to watch as the family was killed one by one; entire assemblies of Jews were killed every Sabbath; and every Jew who refused to eat pork or worship the gods of Syria was slain instantly. The temple, where once Yahweh was worshipped, was now the house of Zeus.<sup>28</sup>

Antiochus seemingly had won a great victory. However, it would be short-lived. In his attempt to put the Jews under subjection, he created a rebellious and obstinate spirit among the people. Antiochus' forceful oppression was unnecessary. Hellenism was already making inroads into the Jewish community and was taking effect in insidious ways. There were pockets of division—some were opposed to Hellenism, but not too severely so. In time, it is likely that Hellenism would have become the norm.

It was during this time that the Jewish belief in the resurrection gained popularity.<sup>29</sup> The Old Testament emphasized temporal blessings for the Jews who remained faithful to Yahweh. But what about martyrs who do not receive the blessing of long, happy lives in the land of promise? During this time of

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<sup>28</sup> 1 Macc. 1:20-29; 2 Macc. 5:18-22; Josephus, *Antiquities*, XII 5:3

<sup>29</sup> Though implicit (cf. Ex. 3:6), the Old Testament law did not deal with life beyond the grave, nor was such ever promised to the Israelites as a blessing for the faithful

religious persecution, the Jews realized that the God who gives life would not leave their martyred souls in the grave—He would surely raise them up, restoring their ravaged bodies.<sup>30</sup> Some have pointed out that when the writer of Hebrews penned, "Some were tortured, refusing to accept release, that they might rise again to a better life" (Heb. 11:35), he was referring to the Maccabees, who laid down their lives in the expectation of receiving it again in the resurrection.

### The Maccabean Period (165–161 B.C.)

The persecutions by Antiochus Epiphanes produced a reaction in some of the more devout Jews that took the Syrians completely off guard and surprised many of the Jews as well—it was one of righteous indignation and objection. All that was needed was a leader who would provide the impetus and organization for the opposition. Such a leader would arise.

The Syrians had erected a pagan altar in the land of Modin (a city of western Judea) and proposed to force the people to worship at it. There was an elderly priest living in Modin named Mattathias who was told to come forward to worship the image in order to set an example for the rest of the people. Mattathias refused. When one timid Jew came forward to worship, Mattathias became so enraged that he slew the young Jew, as well as the Syrian servants. He tore down the pagan altar and fled to the mountains with his family in order to escape the certain vengeance of Antiochus. Other pious Jews (*Hasidim*) joined him there (1 Macc. 2:27).

From their mountain strongholds, the rebels engaged in guerilla warfare, raiding nearby cities, tearing down pagan altars, circumcising Hebrew boys whose parents had failed to comply with the Law, and killing Syrian officials and any Hellenistic Jews who opposed them. However, there was an important factor that hindered the revolt—their refusal to fight on the Sabbath Day. Many pious Jews lost their lives at the hands of the Syrians and Hellenistic Jews who, having determined the locations of some of the hideouts of the *Hasidim*, slaughtered them on the Sabbath (1 Macc. 2:29–38). Consequently, Mattathias adopted the principle that fighting in self-defense would be permitted on the Sabbath Day.

Soon after the revolt began, Mattathias died. On his deathbed, he requested that his followers recognize Judas, his third son, as their military leader, and Simon, his firstborn, as counselor. Judas, whose nickname was

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<sup>30</sup> One sect, the Sadducees, never did accept the belief of life beyond the grave. This led to their being much more materialistic and anxious to preserve their lives in the face of persecution.



"the Maccabee" (n. "the hammer"),<sup>31</sup> was a brilliant leader and quickly won the confidence of even the more timid Jews, causing his army to grow rapidly. In time, Judas' four brothers, and eventually all of his followers, became known as the Maccabees. This was not a family name; by family, they were the Hasmonians, the descendants of Hashmon, Mattathias' great grandfather.<sup>32</sup> "Maccabee" was a descriptive term describing their work in leading the Jewish opposition against Syria and the Hellenism they were seeking to impose.

At first, Antiochus underestimated the strength of these rebels. He sent incompetent generals (viz. Apollonius and Seron) with small armies that were quickly and soundly beaten by the Jewish rebels. After Antiochus realized the magnitude of this revolt, he could not devote the time to the situation that he would have liked because of another large-scale revolt in Parthia. Therefore, he sent his general, Lysias, to stamp out the Jewish rebellion. Lysias led an army of about sixty thousand against Judas. Judas made a surprise attack and utterly defeated the Hellenist army.<sup>33</sup> This victory opened up the road to Jerusalem for Judas. They marched upon the city, and Menelaus, along with the other Syrian sympathizers, was forced to flee. They destroyed the pagan gods and images, thoroughly cleansed the temple, and replaced all of the temple furnishings. The temple was rededicated on 25 Kislev (December 16), 164,<sup>34</sup> and was followed by eight days of celebration. This became an annual celebration known as the Feast of Dedication, and today is celebrated by Jews under the name Hanukkah.<sup>35</sup>

