



Belshazzar's Feast by Rembrandt (1606-1669)

TIME IS RUNNING OUT

The Handwriting is on the Wall!
A Study of the Biblical Prophets
from Amos to Daniel

by

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Covenant Bible Studies

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Dedicated

to

Bernice A. Halverson

December 4, 1911 to August 4, 1992

Bernice studied these prophets, with a small group of dedicated Christians and members of First United Methodist Church in Neenah, Wisconsin, faithfully every Wednesday afternoon from 1:00 to 2:30 p.m., even when she became aware of the fact that her health was breaking down and that she was soon to die.

At the Funeral Service on August 5, 1992, her husband Chet's remarks, included the following statement about their life together:

You couldn't know this remarkable woman well without sensing the sincerity of her Christian commitment. She has always believed, as I have, that to follow Christ means to commit one's self to His basic commandment of love. Yet strangely, this led to the deepest disagreement of our life together, during the years when our five children were growing up. You see, I grew up believing that loving my children required, among many other responsibilities, setting certain limits to their behavior; and to me, that required establishing suitable penalties for repeated transgressions. I'm sure most parents have faced similar problems, and have met them in various ways. Of course Bernice loved our children fully as much as I did; but she felt committed to what she believed a better, more loving solution. A solution that I challenge you young parents to dare to follow, for it makes a far deeper demand on your own commitment, your own patience, your own devotion, than most of you can muster. Compared to it, setting and enforcing limits is child's play.

No one can read these prophets without discerning this same struggle in their writings as they attempted to work out what it meant to be in covenant with God. It is always easier to resort back to legalism, and some of them did this. Others take us down a more excellent way as they define and live out the Spirit of the Law. Both however are struggling to live faithfully to the reign of God in this world and anticipate the time when law as punishment, will be replaced by the Law of Love.

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COVENANT BIBLE STUDY

Background

Having majored in the Humanities in College (which had a good dose of Religion and Bible Courses), Systematic Theology and New Testament in Seminary, and Social Ethics and Missiology in Graduate School, I expected to emerge Biblically literate. I was wrong.

One day in my office, I came to the realization that I was Biblically illiterate, after I had earned a Bachelor of Arts, Bachelor of Divinity, and a Ph.D. The first step to becoming Biblically literate is to confess that you are Biblically illiterate. That is precisely what I did in the summer of 1979. My first step out of illiteracy was to read the Bible for an hour each morning before I began my workday, but I found that lonely and unsatisfying.

This led me to a second step that changed me, and my ministry forever. It also enabled me to see how little the Church knows about the Book it claims as its source for faith and morality. The tragic thing is that most people do not recognize that they are Biblically illiterate, and so they go on quoting Scripture as though they know what they are talking about. In my second step I invited members of my congregation to join me in the study of Scripture on Sunday evenings. I was not sure what I was going to do, but I knew that I had to do something. About a dozen parishioners were willing to confess that they were also Biblically illiterate, and so we entered into a Covenant to study the Bible every Sunday evening at 6:00 p.m. It took us six years to study from Genesis through Revelation, taking a major section each year. Below is a list of the way in which we proceeded:

- The Books of Law (Genesis through Deuteronomy)
- The Books of History (Joshua through Esther)
- The Books of Wisdom (Job through the Song of Solomon)
- The Books of Prophecy (Isaiah through Malachi)
- The Gospels and Acts
- The Letters and Revelation
- The Apocrypha

The most difficult part was not working through all those laws, but through one hundred and fifty Psalms. By the time we finished there were two groups meeting with me. The second group met on Thursday mornings at 9:30 a.m. As both groups reflected on our ordeal through the Psalms, we decided not to do that again. There had to be a better way.

Not yet realizing what that better way might be, I moved to another congregation, where I started four groups, the two new ones meeting on Sunday night at 7:30 p.m., following the 6:00 p.m. group, and another one on Wednesday afternoon at 1:00 p.m. As we began our journey through the Bible, some of the participants suggested studying the Apocrypha as well. That gave me an idea. I included the Apocrypha with the Wisdom Books, and began using a Psalm as a meditation prior to beginning each session. Occasionally, I

selected a Psalm to fit what we were studying; but at other times, I just used the Psalm for the week.

In spite of our difficulty with the Psalms, I still believe in studying the Bible just the way it is written. After we have done that, we may begin to explore its themes and topics, but not before. We must first do our homework. This holds for youth as well as for adults. The following reason was given in the October, 1985 issue of *The Christian Herald*:

For teens, studies of Bible books are preferable to studies of topics. Teenagers accustomed to only thematic Bible Studies may find themselves and their friends in a vulnerable and dangerous spot when they get to college. Cults that focus on reaching college students use topical-style Bible studies that select verses throughout the Bible to “prove” their false doctrines. A solid foundation in Bible-book studies will help young people not to be taken in by cultic teachings. Studies on topics are helpful after a group has done a number of Bible-book studies.

The difficulty with Bible Study in the manner that I am proposing is the tendency to get bogged down, or to spend too much time on a few passages. I would like to suggest that you keep moving. That is why I have broken each book into a number of lessons. You should move on, even if you have not finished your discussion. All this assumes, of course, that you are studying with other people, which I believe to be an absolute necessity. Very few people continue studying the Bible on a regular basis without the discipline of meeting with others. This is necessary because others contribute to your understanding and they keep you honest about your conclusions.

Methodology

At first I called what I was doing *In-depth Bible Study*, but after proceeding through the Bible three times, I decided to change the name to *Covenant Bible Study*. My goal had been to take six to twelve chapters in an hour or hour and one-half session. I liked the longer sessions better, but I am aware of the contemporary expectation to finish everything within an hour. Covering that much material in such a short time can hardly be called dealing with it in depth. My goal was however to get the stories or passages on the table, answer questions about them, and apply them to modern life. This required a Covenant between pastor and people. We covered each major section in nine months, meeting around thirty times in the course of that time. I am not worried that we did not spend enough time on a section, for I have found many themes coming up again and again. Our purpose was to study the whole Bible in Covenant together, trying to understand how the various components relate to one another.

One thing I insisted upon from the beginning—everyone has a right to their own opinion without having to fear criticism from anyone in the group. I have also advertised what we were doing in the newspaper, and have managed to pick up people from all kinds of traditions. Their contributions have greatly enriched the Bible Study Groups, keeping us honest about their traditions. Without their presence, we would not have treated their traditions fairly. One tradition that was never represented, although I wish it were, was

modern Judaism. Covenant Bible Study is best done in an Ecumenical context, but that of course, raises some other questions. Does it mean that we are trying to win or convert people of other traditions to our own? My answer has always been, "No!" Their traditions need to be treated with respect, and they are encouraged to stay within their own traditions. The purpose of Covenant Bible Study is to expand our understanding of the whole Bible, and the only way we can do this is to include people of other traditions, without trying to convert them.

Dr. Harrell Beck, from Perkins School of Theology at Southern Methodist University suggested some principles I have used. He was addressing a group of pastors at a School for Christian Ministry, and he stressed how important it was to teach the Old Testament to children, believing that it could be done. His methodology was very simple, tell them a story, give them an opportunity to ask questions about the story, and work together on the practical application of that story. This gave me the idea for working with adults.

Summarizing the Material

In a typical session, I make assignments to those who will accept them. Not everyone is willing to accept an assignment, and that is okay. I try to encourage those who are too shy to take on an assignment, that it is okay just to sit there. I keep assignments to one or two chapters. The breakdown of assignments is listed right below the title to every session, and I generally pass a sheet of paper with the breakdown around the table, asking those who would take an assignment to simply write their name down next to the assignment they would like to choose. Their task is to read those one or two chapters more carefully than the rest of the assigned material for a session. When we begin our session, I ask those who have accepted assignments to simply summarize their chapters to the group. They may refer to a few scriptures now and then, but they are not to read everything in class. They are to highlight the story, or if there is no story, the essence of what they have read. They are to recognize that someone else might handle it differently, but that is okay. Their assignment is to get the story or the essence of the material on the table.

There are always some people who, though they are unwilling to take an assignment, are willing to read in class. In the assignments I handle myself, I try to find a verse or two in each section, which summarizes things. I then ask persons, who do not take assignments, to read those verses. In the charts that accompany the Bible Studies, you will *sometimes* find these brief references, which point to the essence of things. These are the portions I ask people to read in class. The first third of our session is dedicated to the above task. We may run over, but our intention is to get the content on the table for further discussion.

Questions and Answers

In the second third, our purpose is to ask questions. This does not mean that I answer all the questions. Sometimes, while I am thinking, someone else answers the question, having discovered it in a Study Bible, or commentary. While I do not encourage everyone to use commentaries, I do encourage the use of a good Study Bible. I have also written

my own commentary, which I pass out in advance to all participants. I did not do this the first year, but I found people wanting to know where I was getting some of my information, and so I decided to pass the material out. Those who accepted assignments seemed to feel more comfortable when they knew what I knew ahead of time. Some people had a tendency to read only my commentary, but I have always told them, “If you do not have enough time to prepare, read the Bible rather than my commentary.” Most people have done that.

Practical Application

The final third of the session has to do with making a practical application of the material that we have studied together. To help people along, I prepare two things: a one page chart of all the material so that they can see it in its entirety, and no more than two pages of my own thoughts on the practical application of what we have studied. These two things seem to be enough to get the discussion moving. All of my materials are made available prior to our meeting. Everyone has them while they are doing their own studying. It is difficult to give enough attention to this final third when you meet for only one hour. This is why I prefer an hour and one-half. As the discussion moves along, it is difficult to stop and there is a tendency to move beyond the allotted time. The group should stop on time. There will always be some people with other commitments. The issues will come up again, and so they should not force you to extend the time of a session.

Leadership

I have found the above method of studying the Bible with groups very rewarding. This method does not need a clergy person. The problem lies in the willingness of other laity to accept a layperson as their leader. Many of the participants in my Bible Studies were competent people, fully able to lead sessions. You do not need an expert to lead you. All you need is a good Study Bible, a couple of good commentaries, and four or five other people willing to enter into a Covenant to study the Bible. It will be helpful to set up some questions for discussion. *The Serendipity Study Bible*, which contains 20,000 questions, will help you; but even without it, you can assign different persons to think up questions on chapters or sections to be studied. You do not have to aim at becoming Bible Scholars. The purpose of Bible Study is not knowledge, but reverence for God and discipleship. Do not be too worried if you cannot remember everything. “Its authors,” wrote Frederick Herzog, “never expected to provide literalistic guidelines for the 20th century. But they did want to communicate the power of God (cf. I Cor. 4:20).”

Among some groups I have found resistance to taking assignments. When I have felt this resistance, I have used a different approach. Instead of asking people to summarize chapters, I have asked them to mark their Bibles in a certain way. The following scheme has been used, and it always inspires much more discussion than time permits:



Mark those verses with a heart that offer special insight into religious experience.



Mark those verses with a lamp or light bulb, which offer special insight or illumination.



Mark those verses with a star, which might be used to give guidance or application to daily living.



Mark those verses with a cross, which are difficult to follow or obey.



Mark those verses with a check, which are important to you, but do not fall under any other categories.



Mark those verses with a question mark that you do not fully understand.

When I ask people to mark their Bibles as discussed above, I begin each session with an introduction and a brief video segment. We then attempt to answer questions, share insights, talk about applications, and discuss how to deal with the difficult passages.

Final Comments

The Use of Videos and DVDs

Two final comments need to be made. The first has to do with the use of video, which can add much to a Bible Study session. I have found a number of videos helpful, but I always limit the amount of video that I might use to less than fifteen minutes. This requires previewing video sources, which is very time consuming; but I think that it is very important to limit the use of video to illustrating relevant points. I am reluctant to list the most helpful videos because new ones are being introduced all the time.

The Need for Balance

My second comment has to do with balance. John Wesley called for that balance when he said, “Let us now unite the two so long divided, knowledge and vital piety.” This is my purpose in Covenant Bible Study. Some will think that I give too much attention to the academic side of things, while others will say that I do not give it enough attention. The attempt to apply what we learn is aimed at vital piety. I think that the two must be held together, but I do not view the Bible as a book of rules. For me, “The Bible,” to quote Luther, “is the manger in which we find Christ, the swaddling clothes in which he is wrapped.” Covenant Bible Study helps us sort through all that straw in the manger to discover the Christ, who reveals God and his Will to us. For those who only want to use the Bible devotionally, I say, “You must first study it, hear what its characters are really saying, and then learn the lessons of history, in which God really is present.” These are the tasks of Covenant Bible Study.

The Purpose of Bible Study

One participant, overwhelmed by the pessimism of the prophets, asked, “Is there anything that we can do to break the vicious cycle of the rise and fall of nations (and individuals)?” I firmly believe that there is something we can do. Our first obligation is to study the Scriptures to find out what they are really saying. We have spent enough time manipulating them to say what we want them to say, New and Old Testaments alike; it is now time to enter into Covenant with one another to study them completely, allowing them to speak to us. That is a task that will take us the rest of our lives, but we can begin the journey now. The second step in this journey is to begin applying the truths we learn from our study. Jesus, in Matthew 7:24-25, told us that we should be building our houses (nations and lives) on solid rock, on foundations that will stand. Not to do this, says Psalm 73:18, would be to set our feet “in slippery places.” The purpose of Covenant Bible Study is to help us find our way back to the God of the Bible and build our lives and nation on the solid rock. In the Scriptures we can discover the steppingstones of history, which will enable us to walk on the waters of faith.

Discovering the Main Points

As I wrote my commentary on the Bible, I wrote a short article, which can be found at the end of each lesson. My purpose in doing this was to focus on what I thought was the main point in each of the lessons. Obviously, there is more than one point; but I thought it might be helpful for someone to look for a theme. That is what I have attempted to do.

Studying the Bible is like looking at the many sides of a diamond. Light comes from unexpected places. I would recommend that everyone in a Bible Study Group look for that which sparkles most and attempt to describe what they see. That is what I am attempting to do here. It is only one person’s opinion, but it is worth doing, even if only for that one person.

Not everyone will feel capable of doing what I have done, but everyone should be able to raise a couple of questions about the section to be studied. If that is all you can do, go with it. You will be surprised at how much you will learn, even by asking questions. Remember how, according to Luke 2:46-47, Mary and Joseph found Jesus, “...sitting among the teachers, listening to them and asking them questions. And all who heard him were amazed at his understanding and his answers.” As you grow in knowledge, understanding, and wisdom, people will be amazed at your questions and answers as well.

My only advice is that my commentary and these articles are not to be studied in place of the Bible. Your textbook should be *the Bible*. If this commentary and these articles can help you understand and apply what you read there, then they will have contributed to their purpose. Just keep in mind that they do not represent the last word on the subject. They are but descriptions of the light shining from the diamond, which is God’s Word as it has been communicated through human authors.

The Purpose of Bible Study

When we read the Bible, we are really asking two questions:

1. Do I expect to meet God?
2. Am I willing to obey God?

Applying the Bible

1. Is there an example for me to follow?
2. Is there a sin for me to avoid?
3. Is there a command for me to obey?
4. Is there a promise for me to claim?
5. What does this passage teach me about God or Jesus Christ?
6. Is there a difficulty for me to explore?
7. Is there something in this passage I should pray about today?

A Covenant for Studying Together

Entering into Covenant to Study the Bible together is one of the most important decisions we can make in our lives, and it requires a special Covenant, which will not be easy to follow. Of all the Covenants I have read concerning studying together, I like the one proposed by Augustine:

Let us, you and I lay aside all arrogance.
Let neither of us pretend to have found the truth.
Let us seek it as something unknown to both of us.
Then we may seek it with love and sincerity
when neither of us has the rashness nor
presumption to believe that he (she) already
possesses it.
And if I am asking too much of you,
allow me to listen to you at least,
to talk with you as I do with beings whom,
for my part,
I do not pretend to understand.

INTRODUCTION TO THE PROPHETS

The Hebrew prophets have a queer way of talking, like people who, instead of proceeding in an orderly manner, ramble off from one thing to the next, so that you cannot make head or tails of them or see what they are getting at. — Martin Luther

The Hebrew Words for Prophet

Three Hebrew words have been translated into two English words. Two of the Hebrew words, “ro’eh” and “hozeh,” have been translated into the English word, “seer.” “Seer” means “one who sees.” It means that the “seer,” by the help of inspiration has the ability to see both into the mind and heart of God and into the affairs of men and women. The third Hebrew word, “nabi,” comes from a root meaning “to call” or “to bubble forth,” like a fountain; hence, it refers to “one who is called” or to “one who calls out.” One who pours forth the declarations of God is a prophet.

The English word for “prophet” comes from the Greek “prophetes.” It means “one who speaks for another,” especially, “one who speaks for a god” and interprets his will to humankind. The essential meaning is “an interpreter,” or a “spokesman” for God.

The Authority of the Prophets

Prophets did not come from a particular tribe, such as priests, who came from the tribe of Levi. Their calling was not inherited. God chose them for their tasks and he chose them from within various vocations. (See Isaiah 6:9 and Amos 7:15.) They did not use any authority other than the phrase, “Thus says the Lord.” They claimed to speak the words, which God gave them and yet they were not simply God’s “tape-recorders.” They were great and colorful personalities. Many of them accepted the call to become a prophet with great reluctance.

The Message of the Prophets

The prophets regarded the God of Israel as the Lord of NATURE and HISTORY, who redeemed the Hebrews from Egypt, chose and called them as his people at Sinai, and revealed his righteous will to them in the Law given by Moses. Their intention was to call this people from their false priorities and to insist on God’s primary requirement that his people should obey his commandments and live out his standards. “Return” was their watchword, and “repent” was their common demand. They were troubled by injustice, but they were troubled more by the idolatry, which caused it. Although they cried out against personal and social sin, calling for a personal and national commitment to God, few actually saw it happen; nevertheless, they refused to allow the people to divorce morality from their religion. To them all of life had to be flooded with the divine holiness; such a life was expressed in divine morality.

The prophets were primarily proclaimers of the divine will and only secondarily predictors of the future. Cornfeld and Freedman indicate this in their excellent book, *Archaeology of the Bible: Book by Book*.

When read by later generations under altered circumstances, the prophetic message came to be interpreted in a way that the prophets themselves may not have intended. They were primarily concerned with their own generation and what the future held in store for it, especially if it failed to heed the words of warning and the call to repentance. Since many announcements of impending doom were fulfilled, the prophets were seen primarily as predictors of the future, whose words held meaning for later generations concerning their future.¹

Because they could accurately proclaim the word of God, they could accurately predict the future, but the latter was not their primary purpose. In fact, they hoped that none of their predictions would come to pass. They simply had the ability to for-see what kind of a future would emerge out of the present when their hearers obeyed or disobeyed God's will. Because they were concerned about both the present and the future, one could say that they were both forth-tellers and fore-tellers. The predictive element in their message can be summed up as, "Yahweh, the Lord of the Hebrew nation, will eventually become the God of all Nations." Of that they were certain.

An example of the above can be seen in John the Baptist, who came preaching, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near." (Matthew 3:2) He did not come saying, "Repent, in order that the Kingdom of God may come." The certainty of the Kingdom demanded a new moral realignment. The prophet does not so much predict the future as he announces it.

The prophets were also very conservative. They were calling people back to religion initiated by God through Moses. Cornfeld and Freedman point this out for us:

The prophets should be considered conservative reformers, who wished to restore an earlier form of society, rather than as revolutionaries. They called for a radical return to, not a radical departure from, the traditions of Israel's earliest days. They sought to infuse ritual and legal regulations with spiritual integrity and a deep sense of moral justice and in this way to revitalize the existing order. They carried God's message to repent, to return to God's commandments to which Israel had bound itself at Sinai.²

This does not mean that they did not see the new order coming. Their ability to hear God and to express his Word gave to them visions of that new order. John the Baptist and

¹Gaalyah Cornfeld and David Noel Freedman, *Archaeology of the Bible: Book by Book* (San Francisco: Harper and Row, Publishers, 1976), p. 140.

²*Ibid.*, pp. 140-141.

Jesus could see it coming because they understood what God intended when he initiated the original covenant with Israel.

Categorizing the Prophets

There is a broad way of categorizing the prophets, which would begin with Moses and Aaron and proceed through the New Testament, and there is a narrow way of categorizing the prophets, which would begin with Amos and end with Malachi. The Hebrew Bible categorizes the prophets in the broader manner, for it calls the books of Joshua, Judges, Samuel, and Kings THE FORMER PROPHETS. These books are so defined because their interest is more theological than historical in content. Some of the specific prophets from this time would be Elijah (875-850), Elisha (850-800), Nathan, Gad, Samuel, and Micaiah. Elijah and Elisha were the most important, but none of them wrote their messages down.

THE LATTER PROPHETS were the literary or writing prophets, and are more narrowly categorized. There are sixteen of them: four MAJOR PROPHETS (Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and Daniel), and twelve MINOR PROPHETS (Hosea, Joel, Amos, Obadiah, Jonah, Micah, Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah, Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi). The difference between the major and Minor Prophets has nothing to do with their relative importance in the life of Israel or in the fulfillment of their prophecies. There is simply more material in the Major Prophets and less in the Minor Prophets. This distinction was already being used by the time of Augustine (354-430 C.E.).

Another way of categorizing the prophets would be according to where and when they preached. If we categorized them in this way, they would come out as follows:

A. The Prophets of Israel (Fall of Israel: 722 B.C.E.)

1. Hosea (760-720 B.C.E.)
2. Amos (780-740 B.C.E.)
3. Joel (Date uncertain) (Assyrian Capital)
4. Jonah (790-770 B.C.E.) (Assyrian Capital)

B. The Prophets of Judah (Fall of Judah: 587 B.C.E.)

1. Isaiah (740-695 B.C.E.)
2. Jeremiah (627-586 B.C.E.)
3. Obadiah (586 B.C.E.) (Edom)
4. Micah (739-686 B.C.E.)
5. Nahum (660-620 B.C.E.)
6. Habakkuk (605-586 B.C.E.)
7. Zephaniah (640-609 B.C.E.)

C. The Prophets of the Captivity

1. Ezekiel (593-570 B.C.E.)
2. Daniel (605-534 B.C.E.)

D. The Prophets of the Restoration (538 B.C.E.)

1. Haggai (520 B.C.E.)
2. Zechariah (520 B.C.E.)
3. Malachi (450-400 B.C.E.)

A third way of categorizing the prophets would be as follows:

A. The Prophets of Israel (Fall: 722 B.C.E.)

1. Hosea (1)
2. Amos (2)

B. The Prophets of Judah (Fall: 587 B.C.E.)

1. Before the Fall
 - a. Isaiah (3)
 - b. Joel (4)
 - c. Micah (5)
2. During the Fall and Exile
 - a. Jeremiah (6)
 - b. Habakkuk (7)
 - c. Zephaniah (8)
3. During the Return and Restoration (538 B.C.E.)
 - a. Haggai (9)
 - b. Zechariah (10)
 - c. Malachi (11)

C. The Exilic Prophets

1. Ezekiel (12)
2. Daniel (13)

D. The Prophets to Nineveh (The Assyrian Capital)

1. Jonah (14)
2. Nahum (15)

E. The Prophet to Edom

1. Obadiah (16)

The Time of the Prophets

The books of the prophets belong to the period of the nation's decline, the exile into Babylon, and the return to their homeland. These years span a period of 250 to 300 years.

The Practical Need for Prophets

Example One

Dr. Paul Brand had a leprosy patient at Carville, named Pedro. For fifteen years he had lived without sensation of pain in his left hand, yet somehow the hand suffered no damage. They examined his hand and observed his activities to find out why. Finally, Pedro grew tired of their endless fascination with his hand. "You know," said Pedro, "I was born with a birthmark on my hand. The doctors said it was a hemangioma and froze it with dry ice. But they never fully got rid of it, because I can still feel it pulsing." No one thought of that. They verified that the blood vessels in his hand were indeed abnormal. The blood flowed very swiftly through that part of his hand, keeping its temperature close to that of the heart, too warm for the leprosy bacilli to flourish. A single warm spot, the size of a nickel, which Pedro had viewed as a defect, had become a wonderful advantage to him when he contracted leprosy. The one remaining patch of sensitivity protected his entire hand.

In a church that has grown large and institutional, I pray for similar small patches of sensitivity. We must look to prophets, whether in speech, sermon, or art form, to call attention to the needy by eloquently voicing their pain. "Since my people are crushed, I am crushed," cried Jeremiah (8:21). And elsewhere, "Oh my anguish, my anguish! I writhe in pain. Oh, the agony of my heart! My heart pounds within me, I cannot keep silent" (Jeremiah 4:19).³

Example Two

In 1982 the mayor of New York City, alarmed about the sudden increase of homeless people roaming the streets, made a radical proposal to church leaders. Thirty-six thousand people wander New York streets without shelter, he said; if each of the city's 3,500

³Paul Brand, *In His Image* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1984), p. 249.

churches and synagogues would take in ten of them, the problem of the homeless would be solved. The mayor brought to urgent attention a chronic pain that had long plagued a large city.

The churches responded defensively. One Protestant leader seemed offended that he had first read of the proposal in the newspaper. “It is a very complex situation and the remedy will be complex,” said another. “There are many problems of implementation.” Most asked for time to evaluate the proposal. They claimed their houses of worship were not equipped to shelter the homeless. Only seven congregations responded affirmatively.

Although the mayor’s proposal did have a complex dimension, its simple appeal to charity stands in direct line with the message of the Old Testament prophets, Jesus, and the apostles. “Share your bread with the hungry and bring the homeless poor into your house,” said Isaiah. And Jesus urged disciples to “give to everyone who begs from you.” In the early church, members routinely brought vegetables, fruit, milk, and honey to distribute to widows, prisoners, and the sick.”⁴

We need to study the prophets today because they had the ability to hear God, and with that ability, they could also apply his Word to what was going on in the world. By reading them we might also be able to discern his presence in history so that we could learn the lessons of history and open ourselves up to his Word for our present and future. Paul Brand compares their time to our’s:

The computer makes us fantastically more able to calculate and analyze; it does not help us to meditate. We have instruments to enable us to see everything from the nebulae to the neutron—everything, except ourselves. We have immeasurably extended our gift of sight, but not of insight. For that we have the same equipment as the eighth-century prophets. Potentially the same, but actually far poorer, for while we have been so busy extending one aspect of the knowing and telling self, we have allowed other aspects to atrophy. We have built ourselves up into powerful transmitting stations, but as receiving sets we are feeble.⁵

We need to study the prophets so that we can see what they saw. This will not make our lives more comfortable, but they will tune us into God, who alone holds our future in his hands.

⁴*Ibid.*, p. 275

⁵John V. Taylor, *The Go-Between God*, as quoted in Paul Brand, *In His Image*, p. 214.

AMOS



Amos by *Gustave Doré* (1832-1883)

1. Let Justice Roll

Amos 1:1—9:15

1. AMOS: LET JUSTICE ROLL (1:1—9:15)			
INTRODUCTION (1:1-2)			
A Shepherd from Tekoa, Judah	Two Years before The Earthquake	Uzziah was King of Judah	Jeroboam II was King of Israel
JUDGMENTS AGAINST FOREIGNERS (1:3—2:5)			
Against Damascus (1:3-5)	Against Gaza (Philistines) (1:6-8)	Against Tyre (1:9-10)	
Against Edom (1:11-12)	Against Amon (1:13-15)	Against Moab (2:1-3)	
JUDGMENT AGAINST JUDAH AND ISRAEL (3:1—6:14)			
<i>A Divided Nation</i>			
Judah (2:4-5) (Rejected the Law)		Israel (2:6-16) (Oppressed the Poor and Used Prostitutes)	
The Judgment (3:1—6:14)			
<i>Three Testimonies</i>		<i>Two Woes</i>	
The Promised Destruction (3:1-15) (3:2 & 11)		The Woe of Rejection (5:16-25) (5:18, 21-24)	
The Unheeded Warnings (4:1-13) (4:6-7)			
The Possibility of Life (5:1-15) (5:4-5, 14-15)			
THE FIVE VISIONS (7:1—9:15)			
1. The Locust Plague (7:1-3)	2. The Supernatural Fire (7:4-6)	3. The Plumb Line (7:7-9)	
The Confrontation with Amaziah (7:10-17)			
4. The Summer Fruit (8:1-3)	Indictment Against Israel (8:4-14)	5. The Fallen Sanctuary (9:1-4)	
The Destruction of the Nation (9:5-10)		The Restoration of Israel (9:11-15)	

1. AMOS: LET JUSTICE ROLL

Amos 1:1—9:15

ASSIGNMENTS			
Judgments against the Nations (1:1—2:16)	Testimonies Against Israel (3:1—5:15)	Woes Against Israel (5:16—6:14)	The Five Visions (7:1—9:15)

INTRODUCTION

The Person of Amos

The name “Amos” means “burden,” which might refer to the burden Yahweh gave him for his people. Other definitions given to his name are “the Lord carries” (a burden) and “the Lord upholds.” Amos was a layperson from Tekoa, which was located twelve miles south of Jerusalem on the edge of the Judean desert. Although he was a Shepherd and pruner of fig trees, he was no country bumpkin. He had an excellent grasp of history and responded to God’s call to prophesy in Israel. It is not clear whether he owned his own flocks and Sycamore-fig groves or merely worked as a hired hand. In light of his prophecy to the wealthy, the latter is more likely to be the case.

He left his native Judah to go to Bethel, one of the major religious centers of Israel. Jeroboam I had set up one of the calf-images at the time the Kingdom was divided. Another location for a calf-image was in Dan. Amos’ ministry in Bethel was very brief, no more than a few days. He was the first of the famous prophets to write down his message, although some scholars suggest that some of his hearers wrote it down.

The Message of Amos

Amos’ message was a call to Israel to repent or experience God’s judgment. In the face of the impending judgment, he also announced that a remnant would be spared. Within his message, he spoke against reliance on military might, on meaningless piety, on social injustice, and personal immorality.

The Setting

The setting for Amos’ ministry was during the reign of Jeroboam II (786-746 B.C.E.) in Israel and Uzziah (783-742) in Judah. This was a time of prosperity (for the wealthy),

religious piety (although insincere), and political security (an illusion). This has been referred to as Israel’s (and Judah’s) Indian summer. Everything seemed good on the surface, but Amos saw beneath the surface. Israel assumed that its prosperity and security was due to the effectiveness with which it carried out its cultic observances, but Amos saw that Israel was rotten to the core and so he felt compelled to speak. Thirty years later, after Jeroboam’s death, the Assyrians destroyed Israel.

The Date

It is difficult to be precise, even though an earthquake is mentioned (1:1). Most scholars date Amos at approximately 750 B.C.E.

The Author

No one doubts that Amos wrote the book, but there are doubts about some passages, which some scholars feel might have been added later.

The Organization		
(1:1—2:5)	(2:6—6:14)	(7:1—9:15)
Judgment against Israel’s Neighbors	Judgment against Israel	Five Visions of Judgment

JUDGMENT AGAINST ISRAEL’S NEIGHBORS (1:1—2:3)

Seven of Israel's neighbors are condemned first. The people of Israel were probably rejoicing to hear Amos’ opening prophecies, for those first prophecies were directed against hostile enemies.

Damascus (Syria) (1:3-5)

The phrase “for three...for four” means what the newer translations say—“for crime after crime.” The reference is to the multiplication of sins. The phrase comes out of the Wisdom Literature (Job 5:19; 33:14; Proverbs 6:16; 30:15, 18, 21, & 29); it means an infinite number of sins, even though the prophet does not go into detail.

Damascus was the oldest city in the world and the capital of Syria. It still is. The Syrian King, Hazael, and his son Benhadad, waged war on Damascus; there were many atrocities. Amos warned that the nation would fall. In 733/32 B.C.E., the Assyrian King,

Tiglath-Pileser III, reduced Damascus to subservience from which it never fully recovered. (See 2 Kings 16:9 & Isaiah 22:5-6.)

Gaza (Philistines) (1:6-8)

Gaza was singled out of the five primary cities of Philistia. Other Philistine cities were Ashdod, Ashkelon, and Ekron. For some reason Gath was omitted. Philistia had been Israel's perennial enemy. Amos' prediction was partially fulfilled when the Assyrians overthrew Gaza in 734 B.C.E.

Tyre (1:9-10)

Tyre was the chief city on the northwest coastland. It was weakened by Nebuchadrezzar's thirteen year siege in the sixth century B.C.E., and finally taken over by Alexander the Great in the fourth century B.C.E.

Edom (1:11-12)

The fourth nation was Edom, which had descended from Esau, Jacob's twin brother. Although Israel and Edom were blood brothers, only hatred and hostility existed between them. The Edomites refused to let Israel pass through their territory on the way to the Promised Land. The anger became really intense after Edom plundered Judah following the destruction of Jerusalem (586 B.C.E.).

Ammon (1:13-15)

The capital city of Ammon was Rabbah, now the modern Amman, capital of the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan. Amos predicted the doom of Exile for all its leaders, which occurred at the command of Nebuchadrezzar following the fall of Jerusalem in 586 B.C.E.

Moab (2:1-3)

The last foreign nation mentioned by Amos was Moab, a nation situated between Edom on the south and Ammon on the north. Kerioth, its primary fortified city, was also its capital in Amos' time. At this time Moab was already in the process of being depopulated. It was finally taken captive by Tiglath-Pileser III in 733 B.C.E., and from the sixth century B.C.E. on has been practically extinct.

JUDGMENT AGAINST JUDAH AND ISRAEL (2:4—6:14)

Judah and Israel (2:4-16)

Judah (2:4-5)

In mentioning Judah, Amos is beginning to zero in on Israel. Judah was Amos' own homeland and the only nation he accuses of not following the Law. This of course is coupled with the sin of following after false gods. Judah is to be judged by the full standard of God's Law. Judah's end came in 586 B.C.E. when the Babylonians destroyed both Jerusalem and its Temple.

Israel (2:6-16)

Israel and its neighbors are judged by the very same standards. While the other prophets emphasize "turning away from God to idols" as the primary sin, Amos focuses on the moral and social decline, which inevitably follows. There are first the social sins of the wealthy, who trample the head of the poor into the dust (2:6-7a), and then there are the personal sins which old and young (or father and son) alike commit, such as going to the temple prostitutes (2:7b). All sin profanes the holy name of God. God did not drive out the Canaanites so that his people could corrupt the land (2:9-12). If they insist upon moving in immoral directions, judgment will be certain to come (2:13-16).

The Judgment (3:1—6:14)

This section contains two sets of prophetic oracles. The first is a series of testimonies against Israel and the second is a series of woes for Israel. The former is lengthy (3:1—5:17), while the latter is brief (5:18—6:14)

The Testimonies against Israel (3:1—5:15)

Each of the three testimonies against Israel begins with the words, "Hear this word..."

The Promised Destruction (3:1-15) With Israel's election comes responsibility (3:2-3). Failure to live out that responsibility will result in complete destruction. This destruction however will not come without warning, which is being given by the prophets (3:6-7). When it finally comes nothing will be able to stop it. Although the horns of the altar have been a place of refuge, they will be cut off (3:14). The tradition was that one could gain safety by grasping the horns of the altar, but with God's coming punishment, there will be no sanctuary at the altar. Summer and winter homes will perish as well, and refuge to them will be to no avail (3:15). These luxurious homes decorated with ivory are but symbols of wealth, which has been gained at the expense of the poor. These great houses will be demolished. Such homes have been found in both Megiddo and Samaria by archaeologists.

The Unheeded Warnings (4:1-13) The wives of the wealthy nagged their husbands to continue to bring luxuries home to them, all at the expense of the poor. Amos calls them the “cows of Bashan” (the best breed of cattle in ancient Canaan) and warns that they will be led away with hooks, something that the Assyrians were known to do with their captives. They will be dragged to “Harmon.” (4:3) “Harmon” is a word with an unknown meaning. Amos is the only one in the Bible to use the word. Scholars can only guess at its meaning. Some of the more popular guesses are that it means, “naked devoted to destruction (dunghill), or that it refers to a hill east of Bethel called Rimmon.” While these women sought luxury, they maintained a religious facade (4:4-5), but for such people, worship itself was a sin and their offering an offense. God appealed to them through nature—famine and drought—(4:6ff.) and history (4:11), but they would not listen; therefore, they had better get ready to meet their God (4:12), which will not be a pleasant experience.

“Cleanness of teeth” (4:6) is a figure of speech referring to the famine brought to them by the Lord's control over nature. Those who survived the ravages of nature were like a “brand plucked out of the burning.” (4:11) To survive the acts of God in nature and history would have been a miracle. After all, no one survived the judgment of God on Sodom and Gomorrah. John Wesley used this phrase to describe his own survival from a burning parsonage and saw in his personal survival a calling into ministry.

The Possibility of Life (5:1-15) Although this section opens with a lament (5:1-2), there is still time. Things may look bad, but there is still hope. Hope however cannot be found in more of the same. The path to life is not found in more ritual, whether it be done in Bethel, Gilgal, or Beersheba (shrine towns). Hope is found in turning to the Lord (5:4, 6, & 14) and his ways.

The Woes Against Israel (5:16—6:14)

The Woe of Rejection (5:16-25) Israel believed that on the Day of the Lord God would show his power over the world, and that Israel would be exalted as his chosen nation. Amos warns that the Day of the Lord will be for Israel a Day of Judgment (5:18).

The trouble with Israel is that it continues to trust in its festivals and sacrifices, its cultic worship of the star deities of Sakkuth and Kaiwan (deities associated with the planet Saturn). (See Acts 7:42-43 for a description of the Assyrian deities, who are Moloch and Rephan.) Nothing is wrong with festivals and sacrifices, but obedience is primary. Israel fell in love with festivals and sacrifices without falling in love with the Will of God. When there is no obedience, festivals and sacrifices become meaningless.

Assyria is indirectly referred to as the nation, which will punish Israel (5:27). The heart of Amos' message is that God desires “justice and righteousness” (5:21-24). This is not a new commandment. It was part of the original covenant and Israel should not have forgotten it, but it was forgotten and distorted as Israel began to chase after other gods. This is the reason for the Lord's rejection.

This passage suggests that mercy or justice ranks above piety or ritual. John Wesley wrote that however zealous Christians were for works of piety, they should be more zealous for works of mercy.

Whenever...one interferes with the other, works of mercy are to be preferred [over works of piety]. Even reading, hearing, prayer, are to be omitted, or to be postponed, “at charity’s almighty call”—when we are called to relieve the distress of our neighbor, whether in body or soul.¹

The Woe of Exile (6:1-14) Israel had a false sense of security in its wealth and affluence. People lived in luxurious surroundings and slept on beds of ivory (6:4-5), which lulled the people into thinking, that God was blessing them. It lulls us into thinking that we are enjoying the blessings of God as well.

Only justice and righteousness can bring security and blessing; without them, there is no security. God’s intent is to bring Israel down by raising an enemy, who will penetrate Israel’s borders (Lebo-hamath to the Wadi Arabah) (6:14), and take its affluent citizens into exile first (6:7). The Lebo-hamath to the Wadi Arabah refers to an area of land beginning with the Orontes River in North Lebanon to the Dead Sea in the South. It is a way of saying the whole land of Israel, including both the Kingdoms of Israel and Judah.

THE FIVE VISIONS (7:1—9:15)

What follows is a series of five visions and some narrative or biographical material. Many see in this material Amos’ account of experiences, which constituted his calling to become a prophet. If this is the case, then the material belongs at the beginning of the book.

1. The Locust Plague (7:1-3)

As a locust plague destroys the people’s grain, so will the Lord destroy Israel? Why the King’s share of the grain was not destroyed is not explained. Amos intercedes and begs for God’s forgiveness. God relents, but he does not offer forgiveness. This is the first vision of Israel’s doom.

2. The Supernatural Fire (7:4-6)

As a supernatural fire would destroy all of creation, including the abyss (the waters beneath the earth), so will the Lord destroy Israel? Amos does not ask for forgiveness, but he does beg the Lord to *terminate* this plan. The Lord relents. This is the second vision of Israel’s doom.

¹ John Wesley, *Sermon 92, On Zeal*, ¶II.p.

3. The Plumb Line (7:7-9)

So far Amos has succeeded in convincing the Lord to delay his judgment against Israel, but now the Lord invites Amos to see how serious the situation has become. He does this by measuring Israel against a plumb line. Amos is able to see for himself that Israel cannot stand against this standard of measurement, and that destruction is inevitable. This is the third vision of Israel's doom.

The Confrontation with Amaziah (7:10-17)

Amaziah was the High Priest under the reign of Jeroboam II. When Amos came on the scene, Amaziah saw him as a foreigner interfering in Israel's affairs. To an extent, this was true. Amos came from Judah and prophesied in Israel. He admits that he is not a professional prophet and is not a member of the prophetic guild. He is but a layperson holding down two professions. He is a herdsman and a dresser of sycamore trees. A dresser of sycamore trees was a profession in which a person punctured the unripe fruit to make it edible and salable.

Amaziah sent word to Jeroboam that Amos was predicting his death by means of a sword. This was Amaziah's interpretation of Amos' prophecy. Even if Amos did predict Jeroboam's violent death, he might have been referring to the House of Jeroboam. While Jeroboam himself died a natural death, his son and successor, Zechariah, was assassinated (2 Kings 15:8 and 10).

Amos was willing to confront Amaziah only because the Lord commanded him to do so. So we find God's man going up against the official religion of Israel and Amaziah, its primary leader. Amaziah's angry reaction was that Amos should return to Judah, from which he came. In reply to Amaziah, Amos prophesied that his wife would become a harlot to support her-self; his sons and daughters killed by the sword; his land would be parceled out, and he himself would die in exile.

4. The Summer Fruit (8:1-3)

The basket of Summer Fruit is a symbol of the immediacy of Israel's end. The end is not merely the close of a season, but the end of Israel as a nation. This is Amos' fourth vision of Israel's doom.

Indictment Against Israel (8:4-14)

Israel thinks that its sins are too minor for God to notice. Merchants observe holy days, but they are impatient for them to pass so that they can return to their fraudulent business practices. They use an undersized ephah ($\frac{2}{3}$ of a bushel) to measure their products, and an overweight shekel ($\frac{1}{2}$ an ounce) to balance the customer's silver (8:4-5). Their use of false balances will not go unnoticed. When the end comes their wickedness and idolatry will not help them.

Ashimah was a Syrian fertility goddess worshiped in Israel. Their pagan deities from Dan in the north to Beersheba in the south will be useless (8:14). In the face of such vain idolatry Yahweh hides himself. Once judgment begins, it will do no good to cry out to God, for divine silence accompanies judgment.

5. The Fallen Sanctuary (9:1-4)

This fifth and final vision describes the end of Israel. Destruction is inevitable. There will be no spiritual refuge in sheol or heaven (9:2) and no earthly security on Mount Carmel (9:3). There will be no escape.

The end of Israel is illustrated with the fall of the Sanctuary. Is this the Sanctuary in Bethel or the Temple in Jerusalem? No Temple existed in Bethel, but then, nothing is really said of a Temple. Some of the imagery hints at the idea of a fallen Temple. The capitals (pillars) seem to indicate that the prophet is describing the destruction of the Temple. Whether he is talking about a fallen Sanctuary or a fallen Temple matters little. What he is talking about is the end of Israel as a nation. That much is crystal clear.

Destruction of the Nation (9:5-10)

Israel's privileged position will not help. Everything will be destroyed. The Lord of nature and history will deal with Israel like he would deal with any other sinful Nation. What must be understood here is that any belief in a universal God also implies a universal ethic that applies to every Nation.

The Restoration of Israel (9:11-15)

The end of the book of Amos is so out of character with everything that has gone before, that many scholars have suggested these verses as an addition by another author. Perhaps an exilic or postexilic prophet added these words of hope. The idea is that a righteous remnant will survive and the Davidic Empire will be restored. In the meeting of the Apostles and Elders in Jerusalem, James quoted this hopeful conclusion of Amos in support of the New Israel, the Church (Acts 15:16-17).

A word of caution needs to be spoken. We can never draw the conclusion that a victorious nation is being blessed by God or even that a good nation committed to divine righteousness and justice will inevitably prosper. The crucifixion of Jesus forever lays such ideas to rest. What can be believed however is that God will have the last word and the resurrection of Jesus is the pronouncement in history of God's final word. God is not pleased with destroying his creation, but promises to restore a remnant and rule that remnant forever.

THE HEART OF THE MATTER

The heart of the matter, for Amos, is clearly stated in Amos 5:21-24, where he quotes God:

I hate, I despise your festivals, and I take no delight in your solemn assemblies. Even though you offer me your burnt offerings and grain offerings, I will not accept them; and the offerings of wellbeing of your fatted animals I will not look upon. Take away from me the noise of your songs; I will not listen to the melody of your harps. But let justice roll down like waters, and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream.

This first of the writing prophets calls for faith that results in action. He expects people who enter into a covenant with God to fall in love with God's standard of righteousness and to shape a new kind of justice in the world. Faith that does not do this is hypocritical and good for nothing.

How can we control hypocrisy in the Church? Every Church has its in-actives and those who attend only on Christmas and Easter. In Asia these are called *Rice Christians* because they come only for the distribution of rice. What should be noticed is that Amos is not talking about those who only come occasionally, but about those who are present for religious worship. They love to worship God, but something is missing in their worship. They cannot wait for the Sabbath to end so they can get back to what is really important—earning money (8:4). What is important to them is their luxurious summer and winter homes adorned with Ivory (3:15).

How can we lie on beds inlaid with ivory and eat feasts while there are people without any place to lay their heads and who die of hunger for lack of food? We can only do those things because we close our eyes to crushing needs in the world and because we mistakenly think that our wealth is a sign of God's blessing upon our goodness. Amos bursts all such bubbles and illusions.

Perhaps, says Paul Brand in *Fearfully and Wonderfully Made*, it helps to shrink the world down into a community of 1,000 people. If we did this...

180 of us would live high on a hill called the developed world;
820 would live on the rocky bottomland called the rest of the world.

The fortunate 180 on the hill would have 80 percent of the wealth of the whole town, over half of all the rooms in town with over two rooms per person, 85 percent of all the automobiles, 80 percent of all the TV sets, 92 percent of all the telephones, and an average income of \$5,000 per person per year.

The not-so-fortunate 820 people on the bottom would get by on only \$700 per person per year, many of them on less than \$75. They would average five persons to a room.

How would the fortunate group of hill-dwellers use its incredible wealth? As a group they would spend less than 1 percent of their income to aid the lower land. (In the United States, for example, of every \$100 earned):

\$18.30 goes for food
\$6.60 is spent on recreation and amusement
\$5.80 buys clothes
\$2.40 buys alcohol
\$1.50 buys tobacco
\$1.30 is given for religious and charitable uses, and only a small part of
that goes outside the U.S.

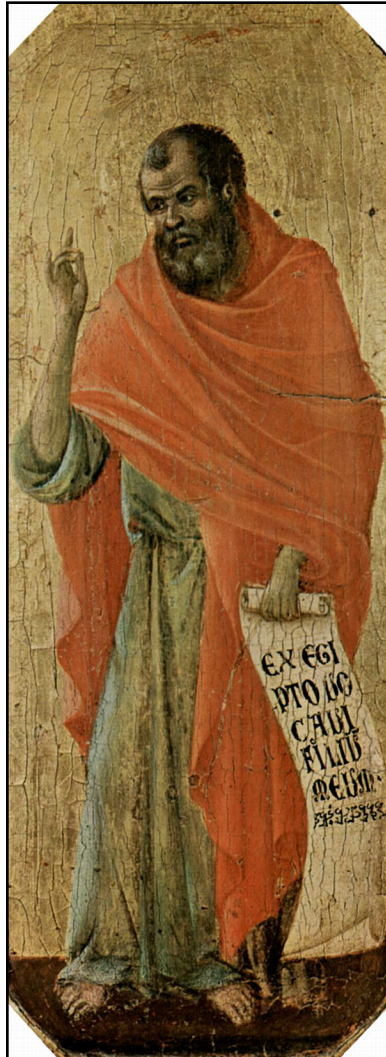
How would the villagers on the crowded plain—a third of whose people are suffering from malnutrition—feel about the folks on the hill?¹

Amos represents the villagers on the crowded plain. He challenges the folks on the hill to repent and get serious about straightening out this gross injustice. The standard for justice is not what our affluent next-door neighbor has, but the Righteousness (or Will) of God.

While we may not have any political power to help those who are on the crowded plain, we can get our own priorities straight. This means that we contribute time and money to those causes, which will help solve the problem, both as individuals and as congregations. My personal goal is to contribute a minimum of 10 percent of my income to the local congregation of which I am a part, with half available for the budget and half for causes beyond the local church. I believe that the budget of every local church should aim at using half of its resources to help the people on the crowded plain. When we begin to do this, then we are getting at the heart of the matter, and God will approve of our worship.

¹ Paul Brand, *Fearfully and Wonderfully Made* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1980), pp. 61-62.

HOSEA



Hosea by Duccio di Buoninsegna (1309-1311)

2. Unconditional Love

Amos 1:1—9:15

2. HOSEA: UNCONDITONAL LOVE (1:1—14:9)		
HOSEA’S MARRIAGE AND FAMILY (1:1—3:5)		
Hosea’s Time (1:1)		
Hosea, son of Beeri “Salvation or Deliverer”	Kings of Judah Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz, Hezekiah	King of Israel Jeroboam
Hosea’s Wife and Children (1:2—2:1)		
Jezreel (Son) (1:4) “God Sows” Destruction and Restoration	Lo-Ruhamah (Daughter) (1:6) “Not pitied or No more mercy” Without Lo: “You are Loved”	Lo-Ammi (Son) (1:8) “Not my People; No longer...” Without Lo: “You are my People”
Hosea reaches out to Gomer (2:2—3:5)		
To Unfaithful Israel (2:2-13) (2:13)	God’s Steadfast Love (2:14-23) (2:14, 19-20, 23)	Restoration of Gomer (3:1-5) (3:1-2a)
GOD’S CASE AGAINST ISRAEL (4:1—14:9)		
<i>The Charge (4:1-2)</i>	Idolatry in Israel (4:1-19)	
<i>The Sentence (5:9)</i>	Judgment against Israel (5:1-14)	
<i>God’s Desire (6:6)</i>	A Change of Heart (5:15—6:6)	
<i>The Warning to Judah (6:11)</i>	Israel’s Turning Away (6:7—7:16)	
<i>A Return to Slavery (8:7 and 13b)</i>	The Death of Israel (8:1-14)	
<i>Exile and Dispersion (9:3 and 17)</i>	The Harlot Rejected (9:1-17)	
<i>Seek the Lord! (10:12)</i>	Loss of King and Image (10:1-15)	
<i>God loves Israel (11:8-9)</i>	A Father’s Agonizing Love (11:1-12)	
<i>God worked through Prophets (12:4b-6 & 13)</i>	Rebellion and Restoration (12:1-14)	
<i>God judges through Assyria (13:2b-3 & 15)</i>	God’s Patience Ends (13:1-16)	
HOSEA’S PLEA TO ISRAEL (14:1-9)		

2. HOSEA: UNCONDITIONAL LOVE

(1:1—14:9)

ASSIGNMENTS				
The Story of Hosea (1:1—3:5)	Judgment against Israel (4:1—6:6)	Israel's turning Away (6:7—9:17)	God's Agonizing (10:1—11:12)	Rebellion and Restoration (12:1—14:9)

INTRODUCTION

Hosea is the first of what we call the Minor (Latter) Prophets. This does not mean that he was the first to write. These prophets are grouped with some thought given to chronology, but their chronology has more to do with who was in power than with who came first. We can group the twelve Minor Prophets as follows:

A. Height of Assyrian Power. (Late 8th Century B.C.E.)

1. Hosea
2. Joel
3. Amos
4. Obadiah
5. Jonah
6. Micah

B. End of Assyrian Power. (Late 7th Century B.C.E.)

7. Nahum
8. Habakuk
9. Zephaniah

C. Height of Persian Power.

10. Haggai
11. Zechariah
12. Malachi

The Person of Hosea

Not a great deal is known about Hosea. His father's name was Beerli and Hosea married a woman named Gomer. Just who was Gomer? Was she a priestess, a cult prostitute, or simply a young wife who went astray? Some connect Gomer's name to "fig cakes," suggesting that she could be had for the price of two cakes.

Hosea was a younger contemporary of Amos and an older contemporary of Isaiah and Micah. Judging from his prophetic work, he was highly educated and preached in Israel (the Northern Kingdom). Death came to him prior to the Fall of Samaria in 722-721 B.C.E. His name means "salvation" or "deliverance." Some think that Hosea was a baker because of the baking imagery he used in 7:4-6.

The Message of Hosea

Using his wife Gomer as an example, Hosea preached that God loves Israel, even though Israel has been unfaithful; hence, Hosea's personal life became an incarnation of God's redeeming love for Israel. The whole book of Hosea is unified around this theme of God's divine love and compassion for Israel. He simply cannot let Israel go.

Jesus was highly influenced by Hosea's message. It forms the background behind Jesus' love for outcasts, sinners, harlots, and tax collectors. The central message in Hosea is that God desires steadfast love, not sacrifice (Hosea 6:6 and Matthew 9:13; 12:7).

Another central concern for Hosea was the crisis in leadership. The priests and cult prophets were worse than useless and the monarchy (King) was an affront to the real kingship of Yahweh. In the midst of this vacuum of leadership, Hosea began to speak with more than words. He spoke with the example of his life.

Judgment also appears in the message of Hosea. Unlike Amos, who does not name the enemy who will conquer Israel, Hosea names Assyria.

The Setting

The real problem for Hosea was a religious one. Although Israel had a powerful King in Jeroboam II, the nation was in a mess. People had given in to Canaanite culture and religion. The religious setting was dominated by Baalism. Baal (Lord, Owner, Master) had a female consort in Astarte or Asherah. The fertility of the land, so the people thought, depended upon sexual relations between Baal and Astarte. To encourage intercourse between these two gods, worshipers gathered at shrines or groves, usually on hills or other high places and tried to stimulate their gods sexually by involving themselves in sacred prostitution, orgies, and other erotic practices, an integral part of Canaanite culture and religion. In Hosea's time many of these practices had been incorporated into the worship of Yahweh as well.

The rejection of Yahweh through the adoption of these pagan religious practices brought about a moral and political decline. Following Jeroboam’s death, Israel had six kings and four of them assassinated their predecessors.

The Date

Hosea wrote sometime between 755 B.C.E. and 723 B.C.E. Although he may have been a prophet for many years, nothing is said of him in other biblical books. He died before the Fall of Samaria.

The Author

There is very little question concerning who wrote the Book of Hosea. Hosea is the author, although some of his disciples might have helped in recreating some of his prophecies. Those prophets came from Judah, while Hosea himself came from Israel.

The Organization

There are basically three parts to the Book of Hosea. There is the biographical section and the collection of his prophecies. The Book ends with a message of hope.

(1:1—3:5)	(4:1—13:16)	(14:1-9)
Hosea’s Marriage and Family	God’s Case Against Israel	Hosea’s Plea To Israel

HOSEA’S WIFE AND CHILDREN (1:1—2:1)

The very name Hosea means “salvation” or “deliverance.” Hosea was commanded to illustrate God’s feelings towards Israel through his marital relationship and family life. First, he was to marry Gomer, a harlot; they were to have three children, whose names would describe the kind of relationship that existed between God and the people. The children were named as follows:

Jezreel (1:4)

The firstborn son was named “Jezreel,” which means “God sows.” Jezreel was both a city and a valley, which was located between Galilee and Samaria. Jezreel, as a symbolic name, points back to Jehu’s bloody revolt at Jezreel around 842 B.C.E. and forward to Israel’s restoration (1:11). The name carries a double meaning. God sows “destruction” as

well as “restoration.” When Hosea names his son, he is thinking about God’s decision to punish his people for their sins. But restoration always lies in the background, for God also calls them to repentance, so he can restore them.

Lo-ruhamah (1:6)

The second child was a daughter, whose name means, “not pitied,” or “no more mercy.” Because of Israel’s sin, the Lord will not pity the nation, nor will he have any mercy on the people. Judgment will break out across the land.

Lo-Ammi (1:9)

The third child was a son, whose name means “not my people,” or “no longer my people.” This name symbolizes the fact that the child does not belong to Hosea; its name symbolizes that Israel has broken the covenant and no longer deserves to be called God’s Chosen People.

God’s purpose in asking Hosea to do all this is to give the people one last opportunity to repent before judgment breaks out. The final verses in this section allude to God’s hope for the nation. Jezreel will also symbolize the restoration of Judah and Israel (1:11), and the "Lo" (not) will be dropped from the other two children’s names to illustrate the new situation. Ammi will mean, “You are my people;” and Ruhamah means, “You are loved.”

The Apostle Paul quotes from Hosea 1:10 when he discusses the problem of the Jews in Romans 9:25-26 and suggests that God intends to reclaim Israel as his people.

HOSEA REACHES OUT TO GOMER (2:2—3:5)

Hosea reaches out to Gomer through his children, as God reaches out to Israel through his prophets.

Unfaithful Israel (2:2-13)

Gomer is not a harlot in the ordinary sense. She does not have sexual relationships with just anybody. She is involved in ritual or sacred prostitution. This would have been a religious act in which sexual intercourse was part of a rite to get Baal to bless them with fertile fields. Gomer was acting very much like Israel, in being unfaithful to Yahweh. The consequence, according to Hosea, will be barren fields to prove that Baal has no power. This is a call for Israel to return to Yahweh.

God’s Steadfast Love (2:14-23)

If Gomer (Israel) would only return then the covenant could be renewed, and all the negatives could be removed. God intends to put forth every effort to capture the heart of Israel. The children’s names would then symbolize the new relationship. War would

become a thing of the past (2:18) in this new relationship, for righteousness, justice, and steadfast love would be the new reality (2:19).

Hosea's Restoration of Gomer (3:1-5)

Apparently Gomer left Hosea for other lovers, just as Israel left Yahweh for other gods. The “cakes of raisins” refers to a cult food used in worshiping the Baal idols; this could be an indication that Gomer was a sacred prostitute for Baal. This act of adultery, or in the case of Israel, idolatry, led to enslavement.

Hosea paid a high price (7 ounces of silver, 11 & 1/2 bushels of barley, and some wine) to redeem her from bondage. Israel too left Yahweh, only to be enslaved; restoration involved a price to be paid. Hosea was to pay the price, which symbolized what God would have to do in order to restore Israel.

GOD'S CASE AGAINST ISRAEL (4:1—14:9)

The prophecies, which follow in these chapters, describe a court trial in which God presses charges (4:1-2), passes a judicial sentence (5:1), and imposes a judicial penalty (5:9).

Idolatry in Israel (4:1-19)

This whole section from chapter four to fourteen was written following the death of Jeroboam and makes no further reference to Hosea's family. It also lacks a clear order and structure.

Israel's idolatry has manifested itself through a number of other sins: swearing, lying, killing, stealing, and adultery (4:2). The kind of adultery mentioned is sacred prostitution in which sexual relations were engaged in on mountaintops and under trees to urge Baal to gain control over the reproductive powers of nature. Idolatry is to be thought of as adultery, for it consists in being unfaithful to Yahweh. Both the priests and the prophets participate in this unfaithfulness. The priests do not properly interpret the Law and the prophets do not have visions at night (4:5).

The chief religious sanctuary of the Northern Kingdom is ironically called “Beth-aven,” (4:15) which means “House of Iniquity/Evil.” The sanctuary's real name was “Bethel,” which means “House of God.”

Ephraim is the name for Israel. Two reasons have been given for the use of Ephraim to refer to Israel. The first is that Jeroboam I, an Ephraimite, was the first King of Israel; and the second reason has to do with Ephraim as being the largest and most centrally located tribe in the Kingdom. Although the nation has committed adultery (idolatry) against Yahweh, the prophet still refers to her with this affectionate term.

Judgment Against Israel (5:1-15)

Moved by the spirit of prostitution (idolatry), Israel forces God to pass judgment. The day of wrath and punishment is coming. The warning is given to priests, kings, and the people (5:1). Out of sacred prostitution were born alien children, who knew nothing of the great religious observances (new moon), and so Ephraim (Israel) would become a complete desolation (5:7-9). Judah should take heed, for its turn is coming (5:10-12). Israel's reliance on Assyria (5:13) will not help. God is the only one who can help.

A Change of Heart (6:1—6:6)

Suffering may cause God's people to turn to him, but unless there is a change of heart, the turning does no good. Like the morning clouds or dew (6:4), it is only a temporary kind of turning. In difficult times people may turn to religion, but that does not mean that they turn to God. God expects an inward change of the heart.

Love, not sacrifice, is what God expects. "For I desire steadfast love and not sacrifice, the knowledge of God rather than burnt offerings." (6:6) Does Hosea consider sacrifice evil, or simply irrelevant? The answer is not clear. What is clear is that he expects more than an institutional response. There must be a change of heart. (Compare Micah 6:6-8 with Amos 5:23-24)

Israel's Turning Away (6:7—7:16)

Instead of keeping the Covenant through steadfast love, Israel responds by turning away from God and involves itself in robbery, murder, and harlotry (idolatry) (6:9-10). Judah should take heed of what is happening, for it too will face judgment for the same sins (6:11). In turning away from God, Israel turns to foreign peoples (7:8-9), foreign powers (7:11), such as Assyria and Egypt, and foreign gods (7:16), such as Baal.

The allusion in Hosea 7:8 to a cake not turned over refers to Israel as a half-fed people who practice a half-lived religion. The references to baking in this chapter have led some to conclude that Hosea was a baker, but no real evidence exists to confirm this conclusion. See also Hosea 7:4-6.

The Death of Israel (8:1-14)

There is a conflict in the Bible over whether the idea of kings was God's idea or that of the people. Hosea sees the monarchy as idolatrous. When the two kingdoms split, Jeroboam I set up two sanctuaries, one at Bethel and one at Dan and golden bulls (calves) were set up in both places. While the intention may not have been to make them idols, idols they soon became (8:4-5).

Israel has sown the wind; it will reap the whirlwind (8:7). This is another way of saying that the death of the nation is just around the corner. It will do no good to turn to Assyria (8:9) or any other ally, for nothing can help. There will be no more kings in Israel (8:10).

It will do no good to keep up the pretense of religion (8:13), for this will not delight the Lord. Both Israel and Judah will return to Egypt (8:14), which is another way of saying they will come to an end. The punishment for violating the Covenant is always a new slavery, only this time it will take place under Assyria instead of Egypt. For Judah that slavery will take place in Babylon, but Hosea is preoccupied with Israel, not Judah.

The Harlot Rejected (9:1-17)

Israel has played the harlot long enough (9:1), and will finally be rejected. Hosea has the awful task of informing them at the height of the grape harvest. He is God's watchman (9:8). In contrast to Amos, who was practically thrown out of Bethel, we have no idea how the people responded to Hosea. We can only conclude from Hosea 9:7b that his prophecy, made him look like a fool to his contemporaries.

His prophetic message was that they would be enslaved by Assyria as their ancestors had been enslaved by Egypt (9:3). While their ancestors had made a covenant with the Lord in the wilderness, they consecrated themselves to fertility gods like Baal. They expected crop renewal but it will do them no good, for Baal cannot produce grain and wine. The Lord will shut up their womb (9:11-12). If that is not enough, he will also destroy them (9:12ff.). Beginning from Gilgal, where Samuel anointed Saul as King, most of their kings led the people into disobedience; hence, Israel has become like a faithless wife and will become a wanderer among the nations (9:17). This was a difficult message for people so engrossed in idolatry.

Loss of King and Image (10:1-15)

Israel has rejected the Lord as King and turned to a useless image, the golden calf at Bethel. The more prosperous the nation became, the more it turned to idolatry and sin (10:1). The people worshiped that which was already marked for destruction. Judgment was about to spring up like poisonous weeds (10:4). When it finally comes, people will be crying out for the mountains and hills to fall upon them (10:8), an image used also by Jesus (Luke 23:30) and John (Revelation 6:16).

The crimes of Gibeah are twofold: (1) The rape and murder of the Levite's concubine (Judges 19:22-28) and (2) the setting up of the monarchy itself (I Samuel 10:17-26). For Israel this symbolizes the compounded sin and guilt of centuries. While Israel is very religious on the surface, the inside is a wasteland. If the nation would only turn to the Lord, salvation would rain upon it (10:12); but unfortunately, nothing can be expected but the storm of war, which will put an end to the monarchy (10:15). The meaning of Shalman's victory at Beath-ar'bel is uncertain. Some scholars think Hosea is talking about Salamann, the Moabite King; and others think he is referring to Shalamemeser V, the Assyrian King who dealt the final blow to Israel.

A Father's Agonizing Love (11:1-12)

One must be careful of the phrase in Hosea 11:1b, which says: “out of Egypt I called my son.” This refers to God’s deliverance of Israel out of Egyptian bondage. It does not refer to the flight of Mary and Joseph and their newborn son into Egypt and their subsequent return to Nazareth. Israel is the son called out of Egypt.

The prophet changes the image from that of husband and wife to father and son. One cannot study this chapter without thinking about Jesus’ parable of the prodigal son. The father simply cannot give his son (Ephraim or Israel) up, whom he called out of Egypt and taught how to walk (11:3). In spite of his sin, God simply cannot destroy Israel as he destroyed Admah and Zeboiim. These were cities destroyed along with Sodom and Gomorrah (Deuteronomy 29:23).

God was torn between being just or loving, a pain that he takes all the way to the cross in Jesus Christ. This dilemma allows us to see into the very heart of God.

Rebellion and Restoration (12:1-14)

Israel’s idolatry began at Bethel. Hosea wants to remind Israel of its spiritual roots, so he makes the connection through Jacob, Israel’s namesake. Three events from Jacob's life are described. They are: (1) the natal heel grabbing, a pun on his name (Genesis 25:26), (2) the wrestling with God at the river Jabbok (Genesis 32:22-30), and (3) the encounter with God at Bethel (Genesis 28:11-17).

It was at Bethel where Jacob first encountered the Lord (Yahweh). This was like Moses’ burning bush. Hosea uses this bit of history to call the people back to the Lord (12:6). There are no excuses, for Israel was led out of Egypt by a prophet, (Moses), and God spoke through many other prophets as well (12:10 and 13). The tragedy is that Israel turned away from God, but the miracle is that God refuses to turn away from Israel.

God’s Patience Ends (13:1-16)

Israel may turn to Baal, but it will do no good. Idols have no power and judgment will be the inevitable result. The symbol of Israel’s rebellion is the “kissing of the calves,” (13:2) of which there had been two (one in Bethel and one in Dan). Israel has thus rebelled against the only one who could help. Even princes and kings stand powerless to help (13:4 & 10). Because the nation has turned away from God, he will become like a lion, a leopard or a wild beast towards it (13:7-8).

The symbol of God’s judgment in this chapter is an East Wind, which was known to dry everything up in the hot summer. The East Wind is Assyria, who will become the instrument of God’s judgment. The East Wind will overtake Samaria (the capital) and Israel (the nation). God’s patience has run out.

HOSEA'S PLEA TO ISRAEL (14:1-9)

Israel's major sins have finally caught up with it. They have been "idolatry" and "foreign alliances." The nation turned to Assyria and it is by Assyria that it will be destroyed. Confidence in "foreign alliances" demonstrates its lack of confidence in the Lord. Judgment will humble Israel, but judgment does not mean that God has rejected his people. God's grace will also be revealed in the forgiven, healed, and holy land. But God's people need to turn to the Lord and it is for this that Hosea pleads.

There is a final postscript in Hosea 14:9. It is a later addition in the tradition of the Wisdom Literature. This postscript closely resembles the main teaching of Proverbs 4:11-12 and Ecclesiastes 12:13-14. It is a final commentary of the message of the Book of Hosea. Those who have reverence for the Lord and turn from evil are truly wise. They will not stumble.

STEADFAST LOVE

When couples come to me to get married, I always give them a premarital inventory. This is not a test. It is a series of 142 statements about marriage in which couples are asked to agree or disagree. The idea is to compare their responses with one another and with what the psychologist, who wrote the inventory, believes will contribute to a good marriage. One of those statements reads as follows: "If my future husband/wife were unfaithful, it would end our marriage relationship." This statement usually sparks some discussion.

Couples planning their weddings do not expect to have to deal with unfaithfulness. After all, they *really* love one another, and they do not expect anything to go wrong with their marriage. Many of them feel strongly about the statement. Even though they might not end the marriage, they feel that the relationship would undergo a *severe* change. One might be able to forgive, but one cannot forget the unfaithfulness.

Hosea entered into a marriage in which he knew that his wife was going to be unfaithful. In fact God tells him to marry a woman of harlotry, which is then compared to Israel's unfaithfulness to God. Harlotry in the Bible is a way of describing idolatry. The people have been unfaithful to the first commandment to worship only the Lord, and they have taken up with the idols of Canaan. Gomer, Hosea's wife, may have been a sacred or temple prostitute, further illustrating the problem of Israel's harlotry or idolatry. Temple prostitutes were used in Canaan to prime the pump of gods to help women become fertile and farmers' crops to grow. There were both male and female prostitutes. While sexual intercourse, with these temple prostitutes, was a common practice for the Canaanites, it was never a common practice for the Israelites. They were to obey the Ten Commandment; nevertheless, some Israelites engaged in sexual relationships with them under the guise of being religious.

All this sexual unfaithfulness really has to do with Israel's violation of the first commandment. Israel has gone after other gods. For God, such unfaithfulness will not end the marriage, for God wants his people to return to him. The key passage is Hosea

6:6, where God pleads with his unfaithful people, "...For I desire steadfast love and not sacrifice, the knowledge of God rather than burnt offerings." God does not expect from his people what he himself has not already given. The story of Hosea and Gomer illustrates what steadfast love really is. Hosea expresses such love to Gomer even though he has no guarantee that she will ever return to him. In the story we simply do not know what she did. The Good News in this story is that God seeks his unfaithful people with steadfast love even when they do not respond to him. He does not desire burnt offerings from them, but the same kind of love he has bestowed upon them. He seeks to be reconciled with them.

That which was promised by the prophet Hosea, became a reality through Jesus Christ. When Jesus was asked why he ate with tax collectors and sinners, he quoted Hosea in Matthew 9:12-13: "Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick. Go and learn what this means, *'I desire mercy, not sacrifice.'* For I have come to call not the righteous, but sinners." Jesus imitated Hosea. He sought those already engaged in harlotry, that is idolatry, and for some strange reason, they responded to him.

If there is anything the church today needs to learn today, it is how to eat with those whom it considers to be sinners and gain a positive response from them. The method used by Hosea and Jesus is not complicated. Paul describes it in Romans 5:8: "But God proves his love for us in that while we still were sinners Christ died for us." Both of them managed to do this without compromising their own principles of righteousness. This is also what the Church—as the Body of Christ—must do as well. It also helps to know that apart from the grace of God, we are all sinners without hope of salvation. The saints knew this. Why has this truth eluded the rest of us? Hosea knew this too, but Isaiah 64:6 expresses it best: "We have all become like one who is unclean, and all our righteous deeds are like a filthy cloth." The reverse side of this is true too. When we experience God's steadfast love, we learn how to love with that same kind of love.

MICAH



Micah by Gustave Doré (1832-1883)

3. Defining the Faith

Micah 1:1—7:20

3. MICAH: DEFINING THE FAITH (1:1 – 7:-20)			
JUDGMENT AGAINST ISRAEL AND JUDAH (1:1 – 3:12)			
Warning to Jerusalem (1:1-16)		Inner Sickness of Judah (2:1-13)	The Leaders Rebuked (3:1-12)
Home: Moresheth Kings: Jothan, Ahaz, Hezekiah Warning: (1:8)		(2:1a and 3)	The Priests (3:1-2) The Prophets (3:5) Jerusalem to be Destroyed (3:12)
RESTORATION AND PEACE (4:1 – 5:15)			
Temple Mount Established (4:1-8)		Suffering and Triumph (4:9 – 5:1)	The King from Bethlehem (5:2-15)
Peace (4:3)	All Nations (4:3)	Necessity of the Exile (4:10)	Jesus birth in Bethelhem (5:2)
WARNING AND HOPE (6:1 – 7:20)			
The Warning (6:1 – 7:7)		The Hope (7:8-20) (7:18-19)	
What is Expected of us? (6:6-8)			
Justice	Mercy		

3. MICAH: DEFINING THE FAITH

Micah 1:1—7:20

ASSIGNMENTS		
Judgment against Israel and Judah (1:1—3:12)	Restoration and Peace (4:1—5:15)	Warning and Hope (6:1—7:20)

INTRODUCTION

The Person of Micah

Micah is an abbreviated form of Micaiah, which means, “Who is like Yahweh?” Not much is known about Micah except that he came from the small village of Moresheth, which was located about 20 miles southwest of Jerusalem, close to the Philistine border and the city of Gath.

Micah was active during the reigns of Jothan (742-735 B.C.E.), Ahaz (735-715 B.C.E.), and Hezekiah (715-687 B.C.E.), and a contemporary of the prophets Isaiah (Judah), Amos (Israel), and Hosea (Israel). Most scholars suggest that he came from among the common people and that he might have been a farmer or tradesman.

The Message of Micah

The message of Micah was directed at both Israel and Judah, for both were infected with the same sins. He denounced rulers, priests, and prophets for their exploitation of the helpless, for their dishonesty in business, and for their sham in religion. The logical consequence of all this would be judgment. Judah would follow in the path of Israel. Beyond judgment, however, would be a glorious future, in which the nation would be restored and Bethlehem would give birth to a greater David, who would rule over all of God’s people.

The Setting

The setting, at least for the first three chapters, takes place prior to the fall of Israel. Both Israel and Judah were basking in the glow of political expansion and material prosperity. Micah correctly saw beneath the surface and prophesied judgment for both nations. Thus

he stands with Amos, Hosea, and Isaiah as champions of (1) pure worship, (2) judgment against Israel and Judah, and (3) hope in a future restoration.

Hezekiah was greatly influenced by both Micah and Isaiah and led the people in Judah to turn to God (Jeremiah 26:18-19). This delayed the judgment of God in the Southern Kingdom, while unrepentant Israel fell quickly to the forces of Assyria.

The Date

The date for Micah’s activity and for his part in the writing of this book would then fall somewhere between 742-687 B.C.E.

The Author

No one doubts Micah’s authorship of the first three chapters, but there is some doubt concerning the rest of the book. Some scholars are willing to give credit to Micah for 6:1 –7:7 as well, but many see the later chapters as having been written in the exilic or postexilic years. They are seen as a commentary on the original work of Micah.

The Organization

The Book of Micah is usually divided into the following three parts:

(1:1 – 3:12)	(4:1 – 5:15)	(6:1 – 7:20)
Judgment against Israel and Judah	Restoration and Peace	Warning and Hope

New Testament Significance

There are some very significant passages that lead naturally into the New Testament. They are as follows:

- A. The Birth of the Messiah. (5:2-4) The Messiah will be born in Bethlehem (Matthew 2:6).
- B. The Definition of Religion. (6:8) Micah's definition of true religion anticipates Jesus’ summary of the Law (Mark 12:29-31).

- C. The Conflict within Families. (7:6) Jesus seems to quote Micah when he suggests that families will be divided over him.

JUDGMENT AGAINST ISRAEL AND JUDAH (1:1—3:12)

This whole section is a prophetic sermon intended for Jerusalem. One symbol of the unity of chapters 1 to 3 is the word “Hear,” which appears in 1:2, 3:1, and 3:9.

A Warning to Jerusalem (1:1-16)

One might contrast the opening imagery with Isaiah 40:3-5, where a road is to be prepared for the coming King. The imagery here is that of a volcano, earthquake, and fire. God is pictured coming down from heaven, treading upon the mountains, to destroy Samaria and then Judah. Micah pictures him coming from the coastal plain through the hills of Judah (from the southwest) on into Jerusalem. Samaria is considered to be beyond help, so Micah warns Jerusalem.

The destruction of Samaria in 721 B.C.E. by the Assyrians becomes both an omen and a warning of the same fate intended for Jerusalem. In 701 B.C.E. Assyria did besiege Jerusalem, but the city escaped by a miracle (2 Kings 18:9—19:37). The miracle was probably due to the reforms of Hezekiah, but the warning still stands. Unless Jerusalem turns away from idolatry and back to God, its fate will be the same as that of Samaria.

The Inner Sickness of Judah (2:1-13)

In these verses Micah contrasts God’s intention (the judgment of Judah) with Judah’s (to get wealthy). Political and economic leaders lie awake at night devising schemes to add to their own wealth, even though it means the oppression of others (2:1). In the end the true enemy of Judah is not external (Assyria), but internal (Judah itself). Idolatry and the exploitation of people is what will bring Judah down. It is Micah’s opinion that the collapse of the nation is inevitable (2:3). Only after the nation has been destroyed will the Lord lead a remnant into a New Jerusalem or New Israel (2:12-13).

Secular and Religious Leaders Rebuked (3:1-12)

In these verses Micah zeroes in on the political and religious leaders, who have confused good and evil. If this is not bad enough, they go even further when they claim God on their side. “Surely the LORD,” they cry in Micah 3:11b “is with us!” Micah claims “the Spirit of the LORD” as his authority (3:8), and proceeds to prophesy their fate.

His closing words are that the Temple and Jerusalem will be plowed up as a field and totally destroyed (3:12). This prophecy of the destruction of Jerusalem is quoted much later in Jeremiah 26:18-19, just as it is about to happen. In Micah’s time Sennacherib approached the gates of Jerusalem (701 B.C.E.), but Hezekiah, a reforming king, bought more time by paying tribute as a vassal state (2 Kings 18:13-16).

RESTORATION AND PEACE (4:1—5:15)

Although many scholars date these chapters much later, there is consensus that they echo the language and imagery of Micah. They have been inspired by Micah and may represent a later response to the first three chapters.

The Temple Mount Established (4:1-8)

Restoration will follow judgment. A new Kingdom will be established based upon the Law of God (4:2). The instruments of war will no longer be needed, so they can be melted down into instruments of labor (4:3). These words of universal peace from Micah 4:1-3 are also contained in Isaiah 2:2-4. Although Micah and Isaiah were contemporaries, Isaiah probably copied Micah, who was his senior.

The people to be included in the new Kingdom are described in Micah 4:6-7. They will be made up of the poor and the oppressed, the ones to whom Jesus ministered. They will all walk in the name of the Lord (4:5). This verse from Micah was read by the president of the State of Israel on the occasion of the visit of the first Roman Catholic Pope, Paul VI, to the Holy Land.

Suffering and Triumph (4:9—5:1)

These paragraphs describe the humiliation that Israel must endure in the near future. A contrast is then made with its final triumph. A question is asked: “Is there no king in you?” (4:9) Reference is made to a Babylonian exile (4:10). Micah is either looking ahead one hundred years or these words, were written after the Babylonian Exile. The author looks forward to the time when Israel will be restored and given a new King.

The King from Bethlehem (5:2-15)

In the midst of the Assyrian invasion, Micah speaks of an ultimate deliverer, who like David, will come from Bethlehem (5:2). Ephrathah refers to the district around Bethlehem. (See Matthew 2:1-6 and John 7:40-43.) Although Isaiah speaks of the Messiah’s birth (Isaiah 9:6-7), Micah is the only prophet to name Bethlehem as the place of his birth.

Looking way beyond the present crisis, Micah foresees a time, when war will be brought to an end (4:3, 5:5 and 10-15) by this prince (the eighth son of Jesse). The reference in Micah 5:5 to seven shepherds and eight rulers is a figure of speech referring to “many,” who will defend Palestine. It has nothing to do with David being the eighth son of Jesse. Micah 5:10 is a reference to Deuteronomy 17:14-20, which warned kings not to multiply their military resources, but to trust in God for their real security. This is what the King from Bethlehem will do.

MESSAGE OF WARNING AND HOPE (6:1—7:20)

The Message of Warning (6:1—7:7)

This section takes the form of a lawsuit against Israel and Judah. God is the judge and the mountains and hills are called in as witnesses to the trial. The heart of the questioning takes place in verses 6-7. The main point being made in these verses is that burnt offerings of calves, rams, and even the firstborn are not enough to satisfy God. The essence of true religion is then defined in verse 8, which says that one should walk with the Lord by doing justice and steadfast love. No one can bribe the Lord with gifts, even the gift of him or herself. Other similar definitions of religion are given in Amos 5:24 and Hosea 6:6.

The problem of course is that the nation is filled with corrupt political, economic, and religious leaders; this has brought about total chaos in all these institutions with the chaos penetrating into the family itself (7:6). All of this can be traced back to kings such as Omri and Ahab (6:16), who were known for introducing Baal-worship to the people of God. As everything tumbles in around him, Micah says that he will look to the Lord, who brings salvation. There is no way we can earn salvation, or bribe God to attain it; salvation is finally God's gift to those who trust in him. Let everyone heed this warning.

The Message of Hope (7:8-20)

Having watched the breakdown of society and having pronounced the end of Samaria and Jerusalem, Micah now turns to prophesying hope. He believes that God will restore all who repent. Those who trust in the Lord will find their sins forgiven—cast into the sea (7:18-20). The human response to this divine action should be the repentance of sin and an affirmation of faith in God. This is a familiar theme that runs through most of the prophetic literature.

STRIKING THE RIGHT BALANCE

Amos expresses a passionate concern for righteousness and justice. Hosea demonstrates how much God loves Israel by marrying Gomer, a harlot, who is continually unfaithful to him. Micah strikes the balance between justice and love. The central passage is Micah 6:8, where the prophet says: "He has told you, O mortal, what is good; and what does the LORD require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?"

The new idea presented by Micah is to walk humbly with your God. To me this means that we need to avoid ditches on both sides of the road as we walk on the highway with God toward his Kingdom. Those who place all the emphasis on divine righteousness, and justice, place themselves in the ditch on the left; those who place all the emphasis on divine love, place themselves in the ditch on the right. We are to walk down the middle of the road striking the balance between justice and love.

The tension between justice and love has been referred to as the tension between a social gospel and an individual gospel. The social gospel proclaims the justice of God for all and the individual Gospel proclaims the love of God for the individual. E. Stanley Jones explains why these two must be held together: “An individual gospel without a social gospel is a soul without a body. And a social gospel without an individual gospel is a body without a soul. One is a ghost, and the other is a corpse.”¹ When you go into the ditch on the left you become a corpse, and when you go into the ditch on the right, you become a ghost. Only as you walk down the middle of the road towards the Kingdom with God do you become a complete person.

Since our purpose is to become complete persons, Micah has something to say to us. He not only tells us what is expected of us—to do justice, to love kindness, and to walk humbly with God—but he also tells us who to follow down that road which leads into the Kingdom of God. The One worthy of following will be born in Bethlehem. He will rule over Israel, (Micah 5:2) and He will lead us into a Kingdom where: “...they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning hooks; nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more.”

We shall never see this take place on earth. It is something that will only be possible in heaven. The best we can do on earth is to imitate it. Such a time of peace will always elude us. As we attempt to approximate on earth what can only happen in heaven, we need to be aware of how we go about it. Since people will always be falling into the ditches of life, we need to have ambulance crews ready to pick them up and take them to hospitals where they can be helped. Churches too are hospitals, so we are not only talking about physical conditions.

There are three activities in the church that try to help. The first is Social Concern, which I shall call the ambulance crew. They, like Mother Teresa, go into the ditches of life, looking for people who have fallen in. A second activity is called Social Action, which is expressed by those folks who would like to prevent people from falling into ditches. They are involved in building fences along the roads of life. Frequently they get involved in politics, for the activity of politics is to erect fences to keep people from falling into ditches. Political organization can make a great deal of difference in regard to how many people are in or out of the ditch. For instance one can frequently stand on the border between two countries and see the drastic difference political organization can make. Politicians who build fences or leave the ditches exposed make a big difference. The final expression of the Church is Evangelism which tries to direct people to stay on the road, remembering the words of Jesus, who said in John 14:6, “I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.”

What do you see when you stand on the road? If you look down the road, you see the cross, which is your compass leading to the one born in Bethlehem, who knows the way into the Kingdom of God. Evangelism is the proclamation of this Good News, calling

¹*World Outlook*, September 1968, p. 50.

people to walk humbly with God on the road leading to his Kingdom. Social Action is an attempt to build fences along the road, preventing people from falling into the ditches on both sides of the road. Social Concern is an attempt to pick people up who have fallen through the cracks in the fences. All of these efforts are needed, but we should not expect the same people to be doing all of them. No one can be in all three places at once. What is important is for all of us to recognize the importance of all three ministries. We need to strike the right balance.

ISAIAH



Isaiah by *Gustave Doré* (1832-1883)

4. The Message and Call

Isaiah 1:1—12:6

4. ISAIAH: THE MESSAGE AND CALL (1:1—12:6)			
GOD'S MESSAGE FOR JUDAH AND ISRAEL (1:1—5:30)			
1. Indictment against Judah (1:1-6) (1:1, 4)		6. The New Age of Peace (2:1-5) (2:2, 4)	
2. Devastation of Judah (1:7-9) (1:7)		7. Judgment of the Lord (2:6-22) (2:8, 17-20)	
3. Rejection of Worship (1:10-17) (1:15-17)		8. Chaos in Jerusalem (3:1-15) (3:9, 15)	
4. Offer of Forgiveness (1:18-20) (1:18)		9. Humiliation of the Women (3:16—4:1)	
5. Restoration of Jerusalem (1:21-31) (1:25-26)		10. Restoration of Jerusalem (4:2-6) (4:2)	
The Lord and His Vineyard (5:1-30)			
Song of the Vineyard (5:1-7) (5:2, 4, 7)	Sin of Judah (5:8-23) (5:20)	Coming Disaster (5:24-30) (5:26)	
THE CALL OF ISAIAH (6:1-13)			
Temple Experience (6:1-5)	Call (6:6-8) (6:8)	Commission (6:9-13) (6:9, 11)	
FAITH OR POLITICS (7:1-25)			
Sign of Shear-jashub (7:1-9) <i>Remnant will return</i> (7:3-6)	Sign of Immanuel (7:10-17) <i>God is with us</i> (7:14)	Judgment through Assyria (7:18-25) (7:18, 20)	
FAITH OR APOSTASY (8:1-22)			
Sign of Maher-shalal-hash-baz <i>Spoil speeds/Prey hastes</i> (8:1-4) (8:3-4)	Warning to Judah (8:5-10) (8:6-7)	Faith of Isaiah (8:11-18) (8:13, 17)	Apostasy of the People (8:19-22) (8:19)
PROMISE AND WARNINGS (9:1—10:4)			
The Future King (9:1-7) (9:2, 6-7)		The Judgment of Israel (9:8—10:4) (9:12, 17, 21, 10:4)	
GOD'S INSTRUMENT OF JUDGMENT (10:5-34)			
Assyria (10:5-19) (10:5, 12)	Remnant (10:20-27b) (10:20-22)	The March (10:27c-34) (10:33)	
GOD'S ULTIMATE KINGDOM (11:1—12:6)			
The Restoration (11:1-9) (11:1-2 & 6-9)	The Remnant (11:10-16) (11:16)	Thanksgiving & Praise (12:1-6) (12:1, 4)	

4. ISAIAH: THE MESSAGE AND CALL

Isaiah 1:1—12:6

ASSIGNMENTS			
Judgments against Judah (1:1—4:1)	God's Plan for Restoration (4:2—6:13)	Signs of What's Coming (7:1—10:4)	The Messiah and the Remnant (10:5—12:6)

INTRODUCTION TO ISAIAH

The Name

The book is named after its principal author, Isaiah, who is credited with chapters 1-39. The word "Isaiah" means "the Lord (Yahweh) gives salvation."

The Author

We only know the author of the first thirty-nine chapters. There is evidence for an unknown prophet being responsible for chapters 40-55 and still another responsible for chapters 56-66.

Isaiah was born around 760 B.C.E. in Jerusalem. His father's name was Amoz (not Amos). The family was aristocratic and he might have been educated as a priest or a scribe (wise man). He describes his call to become a prophet in the year of King Uzziah's death (742/40 B.C.E.) in chapter 6. Isaiah married a prophetess and had two sons (8:3), who were given highly symbolic names: (1) Shear-Jashub, and (2) Maher-Shalal-Hash-Baz.

Having prophesied for a period of forty years, through the reigns of Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah, he may have lived on into the dark days of the evil King, Manasseh. The last we hear of him is on the occasion of Sennacherib's threat to Jerusalem (701 B.C.E.), but tradition tells us that Isaiah was sawn asunder in the reign of Manasseh (687-642 B.C.E.).

The Date

Since there may be as many as three prophets writing in the book of Isaiah, there is no single date that can be given. The reference Isaiah makes to Uzziah's death can be determined with a fair amount of accuracy, and so we can make an estimate for Isaiah

1-39 at around 740 B.C.E., with the setting in Jerusalem. The unknown prophet of Isaiah 40-55 probably wrote during the Exile in Babylon around 540 B.C.E. and the unknown prophet of Isaiah 56-66 wrote in Jerusalem sometime between 520 and 450 B.C.E.

The Setting

The setting varies for the book. The initial setting is Jerusalem, but that changes to Babylon for Isaiah 40-55, and back to Jerusalem again for the remaining chapters.

The setting for Isaiah himself revolves around two wars: (1) the Syro-Ephraimitic War of 734-732 B.C.E., which took place during the reign of Ahaz. (2) The Invasion of Judah by Sennacherib in 701 B.C.E. during the reign of Hezekiah. The unknown prophets of the Exile lived under the reign of Nabonidus, the last Babylonian ruler (555-539 B.C.E.). This period of time ended as history saw the rise of Cyrus (Persia). His rapid series of victories brought the Babylonian empire to an end. This brought hope to the Jewish exiles, so the final chapters in Isaiah deal with their high hopes for the restoration of Israel.

The Purpose

The message is simple. In chapters 1-39, Isaiah warns the people about the impending fall of Jerusalem. In chapters 40-55, the unknown prophet proclaims God's intention to restore his people and in chapters 56-66, another unknown prophet preaches about a new and glorious future for his people.

Another purpose that can be seen throughout the entire book of Isaiah is the warning not to enter into foreign alliances. Isaiah warned Ahaz not to enter into an alliance with Assyria, which Ahaz ignored as he placed the nation under the power of Assyria. For Isaiah an alliance with a foreign power compromised religious as well as political freedom. Faith in Yahweh was a sufficient guarantee for divine protection. After Ahaz concluded the Assyrian Alliance, Isaiah announced his intention to keep silent and wait for Yahweh. He made no public utterances during this time, but the naming of his children became a "sign" from Yahweh. At a much later date Isaiah persuaded Hezekiah not to form an alliance with Egypt against Assyria. Isaiah was aware of Assyria's ruthlessness, but he saw Assyria as an instrument of God's chastisement of Judah. He was also convinced that Zion (Jerusalem) would not be given over to the Assyrians to be spoiled and plundered. Hezekiah paid attention to Isaiah, and Sennacherib's invasion stopped short of taking Jerusalem. Isaiah's point was that one is not able to trust in foreign alliances. Judah was to trust only in God for its deliverance.

The Outline

- A. 1-12
- B. 13-23
- C. 24-27
- D. 28-35

- E. 36-39
- F. 40-55 (40-48 & 49-55)
- G. 56-66

GODS MESSAGE FOR JUDAH AND ISRAEL (1:1—5:30)

By the time of Isaiah, the nation had reached a point of no return, even though the complete collapse would not occur until 587 B.C.E. God had been rejected through moral degradation, social injustice, and religious hypocrisy.

The Indictment against Judah (1:1-6)

The indictment is prefaced with a reference to Isaiah's vision. This vision gives Isaiah the ability to perceive the mind of God. God, according to this indictment, already recognizes the seriousness of his people's rejection of him. Utter estrangement has already run its course between God and his chosen people. The alienation is emphasized by Isaiah's favorite term for God: "the Holy one of Israel." (1:4)

The Devastation of Judah (1:7-9)

The devastation of Judah is related to its disobedience. The nation should have learned its lesson as it watched the northern kingdom—Israel—fall, but now it is being overrun. Judah's devastation in this passage is being accomplished either by Tiglath-Pileser III (734-733 B.C.E.) or Sennacherib (701 B.C.E.). It is more likely to be Sennacherib, who captured 46 cities in Judah, shutting Hezekiah up in Jerusalem like a bird in a cage. The name for Jerusalem here is the "daughter of Zion." The people have no one to turn to but God. The prophet makes them aware of their utter dependence upon his grace and mercy.

The Rejection of their Worship (1:10-17)

God is not happy with people who come with their "hands full of blood" to worship him (1:15). Such worship is unacceptable and the external forms of such worship are rejected. Those who try to worship God and are in open conflict with his laws will not obtain his blessings. They call condemnation down upon themselves, because such worship is totally wrong. The solution is clear: cease to do evil and do good! These two commands make up John Wesley's first two general rules.

The Offer of Forgiveness (1:18-20)

Forgiveness is offered, but only to those who repent and turn away from their evil ways. Scarlet is a symbol of evil (Revelation 17:4) and white is a symbol of righteousness (Revelation 19:8). The cleansing that follows forgiveness must be an act of God. Neither the nation nor the people, apart from an act of God, can restore the nation.

The Restoration of Jerusalem (1:21-31)

In spite of Israel's sin of idolatry, God will restore Jerusalem in the future. The "oaks" are sacred groves where Canaanite rites took place. For Isaiah they are symbols of Judah's idolatry, but God is faithful to his covenant. After the fall of Jerusalem, he will restore it as a city of faith and righteousness in the future.

The New Age of Peace (2:1-5)

Isaiah looks ahead to the time when Jerusalem will become the city of God for the people of all nations. This will be a time of universal peace. (See also Micah 4:1-4) This age of peace, however, follows the judgment of the Lord.

The Judgment of the Lord (2:6-22)

The focus of the judgment is "idolatry," which is expressed through human arrogance. In the final Day of Judgment people will gladly exchange their idols and the security and safety of caves in order to escape the wrath of the Lord.

The Chaos in Jerusalem (3:1-15)

The chaos is the result of turning away from God. The prophet may be comparing conditions in Jerusalem with those found in Samaria just before the Fall of 722 B.C.E. He probably saw the same disaster coming to Jerusalem. Jerusalem is plagued with inept leaders and corruption in government, leading the prophet to predict its chaos and ruin. Where there is injustice, there can only be chaos.

Verses 9 to 11 make it very clear that the citizens of Jerusalem and Judah are responsible for their own fate. They have brought judgment down upon themselves; they cannot hold anyone else responsible. Nothing can save them, for they have ground the faces of the poor into the dirt (3:15); now their time has come and all of their wealth will be useless.

The Humiliation of the Women (3:16—4:1)

The women mentioned are likely to be the wives of the condemned rulers. Their pride and love of fine things will be destroyed. Their fashionable hairstyles and rich clothing will become baldness and sackcloth. A long list of finery is included to reveal how wealthy they had been. Their men have fallen in battle, and they have been so humiliated that they will do anything to get the few men who remain in Jerusalem to protect them. These abandoned women are only seeking the protection of a name and are not asking for a full marriage relationship.

The Restoration of Jerusalem (4:2-6)

In spite of the earlier indictments against Jerusalem and Judah, the prophet now foretells the restoration of Jerusalem.

The “branch” or the “remnant” will lead the restoration of Israel. Here “branch” is used in a more general sense and refers to the “righteous remnant,” but in other places it is used to refer to the leader of the new age. (See Isaiah 11:1; Jeremiah 23:5; 33:15; and Zechariah 3:3 and 6:12.) “Branch” as the “leader” of the new age has “messianic” connotations.

The day of the Lord symbolizes nothing but gloom and terror to those who deserve it; but to the remnant, it symbolizes hope and blessing. The “branch” is sprouting up in the midst of the ruins.

The cloud of smoke by day and the flaming fire by night are symbols of God’s presence in the restoration of Jerusalem. It relates back to an earlier presence as the Israelites left Egypt and journeyed towards Canaan. (Exodus 13:21-22 and 40:34-38)

The Lord and His Vineyard (5:1-30)

The Song of the Vineyard (5:1-7)

The Jewish nation is the vineyard of God. God has done everything he could to insure a good yield, but all has been done in vain. The vineyard has grown wild and yielded wild grapes. The only thing left to do is to destroy the vineyard. Jesus uses this same picture in Matthew 21:33-41; Mark 12:1-9; and Luke 20:9-16. Ezekiel used the same image in Ezekiel 19:10-14.

Justice and righteousness are words that describe the fruit of one’s relationship with God. Those who relate to God will not become sour grapes. This is more than a story about a vineyard that did not produce. It is a story about a people who had every advantage, but failed to benefit from their favored position.

The Sins of Judah (5:8-23)

Several sins are highlighted: luxury, drunkenness, pride, corruption, and injustice. These have led to a general moral confusion (5:20) throughout Judah.

While six different woes are given, the second (5:11) and the sixth (5:22) have some similarities. The first one refers to those who bought up smaller properties from owners in financial difficulty and thus describes the sins of covetousness and luxury. All six woes are examples of Judah’s sinfulness. They do not describe everything the people have done, but they do describe enough for us to understand why judgment is inescapable.

The Coming Disaster (5:24-30)

“A nation far away” will destroy them (5:26). Another reference to this “nation from far away” was made in Jeremiah 5:15. God’s judgment on them will come in the form of a foreign enemy who will defeat them. This took place in 722 B.C.E. and 701 B.C.E. as

Assyria defeated Israel and attacked Judah and then again in 605 B.C.E. when Babylon began its invasion that finally brought down Judah in 587 B.C.E.

THE CALL OF ISAIAH (6:1-13)

The Setting in the Temple (6:1-5)

The place and the date of Isaiah's call is very easy to determine. It took place in the Temple in Jerusalem at the time of the death of King Uzziah (742 B.C.E.). At that time Isaiah experienced the presence of God as an earthquake (6:4). The presence of God was often expressed in terms of an earthquake and, in fact, there was a great earthquake about that time. (See Amos 1:1 and Zechariah 14:5)

The presence of God is also described with the imagery of the seraphim. Seraphim, is the plural of *seraph* which means "fiery one." This was an allusion to the "burning love" of the seraphim, which stood above the throne ready to serve. The term is used elsewhere in the Bible as "fiery serpent." (See Numbers 21:6,8; Deuteronomy 8:15; Isaiah 14:29; and 30:6) In these passages the seraphim are used as instruments of God to inflict punishment on people for their sin. In Isaiah's call however the seraphim are human-animal like creatures related to Isaiah's worship experience, where they have a cleansing effect.

By calling God holy three times, the Seraphim are referring to God's infinite holiness. Saying a word three times was a way of emphasizing its infinite importance. In Jeremiah 7:4, we see the same thing happening with the word "temple."

Although the cherubim are not mentioned here, they too represent the divine presence. They are even more difficult to describe, but like the seraphim, they have wings. Two of them sit on the mercy seat, which is the cover for the Ark of the Covenant. They symbolized the presence and the un-approachability of Yahweh, whose glory was manifested between them. The cherubim are represented by the biblical writers, as animate beings with human intelligence, the strength of an ox, the courage of a lion, and the free motion of an eagle in flight. Isaiah expresses amazement that he should gain a vision of God and fears for his life because of the severity of his own sin.

The Call of Isaiah (6:6-8)

Isaiah hears the call of God and willingly accepts it. Having experienced forgiveness for himself, how could he refuse? Contrast this with other prophets, such as Jeremiah, who were reluctant to accept their calls.

The Commission to Isaiah (6:9-13)

The experience of God's presence was needed, for God was to send Isaiah out to speak to a people who were deaf and blind to his will. Isaiah was to go to them even though they would not listen to him. He was to proclaim, beyond their rejection, the hope of a new

nation, which would survive his judgment. The last few verses become quite complex and are difficult to understand.

FAITH OR POLITICS (7:1-25)

Ahaz had just taken over as King of Judah (735-715 B.C.E.) when Rezin of Syria and Pekah of Israel tried to make an alliance with him against the threat from Assyria. Because Ahaz would not enter into an alliance with them, both Syria and Israel threaten to attack Judah. Looking for security, Ahaz begins to look to Assyria for help. Isaiah warns Ahaz that a political alliance will not help him. He must look only to God. Two signs are given, along with a word about the imminent judgment, which will come through Assyria. (See 2 Kings 16:1-20)

The Sign of Shear-jashub (7:1-9)

Isaiah is told by God to take his son Shear-jashub and meet Ahaz at the conduit of the upper pool, lying at the Fuller's Field. The Fuller needed to be near water for his job of cleaning and whitening cloth. The meaning of Isaiah's son Shear-jashub is important: it means, "a remnant shall return" or "only a remnant will return." Isaiah is trying to persuade Ahaz to have faith in God and not to enter into any agreement with Assyria.

The son of Tabeel is an unknown person. All we know is that Rezin, King of Syria, wanted to install him as the King of Judah in order to get Judah to join the alliance with Israel and Syria against Assyria.

The Sign of Immanuel (7:10-17)

A young woman will bear a son, whose name will be called Immanuel. As the name Shear-jashub was important, so is the name of this child, for Immanuel means "god with us." The identity of the woman is not known for sure, but one guess is that she is Ahaz's wife. This means that the child would be Hezekiah.

Another guess would be that she was Isaiah's wife and that the child is their second. Christians usually identify the young woman with Mary, the mother of Jesus, but this is not very helpful in understanding the story in its historical setting.

Judgment through Assyria (7:18-25)

Dealing with Assyria was unwise, for in the end Assyria would become as a razor not only to Judah, but to Syria and Israel as well. This means that they will be defeated in war. In fact, Ahaz lived to see the fall of Israel in 721 B.C.E.

FAITH OR APOSTASY (8:1-22)

A sign, a warning, and an affirmation of faith in God is given.

The Sign of Maher-shalal-hash-baz (8:1-4)

Isaiah and his wife (the prophetess) bear a son, whom they call Maher-shalal-hash-baz, which means, “the spoil speeds, the prey hastens.” The meaning of Isaiah’s second son is very significant, for it refers to the imminent defeat of Damascus (Syria) and Samaria (Israel).

The Warning to Judah (8:5-10)

Shiloah (an aqueduct outside of Jerusalem) is compared with the mighty River Euphrates. What Isaiah means here is that Ahaz’s ally, Assyria, will turn against him. The overflowing of the banks of the Euphrates means that Assyria will go beyond conquering Syria and Israel. Assyria will come right up to Jerusalem, but God is with his people and will deliver them. (Immanuel/God with us/8:8 and 8:10)

The Faith of Isaiah (8:11-18)

Although Israel and Judah will both ultimately fall, Isaiah expresses his faith in God.

The Apostasy of the People (8:19-22)

The people do not share Isaiah’s faith. Having turned against both God and King, they resort to necromancy (consulting the dead); but Isaiah warns them that it will not benefit them.

PROMISE AND WARNINGS (9:1—10:4)

The Future King (9:1-7)

Zebulun and Naphtali will be the first to be crushed by the Assyrians; hence, they (Galilee) will be the first to see the Light. “The way of the Sea” refers to the main highway between Syria and Egypt, which was also the route used by Assyria to conquer Israel. “The Day of Midian” refers to Gideon’s famous victory over the Midianites, which the Lord gave to him, even though he had only 300 men and was vastly outnumbered.

The promise of a future King refers to a new Judean King, who was to be Hezekiah. The reference to an “eternal” kingdom of “justice” makes Christians think of Jesus. Every King tried to enshrine the Davidic promises for themselves. Both past and future are brought together here and provide the basis for a Messianic expectation.

The four names given to this King are *Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, and Prince of Peace*. These titles seem to point to characteristics far beyond what any human king could accomplish. Some would even say that Jesus failed to fulfill them when he was crucified on the cross, but one must also take into account God’s confirmation of Jesus in the Resurrection.

The Judgment of Israel (9:8—10:4)

The fall of Israel (Ephraim) is viewed as an object lesson for Judah. God had sent two special prophets to Israel (Amos and Hosea), but the people refused to listen. The Assyrians began taking captives in 734 B.C.E., even though Samaria held out until 722 B.C.E. Judah should learn from what she observes in this lesson of divine history.

The prophecy is given in four stanzas, each ending with the same refrain: “For all this his anger has not turned away; his hand is stretched out still.” (9:12, 17, 21, and 10:4) The warning is now given to Judah, but will the nation listen? The answer in the end is, “NO.”

GOD’S INSTRUMENT OF JUDGMENT (10:5-34)

Assyria in God’s Purpose (10:5-19)

God uses the proud and cruel nation of Assyria to punish Israel, but he does not overlook Assyria’s sins. Even as Assyria is being used to punish Israel, Assyria itself is under condemnation. It too will be punished. All arrogance is doomed to destruction.

The conquests of Tiglath-Pileser III (the Assyrian King) are described in 10:9-10. He captured Calno (742 B.C.E.), Carchemish and Hamath (738 B.C.E.), Arpad (741 B.C.E.), and Damascus (732 B.C.E.). Next will be Israel and Judah, whose God, the Lord, is described here as just another idol.

The Future Remnant (10:20-27b)

Following the judgment of Israel and Judah will be the judgment of Assyria. Out of the chaos will emerge a faithful remnant, who, will return and rebuild the nation. The idea of the remnant runs as a thread of hope through the darkest passages of the Bible. Here Isaiah links it with the name of his first born son, Shear-jashub, which means, “a remnant shall return.”

The March of Assyria (10:27c-34)

The path taken by the Assyrian invader (Tiglath-Pileser III or Sennacherib) is described in a very corrupt text. The northern route into Jerusalem is described as the enemy approaches the outskirts of the city. Such important cities as Gibeah (Saul’s capital) and Anathoth (Jeremiah’s home) are mentioned. Actually Sennacherib approached Jerusalem from Lachish, to the southwest. For a description of the southerly route, see Micah 1:10-15. In the end Assyria will be cut down as a forester cuts down trees.

GOD'S ULTIMATE KINGDOM (11:1—12:6)

Restoration of the Kingdom (11:1-9)

The Kingdom will be restored under a new King coming from David's family line. Jesse was David's father. This new ideal King will possess the Spirit of God himself, for he will possess righteousness and faith. In 11:2 we read six fruit of the Spirit, which are: wisdom, understanding, counsel, might, knowledge, and fear. The Septuagint adds piety, expanding the list to seven.

Wisdom and Justice are characteristics that have always been associated with the ideal King. When he comes nature will be restored. The enmity that existed between the animals will turn into amity. The calf will lie down with the lion and the cow and the bear will feed together. All of nature will be restored as the earth is filled with the presence of God. God's presence will bring about a new order of peace, or Shalom.

Gathering of the Remnant (11:10-16)

God will finally deal with the enemies of Israel and Judah, even Israel (Ephraim) and Judah will be reconciled. A highway will be provided from Assyria, so that the faithful can come home to Jerusalem (God's holy mountain). This highway might be compared to the highway through the wilderness from Egypt into the Promised Land. This will be the second Exodus of God's people from bondage, the first being out of Egypt.

While Isaiah seems to be talking about an Assyrian exile, his words seem far more relevant to the Babylonian exile, which took place much later. In another sense, the true remnant has not yet come home.

Songs of Thanksgiving and Praise (12:1-6)

With the promise of a reunited people, a new Davidic Kingdom, and a restored world order, Isaiah concludes this section with two songs, one of thanksgiving (12:1-3) and the other of praise (12:4-6). These songs commemorate God's saving act in history and the people's celebration of his presence in their midst. They praise God and shout for joy.

VOLUNTEERING FOR THE INEVITABLE

Isaiah was a willing volunteer. Having seen a vision of God in the Temple and having heard him say, "Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?" he said willingly, "Here am I; send me!" Even after he heard God say to him that people would neither comprehend nor understand, he simply asked God how long he should continue prophesying. The answer was, "Until cities lie waste without inhabitant, and houses without people, and the land is utterly desolate..." (Isaiah 6:8-11) The chapter closes with a very interesting image—that of a stump. Isaiah says in 6:13, "The holy seed is its stump." In Isaiah 11:1, this image is picked up again: "A shoot shall come out from the stump of Jesse, and a branch shall grow out of his roots."

The tragedy for Isaiah is that very few people will listen. Those who do will not be enough to prevent the demise of the nation. His influence over Hezekiah will be enough to put off the nation's collapse for a few years, but even Hezekiah will not be able to stop the inevitable. Those who confuse good and evil are doomed (5:20), "for they have brought evil on themselves." Their collapse is inevitable.

How can anyone volunteer for the inevitable? Jesus did it, knowing full well, that he would end up crucified upon a cross. What Isaiah and Jesus both knew was the inevitability of the Kingdom of God. They saw something no one else could see. If God was working to bring about the collapse of the wicked, he was also working to bring about the rise of a remnant. Isaiah talked about this in terms of a shoot growing out of the stump of Jesse, or the birth of a child, who, according to Isaiah 7:14, will be called Immanuel, which means "God is with us." Whether Isaiah was thinking about the birth of Hezekiah, his own son, or a descendant of David is not the point. He just knew that God would not allow evil to win, and that he would raise someone up to confront it. What we do know is that his words found in Isaiah 9:6-7 point way beyond any human ruler:

For a child has been born for us, a son given to us; authority rests upon his shoulders; and he is named Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. His authority shall grow continually, and there shall be endless peace for the throne of David and his kingdom. He will establish and uphold it with justice and with righteousness from this time onward and forevermore. The zeal of the LORD of hosts will do this.

One can volunteer for the inevitable when one knows that even though judgment is inevitable, so is the Kingdom of God. Failure in this world can be tolerated when you know how things are going to turn out. Isaiah now hopes in the inevitable; he also describes it in Isaiah 11:6-10:

The wolf shall live with the lamb, the leopard shall lie down with the kid, the calf and the lion and the fatling together, and a little child shall lead them. The cow and the bear shall graze, their young shall lie down together; and the lion shall eat straw like the ox. The nursing child shall play over the hole of the asp, and the weaned child shall put its hand on the adder's den. They will not hurt or destroy on all my holy mountain; for the earth will be full of the knowledge of the LORD as the waters cover the sea. On that day the root of Jesse shall stand as a signal to the peoples; the nations shall inquire of him, and his dwelling shall be glorious.

One question must be asked. Is this kind of a Kingdom possible in this world or must we wait until God establishes it in the next? The question is not really valid. If we do not aim at the Kingdom in this world, our own collapse is inevitable. Christians always volunteer for the inevitable. We know what is really inevitable—the Kingdom of God.

This conviction about the Kingdom of God does not mean that we sit around and dream about the next world. Jesus said that the Kingdom begins in this world when we turn ourselves over to his government. Although we know that it will never be fully

established in this world, we use it as our standard for today. It is when we forsake such visions that we really get into trouble, and such trouble can affect Christians as well. “It is since Christians have largely ceased to think of the other world,” wrote C.S. Lewis, “that they have become so ineffective in this. Aim at heaven and you will get earth thrown in: aim at earth and you will get neither.”¹ Isaiah may not have known about heaven, but he knew that God would call forth a remnant; he also had a good image of the kind of person required to lead the remnant. The early Church identified his image of that person with Jesus of Nazareth, who, like Isaiah, volunteered for the inevitable.

¹ Quoted in Eerdmans’ *Handbook to Christian Belief* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1982), p. 414.

ISAIAH



Isaiah by Gustave Doré (1832-1883)

5. Warning the Nations

Isaiah 13:1—23:18

5. ISAIAH: WARNING THE NATIONS (13:1 – 23:18)		
BABYLON (13:1 – 14:23)		
The Day of the Lord (13:1 – 14:2) (13:9-10 & 19-20)	The Fall of the Tyrant (14:3-23) (14:12,15)	
ASSYRIA (14:24-27) (14:24-25)		
PHILISTIA (14:28-32) (14:29 & 32b)		
Destruction of Philistia (14:29)	Emergence of a Remnant (14:32b)	
MOAB (15:1 – 16:14) (16:13-14)		
DAMASCUS (SYRIA) (17:1-14) (17:1 & 10)		
Syria (17:1-6 & 12-14)	Israel (17:4-11)	
EGYPT (18:1 – 20:6)		
Initiation of Egyptian Alliance (18:1-2a & 7) (714 B.C.E.)	Isaiah symbolizes Egypt's Fall (19:4 & 20:1-4) (701 B.C.E.)	Jewish Colonies in Egypt (19:18) (After 587 B.C.E.)
God's Intention is the Reconciliation of Judah, Egypt, and Assyria (19:22-25)		
BABYLON (21:1-10 (21:5 & 9) Compare to the Fall of Rome (Revelation 14:8 & 18:2)		
EDOM AND ARABIA (21:1-17) (21:12 & 16-17)		
JERUSALEM (22:1-25) (22:8b-13 & 22)		
PHEONICIA (23:1-18)		
Tyre (23:1 & 15)	Sidon (23:2, 4 & 12)	
The 70 Year Exile (Jeremiah 25:11-12 & 29:10) (23:15)		
Assyria defeats: Syria (732), Israel (722), Philistia, Kedar, Moab, & Egypt Babylonia defeats Assyria (612) and Jerusalem (587) Persia defeats Babylonia (539)		

5. ISAIAH: WARNING THE NATIONS

Isaiah 13:1—23:18

ASSIGNMENTS			
Babylon (13:1—14:23)	Assyria, Philistia, Moab, and Syria (14:24—17:14)	Egypt (18:1—20:6)	Babylon, Edom and Arabia, Jerusalem, and Phonicia (21:1—23:18)

This section includes a collection of oracles against foreign nations from various time periods. They demonstrate that God's concern is not limited to Israel.

BABYLON (13:1—14:23)

The Day of the Lord (13:1—14:2)

Before the Exile the day of the Lord referred to God's punishment of Israel, but following the Exile, the day of the Lord began to refer to God's punishment of Israel's enemies. In this passage Isaiah leaps ahead to describe Babylon at its height and then portrays its fall to the Medes and Persians led by Cyrus (539 B.C.E.). The city was destroyed in 478 B.C.E. by Xerxes and finally abandoned in the fourth century B.C.E.

In the New Testament the name "Babylon" is used to describe human opposition to God (Revelation 17:5) and becomes a symbol for the evil power of Rome.

The Fall of the Tyrant (14:3-23)

The tyrant being condemned might be Nebuchadnezzar or the whole dynasty of Babylonian kings. Pride and arrogance are responsible for bringing down the tyrant, just as it brought down Babylon's predecessor, Babel (Genesis 11:1-9). From his desire for popularity and power the tyrant falls into the anonymity of Sheol. This is similar to the fall of Lucifer, whose name is actually used in place of "day (or morning) star" in the Latin Vulgate (14:12).

ASSYRIA (14:24-27)

Although it is Babylon who will break the power of Assyria, Babylon will also go down to defeat. No power on earth can prevent God's purposes from being accomplished. In

bringing about his purposes, God uses evil powers to destroy evil powers. This does not mean that the evil power he uses will escape judgment. In the end all evil powers are brought down. They contain within themselves the seed for their own destruction.

PHILISTIA (14:28-32)

After the death of Ahaz (715 B.C.E.), Assyria seems to be experiencing some difficulty. Philistia, an old enemy of Israel, tries to persuade Judah to join them in a rebellion against Assyria, but Isaiah assures Judah that Assyria will recover and ultimately conquer Philistia.

God's people, according to Isaiah, do not depend upon alliances, but upon God himself. In him they find refuge and security. A remnant will emerge out of this relationship. Assyria and Babylon will leave no remnant. They will face total destruction.

MOAB (15:1—16:14)

The Moabites are descendants from Lot. Although they are occasionally on good terms with Judah, they never shared a common faith. Many of Moab's cities are named (15:1-9), and the reason for its coming fall is their pride (16:6). In the midst of the impending disaster, the Moabite refugees seek shelter in Judah and Edom. (Edom was in this time subject to Judah.)

The prophet predicts that Moab will fall to Assyria within three years (meaning a short time), despite periods of temporary prosperity. In the end Moab will suffer devastation at the hands of Assyria.

DAMASCUS (SYRIA) (17:1-14)

This chapter is not all about Syria. The content comes from Isaiah's early days and is a comment on Ahaz's appeal for help against the Syrian/Israel (Ephraim) alliance. The prophet attacks Israel for siding with Syria against Judah and he affirms the ultimate defeat of both.

The Assyrians (734-732 B.C.E.) launched a series of raids against Syria in which King Rezin (of Syria) met his death. The prophet is making an appeal for the people of God to rely not on military alliances, but on God. Their reliance on the alliance did no good at all, for Syria fell in 732 B.C.E. and Israel in 721 B.C.E.

EGYPT (18:1—20:6)

The occasion from which Isaiah speaks is an invitation from Egypt to Judah to participate in an anti-Assyrian alliance (714 B.C.E.). At the time, Egypt was being ruled by an Ethiopian dynasty, which sent ambassadors to Judah to invite the nation to assist in anti-Assyrian activities. The name of the Pharaoh was Shabako, who established the 25th dynasty in 715 B.C.E.

The “whirring wings” would be “winged ships” or “sailboats”; but they could also symbolize Cush, Nubia, or ancient Ethiopia. The “land the rivers divide” would be Egypt, which is divided by the Nile and its tributaries. The image the author is trying to make is that of ambassadors going down the Nile River in papyrus boats to shape the alliance. They brought gifts to Zion in an attempt to form an alliance against the power of Assyria.

There is both “civil strife” and “natural disaster” taking place in Egypt. The “hard master” in 19:4 may be the Assyrian King, Sargon II (722-705 B.C.E.). There is a failure of wisdom in Egypt to come up with any answers.

A rebellion against Assyria began among the Philistines in 713 B.C.E., but the expected help from Egypt failed to materialize. God instructed Isaiah to play the role of a slave by removing his sandals and sackcloth, so Isaiah symbolized Egypt’s impending disaster by playing the part of a naked prisoner (20:2-4). Egypt’s failure to defend Ashdod against the Assyrian attack led by Sargon II in 711 B.C.E. resulted in its own final defeat to the Assyrians in 701 B.C.E.

Following the fall of Jerusalem in 587 B.C.E., many Jewish colonies developed in Egypt. There were five cities, which spoke the language of Canaan (Hebrew), Alexandria being the largest of them. A refugee priest (perhaps Onia IV) built a Temple in the “City of the Sun.” The “City of the Sun” might be referring to Heliopolis, the center of Egyptian sun worship. The precise meaning of the “City of the Sun” is unknown, but it could also be rendered “City of Destruction.” The Hebrew for “Sun” is almost identical to the Hebrew for “Destruction.”

God is not intent on destroying anyone. All of this is done so that Judah, Egypt, and Assyria will return to the Lord and worship him alone (19:22-25).

BABYLON (21:1-10)

“The wilderness of the Sea” (21:1) is Babylon, which finally will fall to Cyrus of Persia in 539 B.C.E. “Prepare the table” and “oil the shield” in verse 5 refers to their lack of preparation for what is coming. They were feasting when they should have been preparing for battle. The shield needed to be oiled to make the leather more flexible so that they would be more usable in battle and the enemy’s swords or arrows would glance off. Nothing, however, which Babylon can do will help, for in the end the nation will collapse and cause rejoicing for the Israelites (21:9-10). John uses this same imagery in describing the fall of Rome in Revelation 14:8 and 18:2. The imagery of the threshing floor frequently symbolizes divine judgment.

EDOM AND ARABIA (21:11-17)

It is difficult to identify the occasion, but there is some concern expressed here for non-Judean sufferers. The prophet expresses hope for deliverance (morning), but realizes that this will be followed by renewed oppression (night). (21:12) Kedar, the oppressor in

Arabia, will be brought down within a year. This happened when Sargon attacked Arabia in 715 B.C.E.

JERUSALEM (22:1-25)

Despite the withdrawal of Sennacherib in Hezekiah's time, Isaiah still foresees the destruction of Jerusalem, which took place in 587 B.C.E. when Nebuchadnezzar II took the city in a terrible siege. Both the walls were broken down and the Temple destroyed.

The people seem to trust in the "House of the Forest" (an arsenal) rather than in the Lord. (See 22:8b-11) When they should have been repenting, they were engrossed in revelry (22:13). In Hezekiah's court, Shebna is to be demoted, for all he seems to care about is carving out his own place of honor. His replacement, Eliakim, finds himself unable to cope and his authority is short-lived. Jerusalem cannot be saved.

The reference in Isaiah 22:22 is partially quoted in Revelation 3:7. While this is not a Messianic reference, it does remind us of Messianic imagery. As Eliakim has been given the key to the house of David, Peter is given the keys to the Kingdom (Matthew 16:19). In the end, only Jesus holds the key to the Kingdom and he is a descendant from the house of David.

PHOENICIA (23:1-18)

The text is difficult to follow, but the point is clear. All of Phoenicia is under judgment, and its famous sea trade upon which it depends will fall apart. There was an especially strong sea trade going on between Phoenicia and Egypt in 722 B.C.E.

The major cities of Phoenicia are Sidon and Tyre, but Tyre seems to get the most attention. Tyre is compared to a harlot on the street. As the Assyrian forces led by Sennacherib approached Tyre in 701 B.C.E., the ruler of Tyre fled to Cyprus; but when Assyria withdrew, Tyre regained some of its lost power, only to lose some of it to Babylon. Finally, in 332 B.C.E. Tyre fell to Alexander the Great.

Seventy years is similar to what Jeremiah predicted for Judah (Jeremiah 25:11-12 and 29:10). Following that time, which must be thought of in symbolic terms, the Lord will restore the nation. Judgment always has a positive purpose. Phoenicia will eventually serve the Lord, as will every nation on earth.

WARNINGS

The enemies of Israel and Judah are instruments God uses to judge his people; but in the end, they will face judgment themselves. A remnant will survive and that remnant will be for people of all nations, not just Judah, even if the imagery reflects Judah's past. "The LORD," says Isaiah in 14:32, "has founded Zion, and the needy among his people will find refuge in her."

It may not seem fair to us for God to use another nation to destroy his own people, but none of this has taken place without warning, both to his own people and to the foreign nations used by him as instruments of destruction. All could be spared the impending disaster, if they would only rely upon God.

Even as the destruction takes place, God provides paths on which both his people and their enemies can walk. The prophet makes it very clear in Isaiah 19:23-25:

On that day there will be a highway from Egypt to Assyria, and the Assyrian will come into Egypt, and the Egyptian into Assyria, and the Egyptians will worship with the Assyrians. On that day Israel will be the third with Egypt and Assyria, a blessing in the midst of the earth, whom the LORD of hosts has blessed, saying, “Blessed be Egypt my people, and Assyria the work of my hands, and Israel my heritage.”

Warnings have a purpose. They are not just announcements of what God intends to do. He gives warnings in order to keep us from destroying ourselves.

I get little warnings every day. Police cars are hidden all over this community, and I know what the speed limit is. If I get a ticket, I cannot blame the policeman who tickets me, even if he himself speeds. He is an instrument of the city, but he cannot be blamed for giving tickets to speeders. If he becomes a speeder, he too takes the risk of getting a ticket, and should get one. Likewise, Assyria and Babylon are instruments of God’s judgment on Israel and Judah, but if they do the same things as Israel and Judah, then they too will collapse by means of another nation, such as Persia, who becomes the new instrument of divine judgment. The vicious cycle continues because no one heeds the warnings of the prophets, like Amos, Hosea, Micah, and Isaiah.

This is not an illustration of judgment in the Old Testament, which has been eliminated in the New. Jesus sounds the same kinds of warnings as the prophets and insists that he did not come to abolish the law or the prophets, but to fulfill them both (Matthew 5:17). The prophetic warnings are not that everyone is free to do what they want, rather they are free to do what they ought—the Will of God. Prophets call us back to the original intention of the Law, which is to make us free. Nations and individuals are warned of disaster and shown paths that lead to life.

The Old Testament prophets warned nations about very real dangers and pointed them to an emerging remnant, which people of all nations could join. This remnant begins in this world, taught Jesus, but it can only be fully established in the next. In Matthew 7:13-15, he sounds a similar warning to that of Isaiah’s:

Enter through the narrow gate; for the gate is wide and the road is easy that leads to destruction, and there are many who take it. For the gate is narrow and the road is hard that leads to life, and there are few who find it. Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep’s clothing but inwardly are ravenous wolves.

True prophets tell you what you need to know, not what you want to hear. They sound the warnings about the danger of making bad choices and point to those choices, which are best for you.

Both the Old and New Testaments warn us that the remnant will be small, not large, even though most of us prefer to think of the saved as many and the lost few. We have great difficulty understanding how God could condemn anyone to hell, we think of hell as something reserved only for terrible people, like Hitler. How could God condemn nice people, who may not believe in him, to hell, as if our works have anything to do with our eternal destiny. Nice people can end up separated from God, but it is because this is what they have chosen for themselves. Harold Kushner, in his book, *When All You've Ever Wanted Isn't Enough*, illustrates this concept for us:

There is a story told of a man who died after having led a thoroughly selfish, immoral life. Moments later, he found himself in a world of bright sunlight, soft music, and figures all dressed in white. "Boy, I never expected this," he said to himself. "I guess God has a soft spot in His heart for a clever rascal like me." He turned to a figure in a white robe and said, "Buddy, I've got something to celebrate. Can I buy you a drink?" The figure answered, "If you mean alcoholic beverages, we don't have any of that around here." "No booze, huh? Well then, what about a game of cards? Pinochle, draw poker, you name it." "I'm sorry but we don't gamble here either." "Well, what do you do all day?" the man asked. "We read the psalms a lot. There is a Bible class every morning and a prayer circle in the afternoon." "Psalms! Bible study all day long! Boy, I'll tell you— heaven isn't what it's cracked up to be." At which point the figure in white smiled and said, "I see that you don't understand. We're in heaven; you're in hell."¹

God does not need two locations for heaven and hell. One location will do nicely. This is the warning of both the Old and New Testaments: it is also the reason why Jesus prays for the Kingdom to come on earth as it is in Heaven. Anything less than this simply continues the cycle of Judgment, which both he and the prophets warn us about in order to bring it to an end.

¹Harold Kushner, *When All You've Ever Wanted Isn't Enough* (Pocket Books: New York, 1987), pp. 156-57.

ISAIAH



Isaiah by Gustave Doré (1832-1883)

6. The Isaiah Apocalypse

Isaiah 24:1—31:9

6. ISAIAH: THE ISAIAH APOCALYPSE (24:1 – 31:9)		
THE APOCALYPSE (24:1 – 27:13)		
Universal Judgment (24:1-23)		
The Reason (24:5-6)	The Devastation (24:19-21)	The Victory (24:23)
A Psalm of Thanksgiving (25:1-5) (25:4-5) (Luke 1:46-55)		
The Messianic Feast (25:6-9) (25:6-8a) (Luke 14:15-24)		
Doom for Moab (25:10-12) (25:10)		
A Psalm of Victory (26:1-6)		
An Apocalyptic Psalm (26:7-19) (26:14 & 19)		
The Final Battle (26:20 – 27:1) (27:1) (The fleeing twisting Serpent)		
Leviathan (Sea Monster): Assyria	Tannin: Babylonia	
The Vineyard Song (27:2-6) (27:6)		
The Words of Judgment (27:7-11) (27:8 & 9b)		
The Gathering of Israel (27:12-13) (27:13)		
WARNINGS TO GOD'S PEOPLE (28:1 – 31:9)		
The Leaders of Israel (28:1-13) (28:4 & 7)	Parable of the Farmer (28:23-29) (28:24, 26, 29)	The Weakness of Egypt (30:1-33) (30:1-2, 7, 9-11, 18, 31-33)
The Leaders of Judah (28:14-22) (28:14-15 & 16b-17a)	Jerusalem and Its Conquerors (29:1-24) (29:1-2, 13, 18-21)	The Defense of Jerusalem (31:1-9) (31:1, 5 & 8)

6. ISAIAH: THE ISAIAH APOCALYPSE

Isaiah 24:1—31:9

ASSIGNMENTS			
Apocalyptic Judgment (24:1—25:12)	Apocalyptic Restoration (26:1—27:13)	Warnings to God's People (28:1—29:24)	Warnings against an Alliance (30:1—31:9)

THE ISAIAH APOCALYPSE (24:1—27:13)

Universal Judgment (24:1-23)

As this section begins, the prophet moves from pronouncing particular judgments against nations to a universal judgment against the whole world. Things will get so bad that God will intervene, but the purpose of his intervention is corrective. It is the fulfillment of his promise. Some would not consider this passage “apocalyptic;” others would. Perhaps this passage is a transitional form of writing which must be defined as lying somewhere in between the prophetic and the apocalyptic.

Most scholars agree that the Isaiah Apocalypse is not the work of the prophet Isaiah. Isaiah was more concerned about the judgment God was going to bring on Judah. The author of the Isaiah Apocalypse focuses on a worldwide judgment. This reflects a later theological development, which can be dated somewhere between 540 and 525 B.C.E. Some scholars would place the date even later, as late as 400 or even 300 B.C.E.

The reason for such universal devastation is the breaking of God's everlasting covenant (24:5-6). This is more likely to be the Covenant God made with Noah (Genesis 9:1-17) than the Mosaic Covenant. Judgment extends beyond the “Kings of the Earth” and includes the “Hosts of Heaven.” “The Hosts of Heaven” are the rebellious astral deities, who influenced nations and peoples. The purpose of the judgment is the deliverance of all humanity. God will ultimately reign on Mount Zion in Jerusalem, where he will manifest his glory through his elders.

A Psalm of Thanksgiving (25:1-5)

In this Psalm of thanksgiving, the aliens (the presumptuous) are brought low, and the poor and needy (the Jews) lifted up. The same theme is found here as expressed in Mary's song, the Magnificat (Luke 1:46-55).

The Messianic Feast (25:6-9)

As a King holds a coronation feast, the Lord of hosts gathers the nations on Mount Zion for such a feast. The wine is mature, death is overthrown, tears are wiped away, and all hostility towards God's people is removed. Jesus talks about just such a feast to his disciples in Luke 14:15-24.

Doom for Moab (25:10-12)

The rejoicing in the feast is interrupted by words of doom for Moab, which is symbolic of whoever might be Israel's enemy.

A Psalm of Victory (26:1-6)

Confidence in the strength of Zion, established by God, is expressed in this Psalm. No one gets away with anything. The proud will be brought down and the humble exalted. The proud are the enemies of Judah and the humble make up the righteous city (Jerusalem).

An Apocalyptic Psalm (26:7-19)

In good times and in bad times, the wicked often fail to see God's guiding hand at work. In the end God and the righteous will ultimately defeat them, wiping them out of his and our memory (26:14). God's dead, on the other hand, will rise out of the dust. Could this be a reference to the resurrection?

The Final Battle (26:20—27:1)

God's people are to prepare and wait for the final deliverance in which God's judgment extends to the superhuman realm. At this time the power of evil will be overthrown in one final battle between God and the powers of chaos described as Leviathan (the sea monster) and the Dragon. The former refers to a Canaanite sea monster and the latter to Tannin, another type of sea monster, which is here called a dragon. Leviathan refers to Assyria and Tannin to Babylonia. Some of this same imagery is used in Revelation 12:9 to refer to Satan.

The division of Leviathan into *the fleeing serpent* and *the twisting serpent* is not easily understood. Is this a way of suggesting Egypt as a third enemy, or is it an attempt to describe the three rivers that twist and turn through the lands of Israel's three enemies: the Nile, Tigris and Euphrates?

The Vineyard Song (27:2-6)

This is a further exposition of the vineyard mentioned in Isaiah 5:1-7; but in this case, the "thorns and briars" do not symbolize judgment on Israel. They represent the enemies of

Israel, which no longer exist. God waters this vineyard, making the possibility of fruit. The new people of God will spread beyond Israel into the whole world.

The Words of Judgment (27:7-11)

The coming of the new age is sure, mainly because God is in control of things, but it has been delayed because of human sin and failure. Judgment and Exile are necessary, but following that, idolatry will be destroyed, making possible the coming of the new age.

The Gathering of Israel (27:12-13)

The whole section ends with a vision of a renewed and united people in a place where God will reign as the supreme Lord. Assyria and Egypt are symbols of the opposite. They have been places of bondage and exile.

The new age will be greeted with the sound of a trumpet. This was how Israel summoned its people for solemn convocations (Numbers 10:2-10 and Joel 2:15); it will also signal the final Assembly of God's elect (Matthew 24:31; 1 Corinthians 15:52 and I Thessalonians 4:16).

WARNINGS TO GOD'S PEOPLE (28:1—31:9)

The Leaders of Israel (Ephraim) (28:1-13)

This passage was written before the fall of Samaria in 721 B.C.E. Israel is described as a ripe fig ready for the plucking and Assyria as ready to oblige. Priests and prophets should have sounded the warning, but they are too intoxicated with wine and beer to see visions and render decisions. Their behavior is clearly against the Law of Moses, which according to Leviticus 10:9-10, prohibits drinking on duty.

The Leaders of Judah (28:14-22)

Leaders in Judah are no different. Both prophet and priest mislead rather than lead the people. They think that all is secure, but security lies in God alone, a message they are not proclaiming. Instead of leading the people in the right direction towards the foundation stone and cornerstone in Zion (Jerusalem) (28:18), the religious leadership of Judah has made a covenant with death (28:15) and to make matters worse, they boast about it. (See Amos 7:7-9 and Romans 9:33)

Parable of the Farmer (28:23-29)

The farmer knows how to cooperate with God in order to obtain a harvest. Let everyone take notice. God is Lord of both nature and history; the wisdom that guides the farmer ought to guide the prophet as well.

Jerusalem and Its Conquerors (29:1-24)

Ariel is a name applied to Jerusalem as the principal stronghold and spiritual center of Israel. The word literally means “hearth of God” or “lion of God.” The object described as a hearth was a square altar with “horns” at the four corners. The Hebrew word is related to another word with a double meaning: “underworld” and “mountain of God.” What is being said here is that Jerusalem will be encircled and crushed, but its conquerors will also be destroyed.

The problem is that people honor God with their lips, but their hearts are far from him (29:13). In the judgment everyone who looks towards evil will be cut down, but a remnant, which acknowledge the holiness of the Lord of Israel will emerge (29:18-21). The historical situation is the impending fall of Jerusalem, but the imagery is applicable to every age.

The Weakness of Egypt (30:1-33)

Not all the statements in this chapter come from one period of time, but they all do converge on one theme. The theme is that there are kinds of behavior, which deny faith in God, but God in his patience wants to express grace (30:18).

The main problem in this passage is Judah’s attempt to make itself secure against Assyria by forming an alliance with Egypt. Egypt, says Isaiah, will not help (30:7). Egypt is like Rahab, who sits still. Rahab was the mythological sea dragon of chaos, which was defeated by the God of creation in near Eastern mythology. He is totally incapable of granting security to anyone. The people must not trust in Egypt, but God. The reverse side of God’s help is his judgment. He cannot help his people without punishing the enemy, and the enemy is not only Assyria, but also those who trust in the Egyptian Alliance. Security comes only from God.

God's judgment will come like a thunderstorm. His fury will burst over Judah’s enemy. All those opposed to God will be destroyed in a fire like that which burns in the Valley of Topheth. Topheth means “a burning place” and was located in the Valley of Hinnom. In the dark days of Jerusalem, children were sacrificed there to Molech, a pagan god. It was this valley that supplied the name for Hell, which in the New Testament becomes “Gehenna.”

The prophet is talking about the historical period in Hezekiah’s time (705-701 B.C.E.), but what he says has implications for every time. All evil will be overthrown. The final victory of God is assured.

The Defense of Jerusalem (31:1-9)

The historical context for chapter 31 is Sennacherib’s attack on Jerusalem. The King of Judah at the time was Hezekiah. Isaiah warns that the nation is to place its faith in God,

not in an Egyptian alliance. No help can come from Egypt; its horses and chariots are useless in Judah.

Judah must repudiate its idols and place its faith in God, who alone, will defend Jerusalem and judge Assyria. Jerusalem has a special significance for Isaiah because it is the center of God's activity of judgment. Faith in God brings life, but lack of it invites disaster. The promise, for the time being, is that Jerusalem will survive and the Assyrians will be sent fleeing. See Isaiah 37:36-37 for a description of what happened. Following the death of 185,000 Assyrians, Sennacherib withdrew from Jerusalem. This had nothing to do with any Egyptian alliance.

THE END IS CERTAIN

No one seems to enjoy watching a sporting event when they know in advance who is going to win. Coaches, managers, players, etc. might watch the video to find out what they did wrong and how they might improve for the next game, but fans generally do not watch the games, once they have heard the score. When such events are played at a later time, their audiences are not large. Winning, not how you play the game seems to be everything.

For Isaiah, how the game is played is what counts, for this is what results in victory. Victory, however, cannot be assured by military strategy or political alliances; God alone determines the outcome. For this reason, the end is certain. It would not be certain if everything depended upon military and political leadership and strength.

In Apocalyptic writing, even when evil seems to be winning, there is the utmost of faith in the ability of good to win over evil, for God is on the side of good and who can win against God? The forces of evil obviously think that they have a chance, and this delusion is the reason why evil is so prevalent today. Some people actually believe that evil is winning or else the outcome is still uncertain. Jesus went to the cross believing that the end was certain. That is why he did not call his twelve legions of angels to prevent his own crucifixion (Matthew 26:53). He knew that beyond his own death that he would be raised up. God would have the last word.

What is it about this end that is certain? First, no one gets away with anything, especially evil. Those who line themselves up with evil will also experience the negative side of judgment. Isaiah 26:14 says about them: "The dead do not live; shades do not rise—because you have punished and destroyed them, and wiped out all memory of them." I have often heard people lament this negative element of judgment, saying, "If any of my loved ones did not make it into heaven with me, heaven would not be heaven, for I would mourn their absence." Here we discover why this will not be the case. Those who suffer the punishment of God's judgment will be wiped out of our memory. We will forget that they ever existed.

The positive side of judgment is also certain. The Old Testament does not say much about life after death, but when it struggles with the resolution of good and evil, there are

passages, such as Isaiah 26:19, which point to the life everlasting: “Your dead shall live, their corpses shall rise. O dwellers in the dust, awake and sing for joy! For your dew is a radiant dew, and the earth will give birth to those long dead.”

As Christians we believe in the intervention of Grace, but Grace does not force anyone into God’s Kingdom—it only provides the way, if one is willing to take it. If the end is certain, we need to build on a solid foundation. Isaiah 28:16 describes that foundation: “See, I am laying in Zion a foundation stone, a tested stone, a precious cornerstone, a sure foundation: ‘One who trusts will not panic.’” Jesus, the one who called us to repent and follow him into the Kingdom, who was certain of the end, was and is that cornerstone or foundation stone in Zion (Jerusalem). Other verses related to this are Psalm 118:22, 1 Corinthians 3:11, and 1 Peter 2:4-7. Those who want to find life everlasting in God’s Kingdom must relate themselves to this stone, which in the Old Testament was Israel itself, but in the New Testament, it is Jesus (Matthew 21:42, Mark 12:10, and Luke 20:17).

If we really believe that the end is certain, it will make a tremendous difference in the way in which we live out our lives. It means that we will live every moment as if it were our last. When Martin Luther was asked, “What would you do if the end of the world would come tomorrow?” he replied, “I would plant my little apple tree today.” What this means is that he would not change his daily schedule at all, for he is ready at any moment. John Wesley made a similar, but easier to understand reply to a similar question. He replied that he would go about his daily schedule as planned, retire at about 9:00 p.m. as usual, and then he would wake up in glory. He was that certain that his daily activities were consistent with his goal—the Kingdom of God.

ISAIAH



Isaiah by Gustave Doré (1832-1883)

7. Restoration

Isaiah 32:1—39:8

7. ISAIAH: RESTORATION (32:1—39:8)					
THE GLORIOUS FUTURE (32:1—35:10)					
The Future King (32:1-20) (32:1, 9-10, 16-17)			The Intervention of God (33:1-24)		
			The Destroyer: Assyria (?) (33:1)		Who can face God? (33:14-16, 22)
Judgments against the Nations (34:1-17) (34:1-2, 14)			The Future Glory of Zion (35:1-10) 35:3-4, 6, 8, 10)		
*A CRISIS IN JERUSALEM (36:1—39:8)					
The Diplomacy (36:1-22)					
701 B.C. 46 Cities Fall (36:1)		Rabshakeh Eliakim, Shebna, and Joah (36:2-3)		Who can Save Judah? Egypt? (36:6) God? (36:7, 15)	Diplomatic Language Hebrew or Aramaic? (36:11-12)
Hezekiah's Consultation with Isaiah (37:1-35)			The Devastation of Sennacherib's Army (37:36-38) 185,000 Dead Soldiers (37:36-37)		
Consultation (37:1-13) (37:1-2, 6-7)		Prayer (37:14-35) (37:14, 20, 33)			
Hezekiah's Illness and Recovery (38:1-22)			The Ambassadors from Babylon (39:1-8)		
Prayer 38:1b-2)	Answer (38:5)	A Sign (38:7)	The Treasurers (39:2)		Final Prophecy (39:5-7)

*See also 2 Kings 18:13—20:19 for another account of the attack on Jerusalem.

7. ISAIAH: RESTORATION

Isaiah 32:1—39:8

ASSIGNMENTS			
The Future King and the Intervention of God (32-33)	Judgments Against the Nation and the Glory of Zion (34-35)	Sennacherib's Army Retreats (36-37)	Hezekiah's Illness and Recovery (38-39)

THE GLORIOUS FUTURE (32:1—35:10)

The Future King (32:1-20)

A future King will come and reign in righteousness (32:1-8). The very presence of God's righteousness means judgment for those who have not submitted to his rule (32:9-14), such as the affluent women in Judah.

The source of this King's righteousness is the Spirit of God. His righteousness brings both prosperity and security for his people (32:15-20). The language of this chapter is closer to the wisdom literature than it is to prophetic oracles.

The Intervention of God (33:1-24)

There are many different sections in this chapter. This may be a prophetic liturgy written for a Temple service. If it is, then it was added later, and may not represent Isaiah's own words. It could also be a reinterpretation of Isaiah's thought.

The "destroyer" of 33:1 is not identified but; if it was written by Isaiah, then the "destroyer" would be Assyria. There is, however, no direct reference to who it might be.

The intervention of God into human affairs is described in terms of judgment. The question is asked, "Who among us can dwell with the devouring fire?" (33:14) The answer is: "those who walk and speak in righteousness" (33:15-16). Sinners, whether in Zion (Jerusalem) or outside of Zion, will be destroyed by God's wrath; but those who submit to the Lord's reign will find salvation (33:22). God's intervention destroys the unrighteous, but saves the righteous. The righteous will share a glorious future with the Lord and no enemy can deprive them of this promise.

Judgments against the Nations (34:1-17)

Although Edom, along with its capital Bozrah, is named as the object of God's judgment, all the nations who have acted against God's people are to be included. Edom was thought of as the enemy *par excellence*; therefore, it must be understood as symbolically representing all of Israel's enemies, who will experience the judgment of God.

Judgment will result in complete desolation. Goat-demons (Satyrs) and Lilith (night hags) (34:14) will roam over the ruins. A satyr was literally a "he goat" but often referred to as a devil, and night hags were feminine demons. They were known as storm demons, which were related with the night. They derived their name from Lilith, a Mesopotamian storm demon. It is difficult to say whether Isaiah is referring to actual creatures or evil forces. All of this is used to create an image of the desolation, which will be left following the judgment of God.

The Future Glory of Zion (35:1-10)

In stark contrast to chapter 34, judgment gives way to re-creation. By means of the "Holy Way," God is taking his people home. Those with feeble knees (the tired exiles) will receive new strength and courage as they are led back to Zion (Jerusalem). This is a vision of a restored people and nation, which looks forward to the great day of deliverance. Although this chapter may have been written in a later time period, relating to Chapters 40-55, it stands in the tradition of Isaiah and forms a fitting conclusion to this group of oracles concerning Israel's glorious future.

A CRISIS IN JERUSALEM (36:1—39:8)

The chapters which follow are nearly identical to the narration of this same crisis in 2 Kings 18:13—20:19. In the version of 2 Kings, however, the author includes Hezekiah's submission and willingness to pay tribute to Assyria (See 2 Kings 18:14-16). It is understandable why this incident is left out in Isaiah's account. He is trying to give a different version in which God acts, at least temporarily, to avoid the coming disaster.

Diplomacy (36:1-22)

The attack finally came in 701 B.C.E., but there were a number of events, which led up to it. Assyria conquered 46 fortified cities in Judah, giving Hezekiah good reason to worry. Just prior to attacking Jerusalem, there was an attempt at some diplomacy. Sennacherib (King of Assyria) sent the Rabshakeh (a high civil dignitary or "chief steward") to discuss the situation with Eliakim (who was in charge of the palace), Shebna (the secretary), and Joah (the recorder). The Rabshakeh (from Lachish) went to Jerusalem to meet with the three men at the conduit of the upper pool, which was located on the way to the Fuller's Field. This would be near the end of Hezekiah's Tunnel.

The conversation began in Hebrew (the language of Judah). Those who represented Hezekiah desired to use the diplomatic language of Aramaic, but the Assyrians preferred

to use Hebrew so that those listening in to the conversation would be aware of the disaster that was about to come their way. If the common people understood the danger, it might create panic, making a military attack easier or even unnecessary. This is why the Rabshakeh called out in a loud voice declaring that Jerusalem should rely neither on Egypt (an unreliable ally), nor in God (who is on Assyria's side). God had not rescued Samaria, who had fallen twenty years earlier (36:19). After this one-sided exercise in diplomacy ended, Eliakim, Shebna, and Joah said nothing, but went to Hezekiah, with their clothes rent, to tell him the words of the Rabshakeh.

Hezekiah's Consultation with Isaiah (37:1-35)

After hearing of Sennacherib's threat, Hezekiah sent Eliakim, Shebna, and the senior priests dressed in sackcloth to consult with Isaiah. Isaiah assured them that Sennacherib has insulted God, who has determined history's course; for this, God will frustrate Sennacherib's plans.

When Sennacherib heard about the advice of Isaiah, he sent a letter to Hezekiah. In the letter he bragged about all of his exploits and assured Hezekiah that God could not save him. Hezekiah took the letter into the Temple where he prayed (37:16-20). When Isaiah heard about Hezekiah's prayer, he assured him that Sennacherib would return the same way he came and that no attack would be made on the city of Jerusalem.

The Devastation of Sennacherib's Army (37:36-38)

The angel of the Lord killed 185,000 Assyrian soldiers in their camp. Many scholars believe that the Assyrian army suffered from a plague. Herodotus, the Greek historian, attributed the destruction of Sennacherib's army to the bubonic plague. It was also the angel of the Lord who slew the first-born in Egypt the night before the Exodus from Egypt (Exodus 12:29).

The mass destruction of his army caused Sennacherib to return to Nineveh without attacking Jerusalem. While he was worshipping his god, Nisroch, two of his sons, Adrammelech and Sharezer, killed him with a sword. They then escaped to the land of Ararat, while another son, Esarhaddon, replaced him as the new ruler of Assyria.

Hezekiah's Illness and Recovery (38:1-22)

After Isaiah informed Hezekiah that he would soon die (38:1) and that he should put his house in order, Hezekiah prayed to the Lord (38:3) and was given fifteen more years (38:4-5). His prayer follows the pattern of Psalm 6.

Hezekiah asked for a sign (2 Kings 10:8). The sign given to him was the turning back of the sun's shadow, which is cast on the steps leading up to Ahaz's roof chamber. The sign would be that this shadow would move backwards ten steps. God's power would not only heal Hezekiah's illness (38:21), but it would also deliver Jerusalem from Assyria (38:6).

All this was done because of Hezekiah's prayer. In response to God, Hezekiah plans to express his gratitude at the Temple.

The Ambassadors from Babylon (39:1-8)

Merodach-baladan, the son of Baladan (King of Babylon) sent ambassadors with letters and a present for Hezekiah. These were sent, because Babylon had heard of Hezekiah's illness and recovery. Hezekiah proceeded to show them all of his silver, gold, spices, precious oil, and armory. Nothing was spared. They saw everything.

Isaiah suspected the Babylonian ambassadors of being spies and predicted the eventual fall of Judah to Babylon and the carrying off of the nation's treasures (39:6). At the same time the prophet assured Hezekiah that this would not take place in his lifetime. Hezekiah was relieved that his reign would enjoy peace and security and interpreted Isaiah's words as good news. They were not intended to be good news. This prophetic statement was intended to tie these first thirty-nine chapters into what follows, which comes out of the exilic period. It is an important link between the two major divisions of the book.

The word "peace" occurs in a refrain in Isaiah 48:22 and 57:21, dividing the final chapters into three sections of nine chapters each (40-48; 49-57; and 58-66).

THE JOY OF SALVATION

How often have you heard someone say that everything they would enjoy doing is illegal, immoral, or fattening? Many of us approach religious faith in the same way. Deep within us we really believe that there is more joy in a life of idolatry and debauchery.

The discovery of joy in faith did not take place in the New Testament. In the *Talmud*, the collected wisdom of the rabbis of the first five centuries, it is written. "In the world to come, each of us will be called to account for all the good things God put on earth which we refused to enjoy."¹

Christians, on the other hand, went through a long period of identifying their faith with black clothes and long faces, but gloomy Christians contradict both the Old and New Testaments. Nothing has done Christianity more harm in all of religious history than the idea that Christians do not have as much fun as nonChristians. The reason why there has been so much misunderstanding about joy is because it usually gets confused with pleasure. The Christian knows the difference, because, to quote E. Stanley Jones, "The Christian's way to joy is through a Cross, therefore it is a joy that has meaning, depth, and value."²

¹Harold Kushner, *When All You've Ever Wanted Isn't Enough* (Pocket Books: New York, 1987), p. 82.

²E. Stanley Jones, *The Divine Yes* (Abingdon Press: Nashville, 1975), p. 133.

When the author of Hebrews talks about faith, he includes much more than faith as understood in the New Testament. He names the faithful of the Old Testament as well. In Hebrews 12:1, he concludes,

Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight and the sin that clings so closely, and let us run with perseverance the race that is set before us, looking to Jesus the pioneer and perfecter of our faith, who for the sake of the joy that was set before him endured the cross, disregarding its shame, and has taken his seat at the right hand of the throne of God.

Faith was perfected in Jesus, who understood its connection with joy and happiness. Clement of Alexandria was comparing the differences between persons who live by faith and persons who do not when he wrote, “You can always know a pagan by the ugly pleasures in which he indulges, and a heretic by his bickering and quarrelsomeness, and a Christian by his happiness.”³

The same problems existed in the Old Testament and the prophet Isaiah did his best to warn the people of his own time. He may not have had a cross to help him discover the depth of joy, but he had a vision in which he saw the holiness of God. He could hardly stand the vision, for, according to Isaiah 6:5, it made him feel like a man of “unclean lips.” Why was seeing a holy God so difficult? Malcolm Muggeridge helped us to understand when he said, “Our faculties are like those smelting works that can only take ore of a high degree of impurity; when the light is too bright we cannot see.”⁴ Looking at the cross does the same thing to us today, that is, if we really see it for what it is, as did Matthew Arnold in Isaac Watts’ famous hymn:

When I survey the wondrous cross
on which the Prince of Glory died,
My richest gain I count but loss,
and pour contempt on all my pride.⁵

In Isaiah there are two passages that point us in the same direction. The first one is found in Isaiah 33:14-16:

³Quoted in *Pulpit Digest*, April-June, Logos Publications, Grove Heights, MN 55076, 1982, p. 8.

⁴Quoted in Paul Brand, *Fearfully and Wonderfully Made* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1980), p. 175

⁵“When I Survey the Wondrous Cross,” *The United Methodist Hymnal* (Nashville: The United Methodist Publishing House, 1989), Hymn 298.

The sinners in Zion are afraid; trembling has seized the godless: “Who among us can live with the devouring fire? Who among us can live with everlasting flames?” Those who walk righteously and speak uprightly, who despise the gain of oppression, who wave away a bribe instead of accepting it, who stop their ears from hearing of bloodshed and shut their eyes from looking on evil, they will live on the heights; their refuge will be the fortresses of rocks; their food will be supplied, their water assured.

God’s holiness makes Isaiah aware of the fact that he cannot save himself and that only God can save him and restore his joy. In Isaiah 35:8-10, we find the second passage:

A highway shall be there, and it shall be called the Holy Way; the unclean shall not travel on it, but it shall be for God’s people; no traveler, not even fools, shall go astray. No lion shall be there, nor shall any ravenous beast come up on it; they shall not be found there, but the redeemed shall walk there. And the ransomed of the LORD shall return, and come to Zion with singing; everlasting joy shall be upon their heads; they shall obtain joy and gladness, and sorrow and sighing shall flee away. .

The point being made both in the Old and New Testaments is that the Holiness of God and the Cross of Jesus Christ are mirrors into which we must look at ourselves. When we see God and allow him to shape in us his own image, and when our lives, our vocations begin to mesh with our understanding of God, there is joy! “Joy,” said Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, “is the surest sign of the presence of God.”⁶ Judaism agrees. It was Harold Kushner, who said: “...once we have tasted the presence of God, we will no longer envy the wicked.”⁷ Why? Because we will have tasted joy not pleasure.

⁶Quoted in Bruce Larson, *There’s a lot more to Health than not being Sick* (Waco: Word Books, 1984), p. 124.

⁷Harold Kushner, *Who Needs God?* (New York: Summit Books, 1989), p. 161.

ZEPHANIAH



Zephaniah by Gustave Doré (1832-1883)

8. Bearer of Good News

Zephaniah 1:1—3:20

8. ZEPHANIAH, NAHUM, AND HABAKKUK

ZEPHANIAH: BEARER OF GOOD NEWS (1:1—3:20)

Judgment on Judah (1:1—2:3)		Judgment on the Nations (2:4-15)		Jerusalem's Future (3:1-20)	
Idols Baal Starry Host Molech (1:4-5)	Day of the Lord (1:7 & 14)	The Lamp of Zephaniah (1:12)	Philistia (2:4-7) Moab and Ammon (2:8-11) Ethiopia (Cush) (2:12) Assyria (2:13-15)	Jerusalem is Doomed (3:1-7)	A Restored Remnant Pure: 3:9 Humble (3:12-13)

9. NAHUM: CELEBRATION OF VENGEANCE (1:1—3:19)

Judgment of Nineveh (1:1-15)			Fall of Nineveh (2:1—3:19)		
Hometown: Elkosh (1:1)	An Acrostic Poem (1:2-14) (1:14)	Good News (1:15)	Like a Lion (2:11ff.)	Like a Harlot (3:4ff.)	Nothing Can Save Assyria (3:19)

10. HABAKKUK: TWO QUESTIONS FOR GOD (1:1—3:19)

Dialogue with God (1:1—2:4)	Five Oracles of Woe (2:5-20)	A Psalm or Prayer (3:1-19)
First Question (1:2-4) First Answer (1:5-6)	1. Plundering (2:6-8) (2:6)	Rejoice in the Day of Calamity (3:16 and 18)
Second Question (1:12-13) The Tower Incident (2:1) Second Answer (2:4b)	2. Oppressing (2:9-11) (2:9-10) 3. Bloodshed (2:12-14) (2:12)	
New Testament Impact: Rom. 1:17; Gal. 3:11; and Heb. 10:37-38	4. Degrading (2:15-17) (2:15) 5. Idolatry (2:18-20) (2:18)	

8. ZEPHANIAH: BEARER OF GOOD NEWS

Zephaniah 1:1—3:20

ASSIGNMENTS		
Judgment on Judah (1:1—2:3)	Judgment on the Nations (2:4-15)	Jerusalem's Future (3:1-20)

INTRODUCTION

The Person of Zephaniah

Not much is known about Zephaniah. His name means: “the Lord protects.” In addition to the meaning of his name we know that he was related to Hezekiah (715-686 B.C.E.), king of Judah. This would make Zephaniah a man of royalty. Like Isaiah, Zephaniah was a prophet with royal blood in his veins.