At this point, the Syrians knew they would not be able to put down the Jewish revolt—they had too many other hotspots in the empire that needed

<sup>31</sup> The name may refer to the work Judas did in leading the Jewish revolt, or perhaps refers to the shape of his head or some other physical characteristic (cf. 1 Macc. 2:2–4), a common practice among the people (ISBE, "Maccabees")

<sup>32</sup> Josephus, *Antiquities*, XII.6.1

<sup>33</sup> The Greeks were so confident of a victory that slave traders had accompanied Lysias' troops in hopes of purchasing the Jewish revolutionaries from Lysias (1 Macc. 3:38–44)

<sup>34</sup> The temple had lain desecrated for roughly six years (169–164), probably corresponding to Daniel's prophecy of the temple being defiled for 2300 days (which would be the equivalent of a little more than six years)

<sup>35</sup> The Mishnah (actually the *Gemara*, an elaboration on the Mishnah) maintains that, when the temple was being prepared for rededication, they discovered that all the temple oil had been defiled by the Seleucids. When it came time to light the Menorah, they could find only one small flask of oil, perhaps enough to burn for one day. Nevertheless, the Menorah continued to burn for eight days, a sign of God's blessing. For this reason, Hanukkah is an eight-day celebration. However, this legendary story is omitted from the books of Maccabees (1 Macc. 4:52–59; 2 Macc. 10:1–8) and from Josephus' account (*Antiquities*, XII.7.6–7)

attention, and they could not afford to lose any more soldiers. Therefore, they offered a truce that allowed the Jews the freedom of religion, but left Menelaus in control of the High Priest office and a strong Syrian military presence in Jerusalem. While the Syrians may have considered the matter a done deal, Judas was not satisfied. His real goal included political freedom in addition to the religious freedom now achieved. This was a more delicate matter, for many of the *Hasidim* were now satisfied with their religious freedom; but the Hasmoneans were not finished. They continued to raid small villages of the Transjordan, Galilee, and Philistinian regions in an effort to move scattered Jews back into central Judea, thus strengthening Judas' military position.

In May 163, Antiochus IV "Epiphanes" died while defending positions in the eastern portion of his empire. Judas saw this as his opportunity and laid siege to the Jerusalem citadel housing the Syrian armed forces. When word reached Lysias in Antioch, he regrouped his forces and marched against Jerusalem with an army of 120,000, cutting off all food supplies to the city. Judas met Lysias' attack, but suffered bitter defeat and was forced to withdraw into the city. The situation looked bleak for Judas and his followers until Lysias received word of political unrest over the Seleucid throne. With this latter development being a greater priority, he offered a generous peace settlement with the Jews:

- Syria would refrain from interference in Jewish society.
- The Jews would be awarded the freedom of religion.
- Alcimus, a mild Hellenist of Aaron's lineage, would be the High Priest.
- The Maccabees and rebels would not be punished.
- The walls of Jerusalem would be torn down.
- Judea would recognize Syrian control and aid Syria in battle.

Though the peace terms were accepted reluctantly, Judas and the Hasmoneans still were not satisfied. Their goal was not only religious freedom, but political freedom. And as long as Syria held sway over the land and had the authority to select the High Priest for the people, they were not satisfied. Though Alcimus was a true descendant of Aaron, they distrusted his relationship with the Syrians, and in general resented the idea of an outside authority selecting their High Priest. To express their dissatisfaction and in hopes of spurring the people to adopt loftier goals, Judas and the Hasmoneans continued to raid nearby villages and punish Hellenizers.

Upon arriving in Antioch, Lysias found that Demetrius I had returned from Rome, where he had been held hostage in place of Antiochus IV in lieu of the indemnity owed to Rome by Syria. He easily attracted the hearts of the Syrians and killed Lysias, taking the Syrian throne in 162. The Hellenizing

Jews sent an embassy, led by Alcimus, to welcome Demetrius and to request help against Judas. Demetrius first sent Bacchides, and later Nicanor, but neither were successful in controlling Judas' followers. While in Jerusalem, Nicanor issued threats against Judas and his followers, as well as against the Jerusalem temple. This aroused anew the zeal of the *Hasidim* and generated much support for the Hasmonean cause. When the battle ensued, Judas and his army easily defeated Nicanor at Adasa (161).<sup>36</sup> His head and right hand were taken to Jerusalem and nailed to the temple wall. In fear, Alcimus fled to Antioch to request more help.

Demetrius, who had just returned from a long campaign in 160, was finally able to spare enough troops to march against Judas. Judas and his followers met Demetrius on the same battlefield where they had defeated Nicanor earlier, but this time they met with great defeat. Judas himself was killed and the Maccabees routed. Demetrius reinstated Alcimus as High Priest, and the Jewish Hellenizers were given control of the city.