Zephaniah was known as the prophet with a lamp in the medieval Church, which portrayed him as such in stained-glass windows. This imagery comes from Zephaniah 1:12, where he describes God as one who, with a lamp, seeks out the wicked for punishment. No sinner will be hidden from his eyes, or escape his coming judgment.

The Message of Zephaniah

The central message of Zephaniah was that Yahweh would destroy Jerusalem, and every other nation, which defies him. For most people the Day of Yahweh (the Lord), which is rapidly approaching, will not be a day of celebration, but a day of wholesale destruction. Out of Judah, however, God would save a small remnant.

The Setting

The setting is in Jerusalem, following Manasseh and Amon, two of Judah's worst kings, who brought Judah's religion and morality to an all-time low. Josiah has become King, but he has not yet put his reforms in place.

The Date

Since Josiah's reforms went into effect with the discovery of the Book of Law (Deuteronomy) in the Temple (621 B.C.E.), we know that Zephaniah was active prior to

this time. The allusion to the imminent threat from the north, probably the Scythian hordes, suggests that Zephaniah's public ministry took place around 630 B.C.E.

The Author

Like many of the other prophets, there might be some reason for suggesting that, some of his work, was edited by later disciples, but there is no reason to doubt the authorship of this book by a prophet named Zephaniah.

JUDGMENT ON JUDAH (1:1–2:3)

The judgment of God will fall upon Jerusalem and Judah for its idolatry and indifference. Three kinds of idolatry are described: (1) the worship of Baal, the Canaanite fertility god, whose worship involved sexual license and prostitution; (2) the worship of the host of heaven, which consisted of personifying the stars as gods; and (3) the worship of Milcom (Molech), who was the Ammonite god who demanded human sacrifice. God's own people were guilty of mixing these pagan religions with the worship of Yahweh (1:4-6). This practice is called religious syncretism.

Zephaniah portrays God's instrument of punishment as coming out of the north. They will enter by means of the Fish Gate, the least protected quarter of Jerusalem, and the traders and merchants, who deserve God's punishment most, will be the first to suffer from the onslaught (1:10-11). God will search Jerusalem with a lantern and no one will escape his righteous judgment (1:12). This Day of Judgment, according to Zephaniah is the "Day of the Lord." Popular opinion had it that the "Day of the Lord" would be a "Day of Blessing" for God's people, and a "Day of Destruction" for their enemies; but according to Amos (5:18-20) and Zephaniah, the "Day of the Lord" was to be a "Day of Destruction" for God's people as well.

The humble of the land were to seek the Lord. Although they too would have to suffer along with the others, they would be sheltered in the "Day of the Lord's Anger." (2:3)

JUDGMENT ON THE NATIONS (2:4-15)

God's judgment will not only fall upon Judah, but also upon Judah's enemies. Four nations are so named. They are Philistia (2:4-7), Moab/Ammon (2:8-11), Ethiopia (2:12), and Assyria (2:13-15). These nations encircle Judah, from the west (Philistia), east (Moab/Ammon), south (Ethiopia), and north (Assyria).

Gaza, Ashkelon, Ashdod, and Ekron were the remaining four cities of Philistia, and the Cherethites referred to the Philistines who came from Crete. This whole nation will be destroyed, and a remnant from Judah will enjoy its land (2:7), and plunder the remains of Moab and Ammon (2:9). Moab and Ammon will be destroyed, as were Sodom and Gomorrah.

The sins of all these nations are assumed, rather than named; and the main emphasis is on the destruction of Assyria, the enemy in power at the time.

JERUSALEM'S FUTURE (3:1-20)

The city doomed for destruction, although not named, is clearly Jerusalem (3:1-7). It will be wiped out because its officials, judges, prophets, and priests were corrupt and have led the city deeper into civil and religious wickedness.

The city and nation however will be restored through a righteous remnant. The humble shall inherit the earth (Matthew 5:5). This remnant has already been mentioned in Zephaniah 2:7 and 9; but now, the prophet proclaims the reversal of Babel (Genesis 11:1-9), and anticipates Pentecost (Acts 2:1-11). This is what he means by giving his people pure lips. This may also be a reference to forgiveness as described in Isaiah 6:5-7. The remnant is to be restored to favor, in order that all the nations of the earth might share in God's promises (Genesis 12:2-3).

NAHUM



Russian Icon of Nahum

9. Celebration of Vengeance

Nahum 1:1–3:19

8. ZEPHANIAH, NAHUM, AND HABAKKUK

ZEPHANIAH: BEARER OF GOOD NEWS (1:1—3:20)

Judgment on Judah (1:1—2:3)		Judgment on the Nations (2:4-15)		Jerusalem's Future (3:1-20)	
Idols Baal Starry Host Molech (1:4-5)	Day of the Lord (1:7 & 14)	The Lamp of Zephaniah (1:12)	Philistia (2:4-7) Moab and Ammon (2:8-11) Ethiopia (Cush) (2:12) Assyria (2:13-15)	Jerusalem is Doomed (3:1-7)	A Restored Remnant Pure: 3:9 Humble (3:12-13)

9. NAHUM: CELEBRATION OF VENGEANCE (1:1—3:19)

Judgment of Nineveh (1:1-15)			Fall of Nineveh (2:1—3:19)		
Hometown: Elkosh (1:1)	An Acrostic Poem (1:2-14) (1:14)	Good News (1:15)	Like a Lion (2:11ff.)	Like a Harlot (3:4ff.)	Nothing Can Save Assyria (3:19)

10. HABAKKUK: TWO QUESTIONS FOR GOD (1:1—3:19)

Dialogue with God (1:1—2:4)	Five Oracles of Woe (2:5-20)	A Psalm or Prayer (3:1-19)
First Question (1:2-4) First Answer (1:5-6)	1. Plundering (2:6-8) (2:6)	Rejoice in the Day of Calamity (3:16 and 18)
Second Question (1:12-13) <i>The Tower Incident (2:1)</i> Second Answer (2:4b)	2. Oppressing (2:9-11) (2:9-10) 3. Bloodshed (2:12-14) (2:12)	
New Testament Impact: Rom. 1:17; Gal. 3:11; and Heb. 10:37-38	4. Degrading (2:15-17) (2:15) 5. Idolatry (2:18-20) (2:18)	

9. NAHUM: CELEBRATION OF VENGEANCE

Nahum 1:1—3:19

ASSIGNMENTS			
The Judgment of Nineveh (1:1-15)		The Fall of Nineveh (2:1—3:19)	
God’s Mighty Acts	God’s People to be Freed	The Fall of the City	Words of Woe to Nineveh

INTRODUCTION

The Person of Nahum

Not much is known about Nahum except the meaning of his name and his place of birth. His name means, “comfort” or “compassionate.” Elkosh is given as his birthplace, but its location has never been found. Although “Capernaum” means “Village of Nahum,” it is probably not the same Nahum.

The Message of Nahum

Nahum stands in stark contrast to Jonah. Jonah went to Nineveh as a missionary; the Ninevites listened to his message and were spared. Nahum’s message was that there was no hope for Assyria and he rejoiced in its complete destruction.

What we must understand is that Nahum lived at the end of 150 years of Assyrian oppression. The Northern Kingdom, Israel, had been destroyed by Assyria and even Judah came close to being annihilated. Nahum was happy to see the end of Assyria and proclaimed that the Lord has brought the defiant and unscrupulous nation down.

The Setting

The Assyrian Empire crumbled quickly following the death of Assurbanipal (630 B.C.E.). A combined assault by the Medes (from northern Persia) and the Chaldeans (from southern Babylonia) brought Asshur down in 614 B.C.E. and Nineveh in 612 B.C.E. Judah could breathe easily again and life could return to normal. There is a great deal of optimism in the air and Nahum does not seem to sense the judgment that will fall upon Judah in 587 B.C.E.

The Date

The date for Nahum's activity and writing of this book can be estimated with a fair degree of accuracy. It would have to fall somewhere between 630 to 612 B.C.E.

The Author

Although nothing is known about Nahum, no one doubts that a man named Nahum wrote this book.

THE JUDGMENT OF NINEVEH (1:1-15)

This section begins with the name and hometown of Nahum. Although Jerome suggested that Elkosh might be the same as Elkesi (Capernaum) in Galilee, most scholars admit that the city is unknown and probably would have been located in southwestern Judah.

Verses 2-14 make up an incomplete acrostic psalm, which was used to introduce the prophet's own poem about the fall of Nineveh (1:15—3:19). It is incomplete because some of the Hebrew *letters* are missing and some are out of place. The content of the psalm begins with God rather than with Nineveh, and God is described as jealous (1:2), slow to anger (1:3), and good (1:7). This will not however prevent God's judgment on Nineveh. God's goodness necessitates judgment against any nation that opposes him.

This is the only work given the status of a book (1:1). This means that Nahum's oracles were written down on a scroll. They were probably used in worship, for these oracles are good news to a nation threatened by Assyria (1:14-15). Nahum brought Good News to Judah.

THE FALL OF NINEVEH (2:1—3:19)

Previously God used Assyria as his instrument to punish Israel, but now he intends to bring Nineveh down. Nahum is writing about this prior to the fall of Nineveh, but the signs are clear to him that the city is about to fall. The "mantelet" (siege engine armed with a battering-ram), are already set in position against the walls (2:5). Nothing can save the city or nation, not even its mistress (queen or patron goddess "Ishtar"). (2:9) Assyria, described as a lion, which was often the image of a ruthless nation (2:11-12), is doomed.

The end of Nineveh is described in graphic imagery. The city is compared to a prostitute, who will receive her appropriate punishment (3:5-6). She, who inflicted such destruction on Thebes (Egypt) in 663 B.C.E., will suffer the same humiliation. Assyrian soldiers killed many Egyptians, plundered the city and burned much of it to the ground. The fall of Thebes was as much a blow to Egyptian pride as it was a crowning triumph to Assyria, but Nineveh will suffer the same humiliation she inflicted on Thebes. No-Amon (Thebes) meant city of Amun, the state god of Egypt (3:8ff). As Amun could not help the Egyptians, neither will Ishtar be able to help the Assyrians. Although Nineveh would be

overthrown by the Babylonians and Medes, in 612 B.C.E. Nahum's oracle identifies "the Lord of hosts" as the destroyer.

Nahum 3:19 may have been added after the fall of Nineveh. The city fell quickly, leaving behind only a mound known today as Tell Kuyunjik (mound of many sheep). The closing verses of Nahum's prophecy make up a bitter mockery of Nineveh, which for Judah created not weeping, but rejoicing in the streets (3:19).

HABAKKUK



Habakkuk

10. Two Questions for God

Habakkuk 1:1—3:19

8. ZEPHANIAH, NAHUM, AND HABAKKUK

ZEPHANIAH: BEARER OF GOOD NEWS (1:1—3:20)

Judgment on Judah (1:1—2:3)		Judgment on the Nations (2:4-15)		Jerusalem's Future (3:1-20)	
Idols Baal Starry Host Molech (1:4-5)	Day of the Lord (1:7 & 14)	The Lamp of Zephaniah (1:12)	Philistia (2:4-7) Moab and Ammon (2:8-11) Ethiopia (Cush) (2:12) Assyria (2:13-15)	Jerusalem is Doomed (3:1-7)	A Restored Remnant Pure: 3:9 Humble (3:12-13)

9. NAHUM: CELEBRATION OF VENGEANCE (1:1—3:19)

Judgment of Nineveh (1:1-15)			Fall of Nineveh (2:1—3:19)		
Hometown: Elkosh (1:1)	An Acrostic Poem (1:2-14) (1:14)	Good News (1:15)	Like a Lion (2:11ff.)	Like a Harlot (3:4ff.)	Nothing Can Save Assyria (3:19)

10. HABAKKUK: TWO QUESTIONS FOR GOD (1:1—3:19)

Dialogue with God (1:1—2:4)	Five Oracles of Woe (2:5-20)	A Psalm or Prayer (3:1-19)
First Question (1:2-4) First Answer (1:5-6)	1. Plundering (2:6-8) (2:6)	Rejoice in the Day of Calamity (3:16 and 18)
Second Question (1:12-13) The Tower Incident (2:1) Second Answer (2:4b)	2. Oppressing (2:9-11) (2:9-10) 3. Bloodshed (2:12-14) (2:12)	
New Testament Impact: Rom. 1:17; Gal. 3:11; and Heb. 10:37-38	4. Degrading (2:15-17) (2:15) 5. Idolatry (2:18-20) (2:18)	

10. HABAKKUK: TWO QUESTIONS FOR GOD

Habakkuk 1:1—3:19

ASSIGNMENTS		
Habakkuk's Dialogue with God (1:1—2:4)	Habakkuk's Five Oracles of Woe (2:5-20)	Habakkuk's Psalm or Prayer (3:1-19)

INTRODUCTION

The Person of Habakkuk

Apart from this book, nothing is known of Habakkuk. Even his name is not Hebrew in origin, but comes from an Akkadian word for “a garden plant.”

The Message of Habakkuk

Habakkuk raises the same questions as Job and Psalm 73. His question is raised in Habakkuk 1:13: “...why do you look on the treacherous, and are silent when the wicked swallow those more righteous than they?” Habakkuk is angry because he has become aware of how God intends to use the Babylonians (a people more wicked than the people of God) to punish Judah.

God's answer, although it is slow in coming, is given in Habakkuk 2:3-4: “For there is still a vision for the appointed time; it speaks of the end, and does not lie. If it seems to tarry, wait for it; it will surely come, it will not delay. Look at the proud! Their spirit is not right in them, but the righteous live by their faith.” God's answer then is that he will also deal with the Babylonians and that those who are truly his people will live by faith in him and his righteous actions in history.

The Setting

Without a doubt the setting of the historical part of Habakkuk is Judah prior to its fall. Jehoiakim (609-598 B.C.E.) was probably the King of Judah when Habakkuk was active as a prophet. Babylonia was emerging as a political and military power and probably had already defeated Nineveh (612 B.C.E.).

The Date

The above context enables us to place a date on the historical part of Habakkuk at somewhere between 612 B.C.E., when Nineveh fell to Babylonia and 597 B.C.E. when Babylonia began its attack on Judah.

The Author

Although Habakkuk is generally credited for writing the first section, many doubt that he wrote the whole book. The literary style differs too much from section to section. The first section consists of a dialogue between the prophet and God, the second section consists of five prophetic oracles, and the third section turns into a Psalm. This variation plus the book's brevity cause many to doubt that one author is responsible for all three sections. On the other hand, the themes of justice and faith do provide a basic unity to the three sections.

HABAKKUK'S DIALOGUE WITH GOD (1:1—2:4)

Habakkuk begins by questioning God's sense of justice. Why does he allow oppression and lawlessness in Judah? (1:2-4) God answers Habakkuk, but also surprises him. He assures Habakkuk that he is just and that he has chosen to punish the oppression and lawlessness by raising the Chaldeans (the last dynasty of Babylon). (1:5-6) This troubles Habakkuk, because he knows that the Chaldeans (Babylonians) are worse than the people of Judah; hence, Habakkuk questions God a second time (1:12-13).

Habakkuk is determined to have his question answered to his own satisfaction, so he takes his place on a watchtower. The watchtower (2:1) was probably located in the Temple area rather than on a city wall or in an open field, as is popularly imagined. The answer that God gives to him is that the unrighteous will fail and that the righteous will live (2:2-4). By unrighteous He means the Chaldeans and by righteous He means the Israelites, but one can draw individualistic implications from this answer as well. The New Testament does: three examples are Romans 1:17; Galatians 3:11; and Hebrews 10:37-38. After Habakkuk is told that God does not overlook or tolerate injustice, he is then told to communicate to the people of Judah how God operates in history. He is to assure them that, because divine justice is certain, the faithful will live according to God's righteousness, not their own.

HABAKKUK'S FIVE ORACLES OF WOE (2:5-20)

The five woes are directed against Babylon (the Chaldeans) for the following sins:

For Plundering People (2:6-8)

They carried out a policy of robbing the nations they conquered.

For Building by Oppressing (2:9-11)

They used the plunder to build up their own nation (house).

For Cruelty and Bloodshed (2:12-14)

Violence will not work. In the end the Lord will establish a world of peace and godliness. Verse 14 is a quotation from Isaiah 11:9.

For Degrading other People (2:15-17)

The image of a drunken and crazed individual is used to portray the foolishness and irresponsibility of Babylon. In the end Babylon will have to drink from the cup of God's wrath.

For the Folly of Idolatry (2:18-20)

Finally, Babylon's idolatrous worship of Marduk is condemned. Verse 20 is a liturgical formula for worshipping the Lord.

The above oracles of woe demonstrate that every success of evil brings within it the seed of its own judgment and condemnation. They all contain the classic woe form, which includes an invective and threat.

HABAKKUK'S PSALM OR PRAYER (3:1-19)

Many scholars believe that this final chapter was added later, but linguistic studies indicate that the material might be as old as the rest of the book. One of the reasons for calling it an addition is its difference. Just what is it? Is it a Hymn, Psalm, or Prayer? It has characteristics of all three, and the technical terms "Shigionoth" (3:1) and "Selah" (3:13) indicate that it probably was used in public worship.¹ The imagery is of God marching from Sinai toward Edom, as he did with the people following the Exodus. Although judgment lies in store for God's own people, causing Habakkuk to tremble (3:16), he also rejoices (3:18), for he trusts the Lord. Habakkuk is thus a true example of a righteous person living by faith (2:4).

GOD'S ANSWER TO EVIL

In these three brief prophetic books, a couple of verses point to God's answer to evil. Let me quote one verse from each of these minor-prophets; Zephaniah, Nahum, and Habakkuk:

¹ Both of these words are difficult to translate. My guess is that *Shigionoth* is a musical directive calling for passion and enthusiasm, and *selah* is a musical directive calling for people to stop and listen, perhaps like an *Amen*.

At that time I will search Jerusalem with lamps, and I will punish the people who rest complacently on their dregs, those who say in their hearts, “The LORD will not do good, nor will he do harm.” (Zephaniah 1:12)

Look! On the mountains the feet of one who brings good tidings, who proclaims peace! Celebrate your festivals, O Judah, fulfill your vows, for never again shall the wicked invade you; they are utterly cut off. (Nahum 1:15)

Look at the proud! Their spirit is not right in them, but the righteous live by their faith. (Habakkuk 2:4)

These three verses sum up the Old Testament message of all the prophets. Evil and wickedness may seem to rule the day, but God in carrying out his judgment will not miss anything or anyone. Not only will his judgment be fair; it will be thorough. This is Good News to those who suffer from injustice and oppression everywhere. It is Good News not because God will punish all those wicked people and nations who have inflicted suffering, but because it means that God’s people—the Remnant—are on the right track, the road of holiness, which leads into the Restored Jerusalem, the New Israel, the Kingdom of God. God’s people do not have to be jealous of those who are in the ditch on either side of the Road of Holiness; rather, they feel compassion for all who have fallen into such ditches. This alone makes sense of the Parable of the Two Lost Sons in Luke 15:11-32 and the Workers in the Vineyard in Matthew 20:1-16. God’s solution to our deepest questions about how evil people prosper is given concisely in Habakkuk 2:4 and all of its New Testament parables and parallels (Romans 1:17; Galatians 3:11; and Hebrews 10:37-38: “The one who is righteous will live by faith.”

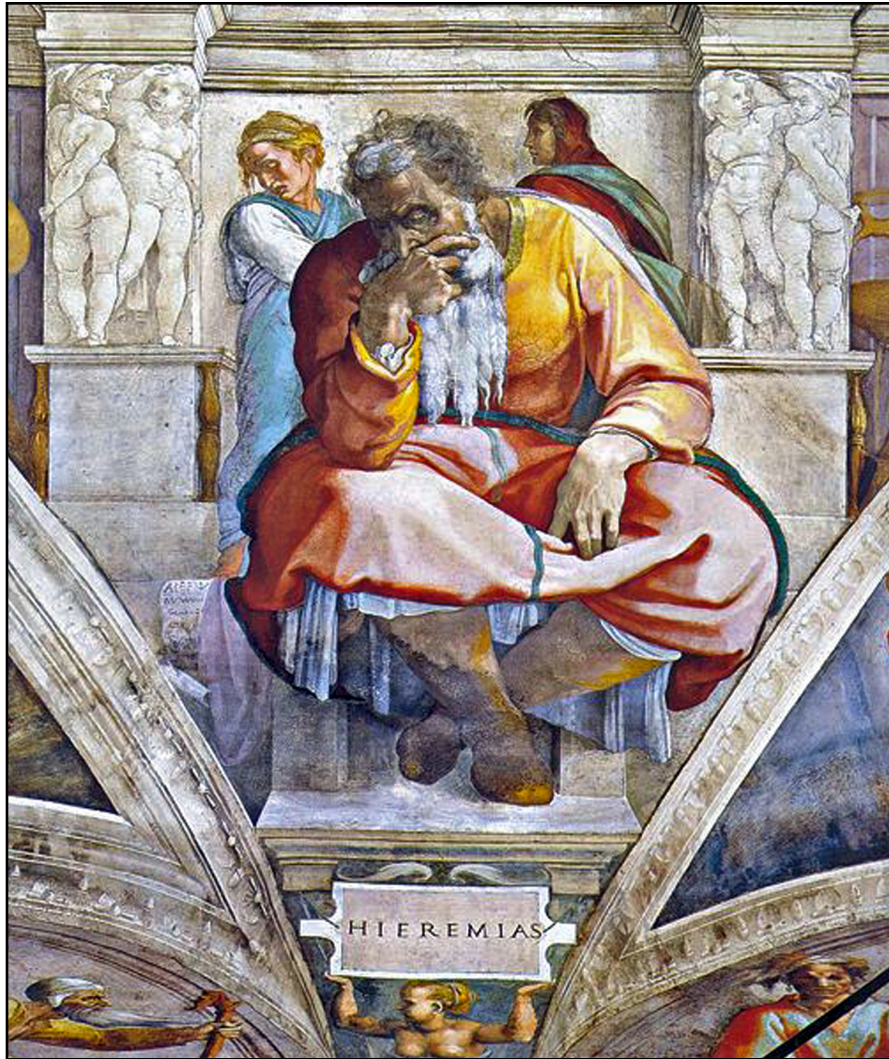
What does this really mean? Perhaps we need to define faith to understand. Hebrews 11:1 says that “...faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen.” This means that the faithful are so sure of things not seen that they are willing to bet their lives on them. It also means that they value righteousness above wickedness, feeling compassion on those who fall into the ditches of wickedness. They know that wickedness does not pay, and they find no delight in it at all. When the prodigal son returns home and when workers finally make it into the vineyard, they rejoice with them as the angels in heaven rejoice (Luke 15:10). They certainly are not envious of life in the far country or in the secular city. The only kind of life worth living is that lived in the Kingdom of God: that kind of life can be lived out now. No one has to wait until the end of history. The Kingdom of God is in our midst, and all who submit to Jesus Christ, its King, have entered into it.

God’s solution to evil is his presence and promise of transformation or eventual judgment. Job discovered that presence when he heard God speak to him from the whirlwind. “I had heard of you by the hearing of the ear,” he cried in Job 42:5-6, “but now my eye sees you; therefore I despise myself, and repent in dust and ashes.” Of what did he repent? He repented of his hasty questioning of God. Habakkuk questioned God in the very same way. Most people think that the problem of evil has not been resolved in Job and Habakkuk, but the problem of evil has been resolved. The very presence of God

put Job on his knees and brought Habakkuk down from his position on the watchtower. The presence of God signifies the eventual transformation or punishment of the wicked. The righteous live by faith, because they know that it is the best way to live. They know that they could never earn their own way into the Kingdom. Faith always results in righteousness, which becomes its expression of gratitude.

Two more passages found in Habakkuk demonstrate the practical implications of these three prophets. The first is Habakkuk 2:20, where the prophet cries, “But the LORD is in his holy temple; let all the earth keep silence before him!” Those of us who discover his presence stand in reverence and desire that his righteousness penetrate all of his creation as well. This leads to another verse, Habakkuk 2:14, which is also found in Isaiah 11:9. “But the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the LORD, as the waters cover the sea.” What can be more practical than to cover God’s creation with righteousness? Anything short of this leads to the inevitable collapse, not only of our individual lives, but of every nation on earth as well. How could it be otherwise?

JEREMIAH



Jeremiah by Michelangelo (1475-1564)

11. Prophecies

Jeremiah 1:1—8:3

11. JEREMIAH: PROPHECIES

Jeremiah 1:1—8:3

ASSIGNMENTS			
The Call of Jeremiah (1:1-19)	Apostasy and the Call to Repent (2:1—4:4)	Judgment and Disaster (4:5—6:30)	Rejection of the Nation (7:1—8:3)

INTRODUCTION

The Person of Jeremiah

We know more about Jeremiah than any other prophet, mainly because of the length of the biblical materials which he contributed and which were written about him. He was born between 650 and 640 B.C.E. into a family of exiled priests, who can be traced back to Abiathar, who had been banished by Solomon to Anathoth (See 1 Kings 2:26-27). Anathoth was a village in the territory of Benjamin, about two and one-half miles northeast of Jerusalem. The time period would have been during the closing years of Manasseh (687-642 B.C.E.) and the opening years of Josiah (640-609 B.C.E.).

Jeremiah lived through the reign of Judah's last five kings:

1. Josiah (640-609 B.C.E.).
2. Jehoahaz (609 B.C.E.).
3. Jehoiakim (609-597 B.C.E.).
4. Jehoiachin (597 B.C.E.).
5. Zedekiah (597-587 B.C.E.).

Jeremiah was called to prophesy (Jeremiah 1:2) around 627 B.C.E. and was active for more than forty years. The historical background for this period of time can be found in 2 Kings 22-25 and 2 Chronicles 34-36. All this took place one hundred years after the prophet Isaiah. Contemporaries of Jeremiah were Zephaniah and Habakkuk. Daniel was in the Babylonian Court and Ezekiel lived among the Exiles in Babylon. Jeremiah was offered a comfortable life at the Babylonian Court, but he chose to remain in Judah. When Gedaliah was murdered, a number of people fled to Egypt taking Jeremiah with them. His final days were spent in Egypt declaring the Word of God to people who refused to listen to him. He predicted that Nebuchadrezzar would also conquer Egypt, but of course, we know that he did not. (See Jeremiah 43:8-13)

The Message of Jeremiah

The essence of Jeremiah's message was that God would judge his people's sins and that he would do this by using Nebuchadnezzar (of Babylon) as the instrument of his punishment. This was the negative aspect of his message. The positive aspect of his message was that God would redeem his people in the future. People heard the negative more than the positive aspects of his ministry, so he stands out as a lonely figure, unpopular and branded a traitor for calling his people to submit to the yoke of Babylon.

In many ways Jeremiah was more like Jesus than any of the Old Testament prophets. (See Matthew 16:13-14)

Both grew up and served God as his messengers in a nation dominated by a foreign power. (Babylon dominated during Jeremiah's time; Rome dominated during Jesus' time.)

Both preached against the legalism of religion and taught a religion of the heart. Jeremiah envisioned the New Covenant (Jeremiah 31:31-34) and Jesus initiated it (Hebrews 8:8-13).

Both wept and suffered over a nation and city that they dearly loved. Jeremiah and Jesus were both rejected by their own people. Both suffered for their efforts.

Both looked beyond the tragedy of national destruction to an era of restoration in a new age where the purposes of God for Israel and the world would be fulfilled.

Both predicted that the Temple would be destroyed.

The Setting

The context in which Jeremiah's ministry took place consisted of those forty years prior to the Fall of Jerusalem in 587 B.C.E.

The Chronology

Reading the Book of Jeremiah can be very confusing because it is not in chronological order. A simple way of organizing the book might be as follows:

- A. Call and Early Vision. (1)
- B. Prophecies Against Judah. (2-25)
- C. An Account of Jeremiah's Ministry. (26-45)
- D. Prophecies Against the Nations. (46-51)
- E. The Destruction of Jerusalem. (52)

Another way of approaching the organization of Jeremiah would be as follows:

- A. Introduction. (1:1-3)
- B. Under the Reign of Josiah. (1:4—6:30) Jeremiah had a high estimate of Josiah's reforms. (See Jeremiah 22:15-16)
- C. Under the Reign of Jehoiakim. (7:1—20:18)
- D. Baruch's Memoirs. (26-45)
- E. Prophecies Against Foreign Nations. (25:15-38 and 46-51)
- F. Historical Appendix. (52)

The chronological order is kept intact in two main sections: (1) 1:4—25:14, and (2) 26-45.

Another way of breaking the book up into broader categories would be as follows:

1-38	39-45	46-51	52
Prophecies Prior to The Fall of Jerusalem	Events Following The Fall of Jerusalem	Prophecies About Various Nations	An Historical Conclusion

The Date

Much of the material comes from Baruch and other editors, so the date is hard to fix. Jeremiah began dictating his message to Baruch in 604 B.C.E. Baruch collected many of Jeremiah's messages right up to the Fall of Jerusalem. There are also traces of other editors, such as the Deuteronomic editor(s), who lived in Egypt and assembled the various collections, revised some of them, and made additions. The chronology may be baffling, but Jeremiah's ministry began in 627 B.C.E. and ended sometime around 580 B.C.E. in Egypt.

Historical Events during Jeremiah's Ministry

1. (627 B.C.E.) - Jeremiah called to become a prophet.
2. (621 B.C.E.) - Discovery of the book of Deuteronomy (Josiah)
3. (612 B.C.E.) - Nineveh, capital of Assyria, falls to Babylon.
4. (609 B.C.E.) - The Egyptian army marches north to help Assyria. Josiah intercepts it at Megiddo and is killed. On his return from Assyria, Pharaoh Necco deposes the new King, Jehoahaz, placing Jehoiakim on the throne.

5. (605 B.C.E.) - The Egyptian forces were defeated at Carchemish by Nebuchadnezzar (Babylon).
6. (604 B.C.E.) - Nebuchadnezzar conquers Syria, Judah, and the Philistine cities.
7. (598 B.C.E.) - An alliance between Egypt and Judah brings the Babylonian forces into Judah.
8. (597 B.C.E.) - King Jehoiakim dies. Jerusalem falls to Babylon after a two-month siege. The new King, Jehoiachin, is deported to Babylon. His uncle, Zedekiah, is put on the throne.
9. (588 B.C.E.) - Under pressure from the pro-Egyptian party, Zedekiah breaks faith with Babylon. Jerusalem falls under siege for eighteen months.
10. (587 B.C.E.) - The Babylonian army breaks into Jerusalem. The people are deported; the city plundered and burned. Three months later Gedaliah is murdered and Jeremiah is taken off to Egypt.

THE CALL FROM GOD (1:1-19)

The Setting (1:1-3)

Jeremiah (The Lord [Yahweh] exalts) was born a priest, but called to become a prophet. His hometown of Anathoth is now called Ras Kharrubeh and is located about two and one-half miles northeast of Jerusalem. This is where his family came from; it is also the place where he was called to begin his prophetic ministry to the nation.

The Call (1:4-10)

God called Jeremiah to become a prophet in the thirteenth year of Josiah's reign (627 B.C.E.), and he was expected to continue prophesying until the eleventh year of Zedekiah's reign (587 B.C.E.). The call came to him when he was about fourteen or fifteen years old. Nothing is known about the circumstances under which he was called. We only know that he felt inadequate because of his age. God however promises to supplement his inexperience. "The word of the Lord came to me" is a common expression that runs throughout the entire book of Jeremiah.

The Almond Tree (1:11-12)

The Almond tree was also known as the Walker tree. It was known as the Walker tree because its blossoms would bloom even before it unfolded its leaves. It was the first among the fruit trees to blossom in the spring. Jeremiah uses it as a play on the verb, "to watch, or to wake."

In the Hebrew language, nearly the same word is used for "almond" (shaqed) as for "watchful" (shoqed). Prophets were appointed as "watchmen" with the responsibility of

warning the people. A watchman in a city was given the responsibility of sounding the alarm whenever an enemy approached.

The Boiling Pot (1:13-19)

The boiling pot is facing away from the north, because that is the direction from which Judah's enemies will come. God intends to bring Jerusalem to the boil, but only for refining purposes. Judah's sin is its rejection of the covenant and idolatry (1:16). The nation has failed to recognize God's (Yahweh's) unique character and its own unique vocation. Thus Jeremiah's main message to the nation is one of doom. Everyone will turn against Jeremiah for such a message and he will have to stand, alone.

THE APOSTASY OF ISRAEL (2:1-37)

God has defended Israel as his bride against all attempts to violate her on the part of the Amalekites, the Canaanites, and the Philistines. While God has been completely faithful, Israel has not. Unfaithful Israel is compared to a stubborn ox and a wild vine. The heathen are at least loyal to their idols; Israel, on the other hand, chases after gods that are not gods.

The tree and stone of 2:27 refer to the Asherah and the sacred pillar, both of which are cult furnishings in Canaanite worship. As long as Israel is going to chase after the Canaanite gods, she might as well depend upon them to rescue her when she gets into trouble. In Israel's rebellion against God, she also rejected his prophets and killed them. Cyprus (west) and Kedar (east) represent the geographical horizons of the prophets.

In the end Israel will stand before God condemned for adultery and prostitution. Sexual images are used because of the link between sacred prostitution and Canaanite religion. Along with child sacrifice, sacred prostitution was one of the reasons why God vomited the Canaanites out of the land and gave it to the Israelites. Jeremiah's rejection of political alliances has to do with the necessity on the part of Israel, as a junior partner in the alliance, to accept the religious domination of the senior ally, who is God.

THE CALL TO REPENT (3:1—4:4)

The call to repent goes out to Judah, who is acting just like Israel did. Israel fell in 722 B.C.E. Josiah tried to initiate reform in 621 B.C.E., but the reform was short lived. The people still continued to commit adultery with stone (sacred pillar) and tree (Asherah). (3:9) Israel's adultery or idolatry resulted in a divorce, (3:8) or the disappearance of its ten tribes.

The same will happen to Judah because she continues her "shameful thing," that is, her involvement with the pagan cults (Baal and Asherah). She does not learn from Israel's mistake, so her adultery is even worse than that of Israel's. A call to repent is still given, but the return must be genuine. Circumcision (the sign of entering the covenant in Genesis 17:1-14) is not enough. There must be a circumcision of the heart, mind, and will

(4:4). When this inner renewal has taken place, there will no longer be any need for the Ark (3:16), for the law will be written in the heart of the believer (31:31-34).

I am referring to Israel and Judah as feminine in chapters 3 and 4 because this is the way in which Jeremiah refers to them. When the imagery is God as the husband and Israel and Judah as his wife, it is difficult to refer to them without reference to gender.

THE APPROACHING DISASTER (4:5-31)

Jeremiah gives a preview of the approaching disaster, which will sweep across the nation like a desert wind (4:11-12). The disaster will begin in Dan (4:15) and move right on into Jerusalem (4:16). The power from the north, which will sweep down into Jerusalem is not named. We are only told that it will come out of the north (4:6). Is it Assyria or Babylon or some other nation? The name of the nation is not really all that important. Judah and Jerusalem will be punished unless they repent. Most invasions came out of the north and that is why the instrument of God's wrath is described as coming from that direction.

THE JUDGMENT AGAINST THE NATIONS (5:1-31)

The chapter begins with the same idea that was presented in God's judgment against Sodom and Gomorrah in Genesis 18:22-32. Not one single righteous person could be found (5:1-4). Thinking that surely the powerful aristocracy would know better than the common people, Jeremiah suggests the possibility that they might be righteous; but even among the aristocracy, not one righteous person can be found (5:5).

Both Israel and Judah have forsaken the Lord and followed idols (5:11). The false prophets all say what the people want to hear (5:13) and the priests all go along with them. The priests are afraid that they might lose their positions of authority and wealth (5:30-31). The burden of prophecy falls upon Jeremiah alone (5:14). God intends to destroy the vineyard (5:10). The people would have been familiar with the imagery of the vineyard, which refers to the nation, for invaders frequently destroyed vineyards, olive trees, and other food-bearing plants and trees. All of nature will turn against the people because of their sin (5:24-25).

Jeremiah has the awesome task of declaring God's judgment against the nation (5:15-17), a nation, which both God and Jeremiah love. The result of this judgment will be Exile in a foreign land (5:18-19).

THE COMING DISASTER (6:1-30)

The unidentified enemy will come out of the north (6:1 and 22). People should leave while they can and a warning should be given beyond Jerusalem. Beth-haccherem, two miles south, and Tekoa, twelve miles south, are symbols of the need for an expanded warning.

A nomadic army (shepherds with their flocks) will attack. Their plan will be to attack at Noon, but due to their disorganization, they will not descend upon Jerusalem until midnight (6:3-5). They may be primitive and naive, but they will win because they are instruments of Yahweh. The only way to avoid the coming disaster is through repentance, but that is difficult when even prophets and priests are corrupt (6:13-14). Sacrifices will not have any effect (6:20). What is needed is a return to God's Law, God's reason for bringing about this disaster (6:19).

Jeremiah's role is that of a tester and refiner of ore (6:27), whose task is to find some silver (faithful people), but he cannot find anyone who is faithful (6:29-30). Jerusalem is doomed, for it endlessly pumps out wickedness like a spring pumps out water (6:7).

With the end of Chapter 6, we come to the end of those oracles spoken during the time of Josiah. I have not tried to count the oracles or to outline them, for they are very complicated, even though their intent is very simple. Most oracles contain three parts: (1) an introduction or attention getter, (2) a description of the people's sin, and (3) a proclamation of the necessary punishment. The next group of oracles can be found in Chapters 7 through 20 and were spoken by Jeremiah during the time of King Jehoiakim.

THE REJECTION OF THE NATION (7:1—8:3)

The Sermon in the Temple (7:1-15)

These verses are Jeremiah's first-hand summary of his sermon. Another account of the sermon can be read in Jeremiah 26:1-6, where Baruch gives a third person account of the same sermon. According to 26:1 the occasion coincides with the beginning of Jehoiakim's reign. Josiah has died in battle, his son Jehoahaz has been deported, and Jehoiakim begins a reign with an unclear future.

Because the Temple was located in Jerusalem, the people could not believe that God would allow the city to fall. Jeremiah attacked this false hope in his sermon at the gate of the Temple (the outer court). The essence of his message was that only good moral living would secure God's protection from their enemy. God allowed Shiloh to be destroyed (7:12-14) and Shiloh had been the central shrine of the twelve-tribe confederacy. While there is no account of Shiloh's fall in the Bible, there are references to it (Psalm 78:60-64). The shrine dropped out of the biblical narrative following the capture of the ark by the Philistines (1 Samuel 4). Archaeological excavations indicate that Shiloh was probably destroyed around 1050 B.C.E. Since Shiloh fell, so can the Temple, along with Jerusalem itself.

Reasons for the Rejection (7:16—8:3)

While the following verses were not part of the sermon itself, they do deal with the reasons for God's rejection of the nation. The first reason has to do with idolatry. The people worshiped the "Queen of Heaven," who would have been the moon goddess, Ashtoreth. Her name was really Ashtarath, but later Hebrew editors referred to her as

Ashtoreth. The Babylonians referred to her as Ishtar and the Greeks referred to her as Astarte. All of these terms tended to merge with Asherah, the mother-goddess who was prominent along with Baal. She was a popular sex and fertility symbol, whom the prophets denounced.

The second reason had to do with their willingness to offer burnt offerings and sacrifices without paying attention to moral obedience. It is doubtful that Jeremiah was rejecting burnt offerings and sacrifices. He was just opposing such religious observances when they are separated from moral obedience. It is not because they have not paid careful attention to the way in which they made these offerings and sacrifices, but because moral obedience did not accompany them. Obedience is more important to God than religious ritual.

The third reason was related to the Topheth (7:30-34), which was “a burning place” in the valley of Hinnom, where children were given as burnt offerings in honor of Baal. Josiah had destroyed this place so that it could not be used (2 Kings 23:10). The sacrifice of children was viewed as one of the most gruesome of the nation’s sins. Jeremiah saw little if any hope for the nation. The digging up of the bones (8:1-3) was a symbol of God’s complete rejection of the nation. Because there was no separation of body and soul, the bones were considered to be part of the individual; for this reason, the bones were treated with great reverence. To treat bones with irreverence was considered the ultimate insult and the bones of those who have worshiped idols are treated with irreverence. This symbolizes complete rejection by God.

This ends the first manuscript of Jeremiah. What follows is known as expansion material.

LEARNING FROM THE PAST

What is so difficult to understand about Jeremiah’s first prophecies is that they were proclaimed in the best of Judah’s history—during the reign of the reforming King Josiah. It was Josiah who discovered the Book of Deuteronomy, read it, and put it into practice on a national level. This was no less significant a movement than was the Reformation under Martin Luther or the evangelical revival led by John Wesley. It was during such a time that Jeremiah began his message of doom, sensing that this movement of religious renewal would not last. He goes so far as to quote God as saying: “Run to and fro through the streets of Jerusalem, look around and take note! Search its squares and see if you can find one person who acts justly and seeks truth—so that I may pardon Jerusalem.” In a time of renewal and reformation, Jerusalem is compared to Sodom and Gomorrah, where not enough righteous people could be found to save its destruction. The same, says Jeremiah, is true for Jerusalem.

What is the problem? In spite of Josiah’s noble attempt to revive his people, it does not seem to have made a difference where it counts—in the heart. He may have been successful as a powerful and good King in putting his reforms into effect, but that does not mean anyone’s heart was transformed. “What do I care about incense from Sheba,” says the Lord in Jeremiah 6:20, “or sweet calamus from a distant land? Your burnt

offerings are not acceptable; your sacrifices do not please me.” “O my people,” warns Jeremiah, “put on sackcloth and roll in ashes; mourn with bitter wailing as for an only son, for suddenly the destroyer will come upon us.” (Jeremiah 6:26) The problem was not that Jeremiah did not influence his nation to observe the ritual law, but that obedience to the moral law did not accompany it. In Jeremiah 7:22-23, the Lord explains what he expects:

For in the day that I brought your ancestors out of the land of Egypt, I did not speak to them or command them concerning burnt offerings and sacrifices. But this command I gave them, “Obey my voice, and I will be your God, and you shall be my people; and walk only in the way that I command you, so that it may be well with you.”

The practical implication of all this is that it is not sufficient to attend worship, even if one does it every Sunday, unless one’s greatest desire is to put into practice the will of the Lord every other day of the week as well. This is precisely what John Wesley meant when he said:

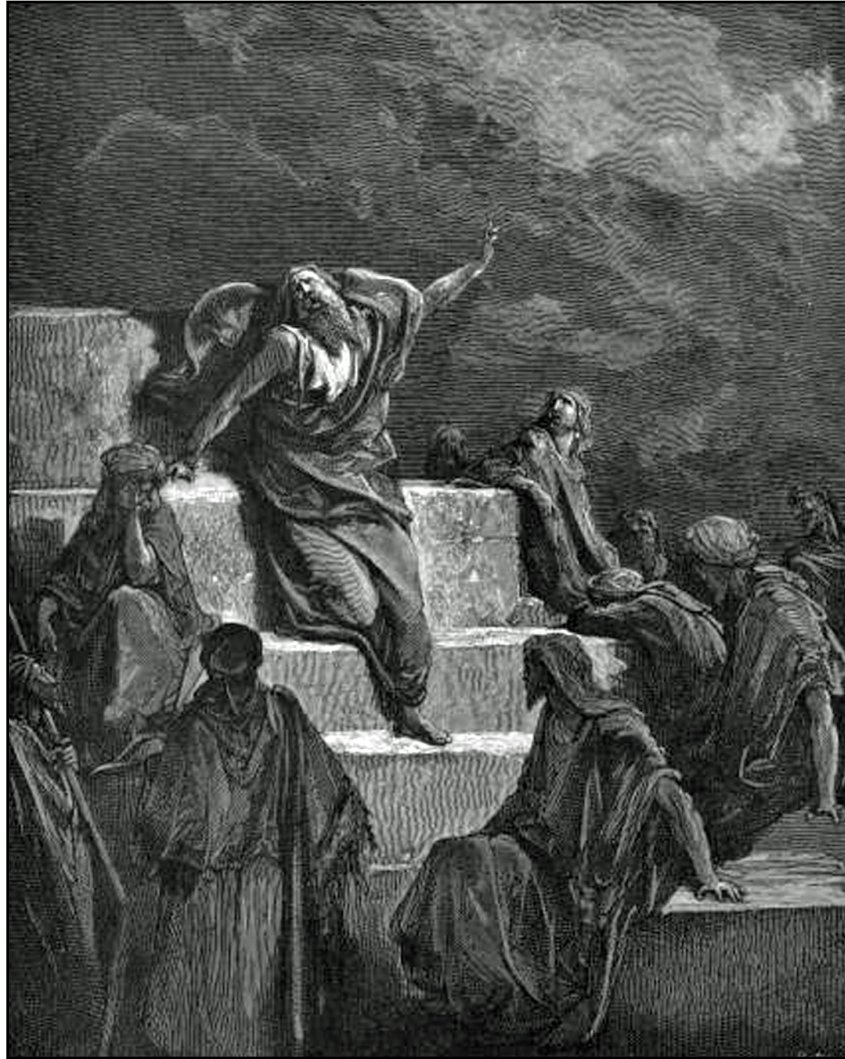
I am not afraid that the people called Methodists should ever cease to exist either in Europe or America. But I am afraid, lest they should only exist as a dead sect, having the form of religion without the power. And this undoubtedly will be the case, unless they hold fast...the doctrine, spirit, and discipline with which they first set out.

The only thing that could save Judah, according to Jeremiah, was a new kind of circumcision, a circumcision of the heart: Circumcise yourselves to the LORD, remove the foreskin of your hearts, O people of Judah and inhabitants of Jerusalem, or else my wrath will go forth like fire, and burn with no one to quench it, because of the evil of your doings.” The Apostle Paul used this same kind of terminology in Romans 2:29 and Galatians 6:15 to put down the idea that people could depend on such outwards acts as circumcision and baptism for their salvation. The only thing that would count would be the circumcision of the heart in which “a new creation is everything!” One of John Wesley’s classical sermons is entitled: *The Circumcision of the Heart*. Like Jeremiah and Paul before him, Wesley knew that what might have seemed like a great revival or reformation or renewal movement could be very deceptive. God measures not by the number of circumcisions or baptisms, not even by the average attendance in worship, but by what happens in the hearts of people he calls to get on the road to holiness.

In Mark 1:8, John the Baptist said that he could only baptize with water, but that Jesus would baptize with the Holy Spirit. That is what it means to have one’s heart circumcised, and that is why Paul makes the comparison. Without the baptism of the Spirit or the circumcision of the heart there is no hope for the individual, the denomination, and the nation. Everything hinges on it. It will do no good to say, as they did in Jerusalem, “This is the temple of the LORD, the temple of the LORD, the temple of the LORD.” (Jeremiah 7:4) In response to such thinking, Jeremiah reminded them of what the Lord had already done to Shiloh, a place that many also thought was immune to

divine punishment (Jeremiah 7:12 and 14). No one, nor any place, is immune. Whether it be an individual, a denomination, a religion, or a nation; the only way to avoid collapse is to submit to the Grace of God and begin to walk in his ways “so that it may be well with you.” (Jeremiah 7:23)

JEREMIAH



Jeremiah by Gustave Doré (1832-1883)

12. Expansion Material I **Jeremiah 8:4—16:21**

12. JEREMIAH: EXPANSION MATERIAL I (8:4—16:21)

LAMENT OVER ISRAEL'S DEMISE (8:4—10:25)

Israel's Indifference (8:4-7) (8:7)	False Sense of Security (8:8-15) (8:11)	First Signs of Disaster (8:16-17) (8:16)	Lament over Judah (8:18—19:1) (8:21-22)
Seriousness of Corruption (9:2-26)	God and the Idols (10:1-16)	The Coming Destruction (10:17-22)	Jeremiah's Prayer (10:23-25)
Sin of Israel (9:11 & 12b-14) Justice of God (9:23-24) Inevitable Result (9:25-26)	Weakness of Idols (10:5 & 14) Power of God (10:12-13 & 16)	(10:21-22) Siege of 598 B.C.E.	(10:25) Psalm 79:6-7

INEVITABILITY OF JUDAH'S DESTRUCTION (11:1—16:21)

The Broken Covenant (11:1-17)	Jeremiah's 1st Lament (11:18—12:6)	God's Lament (12:7-17)	Parabolic Warnings (13:1-27)
Israel and Judah (11:3-5 & 10b-11) Don't Pray for them! (11:14)	Assassination Plot (11:18-23) From Anathoth (11:21-23) Question concerning Wickedness (12:1-6) (12:1 & 5) Mark 3:21	God will forsake Disobedient Judah (12:7) Any disobedient Nation (12:17)	Linen Loincloth (13:1-11) Euphrates or Perath? Wine Jar (13:12-14) (13:13-14) Final Warnings (13:15-27) (13:23-27)
The Terrible Drought (14:1-22)	Jerusalem's Terrible End (15:1-9)	Jeremiah's 2nd Lament (15:10-21)	Sign of Disaster (16:1-21)
No Rain (14:2-4) No Prayer (14:11-13) Only God (14:22)	Moses and Samuel (15:1) Pestilence Sword Famine Captivity Repentance Disobedience Not Prayer (15:3-4)	God's Words (15:19b) God's Spokesman (15:19b)	No Marriage (16:1) Idolatry (16:10-11) New Exodus (16:14-15)

Jehoiakim
(609-598 B.C.E.)

12. JEREMIAH: EXPANSION MATERIAL I

Jeremiah 8:4—16:21

ASSIGNMENTS			
Indifference and Corruption (8:4—10:25)	Lament over Israel's Demise (11:1—12:17)	Parabolic Warning and the Terrible Drought (13:1—14:22)	Jerusalem's End and A Personal Sign (15:1—16:21)

THE FIRST EXPANSION MATERIAL:

INDIFFERENCE AND CORRUPTION (8:4—10:25)

Israel's Indifference (8:4-7)

Jeremiah is saddened over the people's refusal to repent. While wild animals follow their "natural" instincts, God's people do not follow the "moral" instincts (the Law), which God has given to them.

A False Sense of Security (8:8-15)

The people seem to pin their hopes on their possession of the Law (Deuteronomy), but Jeremiah warns them that mere possession is not enough, especially when Israel's secular and religious leadership fails to warn the people of the coming disaster.

There are no grapes on the vine. This is the same as saying that the cupboard is barren or that the well has run dry. Judah is like an unfruitful vine or a barren fig tree. There is no escaping God's judgment of a nation that has come up unfaithful.

The First Signs of Disaster (8:16-17)

The horses in Dan are like the rumbling of tanks. Dan was the city on the northern border and would have been the first through which the Babylonian armies would have to march.

Lament over Judah (8:18—9:1)

It was very painful for Jeremiah to prophesy the demise of Judah. He shed many tears over what was taking place (8:18 and 19:1) but the fall of Judah was inevitable. There was not enough balm (ointment) in Gilead to cure Judah's wounds. The illness was terminal.

The Seriousness of the Corruption (9:2-26)

The corruption of Judah is complete. A wise person would flee (9:2), since a moral God would destroy the nation (9:9 and 11). These are the only reasonable responses to the corruption that has so overtaken the nation. The people have strayed from Yahweh and taken up the worship of Baal (9:13-14). They have rejected the God of revelation and created their own gods. All that is left is to bring in the professional mourners (9:17-18), as there is plenty of work for them to do.

Anyone who seeks wisdom, power, wealth, and glory for self has missed completely what causes delight in the heart of God. God desires that his people come to know him and to be concerned with steadfast love, righteousness, and justice (9:23-24). Instead the people have failed to symbolize the sign of their covenant (circumcision) with God and have become like pagans (9:25-26). Hence, God has no alternative but to punish them as if they were indeed pagans, for that is how they have been acting. Circumcision, without obedience, amounts to nothing. The same can be said of baptism without faith. What needs to be circumcised and baptized is the heart itself.

God and the Idols (10:1-16)

A contrast is drawn between idols, which are lifeless, powerless, motionless, and speechless and Yahweh who controls nature and history. (See Isaiah 40:18-20; 44:9-20; 46:1-7; and Psalm 115:3-8, where Second Isaiah and the Psalmist take up the same theme.)

The Coming Exile (10:17-22)

Idolatry is the reason for the coming exile; Judah's leaders (shepherds) are accused of stupidity (10:21) for not inquiring of the Lord. The result is a scattered flock and the coming exile. These verses probably describe the siege of 597 B.C.E.

Jeremiah's Prayer (10:23-25)

Jeremiah loves Judah and asks God to be merciful and not destroy Judah completely. Chapter 10 ends with a passage (10:25), which is quoted verbatim in Psalm 79:6-7. Either the Psalmist has copied Jeremiah or Jeremiah the Psalmist. At any rate this addition describes the desolation of Judah, which had already occurred.

THE SECOND EXPANSION MATERIAL:

LAMENT OVER ISRAEL'S DEMISE (11:1—24:1)

Jeremiah gathered this material together, with Baruch's assistance, between the burning of the first manuscript (604 B.C.E.), and the capture of Jerusalem by Babylonia in 597 B.C.E.

The Broken Covenant (11:1-17)

These verses belong to the period of reaction following Josiah's reform movement (2 Kings 23). Josiah's reform was good as far as it went, but it did not change people's hearts. Judah went on to break the covenant through idolatry and disobedience (11:3-5); now the curse of Deuteronomy was on the Nation (Deuteronomy 11:26-28).

Both Israel and Judah would experience the wrath of God (11:10b-11) and Jeremiah was not to pray for them (11:14). The people were praying to their idols, which were powerless to help. If God changed his mind, they would think that the idols had helped them. The fall of both nations was inevitable.

Jeremiah's Personal Lament (11:18—12:6)

This is the first of six personal laments. The other five can be found in 15:10-21; 17:14-18; 18:18-23; 20:7-13; and 20:14-18.

The Assassination Plot (11:18-23)

The Lord made known to Jeremiah a plot to assassinate him. Those behind the plot came from his hometown of Anathoth. Why were his own people so hostile towards him? It might be related to his support of Josiah's reforms, one of which was to centralize worship in Jerusalem. The law of a single religious sanctuary aroused a great deal of opposition, mainly from the priests who had a vested interest in a local shrine. It would have also aroused hostility in people who hated to see their beloved family shrine closed. Jeremiah's support of Josiah in these matters must have aroused fierce opposition in his own hometown.

Part of the punishment was that not even a remnant would be left in Anathoth. What does this mean? Since many did return to their hometown of Anathoth following the Exile, it cannot mean that Anathoth itself would suffer complete destruction. It must mean that all those involved in the plot against Jeremiah would be destroyed.

The Question Concerning Wickedness (12:1-6)

Jeremiah raises the question of Job? Why do the wicked prosper and the righteous suffer? (See Psalm 73 for a similar theme.) No conclusion is drawn except that of faith in God's

ultimate victory over the wicked. Any other answer would make God morally indifferent to human need; Jeremiah is not willing to draw such a conclusion.

In replying to Jeremiah, God questions him, as he did Job. If you cannot race with men, he says, how will you compete with horses? If you cannot endure in the open country, how will you do in the jungle of Jordan? The jungle of Jordan refers to dense vegetation along the Jordan, where wild animals lived (12:5). The real test however comes when your own family turns against you (12:6). Jesus also experienced this when his family accused him of being “beside himself.” (Mark 3:21)

God’s Lament (12:7-17)

The lament itself consists of Jeremiah 12:7-13, where the Lord laments the necessary destruction of Judah. Jeremiah 12:14-17 describes the Lord’s intention to restore Judah and any of its neighbors who turn to him. If they do not turn to the Lord, they will be destroyed, as was Judah. God is in control of history.

The Parabolic Warnings (13:1-27)

Not long after the Battle of Carchemish (605 B.C.E.), Jeremiah realized that Judah was going to be defeated by Babylonia. He recognized that only God could save them from such a fate; that Judah would have to repent and turn to God for help. Two parabolic warnings are given.

The Linen Loincloth (13:1-11)

Sometimes words are inadequate and this was one of those times. God instructed Jeremiah to put on a linen loincloth, go to the Euphrates (400 miles away) and hide the loincloth in the cleft of some rocks. After several days he was to go back and get the linen loincloth, which would now be spoiled and good for nothing. This was to be an example of what God intended to do to Judah. Judah was to cling as closely to God as a loincloth clings to a man, but if it does not, then it will be driven into exile. It will be spoiled as a nation and become good for nothing.

In some translations we read the word “Parath” or “Perath” instead of “Euphrates.” If “Euphrates” is the correct translation, then Jeremiah had a long way to go, or else he merely had a vision. If “Parath” is correct, we might have a reference to Parah, which is located about five and one-half miles northeast of Jerusalem and about three miles northeast of Anathoth. The place is not as important as the idea, so we should not become preoccupied by whether he went to the Euphrates or Parath.

The Wine Jar (13:12-14)

Jeremiah is to ask the people a riddle, which seems so simple as to be ridiculous. The essence of this passage about the wine jar is summed up in an ancient Greek saying: “Whom the gods would destroy, they first make mad.” The jar in this parable was two

feet high and held ten gallons of wine. It was made for wine, which symbolized their intoxication. (See also Jeremiah 25:15.) The people who reject God will be smashed like clay pots drained of their wine.

The Final Warnings (13:15-27)

Jeremiah got no joy out of announcing God's coming punishment against Judah. He wept bitterly (13:17). Nevertheless he prophesied. The King and his mother (13:18) were Jehoiachin, and the Queen Mother Nehushta, whose reign lasted only three months. Jeremiah was only 18 at the time that Jehoiachin took over, so his mother is mentioned along with him. He surrendered to the Babylonians in 598 B.C.E. and was taken into Exile.

The attack came from the north, and was led by Nebuchadnezzar, who defeated Neco in 605 B.C.E. at Carchemish. Jeremiah perceives God in these historical events punishing Judah for its sin (13:22), the worship of false gods (13:25). The unfortunate thing is that Judah is unable to change. The nation is like a man unable to change the color of his skin or a leopard, which cannot remove its spots. As a result the coming disaster is inevitable.

The Terrible Drought (14:1-22)

The drought (14:1-6) probably struck Judah somewhere between 605 and 586 B.C.E. After it struck, the people began to beg God to send water, but to ignore their sins (14:7). In Jeremiah's conversation with the Lord over the drought, he is instructed not to pray for the people (14:11), for their sins are too great. The people's sins have taken Judah beyond the help of prayer.

Punishment is described in terms of sword, famine, and pestilence (14:12). When these three punishments are mentioned together they symbolize full-scale judgment. Although Jeremiah obeys the Lord, there arise false prophets who contradict his message of judgment. They cry that no famine or sword will touch Judah (14:13). Jeremiah is told to confront their false message (14:17ff). False gods cannot bring rain; only the Lord can do that (14:22).

Jerusalem's Terrible End (15:1-9)

Jeremiah is to announce a disaster in Jerusalem so terrible and so sure that it could not be avoided, even if Moses and Samuel themselves interceded. (See Exodus 32:11-14 and I Samuel 12:17-25 for examples of Moses and Samuel interceding for the people.)

The doom of Jerusalem is sealed. Four kinds of destroyers will finish the nation off (15:3). This image of four kinds of destroyers was later picked up and included in Revelation 6:1-8, where the symbolism is the four horsemen. With the exception of the white horse, the other three symbolize, war, famine, and death.

The reason why there is no hope is that the people have fled to gods who cannot help them. The inevitable consequence of their flight is pestilence, sword, famine, and captivity (15:2), and the four destroyers are the sword that kills, the dogs that drag away, the birds that devour, and the wild animals that devour (15:3-4).

The wickedness of the people was as bad, if not worse, than it had been under Manasseh (2 Kings 21), which had been an all-time religious and moral low for the nation (15:4). God simply would no longer listen to their pleas, nor would he listen to the pleas of any of their leaders. Captivity and exile are certain. An “iron captivity” awaits them (15:12). It is not prayer that will deliver them out of the coming captivity and exile, but repentance and obedience. Anything else is useless.

Jeremiah’s Second Lament (15:10-21)

In Jeremiah’s second Lament, the Lord does not promise to change his mind. He only promises to support Jeremiah as he continues in his ministry to his people. Such a ministry was no joy for Jeremiah, but he felt called to be faithful to God’s message, even one of judgment. Beyond the message of judgment, Jeremiah still perceived the possibility of redemption and restoration.

The Sign of Disaster (16:1-21)

To communicate the reality of the coming disaster, the Lord forbids Jeremiah to marry (16:2). It would have been very unusual for a man not to marry, so people would have been very much aware of Jeremiah’s choice not to marry. It was a powerful sign or symbol of the coming disaster. In addition to being a sign for the people, it is also interpreted as not being a good time to marry and raise a family (16:3-4), for the coming disaster will be quite severe.

In the midst of all this doom, however, is also a sign of hope. The Lord will call a remnant out of captivity and exile (16:14-15). There will be a New Exodus.

WHEN PRAYER IS INAPPROPRIATE

There are times when it is inappropriate to pray; it is very helpful and practical to know when we are in those times. Jeremiah lived through such a time. The Lord said to him, “...the house of Israel and the house of Judah have broken the covenant that I made with their ancestors. Therefore, thus says the LORD, assuredly I am going to bring disaster upon them that they cannot escape; though they cry out to me, I will not listen to them. (Jeremiah 11:10b-11) Jeremiah was told not to pray for the nation three times (Jeremiah 11:14; 14:11-12; and 15:1). The last time Jeremiah heard these words from God, he was told that even the prayers of such men as Moses and Samuel would not make any difference. The question that must be raised is: “Why not?”

The reason is simple—because God knows that they will not repent of their sin of idolatry. If God would hold back their destruction, then it would reinforce their involvement in idolatry. They would think that their idols had saved them. While it might be appropriate to pray for the nation to repent of its idolatry and turn back to God, it is not appropriate to pray that the nation be spared the consequences of its sin. The wages of sin must remain death and even God will not change this; therefore, it is inappropriate to ask him to do so.

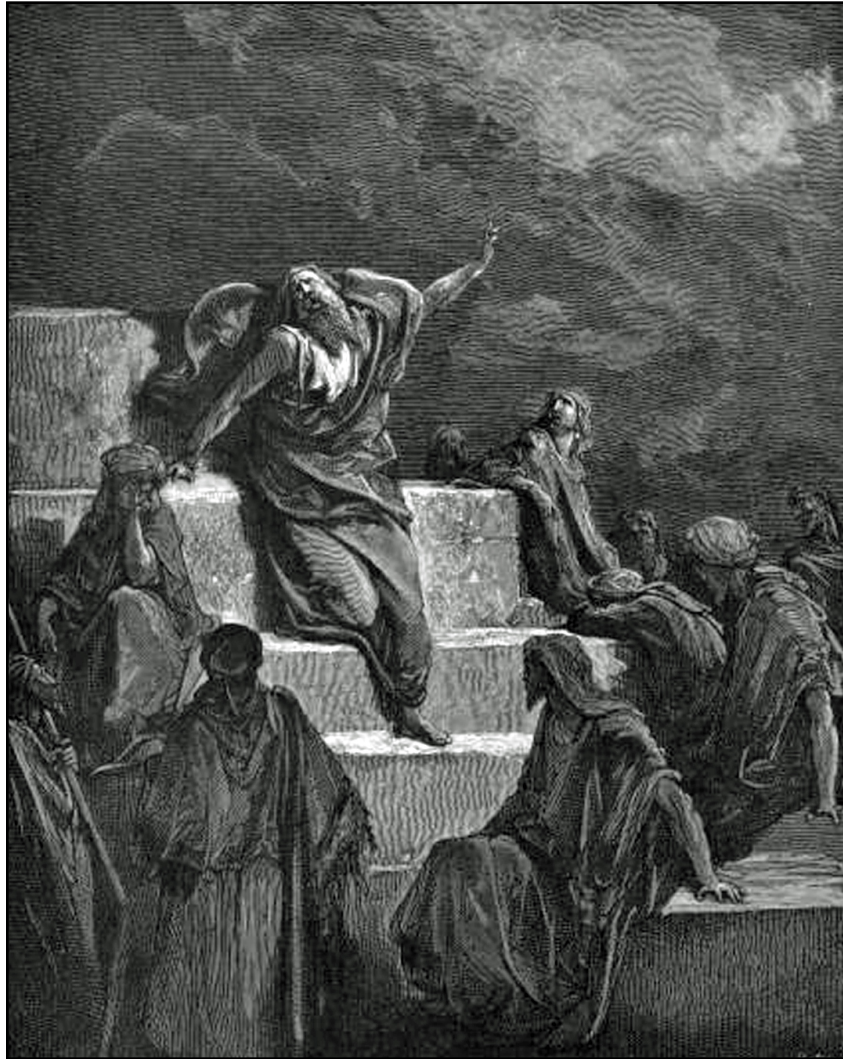
In fact, those who are engaged in idolatry are in danger of having God quicken their demise. In Jeremiah 13:13-14, the Lord says, “I am about to fill all the inhabitants of this land—the kings who sit on David’s throne, the priests, the prophets, and all the inhabitants of Jerusalem—with drunkenness. And I will dash them one against another, parents and children together, says the LORD. I will not pity or spare or have compassion when I destroy them.” Although this sounds harsh indeed, how could it be otherwise? “He who offends against Heaven,” agreed Confucius, “has none to whom he can pray.”¹ Those who worship idols offend God and pray to nothing. They place themselves beyond divine help, making friendship with God impossible.

God never gives up on anyone without first warning them. Jeremiah was the one he sent to warn his people, but they chose not to listen to the warning, even when the snorting of the enemy’s horses could be heard (Jeremiah 8:16). We do ignore such warning as much as did the Israelites of old. Smoking has been connected to lung cancer, yet people continue to smoke. Alcohol is the most addicting of all the drugs, but we continue to drink. Should we pray that people should continue to indulge in such things without reaping the consequences of their actions? The answer is obviously negative. We might pray that such people seek help in overcoming their addictions, but we can never pray that they do not have to suffer because of them. That would be immature and inappropriate prayer.

This does not mean that God does not feel deeply the loss of those who have turned against him. Both God and Jeremiah feel the pain of it. That pain is expressed in Jeremiah 8:21-22: “For the hurt of my poor people I am hurt, I mourn, and dismay has taken hold of me. Is there no balm in Gilead? Is there no physician there? Why then has the health of my poor people not been restored?” There is no healing as long as the idols are chosen over God; but beyond God’s punishment of them lies his hope for their restoration. He knows that he cannot prevent them from facing the consequences of their idolatry, but he continues to hope that some will turn from their idolatry back to him. “I will again have compassion on them,” he says in Jeremiah 12:15, “and I will bring them again to their heritage and to their land, everyone of them.” While it is inappropriate to pray that people can avoid the consequences of their sins, it is not inappropriate to pray for people to repent of their sins and turn back to be reconciled to God.

¹W. Scott Morton, *China: Its History and Culture* (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company, 1980), p. 32.

JEREMIAH



Jeremiah by Gustave Doré (1832-1883)

13. Expansion Material II

Jeremiah 17:1 – 25:38

13. JEREMIAH: EXPANSION MATERIAL II (17:1—25:38)			
CONTINUED PROPHECIES DURING THE REIGN OF JEHOIAKIM (17:1—20:18)			
Prophecies	Experiences		Laments
Sins of Judah (17:1-4) (17:1)	The Potter and the Clay (18:1-17) (18:6-10)		1st Lament (11:18—12:6) 2nd Lament (15:10-21) 3rd Lament (17:14-18) (17:15 and 18b)
Proverbs (17:5-13)	The Earthen Flask (19:1-13) (19:1-3, 9-11a)		4th Lament (18:18-23) (18:18, 22-23) 5th Lament (20:7-13) (20:9 and 11)
Shrub (17:6) Tree (17:7-8a)	Jeremiah in Stocks (19:14—20:6) (19:14 and 20:1-2, 6)		6th Lament (20:14-18) (20:14 and 18)
The Sabbath (17:19-27) (17:27)			
JEREMIAH'S WORDS TO KINGS (21:—22:30) (21:12; 22:3-5 and 8-9)			
Jehoahaz (Shallum) (22:11)	Jehoiakim	Jehoiachin (Coniah/Jeconiah)	Zedekiah (21:1—22:9)
Exiled to Egypt	New Palace (22:13-16) Assassinated (22:18-19)	(22:24-27) 37 years in Babylon	Pashhur & Zephaniah (21:1-5) Blinded and Killed Uncle of Jehoiachin
JEREMIAH'S WORDS TO PROPHETS (23:1—24:10)			
The Branch (23:1-8) Ideal King (23:5-6) Compare Zedekiah (Yahweh is my Righteousness)	The Corrupt Prophets (23:9-32) In the Temple (23:11) Lying Dreams (23:25-26, 32) Word like a Hammer (23:29)	Burden of the Lord (23:33-40) (23:33) Rest is Commentary	Two Baskets of Figs (24:1-10) Good Figs (24:5-9) Bad Figs (24:8-10)
THE ENEMY FROM THE NORTH (25:1-38)			
Babylon Identified (25:1-14) Carchemish (605 B.C.E.) 70 Year Captivity in Babylon (25:11-12)		The Cup of Wrath (25:15-38) Judah to Persia The Lion (God or Nebuchadrezzar) (25:38)	

Jehoiakim
(609-598 B.C.E.)

Zedekiah
(597-587 B.C.E.)

Jehoiakim
(609-598 B.C.E.)

13. JEREMIAH: EXPANSION MATERIAL II

Jeremiah (17:1—25:38)

ASSIGNMENTS					
The Sins of Judah (17:1-13 & 19-27)	The Laments of Jeremiah (17:14-18; 18:18-23; 20:7-13; 20:14-18)	Biographical Segments (18:1-17; 19:1-13; 19:14—20:6)	Jeremiah's Words to Kings (21:1—22:30)	Jeremiah's Words to False Prophets (23:1—24:10)	The Enemy from the North (25:1-38)

THE FIRST EXPANSION MATERIAL CONTINUED:

THE SINS OF JUDAH (17:1-4)

Judah's sins are indelibly engraved. They are engraved both on the tablet of their heart and on horns of their altar. What is in the heart gets expressed in their worship. The Asherim (wooden poles or images of Asherah) are widespread. The primary sin is idolatry, which leads to every form of immorality. God intends to engrave his law in Israel's heart (Jeremiah 31:33).

THE PROVERBS (17:5-13)

The godless man is compared to a fruitless desert plant, while the godly man is compared to a well-watered tree, which bears much fruit. See Psalm 1 for an example of what these verses are saying.

JEREMIAH'S THIRD LAMENT (17:14-18)

In this lament Jeremiah prays that the disaster be avoided, for he does not desire God's day of judgment; but if this is the only way in which he can be vindicated, then let it come.

THE SABBATH (17:19-27)

The breaking of the Sabbath is a symptom of Judah's violation of the Covenant. If Judah had kept the covenant, then it would have enjoyed prosperity and a stable monarchy, but its violation of the Sabbath is evidence of its breaking of the covenant. The only way

back is to observe the Sabbath and be faithful to the covenant, but Judah's unfaithfulness has created the necessity of judgment, for God is *just* as well as *merciful*.

THE POTTER AND THE CLAY (18:1-17)

Jeremiah was told to go down to the potter's house, where he would hear a word from the Lord. As he watched the potter make a vessel of clay, he observed him remold a spoiled vessel; this made him aware of the right of God to remold a spoiled nation. Judah had gone against its very nature. This would be like the snow melting and running off of Sirion (one of the peaks of Mount Hermon), a mountain that is known for its snow all year long (18:14).

In contrast to the potter, who works with clay, having no will of its own, God molded his people who have rebelled against him. If Israel chooses evil, then God, the master potter, has the right to reshape Israel.

JEREMIAH'S FOURTH LAMENT (18:18-23)

Jeremiah has been attacking Israel's traditional teachers—the priests, prophets, and wise men; now they plot against Jeremiah. Their intent is to attack him with malicious charges and to pay no attention to anything he says. Their intent is to destroy his reputation.

Jeremiah defends himself and prays to God for their total destruction. He even includes their families in his vengeance. The completeness of his concept of God's judgment against them is symbolized by his mention of sword, famine, and pestilence (18:21). We must remember that he lives in a time before the Gospel, so we should not expect the Christian attitude of mercy. Jeremiah feels the need to be vindicated.

THE EARTHEN FLASK (19:1-13)

Now Jeremiah is told to demonstrate what God intends to do with Judah. He is to purchase a potter's earthen flask, take it to some of the elders and senior priests, and then take them to the Hinnom Valley and smash it. This is a dramatic way to communicate what God intends to do with Judah. The elders and senior priests were respectable and perhaps friendly people. They might have been some of Jeremiah's personal supporters, but this is not clearly stated. The act of breaking the jar was to illustrate how serious the situation had become. Only one possibility was left, punishment so severe that people would resort to cannibalism (19:9). When Jerusalem's food supply ran out during the Babylonian siege, some of the people did resort to cannibalism (Ezekiel 5:10; Lamentations 2:20; and 4:10). Even Josephus mentions it. "A woman," he says, "who...had fled to Jerusalem...killed her son, roasted him, and ate one half, concealing and saving the rest." (*Jewish War*, 6.3.4) None of this can be blamed on God. Going one's own way leads to war and famine. Cannibalism is only one ugly consequence of humanity's rejection of God's divine wisdom and grace.

The Hinnom Valley was near the Potsherd Gate (Dung Gate/Nehemiah 2:13). Another name for the valley, or one of the altars constructed there, was Topheth. Here children were sacrificed to Baal. The Valley was also a dumping place for the potter's rubbish. It received its name from a previous owner and was known as the Valley of the Son of Hinnom. Because of its association with child sacrifice, Josiah made the Valley into a garbage dump for the city (2 Kings 23:10). As a garbage dump, the Valley smoldered continuously with rubbish fires. It was later compared to punishment in the afterlife and, in New Testament times, Hinnom was corrupted into Gehenna (the New Testament word for Hell). The Hinnom Valley was a gross reminder of Canaanite idolatry and child sacrifice. Pagan worship and human sacrifice are also Judah's sins; and, this Valley is a stark reminder of both.

JEREMIAH IN STOCKS (19:14—20:6)

From the Valley of Hinnom Jeremiah went to the Temple, where he proclaimed a message of doom. This message landed him in trouble. Pashhur, the chief officer (head of the Temple police) had Jeremiah beaten and restrained. He was placed in stocks, which meant that his feet, neck, and hands were fastened to hold his body in a distorted and painful position. The next morning Jeremiah was released, but he had a word from the Lord for Pashhur. He told him that he would be dragged away to die in a foreign land. We do not know for sure if this prophecy was ever fulfilled, but in Jeremiah 25:9-6, we find him replaced. He may have gone into exile with those deported in 597 B.C.E.

JEREMIAH'S FIFTH LAMENT (20:7-13)

This is the best of the six laments, for it gives us a glimpse into the heart of Jeremiah. He was not thick-skinned, but hurt deeply (20:7-8). He felt the pain of being ridiculed because his prophecy was not coming true and people were laughing at him. Yet he could not shut up because it was as if a fire were burning in his bones (20:9). It is only his awareness of the Lord's presence that enabled him to go on (20:11ff).

JEREMIAH'S SIXTH LAMENT (20:14-18)

Jeremiah was called to be a prophet of doom and prophets of doom are not popular. That is why he questions why he was even born. He felt the need for encouragement and praise, but the response he got caused a great deal of conflict within him. He prophesied destruction and even that had not come. People looked upon him as a fool and that hurt him deeply.

JEREMIAH'S WORDS TO ZEDEKIAH (21:1-10)

Worried about a Babylonian siege (588-587 B.C.E.), Zedekiah sends Pashhur (not the same Pashhur as described in 20:1-6) and Zephaniah (the "second" priest present at the fall of Jerusalem, according to 2 Kings 25:18 and Jeremiah 52:24) to inquire of Jeremiah as to whether the Lord would save them from their enemies. Jeremiah's answer is that the Babylonians will successfully conquer Judah.

JEREMIAH'S WORDS TO THE ROYAL HOUSE (21:11—22:9)

The highest function of the King is that of dispensing justice and relieving oppression (21:12). The King who does that will survive, but the King who does not will surely fall. Obedience on the part of the King alone is not sufficient; the whole nation must follow his lead. That is the only thing that can save Judah, but Judah's doom seems to be sealed by its unfaithfulness and disobedience.

JEREMIAH'S WORDS TO KINGS (22:10-30)

“Him who is dead” is Josiah, and “him who goes away” is Jehoahaz (22:10). “Shallum” was Jehoahaz's personal name and Jehoahaz was his throne name. Jehoiachin was also known as Coniah or Jeconiah (24:1).

Jehoahaz (Shallum) went to Egypt following his confrontation with Assyria (609 B.C.E.). Neco took him there (22:11), and he was never to return to Jerusalem.

Jehoiakim (Eliakim) is the one who built a new palace (22:13-15), but Jeremiah warns that the palace does not make the King. A King cannot ignore injustice and live in luxury. As a result of this, the 18-year old Jehoiakim will be taken with the first exiles and he will die in Babylon with the burial of an ass (22:18-19). There is no record of such a death and burial for Jehoiakim, but he apparently did die in Babylon. He was not among those who later returned to Jerusalem.

Jehoiachin (Coniah or Jeconiah) was the last King in the line of David to reign (22:24-30) and he only reigned for three months. He was imprisoned in Babylon for 37 years and never returned to Jerusalem.

Zedekiah did reign for eleven years after Jehoiachin, but he was Jehoiachin's uncle and not directly in the royal line of David. Some scholars name him as the third son of Josiah, which would put him in the line of David.

JEREMIAH'S WORDS TO FALSE PROPHETS (23:1—24:10)

The Branch (23:1-8)

Jeremiah prophesied against both the political and spiritual leaders, whom he claims have misled the people. They (the shepherds) have scattered the flock (Judah). Therefore, God will raise a new (ideal) King, whom Jeremiah refers to as “the branch.” Isaiah also referred to him as a “branch” in Isaiah 4:2 and 11:1; as did Zechariah in Zechariah 3:8 and 6:12. Isaiah develops his thought about the new King a little better in Isaiah 9:2-7. This is Jeremiah's first reference to the idea of an ideal King. There is no development of the idea except to say that this King will not be a puppet like Zedekiah. Jeremiah was probably writing these words even as Zedekiah reigned as King. In 23:6 there is a play on

words. The new King will be called “the Lord is our righteousness.” The name Zedekiah meant “Yahweh is my righteousness,” but Jeremiah did not mean him.

The Corrupt Prophets (23:9-32)

Prophets and priests alike are corrupt. They are worse than the prophets of Baal in Samaria, whose words are corrupt. They are worse than the people of Sodom and Gomorrah, whose deeds are corrupt. Those who were called to be the guardians of Israel’s faith have misled the people with their claims of divine revelations through dreams (self-deceit). They have preached “optimism” when all the signs point to “disaster.” God’s word in this time is as devastating as “fire” and as shattering as a “hammer.” (23:29)

Jeremiah’s criticism of dreams does not have anything to do with dreams and visions, which were genuinely thought to be part of divine revelation. He opposes the kind of dreaming generally associated with soothsayers and sorcerers, (27:9).

Jeremiah’s sharp criticism of these corrupt prophets prepared the way for the end of prophecy. The essence of prophecy had been “ecstatic intuition” and Jeremiah called all this into question. If such men were undependable and unreliable as prophets, how could anyone know whom they could trust? The whole institution of prophecy fell apart.

The Burden of the Lord (23:33-40)

Jeremiah 23:34-40 is a commentary on Jeremiah 23:33. “Burden of the Lord” is a very confusing phrase, which refers to the coming disaster. The corrupt prophets had been optimistic without reason, but that will not cancel out the disaster that is certainly coming.

While much of this commentary is indeed confusing, it probably means that the people should seek an answer from the prophet and accept an answer, which alone comes from God. The other so-called prophets are lying. How does anyone know in such times who is lying and who is telling the truth? This is the problem that brought about the end of prophecy, but not of prophetic preaching.

The Two Baskets of Figs (24:1-10)

After Jeconiah (Jehoiachin) was taken into Exile and Zedekiah left to rule in Jerusalem, the Lord gave Jeremiah a vision of two baskets of figs left before the Temple. One basket was filled with ripe, succulent figs, but the other basket was filled with shriveled up, spoiled figs. This would have been a common enough scene. Worshippers would have given their “first fruits” as they had prospered. One would have been giving from a good crop and the other from a bad crop. That is why there were succulent and spoiled figs.

Jeremiah interpreted the above vision as a sign from God that he would treat the leaders within Jerusalem like good figs. Punishment, however, was necessary and had a purpose;

for God would send them into Exile in order to restore them. The Lord loves those whom he chastises and the hope of Israel lies in these chastised leaders. Since there was no hope for the bad figs, God would destroy them with sword, famine, and pestilence (24:10).

We must be careful with this vision. It does not mean that God only exiled good people, leaving the bad ones back in Jerusalem to be destroyed. Not everyone that was exiled to Babylonia returned as part of the remnant and not everyone who remained in Jerusalem could be considered bad. Jeremiah was given the opportunity to decide whether to go to Babylonia or stay in Jerusalem. He opted for Jerusalem.

THE ENEMY FROM THE NORTH (25:1-38)

Babylon Identified (25:1-14)

The setting in this passage follows Nebuchadnezzar's victory over Assyria and Neco (Egypt) at Carchemish in 605 B.C.E. This occurred during the early part of Jehoiakim's reign in Judah and for Jeremiah, it signaled that Nebuchadnezzar was God's instrument of judgment on Judah. Judah had a chance, but it did not respond (25:5-10), so God intends to put Judah's leaders in Exile for seventy years (25:11-12).

In this passage the seventy years seems to begin in 605 B.C.E. and end in 539 B.C.E., when the Exiles returned. The number seventy is to be thought of as a round and symbolic number rather than a specific one. In the Old Testament, sacredness signifies completeness. Another way of determining seventy years was to count it from the destruction of Jerusalem in 587 B.C.E. to the rebuilding of the Temple in 515 B.C.E. What is important is not the accuracy or the dating of the seventy years, but what it symbolizes. It is a period of chastisement and preparation for restoration. Those who understand this will become part of God's remnant.

The Cup of Wrath (25:15-38)

In Jeremiah 13:12-14 this image was used against Israel; now it is used against all nations (25:15). The list of nations reveals an extensive knowledge of geographical places. All of these places from Egypt to Persia are put in their proper order.

The instrument of God's wrath in Jeremiah's time will be Babylon. The "Lion" in Jeremiah 25:38 refers either to God or Nebuchadnezzar. Universal war in this case is an expression of God's universal judgment on all nations. That he uses nations to judge his own people does not mean that those nations will escape his wrath. While Israel must spend seventy years in Exile, Babylon will be made desolate forever. There is a significant difference in the quality of the punishment.

THY WORD IS A HAMMER!

When I started a three-year ministry in Union County Georgia, one of the members of the Shady Grove Methodist Church said to me, "Your sermons sure do smash rocks." I

thanked him, but I walked away puzzled, for I had no idea what he meant. Later in the week I had an opportunity to talk with him again and so I asked him to explain just what he meant. He was more than happy to oblige and demonstrate his biblical literacy, for he was more familiar with Jeremiah than was I. He introduced to me for the first time, Jeremiah 23:29, where God speaks through the prophet: “Is not my word like fire, says the LORD, and like a hammer that breaks a rock in pieces?” He was not so much complimenting me, as he was the complementing the Word of God, which I was trying my best to proclaim.

Every man or woman of God is called to proclaim the Word of God, which has the power to smash rocks, to break through our defenses and penetrate our hearts, causing us to repent of sin and turn to God. Prophets, who say what they want to say or what people expect them to say, only cause confusion. Jeremiah 23:25-26 and 32 lift up the problem:

I have heard what the prophets have said who prophesy lies in my name, saying, “I have dreamed, I have dreamed!” How long? Will the hearts of the prophets ever turn back—those who prophesy lies, and who prophesy the deceit of their own heart? See, I am against those who prophesy lying dreams, says the LORD, and who tell them, and who lead my people astray by their lies and their recklessness, when I did not send them or appoint them; so they do not profit this people at all, says the LORD.

That which happened in Jeremiah’s time still happens today. We are still tempted to discover the perceived needs of the people so that we can fulfill those needs. When we do this, we lead them astray. We misuse the prophetic office. When people are no longer able to distinguish between prophets who lie and prophets who tell the truth, the office of prophecy dies. This is what has happened in our time.

There are a few prophets out there, but they are wrong so frequently that hardly anyone pays any attention to their message. They are rapidly becoming like the boy who cried “wolf” so often that when a wolf really appeared, everyone was so used to hearing his lies that they no longer knew that he was telling the truth. Lying prophets make it difficult for those who tell the truth. Jeremiah recognized this and lamented it, complaining that they made him look like a “laughingstock” (20:7). The only thing that kept him going was the presence of God and his own knowledge that he was proclaiming faithfully God’s message as it had been delivered to him. Jeremiah never wanted to become a prophet (Jeremiah 1:6), and he cursed the very day he was born (Jeremiah 20:14). In Jeremiah 20:9, he describes what kept him going: “If I say, ‘I will not mention him, or speak any more in his name,’ then within me there is something like a burning fire shut up in my bones; I am weary with holding it in, and I cannot.”

Jesus, like Jeremiah, told the people what they needed to hear, not what they wanted to hear. Both men saw the gathering of the people of God together for mission, to call people into covenant with God, to make disciples. This is what is meant by the story of the potter and the clay found in Jeremiah 18:1-13. God has the right to shape the clay in whatever form he wishes. If the clay resists his shaping, then he also has a right to discard

it. Prophets, priests, and evangelists have a similar role in that they are to describe the kind of vessel God wants to make of his people, even if, no-one wants to be shaped into that kind of a vessel. The Church is not a business, which markets itself in order to sell Jesus as a product. It is rather a mission where God is proclaimed and people are molded according to the image in which they were first created. Jesus was and is the living example of that Image. He is the kind of vessel we are all called to become. When this is proclaimed in our culture, it will sound like a hammer smashing rocks; unless of course, we lie about who he really is and what he really teaches. If we do this, we only make him over in our own image, when our true goal is to be shaped according to his image.

We can tell the difference between prophets who lie and those who tell the truth, but we will have to be very familiar with Jesus and his teachings to be able to distinguish the truth from the lies. Jesus' teachings hit the crowds like a hammer and many left him because of his hard sayings; so he said to those who best understood him, "Do you also wish to go away?" Simon Peter answered him, "Lord, to whom can we go? You have the words of eternal life."

JEREMIAH



Weeping for Jerusalem by Rembrandt (1606-1669)

14. Life and Prophecies

Jeremiah 26:1—35:19

14. JEREMIAH: LIFE AND PROPHECIES (26:1 – 35:19)				Jehoiakim (Temple Sermon) (609-598 B.C.E.) Zedekiah (2 Yokes and Letters to Exiles)(597-587 B.C.E.)
BEFORE THE SIEGE (26:1 – 29:32)				
Temple Sermon (26:1-24)		Two Yokes (27:1 – 28:17)		
The Sermon (26:1-6) (26:2, 4-5) <i>Written by Baruch Jeremiah's Text (7:1-15)</i>	Arrest and Release (26:1-6) (26:16) <i>Micah (26:18) Uriah (26:20-23) Ahikam (26:24)</i>	The Wooden Yoke (27:1-22) (27:1-8 & 14)		First Letter (29:3 & 5-6) (Carried by Elasah & Gamariah) 70 Years (29:10) Lying Prophets (29:21) (Ahab & Zedekiah)
		The Iron Yoke (28:1-17) (28:10-11 & 13)		
		Death of Hananiah (28:16b-17)		Second Letter (29:29 & 32) Sehmaiah wrote to Zephaniah Zephaniah told Jeremiah
THE BOOK OF COMFORT (30:1 – 33:26)				Josiah (The Restoration) (622-609 B.C.E.) Zedekiah (Land Purchase) (588-587 B.C.E.)
The Restoration (30:1-24) (30:3 & 18) Short Term Restoration Long Term Restoration New Jerusalem (Revelation 3:12 & 21:2)	The New Covenant (31:1-40) Dream of Restoration (31:1-4 & 26) Nature of Covenant (31:31-34) Jerusalem (31:38a & 40b)	The Land Purchase (32:1-44) (32:8-11 & 13-15) (Purchased from Hanamel) Reason for Destruction (32:34-35) New Covenant (32:38-40 & 43)	The Promise of Hope (33:1-26) The Righteous Branch (33:14-16)	
THE FREEING OF THE SLAVES (34:1-22)				Zedekiah (588-587 B.C.E.)
Lachish and Azekah (34:7)	Freeing the Slaves (34:8) Failure of Egypt Enslaving the Slaves (34:11)	Freedom to Fall by Sword Plague Famine (34:17)	Consequence for Violating the Covenant (34:18)	
THE EXAMPLE OF THE RECHABITES (35:1-19)				Jehoiakim? (588-587 B.C.E.)
Jeremiah tests the Rechabites with Wine (35:1-3, 5)	The Rechabites pass the Test (35:6-7)	The Contrast with Judah (35:16)		

14. JEREMIAH: LIFE AND PROPHECIES

Jeremiah 26:1—35:19

ASSIGNMENTS		
Events before The Siege (26:1—29:32)	The Book of Comfort (30:1—33:26)	The Freeing of the Slaves and The Example of Rechabites (34:1—35:19)

The biographical events that follow in chapters 26 through 45 are not in chronological order. In some instances the writer places the most important events first.

EVENTS BEFORE THE SIEGE (26:1—29:32)

The Temple Sermon (26:1-24)

The Sermon (26:1-6)

The sermon was delivered during the Feast of Booths (September-October) in 609 B.C.E. This was shortly after Josiah met his death and Judah, under Jehoiakim, became a Vassal State to the Egyptian Pharaoh, Neco. People were still in a state of shock over these political events, and Jeremiah's sermon shocked them even more. The sermon recorded here is a summary of Jeremiah's own words found in Jeremiah 7:1-15. The summary was made by Baruch and is not limited to Jeremiah 7. He includes other sayings from Jeremiah as well. Baruch's purpose is to make his readers aware of the courage of Jeremiah's prophetic sermon.

Arrest and Release (26:7-24)

Jeremiah's sermon sounded very unpatriotic in such difficult times. Both priests and prophets felt threatened by what he had to say about the demise of the nation; hence, he was arrested immediately. Only his eloquent defense to the Princes of Judah (the Judges) gains him his release. The decision to release him was based on a precedent set by Hezekiah (715-687 B.C.E.) in regard to Micah. Micah also prophesied the destruction of Jerusalem.¹ The decision to release Jeremiah was made at the New Gate (Benjamin Gate) on the North side of the city.

¹ See Micah 3:12.

Baruch illustrated the danger to Jeremiah with the story of Uriah, a prophet, who escaped to Egypt, but was brought back by Elnathan and some others only to be executed by Jehoiakim. His execution with a sword, however, was considered unusual. He was buried in the common people's burial grounds.

It was because Jeremiah had the support of Ahikam and his father Shaphan that he was not killed. These two men had been prominent under Josiah. Ahikam's son, Gedaliah, was appointed governor of Judah following the fall of Jerusalem. The importance of these two men meant a great deal. They saved the life of Jeremiah.

The Two Yokes (27:1—28:17)

The Wooden Yoke (27:1-22)

In 593 B.C.E., during the beginning of the reign of Zedekiah (the fourth year of Zedekiah's reign), there was an attempt to rally the enemies of Nebuchadnezzar into an anti-Babylonian alliance. Actually some of the other ancient manuscripts use the name of Jehoiakim instead of Zedekiah, and Nebuchadnezzar is used instead of the more familiar Nebuchadrezzar. The Babylonian form of the name is "Nabu-kudurru-usur." The nations invited to participate in this alliance were Edom, Moab, Ammon, Tyre, and Sidon.

To demonstrate God's disapproval of this alliance, Jeremiah put on a wooden yoke and sandals to symbolize the necessity of submission to Nebuchadnezzar. He insisted that Judah would eventually fall (27:7), that resistance would be met with punishment from the sword, famine, and pestilence (27:8, 12-13); but Judah could escape the exile if it would only submit (27:11). That other prophets were proclaiming another message would not alter things, for they were lying (27:14-15).

The Iron Yoke (28:1-17)

In July/August of 593 B.C.E. Hananiah faced Jeremiah in the Temple and opposed his message of doom with one of optimism. Hananiah insisted that the vessels of the Lord's House would be returned within two years, along with the exiled King of Judah, Jeconiah (Jehoiachin), and all of the other exiles. Jeremiah's response was a hearty "Amen." He hoped that Hananiah was right (28:6), but he accused Hananiah of not prophesying in the tradition of the true prophets (28:8). To symbolize his message, Hananiah broke Jeremiah's wooden yoke, and Jeremiah quietly walked away. God sent him back however with the symbol of an iron yoke which could not be broken (28:13-14). While the wooden yoke had symbolized submission, the iron yoke would symbolize servitude. Jeremiah accused Hananiah of lying and predicted his death, which occurred within the next two months (28:16-17).

Letters to the Exiles (29:1-32)

Following the deportation of 597 B.C.E., Jeremiah sent a letter to those living in exile in Babylon by means of Elasah (the brother of Ahikam, (26:24) and Gemariah. These two

men were envoys of King Zedekiah. It would have taken from four to six months to deliver the letter. Zedekiah himself was to make the trip in 593 B.C.E. (51:59).

Those in exile would have included King Jehoiachin (Jeconiah), Ezekiel, and Second Isaiah; hence, there was a King and at least two true prophets among them. There were also a number of false prophets, who were causing some problems. Jeremiah advised the elders of the exilic community to settle down, establish homes, and assist in the welfare of the Babylonian state (29:5-7). This really angered Ahab and Zedekiah (not the King), who were colleagues of Hananiah and critics of Jeremiah. They predicted an early return to Jerusalem and Judah. Jeremiah condemned them and predicted their execution. Death by burning was a common Babylonian method of execution (29:22) and the reason for their execution would have been subversion against Babylon.

Shemaiah, another colleague of Hananiah's, wrote a scathing letter to Zephaniah, the new overseer of the Temple, and asked him why he had not arrested Jeremiah for his blasphemy against Judah. Zephaniah, for some reason (perhaps he was Jeremiah's friend), shared the letter with Jeremiah, who in turn became very angry and wrote a second letter to the exiles. In the second letter he condemned Shemaiah and predicted that neither he nor his descendants would see the day of restoration.

Many questions have been raised about how long the people would have to remain in exile. In 29:10-14 Jeremiah suggests a Sabbath of 70 years, but what does this mean? One suggestion has been made that the Sabbath begins with the Battle of Carchemish (605 B.C.E.) and ends with the capture of Babylon (539 B.C.E.), but another suggests that it begins with the Fall of Jerusalem (587 B.C.E.) and ends when the completion of the Second Temple (515 B.C.E.).

Conditions for the exiles could not have been too bad. They were allowed to gather and practice their own faith. When the 70 years were over, most of them decided to stay in Babylonia. Jeremiah had been saying all along that the Temple was not as important as their obedience (7:1-15 and 21-22). In the Exilic Period we discover not only the beginning of the Synagogue, but a remarkable transition. The people of the place (the Promised Land), become the people of the Word (Scripture). In the Synagogue people gathered together to read the Scriptures, including the words of Jeremiah. Official recognition of these writings as Scripture would have to wait for some time, but we are seeing the early recognition of valued writings, which were later to be called Sacred Writings or Scripture.

THE BOOK OF COMFORT (30:1—33:26)

Baruch probably edited the following chapters. They reflect the period of time between 622-609 B.C.E. Even though Jeremiah might not have written them, they still might reflect his thought. Baruch was trying to balance Jeremiah's message. Up to now most of it has been a message of doom, which Jeremiah claims was the true prophetic tradition. While that is true, there is also a positive side to the tradition that Baruch does not want his readers to overlook, which is Jeremiah's true intention.

The Restoration (30:1-24)

Jeremiah 30:18-22 seems to be a description of the restored city of Jerusalem, which was to include national independence as well as a revived Davidic monarchy. This is undoubtedly the short-term restoration that Jeremiah had in mind. Christians however have seen a long-term restoration relating to the New Jerusalem of the Book of Revelation.

The New Covenant (31:1-40)

Chapter 31 begins with a very inclusive use of the term “Israel.” (31:1) Israel includes both north and south. Ephraim is a name frequently used to describe the northern kingdom. As the chapter continues this is open to an even more inclusive interpretation. The New Covenant, which is described in Jeremiah 31:31-34, refers to all nations.

Jeremiah 31:15-17 uses some significant imagery in this chapter. Rachel was buried in Ramah, near Bethlehem, and this was emphasized as the people were taken through Ramah on the way to Babylon. At that time it symbolized unmitigated grief, and Matthew 2:18 used this same imagery to describe the grief of Herod’s murder of the children. In Jeremiah however this is a turning point, for the prophet introduces the promise of restoration. Rachel may have wept for her exiled sons, but she will weep no more, for they will return under a New Covenant. According to 31:26, Jeremiah had been dreaming about all this, for at this point he woke up and declared how pleasant the dream had been.

The New Covenant is also described in Jeremiah 32:38-40; Ezekiel 36:24-28; Hebrews 8:8-12; and Hebrews 10:16-17. In Luke 22:20, Jesus took the words “New Covenant” to describe what he was doing at the Last Supper and would be doing on the Cross. These words have become so important that they are used to describe the entire New Testament (Covenant). Scholars are reluctant to say that Jeremiah did not write this New Covenant passage. Those who do, also admit that it is in keeping with the finest of the prophetic tradition.

The chapter ends with a new city plan for Jerusalem (31:38-40). The last verse says that the city will not be uprooted or overthrown again. What can that possibly mean? Jeremiah is not only thinking about the restored city following the exile, but the New Jerusalem of the future. As mentioned previously we are dealing with a short term, and long term restoration in these chapters.

Jeremiah’s Land Purchase (32:1-44)

This chapter may belong chronologically after chapters 37-38, but may have been inserted here because of its importance. Jerusalem was under siege (588/587), and Jeremiah’s hometown, Anathoth was already under enemy occupation. In such a context Jeremiah’s cousin, Hanamel, tried to sell his land. If one wanted to escape, money was portable; land was not. If one was going to sell land, the first offer had to be made to family (Leviticus 25:25); and so that is why an offer was made to Jeremiah. Land was to

be kept in the family if possible. Anyone buying land at such a time would look foolish. Even Jeremiah wonders about his actions (Jeremiah 32:25), but he does what God tells him to do. The purchase of the land for 17 shekels (weight rather than coins) is a sign from God that he has a future for Judah. This was hard for anyone to comprehend at a time when everything was falling apart.

The imagery of sword, pestilence, and famine indicated the imminent destruction of the nation (Jeremiah 32:24 and 36). This was God's way of punishing his rebellious people, whose wickedness was basically idolatry and child sacrifice (Jeremiah 32:33-35). The chapter is concluded with images of hope for a restoration of God's people. The summary of this hope can be found in Jeremiah 32:38-40, which ranks with Jeremiah 31:33 and Ezekiel 36:26 as the Old Testament anticipation of the opening words of Jesus announcement of the New Covenant (Luke 22:20) or the Kingdom of God (Mark 1:15).

A Promise of Hope (33:1-26)

The theme of Chapter thirty-three is that of hope for a restored nation, even while the old nation is undergoing destruction. For the present, says Jeremiah, there will be an eclipse of God (33:5b). God will hide his face because of the people's wickedness; but what God destroys, he will also rebuild. Joy and prosperity will return (33:10-11), and an ideal King will reign (33:14-16). Although Judah did achieve independence as a nation again in 165 B.C.E., it does not seem to fulfill the nation Jeremiah describes here.

Jeremiah 33:15, a Messianic reference, looks beyond the immediate future. Full restoration must await the coming of the Messiah (ideal King), who will be a "righteous branch from David's line." The new name for Jerusalem will be "the Lord is our Righteousness." (Jeremiah 33:16) The reign of the Messiah will be accompanied with a reign of justice. (Compare this with the same Messianic expectation from Isaiah 11:3-4.)

THE FREEING OF THE SLAVES (34:1-22)

With the siege on Jerusalem only a few weeks away (January, 588 B.C.E.), Lachish and Azekah are still holding out. Jeremiah warns Zedekiah that it will do no good to resist, for destruction is imminent. If Zedekiah will submit to the Babylonian armies he can be assured of a peaceful death and a decent funeral (34:4-5). He does not submit, and so he eventually faces a violent death. (See Jeremiah 52:8-11.)

He probably did not submit because Egyptian armies came into Judah in the Spring of 588 B.C.E. to help. This forced the Babylonian armies to lift their siege temporarily, but it was soon resumed. The Egyptians were no *match* for the Babylonians.

Prior to the temporary lifting of the siege, Zedekiah freed the slaves. He might have done this for two reasons: (1) to ease responsibility for feeding them as food supplies grew scarce, and (2) to gain more manpower in the army, for slaves could be used for military service in defense of the city. When the Egyptians forced a temporary lifting of the siege, this created a false hope that Jerusalem would not fall, and so the slave owners took back

their slaves. This horrified Jeremiah, who saw it as a violation of the covenant. According to Exodus 21:2 and Deuteronomy 15:12, Hebrew slaves were not to be kept for more than six years anyway. As a result the Lord would set the people (not the slaves) free to die (34:17). What would happen to them is compared to what is done to the bull in the covenant ceremony. The ancient covenant ritual involved cutting a sacrificial bull in two parts. The two parties of the covenant then passed between the two parts. (See Genesis 15:7-10, 17-18.) The Lord intended to do to his people what was done to this covenant bull (34:20).

THE EXAMPLE OF THE RECHABITES (35:1-19)

Jeremiah invites Jaazaniah and his brothers (the Rechabites) into one of the Temple chambers, where he offered them some wine. This was supposed to have taken place during the reign of Jehoiakim. The Rechabites were in Jerusalem seeking safety from Nebuchadrezzar (35:11), but if this were the case, then the incident would have occurred during the reign of Zedekiah. If it did happen under Jehoiakim's reign, then the threat was probably only from some wandering bands of Chaldeans and Syrians. If we substitute Zedekiah for Jehoiakim, then the story falls into place.

The Rechabites are not willing to drink the wine offered to them, but this does not offend Jeremiah. In fact he makes an example out of it. He admires the Rechabites, abnormal as their way of life is to him, and suggests that there is a future for a disciplined group of people like them; whereas, punishment lies ahead for the Israelites, even if they are the chosen and covenant people of God. Their unfaithfulness results in punishment. None of this means that Jeremiah is a Rechabite or that he is suggesting that all Israelites adopt their lifestyle. He is only lifting up their obedience and contrasting it with Judah's disobedience.

The Rechabites were a sect similar to the Nazirites (Numbers 6:1-21). Their founder was Jonadab, the son of Rechab, who lived during the reign of Jehu (842-815 B.C.E.). Jonadab assisted Jehu in his bloodbath following the revolt against Omri (2 Kings 10:15-28), when an effort was made to rid the nation of Baal worship. The Rechabites had the following characteristics: (1) They did not drink any wine; (2) They did not engage in agriculture; and (3) They lived in tents rather than in houses. They had an aversion to urban life and its Canaanite influences; and because wine was associated with Canaanite civilization, they refused to drink it. Some doubt that anything could have driven them into Jerusalem, but an armed threat might cause any of us to do unexpected things.

WRITTEN IN THE HEART

The real contribution of Jeremiah is the shift of focus from the Temple to the Word. Although many of his prophecies were negative, their primary focus was on what lie beyond the destruction of Jerusalem and its beloved Temple. Jeremiah dreamed of a New Jerusalem where no Temple would be needed, and that was precisely what Jesus and Paul

taught and was fulfilled in Revelation 21:22, where no Temple existed. The need for it was gone, for God was present everywhere.

Prior to the destruction foretold by Jeremiah, God's people thought that they needed the Temple. It was so important to them that they could not conceive of its demise. Without it the people had to depend on the Word, but even that, according to Jeremiah, was only temporary. In the end, God's Word would be written in the heart and everyone would know his Will. This passage from Jeremiah 31:31-34 makes up the heart of the New Covenant:

The days are surely coming, says the LORD, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah. It will not be like the covenant that I made with their ancestors when I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt—a covenant that they broke, though I was their husband, says the LORD. But this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the LORD: I will put my law within them, and ***I will write it on their hearts***; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. No longer shall they teach one another, or say to each other, "Know the LORD," for they shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest, says the LORD; for I will forgive their iniquity, and remember their sin no more.

The step from depending upon a place where one can worship and discover God's Word, to discovering God's Word written in the heart, is a giant leap forward, and it could not take place over night. Without the Temple, God's people developed a community that gathered around the Written Word. From *this* the concept of the Synagogue developed, and after that, the Church. Just as the Temple was needed in the past, the Written Word is still needed in the present, but in the future nothing will be needed, neither the Temple nor the Written Word. Everything will be written in the heart, and God will be everywhere.

This is not to say that he is not everywhere now, but our sin blocks out our awareness of him. In Jeremiah 33:5b, God is quoted, "I have hidden my face from this city because of all their wickedness." The eclipse of God is caused by human sinfulness, but it is God who hides his face from those who turn away from him. This is what eventually causes their collapse. Without the help of God, no individual or nation can expect to stand.

For those who turn to God, however, there is guidance. It may not be clear yet, but one is coming who will make it clear. "In those days and at that time," says God in Jeremiah 33:15-16, "I will cause a righteous Branch to spring up for David; and he shall execute justice and righteousness in the land. In those days Judah will be saved and Jerusalem will live in safety." This is a Messianic reference to an ideal leader, whom Christians believe is Jesus Christ. He is the one who teaches that what matters is not the Letter of the Law, but the Spirit of the Law. That is why he says that he did not come to do away with the Law, but to fulfill it (Matthew 5:17). He then goes on to reinterpret some of the Laws of Moses, giving them a spiritual interpretation, making them harder to obey. Paul agrees and locates the Temple not in Jerusalem, but in the Human Body (1 Corinthians

3:16-17 and 6:19). The heart is the altar, and it is the Holy Spirit who writes God's will on the heart and gives direction to the individual and the community of faith as a whole. According to Ephesians 2:21 and 1 Peter 2:4ff. God's people become his Temple. No Temple of stone or wood is needed. The Temple is now made of flesh. To this extent there will always be a Temple. Revelation simply indicates that no Temple of stone and wood will exist.

What is so very practical about this New Covenant Jeremiah talks about, inaugurated by Jesus, and interpreted by Paul, is that sacred things are not outside of us, but within us. This does not make us divine, but it does mean that we have been created in the divine image, and it is to that image we must return, even though we still live in a secular world.

JEREMIAH



Weeping for Jerusalem by Rembrandt (1606-1669)

15. Trials and Sufferings

Jeremiah 36:1—45:5

15. JEREMIAH: TRIALS AND SUFFERINGS (36:1—45:5)				Jehoiakim (605 B.C.E.)
THE BURNING OF JEREMIAH'S SCROLL (36:1-32)				
The Writing of the Scroll in the 4th Year of Jehoiakim (36:1-8) (36:2-3)				
The Cloister Reading	The Secretarial Office Reading	The Palace Reading		
Read to Gemariah (9th Month of 5th Year) (36:9-10) (36:10) Micaiah, his son, goes to the Princes	Read to the Princes <i>Elishama, Delaiah, Elnathan Gemariah, and Zedekiah</i> (36:11-19) (36:17-19)	Read by Jehudi to Jehoiakim <i>Jehoiakim burns it</i> (36:20-26) (36:23) Elnathan, Delaiah, Gemariah urge him not to burn it (36:25) Jerahmeel, Seraiah, Shelemiah ordered to arrest Jeremiah (36:26)		
The Lord instructs Jeremiah to dictate a Second Scroll (36:27-32 (36:27-28) [Jeremiah 1-25]				
JEREMIAH'S ARREST AND IMPRISONMENT (37:1-21)				
Zedekiah's Request (27:3) Relief from Egypt (37:5) Jeremiah's Response (37:7-8)	Jeremiah's attempt to leave (Benjamin Gate) (37:12)	Irijah arrests Jeremiah (37:13) Imprisonment in the House of Jonathan (37:15-16)	Jeremiah's Defense (37:18-19) The House Arrest (37:21)	
JEREMIAH IN THE CISTERN (38:1-28)				
Cistern of Malchiah (38:1,4, 6) (Zedekiah's Son) (Shephatiah, Gedaliah, Jucal, Pashhur)	Ebed-melech frees him (38:10) (Egyptian Eunuch) With 3 (30 Men)	Zedekiah's Final Encounter The Promise (38:16) The Final Prophecy (38:17-18) Jeremiah's Lie (38:26-27)		
THE FALL OF JERUSALEM (39:1—40:6)				Zedekiah (587 B.C.E.)
Princes sit down at the Middle Gate (39:3) Nergal-sharezer: Son-in-Law Samgar-nebo Sarsechim the Rab-saris: Chief Eunuch/Court Official Nergal-sharezer the Rab-mag: Chief Physician/Soothsayer Zedekiah flees (39:5-6) In the direction of Arabah Overtaken in Jericho Blinded in Riblah Nebuzaradan begins the Exile (39:9-10)		The Release of Jeremiah (39:11-14) Free to do as he pleases (39:11-12) Assurance sent to Ebed-melech (39:15-18) The Egyptian Eunuch (39:17) Jeremiah decides to Stay (40:1-6) Jeremiah in chains? (40:4 & 6)		

15. JEREMIAH: TRIALS AND SUFFERINGS

Jeremiah 36:1—45:5

ASSIGNMENTS			
The Scroll, Jeremiah’s Arrest, and the Cistern (36:1—38:28)	The Fall of Jerusalem (39:1—40:6)	The Assassination of Gedaliah (40:7—41:18)	The Flight to Egypt and the Promise to Baruch (42:1—45:5)

THE BURNING OF JEREMIAH’S SCROLL (36:1-32)

Due to the mention of Jehoiakim in Chapter 35, the editor includes Chapter 36, which also revolves around Jehoiakim. The time period of this chapter is the fourth year of Jehoiakim, or 605 B.C.E. Jeremiah has been banned from speaking around the Temple, and so he turns to the written word. The ban was to prevent his unpatriotic remarks about submitting to Babylonia. Not being able to speak himself, Jeremiah selects Baruch to read his message from a **scroll**. According to Josephus (37-100 C.E.) Baruch came from a distinguished family and was well educated and very articulate.

The scroll was read during the ninth month of the fifth year, when a fast had been declared. The fast was declared to gain the Lord’s favor, but it was also to help Jehoiakim decide between submission to Babylonia or Egypt. The first reading of the scroll by Baruch took place in the chamber (room) of Gemariah (36:9-10). Gemariah must have supported Jeremiah to even allow the scroll to be read in his room. Some have referred to this first reading as the “**cloister reading**.”

Micaiah, the son of Gemariah, then went to the palace (36:11-19) to tell the princes about the scroll, which he heard read in Gemariah’s chamber. The princes present were: Elishama, Delaiah, Elnathan, Gemariah, and Zedekiah (not the King). They in turn sent Jehudi to tell Baruch to bring the scroll to them. The scroll was then read to them. This second reading has frequently been called the “**secretarial office reading**.” At the close of this reading Baruch and Jeremiah were told to hide.

The scroll was placed in the room of Elishama, the court secretary, while the princes went to the palace (36:20-26). They reported everything to the King, who in turn asked Jehudi to get the scroll and read it for him. This third reading was called the “**palace reading**.” As Jehudi read the scroll, the King (Jehoiakim) burned the sections Jehudi finished

reading until the whole scroll was burned up (36:23). The scroll was most likely made of papyrus, which would have been combustible. Elnathan, Delaiah, and Gemariah begged the King not to burn the scroll, but he paid no attention to them. Next the King ordered Jerahmeel, Seraiah, and Shelemiah to arrest Baruch and Jeremiah; but the two of them managed to escape under the Lord's protection.

After King Jehoiakim burned the scroll, the Lord instructed Jeremiah to dictate a second scroll to Baruch (36:27-32). This **second scroll** makes up the nucleus of the Book of Jeremiah (Chapters 1-25).

JEREMIAH'S ARREST AND IMPRISONMENT (37:1-21)

Around 588 B.C.E. Zedekiah sent Jehucal and Zephaniah to seek the Word of the Lord from Jeremiah. Jeremiah's message was still negative. The Babylonians would defeat Judah.

Meanwhile the Egyptian army caused the Chaldeans (Babylonians) to lift their siege, but Jeremiah warns that it is only temporary (37:7b-8). As Jeremiah attempts to return to the territory of Benjamin through the Benjamin Gate, Irijah arrests him and accuses him of deserting to the Chaldeans. Irijah took him to the princes who were enraged with him. Jeremiah was then beaten and imprisoned in the cellar of the house of Jonathan. The cellar had been made into a prison.

Zedekiah inquired of Jeremiah a second time, and was given the same message. The Chaldeans would be victorious (37:17). The other prophets had lied (37:19). Jeremiah made a personal plea to Zedekiah, who made it easier for him, but did not take his message seriously. Instead of being sent back to Jonathan's house, he was placed under house arrest in the court of the guard. Here he was provided with a loaf of bread a day until the bread ran out.

JEREMIAH IN THE CISTERN (38:1-28)

Shephatiah, Gedaliah, Jucal, and Pashhur heard what Jeremiah was saying to the people, and they were convinced that Jeremiah was undermining the war effort; hence, they advised Zedekiah to put Jeremiah to death (38:4). Zedekiah turned Jeremiah over to them, and they promptly lowered him down into the cistern of Malchiah (Zedekiah's son) with the help of ropes. Because there was no water in the cistern, Jeremiah sank into the mire. An Egyptian eunuch, Ebed-melech (not necessarily a physical eunuch) became concerned about Jeremiah's welfare, and so he went to Zedekiah to express his concern. Zedekiah gave him permission to take three (30 in the NIV Bible) men and rescue Jeremiah from the cistern before he died. They used rags and worn out clothes to protect Jeremiah from the ropes.

After Jeremiah was rescued from the cistern, Zedekiah sent for him and received him at the third entrance to the Temple. This gate is unknown, but was probably located between the Temple and Palace. Zedekiah swore secretly that he would neither put Jeremiah to

death nor turn him over to those who sought to kill him, but Jeremiah's message was still the same. He advised the King to surrender to the King of Babylon. The King would not have to worry about those who had already turned themselves over to the Chaldeans, but he must surrender himself or watch his beloved Jerusalem be burned to the ground and be captured by the King of Babylon. Zedekiah asked Jeremiah not to tell the princes of their conversation. If they asked, he was simply to say that he pleaded with the King not to send him back to the house of Jonathan to die. Jeremiah consented to this little white lie, and remained safe in the court of the guard until the final assault on Jerusalem. This final assault came in August of 587 B.C.E.

THE FALL OF JERUSALEM (39:1—40:6)

The Final Conquest in 587 B.C.E. (39:1-10)

After Jerusalem was taken by Nebuchadrezzar's army, the princes of the King of Babylon came and sat down in the middle gate. The middle gate cannot be identified with certainty, but the Talmud suggests that it was one of several names given to the Eastern Gate (what is now known as the Golden Gate). While their names are given, they are very complicated. The New Revised Standard Version lists four of them, but the New English Bible lists only three of them. They are as follows: (1) **Nergal-sharezer**. "Nergal" means, "protect the King." He was Nebuchadrezzar's son-in-law and second successor. He ruled from 560-556 B.C.E. (2) **Samgar-nebo**. "Samgar" means, "be gracious." (3) **Sarsechim the Rab-saris**. "Rabsaris" means "chief eunuch," but probably refers to one who acted as the "chief court official." (4) **Nergal-sharezer the Rab-mag**. "Rabmag" is probably a title, which means "chief physician" or "chief of soothsayers." Some scholars think that this man's name is simply listed twice, and is the same man listed first; but others claim that Nergal-sharezer was a common Babylonian name, and that two separate men are indeed listed here.

When Zedekiah and his soldiers saw them, they fled from the city at night. They went toward Arabah, but the Chaldean army overtook them in the plains of Jericho, where they killed the sons of Zedekiah at Riblah, killed the nobles of Judah, and then blinded Zedekiah and took him to Babylon in fetters.

After Jerusalem was taken, **Nebuzaradan**, the captain of the guard, began to gather up the people who remained for exile in Babylon. He left behind however the poor who owned nothing and gave them vineyards and fields (39:9-10). This story of the final conquest might have been taken from 2 Kings 25:1-12, and inserted here by an editor. If one omits the final conquest of Jerusalem, the story of Jeremiah flows smoothly from 38:28 to 39:11. The editor probably felt the need to include an account of the final conquest, and so he took the account right out of 2 Kings.

While I am going to say that Jerusalem was sacked and burned on August of 587, it was captured at least one month prior to its destruction. It is difficult to be precise with dates, but the siege must have taken place one and one-half years prior to its capture, and I have read some estimates of two and one-half years. About the best we can say is that the siege

of Jerusalem was not done overnight, and that it took some time. The Babylonians broke through the wall and scaled it at the same time.

THE ASSASSINATION OF GEDALIAH (40:7—41:18)				Gedaliah (587 B.C.E.)
The Return of the Army Officers to Mizpah (40:7-8) Ishmael Johanan Seraiah Sons of Ephai Jezaniah	The Warning of Johanan (40:13-14) King Baalis (Amon) orders Ishmael to assassinate Gedaliah	80 Men Visit Gedaliah (41:4-5) Shechem Shiloh Samaria	Johanan attacks Ishmael (41:11)	
The Return of the Jews (40:11-12) Moab Ammon Edom	The Assassination of Gedaliah (41:1-2) By Ishmael and 10 men	Ishmael kills 70 Men (41:7-8) He spares 10 Men	Ishmael Escapes to Ammon (41:15) With 8 Men	
The Decision to go to Egypt (41:16-18) (Baruch and Jeremiah are with them)				
THE FLIGHT TO EGYPT (42:1—43:7)				Jehoiakim (605 B.C.E.)
Johanan and Azariah consult Jeremiah (42:1 & 3)	God speaks to Jeremiah 10 days later (4:7)	Jeremiah reports God's Answer (42:10-11 and 15-17)	Suspicious about Baruch (43:2-3)	
The Flight to Tahpanhes, Egypt (43:7)				
JEREMIAH IN EGYPT (43:8—44:30)				
The Stones at the Palace (43:9-10)	The Refugees Disperse (44:1) Migdol Tahpanhes Memphis (Lower Egypt) Pathros (Upper Egypt)	Warnings against Idolatry (44:7-8)	Rejecting the Warning (44:16-18) Queen of Heaven Babylon/Assyria: Ishtar Canaan: Astarte Greece: Aphrodite Rome: Venus	
Prediction of Hophra's Demise (44:30) [Deposed in 569 B.C. and Assassinated in 566 B.C.]				
THE PROMISE TO BARUCH (45:1-5)				
This Section belongs between 36:8 & 9)		Baruch is to escape with his life (45:4-5)		

The Release of Jeremiah (39:11-14)

Apparently Babylonian intelligence reports spoke favorably of Jeremiah, and so, suspecting him of being a sympathizer for their cause, they set him free from prison and turned him over to Gedaliah, the new governor.

Assurance sent to Ebed-melech (39:15-18)

Remembering how Ebed-melech helped Jeremiah out of the cistern, Baruch reports Jeremiah's gratitude towards him. Jeremiah sent him a letter of personal reassurance for his trust in God. Ebed-melech would survive the indiscriminate killing and the burning of Jerusalem.

Jeremiah's Decision to Stay (40:1-6)

At first Jeremiah got mixed up with some of the others who were being taken off to Ramah (a transit or gathering point which is located about five miles north of Jerusalem), where they would eventually be taken to Babylon. Nebuzaradan, the captain of the guard, gave him the choice to accompany him to Babylon, where he would be well looked after, or to remain in Judah. Jeremiah decided to remain in Judah, and was then given an allowance, some food, and a present; after which, he went to Gedaliah, the new governor at Mizpah. Mizpah cannot be located with any certainty. It might have been two miles north of Ramah, four miles southwest of Ramah, or one and one-half miles south of Gibeon.

THE ASSASSINATION OF GEDALIAH (40:7—41:18)

The Israelite forces had been widely scattered. When they heard that Gedaliah had been made Governor, and were encouraged by him to return home, many of them did. Several leaders are named: **Ishmael**, **Johanan**, **Seraiah**, the **sons of Ephai**, and **Jezeiah**. With their help, Israelites return from Moab, Ammon, Edom, and other unnamed countries. Knowing of a plot to assassinate Gedaliah, Johanan warns him that **King Baalis** of Ammon has sent Ishmael to accomplish the evil deed. Gedaliah however does not believe him, and will not allow him to kill Ishmael in advance.

Ishmael then takes ten men to Mizpah to see Gedaliah. As they are eating bread together, Ishmael and his men assassinate Gedaliah. Along with Gedaliah they killed Israelites and Babylonian soldiers. On the next day, before anyone knew about the assassination, 80 men arrived from Shechem, Shiloh, and Samaria. They were on the way to present offerings at the Temple site. Even though the Temple had been destroyed, people still regarded the site itself as holy. Ishmael invited them in to see Gedaliah only to turn on them and kill all but ten, who pleaded and bargained for their lives. Ishmael spared the ten, and then dumped the bodies of the rest into a cistern. The cistern mentioned, was the one dug by King Asa in the 9th century B.C.E. when King Baasha of Israel attacked him.

Taking the daughters of the King (either Gedaliah's daughters or women who had been members of Zedkiah's court), Ishmael started out for Ammon. Jeremiah and Baruch were probably prisoners as well, although this is not mentioned in the text. Scholars believe this because we seem to be reading an eyewitness account. Meanwhile Johanan and several other army leaders, having heard about the assassination, follow Ishmael to Gibeon, where they rescue some soldiers, the women, children, eunuchs, and possibly Jeremiah and Baruch. They attempt to capture Ishmael, but along with eight of his men he escapes to Ammon. Fearing a reprisal from the Babylonians, the group camps at Chimham, near Bethlehem, but decides to flee to Egypt. They fear indiscriminate retaliation on the part of the Babylonians for the assassination of Gedaliah. Jeremiah and Baruch accompany them to Egypt.

THE FLIGHT TO EGYPT (42:1—43:7)

Before the group leaves for Egypt, Johanan and Azariah (Jezaniah), the leaders, consult God through Jeremiah. Jeremiah is not able to give an immediate answer, but within ten days he has a clear answer from the Lord. The answer is that they are not to flee to Egypt. The Lord's will is that they remain in Judah. This was consistent with Jeremiah's initial decision to stay in Judah. If they stayed in Judah, they would be blessed; but if they decided to flee, they would experience suffering (42:9-22).

Azariah and Johanan accused Jeremiah of lying under the influence of Baruch (43:2-3), and decided to flee to Egypt anyway, taking Jeremiah and Baruch with them. Not obeying the Lord, they fled to Tahpanhes, the first city in Egypt (a border fortress). Their flight would not help, for in 568 B.C.E. Nebuchadrezzar would reach clear down into Egypt. Jeremiah warned them that this would indeed happen.

JEREMIAH IN EGYPT (43:8—44:30)

Jeremiah spent his time in Tahpanhes (on the frontier), but the refugees quickly dispersed into Migdol (not far from Tahpanhes), Memphis (the ancient capital of Lower Egypt), and Pathros (the old name for Upper Egypt). Jeremiah warned them against idolatry, but the refugees did not understand the activity of God in their history. They drew the conclusion that things have gone wrong because they stopped worshiping their idols, mainly the "Queen of Heaven." Their reply to Jeremiah's warnings is that they are going to resume their worship of her (44:16-18).

The Queen of Heaven is the Babylonian/Assyrian goddess Ishtar. She can be compared to the Canaanite Astarte, the Greek Aphrodite, and the Roman Venus. Her worship was introduced to the Israelites by Manasseh (2 Kings 21:1-18), suppressed by Josiah (2 Kings 23:4-14), and restored by Jehoiakim (2 Kings 23:36-24:7). She was especially popular among the women, who tended to have a lesser role in the worship of Yahweh. Features of the worship of the Queen of Heaven were later incorporated into the early Syrian Church in its adoration of the Virgin Mary.

Jeremiah warned the people about their worship of the Queen of Heaven. Just as God turned Judah over to the Babylonians, he will also turn Egypt over to them; hence, Jeremiah predicts the fall of Pharaoh Hophra (44:30). Jeremiah seems to be saying that external enemies (such as Babylonia) will bring Hophra down; but in reality, he was overthrown from within Egypt. He was deposed in 569 B.C.E. and assassinated in 566 B.C.E. by Amasis (Ahmosis II), the new Pharaoh. Tradition has it that Jeremiah was stoned to death in Egypt, but there is no account of this in Scripture.

THE PROMISE TO BARUCH (45:1-5)

This whole section is concluded with a footnote from Baruch, who humbly relates his part in all of this. Although he has had to suffer personally, the Lord has promised to spare his life. In a sense, the essence of this chapter is to have the Lord say to Baruch, “Well done, thou good and faithful servant.”

This chapter, however, is out of place, for it is dated in 605 B.C.E. and properly belongs between Jeremiah 36:8 and 9. Baruch is warned not to seek an important place in politics, like his brother Seraiah had done. Seraiah occupied an important position under King Zedekiah, and was exiled to Babylon along with him (51:59).

THE FINE LINE

There is a very fine line between idolatry and faith. When things go wrong, that fine line is easily crossed, one way or another. The lesson from history is either learned and there is a movement from idolatry to faith, or we strengthen our commitment to our idols.

When Jeremiah was taken off to Egypt, he warned the people to move from idolatry to faith; but the people, it seems, insisted on renewing their commitment to idolatry. In Jeremiah 44:16-18, they say:

We will not listen to the message you have spoken to us in the name of the LORD! We will certainly do everything we said we would: We will burn incense to the Queen of Heaven and will pour out drink offerings to her just as we and our fathers, our kings and our officials did in the towns of Judah and in the streets of Jerusalem. At that time we had plenty of food and were well off and suffered no harm. But ever since we stopped burning incense to the Queen of Heaven and pouring out drink offerings to her, we have had nothing and have been perishing by sword and famine.

The problem with increasing one's commitment to the Queen of Heaven is her connection with child sacrifice and sacred prostitution, both of which were forbidden by the Mosaic Law. The early Christian Church tried to replace this need for a female deity by making Mary, the mother of Jesus, the Queen of Heaven. She at least demanded moral behavior from her worshippers, and today, there is a renewed interest in the adoration of Mary, even among Protestants. While such adoration cannot be termed idolatrous, it has

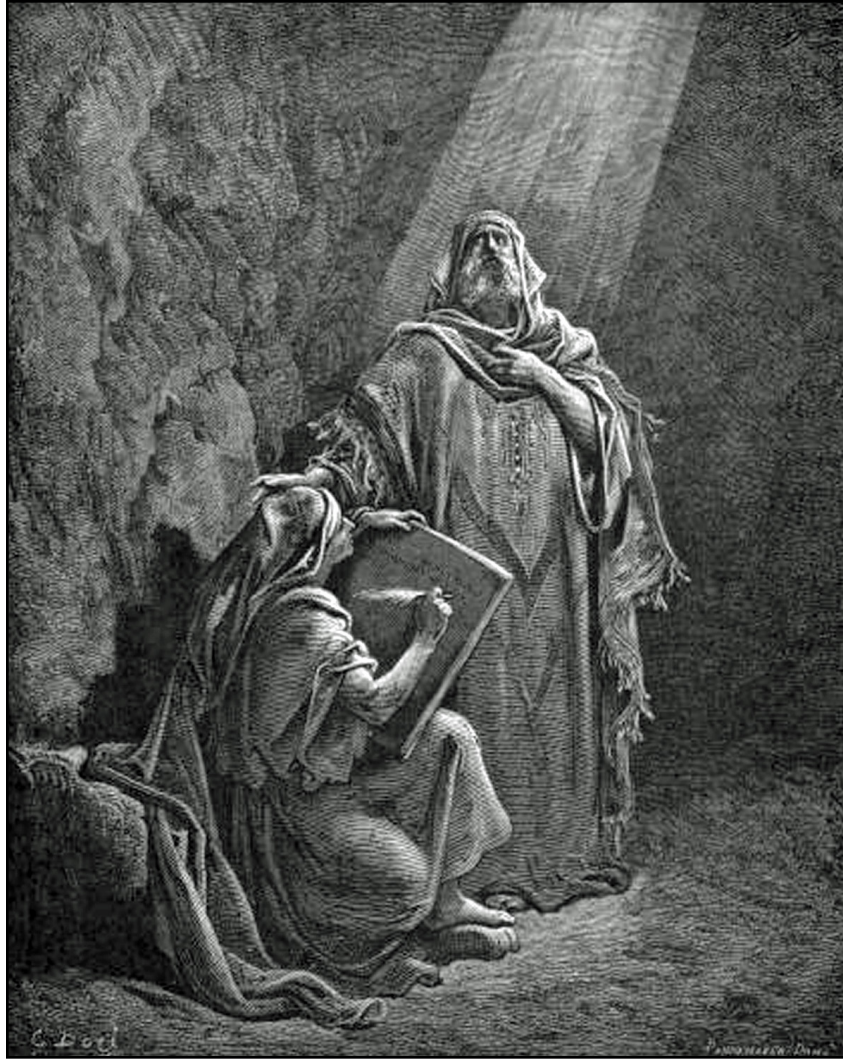
its dangers. It takes us very close to the thin line between the worship of God and idolatry.

We are in danger of crossing this line again in our time as we experience decline in the Protestant Churches. Is the reason for our decline an idolatrous connection with culture, which calls for renewed faith as we once understood it, or does faith have to take on a whole new dimension? Is the old male deity insufficient? Do we need a female counterpart? Pagan religions never lacked this balance and had little difficulty believing in male and female gods, who entered into relationships and bore children. The move to a single deity presents us with the problem of gender. Which gender is this single deity? It sounds too impersonal to think of God in neutral terms, and so our traditional way of describing this deity has been with the use of male imagery.

We have of course spoken of the church with female imagery, but this seems to continue the idea that men are superior. Does the elevation of Mary as the Queen of Heaven change anything? I think not. Without making Mary into an equal divine being, nothing changes; and if we make Mary equal to God, then we have crossed the thin line back into idolatry. Christian Faith affirms the existence of a single deity, whose nature is spiritual. Lacking any better linguistic symbolism, we have attached male terms, such as Father, to this deity.

We do not need to create new gods. We do need to understand the God of Creation and History. In our attempt to understand this God, male and female terms may be appropriately used, but never should we try to establish two gods, one male and one female. This is a move across the thin line back to paganism, and we cannot afford to make that move. It is not a move of faith, but a move towards idolatry. The idolatrous move is easier to make, and this is precisely why we make it. The move to increase our understanding of a single God, and to find adequate terms to describe that God, without simply using abstract terms, is the challenge. Male and female imagery personalize God, but they do so at the expense of one gender or another. We must seek to use those male and female images that truly describe God and drop those images that take us back into idolatry.

JEREMIAH



Baruch and Jeremiah by Gustave Doré (1832-1883)

16. Against Foreign Nations

Jeremiah 48:1—52:34

16. JEREMIAH: AGAINST FOREIGN NATIONS (46:1—52:34)		
THE NATIONS (46:1—51:64)		
<p>EGYPT (46:1-28) (46:2 & 25) Carchemish (May-June 605 B.C.E.) Pharaoh: Neco II Gods: Apis (46:15) & Amon (46:25) Israelites will survive, but not without punishment (46:27-28)</p>	<p>PHILISTIA (47:1-7) (47:2 & 4) “A Warning to Judah” Caphtor: Crete Anakim: Giants</p>	<p>MOAB (48:1-47) Gods: Chemosh and Bethel (48:13) Capital City: Dibon Horn of Moab (48:25) High Places (48:35) Fate of Moab: (48:46-47)</p>
<p>AMMON (49:1-6) Destruction: (49:2) City: Rabbah (49:2) God: Molech (49:3) Fate: Restoration (49:6)</p>	<p>EDOM (ESAU) (49:7-22) Major City: Bozrah (49:13) Fate: Like Sodom and Gomorrah (49:17-18)</p>	<p>DAMASCUS (SYRIA) (49:23-27) Cities: (49:23-24) Hamath (740 B.C.) Arpad (738 B.C.) Damascus (732 B.C.) Fate: 49:27)</p>
<p>KEDAR AND HAZOR (49:28-33) Kedar: Dwelling in black tents Hazor: Center for Namadic Tribes Fate: (49:29 & 33)</p>	<p>ELAM (49:34-39) Throne in Elam (49:38) Fate: (49:39)</p>	<p>BABYLON (50:1—51:64) Return of the Exiles (50:4-5) Fall of Babylon (50:2, 9, 40) (51:37, 44, 48) Zedekiah and Seraiah’s Trip (51:59-64)</p>
THE HISTORICAL APPENDIX (52:1-34)		
The Destruction of the Temple		
The Three Deportations (52:29-30) (4,600 Exiled)		
<p>The Surrender of Jehoiachin (598 B.C.E) 3,023 Exiled</p>	<p>Suppression of Zedekiah’s Revolt (587 B.C.E.) 832 Exiled</p>	<p>Reprisals for Gedaliah’s Assassination (582 B.C.E.) 745 Exiled</p>
Evil-Merodach becomes the New Babylonian King (52:31) (562 B.C.E.)		

16. JEREMIAH: AGAINST FOREIGN NATIONS

Jeremiah 46:1—52:34

ASSIGNMENTS			
Egypt and Philistia (46:1—47:7)	Moab, Ammon, Edom, Damascus, Kedar, Hazor, and Elam (48:1—49:39)	Babylon (50:1—51:64)	The Historical Appendix (52:1-34)

AGAINST EGYPT (46:1-28)

Jeremiah prophesied that Nebuchadnezzar would conquer Neco II of Egypt. The crucial battle was fought in May or June of 605 B.C.E. at Carchemish, which means “fortress of Chemosh,” the chief god of Moab. Carchemish was located on the Northern Euphrates about sixty miles West of Haran. Neco had been moving north, and Nebuchadnezzar had been moving South. Although Neco returned to Egypt, this did not mean that he was free of Nebuchadnezzar. Judah would fall first, but Egypt’s time was coming.

The bull, Apis, mentioned in 46:15 was the reincarnation of the god Ptah (later called Osiris), which was worshiped in Memphis, Egypt. Amon, the god of Thebes, mentioned in 46:25, was the chief god of Egypt during much of its history. These gods cannot prevent what is about to happen. Although the Israelites, in Egypt, would be delivered (46:27), they would not escape God’s punishment for their disobedience (46:28b).

AGAINST PHILISTIA (47:1-7)

In this chapter Jeremiah gives a general warning to Judah to repent before the disaster begins. The reference to the Egyptian Pharaoh (Neco or Hophra) might be a mistake, but it might also be referring to Neco’s capture of Gaza in 609 B.C.E.

Jeremiah perceives the threat coming out of the North. As Nebuchadnezzar approaches he takes everything in his way. This means the destruction of both the Phoenician (Tyre and Sidon) and the Philistine (Gaza and Ashkelon) coastal cities. Tyre and Sidon might have been allied with Egypt (47:4), but they might have just been in the way. The Philistines came from the Indo-European inhabitants of Caphtor (Island of Crete), and were the last remnants of the Anakim, with whom they had intermarried. The Anakim were the mighty men of pre-Hebrew Palestine. They were the giants that the Israelites feared.

AGAINST MOAB (48:1-47)

Moab was on neither the trade route nor the invasion route. Many of the cities and places named have not been identified. Nebo (48:1) refers to a city rather than to the mountain. Arnon (a river on the northern boundary) is known, as is Dibon the capital city of Moab. Kir-heres was the original capital. Destruction will come to all of these places because of Moab's worship of idols, the chief of who was Chemosh. Even Chemosh must bow to Yahweh's plan for history.

The Horn (a symbol for power) of Moab will be cut off (48:25), and even Moab, though it be in an out of the way place, will not escape (48:44). Then Moab will be as ashamed of Chemosh as Israel is ashamed of Bethel (48:13). Bethel is not the city, but a deity about whom little is known. Although the end will come for Moab (48:42), the nation will also experience restoration (48:47); but first its pride will have to be broken (48:20).

Arab tribes overran Moab around 650 B.C.E.; and although Moab ceased to exist as a state, refugees fled there following the fall of Jerusalem in 587 B.C.E.

AGAINST AMMON (49:1-6)

Ammon is condemned for its part in seizing Israelite land. The exact occasion is not known, but it might be referring to a seizure of land in 601 B.C.E. The prophecy against Ammon is relatively mild. Ammon's sins are violence and idolatry. Rabbah, the capital city of the time, is now Amman, the modern capital of Jordan. Milcom, Ammon's national god, will go into exile (49:3), but everything will eventually be restored (49:6).

AGAINST EDOM (49:7-22)

The relationship between Judah and Edom deteriorated very badly because of Edom's occupation of Southern Judah in 587-586 B.C.E. While Edom took advantage of Judah's plight, it was also driven into Southern Judah by invading Arab tribes. Both Jeremiah and Obadiah (1-9) describe Edom's bleak future, and both may be drawing from another source. Even Bozrah, the mightiest city in Edom, will crumble (49:13). The destruction of Edom will be total, just as was the case for Sodom and Gomorrah (49:17-18).

AGAINST DAMASCUS (49:23-27)

Syria actually lost its independence with the capture of Arpad (conquered by Tiglath-Pileser III) (740 B.C.E.), Hamath (738 B.C.E.), and Damascus (732 B.C.E.). The point being made in this prophecy is that following the fall of Hamath and Arpad (49:23-24) nothing is left to protect Damascus. The palaces of Benhadad will be consumed by fire (49:27). Benhadad was the name or title of a number of Syrian Kings.

AGAINST KEDAR AND HAZOR (49:28-33)

Hazor was the center for the nomadic tribes known as the Kedar, which means “dwelling in black tents.” This is not the same Hazor of Northern Galilee, but a center for nomadic tribes located in Eastern Palestine. The site is unknown today. Since it was a nomadic center, nothing remains of it. It had no fortresses and was especially vulnerable to Nebuchadrezzar’s attacking forces in the winter of 599/598 B.C.E.

AGAINST ELAM (49:34-39)

Elam was known for its mighty archers, whose bow (49:35) would be broken by Nebuchadrezzar’s invading armies. This prophecy was spoken in 597 B.C.E., and Elam was attacked in the winter of 596 B.C.E. To “set up one’s throne” in another country is to annex it (49:38). In spite of Elam’s plight, the nation would eventually be restored to its former affluence (49:39).

AGAINST BABYLON (50:1—51:64)

What follows is an illogically arranged and frequently duplicated series of prophecies. Even if Jeremiah did not write them, they do use Jeremiah as a primary source. These prophecies were taken to Babylonia with a delegation in the fourth year of Zedekiah’s reign (593 B.C.E.), that is, six years before the Fall of Jerusalem. There is some question as to whether Zedekiah himself led this delegation. The only record we have of Zedekiah actually making the trip is the Book of Jeremiah (51:59). Baruch’s brother, Seraiah, was given the task of reading the prophecies publicly, and then he was to throw them into the Euphrates. This was to symbolize the ultimate defeat (sinking) of Babylon itself (51:59-64).

The “instrument of God’s judgment” against Judah cannot escape judgment itself. God gave Babylonia power for a specific purpose, but it was not to be established as a great power forever. Its idolatry must eventually be called into account. Bel (great god) is a title for Marduk, and Merodach is the Hebrew name for this Babylonian deity (or idol). Babylon’s false gods cannot save it. In fact the fall of a nation was also viewed as the defeat of its gods (51:44).

There are two themes in these chapters: (1) The theme is the Fall of Babylon (50:3 and 39-40), which takes place between 550-539 B.C.E. Babylon’s fall was as complete as that of Sodom and Gomorrah. The first threat came from the Medes, which may be a reference to Media, which was located northeast of Babylonia, but it may also be a reference to Persia. The author may be talking about a Medo-Persian coalition headed by Cyrus. (2) The second theme is The Return of the Exiles (50:4-5). The everlasting covenant will be restored, and the Exiles will return to Zion (Jerusalem). Israel is to flee from Babylon and return home to resume its covenant relationship with the Lord (51:6, 50-51).

Babylon had been one of the wonders of the ancient world. The city had a population of 100,000 and was spread over 500 acres. Two walls protected the city, and they were wide enough for chariots to drive on top of them. The outer wall was ten miles long. Inside the city was Nebuchadnezzar's famous palace, which contained the famous Hanging Gardens, which were one of the seven wonders of the ancient world. A reproduction of the Ishtar Gate, built by Nebuchadnezzar in 580 B.C.E. may be seen today in a museum in Berlin.¹

Although Babylon was captured in 539 B.C.E., the city was not totally destroyed. The comparison to Sodom and Gomorrah is not accurate. The city remained an important government and commercial center under the Persians and later under the Greeks. When Alexander's successor built a new capital a short distance from Babylon, the new city gradually attracted all of Babylon's population. The city was left in ruins, but not in the way these oracles proclaimed.²

HISTORICAL APPENDIX (52:1-34)

The closing chapter of Jeremiah is very similar to 2 Kings 24:18—25:30 and with Jeremiah 39:1-10; 40:7—43:7. The high points of the historical appendix are the destruction of the Temple and the three deportations of the people. Nebuchadnezzar's field general, Nebuzaradan, led the burning of the Temple, the Palace, and all of the great homes in Jerusalem. The army broke down the walls.

The three deportations that took place coincide with the following events (52:28-30):

The Surrender of Jehoiachin (598 B.C.E.)

This can be dated very accurately. The capture of Jerusalem took place on the second of Adar (March 16). According to Jeremiah, 3,023 persons were deported at this time.

The Suppression of Zedekiah's Revolt (587 B.C.E.)

There are a number of differences as to when this actually happened. Jeremiah 52:12 and 29 do not agree with one another. (See also 2 Kings 25:8.) Jeremiah's reference to the deportation in Jeremiah 52:29 is the chief reason why many date the destruction of Jerusalem in 587 B.C.E. instead of 586 B.C.E. In 587 B.C.E., 832 people were exiled from Jerusalem to Babylon.

¹Linda B. Hinton, *Jeremiah and Lamentations* (Nashville: The Graded Press, 1988), p. 129.

²*Ibid.*, p. 132.

Reprisals for Gedaliah's Assassination (582 B.C.E.)

At the time of Gedaliah's assassination, 745 people were exiled from Jerusalem to Babylon, which gives us a grand total of 4,600. This does not represent the total number of people deported. The number probably refers to adult or male heads of families. We also know that not everyone went to Babylon. Some became refugees in Egypt. Others were too poor to leave Judah, and stayed home.

The Book of Jeremiah, like most biblical books, ends on a positive note. Following the death of Nebuchadnezzar in 562 B.C.E., Evil-merodach releases Jehoiachin from prison (52:31), and makes him into a royal guest with a regular allowance for his needs. The Book of Jeremiah stops short of describing the return from Exile in 538 B.C.E. and the rebuilding of the Temple twenty-three years later. Nevertheless Jeremiah's vision of the future finds its realization in history.

THE FALL OF EVERY NATION

Every nation goes through a life cycle, from birth to death. Jeremiah had the unfortunate experience of living through the end of Judah's life cycle, but even as he experienced the death of his beloved nation, city, and Temple, he envisioned at the same time the birth of a new nation; but first, Babylon, which was once the instrument to destroy Judah, would have to be destroyed itself. "Therefore," according to Jeremiah 50:18-19, "thus says the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel: I am going to punish the king of Babylon and his land, as I punished the king of Assyria. I will restore Israel to its pasture, and it shall feed on Carmel and in Bashan, and on the hills of Ephraim and in Gilead its hunger shall be satisfied."

No nation can avoid moving through its life cycle, but why is it that some nations can look forward to restoration, while other nations vanish into extinction? The message of Jeremiah is clear. There are only two choices, which are symbolized by the names of three cities. Idolatry leads to immorality, which leads to death, symbolized by Sodom and Gomorrah; and faithfulness to God, leads to righteousness symbolized by Jerusalem. Those who recognize why their nation has fallen still have a chance to see it restored, but those who do not perceive the reason for their fall have no hope at all. Every nation will experience its death, but some nations will rise up out of the ashes.

Some of the nations described by Jeremiah died forever; others, like Egypt and Syria have survived. Survival itself is no indication that the nation has found its theological and moral bearings. God is extremely patient, hoping that every nation will build on the right foundation. It is not his intention to destroy any of his creation. He attempts to communicate with potential leaders and prophets in every nation, but unfortunately, his voice frequently falls on deaf ears.

Our nation will also fall. Some believe that it is in the process of dying in our own time, particularly as new nations excel economically in the world. This does not mean that they are more religious than are we. It simply means that we are moving towards the end of

our life cycle. It is inevitable. We cannot stay on top forever. No nation has every managed to prevent its own death. The best that can be hoped for is the emergence of leaders and prophets who can move us towards rebirth and restoration. This will require visions of Jerusalem, even as everything collapses around us.

LAMENTATIONS



Weeping for Jerusalem by *Gustave Doré* (1832-1883)

17. The Fall of Jerusalem

Lamentations 1:1—5:22

17. LAMENTATIONS: THE FALL OF JERUSALEM (1:—5:22)	
JERUSALEM IN MOURNING (1:1-22)	JERUSALEM IN RUINS (2:1-22)
<p>Laments <i>for</i> Jerusalem (1:1-11 & 17) (1:11)</p> <p>Laments <i>by</i> Jerusalem (1:12-16 & 18-22) (1:12)</p> <p>Starvation is rampant (1:11) No one to comfort (1:2, 9, 16, 17, 22)</p> <p style="text-align: center;"><i>Acrostic</i></p>	<p>Lament <i>for</i> Jerusalem (2:1-19)</p> <p>Lament <i>by</i> Jerusalem (2:20-22)</p> <p>Starvation is rampant (2:11-12) The Resort to cannibalism (2:20) The False Prophets (2:14)</p> <p style="text-align: center;"><i>Acrostic</i></p>
HOPE FOR THE FUTURE (3:1-66)	RESTITUTION TO COME (4:1-22)
<p>I (3:1-39 & 48-66) We (3:40-47)</p> <p>Heart of Lamentations (3:22-33)</p> <p>God allows the good and bad (3:38-40) The turning of the other cheek (3:30) The cry for vengeance (3:64-66)</p> <p style="text-align: center;"><i>Acrostic</i></p>	<p>Gold: The demise of the Temple (4:1)</p> <p>Cannibalism by compassionate women (4:10)</p> <p style="text-align: center;">The Causes:</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Kings (4:12) Prophets and Priests (4:13-14)</p> <p style="text-align: center;"><i>Acrostic</i></p>
PRAYER FOR RESTORATION (5:1-22)	
<p>The Lament (5:1-18) (5:15-16)</p>	<p>The Petition (5:19-22) (5:21)</p>
<div style="border: 1px solid black; display: inline-block; padding: 2px;"> <i>Not an Acrostic</i> </div>	

17. LAMENTATIONS: THE FALL OF JERUSALEM

Lamentations 1:1—5:22

ASSIGNMENTS				
Jerusalem in Mourning (1:1-22)	Jerusalem in Ruins (2:1-22)	Hope for the Future (3:1-66)	Restitution to Come (4:1-22)	Prayer for Restoration (5:1-22)

INTRODUCTION

The Title

The Hebrew title comes from the opening word *'ekah*, which means “How” or “Ah, how,” the usual beginning for a funeral dirge. The English title comes from the Talmud and rabbinic tradition, which gave it the title of “Lamentations.” This is also the title used in the Septuagint (Greek Version of the Jewish Scriptures) and the Latin Vulgate (Jerome’s Translation of the Bible).

The Author

Jeremiah has traditionally been named as the author on the basis of 2 Chronicles 35:25, but the lament mentioned in that passage has to do with the death of Josiah and not the desolation of Jerusalem. Although the Greek versions of Jewish Scripture name Jeremiah as the author, the Hebrew versions leave the author as anonymous. The weight falls on the side of an anonymous author. The whole style and content of Lamentations is different from Jeremiah's prophecies. It has been suggested that there is more than one author, but whatever the case, it is generally agreed that whoever is writing is speaking as an eye-witness to the destruction of Jerusalem by the Babylonian army in 587 B.C.E.

The Date

Since we are dealing with an eyewitness account, the book was probably written within a decade of 587 B.C.E.

The Purpose

These five chapters make up an eloquent statement of Israel's response to its downfall. The defeat under the Babylonian military might was more than a disaster for the nation. It had to be interpreted theologically. Without God's consent, it could not have happened; therefore, God must have turned them over to their enemies. Judah's own idolatry and disobedience of the Law would have been the reasons.

Lamentations is more than a description of the destruction of Jerusalem. It is also a description of the emotional, psychological, and religious feelings of the Jewish people over their loss. It probes these feelings for the theological lessons to be learned.

The five chapters, which follow, were composed for public reading on special days of fasting and mourning. This can be detected by observing the way in which the verses move between the first and third persons in their literary structure. Lamentations was read during the month of Ab (July/August) as a way of remembering the destruction of Solomon's Temple in 587 B.C.E. The traditional date would have been the 9th of Ab. Later the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 C.E. was included in Jewish services of remembrance. The Jews chanted the verses of the Lamentations. Roman Catholics read from Lamentations on the last three days of Holy Week as they reflect upon the suffering of Jesus.

The Structure

The five chapters are actually five poems or funeral dirges. Four of them are written as acrostic poems. An acrostic poem begins each verse with a new letter of the Hebrew alphabet. This is not evident in the English translation. Only chapter 5 is neither an acrostic nor a funeral dirge in its structure, but it does have twenty-two verses, the number of letters in the Hebrew alphabet. Chapter 3 is an acrostic, but it contains three verses for each letter of the alphabet. Instead of having twenty-two verses, it has sixty-six. The acrostic structure is used to aid in memorization and to illustrate completeness. The imagery of A to Z is a way of illustrating such completeness.

Another book of the Bible containing many laments is the Book of Psalms. Such literature contains the following parts:

1. A description of the situation
2. A confession of sin
3. A request for God's action
4. An affirmation of faith in God
5. A call to praise God

The Outline

It is difficult to give names to each of the chapters, but here is an attempt.

(1:1-22)	(2:1-22)	(3:1-66)	(4:1-22)	(5:1-22)
Jerusalem in Mourning	Jerusalem in Ruins	Hope for the Future	Restitution to Come	Prayer for Restoration

JERUSALEM IN MOURNING (1:1-22)

Jerusalem is described as a widow who has lost everything. Lamentations 1:1-11 and 17 are verses written in the third person and are laments over Jerusalem (Zion), while Lamentations 1:12-16 and 18-22 are in the first person and are laments by Jerusalem (Zion). It must be remembered that Jerusalem is more than a place or a group of buildings, as special as they might be. Jerusalem is a powerful symbol of a people who have entered into a covenant with God.

Jerusalem is now compared to a widow who has lost her children, who can no longer come to her religious feasts. “She has no one to comfort her.” (Lamentations 1:2, 9, 16, 17, 21) Her people who were not killed were either carried off into exile or are struggling merely to exist. Starvation is rampant in the city (Lamentations 1:11). There is nothing left for her to do but mourn her loss, confess her sins, and turn to her God.

JERUSALEM IN RUINS (2:1-22)

Lamentations 2:1-19 is the poet’s lament, while Lamentations 2:20-22 moves into the first person and represents Jerusalem’s lament. What has happened to Jerusalem is no mere military disaster. God seems to have acted in a way contrary to his character and purpose. This throws Israel into a crisis of faith. No one can offer comfort, not even God; and the enemy rejoices.

The situation is desperate. Starvation threatens everyone and some turn to cannibalism to survive (Lamentations 2:11-12 and 20). While it is easy to blame the enemy, or even God, they are not the ones who led the people astray. Those responsible are their own prophets, who lied to them, and those who believed those lies (Lamentations 2:14). There were of course prophets who told the truth, but the people preferred to hear what they wanted to hear. Israel’s only hope now lies in its courage to confess its sin and turn back to the God it has spurned.

HOPE FOR THE FUTURE (3:1-66)

The third chapter is not a funeral dirge, but a lament and song of confidence concerning the future. It is three times as long as the other chapters in Lamentations. For this reason,

it can be called an acrostic in three parts. Three verses are related to each Hebrew letter of the alphabet.

Some scholars have raised questions about the movement from “I” to “We” in this chapter, and have concluded that it is the work of more than one author. The verses in which we find “we” dominant are 40 to 47. What does this mean? Do we have both an individual lament (the “I” verses) and a communal lament (the “We” verses)? Some scholars say, “No!” They see “I” as a collective term, and insist that there is no inconsistency in the chapter.

As the author expresses his distress over the fall of Jerusalem and the exile of God’s people, he begins by questioning God with some of the imagery we find in the Book of Job. He concludes that hope can be seen in God’s past faithfulness to his people. The fact that they survived the disaster at all is a sign of hope. All that has happened is viewed as punishment for sin. The solution is to examine very carefully what has happened in the past, repent of any disobedience, and trust completely in God. Even as God has acted in “judgment” he will act in “redemption.” (3:38-40)

What is really depressing is the loss of the Sanctuary. In the past one sought the Lord by going to the Sanctuary, but now the Sanctuary has been destroyed. How does one seek the Lord? The basis of certainty and trust lies not in the Sanctuary, but in God’s “hesed” (steadfast love). This is described in Lamentations 3:22-23, which makes up the heart of the whole book of Lamentations. Even though God’s people have strayed from his “steadfast love,” he will hear their cries for help. When they call upon him, he will draw near to them and redeem them. Herein lies their hope for the future.

The closing words of vengeance may disturb us (3:64-66), but we must remember that this poet is in the depths of the pit (3:55). When you find yourself suffering, it is much easier to cry out for compassion for yourself than for your enemies, who put you there. The cry for vengeance is present, but so are the words of Jesus to turn the other cheek (3:30).