### The Successors to Judas Maccabee (160–128 B.C.)

With the death of Judas, it seemed that the Maccabee Cause would fizzle. True, many great advances had been made: the temple had been rededicated to the worship of Yahweh, religious freedom had been gained, and enough respect had been earned in the eyes of the Syrian Seleucids that they would not attempt to impose their cultural views on the Jews again. Even so, the Hasmonean Cause was for complete political freedom, and this had not been attained by Judas. It looked as though the situation would revert to the climate that existed before Antiochus Epiphanes tried to impose his cultural ideals on the Jews. That it did not do so was due to the stubborn opposition of the Hasmoneans. Judas was replaced by his brother Jonathan, who led the opposition movement from 160–143. Though he led the Hasmonean revolution for only a short period, he made great advances for their cause through military prowess and political diplomacy.

Alcimus continued to oppose the Hasmoneans until the day of his death, which came surprisingly in 159 by a stroke. No successor was named, Demetrius probably thinking that this would best insure peaceful relations with the Hasmoneans. After two years of peace, Demetrius pulled his military out of Judea. Jonathan took advantage of the situation by exerting his power over the Hellenizing Jews. Demetrius sent Bacchides to punish Jonathan, but he

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<sup>36</sup> The anniversary of Judas' victory over Nicanor at Adasa on Adar 13 (March 9) has been kept perpetually as a festival day (Nicanor's Day) the day before the festival week of Purim (1 Macc. 7:33–49; 2 Macc. 15:25–36; Josephus, *Antiquities*, XII.10.5)

was outmaneuvered by the Hasmoneans. This ended in a truce in which Jonathan and his followers were authorized to set up official headquarters outside of Jerusalem. Five years of peace followed this confrontation.

Jonathan's next gain came as a stroke of good luck. A newcomer, Alexander Balas, claiming to be the youngest son of Antiochus Epiphanes, vied for the Seleucid throne. He befriended the Ptolemies who had hopes of reacquiring Judea. Both Balas and Demetrius turned to Jonathan for military support. Balas won Jonathan's support by offering to let him maintain a permanent military post in Judea, granting him certain political favors, and placing him in the office of High Priest and political governor of Judea.<sup>37</sup> Demetrius was defeated and killed in battle in 150.

The next several years brought more claimants and turmoil to the Seleucid throne. It is sufficient for our study to note that in each struggle for Syrian dominance, Jonathan played one side against the other in an effort to strengthen his position in Judea. This political maneuvering proved to be a great contribution to the Hasmonean effort. He was finally taken and killed by the treachery of one of the claimants in 143. At this time, his brother, Simon, took his place as the Hasmonean governor and High Priest of Judea.

When Simon (143–128) began ruling, the Syrian throne was still in turmoil. This time, Trypho was seeking to take the throne from Demetrius II. Simon negotiated his support for Demetrius II, and in return, Judea was awarded full immunity from taxes in May 142. This was what Judas, Jonathan, and the Hasmoneans had fought and died for—political freedom. This marked the first national freedom that the Jews had enjoyed since 486 when Nebuchadnezzar took the Jews captive.

In an effort to insure this newly awarded freedom, Simon then negotiated an alliance with Rome, negotiations that had begun under Jonathan's leadership. The Roman senate sent letters throughout the region that Judea had been recognized as an independent nation in friendship with Rome, and that any hostile act toward Judea would be regarded as a hostile act toward Rome itself.

Feeling secure in his position, within a year Simon dismantled the Syrian garrisons and sent the troops packing. In September 140, in appreciation for all of his accomplishments, the Jewish nation gathered in assembly and formally pronounced Simon military-in-chief, governor of the nation, and High

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<sup>37</sup> Notice that Jonathan accepts the High Priest office from an outsider, one of the very acts that the Hasmoneans opposed so strongly. But since it is an Hasmonean who is receiving the honor, they do not object. Ironically, he accepts the honor from one who claims to be the son of Antiochus Epiphanes.

Priest. They also decided that the High Priesthood would reside in his family (the Hasmoneans) forever, or until God sent a prophet to guide them otherwise. This ruling dynasty became known as the "Hasmonean Dynasty."

In 134, Simon and two of his sons were murdered by his son-in-law (Ptolemy Abubus), who apparently had plans to co-opt the throne. When Simon's third son, John Hyrcanus, heard of the assassination, he gathered an army and secured control of the region. But this political intrigue was costly for the Jews.

Seeing the political upheaval in Judea, the Seleucids led a great force into Judea in an effort to regain control of the region. John Hyrcanus held out for a year, but eventually was forced to a negotiated surrender. Judea was required to pay back taxes for their years of independence and to tear down the defensive walls of Jerusalem (133). For the next five years, Judea was again under Seleucid control. But in 128, the Seleucids were greatly weakened in battle with the Parthians, allowing John Hyrcanus and the Jews to once again proclaim their independence, a freedom that never again was taken away by the Seleucids.

### **The Hasmonean Dynasty (128–63 B.C.)**

With the success of the Hasmonean efforts, the Hellenistic party of the Jews lost popularity and dwindled away. The two major Jewish divisions that now existed were the Hasmonians (the rebels who had fought for and gained political freedom, and who now controlled the governorship and priesthood) and the Hasidim (the "pious" Jews who had been satisfied with religious freedom and who now resented the Hasmonean control of the priesthood). The breach between these groups widened during the early days of Jewish independence.

#### **John Hyrcanus (128–104)**

Though undercurrents of rift had been present for some time, it was under the rule of John Hyrcanus that the ideological breach between the Hasmonians and Hasidim was defined and solidified. Hyrcanus, though genealogically an Hasmonean, ideologically was a Pharisee. However, when he began his rule, one of the Hasidim, Eleazar, suggested that Hyrcanus should relinquish the High Priesthood on two grounds: (1) the position rightfully belonged to the lineage of Zadok (the family of priests before the arrival of Antiochus Epiphanes), and (2) there was a rumor that Hyrcanus was the illegitimate son of his mother brought about by rape during a time of Seleucid imprisonment

under Antiochus Epiphanes.<sup>38</sup> Hyrcanus saw Eleazar's words as a personal insult as well as an attempt to undermine his authority. He immediately threw him and the other Hasidim from the palace and personally disavowed the Hasidic cause and adopted the ideology of the Hasmoneans. In time, those who adopted the ideology of the *Hasidim* came to be known as the Pharisees (m. "separatists"), and those who adopted the ideology of the Hasmoneans as Sadducees.<sup>39</sup>

Hyrcanus believed in territorial expansion and was quite successful on the battlefield. Much of the land that Judea had lost under Babylonian, Persian, and Greek rule was reconquered by Hyrcanus through diplomacy and war. Ironically, once he had subdued the border nations (e.g., Idumea), he forced upon them circumcision and Judaic religious practices. This is ironic because it was this type of practice that caused the Jews to revolt against Antiochus Epiphanes, viz. the attempt to force cultural and religious values on another nation.<sup>40</sup> He also attacked and subjugated the Samaritans, destroying the capital city and razing the temple on Mt. Gerizim. He stormed the city of Samaria for a year before its fall, bringing the population under Judean control. Even so, he could never force the Samaritans to accept Judaism as he understood it (they were already circumcised), but only managed to further embitter them against their southern neighbors.

### Aristobulus I (104–103)

Hyrcanus was succeeded by his eldest son, Aristobulus I (104–103 B.C.). Out of fear of being overthrown, he imprisoned his three half-brothers. He continued to expand the borders of the nation. His greatest accomplishment in his brief reign was to subdue the region of Galilee. There were already pockets of Jewish sympathizers in the area, but Aristobulus was able to subdue the entire region and successfully to impose Jewish standards upon them. Indeed, many of the Galilean Jews became more devout than those living in Judea, and

<sup>38</sup> Josephus, *Antiquities*, XIII 10.5–6. If true, Hyrcanus would be ineligible for the office of High Priest (cf. Lev. 21:14).

<sup>39</sup> The *Hasidim* (m. holy, consecrated) devoted themselves to a right understanding and practice of the Law of Moses. Their interpretations of the Law were collected and preserved for later generations, and were regarded by the *Hasidim* as having the weight of law (the "traditions of the elders" in the Gospels). The Hasmoneans, while beginning under the leadership of Mattathias as religious zealots, evolved quickly into a group outwardly religious but with strong political motivation (the Hasmoneans served as political leaders and High Priests). The worldview of each group was, no doubt, molded by their respective positions on afterlife.

<sup>40</sup> The oppressed often become the oppressor. Consider how second century Christians were persecuted by pagan Rome for their unwillingness to adopt pagan practices, only later to become persecutors of pagans who refused to adopt Christian beliefs and practices.

they helped to pave the way for the arrival of the Messiah into the region. Aristobulus was the first Hasmonean to wear a Greek name (his Jewish name was Judah) and the first to wear the title "king." Aristobulus died within a year due to disease and excessive drinking, perhaps mourning the untimely death of his only full brother, Antigonus.

### Alexander Jannaeus (103–76)

Aristobulus' widow, Salome Alexandra, was a most outstanding figure in Hasmonean history. After Aristobulus' death, she released his half-brothers from prison and gave her hand in marriage to one of them, Alexander Jannaeus.<sup>41</sup> He also took his brother's place as king and High Priest. Alexander continued insatiably to expand the national borders, sometimes suffering much for little gain. He expanded the borders of his influence to the extent that he controlled a region roughly the size of David's monarchy. Nevertheless, he lacked personal morals and integrity, and tended to be quite cruel. Because his tactics and rule were so oppressive, he made many enemies along the way, especially among the *Hasidim*.