RESTITUTION TO COME (4:1-22)

In chapter four we again discover the funeral lament, which describes the results of the Babylonian siege and the destruction of the city of Jerusalem. The “gold” refers to the destruction of the Temple (4:1). “The Sons of Zion” refers to the “people of Judah.” The immediate result of the siege was a famine (4:3-5) in which even the most compassionate of mothers killed and ate their own children (4:9-10). All this came upon them because of their disbelief and idolatry. Their Kings did not believe (4:12) and their prophets and priests became like “moral lepers” (4:13-16).

Although Edom gloats, its time is coming, for its actions towards Judah have been treacherous. As Edom experiences judgment for its sins, joy will be restored to Judah. All this means that God is in control of history and sin will be punished. This creates hope for the Exiles who only have to repent and turn to Yahweh for complete restitution.

PRAYER FOR RESTORATION (5:1-22)

The final chapter of Lamentations consists of twenty-two verses, but it is not an acrostic. The verses are not related to the Hebrew alphabet.

The lament is divided into two parts: (1) a lament, and (2) a petition. The Lament is found in 5:1-18, which describes the loss of the nation's status with the imagery of the loss of the crown (5:16). The petition is found in 5:19-22 where the writer concludes with a prayer for restoration on the basis of God's enduring throne and reign (5:19, 21).

In some Hebrew manuscripts, verse 21 is repeated after verse 22. Synagogue readings also follow this pattern. The purpose is to make Lamentations end with hope rather than despair. This is the intention of the prayer of petition.

GREAT IS THY FAITHFULNESS

Two hymns have been inspired by Lamentations 3:22-23. They are *Great is Thy Faithfulness* and *Morning has Broken*. Both of these hymns are very positive, depending upon God in both nature and history. This seems strange in a book of Lamentations about the fall and destruction of Jerusalem, when things got so bad that even compassionate women resorted to cannibalism simply to survive (4:10). In spite of all the gloom and doom, at the heart of this book is one of the most beautiful passages in the Bible: "The steadfast love of the LORD never ceases, his mercies never come to an end; they are new every morning; great is your faithfulness." How can this be?

Two principles are at work here. The first is that dawn always follows the darkest hour, and; the second was expressed by Helen Keller when she said, "Keep your face to the sunshine and you cannot see the shadow." The author of Lamentations knew that the sun would shine again and even in his darkest hour, he saw a vision of it. The purpose of the lamentation is to recognize where their sins have taken them and turn towards the light of God, allowing the shadows to disappear. If God can be relied upon in nature, certainly, he can be relied upon in history. As day follows night, so will restoration follow collapse.

We grow most in adversity. If we never had to face it, we would grow complacent and arrogant. This does not mean that God sends adversity just to make us grow, but he does allow it to come upon us. "Our ancestors sinned;" says Lamentations 5:7, "they are no more, and we bear their iniquities." Human suffering is not always related to the sinners. Sin has an effect far beyond those who commit it; besides, no one is free of sin and its awful consequence—spiritual death. Even the righteous must suffer as a result of someone else's sin. If anyone deserved not to bear the consequences of sin, it was Jesus; yet, he bore the full weight of it as he went through the experience of the cross. Without the suffering of the cross, there would be no joy in the resurrection. Without the judgment of God on Israel's idolatry and the Old Jerusalem, there would be no restoration of Israel and the New Jerusalem. Night and judgment are inevitable, but so are the dawn and salvation. No one can hold back the dawn, for it penetrates the darkness. According to John 1:5, "The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it." The

darkness will never overcome it, so if we keep our eyes fixed on the light, the shadows will fall behind us.

EZEKIEL



Ezekiel by Gustave Doré (1832-1883)

18. The Call

Ezekiel 1:1—3:27

18. EZEKIEL: THE CALL (1:1—3:27)

THE VISION IN THE STORM (1:1-28a)	AN IMPOSSIBLE TASK (1:28b—2:7)			
<p align="center">30th Year (1:1) July 31, 593 (1:2) Four Cherubim (1:4-5)</p> <div style="text-align: center;"> <p>Eagle (Ninib)</p> <table border="1" style="margin: auto;"> <tr> <td style="text-align: center; vertical-align: middle;">Ox (Marduk)</td> <td style="text-align: center; vertical-align: middle;">1:10</td> <td style="text-align: center; vertical-align: middle;">Lion (Nergal)</td> </tr> </table> <p>Man (Nabu)</p> </div> <p>Wheels in Wheels: Mobility in any Direction Feet and Wings: Mobility Eyes within Wheels: Intelligence</p>	Ox (Marduk)	1:10	Lion (Nergal)	<p align="center">The Son of Man (2:1) [93 Times]</p> <hr/> <p align="center">The Rebellious Nation (2:3-7)</p>
Ox (Marduk)	1:10	Lion (Nergal)		
EATING THE SCROLL (2:8—3:3)	MISSION TO TEL ABIB (3:4-27)			
<p align="center">Words on both Sides of the Scroll (2:10)</p>	<p align="center">Tel Abib means “Mound of Flood” Near Nippur on the Chebar Canal (3:15)</p>			
<p align="center">Sweet as Honey (3:3)</p> <p align="center">Compare with... Jeremiah 15:16 Revelation 10:9</p>	<p align="center">Called to be a Watchman (3:7-9)</p> <p align="center">Compare with... Isaiah 6:9-12 Jeremiah 1:17-19</p> <hr/> <p align="center">The Loss of Speech (3:26)</p>			

18. EZEKIEL: THE CALL

Ezekiel 1:1—3:27

ASSIGNMENTS			
The Vision in the Storm (1:1-28a)	An Impossible Task (1:28b—2:7)	Eating the Scroll (2:8—3:3)	Mission to Tel Abib (3:4-27)

INTRODUCTION

The Person of Ezekiel

Ezekiel was a member of one of Judah's aristocratic priestly families. In training for the priesthood, he was looking forward to service in the Temple—like his father before him—when he was exiled to Babylon in the same group as King Jehoiachin (597 B.C.E.). Others who were exiled at the same time were statesmen, soldiers, and craftsmen (2 Kings 24:14); and as tragic as it was for them, it was even more tragic for Ezekiel. Exile in Babylon removed him from Jerusalem and the Temple (the city and house of God), and that meant the end of all his hopes and dreams as a priest.

Five years after Ezekiel was exiled, he was called by God to become a prophet (593 B.C.E.). He was probably in his mid-twenties at the time and it is very likely that he heard the prophecies of Jeremiah, his older contemporary. His call would have come to him five years later when he would have been about thirty. The call was accompanied by a vivid vision. Ezekiel was far more visual, and used much more imagery, than any of the other prophets; his prophecy merges into apocalypticism. The Book closest to Ezekiel's spirit is Revelation, which borrows many of his images. This makes reading it difficult for the modern reader, but one must become acquainted with Ezekiel if one wants to understand Revelation.

The Message of Ezekiel

The message of Ezekiel was directed at the people of Judah and the exiles in Babylonia. Those who live in Jerusalem and Judah are to prepare for the fall and destruction of Jerusalem and the Temple; those who are in exile are to repent and get ready for the restoration of the New Jerusalem and the New Temple.

Ezekiel calls his readers to a personal vision of a God who deals with cultures, societies, and individuals. He writes for the most part in the first person, carefully organizing and dating every prophecy, even to the month and day. His message comes very close to that of Jeremiah, whom he probably heard as a young man. Several themes can be discerned: (1) God works in history, (2) Israel has been sinful (idolatrous), (3) Judgment is certain, (4) Individuals are responsible, and (5) Restoration lies in the future.

Four visions make up the core of Ezekiel’s message. They are as follows:

1. The glory in the storm cloud. (1-3)
2. The eating of the scroll (2:8—3:3),
which was held in Yahweh’s hand (8:1b-2)
3. The destruction of Jerusalem. (9)
4. The restoration of the Nation. (37:7-10)

The message is a synthesis of terrestrial and celestial images stating confidence that God is holy and just. Proof of that can be found in his judgment and eventual restoration of his people.

The Setting

Ezekiel is the prophet of the Exile, and as such, he writes from one of the exilic towns not far from Babylon to those who like himself have been exiled from their homeland; but he also writes to those who have not yet been exiled, who still live in Jerusalem. He warns them that the nation will suffer a humiliating defeat and that Jerusalem and the Temple will be destroyed. His prophecies span a period of time from July of 593 (1:1-2) to April of 571 B.C.E. (29:17). The decisive event in that period of course was the capture and destruction of Jerusalem in 587 C.E. His wife was killed in that event.

The Chronology

The chronology is very detailed, but Ezekiel’s work was added to and edited by his disciples and successors. As a result much of the text suffered in the transmission and has become very difficult to interpret. Josephus thought that they were letters written by Ezekiel to the people in Judah, but we have no records that support this idea. It is possible that they were carried back informally by his disciples.

(1-3)	(4-24)	(25-32)	(33-39)	(40-48)
The Preparation of the Prophet	Prophecies against Jerusalem	Prophecies against the Nations	Promises of Restoration	The Vision of a New Temple

THE VISION IN THE STORM (1:1-28a)

“The thirtieth year” is a bit of a puzzle. It could either be referring to Ezekiel’s “age” or the number of “years following his call.” It probably refers to his age. If it does, the date of his call was July 31, 593 B.C.E.; but if it refers to the number of years following his call, then we have the year in which the Book of Ezekiel was written down. That year would have been 563 B.C.E.

Most scholars think that it refers to Ezekiel’s age. Thirty would have been the age at which a priest would have been ordained. Ezekiel had been studying for the priesthood and was taken into Exile before his ordination. Ordination in Exile seemed pointless. A priest’s duties were in the Temple. In Exile the priesthood as a profession was pointless. In this context God calls Ezekiel to become a prophet.

The call came to Ezekiel on a plain near Chebar, a canal that ran southeast from the Euphrates just north of Babylon. The canal ran through Nippur and rejoined the Euphrates near Erech. Ezekiel lived and worked among the Jewish Exiles there. King Jehoiachin was also living in this area.

Ezekiel’s vision of God comes during an electrical storm. He saw a chariot with a throne above it. The chariot had wheels within wheels, which symbolized mobility in any direction. Other symbols of mobility were the feet (1:7) and the wings (1:11-12, 24). The eyes within the wheels symbolized intelligence. In the chariot were four cherubim. Cherubim had been placed above the mercy seat on the Ark of the Covenant (Exodus 25:18ff). They stood wing-tip to wing-tip, and from in their midst came fire and lightning. Each of them had four faces, one human, one of a lion, one of an ox, and one of an eagle. The human face was in the front, the lion’s to the right, the ox’s to the left, and the eagle’s to the rear. Ezekiel’s vision is probably related to the four leading deities of Babylon, who were Nabu, whose human face was known as the revealer; Nergal, who was the lion-faced god of the nether-world and plagues; Marduk, who was the leading Babylonian deity with the face of an ox; and Ninib, who had the face of an eagle and was the god of hunting and war. John used this same imagery in the Book of Revelation (Revelation 4:7). Cherubim were considered guardians of God’s throne, so they symbolized strength. Ezekiel saw the glory of God in the storm clouds that day. God was calling him to be a prophet.

What did this chariot with a throne mean? Ezekiel wanted to enter the priesthood, but the work of a priest took place within the Temple. In this vision the throne has mobility, which means that God is as present in Babylon as He is in Jerusalem. While Ezekiel may not be able to be a traditional priest, God still has work for him to do, the work of a prophet.

THE IMPOSSIBLE TASK (1:28b—2:7)

Ezekiel is referred to as the “Son of Man,” a term which is used for him ninety-three times. This was also Jesus’ favorite term for himself, but the intended meaning is very

different. The term is also used in Daniel 7:13-14, and there it is used in the same way as Jesus used it. It has a divine reference for Jesus and means the same as the “Son of God,” but for Ezekiel, it has only a human reference. It means “human being,” or one who is dependent upon the infinite power and glory of God. This same God calls Ezekiel to an impossible task because the people are so rebellious (2:5). Their rebelliousness makes his task similar to sitting on scorpions.

EATING THE SCROLL (2:8—3:3)

What was a metaphor to Jeremiah (15:16) became a vision for Ezekiel. (Compare also with Zechariah 5:1-4 and Revelation 10:8-10.) In this vision Ezekiel is told to eat a scroll with words on both sides. This was unusual. Most scrolls contained writing only on one side. The implication here is that this scroll is saturated with the word of God. The actual eating of the scroll symbolizes Ezekiel’s acceptance of the divine commission and the filling of his stomach symbolizes that he has totally assimilated the Lord’s words into himself. The scroll is sweet because he has eaten God’s own word. Any bitterness has to do with the people’s rejection of it (Revelation 10:9).

THE MISSION TO TEL ABIB (3:4-15)

This mission is to be as difficult as that given to Isaiah (6:9-12) and Jeremiah (1:17-19). Ezekiel is not sent to a foreign people, but to his own people who have settled in Tel Abib, a Jewish settlement near Nippur, not far from the Chebar canal. The name of the settlement is derived from the Babylonian word Til Abubi, which means “mound of the flood (deluge).” This word also has some similarity to the modern Israeli city of Tel Aviv, which means “hill of grain.” Abib and Aviv are the same word in Hebrew.

THE WATCHMAN OR SENTINEL (3:16-21)

The title of “watchman” was given to true prophets of God. Such a title was also mentioned in Jeremiah 6:17. The watchman is only responsible for faithfully declaring God’s message. He is not responsible for how the people respond to it. These are the two basic principles of anyone’s ministry. The believer’s only responsibility is to faithfully share God’s message with others. The hearer alone is responsible for accepting or rejecting that message.

THE DUMBNESS OF EZEKIEL (3:22-27)

The Spirit of God now strikes Ezekiel dumb. He is instructed not to speak until the Lord gives him something to say. This takes place in the plain (valley), that is, in the southern Tigris-Euphrates valley. Was Ezekiel’s dumbness self-imposed or was it indeed a loss of speech? One cannot be sure. His dumbness may have been an inability to speak of anything but the doom of Judah and Jerusalem, for it lasted only until news reached him concerning the Fall of Jerusalem (24:26-27; 33:21-22), or seven days. Following the Fall of Jerusalem, Ezekiel’s message became one of hope.

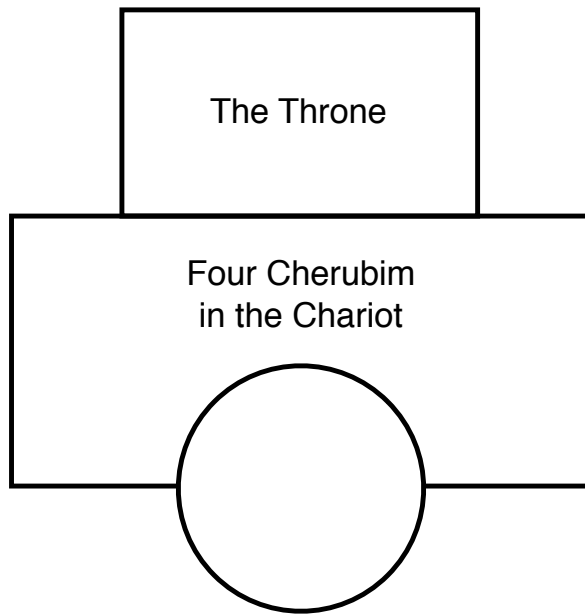
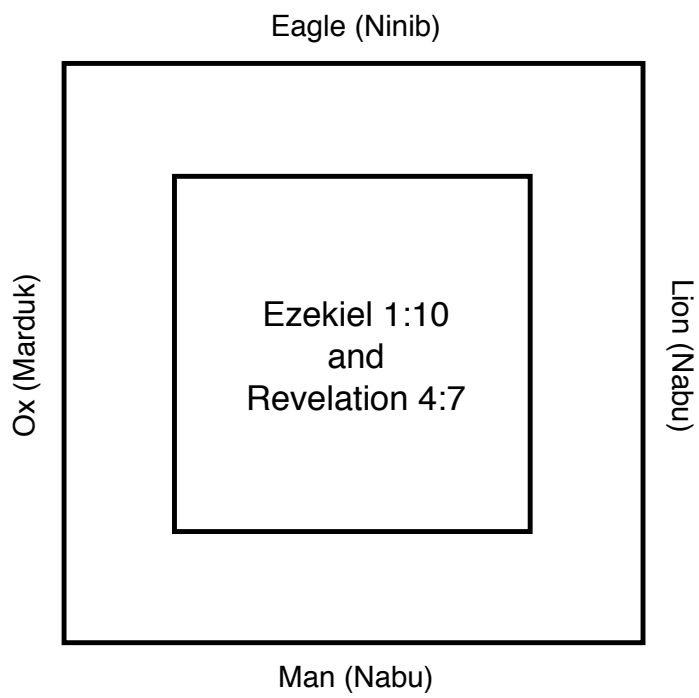
CHANGING VOCATIONS

Ezekiel grew up thinking that God was calling him into the priesthood, which meant that he would be performing priestly duties in and around the Temple in Jerusalem. One can just imagine how he felt when in 597 B.C.E. he was exiled to Babylon. In 593 B.C.E. God called him to become a prophet. The mission given to Ezekiel would be as difficult as it was for Isaiah and Jeremiah; maybe, it was to be even more difficult. Ezekiel was expected to prophesy before, during, and after the destruction of Jerusalem. He had to adjust to changing his primary vocation from priest to prophet. Prophets were not as well liked as priests.

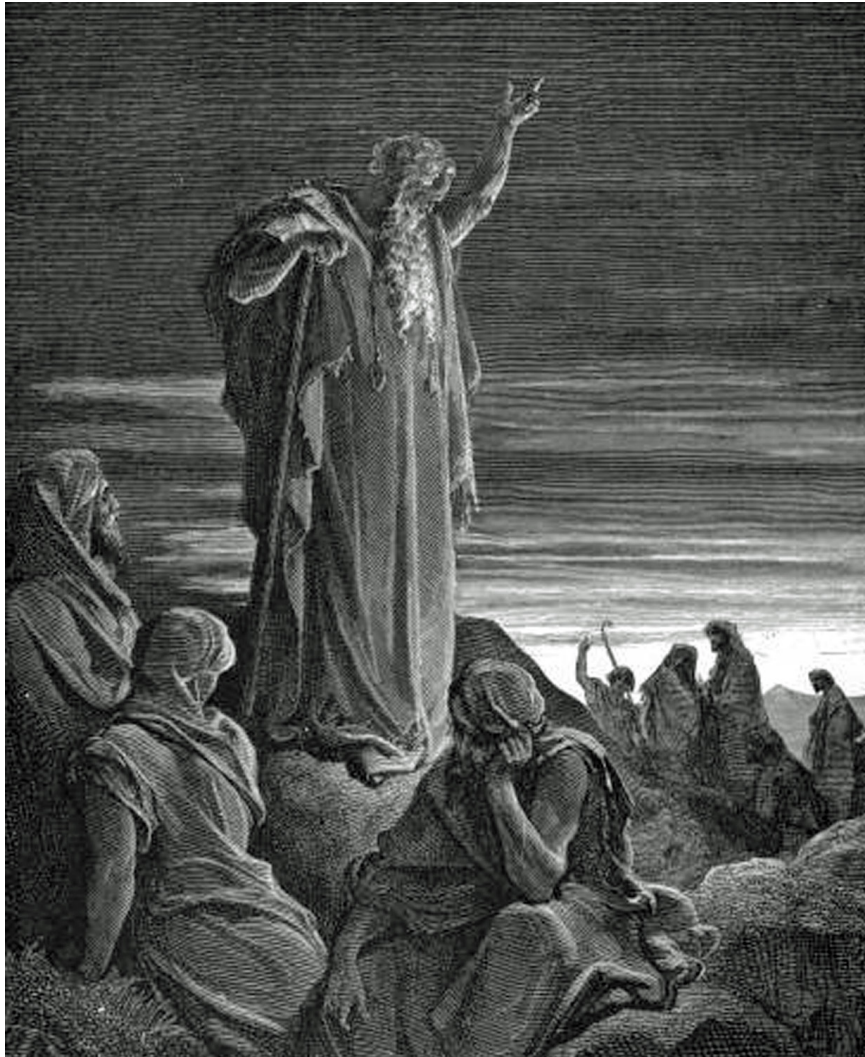
Many of us have had to adapt to a new calling even while pursuing another vocation. Jesus was a carpenter as well as an itinerant preacher. Paul was both a tentmaker and a Pharisee when God called him to be a missionary. I was a machinist when I felt called into the ministry. I did not enter the ministry because I did not like working as a machinist. In fact, I hope there are machines in heaven. I liked working in a factory more than working outside. I have always preferred oil and grease to dirt. I believe that Ezekiel always preferred the work of a priest to the mission of a prophet, but God called him into a prophetic ministry where he had to proclaim some bad news and some good news. That's the work of a prophet.

One of the major lessons we can learn from Ezekiel is that God does not only exist in the Temple or the Church. In one of Ezekiel's earliest visions, God leaves the Temple before it is destroyed. Those who live in Jerusalem or in Babylon must find God elsewhere, for he has forsaken the Temple. This eventually led to the development of the Synagogue and then the Church, where God's presence was and is celebrated through the reading and interpretation of Scripture, Prayer, and Singing. This in no way meant that God was only present in a Synagogue or Church, anymore than it meant that God was only present in the Temple. According to Ezekiel's first vision, the throne of God is mobile. Both Jesus and Paul proclaimed God's presence where two or three are gathered together and that we have become Temples of the Living God.¹

¹ See Matthew 18:20 and 2 Corinthians 6:16.



EZEKIEL



Ezekiel by *Gustave Doré* (1832-1883)

19. Against Jerusalem

Ezekiel 4:1 – 11:25

19. EZEKIEL: AGAINST JERUSALEM

Ezekiel 4:1 — 11:25

ASSIGNMENTS			
Enactment of the Siege (4:1 — 5:17)	Announcement of Doom (6:1 — 7:27)	The Temple Vision (8:1 — 9:11)	Departure from the Temple (10:1 — 11:25)

ENACTMENT OF THE SIEGE (4:1 — 5:17)

Having been called by God to become a prophet, Ezekiel now begins his prophetic work. The first thing he does is to act out four of his prophecies to illustrate what will happen to Jerusalem.

The Siege Works (4:1-3)

In Ezekiel's first enactment he builds a toy siege works against a clay brick or tablet, with an image of Jerusalem drawn upon it. This is to illustrate the coming siege against the city.

The Bearing of Sin (4:4-8)

Ezekiel is to take upon himself the guilt or sin of the nation. This is symbolized by lying on his left side for 390 days and on his right side for 40 days.

The Septuagint (Greek Scriptures) has 190 days on his left side and the discrepancy cannot be explained. Neither can we explain with certainty what these numbers mean. If we count the Fall of Samaria (722 B.C.E.) to the return of the Exiles (538 B.C.E.) we get 184 years, and if we count the Fall of Judah (587 B.C.E.) to the return of the Exiles (538 B.C.E.) we get 49 years. This scheme, if rounded off, follows the Greek translation of the account; but it does not explain the 390 days that we find in the Hebrew translation.

Another suggestion relates it to the 430 years in Egypt (Exodus 12:40), but this number must be reached by adding the 390 days to the 40 days to obtain 430. This would be symbolic of the length of time that the Exiles would have to be punished, but this cannot be taken literally. Other variations suggest that the 390 years refers to that period of time from Solomon's unfaithfulness to the fall of Jerusalem with the 40 years being the long

reign of the wicked Manasseh prior to his repentance. I personally think that the Septuagint account makes the most sense within this context.

The Starvation Rations (4:9-17)

The rations that God permits Ezekiel to have, symbolize the desperate conditions in Jerusalem during the coming siege. The “scarce” and “impure” food, illustrate the desperateness of the situation. To symbolize this Ezekiel could only take eight ounces (20 shekels) of bread (4:10) and one pint of water (1/6th part of a hin) a day (4:11).

Ezekiel’s resists and God changes his instructions slightly. The bread may be baked over cow’s dung instead of human dung (4:15).

The Three Fates of God’s People (5:1-17)

Ezekiel cut his hair and his beard with a sharp sword, symbolizing the three fates of God’s people with his hair (5:2 and 12). The first one-third of his hair was burned up to symbolize **death by pestilence (plague) and famine** during the siege. The second one-third of his hair was chopped up with a sword to symbolize those persons who would be **killed by the sword** as they defended Jerusalem. The final one-third of his hair was scattered to the wind to symbolize **the dispersment of the people**, but even then, God would pursue them and kill them.

All of the above was to take place because of the people’s idolatry and wickedness (5:9). Things would become so desperate that the people would resort to cannibalism (Deuteronomy 28:53; Jeremiah 19:9; Lamentations 2:20; and Zechariah 11:9)

ANNOUNCEMENT OF DOOM (6:1—7:27)

The acted out message is now reinforced with the spoken word about the high places and the end time. Destruction must come in order to prove that God is God and the idols contain no power whatsoever.

The High Places (6:1-14)

Ezekiel attacks the “high places” which had previously been condemned and shut down by Josiah, but revived following Josiah’s death. The “high places” were local open-air sanctuaries built on the hilltops, which contained altars, incense altars, and idols. The incense altars were made of burnt clay and stood about two feet high and contained inscriptions of animal figures and Canaanite gods. The Hebrew word Ezekiel uses to describe the idols means “dung pellets.” It is a derisive term which he uses 38 times. Elsewhere in the Old Testament, this term is used only nine times.

The people also worshiped Jahweh there, but not exclusively. The danger of idolatry was always greater on the “high places.” This is why Ezekiel rails against them. When the end

comes, he says, the idolaters may flee to the “high places,” but they will be cut down there and throughout the entire land. This is to prove that Jahweh is the Lord (6:13).

The End Time (7:1-27)

Jahweh is a God of Mercy and Justice. While his mercy spared the people before, his patience has finally run out. The day of reckoning has to come. Ezekiel is only referring to the day of doom for Judah, and is not prophesying about the end of history (7:1). When the end time comes, an economic collapse (7:12-13) will accompany it. The people have oppressed one another and a just God cannot ignore that.

The reference to the “king” and “prince” is Ezekiel’s recognition of Jehoiachin as the true king and Zedekiah as a mere prince; but both of them, along with all the people, will tremble before the Lord. The purpose of divine judgment is to make the people aware of just who the Lord is (7:27) and to demonstrate his power over idolatry, which has so engrossed the people of Judah.

VISIONS IN JERUSALEM (8:1—11:25)

The Temple Vision (8:1-18)

On September 17/18, 592 B.C.E., while the elders of the Jewish community were gathered at Ezekiel’s house, he was carried from Tel-Abib to Jerusalem in a vision. John, in the Book of Revelation, had a similar experience, but was carried away in the Spirit. Ezekiel is taken to the Temple, where he moves deeper and deeper into the Temple, where only the priest is allowed. What he sees in the Temple deals a deathblow to those who were counting on the Temple to protect Jerusalem. This vision explains why God’s judgment against the nation must come.

The first thing that he sees is the “Image of Jealousy.” (8:5-6) This is an image of the Canaanite goddess Asherah/Astarte, who had been placed there in the days of Manasseh; but in the days of Josiah, it had been removed (2 Kings 23:6). Someone put it back.

Next Ezekiel sees 70 Israelite leaders, including Jaazaniah, worshiping images of animals and reptiles (8:7-12). Jaazaniah was the son of Josiah’s Secretary of State and should have known better. His brother, Ahikam, was Jeremiah’s personal friend. All these people are caught standing there with smoke rising from their incense burners. This kind of worship was very similar to the worship of Osiris. The purpose of such worship was to assure worshipers of a happy after-life.

As Ezekiel moves deeper into the Temple, he runs across some women weeping over the death of Tammuz (8:13-14). Tammuz was a Sumerian fertility god who died with the old year and rose again in the spring. This god was later identified with Hadad or Baal, who died in the dry season and revived with the coming of the rains (Zechariah 12:11).

The final vision in the Temple is that of 25 men who stand with their backs to the Most Holy Place as they bow down to the rising sun (8:15-16). The Temple was constructed facing the east so that the sun would send its rays through the open doors of the porch, then on into the Holy Place and finally shine into the Most Holy Place. For orthodox Jews, there was a very practical reason for this. It symbolized the entry of Yahweh into the Temple and enabled them to date the spring and fall festivals. This was not what it was symbolizing for these 25 men. They turned their back on the Most Holy Place and the presence of God and bowed down to the sun god. This became a symbol not of faithfulness to Yahweh, but of religious syncretism.

Ezekiel's vision of the Temple illustrates that evil has not only penetrated the entire nation, but it has penetrated into the heart of the Temple itself. This gets symbolized with their putting a branch into their nose. This would be similar to "turning one's nose up" at God. Such is an insult and offense to God, who in spite of it, manages to still be present (8:4), but who no longer listens to their prayers (8:18).

Punishment of the Guilty (9:1-11)

Before judgment begins, God's people are marked. A scribe appears to mark the foreheads of those who have opposed the abomination going on in the Temple and in society (9:4). They are to be protected from the coming destruction and death. The mark was an "X" or the last letter of the Hebrew alphabet (tau). The "X" was sometimes used as a man's signature, as was the case in Job 31:35; but here it clearly represents God's signature. The same is true in Revelation 7:2-4 and 14:1, where God's people are to be protected.

Six men (angels) with weapons in their hands are to punish the guilty, beginning with those who have tolerated idolatry in the Temple itself (9:5-6). These are the 25 men with their backs to the Temple, and their faces toward the east, worshiping the sun (8:16). Judgment begins with those who worked in the Temple, closest to the presence of God. They are without excuse.

Departure from the Temple (10:1-22)

A man clothed in linen was commanded to scatter burning coals over the city of Jerusalem (10:2), symbolizing the coming destruction of the city. Before the destruction could take place, however, the glory of the Lord would depart from the Temple. That is what this chapter is about, although the actual departure does not take place until the next chapter (11:22-23).

The chariot, the four cherubim, and the glory of God prepare to depart from the Temple. With the departure of the glory of God, the way is paved for the fires of judgment. There seems to be some hesitation at the east gate, which is the main processional gate, as God pauses for a moment prior to forsaking his sanctuary; but due to the desecration of the Temple through pagan rites and superficial worship, his departure is necessary. His people are no longer worshiping him. All he can do is leave (10:19).

Each of the cherubim has four faces, that of a cherub, a man, a lion, and an eagle. What is missing here is the face of an ox (10:14). Cherubim were similar to statues of human headed bulls or lions that frequently stood guard at the entrances to Mesopotamian temples and palaces. In the Old Testament their main function was to guard the tree of life (Genesis 3:24) and the Ark of the Covenant (Exodus 25:18-22).

Judgment and Promise (11:1-25)

Ezekiel is taken to the east gate where he is told to prophesy. Twenty-five men, two of whom are Jaazaniah and Pelatiah, are accused of giving wicked counsel to the city. Jaazaniah and Pelatiah are unknown except for their role in these verses. All we know is that they were from aristocratic families. The wicked counsel they gave was to support Zedekiah's pro-Egyptian policy against Nebuchadnezzar. They were prophesying peace and advising people to continue with their daily routines (11:3).

The cooking pot symbolizes the nations source of sustenance and the meat refers to the elite members of society. Ezekiel turns the imagery around and says that God will make the city into a Cauldron (cooking pot), but the meat of the city will be the righteous dead or those persecuted by these false prophets. In turn their persecutors will be driven out to die. When Pelatiah dies, Ezekiel asks God whether he will destroy the whole remnant of Israel. The answer is, "No," (See 11:13ff.) but the remnant will come from the exiles. God will create a "new heart" and a "new spirit" in them, and they will return to Jerusalem, where God will re-establish his covenant with them (11:17-20). With this future promise, the glory of the Lord leaves, and was last seen above the Mount of Olives (mountain on the east side of Jerusalem). In light of the people's idolatry, nothing else could be done. God was not being worshiped, and so he had no choice but to leave the city to its own self-destruction.

Ezekiel is returned to Chaldea to share his vision with the exiles. For them this is a message of sadness and hope. Jerusalem and their beloved Temple will be destroyed, but the remnant will come from them. Meanwhile they can worship God where they are, for he is their sanctuary (11:16).

WHEN GOD LEAVES, WHO MOVED?

Two brief passages sum up what takes place in this lesson. They are Ezekiel 10:18-19 and 11:22-23:

Then the glory of the LORD went out from the threshold of the house and stopped above the cherubim. The cherubim lifted up their wings and rose up from the earth in my sight as they went out with the wheels beside them. They stopped at the entrance of the east gate of the house of the LORD; and the glory of the God of Israel was above them.

Then the cherubim lifted up their wings, with the wheels beside them; and the glory of the God of Israel was above them. And the glory of the LORD ascended from the middle of the city, and stopped on the mountain east of the city.

The Spirit of God had departed from the Temple and from the city of Jerusalem. There was some hesitation over the east gate (golden gate), but the idolatry of the people gave no reason for the Spirit to return. So the Spirit departed, allowing Jerusalem and its Temple to be conquered. The people, according to Ezekiel 8:16, had turned their backs on God and bowed to the sun. They involved themselves in idolatry.

The practical implication of Ezekiel's vision is that the Spirit of God will leave when it is rejected. John Wesley understood this about the Methodist movement.

I am not afraid that the people called Methodists should ever cease to exist either in Europe or America. But I am afraid, lest they should only exist as a dead sect, having the form of religion without power. And this undoubtedly will be the case, unless they hold fast...the doctrine, spirit, and discipline with which they first set out.

No building or movement has any assurance that the Spirit of God is somehow tied to it. The east gate is now sealed off, but even that cannot contain the Spirit of God, nor can making a movement into an institutional Church. The Spirit of God goes where it is welcome. This does not mean that God is impatient. A whole parade of prophets warned Israel and Judah, as have reformers. God only leaves when all hope of reform or renewal disappears.

When God leaves, the first question we must ask ourselves is, "Who really moved?" Things go wrong when we try to organize our lives, church, or nation around our own self-interests. If we do not want God at the center of things, he will leave, but we are the ones who pushed him out. He will hang around for a while, but no one stays where they are not wanted.

Jesus tried to show us how to open the door to God's presence. His patience is illustrated in how long he tolerated a lukewarm church in Laodicea. Even to those who turned away from him, he held out the invitation in Revelation 3:20, "Listen! I am standing at the door, knocking; if you hear my voice and open the door, I will come in to you and eat with you, and you with me." Once he returns to an individual or church, there is an accompanying responsibility, which we call the Great Commission. "Go," says Jesus in Matthew 28:19-20, "therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age." As long as we respond to God's mission, the Spirit will never leave us; but if we decide other things are more important, we must ask the question, "Who left whom?"

EZEKIEL



Ezekiel by Gustave Doré (1832-1883)

20. Jerusalem's Downfall

Ezekiel 12:1—24:27

20. EZEKIEL: JERUSALEM'S DOWNFALL (12:1 – 24:27)		
WARNINGS (12:1 – 14:23)		
The Exile Enacted (12:1-20) (12:5 & 12-13)	True and False Prophets (12:21 – 13:23)	Idolatry and Responsibility (14:1-23) Responsibility (14:14) Four Judgments (14:21)
	Proverb of False Prophets (12:22) Proverb of True Prophets (12:23)	
	False Prophets (13:10-12) False Prophetess (13:17-18)	
PARABLES (15:1 – 17:24)		
Parable of the Vine (15:1-8) (15:2-3 and 7) The Wood The Fruit	Bride and Harlot (16:1-63) Illegitimate Birth (16:5b-7) Bride (16:8) Harlot (16:15 & 31-32) Sins: Idolatry (16:15ff) Child Sacrifice (16:20-21) Sacred Prostitution (16:23-25) Comparison to Samaria and Sodom (16:46-47) God's Plan (16:60-61)	Eagles and the Cedar (17:1-24) The Eagles The Great Eagle (17:3-4) (Nebuchadrezzar) The Other Eagle (17:7) (Psammetichus II or Hophra) Topmost Shoot (Jehoiachin) The Cedar (17:22-24) The Shoot (17:22-23)
INDIVIDUAL RESPONSIBILITY (18:1-32)		
Person who sins will die (18:1-4) Old Proverb (18:2b) New Proverb (18:4b)	Three Illustrations (18:5-20) The Righteous Person (18:5-9) The Wicked Son of Righteous Parents (18:10-13) The Righteous Son of Wicked Parents (8:14-18)	The Possibility of Change (18:21-32) (18:23 & 31-32)
LAMENTS ON THE ROYAL HOUSE (19:1-14)		
The Lioness and Her Cubs (19:1-9)		The Vine and Its Strongest Stem (19:10-14)
The Lioness is Judah		The Strongest Stem Jehoiachin <u>Zedekiah</u> (19:11-12)
First Cub (19:4) Jehoahaz	Second Cub (19:9) Jehoiachin <u>Zedekiah</u>	
THE FALL AND RISE OF ISRAEL (20:1-44)		
The Exodus 20:6-7)	August 14, 591 B.C.E. The Desert (20:10-13)	The Purge (20:38-40)

20. EZEKIEL: JERUSALEM'S DOWNFALL

Ezekiel 12:1—24:27

ASSIGNMENTS			
Prophecy and Idolatry (12:1—14:23)	Three Parables and Images (15:1—17:24)	Responsibility and Laments (18:1—20:44)	Judgment, Sin and the End (20:45—24:27)

THE EXILE ENACTED (12:1-20)

Ezekiel enacts the Exile by fleeing through a hole in the wall with his belongings. The question raised in this chapter is: “Where is he doing this?” Scholars are divided over whether this enactment is taking place in Jerusalem or Babylon. The sun-dried clay bricks, which would have been easy to remove, are common in Babylon, but they are not uncommon in Jerusalem. If it were in Jerusalem however, the city wall would not have been easy to dig through, so, many think he dug through the wall of his own house.

The “prince” (12:10) is clearly a reference to King Zedekiah, who later fled to Riblah, where he was blinded, and then taken to Babylon to die. Was this a prediction of the event or did Ezekiel write this in later? We cannot be certain. The main point of this section is that the downfall of Jerusalem is certain and the people, including the King, will be taken into Exile.

TRUE AND FALSE PROPHETS (12:21—13:23)

A popular proverb seems to have been passing around, which is quoted in Ezekiel 12:22: “The days are prolonged, and every vision comes to nothing.” Ezekiel is assured that this will change; therefore, according to Ezekiel 12:23, he is to tell the people, “The days are near, and the fulfillment of every vision.” God is in the process of acting to fulfill what his prophets have been saying. Time is running out.

People were losing faith in the true prophets, because nothing seemed to be happening. Delay caused disbelief (12:22). Ezekiel assures the people that the true prophets will be vindicated soon, that false prophets are those prophesying peace (13:10). Peace in the Hebrew sense means more than “freedom from attack.” It also has to do with “prosperity and well-being.” In a time like this, there cannot be any peace and those who say that there is are to be considered false prophets. They are trying to whitewash mud-bricked

walls. Such has no protection against the coming storm (13:10-12). Everything will be washed away.

Both male and female false prophets abounded. The female prophets were sorceresses and mediums, who claimed power through magic bands and veils. They will all be proven wrong in the end, for Jerusalem is doomed.

INTERNAL IDOLATRY AND PERSONAL RESPONSIBILITY (14:1-23)

The end is certain because of the idolatry of the people; idolatry is not just bowing to wooden and stone objects. There is idolatry in the heart as well and this will bring about the nation's downfall (14:3). No one may replace God with idols and still expect to experience God's favor and consider him or herself to be part of God's people. Idolatry means emphatically, "alienation from God."

Even a few righteous persons such as Noah, Daniel (Dan'el), and Job cannot prevent the national disaster that lies ahead. Righteous persons such as these may be saved, but the nation will still fall. This is stated twice (14:14 and 20).

The man named Daniel is not the biblical Daniel. The spelling of this Daniel in the Hebrew is slightly different; a better English spelling might be "Dan'el." This Daniel is Canaanite. Information about him was discovered in the diggings of the ancient city of Ugarit in northern Syria. He lived in the fifteenth century B.C.E. The following story was discovered about him. He was a good and wise King who offered prayers and sacrifices for his son Aqhat. When Aqhat reached maturity, Kothar, the god of craftsmanship, gave him a magic bow. Anath, the goddess of war, tried to buy it from him, but he refused to sell it. Anath responded by having him killed. It was through the prayers of Daniel that the god, Baal, intervened before the supreme god El, who restored Aqhat to life. It was Daniel's righteousness that saved his son, but according to Ezekiel, it will not work this time. Even a Noah or a Job, who made similar sacrifices on behalf of their sons, would have no effect. Idolatry will bring the nation down.

THE PARABLE OF THE VINE (15:1-8)

Israel is the vine cultivated by God. The other nations are like big trees. The big trees are valued for their wood, but the vine is only valued for its fruit. The reference in 15:3 to the wood of the vine makes very clear that the vine's wood has little value in itself. It is only good as fuel to be burned. The lack of fruit makes the vine worthless, just as Israel's sin makes it worthless. The nation, like the wood of the vine, is only good for burning. This is probably a reference to the burning of Jerusalem by fire.

This Parable of the Vine was given sometime between 592 and 587 B.C.E. Although Jerusalem had been charred already in 597 B.C.E., next time God's consuming fire will destroy it. The people need not think that they can escape the fire of God's wrath, for it (the fire) will catch up with them and consume them (15:7). (See also 19:14.) In 587 B.C.E. Jerusalem was burned to the ground. It is worth noting that Jesus uses the imagery

of the vine in talking about the new Israel (John 15:1-11). He also expects fruit from the vine. Without that fruit, even the New Israel is also doomed.

JERUSALEM AS A BRIDE AND HARLOT (16:1-63)

Jerusalem is described as a woman in the various stages of her life: the main stages being her marriage and then her unfaithfulness. Unlike some of the other great cities of the world, a god did not found Jerusalem. Jerusalem was the result of the Amorite and Hittite movements, an illegitimate child. The Amorites symbolize her father and the Hittites her mother (16:3 and 45). Their sins were primarily idolatry, child sacrifice, and sacred prostitution. Although Jerusalem was illegitimate, the Lord took her as his bride. The marriage took place at the time of David's capture of Jerusalem (2 Samuel 5:6-9). The spreading of Yahweh's skirt over Israel alludes to the pitching of the sacred tent over the Ark of the Covenant (16:8). The Lord enters into a covenant of marriage with Israel, but Israel is not faithful to the covenant.

Jerusalem commits adultery and becomes a harlot. Her main sins are those of her parents, idolatry (16:15-19), child sacrifice (16:20-21), and sacred prostitution (16:23-25). Even the attempt to establish alliances with foreign nations is described as infidelity (16:26-29). Jerusalem stoops to an all-time low as she goes beyond the ordinary harlot, who does it for a living. Instead of taking a fee, Israel pays (16:30-34). The paying of the fee symbolizes the annual payment of tribute to foreign nations. What makes things worse is that Israel plays one lover over against another (entangling foreign alliances), which finally gets her into trouble. Her own lovers turn against her in the form of invasions. The first invasion is described in 16:37-39 (2 Kings 24:1-16) and the second in 16:40-41 (2 Kings 25:1-21).

Even Jerusalem's sister cities were less sinful. Her sins made her worse than her elder sister, Samaria, and her younger sister, Sodom (16:46ff.). Sodom's sins were only pride, self-sufficiency, and the neglect of the poor (16:49-50). Jerusalem's sins go way beyond that; nevertheless, the Lord is willing to restore all three cities (16:55, 60-61). So great is his steadfast love and mercy. His whole purpose in punishing the cities is their eventual restoration into a new covenant, which is described by Jeremiah in 12:14-17 and 31:31-34.

THE PARABLE OF THE EAGLES AND THE CEDAR (17:1-24)

The Eagles (17:1-21)

The parable itself is told in verses 1-10 and an interpretation is given in verses 11-21. The "great eagle" is Nebuchadrezzar of Babylon and the "other eagle" is Psammetichus II (594-588 B.C.E.) or possibly Hophra of Egypt. Ezekiel, like Jeremiah before him, feels that Judah should submit to Nebuchadrezzar (Jeremiah 27:6-7). The "top of the cedar" is the house of David and the "topmost of the young twigs" is King Jehoiachin. The "young twigs," including Jehoiachin are to be taken off to the "city of merchants" (Babylon). Then a "seed" is planted, from which a "low spreading vine" grows. The "low spreading

vine” symbolizes Judah as a subservient state; and the seed is Zedekiah, the new King who is supposed to be subservient to Babylon. Instead, Zedekiah turns towards the other eagle (Egypt); but this will not help, for the “east wind” (Nebuchadrezzar) will still conquer.

The Cedar (17:22-24)

In the end God will pluck a “sprig” or “branch” (the Messiah) from the lofty top of the cedar and plant it upon the high and lofty mountain (Zion or Jerusalem). (See also Ezekiel 31:9, Jeremiah 23:5-6; Zechariah 3:8; and Micah 4:1.) This is a Messianic reference. God will give birth to a mighty ruler who will influence all nations. In the end it is not the maneuverings of kings that counts, but God’s own decisive action in history.

INDIVIDUAL RESPONSIBILITY (18:1-32)

There are three primary parts in this chapter. They have to do with individual responsibility, some illustrative material, and a call to choose the path of faith and righteousness.

The Person who sins will die (18:1-4)

The people were blaming their plight on the sins of their fathers; but Ezekiel, like Jeremiah before him, would not allow them to do this. He rejected the familiar proverb, which had also been familiar to Jeremiah (Jeremiah 31:29). Each person is responsible for his or her own sins. “Soul” in these verses is used in the sense of a “person” and is not a reference to a “spiritual body.”

Three Illustrations (18:5-20)

Three illustrations are given which run through three generations; but at the same time, they present the following three different situations:

The Righteous Person will Live (18:5-9)

The person who does not yield to idolatry and immorality will live. This is true for everyone regardless of what their parents have done or not done. Righteousness and wickedness are not passed on except by influence. We are all responsible for what we do and we cannot blame our actions on our parents.

The Wicked Son of a Righteous Parent will die (18: 10-13)

Righteousness cannot be passed on to the children except by influence. The righteousness of the parents does not help justify their children.

The Righteous Son of a Wicked Parent will Live (18:14-18)

Wickedness cannot be passed on to one's son except by influence. The wickedness of the parents does not bring a death sentence on the children. Every generation is called upon to reject the sins of its ancestors.

The Possibility of Change (18:21-32)

God is not so cruel as to punish one generation for the sins of another, nor is he willing to allow the sins of the former generation as an excuse for present evil. Every person must be responsible for his or her own sins.

While the sins of one generation do affect subsequent generations (Exodus 20:5), they do so in terms of environment and sociology. The past might direct the present, but it does not control it. Neither wickedness nor righteousness is transferred, even though both may be influential. There is no necessary relationship and God does not delight in judging anyone. It is his hope that people will change and turn away from wickedness and death and choose righteousness and life. For those who do this, in spite of their background, there is the possibility of change and hope.

LAMENTS ON THE ROYAL HOUSE (19:1-14)

The Lioness and her Cubs (19:1-9)

The lioness symbolizes Judah and her cubs symbolize two of Judah's kings. The first cub was Jehoahaz, the immediate successor of Josiah, who reigned for three short months, and then was carried off to Egypt by Neco in 609 B.C.E. The second cub was Jehoiachin, who also reigned for three short months, and then was exiled to Babylon.

The Vine and its Strongest Stem (19:10-14)

The vine symbolizes Judah and its strongest stem symbolizes either Jehoiachin or Zedekiah. Zedekiah is the more likely choice. He was stripped by the east wind (Nebuchadrezzar) and transplanted (exiled) to Babylon. With Zedekiah the Davidic dynasty came to terrible defeat. The ruin of the vine was thus brought about through the arrogance of its strongest stem.

THE FALL AND RISE OF ISRAEL (20:1-44)

On August 14, 591 B.C.E. the elders approached Ezekiel to make an inquiry of the Lord. At this point Ezekiel lays aside the imagery he has been using and gets right to the point. He retells their story by going back to Egypt, where the people worshiped the idols of Egypt. He then proceeds to compare that to what happened as they entered the so-called Promised Land, where they worshiped the Canaanite idols, forsaking their statutes and their sabbath. Instead of worshiping Yahweh, they preferred worshiping idols of wood and stone.

Israel has rebelled repeatedly, but Yahweh has always spared the nation. God’s patience is now running out. The present judgment is necessary to purge the nation of its unclean people, after which Yahweh will restore a purified remnant. The remnant will return to “again” worship on Mount Zion (in Jerusalem). Although it is necessary for the nation to rise, it is just as necessary for a remnant to rise again. This remnant is called the New Israel; in the New Testament, the New Israel is the Church of Jesus Christ.

FIRE AND SWORD (20:45 – 21:32)		
Fire (20:46-47)	Sword (21:1-5)	
Jerusalem and Rabbah (21:19-20)		
THE SINS OF JERUSALEM (22:1-31)		
Idolatry and Murder (22:3)	Refined like Silver (22:22)	Leaders and People (22:25-28 & 30)
THE PARABLE OF TWO SISTERS (23:1-49)		
Oholah (Samaria) <i>“Her Tabernacle” or “She who has a Tent”</i> (23:4) She lusted for Assyria (23:9)	Oholibah (Jerusalem) <i>“My Tabernacle is in her” or “My Tent is in Her”</i> (23:11-12 & 14-15) She lusted for Assyria and Babylon	
The Sins of the Two Sisters (23:36-39)		
THE BEGINNING OF THE END (24:1-27)		
The Rusting Cooking Pot (24:1-14) (24:6)	The Death of Ezekiel’s Wife (24:15-27) (24:16)	
<div style="border: 1px solid black; display: inline-block; padding: 2px;">January 15, 588 B.C.</div>		
The Destruction of Jerusalem (24:21-22) and Ezekiel’s Speech Restored (24:26-27)		

FIRE AND SWORD (20:45 – 21:32)

Judgment is described in terms of fire and sword. It will sweep across the land like a forest fire. This imagery would have been understood better in Ezekiel’s time than in the present. The land was more wooded then than it is today (20:46), although efforts are being made today to plant trees.

The symbol of the sword is one of the four conventional instruments of God’s judgment. The other three are famine, wild beasts, and pestilence. The sword of God is in the hands of the King of Babylon (21:19), Nebuchadrezzar. Ammon will be included in the destruction, because the Ammonites are seen as co-conspirators. God will destroy the

capital cities (21:20) of both Judah (Jerusalem) and Ammon (Rabbah). The modern name for Rabbah is Amman, the capital of modern Jordan.

Zedekiah is criticized for his claim to kingship. The *turban* and *crown* are symbols of his revolt against Babylon, who recognized only Jehoiachin as king and they had him in exile. At best Zedekiah could only be considered a prince.

THE SINS OF JERUSALEM (22:1-31)

Many sins are given as the reason for Jerusalem's downfall, but "idolatry" and "murder" are the most serious (22:3). Other sins listed are injustice/oppression, violence, slander, adultery/fornication, and extortion. Violation of the Sabbath is also noted, but that is related to idolatry.

Judah's sins have been committed on every level of society, so there is little hope. Princes, priests, prophets, the nobility, and the common people have all been accused. To be purified, everyone must be punished. They must go through the rigorous refining process of precious metal.

THE PARABLE OF TWO SISTERS (23:1-49)

The two sisters represent Samaria and Jerusalem. Oholah, which means "her tabernacle" or "she who has a tent" symbolizes Samaria, whose temple or temples are illegitimate. She was the first to be unfaithful and has been punished for her unfaithfulness. She fell to the Assyrians in 722 B.C.E. Oholibah, which means "my tabernacle is in her" or "my tent is in her" symbolizes Jerusalem, who possesses the true temple, but this only makes her adultery worse than her sister's.

Both sisters have acted like common whores. Their appetite for their lovers (the pagan gods and foreign nations) is disgusting. They have run in turn to Egypt and Assyria when they should have been trusting in God. Their harlotry consists in making alliances with foreign nations instead of relying upon God alone for protection. Jerusalem will share her sister city's fate. She will suffer shame and destruction at the hands of her latest lover, a punishment she truly deserves. The Babylonians/Chaldeans, along with their Aramean mercenaries (Pekod, Shoa and Koa) will conquer her and take her into exile. Her main sins are similar to her sister's, idolatry and child sacrifice (23:37-39). Punishment is to remind her who the Lord God is (23:39).

THE BEGINNING OF THE END (24:1-27)

The beginning of the end begins on January 15, 588 B.C.E. (24:1-2) On that day Ezekiel is to prophesy by means of the cooking pot and by not mourning the loss of his own wife.

The Rusty Cooking Pot (24:1-14)

The cooking pot (Jerusalem) is to be boiled on top of a pile of wood (siege equipment). The pot contains meat (citizens), which is to be burned to a crisp and emptied (after the siege). The bones are to be burned, which would be a reference to the sacking of the city.

The corrosion of the pot refers to Jerusalem's bloody past. This pot would have been very different from those used by the common people. It would have been made of copper (bronze) and would have been one of the vessels used in the Temple. Because it was corroded with rust, it would have been cast off. The rust, because of the metal from which it was made, would have been green; and as such, it would not really have been symbolic of blood. The purpose of judgment however was to purify the people, but it would all be in vain, for the rust cannot be burned away.

The Death of Ezekiel's Wife (24:15-27)

In the siege, Ezekiel's wife, "the delight of his eyes" would die suddenly. He was not to mourn or weep over her. This was to be a symbol to the people that the loss of their temple, city, and nation would be a numbing experience. When word finally reached Ezekiel, through a fugitive who managed to escape, his speech would be restored and he would begin to proclaim a new and positive message. All this was necessary to make the people aware of who the Lord "is."

Just where was Ezekiel's wife at the time of her death? Did she die in Jerusalem as the siege began or did she die later when the Temple was burned? In Ezekiel 24:21 her death is compared to the destruction of the sanctuary, but this does this mean that her death took place at the same time? The only conclusion I can draw is that while she died in the siege on Jerusalem, there is insufficient evidence to help us determine just when her death occurred. I would like to know what she was doing in Jerusalem while Ezekiel was in Tel-Abib, but no explanation is given.

ACCEPTING RESPONSIBILITY

In Jeremiah 31:29, Jeremiah predicted that a Proverb that had originated in Jerusalem would finally come to an end. Ezekiel declared the same Proverb dead. It should no longer be quoted in Israel, for it is invalid. That Proverb is quoted in Ezekiel 18:2: "The parents have eaten sour grapes, and the children's teeth are set on edge?" In Ezekiel 18:4, the prophet establishes the Proverb to replace it: "...it is only the person who sins that shall die."

When a nation, or an individual, begins to fall apart, there is always the tendency to blame someone or something. Ezekiel refuses to allow blame to be cast. In chapter eighteen, he suggests three examples. He begins with the righteous person, who will live. Then he asks, "Suppose such a man has a son who is his exact opposite? Will he live?" The answer is, "No." He then carries the illustration a step farther. "Suppose the unrighteous man has a son, who then turns out good? Shall he live?" Ezekiel's answer is,

“Yes.” One cannot blame one’s parents for one’s own sin, nor can one rely upon one’s parents for their righteousness.

We all bear our own responsibility for evil and for good. In our time there has been a tendency to excuse immoral behavior, blaming it on others. Ezekiel refuses to allow us to do this. Anna Russell has written a little poem, which challenges such a notion.¹

At three I had a feeling of
 Ambivalence toward my brothers,
And so it follows naturally
 I poisoned all my lovers.
But now I’m happy; I have learned
 The lesson this has taught;
That everything I do that’s wrong
 Is someone else’s fault.

Whether we are talking about the collapse of our own life or the collapse of our national life together, we must begin with the acceptance of personal responsibility. No matter what our parents were like in the past, no matter what kind of environment we grew up in, in the final analysis, we have to accept responsibility for what we do individually and what we do together corporately.

There is however another side to personal responsibility. The world will become wicked when good people do nothing. Karl Menninger shares an excellent image on why it is necessary for good people to sound the warning when they perceive a dangerous situation:

If a dozen people are in a lifeboat and one of them discovers a leak near where he is sitting, is there any doubt as to his responsibility? Not for having made the hole, or for finding it, but for attempting to repair it! To ignore it or to keep silent about it is almost equivalent to having made it!²

We must stop giving excuses and begin accepting responsibility, not only for our personal lives, but also for our corporate life together. This includes both our religious and political lives.

¹Quoted in Karl Menninger, *Whatever Became of Sin?* (New York: Hawthorn Books, Inc., 1973), p. 181.

²*Ibid.*, p. 179.

EZEKIEL



Ezekiel by Gustave Doré (1832-1883)

21. Against Foreign Nations

Ezekiel 25:1–32:32

21. EZEKIEL: AGAINST FOREIGN NATIONS (25:1—32:32)			
ISRAEL'S CLOSEST NEIGHBORS (25:1-17)			
Ammon (25:1-7)	Moab (25:8-11)	Edom (25:12-14)	Philistia (25:15-17)
(25:3)	(25:10-11a)	25:13)	25:16)
<i>The People of the East (Arab Tribes) became the Nabatean Empire with their capital in Petra</i>			
PROPHECIES AGAINST TYRE (26:1—28:19)			
The Prophecy (26:1-21)	The Shipwreck (27:1-36)	The Lament (28:1-19)	
Four Prophecies (26:3, 7, 15, 19) "Thus says the Lord" (26:7-9)	East Wind = Nebuchadrezzar (27:26-27)	King Ithbaal II (Ithobal) (28:2-3 and 6-8)	
PROPHECIES AGAINST SIDON (28:20-26) (28:24)			
PROPHECIES AGAINST EGYPT (29:1—32:32)			
Against Pharaoh (29:1-16)	Booty for Nebuchadrezzar (29:17-21)	The Doom of Egypt (30:1-19)	
January 7, 587	April 26, 571		
Pharaoh Hophra compared to Leviathan (29:3-4 and 10-11)	The Booty (29:17-19) The Horn (29:21)	The Instrument (30:10-11) The Reason (30:13)	
Pharaoh's Broken Arm (30:20-26)	Parable of the Cedar (31:1-18)	Lament over Pharaoh (32:1-16)	
April 29, 587	June 21, 587	March 3, 585	
Both Arms (30:21-22)	Arrogance (31:18)	Lion or Monster (32:2-4)	
THE END OF EGYPT (32:17-32)			
	April 27, 586		
Assyria Elam	Meshech and Tubal Edom	Princes of the North (Sidon)	

21. EZEKIEL: AGAINST FOREIGN NATIONS

Ezekiel 25:1—32:32)

ASSIGNMENTS			
Closest Neighbors (25:1-17)	Tyre and Sidon (26:1—28:26)	Egypt (29:1—30:19)	Egypt (31:1—32:32)

Chapter 25 is the beginning of the second major part of the Book of Ezekiel. Everything prior to chapter 25 has to do with the prediction of Jerusalem’s downfall; everything following it has to do with the promise of hope for Jerusalem. The prophecies against the foreign nations can be viewed as elements of the nation’s hope. In the “before” (the downfall), the prophets concentrated primarily on Judah; but in this new focus on the “after,” we find a wider concern. They were conscious that God was Lord of the whole world and that no nation lies beyond the reach of his judgment. This is to be interpreted as “Good News” to the “faithful few” who respond positively to his lordship, even as everything seems to fall apart. These prophecies are directed first towards Ammon in the northeast; then, they swing southward around the Dead Sea, and finally they end up with Philistia on the coast. Standing on the heights in Jerusalem, one can visually see each of these territories with the naked eye.

ISRAEL’S CLOSEST NEIGHBORS (25:1-17)

Ezekiel begins with four of Israel’s closest neighbors and oldest enemies, all of whom took delight in the fall of Jerusalem. The four nations are Ammon (25:1-7), Moab (25:8-11), Edom (25:12-14), and Philistia (25:15-17). The people of the East overran Moab and Ammon..

The people of the East were Arab tribes, whose expansion into these nations and southern Judah produced the Nabatean Empire, whose capital became Petra.

The Cherethites (an alternate name for the Philistines or perhaps a specific Philistine tribe) were to be totally destroyed; in fact, they did disappear from history following the Maccabean period.

PROPHECIES AGAINST TYRE (26:1—28:19)

The word “Tyre” means “rock,” and refers to an ancient city located one-half mile offshore. The city boasted of a fine natural harbor and was known for its fine glassware and purple dye.

The Prophecy (26:1-21)

There might be a mistake in the opening verse, which dates this in the eleventh year of the exile, which would have been prior to the Fall of Jerusalem. The writer probably intended to say in the twelfth year of the exile (586 B.C.E.). This would make it consistent with the Septuagint (Greek Version of the Old Testament).

The prophecy itself is divided into four parts, each one beginning with the words: “Thus says the Lord God.” (26:3,7,15,19)

Tyre was so well positioned that it was extremely difficult to conquer. Although Nebuchdrezzar laid siege to the city within months after the Fall of Jerusalem, it took him thirteen years to finish the job. It was so difficult because it involved more than a land operation. It took a naval engagement as well.

Some scholars think that this chapter reflects a later writer’s knowledge of Alexander the Great’s conquering of Tyre in 332 B.C.E. Alexander’s strategy seems to be described here. He first captured the “daughters” (suburbs) of Tyre, which were located on the mainland. Then he used their demolished buildings to construct a narrow causeway to the Island of Tyre. This causeway was about 200 feet wide. This enabled him to take his siege weapons to Tyre and conquer the city within seven months. Following the Fall of Tyre, this causeway was expanded and today is more like a peninsula. The city has never been rebuilt and has indeed become a “bare rock” upon which the fishermen “spread their nets.” (26:4,5,14)

The Shipwreck of Tyre (27:1-36)

The city of Tyre is pictured allegorically as one of her own wealthy trading vessels. Verses 5-11 describe what the ship looks like, and verses 10-25 describe its trading partners. This is the best source of information for our understanding of ancient ships and trading. This however is not Ezekiel’s purpose. His purpose is described in verses 26 and 34, where he compares Tyre’s downfall to that of a shipwreck.

The *east wind* refers to Nebuchadnezzar, who will lead an attack on Tyre; if such a city as Tyre can fall, then it can also happen to anyone.

Lament for the King (28:1-19)

The King, Ithbaal II (or Ithobal) of Tyre will be brought down by his arrogance. Pride leads one to regard himself as a god and to ignore divine wisdom. Blinded by arrogance Tyre ignores the wisdom of its national hero, Danel (Daniel), who placed the nation in service of the gods, widows, and orphans. (See Ezekiel 14:14.) The King however does not exercise his wisdom; instead, he grasps divinity for himself. Ezekiel compares him to a cherub (angelic being), whose sin has caused him to be expelled from the Garden of Eden (28:13). As arrogance brought Adam and Eve down, it will bring him down too (28:2, 17). It will cast him into the Pit of Sheol (28:8).

PROPHECIES AGAINST SIDON (28:20-26)

Sidon was a trading partner with Tyre and a rebel against Babylon. Nebuchadrezzar will destroy it too. This famous Old Testament seaport was located approximately twenty miles north of Tyre in Lebanon. Both are small fishing-ports today. The charge made against Sidon was similar to that made against Tyre.

The condemnation of both cities was at the same time a message of hope for Israel; mainly because God's punishment of Israel's unreliable allies gets interpreted as salvation of his covenant people. God's holiness is manifested in the removal of a "brier" or "thorn" in his people's side. Both Tyre and Sidon had become a nuisance to Israel.

PROPHECIES AGAINST EGYPT (29:1—32:32)

Seven prophecies are given in the following chapters, most of which are very accurately dated.

Against Pharaoh (29:1-16)

The first prophecy can be dated on January 7, 587 B.C.E. It is clearly against Pharaoh Hophra (588-69), although Ezekiel does not say his name. Through this Pharaoh's arrogance, the whole nation is exposed to God's anger. When Nebuchadrezzar was laying siege to Jerusalem in 588 B.C.E., Hophra unsuccessfully tried to relieve Jerusalem from the Babylonian threat.

Ezekiel compares Hophra to Leviathan (Tannin) the great sea dragon, who had been subdued in creation, but constantly seemed to threaten to undo the work of God. This dragon was called Leviathan in Job 41, Psalm 74:14, and Isaiah 27:1; but in Job 9:13, Psalm 89:10, Isaiah 30:7, and 51:9-10 he was called Rahab. The name does not matter. We are talking about a sea dragon.

According to Ezekiel God will exercise his control over the dragon and his "fish" (29:4) and disperse them. The nation will lie in waste from Migdol in the Delta region to Syrene (modern Aswan) on the southern frontier of Ethiopia. This is like saying "from Dan to Beersheba" to describe all of Israel. All of Egypt is intended. Following the dispersion there will be a regathering at Pathros, but Egypt will never again enjoy the status of a great nation. The forty years symbolizes a long and difficult time and not a specific number of years.

Booty for Nebuchadrezzar (29:17-21)

This prophecy is described as Ezekiel's last dated prophecy. The date recorded was New Year's Day, April 26, 571 B.C.E. The content has to do with the booty, which Nebuchadrezzar will take out of Egypt. The thirteen year long siege of Tyre was disappointing in that there was no booty left. As compensation Nebuchadrezzar and his men will be allowed to take booty out of Egypt (29:18).

The “horn” in Ezekiel 29:21 is a reference to the power of Israel, which was expected to grow again. The Davidic line is to be reestablished (Psalm 132:17).

The Doom of Egypt (30:1-19)

This is the only one of the seven prophecies that is not dated. We do know that it took place prior to the Babylonian campaign against Egypt in 568/567 B.C.E., but no specific date can be given. The “Day of the Lord” (30:3 and Jeremiah 27:6) will come, and Nebuchadrezzar will be God’s instrument to usher it in (30:10b).

All of Egypt will be brought down along with its allies. Among those allies are named the “people of the land.” These would be the “covenant people,” or Jewish soldiers. Judgment against Egypt has to do with its wealth (30:10ff.) and its idols (30:13ff.).

Pharaoh’s Broken Arm (30:20-26)

This prophecy was dated April 29, 587 B.C.E. It describes a previous attempt on the part of Pharaoh Hophra to resist Nebuchadrezzar. The ability of Nebuchadrezzar to continue his seizure against Jerusalem is described here as the breaking of the Pharaoh’s arm. The citizens of Jerusalem hope that Hophra’s arm will heal and that he will return to relieve them of the Babylonian siege. Ezekiel gives no hope. He simply says that next time both arms of the Pharaoh will be broken (30:22 & 24). Not only shall Egypt fall; but, its citizens will be dispersed and scattered. They will be made aware of whom the Lord really is.

Parable of the Cedar (31:1-18)

This prophecy is dated on June 21, 587 B.C.E., one month before the fall of Jerusalem. Egypt, or Pharaoh, is compared to the tallest cedar. Its nourishment comes from the “deep,” which is a symbol of the sea monster (dragon or crocodile). This is a symbol of chaos. The fact that this tree grows taller than all the other trees in the garden makes it a symbol of arrogance (31:10-12). The tree will have to come down and be consigned to the “nether” world, the “Pit,” or “Sheol” (31:14-15); hence, it will end up with the other trees (kings) that have been cut down (31:18). Arrogance brings every king and nation down.

Lament Over Pharaoh (32:1-16)

This prophecy is dated on March 3, 585 B.C.E., which would have been after the Fall of Jerusalem. Although the Pharaoh (Hophra) thought of himself as a lion (the symbol of power), Ezekiel sees him as a sea monster. God will capture him in a net (32:2-3). (See also Ezekiel 29:3-5.)

The above imagery means that Hophra was flexing his muscles to take on Babylon, but Ezekiel claims that it will do him no good. The Day of the Lord will come for him as it did for Jerusalem and he will be crushed by Babylon.

The End of Egypt (32:17-32)

The date of this final prophecy is uncertain. Although it is incomplete in the Hebrew, it is dated in the Septuagint, April 27, 586.

This prophecy makes a fitting conclusion to the series of prophecies against foreign nations. Egypt will join all the other “evil” nations in Sheol, the Pit, or the Netherworld. The other nations present are listed as Assyria, Elam, Meshech, Tubal, Edom, Sidon, and the princes of the north (32:30). The princes of the north are the city-states located north of Palestine.

At first Sheol was not considered as a place of punishment, but here we seem to find this idea, which originally arose under Persian influence. Prior to such influences it only referred to an untimely death. There seems to be a distinction made here between those who are uncircumcised and those who died honorably, “the fallen warriors of long ago” or “the mighty men of old” (32:27). We do find some other passages that seem to hint at Sheol as a place of punishment; certainly, by New Testament times this was a common belief. Isaiah 24:21-22 contributes to the idea of Sheol as a prison for the wicked and 2 Peter 2:9 suggests that the dead will be resurrected for judgment.

WHEN OUR ENEMY FALLS

How should we respond to the collapse of our enemy, as individuals and as a nation? The recent collapse of the Soviet Union is an interesting case in point. We have interpreted the demise of the Soviet Union as victory for ourselves. “We have won the cold war,” is a statement I have heard more than once. I have not heard any of the leaders of the former Soviet Union admit to losing the cold war, but there is no question about it. We are gloating over our former enemies’ collapse and see it as a feather in our own cap.

A similar thing was happening in the nations that surrounded Judah. Without a question Judah had been considered their enemy and they were happy to see it collapse. This, however, was not the response God thought they should be making. Ezekiel proclaimed the feelings of God on the matter in Ezekiel 25:3-4:

Because you said, “Aha!” over my sanctuary when it was profaned, and over the land of Israel when it was made desolate, and over the house of Judah when it went into exile; therefore I am handing you over to the people of the East for a possession.

Ezekiel then proceeds to describe how each one of Judah’s enemies will collapse. Many of them would never recover. Out of Judah, on the other hand, would emerge a remnant, led by a new Messianic King. The horn, or power, of Judah would be restored (Ezekiel 29:21).

If Jesus taught us anything, he taught us that we do not have to win in this world. He taught us this by his own example as he moved steadfastly towards the cross. He could

have won. When Peter was willing to take on the enemy with a sword, Jesus told him to put his sword away. “Do you think that I cannot appeal to my Father,” he said in Matthew 26:53), “and he will at once send me more than twelve legions of angels?” Victory for him came on Easter Sunday, but it was not a political victory, at least not at that time.

The only victory that really counts is a spiritual one and we cannot win spiritual victories by ourselves. Only God grants spiritual victories. As a nation we are no closer to a spiritual victory than the people of the former Soviet Union. In fact, they may be closer. Their people understand what it has been like to deal with a government opposed to Christianity, that opposition has automatically forced people to think about their relationship to God and the Church. We have not had to think much about these things and our Churches may well be weaker than those in former Communist countries.

There is another kind of gloating we should not do and that is to rejoice over the fall of the televangelists, like Jimmy Baker and Jimmy Swaggart. It is easy to do, because they represented a growth in Christianity that we find wanting; but their fall does not give us any victories. Their fall injures the mainline churches as much as it does the Pentecostal churches to which they belonged, at least in the eyes of people outside the church, who do not know the differences. Their fall has not caused the mainline churches to grow.

Gloating over an enemy’s demise and defining it as your victory only leads to a kind of arrogance that will precede our own fall. If the foreign nations surrounding Judah could only have united together to stand against the domination of Babylon, maybe they would have succeeded; but they were so divided by their own rivalries that there was no chance of that. The same thing brought them down that eventually brought Babylon down— idolatry and arrogance. These twin evils will bring everyone and every nation down. Only the angels in heaven should rejoice, as they do in Revelation 18:2: “Fallen, fallen is Babylon the great! It has become a dwelling place of demons....” In the case of the former Soviet Union, it collapsed because its own leaders began to get rid of the demons. We can take a lesson from them and work at exorcising our own. We have them and some of them are expressing themselves when they rejoice in our winning the cold war. The same is true for individuals. All of the demons are not in the fallen televangelists. Some of them are also in us.

EZEKIEL



Ezekiel by Gustave Doré (1832-1883)

22. Israel's Restoration

Ezekiel 33:1 — 39:29

22. EZEKIEL: ISRAEL'S RESTORATION (33:1 – 39:29)			
THE WATCHMAN (33:1-20)			
The Prophet's Duty (33:1-9) (33:2-4)		The Hearer's Responsibility (33:10-20) (33:11 & 18-19)	
THE FALL OF JERUSALEM (33:21-33)			
Reported on January 19, 586 (33:21-22)		Validation of Ezekiel's ministry (33:32-33)	
THE SHEPHERDS OF ISRAEL (34:1-31)			
The Shepherds (34:1-10)		The Scattered Sheep (34:11-31)	
The Kings who ignored Josiah's Reforms (34:2b)		The Promise of a Messianic King (34:23-24)	
THE PROPHECY AGAINST EDOM (35:1-15) (35:2-3 & 10)			
THE MOUNTAINS OF ISRAEL (36:1-38) (36:8 & 25-28)			
THE VALLEY OF THE DRY BONES (37:1-28)			
Stage One (37:7-8) The Parts Connected	Stage Two (37:9-10) The Spirit Given	Stage Three (37:15-17) Israel and Judah Joined	Stage Three (37:24-28) The Messianic Covenant
GOG AND MAGOG (38:1 – 39:29)			
Genealogical Origin	Historical Origin	Symbolic Meaning	Apocalyptic Use
Japheth's Sons (Father of Indo-Europeans) <i>Genesis 10:2</i> Gomer Magog Madai Javan Tubal Meshech Tiras	Gyges of Lydia Asia Minor 670 B.C. Goshga or Gaga Sumerian god of darkness Alexander the Great Macedonia	<i>Ezekiel 38:2</i> Gog=Evil King Magog=Evil Nation <i>Revelation 20:8</i> Gog=Evil King Magog=Evil King	<i>Ezekiel 38:15-16</i> The Final Battle <i>Ezekiel 39:9</i> Burning the Weapons (7 Years) <i>Ezekiel 39:12</i> Burying the Dead (7 Months) <i>Ezekiel 39:17-20</i> The Sacrificial Feast <i>Rev. 19:17-18 & 20:8</i> <i>Ezekiel 39:25 & 29</i> Elimination of Evil

22. EZEKIEL: ISRAEL'S RESTORATION

Ezekiel 33:1—39:29

ASSIGNMENTS			
The Watchman and the Fall (33:1—34:31)	The Mountains of Edom and Israel (35:1—36:38)	The Valley of Dry Bones (37:1-28)	Gog and Magog (38:1—39:29)

THE WATCHMAN (33:1-20)

The Prophet's Duty (33:1-9)

A Watchman's duty is to blow the trumpet and sound a warning. God calls Ezekiel to be his watchman, which means that he must sound the warning or bear the guilt for his silence. He must warn the people of the impending doom, but he may also describe the restoration. There is some question as to whether Ezekiel is in Babylon or Jerusalem.

The Hearer's Responsibility (33:10-20)

God does not enjoy punishing the wicked (33:11), but at the same time, God must exercise justice. His kind of justice is to save the wicked, who turn to the Law for life, and to punish the good who have turned to wickedness. The point is that one's past life of evil can be cancelled and one's past life of good will not help if one turns away from God. The responsibility for reconciliation falls upon the individual, but reconciliation with God is not a matter of adding up one's good or evil deeds; establishing a relationship with the Lord is what matters.

THE FALL OF JERUSALEM (33:21-33)

The date has some problems connected to it. While January 19, 586 B.C.E. is given, the eleventh year should be read in verse 21 instead of the twelfth year. The twelfth year might have been recorded in that it probably took some time for news of the Fall of Jerusalem to come to the Exiles in Babylon.

The demolition of the Temple itself probably took place over a period of several days, during which time Ezekiel's wife was killed. News of the death of his wife might have

brought about his dumbness; but now, that the dumbness has left him, he has the ability to speak again.

With the destruction of Jerusalem and the Temple, one would think that people would repent, but instead, their response is that of looting (33:23-29). Those who listen to Ezekiel listen as one would listen to a popular singer of love songs, for entertainment. They pay no attention to his message, neither do they believe or act upon his words (33:30-33). While Ezekiel certainly proclaims the divine love of God, he is also a prophet of the justice of God. They have ignored such a message to their own peril. (See Jeremiah 5:12-13.)

THE SHEPHERDS OF ISRAEL (34:1-31)

The Shepherds (34:1-10)

The shepherds symbolize the Kings of Israel, who did not continue the reforms of Josiah. They permitted the resumption of pagan worship, particularly the worship in the “high places.” For this they were doomed.

The Scattered Sheep (34:11-31)

Without a good shepherd, the sheep scatter. Although they are endangered by the wild beasts, (Judah’s attackers), there is hope. This hope comes from God’s promise of a Messianic King (his servant David). (See 34:23-24.)

We not only see the promise of a restored monarchy, but also a return to a theocracy. What the Kings failed to do, God will do through his servant David (the Messiah). The restored Kingdom will consist of showers of blessings (34:26).

THE PROPHECY AGAINST EDMON (35:1-15)

A growing hatred of Edom emerged as the Edomites took possession of much of Southern Judah following its destruction under Nebuchadrezzar. Mount Seir is not a single peak, but a range or highlands rising south of the Dead Sea. The capital, Sela, was located in the midst of this land. Ezekiel’s prophecy indicated that Edom would become a desolate wasteland (35:3-4). The reason given is its greedy desire to possess or occupy the two nations, Israel and Judah (35:10). Compare this oracle against Edom with those found in Ezekiel 25:12-14; Jeremiah 49:17-22; and Obadiah 9-14.

The Edomites did take possession of most of Judah, but within three years its country lay desolate. Unlike Egypt, it was not to be restored. In New Testament times the most well known Idumean was Herod the Great, who became the ruler of all Palestine.