At home, the national division between the Pharisees (the *Hasidim*) and Sadducees (Hasmoneans) reached a climax. While officiating as High Priest at the Feast of Tabernacles, several in the crowd began jeering him for his personal immorality. In a rage, Alexander loosed his troops on the crowd, killing around six thousand.<sup>42</sup> After several poor showings on the battlefield, the Pharisees seized the opportune time for a formal revolt against Alexander, which lasted six years (94–88). To secure his position, Alexander recruited Greek mercenaries from the neighboring countries he had subdued. (How ironic that a Maccabee would seek help from Hellenistic neighbors!) Seeing their strength waning, the Pharisees also sought outside help, convincing the Seleucid king, Demetrius III, to lend military assistance (How ironic that the *Hasidim* would solicit Seleucid help to fight against the Hasmoneans!). Alexander was forced to flee to the mountains for safety. This scene (a Jewish leader fleeing from Seleucid forces) roused the emotions of Jews throughout the region who soon joined Alexander's forces and drove the Seleucids from the region. Alexander led the Pharisees back to Jerusalem as captives. During a drunken carousel, Alexander crucified eight hundred men within sight of the

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<sup>41</sup> Since no children had been born to Aristobulus and Salome, she had the right under Jewish law to marry one of Aristobulus' brothers (Deut. 25.5f).

<sup>42</sup> Josephus, *Antiquities*, XIII.12–15

palace, most of them Pharisees.<sup>43</sup> As they hung in the throes of death, Alexander had the wives and children of each captive slaughtered at the foot of each respective captive Pharisee. Surviving Pharisees fled the city.

The terrorist tactics worked—Alexander had no more internal problems during his reign. He continued to struggle to expand the borders of the nation but at great cost. He finally died in 76 after prolonged illness. By this time, the size of the Jewish state was comparable to that which belonged to David or Solomon, with all of Palestine proper, plus many bordering lands belonging to the Jews;<sup>44</sup> but there was little loyalty to Jerusalem and little glory for Alexander. The Hasmonean cause had been damaged greatly. The High Priest of the people was viewed as an insatiable military leader with a bloodthirsty appetite who often used recruited pagan troops to aid his cause. There was little redeeming in his character and he offered little in terms of spiritual guidance. Interestingly, on his deathbed, he asked his wife to restore the Pharisees to power after his death, stating that no one could rule peaceably without their support.<sup>45</sup>

### **Salome Alexandra (76–67)**

After Alexander's death, his wife, Salome Alexandra, succeeded him. She was nearly seventy years old when she took the throne. Since a woman could not serve as High Priest, she placed one of her sons, Hyrcanus II (a Pharisee), in this position; her other son, Aristobulus II (a Sadducee), she made military leader. In keeping with her husband's wishes, Alexandra made peaceful overtures to the Pharisees and brought them back into the ruling council. She also reintroduced the Hasidic traditions of the elders to the people, commanding these teachings to be obeyed. Though she did not support their actions, the Pharisees firmly took control of the Judean government and killed untold numbers of Sadducees in retaliation for the atrocities of Alexander Jannaeus.

Alexandra proved to be an able ruler and an adept politician, both at home and abroad. The Jews portray her rule as a Golden Age, and certainly it was for the Pharisaic party. However, when Salome Alexandra died in 67, the atmosphere was right for another civil war.

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<sup>43</sup> Josephus, *Antiquities*, XIII.13.2 Josephus does not state that these were all Pharisees, but the implication is that most, if not all, were, for these were his greatest enemies

<sup>44</sup> Although the Jews controlled a large land area, the Hasmonean kingdom paled in comparison with that of David and Solomon in virtually every other respect. In the first century B.C., the entire Near Eastern region was militarily and politically weak and depressed. Judea had nominal control by default, not out of merit. There was no strong government, no strong capital, and no real unity within or without Judea. There was no glory attached to this kingdom

<sup>45</sup> Josephus, *Antiquities*, XIII.15.5



**Hyrcanus II and Aristobulus II (67–63)**

Following his mother's death, Hyrcanus II, the rightful High Priest, assumed rulership of Judea. However, Aristobulus II had other ideas. He was head of the armed forces and led a large army of Sadducees against Hyrcanus, forcing him to flee. Hyrcanus did not have the same ambitions as Aristobulus and agreed (perhaps gladly) to surrender all offices and power in exchange for a peaceful existence. Aristobulus agreed.

Though content to live out his days under the leadership of his brother, Hyrcanus was not allowed to do so. Antipater, the Idumean ruler, began a campaign to convince a large portion of the Jewish nation that Hyrcanus was the rightful heir to the throne. He also convinced Hyrcanus to flee Judea because Aristobulus would never feel safe as long as Hyrcanus was alive. Hyrcanus fled to Nabatea to King Aretas III, a friend and ally of Antipater. Aretas offered a large army to win back the throne for Hyrcanus in exchange for the return of cities that Alexander Jannaeus had captured. Aretas and Antipater eventually convinced Hyrcanus and he returned to Judea with a large force of foreign troops. Many of Aristobulus' followers, convinced that Hyrcanus was the rightful heir, abandoned Aristobulus, forcing him to flee to Jerusalem for safety. Here he fortified himself within the walls of the temple (65).

**The Roman Empire to the Birth of Christ (63–4 B.C.)**

In 66, the Roman senate authorized Pompey to move Roman forces into Asia Minor to subdue Mithridates, a troublemaker who had attacked many Roman outposts in Asia Minor during a time when Rome was too preoccupied to retaliate. Pompey drove Mithridates out of Asia Minor in a single campaign. Mithridates eventually took his own life in 63 near the Black Sea. There was much work to be done in reorganizing the Roman territories of Asia Minor. While busying himself with these matters, Pompey sent his lieutenant Scourus to Syria to check on the affairs of the Seleucids. While there, he heard of the civil unrest in Judea and made his presence known in hopes that a Roman advantage might come from the situation.

Both Hyrcanus and Aristobulus sought the aid of Scourus and the Romans by offering large sums of money. He considered the situation and decided to aid Aristobulus. He ordered Aretas to withdraw his troops, an order that could hardly be refused. Soon, Pompey arrived with the Roman army, having subdued Syria. Hyrcanus, Aristobulus, and the Jewish people pled their cases to Pompey who agreed to take their petitions into consideration. Meanwhile, he turned his army eastward to subdue the Nabataeans and teach them a lesson for interfering with Judea. As he did so, Aristobulus hurried to Jerusalem and began fortifying for battle in case Pompey would side with Hyrcanus. Pompey

did not take kindly to this measure and turned his troops toward Jerusalem instead. Aristobulus gave himself up immediately, but his followers fortified themselves within the walls of the temple and fought the invading Romans. Hyrcanus' followers managed to open the city gates to the Romans (April), and the temple fell into Roman hands in July/August 63. Around twelve thousand Jews died in this battle.

When Pompey had conquered Jerusalem, he killed the temple priests and further horrified the people by entering into the Holy of Holies (though he did not damage the temple or prohibit the Jewish form of worship). He placed the land of Judea under Roman control and burdened them with heavy taxation. The Romans then took Samaria and many of the Greek cities of the coastal plain and Transjordan that had been captured by Alexander Jannaeus. Hyrcanus was placed in control of the city of Jerusalem, with Antipater (an Idumean general) as his adviser. Overnight, Judea's days of political freedom were over.

For the next fifty years, there were many revolts and rebellions against Roman rule and against the authoritative position of Antipater (or Antipas). Antipater was an Idumean (Edomite), and therefore a long time enemy of the Jewish nation.<sup>46</sup> However, through the aid of the Roman Empire, Hyrcanus and Antipater were able to subdue the people.

Antipater continued to gain power through political maneuvering, and he became highly respected in Rome for his loyalty to the Empire. In 48, civil war broke out in Rome between Julius Caesar and Pompey, who was trying to take the throne. Julius Caesar retained control, and Pompey was slain. Because of his promise of loyalty, Caesar placed Antipater as the governor of all of Judea, a position above Hyrcanus. Caesar was lenient with the Jews, as was Antipater, giving them special privileges within the Roman Empire. Antipater continued to seek more power for himself and for his sons, Phasael and Herod. However, after only one year of service in this position, Antipater was poisoned. Three years after this, Julius Caesar was assassinated in Rome, reflecting the constant turmoil during this period.

At the assassination of Julius Caesar, Cassius took over the throne. Soon after this, Anthony defeated Cassius and Brutus, bringing in yet another Roman regime. Under each of these successive rulerships, Herod was able to

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<sup>46</sup> The Jews were loathe to have an Edomite, someone of Esau's lineage, rule over them. While Antipater was circumcised (probably forced upon him under Hasmonean oppression), the Jews never accepted Antipater as a legitimate ruler.

convince the "head of state" of his loyalty to the throne.<sup>47</sup> Therefore, he continued to gain power in the land of Judea. He became governor of the land after the death of his father (Antipas), and soon received the title of king, eventually being called "the King of the Jews."<sup>48</sup>

In 32, Octavian attacked Rome in an effort to gain supreme power of all the Roman lands. Anthony was defeated at Actium on September 2, 31 and was forced to flee to Egypt. Realizing that Octavian would overcome and receive supreme power, Herod once again aligned himself with the eminent victor. As a result, he was awarded rule over several other cities in the lands of Palestine, having won the favor of Octavian (Augustus Caesar). He reigned under the title of Herod the Great, the King of the Jews, and the expanse of his reign rivaled that of Solomon and Alexander Jannaeus.

Though Herod had won the favor of Rome, he had not won the favor of the Jews, and this upset him. He married Mariamne, a descendant of the Hasmonean Dynasty, in an effort to make himself a rightful heir to the throne. The Jews did not like him or accept his rule willingly. In another bold effort, Herod decided to make several renovations in the city of Jerusalem, including the remodeling of the temple. The renovations to the main structure of the temple took a little over ten years, being completed around 8. Though these were grand gestures, they were not able to overcome his background and reputation.