THE MOUNTAINS OF ISRAEL (36:1-38)

In the past the mountains of Israel became places where other gods were served. Altars and idols were constructed on top of the mountains. That these shrines were not torn down is part of the reason for the exile, but now people (other nations) are making fun of Israel's God. Therefore God will call forth a remnant and restore the mountains of Israel, but this time altars will not be built to foreign gods and idols on the mountaintops. God will not restore Israel because of Israel's goodness, but for his own reputation (36:22-24).

God will cleanse (36:25) the people and give them a new heart (36:26). The heart symbolized a person's total personality. This imagery was later used in the baptismal rituals of the Qumran community, which produced the Dead Sea Scrolls, and in the Christian Church itself. The new heart would turn people towards God's Law (36:27) and he would restore their land (36:28) and make them prosperous (36:29-30). The mountains of Israel, which had become desolate, would be turned into a Garden of Eden again (36:35). This has not yet happened, for only the Holy Spirit, and ultimately Christ, can create a new heart (2 Corinthians 5:17).

THE VALLEY OF THE DRY BONES (37:1-28)

The Valley of Dry bones symbolizes the death of the Nation, restoration symbolizes new life for the nation. The Valley or Plain was the location of one of the battles, in which, the nation had fought against the Chaldeans, and the bones were the remains of dead Israelite soldiers. They did not receive a proper burial, and so their bones lay in disgrace.

Ezekiel's vision takes place ten years after the demise of Judah and the deportation of its people into exile. The people in exile were without hope. It was as difficult to imagine the nation's restoration, as it was to imagine the restoration of bones to life. New life comes in two stages. In the first stage, the body is reshaped, with bones and flesh and skin coming together, but there is no spirit. In the second stage, the spirit is given, which is described as the "Ruah" (Spirit, Breath, Wind) of God (37:9). The "four winds" refers to God-ever-present (omnipresence), with the power to restore the life of persons and nations. By his breath he can give life to the nation. What Ezekiel promises is not individual resurrection, but the restoration of the nation (37:14).

The vision also includes the re-unification of a divided land along with the establishment of a United Israel, which will be ruled by one King. Symbolizing the re-unification of Israel and Judah, Ezekiel places two sticks together (37:15-17). The sticks symbolize Judah and Joseph (the ancestor of the two largest tribes). The ruler over the United Israel will be David, which really means a descendant of David (37:24-25). Under his leadership the nation will be restored. A new covenant of peace will be established (37:26) and God's sanctuary will be placed in the midst of his people (37:27-28). This has been taken by many to mean a rebuilding of the Temple. Certainly, this is what happened at the end of the Exile, but because no Messiah (Prince or King) established the new nation as described here, some more conservative scholars have suggested that this is yet to come. They see the establishment of Israel in 1948 as the restoration of the nation and

look for the rebuilding of the Temple in the future, after which the second coming of Jesus would occur.

GOG AND MAGOG (38:1—39:29)

Gog and Magog have been used in many different ways. Gog, the chief prince of Meshech and Tubal, came from the land of Magog. In Ezekiel he leads the evil forces, which rise up against Yahweh in a climactic battle. In Revelation 20:8, Magog, by some strange process, is no longer a country, but a fellow culprit with Gog in the Battle of Armageddon.

Many have tried to identify Gog in history. Magog, for example is identified as one of Japheth's sons, the others being Meshech, Tubal, and Gomer. Japheth, of course, was one of Noah's three sons. (See Genesis 10:2.) Other sources that have been used to identify Gog are as follows: (1) He might be Gyges, the founder of a great Kingdom, perhaps Lydia, in Asia Minor (670 B.C.E.), of which Croesus was the last ruler. The only evidence for this, however, is the similarity in the names. (2) The name might have been drawn from Goshga or Gaga, the Sumerian god of darkness. Here he would represent the evil darkness set against the light of God. (3) Another possibility that has been suggested is Alexander the Great, whose homeland, Macedonia, has been identified with the Magog of Genesis 10:2.

There has also been an attempt to identify Gog with an apocalyptic future. Although the Hebrew word for Gog, which means "chief," has no relationship to Russia, some have suggested that Gog refers to Russia and Meshech refers to Moscow. None of this can be proven.

When we look at Ezekiel's historical situation, the imagery refers to an attack from the north, where Israel's major enemies generally came from, but it is more than just from the north. Revelation 20:8, rightly interprets this as "the four corners of the earth." What Ezekiel pictures is "the ends of the earth" rising up against, Yahweh. These enemies included Persia, Cush, Put, Gomer, Togarmah, Sheba, Dedan, and Tarshish. These were the Kingdoms of the world, which would rise up against the Kingdom of God as established in a restored Israel; but according to Ezekiel, the attack was doomed to failure. None of this is to be understood as past or future literal history; rather, it involves the profound insight that ultimately the tension between good and evil must be resolved.

Ezekiel describes the events as follows:

1. Foretelling of the conflict (38:1-6)
2. The Attack on Israel (38:7-13)
3. Triumph of God (38:14-23)
4. Defeat of Gog (39:1-6)
5. Burning of the weapons (39:7-10)
6. Burial of the destroyed army (39:11-16)
7. Sacrifice of the mighty (39:17-20)

8. Glory of Yahweh (39:21-24)
9. Restoration of Israel (39:25-29)

So vast was Gog's army that it took seven years to burn all the weapons (39:9-10) and so many were killed that it would take seven months to clean up the mess (39:12). The number seven refers to perfection and completeness. The sacrificial feast which follows is difficult to understand, but is again referred to in Revelation 19:17-18. The fact that this last battle occurs just prior to Ezekiel's vision of the New Temple makes the imagery very useful to John as he describes the final battle instigated by Satan at the end of time (Revelation 20:8).

GRACE IN THE OLD TESTAMENT

Many of us write off the Old Testament as a book of judgment and insist that Grace can only be found in the New Testament. Jesus, we suggest, adds something new to our understanding of God. I would like to take issue with this commonly-held-suggestion. Jesus only makes clear what is already an Old Testament idea.

God's grace was operating when He delivered the Israelites from slavery in Egypt. He did not expect them to do anything prior to their deliverance and He gave them the Law only after they had been delivered and were safely in the Sinai Desert. The Commandments, delivered through Moses, are given to illustrate what it will take to remain free. At the same time the commandments contain a warning that disobedience will result in a new slavery. They did not learn the lessons of freedom and soon they found themselves enslaved in Babylon, where Ezekiel again points to the Grace of God.

In Ezekiel 33:11, the Lord speaks through the prophet, saying: "As I live...I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but that the wicked turn from their ways and live; turn back, turn back from your evil ways; for why will you die, O house of Israel?" He then goes on to describe the condition of Grace in Ezekiel 33:13-16)

Though I say to the righteous that they shall surely live, yet if they trust in their righteousness and commit iniquity, none of their righteous deeds shall be remembered; but in the iniquity that they have committed they shall die. Again, though I say to the wicked, "You shall surely die," yet if they turn from their sin and do what is lawful and right—if the wicked restore the pledge, give back what they have taken by robbery, and walk in the statutes of life, committing no iniquity—they shall surely live, they shall not die. None of the sins that they have committed shall be remembered against them; they have done what is lawful and right, they shall surely live.

God does not add up our good deeds and our bad deeds and judge us accordingly. What is important to him is that we turn to him and enter into a relationship with him. While we may call that turning repentance, it is God's Grace that nudges us.

When God reaches out to Israel, he does not do so because they among all the nations of the earth are most righteous, but because he loves them, as he loves all people. It is his nature to love. “It is not for your sake, O house of Israel,” says the Lord in Ezekiel 36:22, “that I am about to act, but for the sake of my holy name, which you have profaned among the nations to which you came.” God reaches out even to those who profane his name, in hopes that they will respond to him. They do not have to do anything to get him to reach out. That is his very nature, but they do have to be ready to respond to God’s initiative of Grace.

Whenever anyone responds, upon them, God pours his Grace and blessings. This is promised in the most important passage in the whole Book of Ezekiel—Ezekiel 36:25-28:

I will sprinkle clean water upon you, and you shall be clean from all your uncleannesses, and from all your idols I will cleanse you. A new heart I will give you, and a new spirit I will put within you; and I will remove from your body the heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh. I will put my spirit within you, and make you follow my statutes and be careful to observe my ordinances. Then you shall live in the land that I gave to your ancestors; and you shall be my people, and I will be your God.

Knowing that his people, like sheep, will need to be led, the Lord also promises a Shepherd King to lead them. That Shepherd King will come out of the House of David. Ezekiel 37:24-26 describes the new relationship that will exist between the Messiah and those who respond to him:

My servant David shall be king over them; and they shall all have one shepherd. They shall follow my ordinances and be careful to observe my statutes. They shall live in the land that I gave to my servant Jacob, in which your ancestors lived; they and their children and their children's children shall live there forever; and my servant David shall be their prince forever. I will make a covenant of peace with them; it shall be an everlasting covenant with them; and I will bless them and multiply them, and will set my sanctuary among them forevermore.

“Grace,” George Morris reminds us, “is the term we use to speak of God’s initiative, God’s going—before or ‘pre-venience’. Grace means the benevolent and merciful (and at the same time free and sovereign) love of God for people.”¹ This is certainly what God is doing throughout the Old Testament as he seeks people to respond to him, without expecting them to have performed more good deeds than bad ones. Even the God described in the Old Testament is first of all interested in calling people to enter into a relationship with him. That the Bible places the emphasis on the Jewish people does not mean that God was not trying to enter into a relationship with other people at the same time. The Bible is the Sacred History of the Jewish people, and that is precisely why it

¹George Morris, *The Mystery and Meaning of Christian Conversion* (Discipleship Resources: Nashville, 1981), p. 107.

focuses on them. They did not deserve God's grace any more than any other people, but some of them became aware of God's offer of Grace, and Ezekiel was one of them.

DATES IN EZEKIEL

1. July 31, 593 Ezekiel's Call and Vision (1:1ff)
2. Sep 17/18, 592 Ezekiel carried to Jerusalem
3. August 14, 591 Elders approach Ezekiel (20:1ff)
4. January 15, 588 Babylon begins the siege (24:1ff)
5. April 23, 587
to
April 13, 586 Oracle against Tyre
6. January 7, 587 Oracle against Egypt (29:1ff)
7. April 26, 571 No booty left in Tyre (29:17ff)
8. April 29, 587 Pharaoh's arms will be broken (30:20ff)
9. June 21, 587 Pharaoh compared to a Cedar (31:1ff)
10. March 3, 585 Pharaoh compared to a dragon (32:1ff)
11. April 27, 586 The end of Egypt (32:17) [Septuagint dating]
12. January 8, 586 An eyewitness to Jerusalem's disaster reports (33:21ff)
13. April 28, 573 A Vision of the Future (40:1ff)

“They will know that I am the Lord” (In 28 verses)

EZEKIEL



Ezekiel by Gustave Doré (1832-1883)

23. Vision of the Temple

Ezekiel 40:1 — 40:48

23. EZEKIEL: VISION OF THE TEMPLE (40:1—48:35)

THE TEMPLE AREA, GATES, AND COURTS (40:1-46)

April 28, 573 [25th Anniversary]		
East Gate (40:5-16) Processional Gate (7 Steps)	Outer Courtyard (40:17-19) Rooms for Laity (30 Rooms)	North Gate (40:19-23) Seven Steps (40:22)
South Gate (40:24-27) Seven Steps (40:26)	Inner Courtyard (40:28-37) Eight Steps into Inner Court	Inner Court (40:38-46) Sacrifices (40:38-39)

THE TEMPLE PROPER (40:47—41:26)

<div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 5px; width: fit-content; margin: 0 auto;"> 116 x 150 Feet 70 by 90 Cubits </div> <p align="center">Auxiliary Building</p>	<table border="1" style="margin: 0 auto;"> <tr> <td style="text-align: center;">Inner Room (41:4) 20 x 20 Cubits</td> <td style="text-align: center;">The Nave (41:2) 20 x 40 Cubits</td> <td style="text-align: center;">The Vestibule (40:49) 12 x 20 Cubits</td> </tr> </table> <p align="center">The Temple</p>	Inner Room (41:4) 20 x 20 Cubits	The Nave (41:2) 20 x 40 Cubits	The Vestibule (40:49) 12 x 20 Cubits	Furnishings Cherubim and Palm Leaves (41:17-20) (Genesis 3:22-24)
Inner Room (41:4) 20 x 20 Cubits	The Nave (41:2) 20 x 40 Cubits	The Vestibule (40:49) 12 x 20 Cubits			

THE TEMPLE COMPLEX (42:1-20)

The Temple Itself (1) The Auxiliary Building (1)	The Priests Rooms (2) (50 x 100 Cubits (42:2, 13-14))	The Temple Complex 500 x 500 Cubits (42:16-19) Revelation 21:16)
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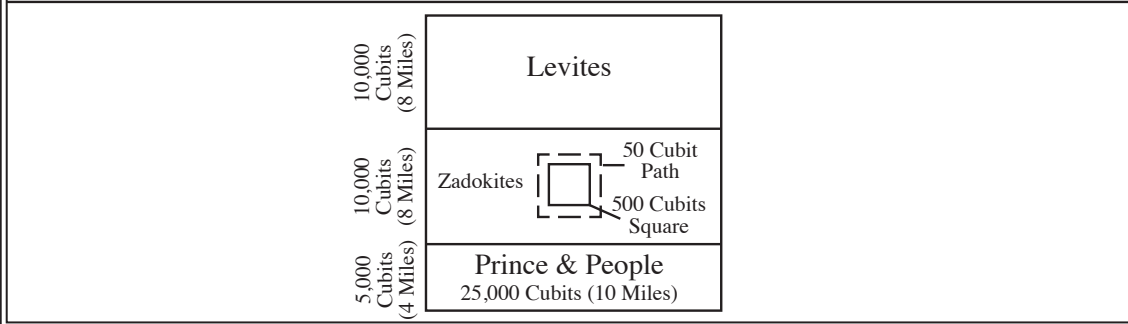
THE RETURN OF GOD’S GLORY (43:1-26)

The Return (East Gate) (43:1-5)	The Altar (43:25)
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THE TEMPLE ORDINANCES (44:1-31)

East Gate is Shut (44:1-3)	The Levites (44:10, 13-14)	Zadok as High Priest (44:15)	The Tithe (44:30)
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THE DISTRIBUTION OF LAND (45:1-8)



23. EZEKIEL: VISION OF THE TEMPLE

Ezekiel 40:1—48:35

ASSIGNMENTS			
The New Temple (40:1—42:20)	The Return of God and Temple Ordinances (43:1—44:31)	Princes and Priests (45:1—46:24)	The Sacred River and The New Jerusalem (47:1—48:35)

The final vision of Ezekiel's is that of the New Temple. This is really the climax of his whole book. He began with a vision of God in the plains of Babylon; now he ends with a vision of God returning in glory to a New Temple in Jerusalem. He is not simply describing the second Temple, but something more far-reaching than that, although not quite as far reaching as the description of the New Jerusalem in the Book of Revelation.

While the vision in Revelation is clearly in the heavenly realm, Ezekiel's vision seems to be an earthly one. In Revelation there is no Temple and no need for sacrifices. This cannot be said of Ezekiel's vision. Both the Temple and the sacrificial system still exist; nevertheless, they are described in an idealized form. This raises the question as to what Ezekiel expected. Did he expect a literal or figurative fulfillment of his vision? If he expected a figurative fulfillment, then why does he talk about such precise measurements?

THE TEMPLE AREA, GATES, AND COURTS (40:1-46)

Ezekiel is taken to Jerusalem for his vision, which occurs to him on the twenty-fifth anniversary of his exile. The date is given as April 28, 573 B.C.E.

The East Gate (40:5-16)

The East Gate was the processional gate. One approached the Gate by means of seven steps; and once inside, one encountered three guardrooms on either side of the entrance. The wall that surrounded the Temple area was ten feet high and ten feet thick. A man, whose appearance was like bronze, measured everything for Ezekiel. His measuring instrument was 6 cubits (10 feet) long. An ordinary cubit was actually 17.5 inches, and a long cubit was 20.68 inches. This will explain the discrepancies found in the various translations of the Bible.

The Outer Courtyard (40:17-19)

In the outer courtyard there were thirty rooms built against the outer wall. In front of them was an area paved with stones. Pilgrims used these rooms to eat their sacrificial feasts and to obtain shelter, when coming to the Temple from a great distance.

The North Gate (40:19-23)

This gate was similar to the East Gate. There were 168 feet (100 cubits) between the two gates, but seven steps led up to the Gate and the gate was 84 feet long (50 cubits) and 42 feet wide (25 cubits). Palm trees were carved on the inner walls that faced the passageway.

The South Gate (40:24-27)

The same measurements are given for the South Gate as for the North Gate.

The Inner Courtyard (40:28-37)

Ezekiel is then shown the way into the Inner Court through the South, East, and North Gates. There are eight steps into the Inner Court.

The Inner Court (40:38-46)

Nearby there were eight tables (four outside and four inside) on which animal carcasses were washed and prepared as sacrifices. In addition to these tables, there were four stone tables. In the Inner Court there were two rooms, one for the priests, who served in the Temple; and, one for the priests who served at the altar. All of the priests were descendants of Zadok.

THE TEMPLE PROPER (40:47—41:26)

Ten steps above the level of the inner court stood the Temple Proper (40:49). The Temple consisted of **three major parts**: the **Vestibule**, the **Nave**, and the **Inner Room**. To enter the Vestibule involved passing between two freestanding pillars (I Kings 7:15-22). The Vestibule itself was 34 by 20 feet (35 1/2 by 20 1/2). Beyond the Vestibule was the Nave, which was the largest of the three parts of the Temple. It was 34 by 66 feet (35 1/2 by 71). Beyond the Nave was the Inner Room, the Most Holy Place or the Holy of Holies. This room was 34 by 34 feet (35 1/2 by 35 1/2), a perfect square. Nothing is said about the height of the Temple, but the existence of the three tiers (stories) of 30 chambers (per story) indicates that it was quite high. The chambers were for storage of equipment and treasures.

The interior of the Temple was paneled and decorated with cherubim and palm trees, symbols of the Garden of Eden (Genesis 3:22-24). Every cherub had two faces, one

human and the other of a lion; and each face was pictured looking at a palm tree (41:18-19).

Nothing is said of the Ark of the Covenant with its overshadowing cherubs. The only furniture mentioned is the altar or table in front of the Inner Room. This was where the bread of the presence was placed (41:22).

Another building is described (41:12), but no one is certain why it existed. It might have been a stable for horses or a place to dispose of the waste from the sacrifices. The building was 116 by 150 feet (125 by 160).

THE TEMPLE COMPLEX (42:1-20)

In addition to the auxiliary building mentioned in 41:12, there were two more buildings almost as large. One was on the north side of the Temple in the outer courtyard and the other was on the south side. Both of them were approximately 84 by 168 feet and consisted of three tiers (levels). The buildings were identical and so was their use. They existed as dressing rooms for the priests to change from their secular into their clerical clothing, since clerical clothing was never to be worn on the street. The holiest offerings were also eaten in these buildings.

Ezekiel 42:15-20 describes the size and shape of the total Temple Complex. It is 840 by 840 feet (861.63 by 861.3), a perfect square. This is also the shape of the New Jerusalem (Revelation 21:16).

THE RETURN OF GOD'S GLORY (43:1-26)

As God left the Temple by means of the East Gate (10:18-19; 11:22-23), he now returns from the same direction. The East Gate was known as the Gate of Procession, whether leaving or entering. His purpose in leaving was the sinfulness and rebelliousness of the people; his purpose in returning is his own mercy and faithfulness to the covenant he established in the past. He will call forth a remnant, which he will restore and bless with his presence. Ezekiel describes his return, which will be unlike any other king, for the New Temple will not be dependent upon any secular ruler.

The altar represents God and it will be a sign of his permanent presence. It will be constructed of three superimposed squares of 16, 14, and 12 cubits resting on a foundation platform. The height was 12 cubits (20.68 feet). Steps led up to the top from the east. Steps had been forbidden in Solomon's Temple (Exodus 20:26), but here the altar is so large that they are needed. The altar resembled a Mesopotamian Ziggurat. Could this be the result of Ezekiel's experience in Babylon?

The priests of Zadok were to dedicate the altar. This was done by sprinkling blood on the four horns of the altar etc., along with several animal sacrifices (bulls and goats). Atonement is to be made for seven days, after which the Lord will accept his people back.

THE CONCERN FOR JUSTICE (45:9-17) (45:9)			
THE FESTIVAL REGULATIONS (45:18-25)			
Passover (45:21)	Tabernacles (45:25)	Omitted: Pentecost	
REGULATIONS FOR THE PRINCE AND PEOPLE (46:1-18)			
Prince: Eastern Gate of Inner Court (46:1-2 & 12)		People: Enter and leave by Different Gates (46:9-10)	
THE PRIESTS QUARTERS AND KITCHENS (46:19-24)			
Kitchen at the end of the Priest's Quarters (46:19-20)		Kitchens at every Corner (46:23-24)	
THE SACRED RIVER (47:1-12)			
From Underneath the Temple (47:1ff)	Life in the Dead Sea (47:6ff)	Salt in the Swamps (47:11)	Fruit: Nourishment Leaves: Healing (47:12)
BOUNDARIES AND TRIBAL PORTIONS (47:13 – 48:29)			
National Boundaries	Tribal Boundaries		
Syria to Egypt Sea to Jordan (47:13-20)	North (7 Tribes) (48:1-7)	Center Priests, Levites, Prince (48:8-22)	South (5 Tribes) (48:23-29)
THE NEW JERUSALEM (48:30-35)			
North Reuben Judah Levi	East Joseph Benjamin Dan	South Gate Zebulun Issachar Simeon	West Gate Gad Asher Naphtali
THE NEW NAME: <i>Yahweh-Shammah</i> or <i>The Lord is There</i>			

THE TEMPLE ORDINANCES (44:1-31)

The East Gate of the Temple is to be shut. No one, including the Prince, is to use it. The closed gate symbolizes God's continued presence in the Temple. It was the gate through which the Lord entered and opening it would symbolize his leaving. The equivalent to this gate, the Golden Gate, which looks over the Haram esh-Sharif, the sacred Moslem area in Jerusalem, remains shut, perhaps for similar reasons. Another possible reason for the sealing of the East Gate is the former tendency, described in Ezekiel 8:16, to worship the sun.

Even the Prince (Ruler in the line of David) could not use this entrance. He could only enter by means of a side Vestibule, and even then, his presence in the Temple had nothing to do with priestly duties. He could not perform such duties. He is called Prince here because only God is King. (44:1-3)

Foreigners were not allowed in the Temple (44:9). Levites, who had traditionally served as priests, were now demoted to menial tasks (44:10-14) as "temple servants." This was due to their faithlessness as symbolized in Abiathar's defection and banishment in Solomon's time (I Kings 2:26-27). Zadok became the new Chief Priest so only those who belonged to the sons of Zadok could minister in the inner court and sanctuary.

Below are some of the ordinances that must be followed by the priests:

1. They must wear linen, not wool. (44:17-18)
2. They must change clothing when going to the Outer Court, where they will mix with common people. (44:19)
3. They shall not shave their heads or let their hair grow long. (44:20)
4. They shall not drink wine before entering the Inner Court. (44:21)
5. They cannot marry a widow or divorced woman. They can only marry a virgin of the house of Israel. (44:22)
6. They must teach the people the difference between the holy and common, the clean and the unclean. (44:23)
7. They are to act as judges in controversies. (44:24)
8. They cannot touch the dead. The only exception would be parents, siblings, and children; then, they must observe a seven-day period of ritual cleansing before they can return to their priestly duties. (44:26-27)
9. They are to receive no inheritance, for God is their inheritance. (44:28ff)
10. They are to be supported with the Tithe. (44:30)
11. They cannot eat any animal that has died by itself. (44:31)

THE DISTRIBUTION OF LAND (45:1-8)

A holy district is to be divided into two sections. These sections are to be 25,000 cubits by 10,000 cubits (10 miles by 8 miles). The southern section is to contain a 500 cubit

square section for the Temple with a 50 cubit path extending all the way around it. A place is also to be provided in this southern section for the Zadokite priests to live. A section of equal size is to be created in the north to house the Levites. A third section, 25,000 cubits by 5,000 cubits is to be created for other Israelites to live. This section was to be located just south of the holy district and was considered a secular district.

The interesting thing about this new division of land is that the new Temple was to be located next to the New Jerusalem. Previously the Temple had been located within the walls of Jerusalem.

THE CONCERN FOR JUSTICE (45:9-17)

The Princes (Davidic Kings) are to insure the practice of justice (45:9). Just balances must be used and there must be standard weights and measures. Details are given as to what these standards should be.

THE FESTIVAL REGULATIONS (45:18-25)

The festivals mentioned are Passover (45:21) and Tabernacles (45:25). Those omitted are Pentecost (Feast of Weeks), First Fruits, and the Day of Atonement.

REGULATIONS FOR THE PRINCE AND PEOPLE (46:1-18)

The eastern gate of the outer court was never opened and even the Prince was forbidden from using it. The Prince was to enter through the eastern gate of the inner court. The Prince was allowed in the inner vestibule where he could watch the priests offering his sacrifices on the altar. The people had to stand in the outer court. The Prince was expected to make a whole burnt offering every morning and this was continued right up to the destruction of the Temple in 70 C.E. The Priest left the inner court the same way he entered, but the laity had to leave the outer court a different way than they entered. If they entered through the southern gate, they had to leave through the northern gate. If they entered through the northern gate, they had to leave through the southern gate. The eastern gate to the inner court had to be closed in the evening.

THE PRIESTS' QUARTERS AND KITCHENS (46:19-24)

There was a kitchen at the western end of each of the priests' quarters. The priests were to cook their offerings in these two kitchens. There were also four other kitchens, one at each of the corners of the outside wall. These kitchens were used for preparing the common meal sacrifices.

THE SACRED RIVER (47:1-12)

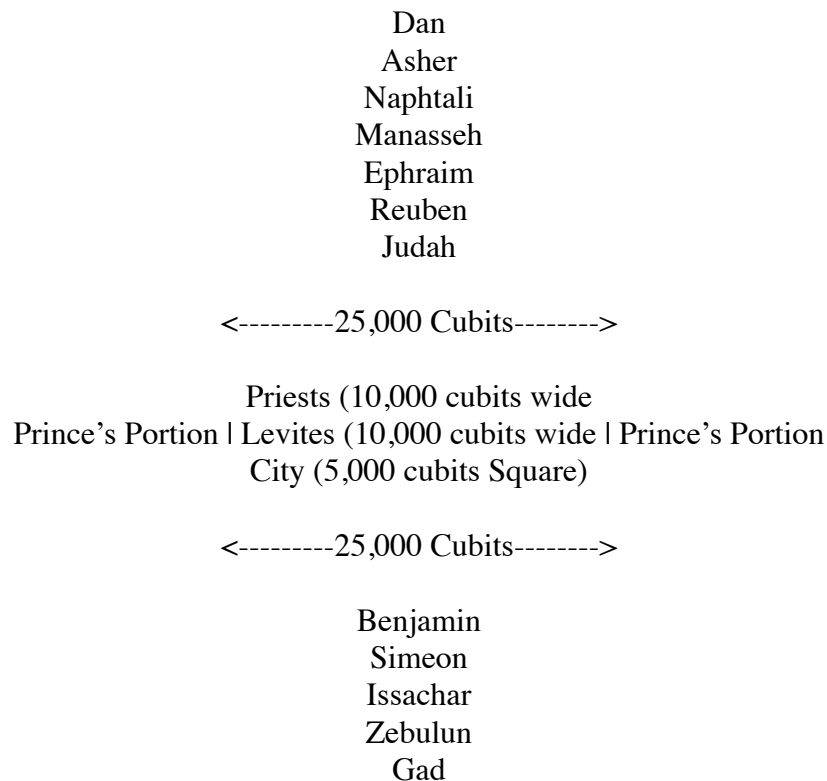
The sacred river flows from underneath the Temple; the farther it flows, the deeper it becomes. It symbolizes paradise regained as trees grow on its banks. These trees symbolize the "tree of life." (See Genesis 2:9; 3:22; and Revelation 22:1-2.) The fruit

symbolizes food for the body and the leaves are used for healing the body (47:12). The water sweetens everything, including the Dead Sea, which contain 26% of mineral salts. The water will become so fresh that people will be able to go fishing in the Dead Sea. Not all the swamps and marshes will become fresh. Some will be left for salt, a necessary commodity (47:11).

BOUNDARIES AND TRIBAL PORTIONS (47:13—48:29)

Except for the Transjordan, the boundaries of the New Israel are the same as those under David, the ideal King. They extend north to Syria, west to the Mediterranean Sea, south to the Brook of Egypt, and east to the Jordan. The East Bank is excluded, because the tribes who lived there tended to isolate themselves from the others.

The tribes are all given equal portions without reference to geographical differences. Portions are all in horizontal strips. Seven tribes are located north of the holy portion and five tribes are south of the holy portion. Tribes descended from Jacob's concubines are placed farthest away from the holy portion. The sequence is as follows:



The fixed point would be the site of the Old Temple and everything would move out from that location. This would place the city right over Bethlehem.

THE NEW JERUSALEM (48:30-35)

The size of the city will be ten times that of the Temple (5,000 cubits or 1.6 miles on each side of a square compared to 500 cubits for the Temple). Like the Temple, there is also to be an open area around the city where nothing is to be built. Even this is five times as broad as that open space which surrounds the Temple. The actual length of the wall, which surrounds the City, is 4,500 cubits and in each of four walls there are three gates. Each gate is given the name of one of the tribes.

North Gate	East Gate	South Gate	West Gate
Reuben	Joseph	Zebulun	Gad
Judah	Benjamin	Issachar	Asher
Levi	Dan	Simeon	Naphtali

Ephraim and Manasseh are merged into the tribe of Joseph and Levi is given a Gate by itself. (Compare 48:30-35 with Revelation 21:12-14.) The New Jerusalem in Revelation 21 is patterned after the New Jerusalem in Ezekiel. There is no Temple in the city itself, because it is given the name of “Yahweh-Shammah,” which means, “The Lord is there.” The city itself is the home of God.

THE GOLDEN GATE

One cannot visit Jerusalem without noticing the Golden Gate. It has been filled in. It is the only Gate you cannot use. According to Ezekiel 43:1-5, God returned through this Gate:

Then he brought me to the gate, the gate facing east. And there, the glory of the God of Israel was coming from the east; the sound was like the sound of mighty waters; and the earth shone with his glory. The vision I saw was like the vision that I had seen when he came to destroy the city, and like the vision that I had seen by the river Chebar; and I fell upon my face. As the glory of the LORD entered the temple by the gate facing east, the spirit lifted me up, and brought me into the inner court; and the glory of the LORD filled the temple.

Following God’s return, Ezekiel 44:1-2 tells us that the Gate was to be shut, never to be used again.

The Gate mentioned in the Bible is the East Gate. While the Golden Gate is the East Gate in modern times, this is not the exact same Gate. It is only on approximately the same site; its being closed today, must be understood symbolically.

It has not always been closed. Jesus went through this Gate on Palm Sunday and went straight to the Temple to drive out those who were misusing the Temple Complex. It was to be *a House of Prayer for all Nations* (Mark 11:17). According to Ezekiel, God left through that very same Gate when his people turned their backs towards the Temple and

turned their faces toward the east, bowing down to the sun (Ezekiel 8:16). God had no alternative but to depart from the Temple, even though he hesitated as he left (Ezekiel 10:18-19 and 11:22-23).

The promise of Ezekiel and the promise of Jesus is that God will be with his people permanently. The fulfillment of this promise will ultimately do away with the need for a Temple. As the Book of Revelation opens, there is a Temple; but by the time it closes, the Temple itself disappears. In Revelation 21:22, John says, “I saw no temple in the city, for its temple is the Lord God the Almighty and the Lamb.” The Book of Ezekiel ends the same way, stating, “And the name of the city from that time on shall be, The LORD is There.” The Hebrew name is *Yahweh-Shammah*.

Whether for Jews or Christians, there will never be any need to rebuild the Temple and reinstate animal sacrifices. Buildings do not guarantee God’s presence. God guarantees his presence in the midst of his faithful people, the remnant that returns and agrees to be the New Temple.

There is a very practical implication to all of this. The Church must set aside its preoccupation with buildings and begin to focus on where the Lord is really present—where two or three are gathered in Jesus’ name (Matthew 18:20). How does all this square with Ezekiel’s vision of a New Temple? The remarkable thing is that Ezekiel’s Temple was never built and those that were did not measure up to the one envisioned by Ezekiel. Herod came closest in his attempt to rebuild the second Temple, but Jesus was not impressed and predicted its demise (Mark 14:58). This is one of the reasons why he was crucified; at his crucifixion, the curtain dividing the Nave from the Holy of Holies was torn asunder (Mark 15:38). It is also one reason why Stephen was martyred (Acts 7:48-50).

To those who are willing to become the New Temple, the Gate is shut. God promises to make himself permanently at home on their altar, their hearts. Out of them will come the New Jerusalem, which will no longer need a Temple made of stone and cedar, for the Lord is There, living in the midst of those who have become citizens of his Kingdom, the New Jerusalem.

SECOND ISAIAH

Have you not known? Have you not heard?
The LORD is the everlasting God,
the Creator of the ends of the earth.
He does not faint or grow weary;
his understanding is unsearchable.
He gives power to the faint,
and strengthens the powerless.
Even youths will faint and be weary,
and the young will fall exhausted;
but those who wait for the LORD
shall renew their strength,
they shall mount up with wings like eagles,
they shall run and not be weary,
they shall walk and not faint.

Isaiah 40:28-31

24. Beyond the Exile

Isaiah 40:1—48:22

24. SECOND ISAIAH: BEYOND THE EXILE (40:1 – 48:22)			
A MESSAGE OF COMFORT (40:1-31)			
The Forerunner (40:3-5)	The Shepherd (40:11)	The Eagle (40:28-31)	
HELP FROM THE NORTHEAST (41:1-29)			
Like a Conqueror (41:2-4)	Cyrus of Persia	Like a Potter (41:25)	
THE SERVANT (42:1-25)			
<i>The First Servant Song (42:1-4)</i>	The Servant's Tasks (42:6-7)		
	Light	Justice	
THE NEW EXODUS (43:1 – 44:8)			
Through the Desert (43:16-19)		The Only Possible Leader (44:6)	
THE FOOLISHNESS OF IDOLATRY (44:9-23)			
The Ironsmith (44:12)	God's Glory (44:21-23)	The Carpenter (44:13)	
CYRUS, KING OF PERSIA			
THE COMMISSION OF CYRUS (44:24-28) (24:24 & 28)		THE ANOINTING OF CYRUS (45:1-13) (45:13)	
GOD, THE KING OF THE UNIVERSE			
THE GOD OF ALL NATIONS (45:14-25)		THE IDOLS OF BAYLON (46:1-13)	
The Only God (45:5,6,14,18,21,22)	Every Knee & Tongue (45:23) (Romans 14:11; Philippians 2:10-11)	(46:1) Bel (lord) Nebo (Speaker, Proclaimer, Prophet)	Bird of Prey (46:11) (Cyrus)
THE FALL OF BABYLON (47:1-15) (47:1-3 & 13)			
THE SALVATION FROM GOD (48:1-22)			
Righteousness and Peace (48:18)	Flee from Babylon (48:20)	Wickedness and no Peace (48:22)	

24. SECOND ISAIAH: BEYOND THE EXILE

Isaiah 40:1—48:22

ASSIGNMENTS		
Comfort and Help (40:1—42:25)	Idols, Cyrus, and God (43:1—45:25)	The New Exodus (46:1—48:22)

Liberal scholars believe a new author wrote everything beyond chapter 39, whom they call Second Isaiah or Deutero-Isaiah. Some scholars think that there might be a Third Isaiah, but conservative scholars reject both these theories and affirm the whole work as coming from one author.

For those who accept a new author, this new man stands in succession to the prophet Isaiah. He lives during the exilic period and interprets the disaster and shares a vision of restoration. For those who affirm only one author, the prophet Isaiah shares a glimpse of the future with his people. At any rate what is about to follow moves from the pronouncement of judgment to a positive affirmation of restoration. The writer focuses on the new Kingdom about to rise up from the ashes of judgment.

A MESSAGE OF COMFORT (40:1-31)

Judgment has passed and comfort will come. The way has been prepared and the Lord is coming. Isaiah 40:3-5 describes the work of John the Baptist (Luke 3:1-6). The ministry described in Isaiah 40:11 was taken up by Jesus (John 10:11) when he described himself as the good shepherd. God, who is Creator and Sustainer, also comes as Redeemer. All who call upon him are given new strength and find comfort (Isaiah 40:31).

The message in this chapter is the heart of the chapters I have included in Second Isaiah, and a few that I would call Third Isaiah, but that will be discussed later.

HELP FROM THE NORTHEAST (41:1-29)

The historical context of this chapter is the advance being made by Cyrus of Persia towards Babylon. Although Cyrus is not named here, he will be named later. It is clear that the author has Cyrus in mind. Nation after nation falls before him. The God of Israel is using him to liberate and restore the Nation. Other nations are powerless before him. It does them no good to call upon their gods, because they are only idols. Only the Lord knows what is going to happen; the gods of these other nations know nothing (41:21-24).

God stirred up other leaders and nations, such as Assyria and Babylonia, to punish Israel and Judah, but now he stirs up Cyrus of Persia not to punish them, but to bring about their salvation. This is a significant difference.

THE SERVANT (42:1-25)

This chapter opens with the first of four servant songs. The servant songs can be found in Isaiah 42:1-4; 49:1-7; 50:4-11; and 52:13—53:12. There are at least two things that the prophet does not tell us, such as the identity of the Servant and the circumstances under which the Servant is commissioned. What is told to us is the twofold nature of the Servant's task.

God's Servant will establish justice and be a Light to the Nations. This was God's intended purpose for Israel as a Nation (Genesis 22:18), but it failed. Is the task now left to the remnant or an individual such as Cyrus or Jesus? Matthew believes that Isaiah is talking about Jesus and so he quotes Isaiah 42:1-4 (Matthew 12:15-21). Jesus himself made similar comments about himself. He quotes, for example, Isaiah 61:1-2 (Luke 4:18-19). There has been a difference of opinion as to whether God's Servant is the Nation or Jesus. While most would agree that it was the Nation in the Old Testament, Christians see God's Servant as Jesus. The nation had been called to be a Kingdom of Priests (Exodus 19:6) and that still holds even for the Christian community today. Jesus is only the High Priest who atones for the sins of the world, setting people free to join the Holy Priesthood (1 Peter 2:4-5).

THE NEW EXODUS (43:1—44:8)

God is Israel's Creator and Redeemer. Other nations may have Kings; Israel has God as its King. In fact there is no god but Israel's God. He will redeem and restore Israel, not because of Israel's faithfulness or righteousness, but because of the Covenant he made with Israel. Israel's enemies will be destroyed and the Nation will be restored. Because Cyrus will conquer the Babylonians, one might think that he is to be the new Messiah; but Cyrus is not a descendant of David, nor is he one of the chosen people. He is a mere instrument in the hands of God.

The new Exodus will lead from Babylon to Jerusalem and will begin with the overthrow of Babylon and its allies. God will not forsake "Jeshurun," whom he has chosen. "Jeshurun" is a poetic name for Israel, which means "dearest upright one." The prophet is not thinking of an individual, like Moses, to lead this new Exodus described in 43:16-19. God himself will lead his chosen people. When Christians name Jesus as the Messiah, they are thinking of God himself. One of the central theological ideas of Christianity is the Incarnation, which teaches that God was in Christ reconciling the world to himself. Jesus is the new Moses.

THE FOOLISHNESS OF IDOLATRY (44:9-23)

Israel has followed other nations into idolatry, but God will redeem and forgive. A scathing warning goes out to Israel. An idol is not a god, but an image made by human craftsmen. The ironsmith and carpenter are named, but the whole nation is to blame. It is foolish to use wood for fuel to keep warm and to bake bread and then to make an idol out of it and bow down before it.

THE COMMISSION OF CYRUS (44:24-28)

Cyrus is given the commission to allow the exiles to return home and rebuild Jerusalem and its Temple. The oracle, which follows, is similar to the Cyrus cylinder, an inscription from Cyrus's archives, which states that Yahweh, God of Israel, will anoint Cyrus, King of Persia, to set Israel free from captivity. This will be accomplished through the defeat of Babylon and the releasing of its prisoners.

THE ANOINTING OF CYRUS (45:1-13)

Does Cyrus know that he has been commissioned to liberate the exiles? This question is difficult to answer, for even though he was commissioned by Yahweh, he worshiped Marduk, the chief Babylonian god. At any rate, God (Yahweh) anointed him as Israel's Shepherd (King) to make possible a return to Jerusalem and the rebuilding of the Temple. This is the only time in the Old Testament when a foreign King is referred to as the Messiah.

Not only is a non-Israelite referred to as a Messiah, but non-Israelites will also worship the God of Israel. Apart from this God, we see stated over and over, there is no God. (45:5, 6, 14, 18, 21 & 22) Such references are not limited to this chapter, but make up an important part of Second Isaiah's message (44:6).

THE GOD OF ALL NATIONS (45:14-25)

There is no God but the Lord, who is the creator and redeemer of the world. He has revealed himself through Israel. All the idols of the world are powerless (45:16) All who follow idols will be caught in the midst of chaos. Those who follow the Lord find themselves in the midst of order. In the end, all nations will bow down and confess the Lord as the only God (45:23). In the New Testament the confession is made to Jesus as Lord. (See Romans 14:11 and Philippians 2:10-11.) Strength and righteousness can only be found in the Lord (45:24).

THE IDOLS OF BABYLON (46:1-13)

The gods of Babylon are seen as "no gods." They are idols that place heavy burdens on their worshipers. The two that are named are Bel and Nebo. Bel is a title or synonym for Bel-Marduk, the chief Babylonian god. This is the Aramaic form for Baal, whom we have met before in the Bible. The literal meaning of Bel is "lord." Nebo is the son of

Marduk. His name means “speaker, proclaimer, or prophet.” In Babylonian astrology he was identified with the planet Mercury. Because of his connection with “writing” and “learning,” he was considered the god of wisdom. Isaiah condemns both gods as nothing but idols.

The Lord (Yahweh) will remove burdens, rather than place them on us. He will show his power by bringing salvation to Zion, that is, to Israel. The idols of Babylon will have no power to stop Yahweh from acting in history and bringing about Babylon’s downfall. Yahweh will use his bird of prey (46:11) to grant salvation to Israel in Zion. “Bird of prey” is a reference to Cyrus of Persia, who will conquer the Babylonians, setting free the exiles (Israelites) to return to their beloved Jerusalem (Zion).

THE FALL OF BABYLON (47:1-15)

The “virgin daughter” of Babylon is Babylon as an unconquered nation, but the nation’s statues as such will not last. The false sense of security in which Babylon bathes is all an illusion. The nation and its allies will all fall suddenly. Dependence upon magic and gods (idols) will not help. Babylon falls under the sentence of divine judgment, and nothing can save it. The purpose of God is to save his people and let the whole world know who he is.

SALVATION FROM GOD (48:1-22)

This chapter summarizes the first part of Second Isaiah. It laments the skepticism, rebellion, hypocrisy, and idolatry of Israel; it points out that Israel has deserved its punishment and suffering. God however is merciful and he will save Israel. Salvation will come with an Exodus out of Babylon (48:20). This is the last time that Babylon is mentioned by name in the book of Isaiah.

The new Israel will experience salvation, but it will have to learn the lessons that the old Israel could not comprehend. There is no peace “for the wicked;” peace is found only by those who obey God’s commandments (48:17-19 and 22).

WHAT IF THERE IS ONLY ONE GOD?

Second Isaiah makes a fantastic claim. “I am the LORD, and there is no other;” says the prophet in Isaiah 45:5, “besides me there is no god.” The practical implication of such a statement is staggering. It means that every religion must come to grips with the different ways in which they describe this God, especially with the way in which God works in history. We cannot all be right.

If there is only one God, then we need to enter into dialogue with one another. We need to compare our several experiences of this God to find ways of verifying those experiences. If we do not do this, then our understanding of God will diminish.

If there is only one God, then we need to discover together how this God works in history and what he wants us to do, both as nations and as individuals. Second Isaiah indicates that God used the Kings of Babylon and Persia as his instruments, even though their Kings worshipped idols. One he used as an instrument of judgment and the other he used as an instrument of salvation. While these Kings may have known, they were being used by God they may not have understood how God was using them. They may have seen God as being on their side. The important thing is to be on God's side.

If there is only one God, then we need to discover what his will for us is and that involves uncovering a moral law that applies for all. For Christians and Jews, the Ten Commandments represent a universal code of conduct applicable to all. "O that you had paid attention to my commandments!" says the Lord in Isaiah 48:18, "Then your prosperity would have been like a river, and your success like the waves of the sea...." We can hardly live in harmony together without agreeing on a common moral code.

If there is only one God, then we need to be working on establishing both a common faith and a common morality throughout the world. This does not mean the creation of one religion or one denomination; rather, it means that we work together to discern what God wants us all to do and to do it. Israel was called the chosen nation, because Israel was called to do two things—to be a light to the nations and establish the righteousness of God on earth. These two things, light and righteousness, cannot be separated. "I am the LORD," says Isaiah 42:6-7, "I have called you in righteousness, I have taken you by the hand and kept you; I have given you as a covenant to the people, a light to the nations, to open the eyes that are blind, to bring out the prisoners from the dungeon, from the prison those who sit in darkness." Obeying God's commandments liberates us and establishes peace amongst us.

The difficulty is getting everyone to agree with the nature of God and the details of his will as expressed in the commandments. Our difficulty with this should not keep us from trying. One thing is sure: we will never carry it off by ourselves.

Because there is only one God, Isaiah 45:23b tells us that every knee will bow and every tongue will swear. By doing this we will be saying, to quote Isaiah 45:24, "Only in the LORD, it shall be said of me, are righteousness and strength; all who were incensed against him shall come to him and be ashamed." Paul quotes this passage in Romans 14:11 and Philippians 2:10-11. While Philippians focuses on bowing and confessing before Jesus, Romans 14:11 interprets the confession as praise to God: "For it is written, 'As I live, says the Lord, every knee shall bow to me, and every tongue shall give praise to God.'" As Christians we believe this one God has revealed *himself* and his *will* in Jesus Christ. But this should not keep us from sharing our insights with others who do not believe this; nor should it keep us from listening to the religious experiences of others. In the end, we may both learn from one another.

If there is only one God, he most certainly must be attempting to make himself known to people of every race, culture, and nation. How could it be otherwise?

SECOND ISAIAH

For he grew up before him like a young plant,
and like a root out of dry ground;
he had no form or majesty that we should look at him,
nothing in his appearance that we should
desire him.

He was despised and rejected by others;
a man of suffering and acquainted with infirmity;
and as one from whom others hide their faces
he was despised, and we held him of no account.

Surely he has borne our infirmities
and carried our diseases;
yet we accounted him stricken,
struck down by God, and afflicted.
But he was wounded for our transgressions,
crushed for our iniquities;
upon him was the punishment that made us whole,
and by his bruises we are healed.

Isaiah 53:2-5

25. Servanthood and Salvation

Isaiah 49:1 — 55:13

25. SECOND ISAIAH: SERVANTHOOD AND SALVATION (49:1 – 55:13)			
ISRAEL'S RESTORATION AND COMMISSION (49:1-26)			
<i>The Second Servant Song</i> (49:1-7)	The Great Commission (49:6b)	Israel will never be Forgotten (49:14-16)	
THE FAITHLESS AND THE FAITHFUL (50:1-11)			
The Faithless (50:1)	<i>The Third Servant Song</i> (50:4-11)	The Faithful (50:10)	
THE PROMISED DELIVERANCE OF ISAIAH (51:1 – 52:12)			
The Past Deliverances		The Present Deliverances	
From Chaos (51:9)	From Egypt (51:10)	From Babylon (51:11)	For All Nations (52:7-10)
GOD'S SUFFERING SERVANT (52:13 – 53:12)			
<i>The Fourth Servant Song</i> (52:13 – 53:12) <i>The Gospel of the O.T.</i>	Young Plant and Root (53:2) <i>Descended from David</i>	The Light of Life (53:11) <i>Resurrection from the Dead</i>	
GOD'S ASSURANCE TO ISRAEL (54:1-17)			
God abandoned Israel (54:7-8)		God will build a New Israel (54:10-12)	
GOD'S SALVATION FOR ALL (55:1-13)			
The Invitation to Drink (55:1) Water, Wine, and Milk (John 4:10ff)	The Invitation to Eat (55:2) Bread (Proverbs 9:3-6 and Matthew 22:1ff)	The Song of Joy (55:12)	

25. SECOND ISAIAH: SERVANTHOOD AND SALVATION

Isaiah 49:1—55:13

ASSIGNMENTS		
The Mission of the Faithful (49:1—50:11)	The Promise of Deliverance and the Suffering Servant (51:1—53:12)	Assurance and Salvation for All who will Respond (54:1—55:13)

In this section we find a series of portraits of God’s servant and his mission to Israel and the world. At times the Servant is thought of as Israel and at times he is thought of as an individual. When considering the servant as Israel, the author may have a remnant of Israel in mind. Most Christians read the Messiah (Jesus) into the idea of “the Servant as an individual.”

ISRAEL’S RESTORATION AND COMMISSION (49:1-26)

In this second Servant Song (49:1-7), the Servant is described as one commissioned before he was born. The Servant has a mission to Israel, but this mission cannot be limited to Israel. It must be taken to the whole world. The Servant is to be a Light to the Nations (49:6). This has been called the “Great Commission” of the Old Testament.

Does this mean that God has forgotten his chosen people? Can a mother forget her child? God has inscribed his people in the palms of his hands, like a tattoo (49:16), never to forget them. Those who oppress God’s people will become their servants (49:24-26); and ultimately, all flesh will acknowledge Israel’s God (49:26).

THE FAITHLESS AND THE FAITHFUL (50:1-11)

As a nation, Israel is neither doomed (divorced) nor sold into slavery. The Exile is simply punishment for the nation’s unfaithfulness. The remnant that is faithful will be vindicated in the end. With this message Isaiah sounds very much like Jeremiah and Job. (See Isaiah 50:7-9.)

In this third Servant Song, the Servant’s suffering is described. Those who refuse to listen to the Servant light their own fires of torment.

THE PROMISED DELIVERANCE OF ISRAEL (51:1—52:12)

There are two very beautiful passages in this section. The first one (51:9-11), which has been called one of the greatest Old Testament statements of God's redeeming power, points the reader to Israel's past history when God was victorious over the chaos symbolized by Rahab and the Dragon. These two names suggest the power of chaos prior to creation, but "Rahab" is also compared with the enslaving power of Egypt. (See Isaiah 30:6-7.) The passage expresses confidence in this same God to lead his people in an even greater victory than creation from chaos or the Exodus out of Egypt.

This same God is about to be victorious again. He will deliver Israel from its enslavement in Babylon. The second important passage (52:7-10) describes this coming victory. The picture is of watchmen standing on watchtowers proclaiming the message of the salvation of the people and the restoration of Jerusalem. All nations will see the power of God's saving act, as he is proclaimed King of Zion.

Foreigners who submit to God will experience the joy of God's promised deliverance, but those who resist will never enter the Holy City (52:1-2). This is why the gates to the New Jerusalem will stand wide open with no need for closing or locking. The wicked or the enemies of God will not be able to enter, even though the gates to the city stand wide open (Revelation 21:22-27). The presence of God himself will prevent their entry, for standing in his presence will be a living hell. The process of loving God will itself be heaven, with no need for a Temple. God's presence will make the whole city into a Temple.

GOD'S SUFFERING SERVANT (52:13—53:12)

There is a great deal of disagreement over this well-known and greatly loved description of the Suffering Servant. Who is he? Some claim that Isaiah is making a prophecy about Jesus and the kind of Messiah he would be, but others see this as a description of Israel. In the latter case, all nations will be brought to God through the vicarious suffering of Israel. They will recognize that God is with Israel, and if they want to know Him, they will have to approach him through Israel (See Zechariah 8:23). Whether the suffering servant was intended to be the nation or an individual, it is certainly clear that the early Church used it to describe Jesus' role as the Messiah.

This fourth servant song is the most familiar passage in the Old Testament; it is quoted more frequently in the New Testament than any other Old Testament passage. It is frequently referred to as the Gospel of the Old Testament. The reference, according to Christianity, in Isaiah 53:2 to the young plant or the root is a reference to the servant's connection to David, and the reference in Isaiah 53:11 to seeing light after his suffering is a reference to the resurrection. Whether one believes Isaiah is talking about Israel or its Messiah, the servant's physical appearance stands in sharp contrast to his high status.

GOD'S ASSURANCE TO ISRAEL (54:1-17)

God is portrayed as the husband and Israel as the unfaithful wife. For one brief moment God forsook Israel, but his compassion and everlasting love caused him to remain steadfast. He then promises to restore Jerusalem (54:11ff), but more than that, to build a New Jerusalem (Revelation 21:18ff). No nation will be able to prosper against the new Israel. God will be faithful in his promise, even if it takes a very long time to fulfill it.

GOD'S SALVATION FOR ALL (55:1-13)

The conclusion of Second Isaiah is really a hymn of joy celebrating God's salvation for all. The prophet closes this section with a celebration of the approaching restoration of Israel. This celebration goes far beyond the return of the exiles from Babylon to a vision of the final establishment of God's Kingdom.

The invitation into the Kingdom of God extends to every person and every nation and is similar to being invited to a feast. The door stands wide open and all who would enter are welcome. The salvation offered cannot be purchased, but a high price has been paid for it. The price is God's own suffering and the suffering of his own servant. (See Isaiah 53.)

The above invitation to drink and eat is similar to invitations found in the wisdom literature that calls people to a banquet (Proverbs 9:3-6). Jesus also invited people to drink living water (John 4:10ff) and compared the Kingdom of God to a banquet (Matthew 22:1ff).

EXTRA-ORDINARY PEOPLE

There is a tendency in some churches to use extra-ordinary people to witness to their faith in hopes that they might influence ordinary people to make a commitment to Christ. I saw this happening in a ministry to teenagers in high school. Baseball players were invited to speak to them from the Milwaukee Brewers. Guide Posts, the devotional booklet, does it quite regularly with well-known personalities, as does Robert Schuller on his Hour of Power television program. I have even seen a Miss America and a number of singers appear on the Billy Graham Crusades. The temptation has even overcome me, for I have invited Kathy Sullivan, who used to sing on the Lawrence Welk Show and Joyce Landorf, a famous Christian author to sing and speak at one of the churches I served. These are extra-ordinary people; we look to them for help to get a message across to those who might have respect for people who have succeeded in their various fields of endeavor.

Second Isaiah mentions an extra-ordinary person too, but with quite a difference. In Isaiah 53:2b-3, we read a description of this extra-ordinary person:

...he had no form or majesty that we should look at him, nothing in his appearance that we should desire him. He was despised and rejected by others; a man of

suffering and acquainted with infirmity; and as one from whom others hide their faces he was despised, and we held him of no account.

As Christians we think of this person described by Isaiah as Jesus. He was neither a famous sports star nor a popular singer, but he was an extra-ordinary person. He also made us into extra-ordinary people.

Just what is it that we are to do as extra-ordinary people? The first thing is to be a light to all others. "I will give you as a light to the nations," says the prophet in Isaiah 49:6b, "that my salvation may reach to the end of the earth." This is the Great Commission of the Old Testament and it is given not to the Super Stars, but to extra-ordinary people, that is, common people like you and me. Jesus made a similar commission in Matthew 5:14: "You are the light of the world. A city built on a hill cannot be hid." Light was a familiar symbol used throughout the Old and New Testament to direct both Judaism and Christianity to become inclusive in their mission; their mission was to be carried out not by super stars, but by common people.

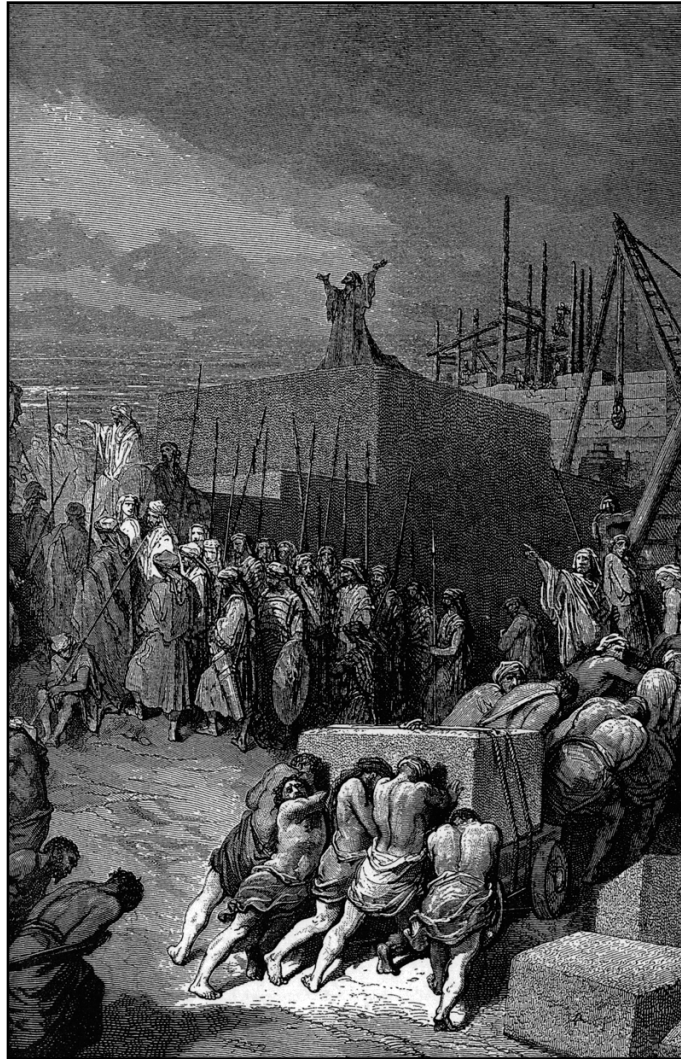
How are we to carry this task out? If we have been made into extra-ordinary people, how do we keep this from going to our heads? The first thing we need to realize as we let this light shine is that we are only reflecting the light. We are only instruments of the Good News, which is communicated through us. The instrument is still significant as the prophet tells us in Isaiah 52:7: "How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of the messenger who announces peace, who brings good news, who announces salvation, who says to Zion, 'Your God reigns.'" As God's extra-ordinary instruments, we proclaim God's reign, not our own. The second thing we need to understand is that our task is to invite, not to save. Only God can save. Our task is that of inviting, or as D.T. Niles said in his definition of evangelism, we are *beggars telling other beggars where to find bread*.

When Jesus invited others to drink living water and to eat the bread of life, he was only extending an invitation that had already been given by the prophet in Isaiah 55:1-2:

Ho, everyone who thirsts, come to the waters; and you that have no money, come, buy and eat! Come, buy wine and milk without money and without price. Why do you spend your money for that which is not bread, and your labor for that which does not satisfy? Listen carefully to me, and eat what is good, and delight yourselves in rich food.

This rich imagery of eating and drinking lies behind the idea of what surfaces in the New Testament as the Messianic Feast. It is the task of extra-ordinary people inviting people to a feast. We do not have to be good looking or possess any special athletic or musical talents, but we do need to be going to the feast ourselves, and we need to share our enthusiasm and excitement in going.

HAGGAI



Haggai preaching on the Temple

26. Rebuild the Temple

Haggai 1:1 — 2:23

26. HAGGAI AND ZECHARIAH			
HAGGAI: REBUILD THE TEMPLE (1:1—2:23)			
Rebuild the Temple (1:1-15a) (1:1-3 & 12b-15)	The New Temple will be Glorious (1:15b—2:9) (1:13 & 2:4 & 2:9)	Repent and be Blessed (2:10-19)	Zerubbabel will be The Messiah (2:20-23) (2:23)
8-29-520 Oracle Begin: 9-21-520	10-17-520 Oracle Improvement (2:9)	12-18-520 Holiness/Sin (2:12-13) Conclusion (2:14)	12-18-520 Is Zerubbabel the Messiah? (2:23)
27. FIRST ZECHARIAH: EIGHT VISIONS OF GLORY (1:1—8:23)			
The Eight Visions of Zechariah (1:1—6:8)			
1. The Four Horsemen (1:7-17) 2-15-519 Encouragement (1:16-17)	2. Horns and Blacksmiths (1:18-21) Horns: (1:19) Blacksmiths: (1:21)	3. The Measuring Line (2:1-5) God is the Wall (2:4-5) Walls rebuilt in 445 B.C.	
<i>The Invitation to Jerusalem (2:6-13)</i>			
The Apple of his Eye (2:8)	The Promise (2:10)	The Holy Land (2:12)	
4. The High Priest (3:1-10) Joshua (3:2 & 9) Brand and the Stone The Branch=Zerubbabel (3:8)	5. Lampstand and Olive Trees (4:1-14) Lampstand: (4:2 & 6) Olive Trees (4:3 & 14) Zerubbabel & Joshua	6. The Flying Scroll (5:1-4) (5:2) Everyone who steals (5:3a) Everyone who swears (5:3b)	
7. The Woman in a Basket (5:5-11) Scapegoat (Leviticus 16:6-10) The Woman (5:7, 10-11)		8. The Four Chariots (6:1-8) Red, Black, White, Dappled Messianic Age about to begin	
The Command to Crown Joshua (6:9-15) (6:10-12)			
The Question about Fasting (7:1-14) [12-7-518] (7:9-10)			
The Lord's Return to Jerusalem (8:1-23)			
The Return (8:3)	Salvation (8:7-8)	Fasting (8:16-18)	Gentiles (8:23)

26. THE BOOKS OF HAGGAI AND ZECHARIAH

Haggai 1:1—2:23 and Zechariah 1:1—8:23

ASSIGNMENTS				
The Temple Haggai 1:1—2:23)	Visions 1-3 Zechariah (1:1— 2:13)	Visions 4-5 Zechariah (3:1—4:10)	Visions 6-8 Zechariah (5:1—6:8)	Fasting Zechariah (7:1—8:23)

HAGGAI: REBUILD THE TEMPLE

Haggai 1:1—2:23

INTRODUCTION

The Person of Haggai

Tradition suggests that Haggai was a prophet-priest and that he was old. Perhaps he remembers the old temple of Solomon, which was destroyed in 587 B.C.E. Tradition also makes him a member of the “Great Synagogue,” the first college of learned Scribes. Not much is known beyond this. His name means “festal,” which might indicate that he was born on a Jewish feast day.

The Message of Haggai

His message was very simple: “Rebuild the Temple.”

The Setting

The Persians, under Cyrus, had conquered Babylon in 538 B.C.E.; Cyrus then gave permission to the Jewish Exiles to return to Palestine and even encouraged them to rebuild their Temple. Although the people rebuilt their homes, the Temple lay in ruins. Haggai and Zechariah urged the people to rebuild the Temple (Ezra 5:1-2) under the reign of the Persian King, Darius I (Ezra 6:14).

Haggai saw that the people’s priorities were all confused. They were living in a difficult economic situation, with food and clothing in short supply. Why? According to Haggai, everyone was wrapped up in his or her own selfishness and God was being neglected. The solution to their economic woes was to put God first, which meant rebuilding his

Temple. Haggai approached the problem by giving four addresses (1:2-15; 2:1-9; 2:10-19; and 2:20-23) from the sixth to the ninth months of 520 B.C.E. He exhorted Zerubbabel, the Governor, and Joshua the High Priest, to assume their rightful leadership in this project. The construction started within one month of his first address (oracle). The Temple was finished by 516 B.C.E.

Haggai differed slightly with Amos and Micah, who saw the Kingdom of God being dependent upon justice and righteousness. This is not to say that Haggai disagreed with them, but his emphasis fell upon the performance of religious rites; hence, the need for rebuilding the Temple. Haggai believed that the reconstruction of the Temple was a necessary preparation for the Messianic Age. Upon the completion of the project, he perceived that the wonderful era (the Messianic Age) predicted by the earlier prophets would come true. God would bless his people with fruitfulness and prosperity, overthrow the Gentiles, and establish Zerubbabel as the Messianic King on the throne of David.

The Date

The activity of Haggai can be dated precisely. It was in 520 B.C.E. that he prophesied. These prophecies might have been put together much later, but no specific date can be suggested.

The Author

Haggai was the author of his prophecies, but who wrote them down? Was it Haggai or someone else? Of this we are not sure.

The Organization.

The Book of Haggai is clearly divided into four parts:

Rebuild the Temple (1:1-15a)	The New Temple will be Glorious (1:15b—2:9)	Repent and be Blessed (2:10-19)	Zerubbabel will be the Messiah (2:20-23)
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REBUILD THE TEMPLE (1:1-15a)

This is the heart of Haggai’s message to Zerubbabel and Joshua. The precise date of this oracle is from mid-August to mid-September (the sixth month of the second year). It was Darius’ (521-485 B.C.E.) second year in power. Zerubbabel had been appointed Governor of Judah and he shared authority with Joshua, who was the High Priest. Both men were related to their predecessors. Jehoiachin, the King taken into Babylonian Captivity, was Zerubbabel’s grandfather and Joshua was a descendant of the last High Priest, just before

the Fall of Jerusalem (587 B.C.E.). Like their predecessors, they were leaders of the nation. Zerubbabel was the political leader and Joshua the spiritual leader.

The message to these two men from God was to exert their authority and organize the people to resume work on rebuilding the Temple. Construction had started under Sheshbazzar, but the people began to pay more attention to their own homes and soon work on the Temple ceased. On August 29, 520 (1:1) Haggai urges the people, through their leaders, to get their priorities straight. To put their business above the demands of God is self-defeating. Their unwillingness to finish the Temple is the reason why the drought has come and caused a serious economic depression. Neglect of the House of God has brought on this drought; the only thing that will reverse the situation is to put the construction of the Temple first. The response was overwhelmingly positive, and construction was begun on September 21, 520 B.C.E. (1:15a), less than one month after Haggai began to prophesy. Haggai's focus on a New Temple goes far beyond providing a place for God's presence. The presence of a New Temple looks toward the coming of a New Messianic Age.

THE NEW TEMPLE WILL BE GLORIOUS (1:15b—2:9)

As the people began to build the New Temple, they began to realize that it would not measure up to Solomon's Temple. While few had seen Solomon's Temple, some had and the stories about the Temple were well known. If Haggai were among those who had seen the old Temple, he would now be in his early 70s.

In this oracle given by Haggai on October 17, 520 B.C.E., the people are encouraged. While the New Temple might not look as nice, it will have a splendor of its own. "My Spirit abides among you," says the Lord (2:5); "I will shake the heavens and the earth" (2:6); "I will fill this house with splendor" (2:7); and "the latter splendor of this house shall be greater than the former" (2:9). The New Temple will be glorious because the Glory of the Lord will be present among the people who build it.

How can this Temple be greater than Solomon's? God was present in that Temple too, that is, until he departed from it just prior to the Fall of Judah. (See Ezekiel 10:18-19 and 22:24.) Some would suggest that it became more glorious because Jesus the Christ (the Messiah) came to Zerubbabel's Temple. The important point being made is that God's presence makes any Temple glorious, including the human one. Haggai's most important passages can be found in 1:13 and 2:4, where God says, "I am with you."

REPENT AND BE BLESSED (2:10-19)

Drawing from the Old Testament Law, Haggai proclaims his third oracle on December 18, 520 B.C.E. His main point is that working on the Temple will not make anyone holy. Holy peoples, places, and things do not make people holy. Sin, not holiness, is contagious. One rotten apple makes the whole bushel rotten, but one good apple does not make the whole bushel good. What is required is repentance; therefore, the people should put God first and he will bless every aspect of their lives.

Some scholars suggest that verses 15-19 are out of place and that they should follow Haggai 1:15a. I do not agree. The topic of verses 15-19 is the consequence of repentance. Before the people started working on the Temple, they experienced drought; but now, since they began rebuilding the Temple, they will begin to experience fruit and blessing.

ZERUBBABEL WILL BE THE MESSIAH (2:20-23)

This last oracle was given on the same day as the third one (December 18, 520 B.C.E.). Zerubbabel, in the midst of Persia's relaxed power, is named as the heir to David's Throne. It was thought that Persia would allow a descendant of David to occupy the throne, so that a representative of God could again bring the authority of God into the affairs of nations (Isaiah 42:1-4).

What happened to Zerubbabel's messianic reign? The Bible and history are silent. Two guesses have been made. First, it has been suggested that Persia feared such aspirations of independence and simply demoted him. A second guess is, he was martyred by the servants of Darius (King of Persia), who were attempting to reestablish Persian authority and order in the provinces. Although nothing is known, Haggai's oracle contributes to the emergence of a Messianic hope and expectation.

1ST ZECHARIAH



Zechariah's Vision by *Gustave Doré* (1832-1883)

27. Eight Visions of Glory

Zechariah 1:1—8:23

26. HAGGAI AND ZECHARIAH			
HAGGAI: REBUILD THE TEMPLE (1:1 – 2:23)			
Rebuild the Temple (1:1-15a) (1:1-3 & 12b-15)	The New Temple will be Glorious (1:15b – 2:9) (1:13 & 2:4 & 2:9)	Repent and be Blessed (2:10-19)	Zerubbabel will be The Messiah (2:20-23) (2:23)
8-29-520 Oracle Begin: 9-21-520	10-17-520 Oracle Improvement (2:9)	12-18-520 Holiness/Sin (2:12-13) Conclusion (2:14)	12-18-520 Is Zerubbabel the Messiah? (2:23)
27. FIRST ZECHARIAH: EIGHT VISIONS OF GLORY (1:1 – 8:23)			
The Eight Visions of Zechariah (1:1 – 6:8)			
1. The Four Horsemen (1:7-17) 2-15-519 Encouragement (1:16-17)	2. Horns and Blacksmiths (1:18-21) Horns: (1:19) Blacksmiths: (1:21)	3. The Measuring Line (2:1-5) God is the Wall (2:4-5) Walls rebuilt in 445 B.C.	
<i>The Invitation to Jerusalem (2:6-13)</i>			
The Apple of his Eye (2:8)	The Promise (2:10)	The Holy Land (2:12)	
4. The High Priest (3:1-10) Joshua (3:2 & 9) Brand and the Stone The Branch=Zerubbabel (3:8)	5. Lampstand and Olive Trees (4:1-14) Lampstand: (4:2 & 6) Olive Trees (4:3 & 14) Zerubbabel & Joshua	6. The Flying Scroll (5:1-4) (5:2) Everyone who steals (5:3a) Everyone who swears (5:3b)	
7. The Woman in a Basket (5:5-11) Scapegoat (Leviticus 16:6-10) The Woman (5:7, 10-11)		8. The Four Chariots (6:1-8) Red, Black, White, Dappled Messianic Age about to begin	
The Command to Crown Joshua (6:9-15) (6:10-12)			
The Question about Fasting (7:1-14) [12-7-518] (7:9-10)			
The Lord's Return to Jerusalem (8:1-23)			
The Return (8:3)	Salvation (8:7-8)	Fasting (8:16-18)	Gentiles (8:23)

27. FIRST ZECHARIAH: EIGHT VISIONS OF GLORY

Zechariah 1:1—8:23

INTRODUCTION

The Person of Zechariah

Zechariah's name means "Yahweh remembers." All that we know about Zechariah is that Iddo was his father or grandfather (1:1) and that he came out of a priestly family. He was closely involved with Haggai in rebuilding the Temple (Ezra 5:1 and 6:14) following the return of the Exiles from Babylon to Jerusalem.

The Message of Zechariah

His message was that God wanted the Temple rebuilt and the work of the priests reinstated, so that a new era of prosperity and glory could begin in Jerusalem under the messianic King Zerubbabel.

While Zechariah shared with Haggai his zeal for the new temple and the messianic age, he differed from Haggai in his vivid apocalyptic imagery. This makes him a kind of link between the earlier prophets (like Ezekiel) and the mature apocalyptic thought of Daniel 7-12. In him both the "form" and the "imagery" of Jewish apocalyptic thought are more fully developed. The essence of such thought focused on a Righteous God, who would destroy human evil (and evil humans), but who would deliver and save all who were faithful to him and his ways. Although sharing with Haggai a concern for the restoration of Jerusalem, the rebuilding of the Temple, and the purification of the people of God, Zechariah's bizarre images and symbols take us beyond the immediate present to the end of history. The earlier prophets focused on God acting within the flow of history, but Zechariah focuses, along with apocalypticism, on the very end of history. This does not mean, however, that he was not concerned with contemporary moral issues. He begins his book with a call to repentance (1:4b), just as did Jesus centuries later (Mark 1:15). This should not be forgotten as we deal with Zechariah's strange imagery. Neither should we forget that like Haggai, Zechariah identified Zerubbabel as the Messiah and expected the Messianic Age to come in with his reign.

In addition to his apocalyptic emphasis, there is another distinction to be made between Zechariah and some of the other prophets. The Word of God comes to him through angels. He never quotes the Lord directly. God, for him, is majestic and transcendent and works through a host of intermediaries (angelic beings). Zechariah is the only prophet to speak of Satan (adversary). The only other references to Satan are found in Job 1-2 and I Chronicles 21:1. This imagery of angels and Satan tends to make God more distant and less approachable to the ordinary person. Even Zechariah, a priest and prophet, does not have immediate access to him. Instead God communicates to him through visions and angels.

The Setting

The setting was postexilic Jerusalem. Zechariah worked within the same setting as Haggai. In fact he built upon Haggai's work, but seems to have been active for a longer period of time.

The Date

The dates of Zechariah's activity can be precisely set between 520 and 518 B.C.E. He, like Haggai, noted the precise dates of his various oracles.

The Author

No one questions the authorship of chapters 1-8 as being from the pen of Zechariah, but when we come to chapters 9-14, almost everyone questions his authorship. The author (or authors) of these latter chapters is unknown. Perhaps a later disciple (or disciples) wrote this second part of the book of Zechariah.

The Organization

The Book of Zechariah is clearly divided into two parts, the second of which we will deal with later:

<p>The Call to Repentance (2nd Year of Darius, and the 8th Month) (1:1-6)</p>	
<p>Visions (2nd Year of Darius, and the 11th Month) (1:7—6:15)</p>	<p>Questions or Oracles (4th Year of Darius, and the 9th Month) (7:1—8:23)</p>

THE CALL TO REPENTANCE (1:1-6)

This first section, which represents the call of Zechariah to prophesy and his call to the people to repent, can be dated just prior to Haggai's third oracle (Haggai 2:10). This call to repentance would have occurred somewhere between mid-October and mid-November of 520 B.C.E., the 8th month of Darius' second year (Babylon).

In Mark 1:14-15, Jesus began his ministry in a very similar manner to Zechariah. The difference in their opening words is that Jesus calls for repentance in light of the coming Kingdom of God. Zechariah almost makes it dependent upon the people's repentance.

THE EIGHT VISIONS (1:7—6:15)

The Four Horsemen (1:7-17) (1st Vision)

[February 15, 519 B.C.E.]

This first vision (a dream), dated on the 24th day of the 11th month (Shebat) in the 2nd year of Darius' reign, consists of four horsemen on four different colored horses. The number four symbolizes the completeness of the patrol, but the significance of the colors of the horses has been lost. The horsemen represent a patrol similar to the mounted patrols, which policed the Persian Empire.

According to the angel's urging, God's wrath against Judah and Jerusalem is to be lifted. The message of this imagery is one of comfort and encouragement. The destruction related to the Lord's punishment, will be transformed by the Lord's love into reconstruction, symbolized by the measuring line (1:16).

The Four Horns and Blacksmiths (1:18-21) (2nd Vision)

The four horns (images of innate good or evil power) symbolize the hostile powers (mainly Babylonia), which had managed to destroy Judah. The number four symbolizes the completeness with which that was done.

The four blacksmiths symbolize the counter-destructive forces used by God to bring Babylon down. These blacksmiths represent the compassion of God for his people and the punishment of their enemies in the same divine activity.

The Measuring Line (2:1-5) (3rd Vision)

Measuring lines were used to mark a city's boundaries. They were approximately 10'4" in length. The angel in this vision insists that they will not need any measuring line, for Jerusalem will be a city without walls and limitations. Walls are not needed in a city where the Lord is present to protect it. The walls of Jerusalem, destroyed in 587 B.C.E., were not rebuilt until 445 B.C.E. That is seventy-five years after Zechariah's prophecy.

The Invitation to Jerusalem (2:6-13)

Following the vision of Jerusalem is an invitation to the Exiles to make Jerusalem, the dwelling place of God (2:10), their home. The Lord's presence will be experienced as a time of rejoicing and God's people are to escape from the land of the North to Zion (Jerusalem). Zion is the hill on which the Temple stood in Jerusalem and all enemy

armies invaded Palestine from the North. That was the way into the Holy Land. Verse 12 is the only place in the Bible where Palestine is referred to as *the Holy Land*.

The community of faith is referred to as a daughter of Zion. The Hebrew word for “city” is feminine, for it expresses the idea that a city is the mother of its inhabitants. The population of Jerusalem at the time of its fall in 587 B.C.E. was approximately 40,000. In Zechariah’s time, it had shrunk to about 20,000. All this will change as God again chooses Jerusalem as his daughter.