Herod is best known as the king that so feared the emergence of a rival king of the Jews that he had all the infants of Bethlehem murdered at the birth of Jesus Christ (Mt. 2:2).

### **Preparation for the Messiah**

The Old Testament is a record of the revelation of the Lord's plan to redeem humanity by means of a Messiah. When Adam and Even disobeyed God and were driven from the garden, the Lord promised Eve one of her descendants would deal a mortal blow to the serpent who had deceived them (Gen. 3:16). To Abraham, God promised that one of his descendants would provide a blessing for all nations (Gen. 12:3). To the Israelites, God promised to send a prophet who would be like Moses to whom the Israelites were to give their

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<sup>47</sup> Times of political intrigue provided ideal opportunities to revolt. Instead, Herod continued to confirm his loyalty to Rome, winning the admiration (and reward) of his overlords

<sup>48</sup> This explains why Herod would become so concerned and angry to hear from the Magi that there had been one born in Judea who would be called "King of the Jews" (Mt. 2:1ff). It was in an effort to protect his throne from possible political intrigue that he slew the babies of Bethlehem.

complete allegiance (Deut. 18:14–19). And through prophets, God continued to promise the Israelites that He would send a Messiah who would provide deliverance, redemption, and a New Covenant. The Old Testament tells how God prepared a people to receive a Messiah. From our vantage in time, we are able to discern many of the things that God said and did in order to accomplish this goal.

From the close of the Old Testament historical record to the birth of Jesus (420–4 B.C.), the Jews endured a long period of turmoil and successive subjugations. Yet, even amidst such turbulent times, the Lord was making preparations for the advent of a Messiah and the quick growth of His kingdom.

### **The Captivities**

In 722 B.C., the Lord allowed the Assyrians to invade Israel and take a large portion of the Northern Kingdom captive, scattering them among several Assyrian cities. This punishment came as a result of their incessant idolatry and moral degradation. Unfortunately, we do not have a record of what happened to these tribes during their captivity or after the collapse of Assyrian power. We are left to assume that their identity as a people was removed because of their continued rebellion against God.

In 586 B.C., the Lord allowed the Babylonians to invade Judah at least three times and take a significant portion of the Southern Kingdom captive to Babylon. Those left behind fled from Jerusalem, leaving the capital city in complete ruin and virtual desertion. This punishment came upon the Kingdom of Judah because they had fallen into a state of unrepentant idolatry. While in Babylon, the Judites (known as Jews from this point forward in history) repented of their sins and were allowed to return to their homeland after three generations (70 years) of captivity.

At least two significant results came as a consequence to these captivities. First, the Israelites never again practiced idolatry. Even in Samaria, after the new inhabitants (transplants from various cities conquered by the Assyrians) attempted to establish an idolatrous form of worship and were punished by God (1 Kgs. 17:24ff), the people never again practiced idolatry. Since the captivities and until this day, the Jews have not worshiped any deity other than Yahweh. Second, the captivity spawned a new understanding of worship. Separated from the temple and the priesthood, the captives had to find a new way to study the Scriptures, encourage one another, and preserve their religious identity. This was probably the beginning of "synagogue" activities. In time, synagogues were established anywhere Jewish people were separated from their homeland and the Temple, and eventually even within Judea itself. These became places for Jewish families to gather to read and study the Scrip-

tures and to acknowledge their faith in Yahweh. The existence of such centers encouraged local worship and personal study of the Scriptures.

### The Diaspora

With the captivities in Assyria and Babylonia, Israelites began living in communities outside of Palestine. Many of the people left behind voluntarily fled to other lands in fear that further attacks would be made on the weakened land. And with the turmoil and persecutions that came with Greek domination, many others fled Palestine for safety. This dispersion of the Jews is called the Jewish Diaspora, a Greek word meaning "a scattering."

The Jewish Diaspora was an important step in preparing the world for the Messiah and His kingdom. When the Jews left Palestine, they took two things with them: a firm belief in one God (monotheism) and the Law of Moses (code of conduct). These two things firmly in hand, Jewish families began to influence the communities in which they settled. They erected synagogues as places of study and worship wherever they settled. And though Judaism was not designed to be propagated actively among the nations, in a quest to gain companionship and community acceptance, many displaced Jews began actively teaching the Old Testament Scriptures to the Gentiles in an effort to proselytize. Such efforts served to make communities aware of the existence of Yahweh, His demands, and His promises to send a Messiah.

These communities became the seedbeds for Christianity. When the gospel began to be spread, the apostles were able to find centers of Jewish religion in almost every city they visited. Where synagogues were present, the apostles began their preaching here, explaining to mature, faithful Israelites that Jesus of Nazareth was the Messiah for whom they looked. Conversions among these displaced Jews and God-fearing Gentiles allowed strong, faithful congregations to be established quickly throughout the empire.<sup>49</sup>

### The Septuagint

The history of Bible translation begins during the period of the Greek Empire in 285 B.C. Ptolemy Philadelphus invited Jewish scholars to Alexandria to prepare a Greek translation of the Jewish Scriptures to be placed in the great library there. History records that seventy-two men worked on this project, thus it became known as the "Septuagint" (Latin meaning "seventy"). Jewish lore has attached inspirational guidance to this work, claiming that the

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<sup>49</sup> This also explains how Paul was able to establish elders so quickly in many of the congregations he established—he was beginning with mature and faithful Israelites who, after learning about the Messiah, were prepared in every way to take on leadership roles within the church.

men worked independently in seventy separate cells, and when they each finished their work, their independent translations were in perfect harmony with one another.