The Installation of the High Priest (3:1-10) (4th Vision)

Satan, in verses 1-2, acts towards Joshua as he did towards Job, but another angel intercedes for Joshua. Joshua is considered like “a brand plucked from the fire.” This is also what John Wesley said of his own calling into the ministry, as he reflected back on how he was saved from the burning parsonage.

Joshua is then purified with clean new clothing, which represents a purified priesthood. When he is told to “walk in my ways” and “keep my requirements,” he is to accept both a moral and official responsibility for the people of God (3:7). To help him in his duties, the Lord will give him a “branch.” (3:8) Branch is a Messianic image, and refers to Zerubbabel, the descendant of David and soon-to-be anointed King.

In front of Joshua is placed a stone with seven facets (eyes), which symbolizes Joshua’s high priesthood. In one day everyone’s sin will be taken away; and along with Zerubbabel, Joshua will usher in a day of universal peace and prosperity. Symbolic of this Messianic age is the leisure to sit under one another’s vine and fig tree (3:10).

The Lamp Stand and the Olive Trees (4:1-14) (5th Vision)

Both of these images are also used in the Book of Revelation (Revelation 1:12, 20 and 11:4ff). The seven-branched lamp stand stood both in the Tabernacle and in the Temple. The number seven represents completeness and God’s all-seeing presence (4:10). They are like eyes. His ability to see is not limited to the Temple, but extends to the whole earth.

The bowl on top was to provide oil to the seven lamps. The olive trees stand on opposite sides and represent Joshua the High Priest and Zerubbabel the Royal Prince. Olive trees provided oil for lamps and priest and prince will be as olive oil to the worship in the Temple. They are called the “anointed branches,” which is a Messianic term. Zechariah asked twice about their role. Zerubbabel was told to lay the last stone in the Temple as he had laid the first. This symbolizes the interdependence of the political and religious realms (4:6).

One almost gets the idea that God intends to raise up two Messiahs, one to be an anointed King and the other to be an anointed priest. Later Jewish writings did include the idea of

two Messiahs, but it never became as prominent as the idea of one Messiah who would combine the roles of King and Priest into one.

The Flying Scroll (5:1-4) (6th Vision)

The scroll symbolizes the Word of God materialized. It is 30 feet long by 15 feet wide, and its purpose is to eliminate all criminals, primarily thieves and perjurers, from the land. How it operates is not made clear, but its purification penetrates both civil (secular) and cultic (religious) life.

The Woman in a Basket (Ephah) (5:5-11) (7th Vision)

An Ephah consists of about six gallons or one and a third bushels. Judah is purified symbolically by sending a woman (symbolizing wickedness) in a basket back to the place where it suffered (Shinar or Babylonia). What was done in Babylonian worship was considered immoral in Judah; hence, this vivid imagery symbolizes the cleansing of the people of God.

Since no woman would fit into such a small basket, the above act is symbolic of the scapegoat sent into the wilderness to carry away the nation's sins (Leviticus 16:6-10). The basket was set on a base, which the Babylonians would use to hold their idols. The abomination of Judah would then be worshiped in Babylon, but Judah would no longer worship Babylonian idols.

The Four Chariots (6:1-8) (8th Vision)

The four chariots are similar to the four horsemen. The Messianic age is about to be initiated with God's judgment on all the earth. God is in control of things and his power is increased with war chariots. The horses are of four different colors (red, black, white, and dappled gray); although the significance of the colors is unknown, the purpose of the chariots is clear. They focus on the enemy from the North, the direction from which every enemy attacked.

The Command to Crown Joshua (6:9-15)

There are great difficulties with the crowning of Joshua. He has already been installed as the High Priest and Zerubbabel was to be the political ruler. Perhaps something happened to Zerubbabel and someone wrote Joshua down as a replacement. Some have felt that the people expected two Messiahs—one political and one spiritual.

The later Messianic Expectation was that the offices of priest and king would be merged into one man. This new age would see the return of the Exiles (those who are far off), the conversion of the Gentiles, and the completion of the Temple (8:20-23; Obadiah 19-21; Micah 2:12; 4:1-5; 6-8; Zephaniah 3:9-10, 20; and Malachi 1:11). The crown in the Temple suggests the temporal dependence on the spiritual. Nothing is known about Josiah, where the crown was made, and the three witnesses, Heldai, Tobijah, and Jedaiah.

THE QUESTION ABOUT FASTING (7:1-14)

A delegation from Bethel, including Sharezer and Regem-melech, were sent to ask whether fasting could cease. Bethel had been a long-time opponent to Jerusalem and was one of the two alternative sites for religious worship following Solomon's reign. The other site was Dan. Zechariah dealt with their question on the 4th day of the 9th month (Chislev) in 518 B.C.E. (December 7).

The two fasts that were being observed took place in the 5th month (July-August) and in the 7th month (September). The first one commemorated the Fall of Jerusalem (587 B.C.E.) and the second the murdering of Gedaliah (Governor of Judah). Since the Temple was being rebuilt, they reasoned, could the fasting cease? The question is never directly answered.

The reason for the fasting is given in a summation of what God requires of his people (7:9-10). The purpose of fasting is to focus on a life that pleases God. If this kind of life is being lived, then fasting is not required. Fasting is not done to please God, but to make his people aware of his ways. Fasting can never be a substitute for righteous living.

THE LORD'S RETURN TO JERUSALEM (8:1-23)

Zechariah ends his prophecy on a note of joy and gladness for the coming age. God has promised to return to Jerusalem (8:3) and his people will return from the East and West. Both the old and the young will live together in harmony with one another and with the Lord. The covenant, the essence of which is found in 8:16-17, will be renewed; and all fasting will be transformed from sadness to joy.

Two new fasts are mentioned. The fast of the 4th month commemorates the time when the Babylonians breached the walls of Jerusalem and the fast of the 10th month commemorates the time when the siege of Jerusalem began. Reconstruction of the destroyed city and Temple had barely begun; but this work, meager as it was, provided the people with optimism about, and a foretaste of, the wonderful days to come. Fasting will turn into feasting. All nations will hear of the Lord's presence in Jerusalem, and they will flock to Jerusalem to seek Him along with the Jews. The Messianic Age will soon be realized.

MESSIANIC CONFUSION

According to Haggai 2:23, Zerubbabel will be given the Messiah's signet ring, but according to Zechariah 6:10-12, Joshua will be crowned as the Messiah. In Zechariah 4:14, both are called olive trees and both are to be anointed to rule over the whole earth. Zerubbabel represents the Palace and Joshua the Temple. It seems as if some believed that there would be two Messiahs, one political and one religious; but this concept of the Messiah never became dominant. Most believed in the merging of the political and religious into one Messiah.

This is certainly what was meant when Jesus was compared to Melchizedek in Hebrews 5:5-10. As a descendant of David, one would expect Jesus to become the political Messiah, but he did not come from the Tribe of Levi and this would mean that he could not become the High Priest. Kings and Priests came from different tribes, maintaining a separation between the political and religious realms. Jesus changed all that, claiming to encompass both in the line of Melchizedek.

We try to keep our Messiahs separate. Those who encompass both the political and religious into one make us uncomfortable. They appear too radical to us. I wonder what we would have done with Jesus? Since he did not throw the Romans out and try to seize the throne in Jerusalem, he does not appear political; but he was crucified for political as much as he was crucified for religious reasons. Herod tried to have him killed when he was first born in the killing of the innocents, and Pilate succeeded, even though he could see no reason to carry out the sentence. His blasphemy against the Temple and his violation of the Sabbath infuriated the religious leaders, who were unable to execute him themselves, but who certainly called upon the political leaders to put an end to him.

Haggai and Zechariah believed that rebuilding the Temple was necessary to prepare for the Messiah. That is why they urged the people not to get too preoccupied with their own homes. Even the economy was dependent upon their rebuilding the Temple. They certainly saw the connection between the coming of a political Messiah and his authority in spiritual matters. It might be that they are not as confused as we are; hence, they saw no reason to be consistent in whether Zeurbabel or Joshua was the Messiah. They might not have been thinking about personalities, but the bringing together of the political and religious realms they represented.

We may not have any difficulty believing in a political and religious Messiah who only threatens to reign in heaven, but what if he ever attempted to set up his Kingdom on earth? Actually, that is precisely what he has done; he expects us not only to pray for its coming, but to live consistently with the principles of the Kingdom. It has been inaugurated, even if it has not been established in power. The apocalypticism of Zechariah and the Book of Revelation proclaim that the Kingdom will be established in power. We may still insist that its final establishment will only take place beyond history, but the Messianic expectations of the Bible expect it to begin within history.

In a world with such political and religious diversity, we may want to keep religion and politics apart, but in the final analysis, that is impossible. Those who refuse to make such separations may be more correct than those of us who continue to think separation of religion and politics is God's idea. We must be careful, however, not to equate the integration of religion and politics with the integration of church and state. The two are not the same thing. The Messiah talked about by Haggai and Zechariah, and fulfilled by Jesus, reigns above and beyond human institutions; and we must never be so pretentious as to think that our human institutions, whether they be political or religious, always represent the divine will. A careful reading of the New Testament demonstrates how this was not the case, nor will it ever be the case.

THIRD ISAIAH

Is not this the fast that I choose:
to loose the bonds of injustice,
to undo the thongs of the yoke,
to let the oppressed go free,
and to break every yoke?
Is it not to share your bread with the hungry,
and bring the homeless poor into your house;
when you see the naked, to cover them,
and not to hide yourself from your own kin?
Then your light shall break forth like the dawn,
and your healing shall spring up quickly;
your vindicator shall go before you,
the glory of the LORD shall be your rear guard.
Then you shall call, and the LORD will answer;
you shall cry for help, and he will say,
Here I am.

Isaiah 58:6-9

28. Israel's Shame and Glory

Isaiah 40:1—48:22

28. THIRD ISAIAH: ISRAEL'S SHAME AND GLORY (56:1—66:24)		
SALVATION FOR THE GENTILES (56:1-8) (56:2-3, 7) (Mark 11:17)		
APOSTASY, JUDGMENT, AND DELIVERANCE (56:9—57:21)		
Corrupt Leadership (56:9-12) (56:10-12)	Corrupt Worship (57:1-13) (57:5, 9, 13)	God's Deliverance (57:14-21) (57:19b-21)
TRUE WORSHIP AND FASTING (58:1-14)		
Social Justice (58:6-7, 10)	Fasting? (58:4b)	The Sabbath (58:13-14)
SIN, CONFESSION, AND SALVATION (59:1-21)		
Sin (59:1-8) (59:2)	Confession (59:9-15b) (59:12)	Salvation (59:15c-21) (59:20-21)
THE TRANSFORMATION OF GOD'S PEOPLE (60:1-22)		
The Light (60:1-3) (Revelation 21:24)	The Walls (60:10-11) (Revelation 21:25)	The Sun (60:19) (Revelation 21:23)
THE MISSION OF GOD'S SERVANT (61:1-11)		
The Servant as an individual (61:1-2) (Luke 4:16-21; 7:22; Matthew 11:5)	The Servant as God's Priests (61:6) (Exodus 19:6 and 1 Peter 2:9)	
THE NEW JERUSALEM (62:1-12)		
Zion (62:1)	Hephzibah (62:4) (2 Kings 21:1) "My Delight is in Her"	Beulah (62:4) "Married" Bride of Christ (Eph. 5:23-27 & Rev. 21:2, 9ff.)
THE VICTORIOUS GOD (63:1-6) (63:1 & 4) (Revelation 19:13)		
A PRAYER FOR GOD'S PEOPLE (63:7—64:12)		
Faithfulness of God (63:7)	Sinfulness of Humanity (63:10 & 64:6)	Fatherhood of God (63:16 & 64:8-9)
THE FAITHLESS AND THE FAITHFUL (65:1-25)		
The Choices (65:10-12)	The New Heaven and the New Earth (65:17-19 & 25a) (2 Peter 3:13 & Revelation 21:1-4)	
THE FINAL JUDGMENT AND PROMISE (66:1-24)		
God's Presence (66:1-2)	God's Message (66:19-21)	Heaven and Hell (66:22-24)

28. THIRD ISAIAH: ISRAEL'S SHAME AND GLORY

Isaiah 56:1—66:24

ASSIGNMENTS				
Corruption and Deliverance (56:1—57:21)	Worship and Redemption (58:1—59:21)	Transformation of God's People (60:1—61:11)	The New Jerusalem (62:1—64:12)	Judgment and Promise (65:1—66:24)

This last section of Isaiah has been called Third Isaiah. It turns away from Babylon and focuses its attention on the New Israel. We find in these chapters scenes of Israel's sins and failures, but we also find in them scenes of Israel's future glory.

The author seems to be speaking from within Jerusalem itself, and what he says relates more to the fifth century B.C.E. He shares many words and themes with Haggai and Zechariah, who also worked during that period. Another issue of that time was a growing interest in eschatology, or the end of history. In preparation for the end, there is a renewed interest in the Temple and an invitation to all to respond to God. The message is universalized and salvation is represented as being for all, including the Gentiles. These were not the themes of the Exile, but themes that dominated the fourth century B.C.E.

SALVATION FOR THE GENTILES (56:1-8)

Blessed are those who observe the Sabbath and refrain from doing evil (Isaiah 56:2). Salvation will come to them; it makes no difference where they come from. They do not even have to be Israelites.

All who keep the Covenant and observe the Sabbath are included within God's steadfast love. The Temple is for all. This idea was later reflected in Jesus' statement concerning the Temple. It is a house of prayer for all nations (Mark 11:17). Both Eunuchs and foreigners are welcome. Although Eunuchs frequently attained fairly high positions, they were usually considered as outcasts and always excluded from the congregation. They were like Gentiles.

APOSTASY, JUDGMENT, AND DELIVERANCE (56:9—57:21)

Corrupt Leadership (56:9-12)

Both the spiritual and secular leaders have failed to do their jobs. Not only have they lacked understanding; but, they have been primarily preoccupied with their own interests. Wine and strong drink, were the goals in their lives.

Corrupt Worship (57:1-13)

The suffering of the righteous goes unnoticed by the hedonistic religious leaders, who in turn allow sacred prostitution and child sacrifice in the name of their god Molech (King). In the end God will give them up and they can cry out for help from their collection of idols (57:13).

God's Deliverance (57:14-21)

God, who is both distant and near, helps the humble and the righteous; but, there can be no peace for the wicked. They have chosen a path that can only lead to their own self-destruction.

TRUE WORSHIP AND FASTING (58:1-14)

Third Isaiah redefines fasting. One cannot fast and be involved with injustice. Such fasting blocks effective prayer. The kind of fasting that the Lord approves of is expressed in social concerns (58:6-7) and a right observance of the Sabbath (58:13-14).

Micah 6:6-8 and Matthew 25:31-46 reinforce Isaiah's concept of the proper relationship between fasting, or true worship, and good works. Faith, which is not expressed in works, is insufficient. (See James 1:27) Those who fast and worship by expressing concern for the oppressed and hungry will become a bright shining light in the darkness. This is precisely what God wants from his people in the world.

SIN, CONFESSION, AND SALVATION (59:1-21)

This chapter reads like one of the Laments out of the Book of Psalms. It begins by stating the problem of sin, that it separates people from God (59:1-8). It continues with a confession of sin, primarily an admission that righteousness and justice are lacking (59:9-15b). The concluding portion of this lament deals with salvation, which comes on the basis of the restoration of the covenant (59:15c-21). One might compare 59:21 with Jeremiah 31:31-34.

The point is that the nation's problem is not that God is deaf or inactive, but that the people have transgressed. If they would confess their transgressions and become faithful again to the covenant, God's presence and activity would be realized immediately.

THE TRANSFORMATION OF GOD'S PEOPLE (60:1-22)

God's people will become a light, which will attract all nations; foreigners will help to rebuild Jerusalem. King Artaxerxes actually issued a decree in 445 B.C.E., which made it possible for Nehemiah to lead the people in the rebuilding of the walls around Jerusalem.

The New Jerusalem will surpass the beauty of Solomon's time. While Isaiah seems to describe the restoration of Jerusalem in terms of wealth, power, and influence, the New Testament spiritualizes its restoration. Revelation 21:23-26 picks up the themes described in Isaiah 60:11 and 19. The gates will stand open and there will be no more night, for God's presence will be pervasive.

THE MISSION OF GOD'S SERVANT (61:1-11)

The opening verses are an echo of Isaiah 40:9, and they refer to the voice of the Servant of God. Jesus identified himself as this servant in Luke 4:16-21, 7:22, and Matthew 11:5; but he gives this same ministry to his followers, who are to become a nation of priests. This is both an Old Testament theme (Exodus 19:6) and a New Testament theme (1 Peter 2:9).

In the Old Testament Israel as a kingdom of priests, is encouraged by the prophet. The nation is promised a double-portion, or the portion that rightfully belongs to the firstborn son. In Judah all nations will finally see God's faithfulness and blessing. It is the nation's responsibility to be in ministry to the other nations, to point to the God who loves justice, loves steadfastly, and holds out an everlasting covenant to everyone.

THE NEW JERUSALEM (62:1-12)

God will restore Jerusalem and give it a new name. A new name denotes a change in status. Abram had his name changed to Abraham. Jacob had his name changed to Israel. The changing of the name is also linked to the marriage that is taking place between God and his people. What is this new name? Is it simply "Zion" or is it "My Delight is in Her," such as we read in 62:4? The Hebrew word is Hephzibah, which was the name given to Hezekiah's wife (2 Kings 21:1). Another term used here for the land is Married, which comes from the Hebrew word "Beulah." Of all the terms used here, Zion is the most familiar (62:1).

The prophet or prophets (watchmen) will proclaim the restoration of Jerusalem, but perhaps the New Jerusalem is more than a city. Could it be an idea, such as the Kingdom of God, which is inaugurated, but not yet fully established until the end of time? At any rate, prophets have a higher task than to simply announce judgment and doom. Here their task is positive, to announce the marriage between God and his people, that is, the New Jerusalem or the Kingdom of God.

THE VICTORIOUS GOD (63:1-6)

The prophet challenges God's opposition, who is symbolized in terms of Edom and its capital, Bozrah. The day of vengeance and the year of redemption (63:4) are the same. What is victory for God has to be disaster for God's enemies.

In Revelation 19:13, Jesus is described in a robe dripping with blood. What does the blood mean? It could symbolize the blood of God's enemies on the day of vengeance or the sacrificial blood of Jesus on the day of redemption.

A PRAYER FOR GOD'S PEOPLE (63:7—64:12)

This prayer is similar to a Psalm categorized as a Lament. It begins with the recollection of God's past faithfulness and goodness. Then it moves into a recognition and confession of how sin moved in between God and his people. In the conclusion the prophet makes an appeal on behalf of God's people for deliverance. After all, if He did it in the past, He can certainly do it in the present; God's people are worth remolding, for they are the clay and God is the potter (64:8). How wonderful it would be for the Temple and the Holy City to be restored to their former glory.

The reference to God as father in Isaiah 63:16 and 64:8 is not to be thought of in the same sense as Jesus' use of Father in the Lord's Prayer. The prophet is using the term in the sense of God being our Creator. Jesus uses it as an intimate way of addressing God.

THE FAITHLESS AND THE FAITHFULL (65:1-25)

God has always been more willing to speak to his people than they have been willing to listen to him or to obey him (65:1-2). In the final analysis, God cannot overlook evil, for that would make him unjust. This means that those who line themselves up with evil will have to suffer the consequences, while those who line themselves up with God will enjoy the blessings. The former include those who chase after the Syrian gods "Gad" (Fortune) and "Meni" (Destiny), gods of fate.

A new heaven and a new earth belong to those who serve the Lord. (See 2 Peter 3:13 and Revelation 21:1-4.) In the end all mourning will cease in Jerusalem and there will be a new spirit of rejoicing (65:17-19). Evil will finally be crushed, and peace will be established (65:25). The wolf and the lamb feeding together is a symbol of the kind of harmony necessary for peace. There is a more comprehensive passage on this in Isaiah 11:6-9.

THE FINAL JUDGMENT AND PROMISE (66:1-24)

The chapter begins with a description of the Temple, which cannot contain God. This is not a negative comment against the Temple. It is only a reminder that God exists beyond the confines of the Temple. Solomon realized this even as he built the first Temple and dedicated it (2 Kings 8:27).

While the passages in this chapter are loosely connected, there is a common theme relating to the final judgment and promise. All nations will be invited to share in the final promise. People will be gathered from Spain (Tarshish), Africa (Put and Lud), and Asia Minor (Tubal and Javan). The rebirth of an inclusive Jerusalem will not only be something to rejoice about; it will also be a miracle (66:7-9). The unfortunate thing is that so many will choose judgment instead of promise; for them there will be nothing but perpetual fire and destruction. This image comes from the constant burning of refuse in the Valley of Hinnom just outside the walls of Jerusalem. In the end salvation comes from God, but we can choose to turn away. Judgment is our own choice.

Not only are all welcome, but, the priesthood has been expanded. Formerly, one had to be a Levite, but now priests are selected from every tribe and nation (66:21). By the time we get into New Testament times, the priesthood is for all who believe (1 Peter 2:5, 9).

THE NEW HEAVENLY ORDER

There is much talk today of a new world order; but such visions have been shared before, without coming into being. The prophet who writes in Isaiah 65:17-19 knows that our vision should be of a new heavenly order:

For I am about to create new heavens and a new earth; the former things shall not be remembered or come to mind. But be glad and rejoice forever in what I am creating; for I am about to create Jerusalem as a joy, and its people as a delight. I will rejoice in Jerusalem, and delight in my people; no more shall the sound of weeping be heard in it, or the cry of distress.

The name of this new heavenly order is the New Israel and its capital the New Jerusalem, both of which must be taken figuratively. They are but symbols of the new heavenly order.

Even though the imagery is taken from Jewish history, this new divine order is open to all. "Do not let the foreigner joined to the LORD say, 'The LORD will surely separate me from his people...'" "...these," says the Lord, "I will bring to my holy mountain, and make them joyful in my house of prayer; their burnt offerings and their sacrifices will be accepted on my altar; for my house shall be called a house of prayer for all peoples." (56:3 and 7) Jesus insisted on the same thing when he cleared out the Temple (Mark 11:17)

In this new heavenly order, everyone will be married to God. Isaiah 62:4 uses the term "Beulah," which means, "married." In the New Testament Christ is the Bridegroom and the Church his Bride (Ephesians 5:23-27 and Revelation 21:2, 9ff.).

Although a wall will stand around this new heavenly order, none of its doors will be shut (Isaiah 60:11). They will always stand open. Another strange characteristic of this new heavenly order is that it will contain no sun. The Lord will be its everlasting light (Isaiah 60:19). Because the Lord is its everlasting light, the new heavenly order will not need a

Temple (Revelation 21:22). This does not mean that there is no Temple. What it means is that there is no Temple made out of stone and cedar. The New Temple is made out of flesh, and every believer is a priest. This is as God intended it (Exodus 19:6), and so he moves the new divine order in this direction by calling believers into the divine priesthood (1 Peter 2:9).

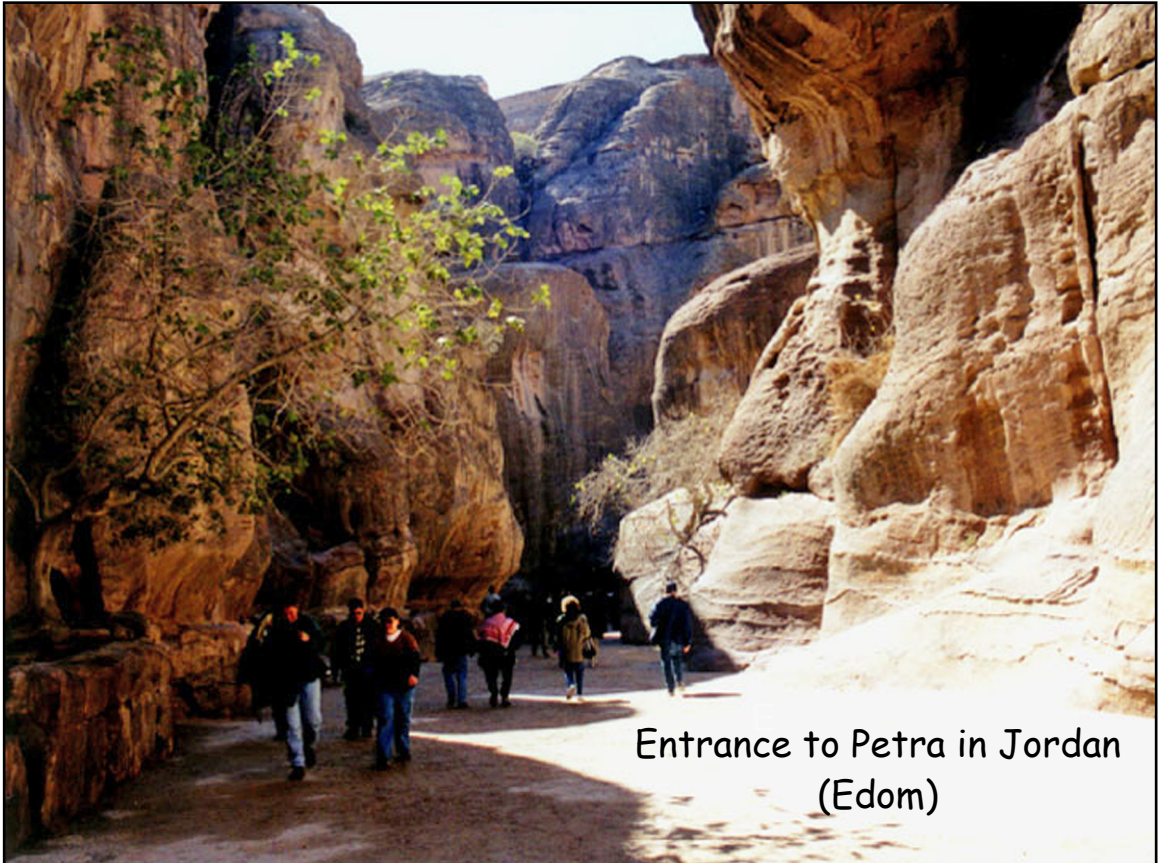
Is everyone to be forced into this new divine order? The answer to such a question must certainly be in the negative. That is why it will take such a long time to establish this new order. God wants to include as many of his children in it as possible, but there is great resistance. God patiently waits for people to wake up and turn to him and his new divine order, which has been inaugurated in the life, suffering, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

Will God's patience last forever? Will he wait until all have turned to him before completely establishing his new divine order? The answer given at the end of Isaiah and the end of Revelation is, "No!" While this new divine order is for everyone, not everyone chooses to have anything to do with it. Some will oppose it and destroy themselves in the process. The Book of Isaiah ends with a description of the awful choice that many insist on making. This description can be found in Isaiah 66:22-24:

For as the new heavens and the new earth, which I will make, shall remain before me, says the LORD; so shall your descendants and your name remain. From new moon to new moon, and from Sabbath to Sabbath, all flesh shall come to worship before me, says the LORD. And they shall go out and look at the dead bodies of the people who have rebelled against me; for their worm shall not die, their fire shall not be quenched, and they shall be an abhorrence to all flesh.

In the Book of Revelation, things get even more aggressive, as Satan and his followers are cast into the Lake of Fire (Revelation 20:14-15). Only after that has been accomplished is the new divine order even possible; immediately after it happens, the new divine order is established. Its symbolic names consist of the New Heaven and the New Earth and its capital the New Jerusalem.

OBADIAH



Entrance to Petra in Jordan
(Edom)

Photo by Jim Reuteler

29. Arrogance Precedes Collapse **Obadiah 1:1-21**

29. OBADIAH, JOEL, AND MALACHI				
OBADIAH: ARROGANCE PRECEDES COLLAPSE (1:1-21)				
The Doom of Edom (1:1-14) (1:3-4 & 10)		The Day of the Lord (1:15-21)		
		Judgment on Edom (1:15)	Restoration for Judah (1:17 & 21)	
30. JOEL: TIME IS RUNNING OUT (1:1 – 3:21)				
The Locust Invasion (1:1 – 2:27)				
The Plague (1:1-20)		The Promise of Deliverance (2:1-27)		
The Interpretation (1:6)	The Call to Fast (1:13-14)	Devastation (2:3 & 11)	Repentance (2:13)	Deliverance (2:20)
The Day of the Lord (2:28 – 3:21)				
The Day of Salvation (2:28-32) (2:28-29)		The Judging of the Nations (3:1-8) (3:2)		The Blessings of God’s People (3:9-21)
		The Battle (3:10-12)	The Decision (3:14)	The Blessing (3:17)
The Day of the Lord				
For Judah (1:15; 2:1, 11)		For Every Nation (2:31; 3:14)		Where: Valley of Decision Valley of Jehoshaphat/Kidron
31. MALACHI: A CALL TO FAITHFULNESS (1:1 – 4:6)				
The Six Oracles (1:1 – 4:3)				
God’s Love for Israel (1:1-5) (1:2-3)		False Priests (1:6 – 2:9)		Divorce and Mixed Marriages (2:10-16) (2:11 & 16)
		The Problem (1:6b & 8)	The Responsibility (2:7-8))	
The Lord’s Messenger (2:17 – 3:5) (3:1-4)		The People’s Tithe (3:6-12) (3:7-10)		The Day of the Lord (3:13 – 4:3) (4:1-2)
An Editorial Conclusion (4:4-6)				
Remember Moses (4:4)		Anticipate Elijah (3:1 & 4:5-6)		

THE BOOKS OF OBADIAH, JOEL, AND MALACHI

ASSIGNMENTS				
Edom's Doom and Judah's Restoration (Obadiah 1:1-21)	The Locust Invasion (Joel 1:1—2:27)	The Day of the Lord (Joel 2:28—3:21)	False Priests and Mixed Marriages Malachi 1:1—2:16)	Tithing and the Day of the Lord (Malachi 2:17—4:6)

29. OBADIAH: ARROGANCE PRECEDES COLLAPSE

Obadiah 1:1-21

INTRODUCTION

The Author

The name of the author is obviously a prophet named Obadiah, but beyond that, we know nothing except the meaning of his name. His name means “servant of the Lord” or “worshiper of Yahweh.” While there are several Obadias in the Bible, none of them is the same as this one.

The Message of Obadiah

Obadiah's message is simply that God makes moral judgments and acts upon them. Because Edom had no respect for the Fall of Judah and Jerusalem, Edom itself will be judged. At the same time God will restore Jerusalem.

The Setting

Nothing is known of the setting except that it was probably Judah. One might perceive this because of Obadiah's defense of Judah.

The Date

Since Obadiah refers to Edom's reaction to the Fall of Jerusalem, the prophecy has to be dated around 587/6 B.C.E., or later.

The Organization

The Book of Obadiah is the shortest book in the Old Testament and can be divided into two parts:

The Doom of Edom (1:1-14)	The Day of the Lord (1:15-21)
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THE DOOM OF EDOM (1:1-14)

Obadiah predicts that Edom will be judged and punished for expressing joy over Judah's fall, for standing aloof while Babylon attacked Judah and for actually cutting down fugitives and refugees who were fleeing Judah. According to 1:3-4, Edom's primary sin was arrogance. "Pride," wrote John Wesley, "is the first, grand hindrance of all religion."¹ Pride, or better, arrogance took Judah down and it will also take Edom down; in fact, it will take every nation or religion down. It is the sin of sins.

Edom was an age-old enemy to Israel and Judah. Esau, the father of Edom, was the twin brother of Jacob, who was the father of Israel. The hostility between the two dates back to their sibling rivalry. (Genesis 25:30 and 36:1) It deepened when Moses asked Edom for permission to pass through their land on the way to Canaan, but Edom denied the request. Moses was then forced to take the longer route around Edom. (Numbers 20:14-20) Edom thus came to symbolize any power hostile to Yahweh and his people.

The major city of Edom was Sela (Petra), which means "clefts of the rock." (1:3) The Edomites thought that this city, carved in solid rock and set deep in a canyon, was impregnable. It could only be entered through a single, narrow and easily defended canyon. According to Obadiah, this would not save Edom, for God could easily send in an enemy to ransack it. Obadiah seems to suggest that there will be no survivors (1:18), but we find a trace of some survivors in the Idumeans of the New Testament. The most well known Idumean was Herod the Great, who became the founder of the line of Herods so intimately linked up with the time of Christ.

THE DAY OF THE LORD (1:15-21)

The day on which Israel's enemies would be destroyed came to be known as the "Day of the Lord." Other prophets turned this title against Israel, but not Obadiah. When Obadiah uses the term he is talking about the end of Edom and the restoration of Israel.

The symbol of "Mt. Zion" however is more than the mere restoration of an earthly city (Jerusalem). It also refers to the final reign of Yahweh envisioned in the future.

¹ John Wesley, Sermon 22, "Upon Our Lord's Sermon on the Mount," §11.1.

JOEL



Joel by Micheangelo

30. Time is Running Out Obadiah 1:1-21

29. OBADIAH, JOEL, AND MALACHI				
OBADIAH: ARROGANCE PRECEDES COLLAPSE (1:1-21)				
The Doom of Edom (1:1-14) (1:3-4 & 10)		The Day of the Lord (1:15-21)		
		Judgment on Edom (1:15)	Restoration for Judah (1:17 & 21)	
30. JOEL: TIME IS RUNNING OUT (1:1–3:21)				
The Locust Invasion (1:1–2:27)				
The Plague (1:1-20)		The Promise of Deliverance (2:1-27)		
The Interpretation (1:6)	The Call to Fast (1:13-14)	Devestation (2:3 & 11)	Repentance (2:13)	Deliverance (2:20)
The Day of the Lord (2:28–3:21)				
The Day of Salvation (2:28-32) (2:28-29)		The Judging of the Nations (3:1-8) (3:2)		The Blessings of God’s People (3:9-21)
		The Battle (3:10-12)	The Decision (3:14)	The Blessing (3:17)
The Day of the Lord				
For Judah (1:15; 2:1, 11)		For Every Nation (2:31; 3:14)		Where: Valley of Decision Valley of Jehoshaphat/Kidron
31. MALACHI: A CALL TO FAITHFULNESS (1:1–4:6)				
The Six Oracles (1:1–4:3)				
God’s Love for Israel (1:1-5) (1:2-3)		False Priests (1:6–2:9)		Divorce and Mixed Marriages (2:10-16) (2:11 & 16)
		The Problem (1:6b & 8)	The Responsibility (2:7-8))	
The Lord’s Messenger (2:17–3:5) (3:1-4)		The People’s Tithe (3:6-12) (3:7-10)		The Day of the Lord (3:13–4:3) (4:1-2)
An Editorial Conclusion (4:4-6)				
Remember Moses (4:4)		Anticipate Elijah (3:1 & 4:5-6)		

30. JOEL: TIME IS RUNNING OUT

Joel 1:1—3:21

INTRODUCTION

The Person of Joel

Not much is known about Joel. We know that he was the son of Pethuel (1:1) and that his name means “Yah(weh) is (my) God,” or “Yah(weh) is El.” In plain English we can say that the name means, “The Lord is God.” Late tradition suggested that he came out of the Tribe of Reuben, but his book seems to indicate Judah.

The Message of Joel

Joel called people to repent in preparation for the Day of the Lord. In talking about the Day of the Lord (1:15; 2:2; 2:11; 2:31; 3:14) he was following in the tradition of Amos (5:18, 20), Isaiah (13:6, 9), Ezekiel (13:5; 30:3), Obadiah (15), Zephaniah (1:7,14), and Malachi (4:5). The idea is that God will appear and establish his justice among the nations. In the New Testament, Jesus is the King whom they expect to establish this Kingdom of Justice and Peace.

The high point of Joel’s prophecy is the promise of the universal gift of the Spirit (2:28-29). It is amazing how the prophet’s faith could rise to such heights in the midst of the depressing conditions he describes. When the Spirit comes at Pentecost, Peter thinks immediately of Joel (Acts 2).

The Setting

Although the setting is unknown Joel 3:2 suggests the Valley of Jehoshaphat. The difficulty is that this Valley is not known, so the reference is not much help. Because of his interest in the Temple, one can only guess that the setting is near Jerusalem (Judah).

Joel’s interest in Jerusalem seems to indicate that he lived near or in the city and Jerusalem was part of the territory of Judah. His interest in the Temple seems to suggest that he was a Temple or Cultic Prophet. A cultic prophet was one who had a recognized position in the official religion. This would make him a priest in the tradition of Jeremiah and Ezekiel, all of whom, focused on the Temple.

The Date

Precise dating of Joel is impossible, but some clues are present. He never mentions Assyria and Babylon and there is no indication that Greece has yet become a world power. Since he is involved in the Temple, he must have lived in postexilic Israel, somewhere between 500 and 350 B.C.E. A good guess would be around 400 B.C.E.

The Author

There have been some suggestions that Joel was written by two authors, but few scholars believe these theories. Such theories have emerged because of the twofold division of Joel: Joel 1:1—2:27 and 2:28—3:21. A single author could divide his work.

The Organization.

The Locust Invasion (1:1—2:27) (Contemporary History) (Prophecy)	The Day of the Lord (2:28—3:21) (The Apocalyptic Future) (Eschatology)
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In the Hebrew Scriptures we see four chapters. Chapter 3 consists of our chapter 2:28-32 and chapter 4 consists of our chapter 3:1-21.

THE LOCUST INVASION (1:1—2:27)

The Plague (1:1-20)

Joel uses the imagery of a locust invasion to warn the people about the coming judgment of God. The Plague of Locusts is a prelude to, and a symbol of, that judgment. Such plagues were known in Joel's time, and they are known in our own in our own time. The locusts were carried into Palestine by the desert winds from Arabia. Palestine was ravaged by such a plague in 1915 and again in 1930. Every plague however has not been interpreted as the judgment of God.

Joel took such a plague and made an object lesson out of it. The plague would be devastating. Cutting, swarming, hopping, and destroying locusts would sweep down among the people. It is not clear whether Joel is talking about different kinds of locusts or their stages of growth (1:4). What is clear is that the locusts will destroy everything in their path. The first to feel the effects of the destruction will be the drinkers of wine, for no grapes will be left to make wine (1:5). Joel warns the people in hopes that they will repent so that the coming judgment can be avoided. All they have to do is repent; to accomplish this, Joel calls for a national Fast (1:14).

“The Day of the Lord” mentioned in Joel 1:15 also appears in 2:1; 2:11; 2:31; and 3:14. The idea behind the Day of the Lord goes back to the conquest of Canaan when Yahweh led his people to victory, but now the Day of the Lord turns against them. In the first three references, the term is used against Israel, but in the last two references the term is used against other nations. The Day of the Lord can be viewed positively for all who turn to the Lord, but for those who refuse, it can only be understood negatively.

The Promise of Deliverance (2:1-27)

While the locusts symbolized the judgment of God against Israel, the judgment could be avoided. Repentance was required. There had to be a change of heart (2:13). Drink-offerings and grain-offerings (1:9) and garments of repentance (2:13) would not do it. Joel seems confident that such a transformation will take place. When it does, God will restore the nation's crops of grain, wine, and oil (2:19) and destroy the enemy in the north (2:20).

It is unlikely that the locusts came out of the north, but Israel's traditional enemy did. That is why Joel describes the swarm of locusts as coming out of the north. The locusts are to be compared to the enemy.

THE DAY OF THE LORD (2:28—3:21)

The Day of Salvation (2:28-32)

Now Joel turns to the distant future, a kind of prophecy, which flows into apocalypticism. A day is foreseen when God's Spirit will be poured out not just on priests and prophets, but on ordinary people as well, regardless of sex, age, and class. Paul says essentially the same thing in Galatians 3:28 when he suggests that there is neither Jew nor Greek, slave or free, male or female. All become one in Christ Jesus.

When the day of the Lord finally comes, even nature will be disturbed as the sun goes out and the moon turns to blood. This final day will culminate in judgment; but beyond that, it will culminate in the elimination of evil. It can indeed be called the Day of the Lord, but it will also be the Day of Salvation. "Then everyone who calls on the name of the LORD," says Joel 2:32, "shall be saved."

The Judging of the Nations (3:1-8)

In the end it will not only be Israel, which is judged, but all the nations of the earth, even those that were used by God to judge Israel. The tables will be reversed. The merchants of Tyre and Sidon, who used to buy Jews as slaves in order to sell them, will now be enslaved themselves (3:4ff). No one can escape the Day of the Lord.

The Blessing of God's People (3:9-21)

A battle is expected to precede the final victory, so plowshares will have to be beaten into swords and pruning hooks into spears (3:10). This is the reversal of what we read in Isaiah 2:4 and Micah 4:3. The final judgment will take place after the battle in the Valley of Jehoshaphat (Valley of Decision). Tradition has equated this place with the Kidron Valley, but Joel is probably using the term symbolically. Jehoshaphat means "the Lord judges" and that is what is supposed to take place.

Following the final judgment, the Lord will dwell in Zion (Jerusalem) forever (3:20-21); hence, we have a glimpse into the distant future when God will be victorious and his kingdom established. This is one of the main points, if not the main point, of Joel (2:27, 32; 3:17, 21).

MALACHI



Malachi

31. A Call to Faithfulness

Malachi 1:1—4:6

29. OBADIAH, JOEL, AND MALACHI				
OBADIAH: ARROGANCE PRECEDES COLLAPSE (1:1-21)				
The Doom of Edom (1:1-14) (1:3-4 & 10)		The Day of the Lord (1:15-21)		
		Judgment on Edom (1:15)	Restoration for Judah (1:17 & 21)	
30. JOEL: TIME IS RUNNING OUT (1:1—3:21)				
The Locust Invasion (1:1—2:27)				
The Plague (1:1-20)		The Promise of Deliverance (2:1-27)		
The Interpretation (1:6)	The Call to Fast (1:13-14)	Devastation (2:3 & 11)	Repentance (2:13)	Deliverance (2:20)
The Day of the Lord (2:28—3:21)				
The Day of Salvation (2:28-32) (2:28-29)		The Judging of the Nations (3:1-8) (3:2)		The Blessings of God's People (3:9-21)
		The Battle (3:10-12)	The Decision (3:14)	The Blessing (3:17)
The Day of the Lord				
For Judah (1:15; 2:1, 11)		For Every Nation (2:31; 3:14)		Where: Valley of Decision Valley of Jehoshaphat/Kidron
31. MALACHI: A CALL TO FAITHFULNESS (1:1—4:6)				
The Six Oracles (1:1—4:3)				
God's Love for Israel (1:1-5) (1:2-3)		False Priests (1:6—2:9)		Divorce and Mixed Marriages (2:10-16) (2:11 & 16)
		The Problem (1:6b & 8)	The Responsibility (2:7-8))	
The Lord's Messenger (2:17—3:5) (3:1-4)		The People's Tithe (3:6-12) (3:7-10)		The Day of the Lord (3:13—4:3) (4:1-2)
An Editorial Conclusion (4:4-6)				
Remember Moses (4:4)		Anticipate Elijah (3:1 & 4:5-6)		

31. MALACHI: A CALL TO FAITHFULNESS

Malachi 1:1—4:6

INTRODUCTION

The Person of Malachi

Nothing is known about Malachi other than that his name means “My Messenger” or “My Angel.” Some scholars believe that Malachi is a title rather than a personal name. Whoever the author was he was devoted to the Temple and had a high regard for the priesthood. He can thus be called a “cultic prophet.”

The Message of Malachi

The purpose of Malachi is to call the people and their priests to renew their faithfulness to God and his covenant. He assures the people that God is interested in them and that he will judge and purify his people, sending a messenger to prepare the way for the proclamation of his “new” covenant.

The Setting

A mature postexilic community is described in Malachi. Enough time has passed for disillusionment to set in and for laxity and corruption to appear in the life and worship of the people and their priests. What brought all this on? First, the Kingdom did not arrive after the Temple was built; secondly, hard times set in and the promised prosperity never arrived. All this caused the people to express a casual attitude toward worship and the priests to cheat God by not giving him the offerings due him. Drought and locusts brought about the hard times for the farmers, but worst than that, social life began to break down. Family life was plagued by adultery and divorce and dishonesty was viewed as the key to success in business. The rich oppressed the poor and God appeared either distant or uninterested.

The Date

The date was approximately 450 B.C.E. We know this for several reasons: (1) the Temple has been restored long enough for the priests to become lax and corrupt (1:6), (2) Judah was under the rule of a governor (a Persian administrative term) (1:8), (3) divorce and re-marriage to foreign wives was a serious problem (2:11-16), not yet dealt with by Nehemiah. Had Nehemiah dealt with these issues, Malachi would have referred to him. A fourth factor is the reference to the priests as descendants of Levi instead of Aaron (2:4). The priests are described as descendants of Levi (2:4) instead of Aaron. All of the above points to a time prior to the work of Nehemiah, who arrived in 445 B.C.E. This suggests a date somewhere between 500-450 B.C.E.

The Author

The author is unknown.

The Organization

A Superscription (1:1)	The Six Oracles (1:2—4:3)	An Editorial Conclusion (4:4-6)
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Six oracles are written, followed with an editorial conclusion.

A. A Superscription (1:1)

B. The Six Oracles (1:2—4:3)

1. God's Love for Israel (1:2-5)
2. False Priests (1:6—2:9)
3. Divorce and Mixed Marriages (2:10-16)
4. The Lord's Messenger (2:17—3:5)
5. The People's Tithes (3:6-12)
6. The Day of the Lord (3:13—4:3)

C. An Editorial Conclusion (4:4-6)

(2nd Year of Darius, and the 8th Month)

THE SIX ORACLES (1:1—4:3)

God's Love for Israel (1:1-5)

Because of their poor economic situation the people have lost faith in God, so Malachi comforts them by affirming God's love for Israel. He does this in part by demonstrating God's hatred of Israel's (Jacob's) brother Edom (Esau). Edom was worse off than Israel. Israel has a Nation and a Temple, but Edom is about to go completely under. Most scholars think that Malachi is referring to the invasion of the Nabateans. The sign of God's election and love of his people gives hope to Israel.

False Priests (1:6—2:9)

The priests are false for neglecting two very important tasks: (1) that of obeying the law, and (2) instructing others so to do. They permit and even offer defective sacrifices, which violate the law and is an affront to the Lord. Polluted food, blind, lame, and sick animals all make up the defective sacrifices. They offer God the leftovers, gifts that they would not even offer to a Persian governor (1:8). Even the Gentiles (the nations) show more

reverence to God than they do (1:11). Such offerings are completely unacceptable to God, so they have broken the Covenant of Levi.

The Covenant of Levi reveals when this book was written. This is a reference to the “D” Code instituted in 622 B.C.E. (2 Kings 22-23). According to this code all Levites were eligible for the priesthood, but this changed with Ezra, who instituted the “P” Code, limiting the priestly office to descendants of Aaron. Under this code the Levites could only serve in a subordinate position in the Temple. This reference to the Covenant of Levi clearly indicates that Malachi had to be written before the time of Ezra.

Divorce and Mixed Marriages (2:10-16)

Their indifference towards the Lord has also resulted in callousness towards one another. Faith no longer holds the family together. With the violation of the covenant, they began to seek foreign wives (daughters of foreign gods); some of them are actually divorcing their older wives in order to marry younger ones. In response to all this God says, “...I hate divorce.” (2:16) Malachi looks beyond the narrow provisions of Hebrew law and anticipates the viewpoint of Jesus (Mark 10:2-12). Marriage is viewed as a solemn agreement (covenant) before God, not to be taken lightly; those who seek divorces not only break the covenant, but blaspheme against God as well.

The message is clear, but if marriage is so sacred, then why did Ezra and Nehemiah command the people to divorce their wives (Ezra 10:11). The only answer that can be given is *for religious reasons*. The prohibition against marrying foreign women has nothing to do with race, but it has everything to do with faith. The people of God are not to marry unbelievers.

The Lord’s Messenger (2:17—3:5)

The people have concluded that God lets the wicked go free and that there is no justice. This simply is not true. The Lord will send his “messenger” (Malachi) to purify and then to judge. Malachi has in mind a reforming or messianic priest, whose function is to make possible, the Lord’s return to the Temple.

The first order of business is to purify the priesthood, so that they will in turn perform their proper function of prescribing and offering the right sacrifices. This in turn will guarantee justice. There is a relationship between faith and morality. The Temple stands at the center of a just and moral order. When God is in his house, his household will be in order.

The People’s Tithe (3:6-12)

The proper response of the people is the tithe. The word “tithe” means “one-tenth.” This reference to the tithe is the most familiar on the subject in the entire Old Testament. To withhold their tithe from God has brought about their present distress, and the only way out is to restore the tithe to the Lord.

The tithe in this passage seems to be a kind of income tax paid towards the upkeep of the Temple and the support of the Priests and Levites. This would be in accord with the “P” Code; the supporting passages would be Leviticus 27:30-33 and Numbers 18:21-32. This would be in contrast to the “D” Code of Deuteronomy 14:22-29 in which the people themselves consume a ritual meal in the sanctuary for two years and on the third year, the tithe would go towards supporting the Levites and others deserving charitable aid. This does not contradict the evidence that the Book of Malachi was written prior to the adoption of the “P” Code. It simply demonstrates that the “P” Code incorporated customs that had already been practiced prior to its adoption.

God invites the people to put him to a test. All they need to do is to begin tithing and He will pour out a blessing they themselves cannot hold. A proper response to God will result in crops from their fields and fruit from their vines. This does not mean however that only the fields and vines of the faithful will produce. Their faithfulness will also help the wicked, even as unfaithfulness causes misfortune for the righteous (Matthew 5:45b).

The Day of the Lord (3:13—4:3)

Finally they are told that no one gets away with anything. The Day of the Lord will indeed come. The wicked will see that Day as a furnace that burns them up; but the faithful will see that Day and rejoice in it as they experience its healing and redeeming rays. God knows the difference between the two groups and can judge with absolute fairness. The names of the faithful are written down in the book of the living (3:16). Jesus (Luke 10:20) and John (Revelation 3:5) used this same imagery. The Day of Judgment is coming and the Lord does not make mistakes. He knows what is happening in the world and the world stands under his “just” judgment.

Some Hebrew manuscripts say “with healing in the corners of its garments” instead of “with healing in its wings.” This obviously brings to mind the woman who found healing by touching the “the fringe of his cloak.”¹ Both images however are marvelous symbols of healing.

AN EDITORIAL CONCLUSION (4:4-6)

The editorial conclusion is actually made up of two postscripts. The first one (4:4) looks back to the revelation of God through the giving of his Law at Sinai and the second (4:5-6) looks forward to a new age, proclaimed by God’s prophets. The first postscript calls for obedience to the Law (Pentateuch) of Moses, which had already been established as Scripture. The second identifies the forerunner mentioned in Malachi 3:1 as Elijah. The only problem with this is that the forerunner is described as a priest rather than a prophet. Perhaps that is the reason why a postscript was needed. Elijah was considered available for the assignment because, of all the prophets, he alone was translated into the Kingdom. He did not die (2 Kings 2:11). This idea caught on quickly in Jewish tradition and is also expressed in the New Testament (Matthew 11:13-14 and Mark 9:11-13).

¹ See Matthew 9:21.

These two postscripts link the Law and the Prophets together and set the mood for the coming of the Messiah. It is easy to understand why the Church placed Malachi at the end of the Old Testament. This closes the activity of the prophets for the next four hundred years until John the Baptist appears on the scene as the forerunner of the Messiah (Christ).

THE DAY OF THE LORD

A common theme runs through Obadiah, Joel, and Malachi. It is the idea of the “Day of the Lord.” This concept began with Amos, who warned in Amos 5:18 that the Day of the Lord would be a day of darkness, not light. This means that Israel and Judah will experience judgment before they will experience salvation.

In Obadiah, Joel, and Malachi, God’s judgment extends to Edom and the other nations of the world as well as to Israel and Judah. Every nation will be judged, but every nation will also be given the same chance to repent and turn to God. Some nations will repent and some will not, but in the end, a remnant from Judah will.

The Day of the Lord affects all of us in the same way. Those who are not ready for it will experience it as judgment; but those who are ready for it will experience it as salvation. Those who do repent and turn to God will be filled with his Spirit and they will have visions of the coming Kingdom.

While individual repentance is possible for any one of us, these prophets are interested in national repentance. What is necessary for this to take place? The first and most obvious example of what must take place is for national religious leaders to assume their rightful responsibilities. According to Malachi 2:7, “...the lips of a priest should guard knowledge, and people should seek instruction from his mouth, for he is the messenger of the LORD of hosts.” National repentance is impossible when religious leaders do not take their responsibilities seriously. They must tell it like it is, even if no one wants to hear it.

The first step in repentance is to make a decision for God and his ways. Such a decision has very practical implications for us. While God hates divorce, he also hates marriages between the faithful and those engaged in idolatry. It is better not to marry at all than to be unequally yoked. This is not just the attitude of a few prophets in the Old Testament. It is also the conclusion of the New Testament. It is Paul who best expresses the reasons in 2 Corinthians 6:14-15, where he says:

Do not be mismatched with unbelievers. For what partnership is there between righteousness and lawlessness? Or what fellowship is there between light and darkness? What agreement does Christ have with Beliar? Or what does a believer share with an unbeliever?

The above may be very unpopular today when hardly anyone considers religion as they choose a mate. On a premarital inventory, it is usually the least talked about item in a list of ten categories.

The other practical fruit of repentance mentioned has to do with tithing. While only Malachi mentions it, it had been part of the covenant since Abraham first gave his tithe to Melchizedek. It was also a part of the Mosaic Law. Even Jesus affirmed it, although he suggested that giving a tithe without including an interest in justice and mercy was insufficient (Matthew 23:23 and Luke 11:42). Malachi 3:7-10 relates tithing to repentance:

Ever since the days of your ancestors you have turned aside from my statutes and have not kept them. Return to me, and I will return to you, says the LORD of hosts. But you say, "How shall we return?" Will anyone rob God? Yet you are robbing me! But you say, "How are we robbing you?" In your tithes and offerings! You are cursed with a curse, for you are robbing me—the whole nation of you! Bring the full tithe into the storehouse, so that there may be food in my house, and thus put me to the test, says the LORD of hosts; see if I will not open the windows of heaven for you and pour down for you an overflowing blessing.

Do we really believe this? In Matthew 6:21, Jesus says, "...where your treasure is, there your heart will be also." It seems to me that we must begin to take Malachi and Jesus seriously. Without doing so, our repentance is weak and feeble; we will not be ready for the Day of the Lord.

Malachi ends with an editorial conclusion, which can be summed up in two concise statements: *Remember Moses* and *Anticipate Elijah*. Marriage and tithing are only two practical things to remember from the Law of God given through Moses, but they strike at the heart of our lives and really affect how we can function as the people of God. Elijah represents the forerunner who will call God's chosen people to repent. They are not immune from the judgment of the Day of the Lord. As Christians we believe John the Baptist fulfilled the function of Elijah, preparing the way for Jesus to announce the coming of the Day of the Lord, which he announces as the coming of the Kingdom of God (Mark 1:14-15).

JONAH



Painting of Jonah in the Catacombs

32. The Reluctant Missionary

Malachi 1:1—4:6

32. JONAH: THE RELUCTANT MISSIONARY (1:1 – 4:11)					
JONAH’S CALL AND DISOBEDIENCE (1:1-16/17)					
The Call of God (1:1-2)	Jonah’s Rebellion (1:3)	God’s Response (1:4)	The Sailors’ Response (1:5 & 7)	Jonah’s Answer (1:12 & 15)	The Great Fish (1:17)
JONAH’S REPENTANCE AND SUBMISSION (2:1-10)					
Jonah’s Prayer (2:1ff)	Despair (2:4)		The Fish Vomits Jonah Out in [Joppa] (2:10)		
	Deliverance (2:6b)				
JONAH’S MISSION TO NINEVEH (3:1-10)					
The Second Call (3:1-2)	Jonah’s Obedience (3:3)	Jonah’s Message (3:4)	Nineveh’s Repentance (3:5)	The King’s Repentance (3:6)	God’s Compassion (3:10)
GOD’S MERCY TO NINEVEH (4:1-11)					
Jonah’s Anger (4:1)	Jonah’s Prayer (4:2-3)	The Bush (4:6)	The Worm (4:7)	The East Wind (4:8)	God’s Mercy (4:11)
IS THE STORY HISTORICAL OR PARABOLIC?					
Who is Jonah? Israel/The Elder Son			What does the Fish symbolize? The Exile/The Cross		

32. JONAH: THE RELUCTANT MISSIONARY

Jonah 1:1—4:11

ASSIGNMENTS			
Jonah's Call and Disobedience (1:1-17)	Jonah's Repentance and Submission (2:1-10)	Jonah's Mission to Nineveh (3:1-10)	God's Mercy on Nineveh (4:1-11)

INTRODUCTION

The Person of Jonah

Jonah means: “dove.” The only other place he appears in the Bible is in 2 Kings 14:25, where he prophesied victories for Jeroboam II in recovering lost territory for Israel. Since Jeroboam II reigned from 786-746 B.C.E., this was also the time of Jonah’s prophetic activity. The only other facts we know about him is the name of his father, Amittai, and his hometown of Gath-hepher, which was located in Zebulun.

The Message of Jonah

Jonah’s message is simple. God’s concern extends beyond Israel to the world. Jonah himself becomes an example of the problem. Other prophets, such as Jeremiah, resisted God’s call, but they gave in without too much trouble. Jonah not only denies God’s claim on him, but he attempts to flee from God’s presence. The entire first half of the Book describes Jonah’s rejection of God. In the end the question is not whether Nineveh would repent, but will Israel? Jonah, representing Israel, is not happy with God’s willingness to forgive the people of Nineveh. Jonah acts like the elder brother in Jesus’ Parable of the Prodigal Son. He should be rejoicing as his brother returns to the Father, but all he can do is sulk.

The Setting

The story of Jonah takes place prior to Assyria’s rise to power; nevertheless, Assyria is seen as Israel’s enemy. Although Nineveh, the capital of Assyria, repented in the story, there is no record of this in Assyrian history. The Babylonians destroyed Assyria in 612 B.C.E. and then went on to conquer Judah.

The Date

Although Jonah himself can be placed within the history of Israel with some degree of accuracy, the date of the Book of Jonah is another matter. It was obviously written in the post-exilic period. We know that from the influence of Jeremiah and 2nd Isaiah on the book, which likewise opposes the narrow nationalism of Ezra and Nehemiah. This places the date of the book somewhere in the fifth and fourth centuries B.C.E.

The Author

Some scholars insist that Jonah wrote the book, but others dispute their claim. The disagreement often revolves around whether to take Jonah as history or a parable. Those who understand the book as a parable tend to allegorize it. Jonah symbolizes rebellious Israel. The fish story refers to Israel's exile, and the mission to Nineveh symbolizes God's concern for the Gentiles. Jesus himself used the symbolism of Jonah to talk about his death and resurrection (Matthew 12:40) and the ability of his own listeners to respond to his teachings (Matthew 12:41 and Luke 11:32).

The Organization

The Book of Jonah can be organized as follows:

Jonah's Call and Disobedience (1:1-17)	Jonah's Repentance and Submission (2:1-10)	Jonah's Mission to Nineveh (3:1-10)	God's Mercy on Nineveh (4:1-11)
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JONAH'S CALL AND DISOBEDIENCE (1:1-16/17)

The call to Jonah is to go and preach against Nineveh (1:2). Nineveh was the capital of Assyria, which was an emerging power and an enemy of Israel. Two questions would immediately come to Jonah's mind. (1) What language would he speak? (2) What authority would he have? While Jonah might have liked to speak against an enemy, he was not very willing to do so on the enemy's home turf; hence, he decided to run as far away as he could possibly go. He went to Joppa (modern Jaffa) and boarded a ship to Tarshish. Tarshish probably refers to the city of Tartessus, which lies beyond Gibraltar on the southwest coast of Spain. This would have been the end of the earth for Jonah.

In leaving Israel Jonah probably thought that he was also leaving Israel's God behind. Gods were closely associated with the land; in boarding a ship Jonah believed that he was fleeing from the presence of the Lord (1:3). As the story develops Jonah realizes and acknowledges that the Lord (Yahweh) not only created the land, but also the sea (1:9). Meanwhile a tremendous storm comes up and the sailors become very worried. They cast

lots to find out who is to blame for God's wrath, which they believe is being expressed through the storm. The lot falls on Jonah, and so they begin to question him. Not knowing what to do with him, they ask him and he tells them to cast him into the sea. They do not want to do this and begin rowing towards the shore (1:13). The storm worsens, so finally they agree to throw him overboard. They see this as a way of fearing (worshipping) the Lord and offering a sacrifice.

After the sea stops raging Jonah is swallowed by a great fish. The fish is the biggest problem for modern people. Does it refer to a miracle or is it simply a symbol of something else? If it is a symbol, it probably refers to the exile of God's people for their disobedience to the Lord. They have been called to become a "light to the nations;" but instead, they have refused to go to the Gentiles. The method of interpretation is not as important as the main message, which is MISSIONS. Jonah was called to become a missionary to the Assyrians, who were not only Gentiles but also enemies of Israel. The mission is not to friends. Part of the mission is to make friends out of the enemy.

JONAH'S REPENTANCE AND SUBMISSION (2:1-10)

Jonah's prayer from the belly of the fish is similar to Jesus' cry from the cross. "I am driven away" he cries, "from your sight..." (2:4) Compare Jonah's prayer to Jesus, who cried, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" (Matthew 27:46) Both experienced the "belly" of Sheol (the Pit or Hades).

With confidence that God will hear his prayer, Jonah repents and recites a Psalm of Thanksgiving (2:2-9). Some scholars believe that this Psalm was inserted later, but it does not come from the Book of Psalms. It could be Jonah's own prayer. In the end the Lord has the fish vomit Jonah out on dry land (2:10), presumably back at Joppa.

JONAH'S MISSION TO NINEVEH (3:1-10)

Jonah is now given a second chance and his response is positive. The message he is to take to Nineveh is negative. In 40 days Nineveh is to be overthrown (3:4). Nineveh is described as a very large city. Excavations have revealed a city about three miles long and a mile and one half wide. This is much smaller than the city described in the Book of Jonah (3:3). One solution is that the whole district of Nineveh is meant.

Jonah only finishes one-third of his mission and the people respond positively. The King removes his robe, covers himself with sackcloth, and sits in ashes. All this symbolizes his repentance. He then calls a citywide fast, which includes even the animals. The hope is that God will repent and forgive them and that is exactly what happens (3:10). This makes Jonah, a reluctant missionary, and the most successful missionary of all time. The population of Nineveh is described as 120,000 (4:11).

GOD'S MERCY ON NINEVEH (4:1-11)

Having finished his preaching mission, Jonah went to the eastern side of the city to see what God would do. When he realized that God really would be merciful to the Ninevites, as written in Exodus 34:6-7, he expressed a desire for death (4:3 and 8). To teach Jonah a lesson, God caused a bush to grow up and provide him with shade. The bush was probably the castor-oil plant, although we cannot be certain. Then God killed the bush, and sent an east wind to torment Jonah. When Jonah responded with anger, God made his point. If Jonah pitied a mere bush, which he did not even create, why should God not be concerned about the Ninevites, whom he did create? God is even concerned with ignorant people (who do not know their right hand from their left) or innocent children. His mercy is even extended to the cattle, that were included in the city wide fast (3:7).

THE RELUCTANT MISSIONARY

When they asked Jesus for a sign, he replied, “An evil and adulterous generation asks for a sign, but no sign will be given to it except the sign of the prophet Jonah.” (Matthew 12:39) What could he possibly have meant? In Matthew 12:40-41, he tells us:

For just as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of the sea monster, so for three days and three nights the Son of Man will be in the heart of the earth. The people of Nineveh will rise up at the judgment with this generation and condemn it, because they repented at the proclamation of Jonah, and see, something greater than Jonah is here!

Jonah can be compared to the prodigal son's elder brother, who became a reluctant missionary. He understood all too well God's compassionate love for the sinner and, like the elder brother he wanted nothing to do with it. That is why he ran as far away as he could, but he ended up in the belly of a sea monster for three days and three nights.

Jesus faces the cross with the same reluctance that Jonah faced—God's call to preach to the sinners in Nineveh. In Matthew 26:39, Jesus threw himself down on the ground and prayed, “My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from me; yet not what I want but what you want.” Neither Jonah nor Jesus looked forward to what needed to be done to bring about the salvation of sinners. Both of them ended up in the belly of a sea monster. For Jesus that monster was his death on the cross.

Both Jonah and Jesus succeeded in their mission. Jonah represents Israel's call to become a Light to the Gentiles (Isaiah 42:6-7 and 49:6). Israel's rebellion led to its 70 years of captivity in Babylon. While Jesus never left Palestine, John 8:12 says that he became a light for the whole world and according to Matthew 5:14-16, he calls us to be lights to the world as well.

A sign has been given. Someone greater than Jonah has come. Not only has a whole city been attracted to God's light, but, now that light illuminates the whole world. The

Ninevites stand as a sign that sinners will repent and that God will have mercy on them. The Christian Church stands as a sign that someone greater than Jonah has appeared and salvation is now offered to the whole world.

This leaves each one of us with two questions to contemplate. First, am I a reluctant or an eager missionary? Am I helping to carry the message to every corner of the earth, or am I running as far away from what God wants me to do as I can possibly go? The second question is this: Am I happy to see people repent and turn from their sin and find forgiveness in the marvelous grace of God? Perhaps I would rather see them punished for their sins. It would serve them right. God not only wants us to share his love with the whole world, but he wants us to rejoice with the angels in heaven whenever one sinner comes home (Luke 15:7 and 10).

2ND ZECHARIAH



Zechariah's Tomb in Jerusalem

33. The Road to Peace

Zechariah 9:1—14:21

33. SECOND ZECHARIAH: THE ROAD TO PEACE (9:1 – 14:21)			
THE RESTORATION OF ISRAEL (9:1 – 11:17)			
Three Oracles on the Universal Kingdom (9:1-17)			
The Downfall of Proud Nations (9:1-8) Syria, Phoenicia, Philistia God's People (9:8)	The Prince of Peace (9:9-10) 2 Samuel 18:9/1 Kings 1:33 Matthew 21:5/John 12:14-15	The Prisoners of Hope Return (9:11-17) Bow and Arrow Image (9:13)	
The Restoration of Israel (10:1 – 11:17)			
The Lord alone Controls Nature (10:1-2) (10:1)	The Lord alone Controls History (10:3-12) (10:4 & 10)	The Fallen Tyrants (11:1-3) Trees/Shepherds/Lions Lebanon, Bashan/Jordan	The Two Shepherds (11:4-17) Staffs: Favor/Unity Shepherds: Rejected/Exploiting (11:7 & 15:16)
THE DAY OF THE LORD (12:1 – 14:21)			
The Deliverance of Jerusalem (12:1 – 13:1) (12:10 & 13:1)	The End of Professional Prophecy (13:2-6 (13:2)	The Emergence of the Remnant (13:7-9) (13:8-9)	The Final Victory (14:1-21) (14:4, 9, 16)

33. SECOND ZECHARIAH: THE ROAD TO PEACE

Zechariah 9:1—14:21

ASSIGNMENTS			
Oracles of The Universal Kingdom (9:1-17)	The Restoration of Israel (10:1—11:17)	The Deliverance of Jerusalem (12:1—13:1)	The Final Victory (13:2—14:21)

INTRODUCTION

The Person of Second Zechariah

In these last six chapters, the name of Zechariah is not even mentioned. While the author (or authors) is unknown, he might be a spirited disciple (or disciples) of Zechariah.

The Message of Second Zechariah

The general message of Second Zechariah is that God will be victorious over all the nations of the earth and that He will establish a universal peace through his people and their Messianic King. Instead of an emphasis on rebuilding the Temple, the emphasis is on warfare and the final judgment, followed by peace. Instead of Zerubbabel and Joshua leading the nation, unnamed shepherds lead.

The Setting

The setting for Second Zechariah is much later than was the case for First Zechariah. Nothing is mentioned about the Persian Period. What is mentioned is the rise of Greece (9:13). The context seems to be Alexander the Great's victories over the Persian King Darius III at Granicus in 334 and at Issus in 333 B.C.E. (Turkey). The Greek armies then marched over Tyre in 332 B.C.E. and by 331 B.C.E. they were in Jerusalem. By 326 B.C.E. Alexander was the master of a vast Kingdom that stretched from Greece to Egypt to Afghanistan, and it has been said that he wept because he had no more worlds to conquer.

The Date

The reference to the rise of Greek power puts this work somewhere between the 4th and 3rd Centuries B.C.E.

The Author

In addition to the lack of any reference to Zechariah, nothing is said of his concern for rebuilding the Temple and no reference is made to Zerubbabel and Joshua. Instead of prose, which we find in chapters 1-8, we find poetry in chapters 9-14. This difference in subject matter and style lead us to conclude that, Second Zechariah was written by one or more of Zechariah's disciples.

The Organization

The Second Book of Zechariah is clearly divided into two parts, both of which might be described as apocalyptic:

The Restoration of Israel (9:1 — 11:17)	The Day of the Lord (12:1 — 14:21)
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THE RESTORATION OF ISRAEL (9:1 — 11:17)

Three Oracles on the Universal Kingdom (9:1-17)

This chapter is made up of three brief oracles, which have no clear connection to one another.

The Downfall of Proud Nations (9:1-8)

A number of cities to be conquered are mentioned. Most of them are related to Syria (Damascus, Hadrach, and Hamath), Phoenicia (Tyre and Sidon), or Philistia (Ashkelon, Gaza, Ekron, and Ashdod), which lie in the path of Alexander the Great's advance. Of the five major cities of Philistia, only Gath is missing.

Greece, perhaps under Alexander the Great, will conquer these nations. God will stand in the Temple Watchtower in Jerusalem and forever guard Judah from any similar invasion, but Philistia, Israel's ancient enemy, will be absorbed as were the Jebusites in David's time.

The Prince of Peace (9:9-10)

The Prince of Peace will come into Jerusalem riding on the colt of a donkey. This contrasts sharply with Alexander's horse (symbol of power and war). The donkey was a symbol of royalty and peace. Jesus would have been familiar with this scripture, and could have sought out a colt of a donkey to make his final claim as the Messiah (Matthew 21:5 and John 12:14-15). Christians claim that this was fulfilled on Palm Sunday.

According to 1 Kings 1:33, King David had a mule. Could this have been the royal mount used prior to the general use of horses? If so, then what Jesus did on Palm Sunday was a symbolic act demonstrating his connection to David. Another symbolic connotation of the mule is his humility. The Hebrew word can also imply "afflicted." All this applies to the Messiah who will identify with the people and suffer on their behalf.

The Prisoners of Hope Return (9:11-17)

The Jews in dispersion are to return home to participate in the final battle. Judah will be God's bow, and Ephraim (Israel) will be the arrow. Together they will take out their common enemy.

The key verse is 13, which describes Greece as the victim of God's armies. The author may have meant the Seleucid Dynasty in Syria, one of the four Hellenic (Greek) subkingdoms emerging from Alexander the Great's Empire. At any rate, the Jewish captives will be set free and Israel's military power will equal that of the rising power of Greece.

The Restoration of Israel (10:1—11:17)

The Lord Alone Controls Nature (10:1-2)

It will do no good to look to the household gods (terebinths) or magic for water, for the Lord alone controls nature; yet, this is precisely what happens in the absence of strong spiritual leadership.

The Lord Alone Controls History (10:3-12)

The shepherds described in these verses might have been foreign rulers, such as the Ptolemies of Egypt or the Seleucids of Syria. God's anger burns against them and they are brought down. In their place, the Lord calls forth new rulers out of the flock (10:3-4). His flock shall return from all over the known world (10:9) and God will act as their source of power and strength (10:12). At the cornerstone will be Judah and from Judah will emerge the Messianic King.

The Fallen Tyrants (11:1-3)

The fallen tyrants (foreign rulers) are described here as fallen cedars, oaks, shepherds, and lions. All three of these (trees, shepherds, and lions) were traditional symbols for strong rulers. The foreign nations are Lebanon, Bashan and the lush thickets of the Jordan.

The Two Shepherds (11:4-17)

The prophet himself represents both the first and second shepherds. Within the description of the first shepherd are three more shepherds, who ought not to be confused with the shepherd who holds the flock together and the shepherd who exploits the sheep. In being both shepherds, the prophet is acting out his message in the same way as Jeremiah and Ezekiel did.

The first shepherd, whose staffs of “favor” and “unity” (11:7), holds the flock together, but will be rejected by his sheep. This brings about the breaking of the staff of “favor” (11:10) and “unity” (11:14). Hope only exists for those who follow him. To reject his “favor” also affects human “unity.”

The flock and its three minor shepherds are allowed to take the path of destruction. The identity of the three shepherds cannot be made, but they might have been contemporary officials or priests (11:8). Whoever these leaders might be, it is made very clear that they will be held accountable for their deeds.

Those who bought and sold were Ptolemaic overlords (11:11), who paid the shepherd 30 pieces of silver, the price of a slave (Exodus 21:32; Matthew 26:15-16; and 27:3-5, 9). In Matthew 27:9, Zechariah 11:12 is erroneously attributed to Jeremiah.

The second shepherd exploits the sheep, but the flock seems to prefer exploitation to genuine care (11:15-16). (See also, John 10:1, 8-13.) This exploitation however brings him down, along with his flock.

THE DAY OF THE LORD (12:1—14:21)

The Day of the Lord refers to that time in the future when God shall cleanse his people from sin, re-establish a new covenant with them, and reign over all the earth. The New Jerusalem is a symbol of that final reign.

The Deliverance of Jerusalem (12:1—13:1)

The people of God will be empowered by God to win the final battle. This does not only apply to those who live in Jerusalem, but to those who live outside of the city walls, as well (12:7). When this happens, God’s people will mourn over having slain the shepherd (12:10). Their mourning will be a sign of national repentance and salvation and it will be

as deep as the mourning expressed by pagans over Hadad-rimmon (Hadad the thunderer), a Canaanite fertility god, mourned in the season when all vegetation died.

The precise meaning of 12:10b is not known. Although the identity of the one who is pierced is not given, John 19:34-37 identifies Jesus as the one who is pierced. From the side of the one who is pierced, will flow a fountain of blood, which will cleanse us from sin and impurity. Linking Zechariah 13:1 with Revelation 7:14, William Cowper wrote his wellknown hymn, "There is a Fountain filled with Blood."

The End of Professional Prophecy (13:2-6)

Professional prophecy with its link to idolatry will come to an end. Those connected with it will be ashamed and pretend to be farmers. Since they suffered wounds, received in ecstatic activities, they can be easily recognized, but they will defend themselves by saying they received their wounds in a friendly brawl. That would be less degrading than to be recognized as a former professional (false) prophet.

The Emergence of the Remnant (13:7-9)

A remnant will respond to God and be cleansed. Making up a clear minority (one-third), they choose the narrow gate or the road less traveled. God will re-establish his covenant with them.

The Final Victory (14:1-21)

The final victory will be preceded by a final battle. All nations will participate. The Lord will place his feet on the Mount of Olives, which will split in two. Night will end and water will flow out of the New Jerusalem. This imagery is similar to that used by Ezekiel to describe the New Jerusalem (Ezekiel 40-48).

The destruction of the armies of the nations proves decisively that the Lord reigns over the whole earth (14:9, 16, & 20). Survivors of the battle will join with God's people in worshiping the Lord; and all who fight against Him, will be destroyed (14:17-19).

The survivors will celebrate the Feast of Tabernacles, the final and greatest festival of the Hebrew calendar. On that day the bells of the horses will be inscribed "Holy to the Lord" (14:20a) and every home will be as a Temple, where sacrifices are made to the Lord (14:20b). Distinctions between the sacred and the secular will have ended and God will be everywhere. There will no longer be any Canaanite in the house of the Lord, because all will have become the people of God. This is the final victory.

THE SYMBOL OF PEACE

When Jesus made his final move into Jerusalem, he chose to fulfill Zechariah 9:9-10:

Rejoice greatly, O daughter Zion! Shout aloud, O daughter Jerusalem! Lo, your king comes to you; triumphant and victorious is he, humble and riding on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey. He will cut off the chariot from Ephraim and the war horse from Jerusalem; and the battle bow shall be cut off, and he shall command peace to the nations; his dominion shall be from sea to sea, and from the River to the ends of the earth. (Zechariah 9:9-10)

John 12:14-15 simply states: “Jesus found a young donkey and sat on it; as it is written: ‘Do not be afraid, daughter of Zion. Look, your king is coming, sitting on a donkey’s colt!’” What was he doing? He was not only fulfilling the imagery of Zechariah, but he was doing something that had been done by his ancestor David in 1 Kings 1:33, who placed his son Solomon on his own mule. We are not to make too much of the use of “mule” in 1 Kings and “donkey” in Zechariah, Matthew, and John. Alexander the Great would have used horses to demonstrate his power to rule. Horses for the Greeks were symbols of power. Zechariah and Jesus are proclaiming the coming of peace, so their symbol is the ordinary work animal used by the Jews. This, for them, was the symbol of peace: it is that kind of a reign that will be inaugurated by the Messiah. Jesus carefully chose this kind of animal to ride on as he entered the Golden Gate into Jerusalem.

This prophet recognizes that peace is not achieved by means of worldly power. “Victory,” said E. Stanley Jones, “may be achieved through armaments, but not world peace.”¹ World peace will only be achieved when the love of power gives way to the power of love. This is precisely the point of this Old Testament prophet. It is also the point Jesus makes when he rides into Jerusalem on a donkey. This contrasts sharply to Alexander the Great as he conquered the world on horses.