Once the Old Testament Scriptures had been translated into Greek, the message of the Old Covenant and God's special guidance could be shared throughout the Roman Empire. Greek-speaking Jews living in Gentile communities throughout the empire began reading and studying from the Septuagint and presented its teachings publicly within the synagogues. Consequently, many Gentiles came to respect the Jewish faith in Yahweh and some even adopted the principles of the Old Covenant into their daily lives and frequented the synagogues regularly. These individuals are referenced in the New Testament as proselytes and God-fearing Greeks (the former officially converted to Judaism including circumcision; the latter merely accepted the moral and theological teachings of the Old Covenant but objected to circumcision, certain religious rites, and/or various food restrictions). In this way, the publication of the Septuagint was instrumental in preparing Gentile communities for the reception of the gospel.

Most of the sixty-eight direct quotations of the Old Testament in the New Testament are from the Greek Septuagint rather than the Hebrew Scriptures. It was the Bible of the early church. As such, it later began to be associated with Christianity, and was then rejected by Jews remaining loyal to their faith. As a result, more copies of the Septuagint have been preserved from Christian communities than from Jewish communities.

### **Cultural Unification**

When the Greeks controlled the world, they brought with them their own culture (Hellenism), which they attempted to force upon all of their subjects. This brought about cultural unity: the people adopted many of the same customs and spoke the same language. The Greek culture continued to expand, even under Roman rule, providing a cultural unity for the Mediterranean world. Indeed, the Greek culture had a far greater impact on Rome itself than Roman culture had on any of her subjects, this being a complaint of Roman writers of the period who described Rome as the conqueror who had, in fact, been conquered by the Greeks.

This cultural unity provided an ease of communication that helped the gospel to spread quickly to all nationalities. In addition to the obvious advantages of having a common language and cultural norm among the nations, the Greek language was an excellent language for producing precise communication. This was as helpful in the first century as to us, since the New Testament was penned in this language.

**Political Unification**

When the Roman Empire gained power, it brought political unity to its subjects, as well as an elaborate system of roads to aid travel. This, too, made the spread of the gospel quick and allowed the apostles easy access to other parts of the Roman Empire. Another great contribution of the Romans was the political system of world peace (*Pax Romana*). Freedom of religion was allowed, and law and order prevailed in every nation of the empire. This meant an open door for evangelism without undue fear.

Without a doubt, the fullness of time had come (Gal. 4:4); the world was ripe for the coming of the Messiah. At no other time in history have all these important factors existed at the same time. Therefore, we see the hand of God at work. Only when everything was just right did God send His Son as the Redeemer of lost humanity (Gal. 4:4; Rom. 5:6). *5703 Melstone Dr., Arlington, TX 76016*

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**Time Chart for the Period Between the Testaments**

- 586 B.C. Babylon attacks Jerusalem and many Hebrews are taken captive
- 539 B.C. Medo-Persia conquers Babylon; the Jews are allowed to return to Palestine
- 335 B.C. Alexander the Great ascends the Greek throne and attacks Persia
- 331 B.C. The Medo-Persian Empire falls under the forces of Greece
- 323 B.C. Alexander dies and the Greek Empire is divided amongst his generals
- 322 B.C. The Jews are placed under the rule of the Ptolemies
- 285 B.C. The Hebrew Scriptures are translated into the Greek language (Septuagint)
- 198 B.C. The Jews come under the rule of the Seleucids
- 176 B.C. Antiochus Epiphanes begins forcing Hellenism upon the Jews
- 165 B.C. The Maccabean Period opens with the revolt of Mattathias
- 164 B.C. Mattathias dies, and Judas "Maccabee" leads the revolt; the Jewish temple is cleansed and rededicated (Feast of Dedication)
- 143 B.C. Under Simon, the Jews gain political freedom from the Seleucids
- 134 B.C. The Hasmonean Dynasty is established; John Hyrcanus assumes office
- 69 B.C. Civil War breaks out between Aristobulus II and Hyrcanus II
- 63 B.C. Rome, under Pompey, attacks Jerusalem and assumes control of Palestine; Hyrcanus II and Antipater made rulers over Judea
- 48 B.C. Antipater becomes governor of Judea
- 47 B.C. Antipater dies, and Herod becomes governor of Judea
- 10 B.C. Renovations to the main structure of the temple are completed
- 4 B.C. Birth of Christ; Herod kills all the babies of Bethlehem