Two stories are told about Alexander the Great as he came to the end of his life. In the first one he weeps because he has no more worlds to conquer; in the second story, his friends ask him on his deathbed to designate a successor. His reply was: “To the strongest.”² How blind can anyone be? The world is only conquered when it voluntarily conforms to the Will of God: peace will be impossible until God’s righteousness is established.

Those who think that they can conquer the world through power need to think again. Power not only corrupts those who wield it, but also those who are subservient to it. Christians can never submit to military power, symbolized by the horse, even to do good; rather, we must submit to divine power, symbolized by the donkey, even if the battle seems to be lost. Jesus ended up on the cross one week later, but this did not symbolize the end. The end came three days later when God’s divine power raised him up from the

¹E. Stanley Jones, *The Way* (Abingdon Press: Nashville, 1984), p. 347.

²Edward McNall Burns, *Western Civilizations: Their History and Their Culture*, Volume I (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, Inc., 1984), p. 148.

dead. I like the way Dr. William McClain, from Wesley Seminary put it one day in a sermon I heard him preach: “The final chapter of life will not be written by sinful men and women. The final chapter will be written by the author of life.”³ That chapter has yet to be written, but we who are Christians believe that God has demonstrated in the resurrection of Jesus Christ how things will finally turn out. The prophet indicates his confidence in how things will turn out as well in Zechariah 14:4 and 9:

On that day his feet shall stand on the Mount of Olives, which lies before Jerusalem on the east; and the Mount of Olives shall be split in two from east to west by a very wide valley.... (14:4)

And the LORD will become king over all the earth; on that day the LORD will be one and his name one. (14:9)

³From an unprinted sermon I heard him preach.

34. DANIEL: THE STORIES (1:1 – 6:28)					
DEPORTATION AND TRAINING (1:1-21)					
The Length of his Stay (605 to 538 B.C.E.) (1:1 & 1:21)					
King: Jehoiakim (1:1) Chief Eunuch: Ashpenaz (1:3)			Literature and Language(1:4) Three Years (1:5)		
<i>Hebrew Names</i>			<i>Arabic Names</i>		
Daniel <i>God is my Judge</i> Hannaniah <i>The Lord shows grace</i> Mishael <i>Who is what God is?</i> Azariah <i>The Lord helps</i>			Beltshazzar <i>Bel protects his life</i> Shadrach <i>Command of Aku</i> Meshach <i>Who is what Aku is</i> Abednego <i>Servant of Nebo</i>		
(1:6-7)					
10 Day Vegetarian Test (1:12 & 15)			10 Times Better (1:20)		
NEBUCHADNEZZAR'S DREAM (2:1-49)					
The Problem (2:3b-6, 11-13)	Rock & Mountain (2:34-35)	The Dream		Liberal	Conservative
The Decree (Arioch) (2:13)	The Interpretation (2:38b-40)	Head: Gold		Babylonia	Babylonia
		Chest/Arms: Silver		Midia	Midia/Persia
		Waist/Hips: Bronze		Persia	Greece
The Dream (2:32-33)	The Reward (2:48)	Legs: Iron		Greece	Rome
		Feet: Iron/Clay			<i>Breakup</i>
THE FIERY FURNACE (3:1-30)					
The 90' Image (3:1)	The Decree (3:4-6)	The Defiance (3:16-18)	The Punishment (3:19-23)	The Deliverance (3:24-25)	The New Decree (3:29)
NEBUCHADENEZZAR'S MADNESS AND RECOVERY (4:1-37)					
The Dream (4:13-16)	The Interpretation (4:20-27)	The Dream Fulfilled (4:28-30 & 33)		The Restoration (4:34 & 37)	

DANIEL



Daniel in the Lion's Den by *Gustave Doré* (1832-1883)

34. The Stories

Daniel 1:1—6:28

THE MOVING FINGER WRITES (5:1-31)					
The Banquet (5:1-2)	The Finger (5:5)	The Reward (5:7)	The Offer (5:16-17)	The Message (5:26-28)	The Fulfillment (5:30-31)
<i>Mene Mene (Numbered)</i>		<i>Tekel (Weighed)</i>		<i>Parsin (Divided)</i>	
God has numbered the days of your Kingdom and brought it to an end. (5:26)		You have been weighed on the scales and found wanting. (5:27)		Your Kingdom is divided and given to the Medes and Persians. (5:28)	
DANIEL IN THE LIONS' DEN (6:1-28)					
Three Leaders (6:1)	Daniel's Advancement (6:3-5)	The Decree (6:6-7, 9)	Daniel's Response (6:10)	The King's Order (6:16)	The Rescue (6:19-22, 24)

THE BOOK OF DANIEL

An Overview

Chapter	1-4	5	6	7-8	9	10-12
Daniel and His Friends: The Stories				The Visions		
Under	Nebuchadnezzar	Belshazzar	Darius and Cyrus	Nations	Messiah	Future

34. DANIEL: THE STORIES

Daniel 1:1—6:28

ASSIGNMENTS					
Deportation and Training (1:1-21)	The King's Dream (2:1-49)	The Fiery Furnace (3:1-30)	The King's Madness (4:1-37)	The Moving Finger (5:1-31)	The Lions' Den (6:1-28)

INTRODUCTION

The Person of Daniel

Daniel¹ was a young man taken to Babylon in the deportation of 605 B.C.E., just a few years prior to Ezekiel's arrival in Babylon. He is a true Jew, loyal to God, who resists the pressures of pagan life in a foreign land. God gives him the ability to interpret dreams, and this wins for him a position in the Babylonian court. Nebuchadnezzar is still King when Daniel's story begins.

The Message of Daniel

The message of Daniel is a word of encouragement for people living in depressing times. The book was written not for the Babylonian Exiles, but for Jews living in the time of Antiochus IV Epiphanes (167-164 B.C.E.), who was not only persecuting the Jews, but also defiling their faith. His paganizing activities brought on the Maccabean revolt and the suffering and death of many loyal Jews. Daniel assures Israel of victory through God, who is greater than the idols of Israel's pagan conquerors. The God of Israel is in charge of all history.

The Setting

Although the setting for the first part of Daniel (1-6) is clearly the sixth century B.C.E., the setting for the second part of Daniel (7-12) is the second century B.C.E. The first part of Daniel takes place in Babylon; the second part takes place in Israel.

¹ Dan'el means "God is my judge."

The Date

There are differences of opinion. Liberal scholarship dates the writing of the book in the second century B.C.E. during the time of Antiochus IV Epiphanes (167-164 B.C.E.), but conservative scholarship dates it in the sixth century B.C.E. (605 B.C.E.) Conservative scholarship interprets the author's knowledge of later events as prophecy, while liberal scholarship interprets it as evidence of a later author.

The Author

Conservative scholarship identifies the author as Daniel himself, but liberal scholarship claims that it was written too late for Daniel to have written it. For liberal scholars, the author is an unknown person who used Daniel's name to give the book more authority.

The Style

This is the first "apocalyptic" book of the Bible. Apocalyptic literature became fashionable sometime between 200 B.C.E. and 100 C.E. The word itself means "unveiling, disclosure, or revelation." The message of apocalyptic literature is to wait patiently upon God to overthrow the enemy and usher in his Kingdom. The predictive element often associated with prophecy belongs more to apocalypticism. The Book of Revelation performs a similar function in the New Testament. It is a message of hope to suffering and dying Christians. It informs them that they are not dying in vain and that God's Kingdom will soon be established. Even for the Book of Revelation, Daniel seems to be the model for apocalyptic literature. Both books had as their main purpose to help people be faithful and not collapse in the midst of vicious persecution.

The Language

The book is written in Aramaic and Hebrew. Chapters 2:4b to 7:28 are written in Aramaic, and chapters 1:1—2:4b to 8:1—12:13 are written in Hebrew. Some scholars suggest that the author was more familiar with Aramaic, but felt the need for an introduction and conclusion in Hebrew. Hebrew was recognized as the language of scripture.

The Organization

The book can be divided into two parts. In the first part we read the stories of Daniel and his companions, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego.

In the second part we read four visions, which interpret history and the coming Kingdom of God. This will only take place following the defeat of the enemies of Israel, who according to liberal scholars are: (1) Babylon, (2) Media, (3) Persia, and (4) Greece. According to conservative scholars these enemies are: (1) Babylon, (2) Media/Persia, (3) Greece, and (4) Rome.

Conservative scholars believe that we still live in the Roman era, so Daniel’s visions are about the end, which lies in our future. Liberal scholars claim that Daniel was predicting an end of about 3 1/2 years and that he was not talking about the twentieth century.

The Life of Daniel (1:1—6:28)	The Visions of Daniel (7:1—12:13)
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A. The Life of Daniel (1-6)

1. Deportation and Training
2. Nebuchadnezzar’s Dream
3. The Fiery Furnace
4. The Moving Finger Writes
5. Daniel in the Lion’s Den

B. The Visions of Daniel (7-12)

1. The Four Beasts (7:1-28)
2. The Ram and the Goat (8:1-27)
3. The Seventy Weeks (9:1-27)
4. The Heavenly Messenger (10:1-21)
5. The Synopsis of History (11:1-45)
6. The End of History (12:1-13)

Daniel and the Apocrypha

It must be mentioned that Roman Catholics have an expanded version of the Book of Daniel, which is commonly referred to by Protestants as the additions to Daniel. Because these additional passages are found in the Greek translation of the Old Testament (the Septuagint), which was begun in the third century B.C.E. in Egypt, Jews and Protestants have not accepted them as part of the Hebrew Scriptures (the Old Testament).

The additions to Daniel are made up of several short books. The first book, *Susanna*, makes up an introduction to the Book of Daniel and logically stands at the beginning. Two books, *The Prayer of Azariah* and *The Song of the Three Young Men* belong between verses 23 and 24 of the third chapter of Daniel (3:23-24). *Bel and the Dragon* makes up a supplement to Daniel and belongs at the end.

DEPORTATION AND TRAINING (1:1-21)

Daniel and three of his friends were taken to Babylon (Shinar) around 605 B.C.E., the third year of Jehoiakim’s reign. Promising youth from the conquered nation were often

trained to help make ruling the nation easier. The chief Eunuch, Ashpenaz, had the task of taking care of them. The four young men were given Babylonian names. A person's name was important. Each of these four Hebrew youth possessed a name that identified them with their God. The endings of their names were either -el (God) or -iah (Yahweh). The four young men with their new names were as follows: (1:6-7)

Hebrew Name	Babylonian Name
Daniel <i>God is my Judge</i>	Belteshazzar <i>Bel (Marduk) protects his life</i>
Hannaniah <i>The Lord shows grace</i>	Shadrach <i>Command of Aku (Sumerian Moon-god)</i>
Mishael <i>Who is what God is</i>	Meshach <i>Who is what Aku is?</i>
Azariah <i>The Lord helps</i>	Abednego <i>Servant of Nego/Nebo (Nabu)</i>

Daniel's new name was most clearly linked to the Babylonian god "Bel." Azariah's name "Abednego" might have a connection to the Babylonian God "Nebo," but the new names of Hananiah and Mishael are not clearly connected to any Babylonian god. The connection to Aku is only a guess.

The first problem these four young men faced in their education was diet, much of which was an affront to their faith. The first portions of Babylonian food were offered to idols and some of the food not offered to idols was simply ceremonially unclean. Daniel and his friends decided to become vegetarians. This was allowed as long as it did not affect their health. Daniel asked for a ten-day trial period, and at the end of the ten days, they looked better than ever. They looked better than those who ate the rich Babylonian food, some of which was a violation of the Mosaic Law. Daniel and his friends also became skilled in letters and wisdom. They were ten times better than all the magicians and enchanters in the Kingdom; Daniel excelled in his ability to understand visions and dreams.

Daniel stayed in Babylon until the first year of Cyrus (538 B.C.E.). This does not mean that he died at this time. It means that he lived through the entire exile, which was ended with Cyrus' decree permitting the exiles to go home. The exilic period lasted approximately seventy years.

NEBUCHADNEZZAR'S DREAM (2:1-49)

King Nebuchadnezzar had a dream, which he could not remember, but which troubled him greatly. He asked the magicians, enchanters, sorcerers, Chaldeans (not an ethnic group, but a caste of wisemen), and astrologers to not only interpret it for him, but to describe the dream itself. No one was able to do it. They were all prepared to interpret dreams but none of them could describe his dream. Was Nebuchadnezzar simply testing them, or did he really not know the nature of his dream. The latter could be true.

Psychologists tell us that we do not remember most of our dreams. In the case of Nebuchadnezzar he does not seem to remember the dream itself; only that, he was troubled by his dreaming. The King was so angered that he ordered his captain of the Guard, Arioch, to have all the dream interpreters and wisemen killed. Daniel objected and suggested that he be given a chance to describe and interpret the King's dream.

Both Old and New Testaments see the dream and vision as a revelation from God. (See Genesis 20:3; 41:1-32; Numbers 12:6; Job 33:14-18; and Matthew 27:19.) It was especially believed that if one had a dream in a holy place that the dream came from God (Genesis 28:10-17 and I Kings 3:4-15). For this reason it was not unusual for a King, who was facing difficulty, to sleep in the Temple. He did this hoping for a dream or vision that would give him guidance.

Daniel described the dream in terms of a giant statue, which was made out of various materials. The head was made of gold, the chest and arms of silver, the waist and hips of bronze, and the legs of iron. The feet were made of iron and clay. A stone broke loose from a cliff and struck the iron and clay feet shattering them. In turn the whole statue came crumbling down. The dream was about the future or hereafter, although scholars disagree about just what that means.

Liberal scholars interpret the Gold as the Babylonian, the Silver as the Midian, the bronze as the Persian, and the iron as the Greek Kingdoms. The Greek Kingdom had been led by Alexander the Great, whose Kingdom, at his death, was divided among his four generals. Some also suggest that the unsuccessful attempt to unite the Seleucid and Ptolemaic Empires through a royal marriage is what is being described in Daniel 2:43. They suggest that the author of Daniel lives during the time of the Greek Kingdom and that his message is that God has destroyed the three prior Kingdoms and he will destroy the Greek Kingdom as well.

More conservative scholars reject the above theory and claim that the Midians never made up a dominant Kingdom, and so they must be considered as a part of the Persian Kingdom. They suggest that Daniel is talking about the Roman Empire as the fourth Kingdom, a Kingdom that still exists today. In spite of these differences, both liberal and conservative scholars agree that Daniel is predicting the fall of all four Kingdoms and the establishment of the eternal Kingdom of God. The stone that destroys the statue might be Jesus and the resulting mountain is the Kingdom of God, which while growing, has not yet been fully established.

The King was so grateful for Daniel's ability to describe and interpret his dream that he elevated Daniel and his friends to positions of power. Daniel's promotion would have been similar to what happened to Joseph in Egypt after he successfully interpreted dreams for the Pharaoh (Genesis 41:1-32 & 41).

THE FIERY FURNACE (3:1-30)

Having forgotten about his commitment to Daniel's God, Nebuchadnezzar had a ninety-foot statue (idol) built, and then he demanded that everyone worship it. While Daniel is not mentioned in this chapter, his three friends, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego all refuse to worship the idol. Death in the fiery furnace was to be the punishment for disobedience. The three faithful Jews profess their faith in God, who has the power to deliver them; but even if he does not, they will remain faithful to him. Martyrdom is preferable to apostasy.

The furnace had an opening at the top, through which the flames and gases could escape, and an opening at the bottom, through which one could look into the furnace. Such furnaces were used for making bricks or smelting metals. The gases were so hot that the men assigned to throwing the three into the furnace were killed as they performed this grisly act. When Nebuchadnezzar looked into the bottom opening of the furnace, he saw not three, but four men in the fire. Not one of them was hurt; instead, they were all walking around and one of them "had the appearance of a god."¹ (3:25; Isaiah 43:2b-3a). This caused Nebuchadnezzar to recommit himself to the God of Israel and to promote Daniel's three friends in the province of Babylon.

NEBUCHADNEZZAR'S MADNESS AND RECOVERY (4:1-37)

In this fourth story Nebuchadnezzar had a dream in which he saw a tree with its top in the heavens. A watcher (or holy one) came down and cried, "Cut down the tree and chop off its branches, strip off its foliage and scatter its fruit. Let the animals flee from beneath it and the birds from its branches." (4:14) No one could tell him what it meant except for Daniel. Daniel was afraid to at first, but with the encouragement of the King, he interpreted the tree to be the King himself, who would be cut down from his power.

It was not uncommon to compare a person to a tree. One can see examples of this in Psalm 1:3, 37:35 and in Jeremiah 17:8. Ezekiel 31:3-14 contains a similar kind of interpretation and the Tower of Babel in Genesis 11:1-9 makes the same point. The point is that no matter how great the power of the heathen, the God of Israel is more powerful. No king or nation can stand against his power.

When the writer moves from the tree imagery to that of the madness of the King, some scholars believe that he is combining two separate traditions; but this might simply be the way God brings down a king and the nation he rules. While there is no record, apart from the Bible, which indicates that Nebuchadnezzar went mad, there is a Babylonian tablet in the British Museum which says that he may have left his throne and family, leaving his son to rule for a brief time.

A similar story has been told on Antiochus IV Epiphanes, who took on the surname "Epiphanes," which means "manifested one", e.g. "a revealed god." Some of his enemies

¹ Or: "looked like a son of the gods."

called him “Epimanes” instead, a word which means “madman.” The point being made would hold true both for the heathen Babylonian power as well as for the heathen Greek power. God will bring any arrogant and idolatrous power down. The only thing that could save such a King would be repentance and a commitment to God’s righteousness.

Twelve months after the dream, Nebuchadnezzar was on the roof of his royal palace bragging about his power and kingdom, when all of a sudden he went mad. He began eating like an ox. His hair grew as long as an eagle’s feathers, and his nails looked like those of a bird’s claws (4:33). This condition in which a man begins acting like a beast is known as “insania zoanthopia.” The dream suggests that he would be mad until seven times passed over him (4:23). What does this mean? It could either mean seven years or else seven seasons, which would be three and one-half years. A year consisted of two seasons: summer and winter. At the end of this time, the King repented and acknowledged the God of Israel, after which, he recovered from his madness.

THE MOVING FINGER WRITES (5:1-31)

Belshazzar’s name means “Bel (a Babylonian god) protects the King.” Although Belshazzar is described as Nebuchadnezzar’s son and Babylon’s last king, he was really only a descendant of Nebuchadnezzar and never became king by himself. He shared power with his father, Nabonidus, who was Babylon’s last king. The Kings of the Babylonian Empire were as follows:

Nebuchadnezzar
Evil-merodach
Neriglissar
Labashi-Marduk
Nabonidus - Belshazzar

During one of the times when Belshazzar was “acting as king” in his father’s absence, he threw a great feast for a thousand of his lords. This would have been similar to a state banquet. In defiance of Israel’s God, Belshazzar took the gold and silver vessels, which Nebuchadnezzar had taken out of the Jerusalem Temple and invited everyone to drink from them. As they drank they praised the gods of gold, silver, bronze, iron, wood, and stone. This would have been considered a sacrilege by the Jews; in later times, it would have reminded them of Antiochus IV Epiphanes’ desecration of the Temple and its altar.

Immediately on the plaster of the wall of the King’s palace, the fingers of a man’s hand appeared and wrote: “Mene, Mene, Tekel, Parsin.” Although these words were in the King’s own language, he could not understand what they meant. His color changed, thought abandoned him, his limbs gave way, and his knees knocked together. He called for the enchanters, Chaldeans, and astrologers to interpret the words, but they were unable to help him; so he offered to clothe with purple and hang a chain of gold around the neck of anyone who could interpret these words. Such a person would be made the third ruler of the Kingdom.

The Queen Mother (not his wife) came into the banquet hall about that time and told him about Daniel (Belshazzar), who was capable of interpreting dreams. Daniel interpreted the words. They meant literally “numbered, weighed, and divided” and they symbolized a series of weights in descending value. The finger wrote a message of doom on the wall for the Babylonian ruler, the interpretation of which might be written as: (1) God has “numbered” the days of your Kingdom, (2) You have been “weighed” in the balances and found wanting, and (3) Your Kingdom will be “divided” and given to the Medes and Persians. Belshazzar seems to have accepted Daniel’s interpretation for he clothes him with purple and places a chain of gold around his neck. He then proclaimed him the third ruler (after the King and Crown Prince) in the Kingdom, but it was too late. That very night Belshazzar was slain and Babylon was taken without a battle. All this, according to historical records, followed a great feast. The Fall of Babylon can be dated to October of 539 B.C.E.

The conqueror is identified as Darius the Mede, who was about sixty-two years old. Since Darius was not listed among the Median kings in any of the historical records, one guess is that the author was referring to Gobyras, one of Cyrus’ generals, who happened to be sixty-two years old at the time. Another guess is that he was confused with the later Persian King, Darius the Great (522-486 B.C.E.), who aided in the rebuilding of the Temple in Jerusalem (Ezra 5-6). In this case the name is mistakenly applied to Astyages, the last ruler of the Median Empire.

DANIEL IN THE LION’S DEN (6:1-28)

Darius is said to have organized the Persian Empire into 120 satraps (provincial states), but Persian sources give the number as 29. The discrepancy might have to do with the tendency of later kings to extend the status to smaller sub-provinces. Daniel is to be numbered among the three presidents or chief ministers. In addition to Daniel there would be a military chief and a civil secretary. No reason is given for the promotion of Daniel to prime minister or president, except for his reputation of integrity and efficiency. His promotion aroused jealousy and the fact that he was a foreigner aggravated the resentment. Since no one could find any fault with him, they decided to attack the one chink in his armor, which was his religion. The scheme devised by the presidents of the satraps was to play on the king’s vanity. They suggested that a month be set aside in which everyone had to worship him as a god. This ordinance or interdict was to be “irreversible.” All of this has a great deal of symbolic value for what was happening during the reign of Antiochus IV Epiphanes and his pretensions of divinity.

When King Darius discovered the implications of the interdict and what it meant for Daniel, he was truly distressed and sought for a way to rescue him, but it was to no avail. Daniel had to be punished for disobeying the interdict and punishment consisted of being thrown to the lions. Daniel spent a night with the lions and emerged unharmed. He claimed that God had sent an angel to shut the lions’ mouths. The King was glad and punished the men involved in the cruel scheme. They, along with their wives and children, were thrown to the lions. Even before they reached the bottom of the den (pit),

the lions overpowered them and broke them into pieces. Darius committed himself to the God of Israel and Daniel prospered during both the reigns of Darius and Cyrus.

FOLLOW GOD'S DREAM

Daniel knew how to interpret other people's dreams. Along with Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, Daniel relied upon God to keep his promise. None of them would give in to any pressure, political or social, to follow any interpretation of the dream, but God's. When pressured by the King in Daniel 3:16-18, to worship the golden image, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego replied: "O Nebuchadnezzar, we have no need to present a defense to you in this matter. If our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the furnace of blazing fire and out of your hand, O king, let him deliver us. But if not, be it known to you, O king, that we will not serve your gods and we will not worship the golden statue that you have set up." Only God's dream of a new Kingdom was going to be turned into reality. All other dreams are illusions to be avoided.

The Church needs a dream that can unify and move it, even when it faces a wall of hostility symbolized here by a fiery furnace and a den of lions. We have just as many obstacles and pressures to give in to the current culture, as did Daniel and his three friends, so we need as clear a vision as they had in their time. "I am a firm believer," wrote Robert Schuller, "that we should never attack any problem until we can do it with a positive plan, with a creative idea, with a non-inflammatory dream."¹

This does not mean that everyone has to agree with the dream. The Church and Society will never come to agreement concerning God's dream of a new creation. Israel and Babylon were not following the same dream. Even when Babylonian Kings acknowledged the power of Israel's God, they were unable to move their people to follow Israel's dream. One minute the Babylonian King would acknowledge Israel's God and the next minute he would be threatening Israel with a new disaster. What was important for Israel was that its people were shaped by God's dream; that is just as important for the Church today as it was for Israel in Daniel's time.

We are threatened today with a fragmentation of God's dream. The evangelical and liberal wings of the Church do not share the dream. There is no reason why we should share every element of the dream, but we ought to share that which is most important and essential to the dream—that God's Kingdom is breaking in and will be victorious. When God's dream becomes our dream, then we will be willing to do things together, even to fail together, in order to be faithful to the dream.

¹Robert Schuller, *Self Esteem: The New Reformation* (Word Books: Waco, 1982), p. 125.

Only as our dream becomes clear are we willing to fail and still remain faithful to the dream. No one understood this better than John Bunyan, who wrote:²

I am going on, and venturing my eternal state with Christ, whether I have comfort here or no; if God doth not come in...I will leap off the ladder even blindfold into eternity, sink or swim, come heaven, come hell. Lord Jesus, if thou wilt catch me; do, if not, I will venture for thy name.

Daniel and his friends understood God's dream and that enabled them to see through the shallow dreams of Babylonian society. Do we understand God's dream in our time well enough to follow it, even when it leads straight to the cross, the New Testament equivalent of the fiery furnace and the lions' den. The protection offered by God may not be physical, but it certainly is spiritual. Remember what Jesus said in Matthew 10:28: "Do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul; rather fear him who can destroy both soul and body in hell." We are willing to face danger in this world for God's dream of a New Kingdom because we know that his dream is certain to be fulfilled. There is a fourth man in the fiery furnace and his name is Jesus.

²John Bunyan, *Grace Abounding to the Chief of Sinners* (SCM Press: London, 1955), p. 146.

DANIEL



Daniel's Vision of the Beasts by Gustave Doré (1832-1883)

35. The Visions

Daniel 7:1—12:13

35. DANIEL: THE VISIONS (7:1 – 12:13)

THE FOUR BEASTS (7:1-28)

The Vision (7:1-14) (Out of the Sea [Chaos]) [554 B.C.E.]

A Lion with Eagles' Wings (7:4)	A Bear with 3 Tusks in its Mouth (7:5)	A Leopard with 4 Wings and 4 Heads (7:6)	A Beast with 10 Horns (7:7)
Babylon	Medes (and Persians)	Greeks or Persians 4 Corners of the World	Romans or Greeks Little Horn: Antiochus (7:8)

The Interpretation (7:15-28) (of an Angel)

The Son of Man will Conquer (7:13-14)	The Beastly Kingdom (3 & 1/2 Years) (7:25)	The Everlasting Kingdom (Eternal) (7:27)
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THE RAM AND THE GOAT (8:1-27)

The Vision (8:1-14) [552 B.C.E.]

The Ram with 2 Horns (8:3) (8:20)	The Goat with 1 Horn (8:5) (8:8 & 22)
Media Persia	Cassander Lysimachus
	Seleucus Ptolemy

The Interpretation (of Gabriel) (8:15-27) (8:16)

Antiochus is the Little Horn (8:9-12)	The Collapse in 3 & 1/2 Years (8:13-14)
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THE SEVENTY WEEKS (9:1-27)

The Prophecy (from Jeremiah) (9:1-2)	The Prayer (9:3-19) (9:4-5 & 18)
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The Interpretation (of Gabriel) (9:21)

7 Weeks (49 Years) (9:25) Cyrus's Victory	62 Weeks (434 Years) (9:26) Greek Victory	1 Week (7 Years) (9:27) [1/2 Week] Antiochus' Victory (12-16-167) Jewish Victory (12-14-164)
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35. DANIEL: THE VISIONS

Daniel 7:1—12:13

ASSIGNMENTS				
The Four Beasts (7:1-28)	The Ram and The Goat (8:1-27)	The 70 Weeks (9:1-27)	The Heavenly Messenger (10:1-21)	History and The End (11:1—12:13)

THE FOUR BEASTS (7:1-28)

The Vision (7:1-14)

The vision probably took place around 554 B.C.E. It consisted of seeing four beasts emerge out of the sea. The beasts are described as (1) a lion with eagles' wings, similar to a Cherub, (2) a bear with three ribs in its mouth, (3) a leopard with four wings and four heads, and (4) a beast with ten horns. All of these beasts are to be destroyed by the Son of Man, who comes with the clouds of heaven.

The Interpretation (7:15-28)

An angel does the interpreting for Daniel. That the four beasts emerged out of the sea is a symbol of their connection with chaos, which is what the sea represents. The lion with eagles' wings represents Babylon and its King, Nebuchadnezzar. The bear with three ribs in its mouth represents the Medes or the Median Empire. The leopard with four wings and four heads represents the Persians. The four wings and four heads symbolize the four corners of the world. The four Persian kings had stretched the Persian Empire to the four corners of the known world. The final [dragon-like] beast with ten horns represents the Greek Empire. The ten horns represent the ten rulers who succeeded Alexander the Great. (Fundamentalists see the fourth beast as the Roman Empire, which they still claim as the final beast on the basis that no nation has become a world Empire since then.) The little horn represents Antiochus IV Epiphanes who uprooted the others and seized power. The prediction is that he will be overthrown within three and one-half years. That's what "a time, two times, and half a time" mean (7:25). Following the end of the final beast will come the Messianic Kingdom, which will be established by the Son of Man.

In place of the beasts comes the Son of Man. "Son of Man" is merely a synonym for "man" in contrast with "beasts." While beasts have represented the four kingdoms, man

will represent the new kingdom, which will be a humanitarian kingdom in contrast to oppressive (animalistic) ones. The Son of Man represents the Son of Humanity, who will carry out God's intention for humanity. He is made in the image of God (Genesis 1:26) and worthy of taking dominion over all of creation (Genesis 1:28 and Psalm 8:6-8). This is the first use in the Old Testament of the "Son of Man" as a Messianic title. Israel as a "holy nation" (Exodus 19:6) was frequently thought of in terms of the "Son of Man." (See Psalm 80:17.) It is this nation, through its messianic king, which will usher in the new age. Daniel was troubled greatly by this vision.

THE RAM AND THE GOAT (8:1-27)

The Vision (8:1-14)

This vision, similar in meaning to the one about the four beasts, takes place two years later around 552 B.C.E. The setting was Susa, the winter capital of the Persian kings. The vision consists of a two-horned ram that displays his power only to be conquered by a he-goat with one horn. The he-goat's horn breaks off and in its place appeared four horns, which again gave way to one little horn. The little horn aspired to be the "prince of the host." When one of the holy ones asked the other how long the little horn would be tolerated, the answer was given in terms of 2,300 evenings and mornings (1,150 days or approximately three and one-half years).

The Interpretation (8:15-27)

This time the interpreter is an angel who is given the name "Gabriel." The two-horned Ram is described as the Medo-Persian Empire. The two horns symbolize double power, which Persia assumes when it incorporates the Median Empire into itself. The He-Goat from the West is Alexander the Great, who easily and quickly overthrows the Persian Empire. He is the single horn, but following his death, the kingdom is divided into four segments, ruled by Cassander, Lysimachus, Seleucus, and Ptolemy. The "little horn" is Antiochus IV Epiphanes, who finally gains power in 167 B.C.E. and prohibits worship in the Temple. In addition to putting a stop to the sacrifices, he violates the sanctuary itself. Zeus is now worshiped there. Antiochus IV Epiphanes has even risen up against Yahweh. How long will this be allowed to continue? The angels calculate the time in terms of 2,300 evenings and mornings (1,150 days or three and one-half years). The sanctuary was actually restored on December 14, 164 B.C.E., approximately three and one-half years later. Not only was Daniel troubled by this vision, he did not understand it, for these events had not yet taken place.

THE SEVENTY WEEKS (9:1-27)

The Prophecy (9:1-2)

In the year of Darius, the son of Ahasuerus (the Hebrew term for Xerxes), Daniel was reading the prophet Jeremiah (25:11-12 and 29:10-14) and concluded that Jerusalem had to lie in ruins for 70 years before it could be restored.

The seventy years might be calculated from 605 B.C.E., when Jeremiah made this prediction, to 538 B.C.E., when Cyrus sent out the Decree permitting the Jews to return to Jerusalem. This would be approximately sixty-seven years. Another way of looking at it would be from the destruction of Jerusalem in 587 B.C.E. to the dedication of the Temple in 515 B.C.E., which would be approximately seventy-two years. What must be remembered in prophecy is that predictions like this do not have to be precise. If one wants to be precise, there is one more option. If we calculate the beginning of the seventy years from the initial victory of Babylon in 609 B.C.E. to Cyrus' victory over Babylon in 539 B.C.E., then we have seventy years.

The Prayer (9:3-19)

Since the 70 years was almost up, Daniel decided to intercede on Israel's behalf. He confessed the nations sins and sought God's forgiveness. He shared blame for their sins and asked God to restore Jerusalem, not on the basis of Israel's righteousness, but on the basis of God's great mercy (9:18).

The Interpretation (9:20-27)

Gabriel, described here as a man (angels came in human form), came to Daniel at the time of the evening sacrifice and interpreted the prophecy of Jeremiah to him. There are three distinct parts to the 70 years, which really means 70 weeks of years, which would total 490 years.

The key passage can be found in Daniel 9:24, where six points are made: (1) to finish the transgression, (2) to put an end to sin, (3) to atone for iniquity, (4) to bring an everlasting righteousness, (5) to seal both vision and prophet, and (6) to anoint a most holy place. The concern has to do with the time between the actual rebuilding of Jerusalem and the coming of its messianic King. One must look at this time in the context of history first, and only then, can one begin to interpret it symbolically from the perspective of the Christian faith. The latter is extremely difficult to do and so I prefer to deal primarily with the former. If I were to look to the future, I would conclude that the sixth point alludes to God's people as a dedicated temple (1 Chronicles 23:13) and finally to the church as the Body of Christ or the Temple of the Holy Spirit.

7 Weeks. (9:25)

The coming of the "anointed one" will take place in 7 weeks (49 years). To whom was Daniel referring? Some say Cyrus, who set the exiles free to return to Jerusalem, others say Zerubbabel, who led a group of them home, and others say Jeshua (Joshua), who was the first high priest to be anointed.

62 Weeks (9:26)

Following the 62 weeks (434 years), the anointed one will be "cut off" and the city and sanctuary will be destroyed. The "one cut off" may have been Philopator, Jason, or Onias

III. The “prince to come” is Antiochus IV Epiphanes, who put an end to sacrifice in the Temple and began to offer pagan sacrifices there.

1 Week (9:27)

In the final week (7 years) the Prince will make a covenant with Jews sympathetic to Greek culture, but in the midst of his reign, he himself will be cut down. His reign was to last a half of a week (three and one-half years, or 1,150 days). Antiochus IV Epiphanes conquered Jerusalem on December 16, 167 B.C.E. and was soundly defeated approximately three and one-half years later in 163 B.C.E.

Not everyone relates the historical events just mentioned to Daniel’s vision. Some see Jesus as the anointed one “cut” off after the 62 weeks and feel that we are waiting for the last three and one-half years to go by before he comes again to establish his Kingdom. They would interpret part of the vision literally and other parts of it symbolically.

THE HEAVENLY MESSENGER (10:1-21)				
A Great War (10:1) [535-536 B.C.E.]				
The Three Week Fast (10:2-3)	The Vision (of Gabriel) (10:5-6)		The Help of Michael (10:13)	
THE SYNOPSIS OF HISTORY(11:1-45)				
Four Persian Kings (11:2)		The Mighty Greek King (11:3)		
The Breakup of the Greek Kingdom (11:4-5)				
Ptolemaic/South (Egypt)	Seleucid/North (Syria)	The Retreat (11:30)	The Desecration (11:31-32)	The Rebels (11:32)
THE END OF HISTORY (12:1-13)				
Michael (12:1)	The Judgment (12:2)	The Question (12:5-6)	The Answer (12:7 & 11)	The Solution (12:9 & 13)
1,150 (3 & 1/2 Years); 1,290, or 1,335 Days		<i>Be Ready Always!</i>		

THE HEAVENLY MESSENGER (10:1-21)

In the third year of Cyrus (535-536 B.C.E.), Daniel had a vision following three weeks of mourning in which he ate no meat and delicacies and in which he drank no wine. The

vision occurred on the banks of the Great River. While the Tigris is mentioned, the Great River was the Euphrates. In the vision Daniel saw a heavenly messenger, who was probably Gabriel. The vision reminds one of John's vision of Christ in Revelation 1:12-16. The men with Daniel did not see the vision, but they were affected by it. They fled, leaving Daniel alone. Daniel himself felt weak, and fell on his face in a deep sleep, with his face to the ground. A hand touched him and he stood up trembling. His prayer had been heard.

The angelic messenger informed Daniel of the conflict between the nations, which is symbolized by conflict between their guardian angels (princes). Nations as well as individuals are said to have guardian angels. Both Persia and Greece had guardian angels, which are not named; and these angels were preventing Gabriel from approaching Daniel. Thanks to Michael, Israel's guardian angel, Gabriel was finally able to approach him.

A SYNOPSIS OF HISTORY (11:1-45)

What follows, except for verses 40-45, is a fairly accurate synopsis of history. The angel begins by describing three Persian kings who followed Cyrus and a fourth who would take on Greece; but since there were more than four Persian kings, it is difficult to identify these kings. Scholars do not agree on their identity. The mighty king to arise out of Greece is clearly Alexander the Great (11:3). After his death the Kingdom was divided into four parts, which was followed with struggles between the Ptolemaic (Egyptian) Kingdom in the South and the Seleucid (Syrian) Kingdom in the North. These struggles are accurately described here. The man who finally emerges from all this is the Seleucid ruler, Antiochus IV Epiphanes. He replaced Onias III, the High Priest in Jerusalem, with his brother Jason, who would be more cooperative. Antiochus IV Epiphanes carried on two campaigns against Egypt, but was forced to withdraw from Egypt by the Romans (the ships from the west) (11:30). On his return to Syria, he desecrated the Temple in 168 B.C.E. Those who fought back were the leaders of the Maccabean Revolt (11:32), specifically Judas Maccabeus.

Verses 40-45 are confusing. A new war will be initiated by the King of the South, the Egyptian King, which will take place between the sea and the glorious holy mountain in Palestine. This war seems to be a description of the end, but many of the elements do not fit the history of Antiochus IV Epiphanes, nor do they seem to fit any other prophetic passages describing the end. Some scholars suggest that they leap the gap between the second century B.C.E. and the end time, but even then, they have no parallel anywhere else in the Bible.

THE END OF HISTORY (12:1-13)

The campaigns of Antiochus IV Epiphanes are to precede the end of history, which will result in judgment. Michael, the guardian angel of Israel, will watch over God's people, who will be raised to "everlasting life," while their enemies will be raised to "shame and everlasting contempt." This is the first mention of everlasting life in the Bible (12:2). Daniel is thinking only of the Jewish nation (God's people). When Daniel asks how long

it will be before these things take place, the answer given him is “a time, two times, and half a time” which can be translated into three and one-half years or 1,150 days. Two other figures follow, one in Daniel 12:12 which is 1,290 days, and the other in Daniel 12:13 which is 1,335 days. Why three answers are given is a puzzle to which no one can give any clear answer.

A final word must be said about this very complex analysis of past history and future reference to the end of history. The above texts treat time in more than one way. There is chronological, or historical time, (chronos) and then there is the fullness of time (kairos). The Book of Daniel may deal with the events of history (chronos), but it is more concerned with the fullness of time (kairos). The events of history point to the fulfillment of history. Specific times and dates may be important within history, but when we talk about the fullness of time, they are only symbolic. No one can pinpoint the end of history. We should not be preoccupied with it, but we should always be ready for it. The end of history for each of us comes with our own personal death. As long as that is the case, timetables of history mean nothing.

DAWN MUST FOLLOW THE NIGHT

Jesus only referred to Daniel once. In Matthew 24:15-22, he says,

So when you see the desolating sacrilege standing in the holy place, as was spoken of by the prophet Daniel (let the reader understand), then those in Judea must flee to the mountains; the one on the housetop must not go down to take what is in the house; the one in the field must not turn back to get a coat. Woe to those who are pregnant and to those who are nursing infants in those days! Pray that your flight may not be in winter or on a Sabbath. For at that time there will be great suffering, such as has not been from the beginning of the world until now, no, and never will be. And if those days had not been cut short, no one would be saved; but for the sake of the elect those days will be cut short.

The above is a description of the darkness yet to come. If Jesus, and Daniel, are right, then we must modify our theories about the possibility of things getting better and better. There has never been any such progression in history, just ups and downs. Our hope lies not in our ability to build a universal kingdom of peace, but in God finally establishing it himself. Jesus promises in Matthew 24:29-31 that God will indeed establish such a Kingdom following history's darkest hour:

Immediately after the suffering of those days the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light; the stars will fall from heaven, and the powers of heaven will be shaken. Then the sign of the Son of Man will appear in heaven, and then all the tribes of the earth will mourn, and they will see 'the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven' with power and great glory. And he will send out his angels with a loud trumpet call, and they will gather his elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other.

While it is easy enough to identify the desolating sacrilege of Daniel's time, it is not so easy to identify what the modern equivalent might be. In Daniel's time it was the statue of Zeus placed in the Temple by Antiochus IV Epiphanes. That was certainly a dark moment in Jewish history, which was followed with the Maccabean Revolt. Jews celebrate the Maccabean Victory today with Hanukkah. Their darkness had turned into dawn, but the dawn was short-lived as the Roman Empire loomed on the horizon.

As the Jews had to deal with the aftermath of the Greek Empire, early Christians had to deal with the full brunt of the Roman Empire. The desolating sacrilege in their time became the Roman Emperors, who claimed divinity. The most obvious parallel to Antiochus IV Epiphanes was the Roman Emperor, Caligula, who tried to place a statue of himself in the Temple around 40 C.E. Titus went a step further in 70 C.E. and destroyed the Temple itself; but not before Paul equated the desolating sacrilege to the antichrist. In 2 Thessalonians 2:4, he described this desolating sacrilege (the antichrist) to the Christians in Thessalonica: "He opposes and exalts himself above every so-called god or object of worship, so that he takes his seat in the temple of God, declaring himself to be God." This gets further developed in the Book of Revelation. With the eventual fall of the Roman Empire, the darkness again gives way to the dawn. Darkness and dawn seem to repeat themselves. Will the darkness ever completely give way to the dawn?

The darkness will not go away on earth, but it will disappear in heaven. While heaven is not a common theme in the Old Testament, Daniel 12:2 does speak clearly of the coming dawn: "Many of those who sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt." All who have been forced to live in the past darkness will awaken to the final dawn and share in its eternal light. How far away is that dawn? No one can say, not even Jesus or the angels in heaven. The desolating sacrilege will be tolerated for "...a time, two times, and half a time." That would be three and one-half years, but what does that mean? It means a short time. Jesus and Paul implied that the end would come quickly. At the same time God is patient and wants everyone to enjoy eternity, but that does not mean that the end will never come. Time is running out. This has been the message of the prophets. Beyond the darkest night will come the brightest day. Get ready for it!

APPENDIX

KEY PASSAGES FROM AMOS

JUDGMENT ON JUDAH

Thus says the LORD: For three transgressions of Judah, and for four, I will not revoke the punishment; because they have rejected the law of the LORD, and have not kept his statutes, but they have been led astray by the same lies after which their ancestors walked.

Amos 2:4

JUDGMENT ON ISRAEL

Thus says the LORD: For three transgressions of Israel, and for four, I will not revoke the punishment; because they sell the righteous for silver, and the needy for a pair of sandals —they who trample the head of the poor into the dust of the earth, and push the afflicted out of the way.

Amos 2:6-7a

THE DAY OF THE LORD

Alas for you who desire the day of the LORD! Why do you want the day of the LORD? It is darkness, not light; as if someone fled from a lion, and was met by a bear; or went into the house and rested a hand against the wall, and was bitten by a snake. Is not the day of the LORD darkness, not light, and gloom with no brightness in it?

Amos 5:18-20

LET JUSTICE ROLL

I hate, I despise your festivals, and I take no delight in your solemn assemblies. Even though you offer me your burnt offerings and grain offerings, I will not accept them; and the offerings of well-being of your fatted animals I will not look upon. Take away from me the noise of your songs; I will not listen to the melody of your harps. But let justice roll down like waters, and righteousness like an everflowing stream.

Amos 5:21-24

THE RESTORATION OF DAVID'S KINGDOM

I will restore the fortunes of my people Israel, and they shall rebuild the ruined cities and inhabit them; they shall plant vineyards and drink their wine, and they shall make gardens and eat their fruit. I will plant them upon their land, and they shall never again be plucked up out of the land that I have given them, says the LORD your God.

Amos 9:14-15

KEY PASSAGES FROM HOSEA

STEADFAST LOVE

For I desire steadfast love and not sacrifice, the knowledge of God rather than burnt offerings.

Hosea 6:6

REAP WHAT YOU SOW

For they sow the wind, and they shall reap the whirlwind.

Hosea 8:7a

THE MOUNTAINS

They shall say to the mountains, Cover us, and to the hills, Fall on us.

Hosea 10:8b

OUT OF EGYPT

When Israel was a child, I loved him, and out of Egypt I called my son.

Hosea 11:1

THE WAYS OF THE LORD

Those who are wise understand these things; those who are discerning know them. For the ways of the LORD are right, and the upright walk in them, but transgressors stumble in them.

Hosea 14:9

KEY PASSAGES FROM MICAH

WICKED RULERS AND PROPHETS

Its rulers give judgment for a bribe, its priests teach for a price, its prophets give oracles for money; yet they lean upon the LORD and say, "Surely the LORD is with us! No harm shall come upon us." Therefore because of you Zion shall be plowed as a field; Jerusalem shall become a heap of ruins, and the mountain of the house a wooded height.

Micah 3:11-12

SWORDS INTO PRUNING HOOKS

He shall judge between many peoples, and shall arbitrate between strong nations far away; they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning hooks; nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more....

Micah 4:3

BORN IN BETHLEHEM

But you, O Bethlehem of Ephrathah, who are one of the little clans of Judah, from you shall come forth for me one who is to rule in Israel, whose origin is from of old, from ancient days.

Micah 5:2

DO JUSTICE AND LOVE KINDNESS

With what shall I come before the LORD, and bow myself before God on high? Shall I come before him with burnt offerings, with calves a year old? Will the LORD be pleased with thousands of rams, 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 has told you, O mortal,

what is good; and what does the LORD require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?

Micah 6:6-8

FAMILY CONFLICTS

Put no trust in a friend, have no confidence in a loved one; guard the doors of your mouth from her who lies in your embrace; for the son treats the father with contempt, the daughter rises up against her mother, the daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law; your enemies are members of your own household. But as for me, I will look to the LORD, I will wait for the God of my salvation; my God will hear me.

Micah 7:5-7

KEY PASSAGES FROM ISAIAH

DO GOOD

Wash yourselves; make yourselves clean; remove the evil of your doings from before my eyes; cease to do evil, learn to do good; seek justice, rescue the oppressed, defend the orphan, plead for the widow.

Isaiah 1:16-17

FORGIVENESS

Come now, let us argue it out, says the LORD: though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be like snow; though they are red like crimson, they shall become like wool.

Isaiah 1:18

THE MOUNTAIN OF THE LORD

In days to come the mountain of the LORD'S house shall be established as the highest of the mountains, and shall be raised above the hills; all the nations shall stream to it.

Isaiah 2:2

SWORDS INTO PLOWSHARES

He shall judge between the nations, and shall arbitrate for many peoples; they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning hooks; nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more.

Isaiah 2:4

THE POOR

What do you mean by crushing my people, by grinding the face of the poor? says the Lord GOD of hosts.

Isaiah 3:15

EVIL GOOD?

Ah, you who call evil good and good evil, who put darkness for light and light for darkness, who put bitter for sweet and sweet for bitter!

Isaiah 5:20

ISAIAH'S VISION

In the year that King Uzziah died, I saw the Lord sitting on a throne, high and lofty; and the hem of his robe filled the temple. Seraphs were in attendance above him; each had six wings: with two they covered their faces, and with two they covered their feet, and with two they flew. And one called to another and said: "Holy, holy, holy is the LORD of hosts; the whole earth is full of his glory." The pivots on the thresholds shook at the voices of those who called, and the house filled with smoke. And I said: "Woe is me! I am lost, for I am a man of unclean lips, and I live among a people of unclean lips; yet my eyes have seen the King, the LORD of hosts!"

Isaiah 6:1-5

ISAIAH'S CALL

Then one of the seraphs flew to me, holding a live coal that had been taken from the altar with a pair of tongs. The seraph touched my mouth with it and said: "Now that this has touched your lips, your guilt has departed and your sin is blotted out." Then I heard the voice of the Lord saying, "Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?" And I said, "Here am I; send me!"

Isaiah 6:6-8

THE SIGN

Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign. Look, the young woman is with child and shall bear a son, and shall name him Immanuel.

Isaiah 7:14

THE LIGHT IN THE DARKNESS

The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light; those who lived in a land of deep darkness—on them light has shined.

Isaiah 9:2

THE SHOOT OUT OF THE STUMP

A shoot shall come out from the stump of Jesse, and a branch shall grow out of his roots. The spirit of the LORD shall rest on him, the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of counsel and might, the spirit of knowledge and the fear of the LORD.

Isaiah 11:1-2

THE WOLF AND THE LAMB

The wolf shall live with the lamb, the leopard shall lie down with the kid, the calf and the lion and the fatling together, and a little child shall lead them. The cow and the bear shall graze, their young shall lie down together; and the lion shall eat straw like the ox. The

nursing child shall play over the hole of the asp, and the weaned child shall put its hand on the adder's den. They will not hurt or destroy on all my holy mountain; for the earth will be full of the knowledge of the LORD as the waters cover the sea.

Isaiah 11:6-9

FALLEN FROM HEAVEN

How you are fallen from heaven, O Day Star, son of Dawn! How you are cut down to the ground, you who laid the nations low!

Isaiah 14:12

NAKED FOR THREE YEARS

...at that time the LORD had spoken to Isaiah son of Amoz, saying, "Go, and loose the sackcloth from your loins and take your sandals off your feet," and he had done so, walking naked and barefoot. Then the LORD said, "Just as my servant Isaiah has walked naked and barefoot for three years as a sign and a portent against Egypt and Ethiopia,

Isaiah 20:2-3

BABYLON IS FALLEN

Fallen, fallen is Babylon; and all the images of her gods lie shattered on the ground.

Isaiah 21:9b

WIPED OUR OF OUR MEMORY

The dead do not live; shades do not rise—because you have punished and destroyed them, and wiped out all memory of them.

Isaiah 26:14

HOPE OF RESURRECTION

Your dead shall live, their corpses shall rise. O dwellers in the dust, awake and sing for joy! For your dew is a radiant dew, and the earth will give birth to those long dead.

Isaiah 26:19

GOD'S HOLY MOUNTAIN

On that day the LORD will thresh from the channel of the Euphrates to the Wadi of Egypt, and you will be gathered one by one, O people of Israel. And on that day a great trumpet will be blown, and those who were lost in the land of Assyria and those who were driven out to the land of Egypt will come and worship the LORD on the holy mountain at Jerusalem.

Isaiah 27:12-13

A FOUNDATION STONE IN ZION

See, I am laying in Zion a foundation stone, a tested stone, a precious cornerstone, a sure foundation: "One who trusts will not panic."

Isaiah 28:16

A RIGHTEOUS KING

See, a king will reign in righteousness, and princes will rule with justice.

Isaiah 32:1

ZION'S TREASURE

The LORD is exalted, he dwells on high; he filled Zion with justice and righteousness; he will be the stability of your times, abundance of salvation, wisdom, and knowledge; the fear of the LORD is Zion's treasure.

Isaiah 33:5-6

THE HOLY WAY

A highway shall be there, and it shall be called the Holy Way; the unclean shall not travel on it, but it shall be for God's people; no traveler, not even fools, shall go astray.

Isaiah 35:8

THE RANSOMED SHALL RETURN

And the ransomed of the LORD shall return, and come to Zion with singing; everlasting joy shall be upon their heads; they shall obtain joy and gladness, and sorrow and sighing shall flee away.

Isaiah 35:10

KEY PASSAGES FROM ZEPHANIAH

ZEPHANIAH'S LAMPS

At that time I will search Jerusalem with lamps, and I will punish the people who rest complacently on their dregs, those who say in their hearts, "The LORD will not do good, nor will he do harm."

Zephaniah 1:12

THE DAY OF THE LORD

The great day of the LORD is near, near and hastening fast; the sound of the day of the LORD is bitter, the warrior cries aloud there. That day will be a day of wrath, a day of distress and anguish, a day of ruin and devastation, a day of darkness and gloom, a day of clouds and thick darkness, a day of trumpet blast and battle cry against the fortified cities and against the lofty battlements.

Zephaniah 1:14-16

SEEK THE LORD!

Seek the LORD, all you humble of the land, who do his commands; seek righteousness, seek humility; perhaps you may be hidden on the day of the LORD'S wrath.

Zephaniah 2:3

THE REMNANT

For I will leave in the midst of you a people humble and lowly. They shall seek refuge in the name of the LORD—the remnant of Israel; they shall do no wrong and utter no lies, nor shall a deceitful tongue be found in their mouths. Then they will pasture and lie down, and no one shall make them afraid.

Zephaniah 3:12-13

KEY PASSAGES FROM NAHUM

THE LORD IS SLOW TO ANGER

The LORD is slow to anger but great in power, and the LORD will by no means clear the guilty.

Nahum 1:3

THE LORD IS GOOD

The LORD is good, a stronghold in a day of trouble; he protects those who take refuge in him...

Nahum 1:7

THE WICKED WILL BE CUT OFF

Look! On the mountains the feet of one who brings good tidings, who proclaims peace! Celebrate your festivals, O Judah, fulfill your vows, for never again shall the wicked invade you; they are utterly cut off.

Nahum 1:15

REJOICE

All who hear the news about you clap their hands over you. For who has ever escaped your endless cruelty?

Nahum 3:19

KEY PASSAGES FROM HABAKKUK

HABAKKUK'S QUESTION

Your eyes are too pure to behold evil, and you cannot look on wrongdoing; why do you look on the treacherous, and are silent when the wicked swallow those more righteous than they?

Habakkuk 1:13

HABAKKUK'S PERSISTENCE

I will stand at my watchpost, and station myself on the rampart; I will keep watch to see what he will say to me, and what he will answer concerning my complaint.

Habakkuk 2:1

GOD'S ANSWER

Look at the proud! Their spirit is not right in them, but the righteous live by their faith.

Habakkuk 2:4

GOD IS PRESENT

But the LORD is in his holy temple; let all the earth keep silence before him!

Habakkuk 2:20

REJOICE IN THE LORD

Though the fig tree does not blossom, and no fruit is on the vines; though the produce of the olive fails and the fields yield no food; though the flock is cut off from the fold and there is no herd in the stalls, yet I will rejoice in the LORD; I will exult in the God of my salvation.

Habakkuk 3:17-18

KEY PASSAGES FROM JEREMIAH

JEREMIAH'S CALL

“Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, and before you were born I consecrated you; I appointed you a prophet to the nations.” Then I said, “Ah, Lord GOD! Truly I do not know how to speak, for I am only a boy.” But the LORD said to me, “Do not say, ‘I am only a boy’; for you shall go to all to whom I send you, and you shall speak whatever I command you...”

Jeremiah 1:5-7

THE PROBLEM

...for my people have committed two evils: they have forsaken me, the fountain of living water, and dug out cisterns for themselves, cracked cisterns that can hold no water.

Jeremiah 2:13

NO BALM IN GILEAD

Is there no balm in Gilead? Is there no physician there? Why then has the health of my poor people not been restored?

Jeremiah 8:22

THE FATE OF JERUSALEM

I will make Jerusalem a heap of ruins, a lair of jackals; and I will make the towns of Judah a desolation, without inhabitant.

Jeremiah 9:11

DO NOT PRAY FOR JERUSALEM!

The LORD said to me: Do not pray for the welfare of this people. Although they fast, I do not hear their cry, and although they offer burnt offering and grain offering, I do not accept them; but by the sword, by famine, and by pestilence I consume them.

Jeremiah 14:11-12

THE BURNING FIRE

O LORD, you have enticed me, and I was enticed; you have overpowered me, and you have prevailed. I have become a laughingstock all day long; everyone mocks me. For whenever I speak, I must cry out, I must shout, “Violence and destruction!” For the word of the LORD has become for me a reproach and derision all day long. If I say, “I will not mention him, or speak any more in his name,” then within me there is something like a burning fire shut up in my bones; I am weary with holding it in, and I cannot.

Jeremiah 20:7-9

JEREMIAH’S BIRTH

Cursed be the day on which I was born! The day when my mother bore me, let it not be blessed!

Jeremiah 20:14

THE BRANCH

The days are surely coming, says the LORD, when I will raise up for David a righteous Branch, and he shall reign as king and deal wisely, and shall execute justice and righteousness in the land. In his days Judah will be saved and Israel will live in safety. And this is the name by which he will be called: “The LORD is our righteousness.”

Jeremiah 23:5-6

THE HAMMER

Is not my word like fire, says the LORD, and like a hammer that breaks a rock in pieces?

Jeremiah 23:29

THE NEW COVENANT

The days are surely coming, says the LORD, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah. It will not be like the covenant that I made with their ancestors when I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt—a covenant that they broke, though I was their husband, says the LORD. But this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the LORD: I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. No longer shall they teach one another, or say to each other, “Know the LORD,” for they shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest, says the LORD; for I will forgive their iniquity, and remember their sin no more.

Jeremiah 31:31-34

GOD'S EVERLASTING COVENANT

will make an everlasting covenant with them, never to draw back from doing good to them; and I will put the fear of me in their hearts, so that they may not turn from me. I will rejoice in doing good to them, and I will plant them in this land in faithfulness, with all my heart and all my soul.

Jeremiah 32:40-41

THE BRANCH

The days are surely coming, says the LORD, when I will fulfill the promise I made to the house of Israel and the house of Judah. In those days and at that time I will cause a righteous Branch to spring up for David; and he shall execute justice and righteousness in the land. In those days Judah will be saved and Jerusalem will live in safety. And this is the name by which it will be called: "The LORD is our righteousness."

Jeremiah 33:14-15

KEY PASSAGES FROM LAMENTATIONS

HOPE FOR JERUSALEM

The steadfast love of the LORD never ceases, his mercies never come to an end; they are new every morning; great is your faithfulness. "The LORD is my portion," says my soul, "therefore I will hope in him."

Lamentations 3:22-24

KEY PASSAGES FROM EZEKIEL

THE CALL OF EZEKIEL

Then the hand of the LORD was upon me there; and he said to me, Rise up, go out into the valley, and there I will speak with you. So I rose up and went out into the valley; and the glory of the LORD stood there, like the glory that I had seen by the river Chebar; and I fell on my face. The spirit entered into me, and set me on my feet; and he spoke with me and said to me: Go, shut yourself inside your house. As for you, mortal, cords shall be placed on you, and you shall be bound with them, so that you cannot go out among the people; and I will make your tongue cling to the roof of your mouth, so that you shall be speechless and unable to reprove them; for they are a rebellious house. But when I speak with you, I will open your mouth, and you shall say to them, "Thus says the Lord GOD"; let those who will hear, hear; and let those who refuse to hear, refuse; for they are a rebellious house.

Ezekiel 3:22-27

EZEKIEL'S VISION OF THE THRONE

Then the glory of the LORD went out from the threshold of the house and stopped above the cherubim. The cherubim lifted up their wings and rose up from the earth in my sight as they went out with the wheels beside them. They stopped at the entrance of the east gate of the house of the LORD; and the glory of the God of Israel was above them.

Ezekiel 10:18-19

Then the cherubim lifted up their wings, with the wheels beside them; and the glory of the God of Israel was above them. And the glory of the LORD ascended from the middle of the city, and stopped on the mountain east of the city.

Ezekiel 11:22-23

A NEW HEART AND SPIRIT

Cast away from you all the transgressions that you have committed against me, and get yourselves a new heart and a new spirit! Why will you die, O house of Israel? For I have no pleasure in the death of anyone, says the Lord GOD. Turn, then, and live.

Ezekiel 18:31-32

A NEW HEART AND SPIRIT

Cast away from you all the transgressions that you have committed against me, and get yourselves a new heart and a new spirit! Why will you die, O house of Israel? For I have no pleasure in the death of anyone, says the Lord GOD. Turn, then, and live.

Ezekiel 18:31-32

A HORN TO SPROUT UP

On that day I will cause a horn to sprout up for the house of Israel, and I will open your lips among them. Then they shall know that I am the LORD

Ezekiel 29:21

THE ROLE OF DAVID

I will set up over them one shepherd, my servant David, and he shall feed them: he shall feed them and be their shepherd. And I, the LORD, will be their God, and my servant David shall be prince among them; I, the LORD, have spoken.

Ezekiel 34:23-24

A NEW SPIRIT AND A NEW HEART

I will sprinkle clean water upon you, and you shall be clean from all your uncleannesses, and from all your idols I will cleanse you. A new heart I will give you, and a new spirit I will put within you; and I will remove from your body the heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh. I will put my spirit within you, and make you follow my statutes and be careful to observe my ordinances. Then you shall live in the land that I gave to your ancestors; and you shall be my people, and I will be your God.

Ezekiel 36:25-28

A NEW SPIRIT AND A NEW LAND

“I will put my spirit within you, and you shall live, and I will place you on your own soil; then you shall know that I, the LORD, have spoken and will act,” says the LORD.

Ezekiel 37:14

A NEW LAND AND AN ETERNAL PRINCE

My servant David shall be king over them; and they shall all have one shepherd. They shall follow my ordinances and be careful to observe my statutes. They shall live in the land that I gave to my servant Jacob, in which your ancestors lived; they and their children and their children's children shall live there forever; and my servant David shall be their prince forever.

Ezekiel 37:24-25

THE LORD'S RETURN

Then he brought me to the gate, the gate facing east. And there, the glory of the God of Israel was coming from the east; the sound was like the sound of mighty waters; and the earth shone with his glory. The vision I saw was like the vision that I had seen when he came to destroy the city, and like the vision that I had seen by the river Chebar; and I fell upon my face. As the glory of the LORD entered the temple by the gate facing east, the spirit lifted me up, and brought me into the inner court; and the glory of the LORD filled the temple.

Ezekiel 43:1-5

THE GLORY OF THE LORD

Then he brought me by way of the north gate to the front of the temple; and I looked, and lo! the glory of the LORD filled the temple of the LORD; and I fell upon my face.

Ezekiel 44:4

THE NEW NAME

The circumference of the city shall be eighteen thousand cubits. And the name of the city from that time on shall be, The LORD is There.

Ezekiel 48:35

KEY PASSAGES FROM SECOND ISAIAH

THE GREAT COMMISSION

I am the LORD, I have called you in righteousness, I have taken you by the hand and kept you; I have given you as a covenant to the people, a light to the nations, to open the eyes that are blind, to bring out the prisoners from the dungeon, from the prison those who sit in darkness.

Isaiah 42:6-7

GOD COMMANDED CYRUS

I made the earth, and created humankind upon it; it was my hands that stretched out the heavens, and I commanded all their host. I have aroused Cyrus in righteousness, and I will make all his paths straight; he shall build my city and set my exiles free, not for price or reward, says the LORD of hosts.

Isaiah 45:12-13

EVERY KNEE SHALL BOW

To me every knee shall bow, every tongue shall swear.

Isaiah 45:23b

THE GREAT COMMISSION

It is too light a thing that you should be my servant to raise up the tribes of Jacob and to restore the survivors of Israel; I will give you as a light to the nations, that my salvation may reach to the end of the earth.”

Isaiah 49:6

IN THE PALM OF GOD’S HAND

See, I have inscribed you on the palms of my hands; your walls are continually before me.

Psalm 49:16

THE RANSOMED OF THE LORD

So the ransomed of the LORD shall return, and come to Zion with singing; everlasting joy shall be upon their heads; they shall obtain joy and gladness, and sorrow and sighing shall flee away.

Isaiah 51:11

THE BEARER OF GOOD NEWS

How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of the messenger who announces peace, who brings good news, who announces salvation, who says to Zion, “Your God reigns.”

Isaiah 52:7

AN INVITATION TO ABUNDANT LIFE

Ho, everyone who thirsts, come to the waters; and you that have no money, come, buy and eat! Come, buy wine and milk without money and without price.

Isaiah 55:1

SEEK THE LORD

Seek the LORD while he may be found, call upon him while he is near; let the wicked forsake their way, and the unrighteous their thoughts; let them return to the LORD, that he may have mercy on them, and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon.

Isaiah 55:6-7

GOD’S THOUGHTS

For my thoughts are not your thoughts, nor are your ways my ways, says the LORD. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts.

Isaiah 55:8-9

KEY PASSAGES FROM HAGGAI AND ZECHARIAH

THE TEMPLE

The latter splendor of this house shall be greater than the former, says the LORD of hosts; and in this place I will give prosperity, says the LORD of hosts.

Haggai 2:9

TRUE REPENTANCE

Therefore say to them, Thus says the LORD of hosts: Return to me, says the LORD of hosts, and I will return to you, says the LORD of hosts.

Zechariah 1:3

THE WALLS OF THE TEMPLE

For I will be a wall of fire all around it, says the LORD, and I will be the glory within it.

Zechariah 2:5

THE HOLY LAND

The LORD will inherit Judah as his portion in the holy land, and will again choose Jerusalem.

Zechariah 2:12

THE SPIRIT OF THE LORD

Not by might, nor by power, but by my spirit, says the LORD of hosts.

Zechariah 4:6

KEY PASSAGES FROM THIRD ISAIAH

THE TEMPLE

My house shall be called a house of prayer for all peoples.

Isaiah 56:7

THE SABBATH

If you refrain from trampling the sabbath, from pursuing your own interests on my holy day; if you call the sabbath a delight and the holy day of the LORD honorable; if you honor it, not going your own ways, serving your own interests, or pursuing your own affairs; then you shall take delight in the LORD, and I will make you ride upon the heights of the earth; I will feed you with the heritage of your ancestor Jacob, for the mouth of the LORD has spoken.

Isaiah 58:13-14

THE NEW COVENANT

And as for me, this is my covenant with them, says the LORD: my spirit that is upon you, and my words that I have put in your mouth, shall not depart out of your mouth, or out of

the mouths of your children, or out of the mouths of your children's children, says the LORD, from now on and forever.

Isaiah 59:21

THE GATES

Your gates shall always be open; day and night they shall not be shut, so that nations shall bring you their wealth, with their kings led in procession.

Isaiah 60:11

THE GLORY OF GOD

The sun shall no longer be your light by day, nor for brightness shall the moon give light to you by night; but the LORD will be your everlasting light, and your God will be your glory.

Isaiah 60:19

THE SPIRIT OF THE LORD

The spirit of the Lord GOD is upon me, because the LORD has anointed me; he has sent me to bring good news to the oppressed, to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and release to the prisoners; to proclaim the year of the LORD'S favor, and the day of vengeance of our God; to comfort all who mourn;

Isaiah 61:1-2

THE NEW CREATION

For I am about to create new heavens and a new earth; the former things shall not be remembered or come to mind. But be glad and rejoice forever in what I am creating; for I am about to create Jerusalem as a joy, and its people as a delight.

The wolf and the lamb shall feed together, the lion shall eat straw like the ox; but the serpent—its food shall be dust! They shall not hurt or destroy on all my holy mountain, says the LORD.

Isaiah 65:17-18 and 25

KEY PASSAGES FROM OBADIAH, JOEL AND MALACHI

ARROGANCE

Your proud heart has deceived you, you that live in the clefts of the rock, whose dwelling is in the heights. You say in your heart, "Who will bring me down to the ground?" Though you soar aloft like the eagle, though your nest is set among the stars, from there I will bring you down, says the LORD.

Obadiah 1:2-3

THE LORD'S KINGDOM

Those who have been saved shall go up to Mount Zion to rule Mount Esau; and the kingdom shall be the LORD'S.

Obadiah 1:21

RETURN TO THE LORD

Yet even now, says the LORD, return to me with all your heart, with fasting, with weeping, and with mourning; rend your hearts and not your clothing. Return to the LORD, your God, for he is gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love, and relents from punishing.

Joel 2:12-13

THE POURING OUT OF THE SPIRIT

Then afterward I will pour out my spirit on all flesh; your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, your old men shall dream dreams, and your young men shall see visions. Even on the male and female slaves, in those days, I will pour out my spirit.

Joel 2:28-29

PREPARE THE WAY

See, I am sending my messenger to prepare the way before me, and the Lord whom you seek will suddenly come to his temple. The messenger of the covenant in whom you delight—indeed, he is coming, says the LORD of hosts.

Malachi 3:1

THE TITHE

Will anyone rob God? Yet you are robbing me! But you say, “How are we robbing you?” In your tithes and offerings! 9 You are cursed with a curse, for you are robbing me—the whole nation of you! 10 Bring the full tithe into the storehouse, so that there may be food in my house, and thus put me to the test, says the LORD of hosts; see if I will not open the windows of heaven for you and pour down for you an overflowing blessing.

Malachi 3:8-10

THE FORERUNNER

Lo, I will send you the prophet Elijah before the great and terrible day of the LORD comes.

Malachi 4:5

KEY PASSAGES FROM JONAH

JONAH SPEAKS

O LORD! Is not this what I said while I was still in my own country? That is why I fled to Tarshish at the beginning; for I knew that you are a gracious God and merciful, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love, and ready to relent from punishing.

Jonah 4:2

GOD REPLIES

And should I not be concerned about Nineveh, that great city, in which there are more than a hundred and twenty thousand persons who do not know their right hand from their left, and also many animals?

Jonah 4:11

KEY PASSAGES FROM SECOND ZECHARIAH

THE DONKEY

Rejoice greatly, O daughter Zion! Shout aloud, O daughter Jerusalem! Lo, your king comes to you; triumphant and victorious is he, humble and riding on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey.

Zechariah 9:9

THIRTY PIECES OF SILVER

So they weighed out as my wages thirty shekels of silver.

Zechariah 11:12

THE ONE THEY PIERCED

And I will pour out a spirit of compassion and supplication on the house of David and the inhabitants of Jerusalem, so that, when they look on the one whom they have pierced, they shall mourn for him, as one mourns for an only child, and weep bitterly over him, as one weeps over a firstborn.

Zechariah 12:10

THE REMNANT

And I will put this third into the fire, refine them as one refines silver, and test them as gold is tested. They will call on my name, and I will answer them. I will say, "They are my people"; and they will say, "The LORD is our God."

Zechariah 13:9

THE MOUNT OF OLIVES

On that day his feet shall stand on the Mount of Olives, which lies before Jerusalem on the east; and the Mount of Olives shall be split in two from east to west by a very wide valley; so that one half of the Mount shall withdraw northward, and the other half southward.

And the LORD will become king over all the earth; on that day the LORD will be one and his name one.

Zechariah 14:4 and 9

HOLINESS

On that day there shall be inscribed on the bells of the horses, "Holy to the LORD." And the cooking pots in the house of the LORD shall be as holy as the bowls in front of the altar; 21 and every cooking pot in Jerusalem and Judah shall be sacred to the LORD of

hosts, so that all who sacrifice may come and use them to boil the flesh of the sacrifice. And there shall no longer be traders in the house of the LORD of hosts on that day.

Zechariah 4:20

KEY PASSAGES FROM DANIEL

THE FOURTH MAN IN THE FIRE

Then King Nebuchadnezzar was astonished and rose up quickly. He said to his counselors, “Was it not three men that we threw bound into the fire?” They answered the king, “True, O king.” 25 He replied, “But I see four men unbound, walking in the middle of the fire, and they are not hurt; and the fourth has the appearance of a god.”

Daniel 3:24-25

HANDWRITING ON THE WALL

Immediately the fingers of a human hand appeared and began writing on the plaster of the wall of the royal palace, next to the lampstand. The king was watching the hand as it wrote.

So from his presence the hand was sent and this writing was inscribed. 25 And this is the writing that was inscribed: MENE, MENE, TEKEL, and PARSIN. 26 This is the interpretation of the matter: MENE, God has numbered the days of your kingdom and brought it to an end; 27 TEKEL, you have been weighed on the scales and found wanting; 28 PERES, your kingdom is divided and given to the Medes and Persians.

Daniel 5:5 and 24-28

DECREE FROM THE LION’S DEN

I make a decree, that in all my royal dominion people should tremble and fear before the God of Daniel: For he is the living God, enduring forever. His kingdom shall never be destroyed, and his dominion has no end. He delivers and rescues, he works signs and wonders in heaven and on earth; for he has saved Daniel from the power of the lions.”

Daniel 6:26-27

THE ANCIENT ONE AND THE OPENED BOOKS

As I watched, thrones were set in place, and an Ancient One took his throne, his clothing was white as snow, and the hair of his head like pure wool; his throne was fiery flames, and its wheels were burning fire. A stream of fire issued and flowed out from his presence. A thousand thousands served him, and ten thousand times ten thousand stood attending him. The court sat in judgment, and the books were opened.

Daniel 7:9-10

COMING ON THE CLOUDS OF HEAVEN

I saw one like a human being coming with the clouds of heaven. And he came to the Ancient One and was presented before him. To him was given dominion and glory and kingship, that all peoples, nations, and languages should serve him. His dominion is an

everlasting dominion that shall not pass away, and his kingship is one that shall never be destroyed.

Daniel 7:13-14

GOD'S SIXFOLD PROGRAM

Seventy weeks are decreed for your people and your holy city: to finish the transgression, to put an end to sin, and to atone for iniquity, to bring in everlasting righteousness, to seal both vision and prophet, and to anoint a most holy place.

Daniel 9:24

RESURRECTION

Many of those who sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt. 3 Those who are wise shall shine like the brightness of the sky, and those who lead many to righteousness, like the stars forever and ever.

Daniel 12:2-3

CHRONOLOGY OF THE KINGS

THE UNITED KINGDOM

Saul (1020-1000 B.C.)
 David (1000-961 B.C.) or [1000-965 B.C.]
 Solomon (961-922 B.C.) or [965-931 B.C.]

THE KINGS OF JUDAH AND ISRAEL

JUDAH	YEARS SERVED	ISRAEL
Rehoboam (922 B.C.) [931]	17	Jeroboam (922 B.C.) [931]
Abijam (915) [913]	3	
Asa (913) [911]	41	
	2	Nadab (901) [910]
	24	Naasha (900) [909]
	2	Elah (877) [886]
		(Assassinated)
	7 Days	Zimri (876) [885]
		(Suicide)
	12	Omri, Tibni (876) [885]
Jehosaphat (873) [870]	25	
	22	Ahab (869) [874]
	2	Ahaziah (850) [853]
	12	Jehoram (849) [852]
Jehoram (849) [848]	8	
Ahaziah (842) [841]	1	Jehu (842) [841]
Athaliah (842) [841]	6	
Jehoash (837) [835]	40	
	17	Jehoahaz (815) [814]
	16	Jehoash (801) [798]
Amaziah (800) [796]	29	
	41	Jeroboam II (786) [782]
Uzziah/Azariah (783) [767]	52	
	6 Months	Zechariah (746) [753]
	1 Month	Shallum (745) [752]
	10	Menahem (745) [752]
Jotham (742) [740]	16	
	2	Pekahiah (738) [742]
	20	Pekah (737) [740]
Ahaz (735) [735]	16	
	9	Hoshea (732) [732]
		THE FALL (721) [723/722]
Hezekiah (715) [715]	29	
Manasseh (687) [686]	55 (45)	
Amon (642) [640]	2	
Josiah (640) [640]	31	
Jehoahaz (609) [609]	3 Months	
Jehoiakim (609) [609]	11	
Jehoiachin (597) [597]	3 Months	
Zedekiah (597) [597]	11	
THE FALL (587) [586]		

Beginning of the Siege: January 15, 588
 Burning of the City/Temple: July 19 (August 14), 587/586

THE KINGS OF ISRAEL (1 and 2 Kings)

NAME OF KING	MOTHER OF KING	CAPITAL CITY	LENGTH OF RULE	YEARS OF RULE	ACTIVE PROPHETS	EVALUATION DEATH
Jeroboam	Zeruah	Shechem Tirzah	22 Years	931-910	Ahijah	Evil
Nadab		Tirzah	2 Years	910-909		Evil
Baasha		Tirzah	24 Years	909-886	Jehu	Evil
Elah		Tirzah	2 Years	886-885		Evil Assassinated
Zimri		Tirzah	1 Week	885		Evil Suicide
Omri		Tirzah (6) Samaria (6)	12 Years	885-874		Evil
Ahab and Jezebel		Samaria	22 Years	874-853	Elijah Obadiah Micaiah	Evil Killed in Battle
Ahaziah	Jezebel?	Samaria	2 Years	853-852	Elijah	Evil Killed in Battle
Jehoram		Samaria	12 Years	852-841	Elisha	Evil Assassinated
Jehu		Samaria	28 Years	841-814	Elisha	Evil
Jehoahaz		Samaria	17 Years	814-798	Elisha	Evil
Jehoash		Samaria	16 Years	798-782	Elisha	Evil
Jeroboam II		Samaria	41 Years	782-753	Jonah, Amos, Hosea, Micah	Evil
Zechariah		Samaria	6 Months	753		Evil Assassinated
Shallum		Samaria	1 Month	752		Evil Assassinated
Menahem		Samaria	10 Years	752-742		Evil
Pekahiah		Samaria	2 Years	742-740		Evil Assassinated
Pekah		Samaria	20 Years	740-732		Evil Assassinated
Hoshea		Samaria	9 Years	732-722		Evil
Fall of Samaria				722		

THE KINGS OF JUDAH (1 and 2 Kings)

NAME OF KING	MOTHER OF KING	AGE	LENGTH OF RULE	YEARS OF RULE	ACTIVE PROPHETS	EVALUATION DEATH
Rehoboam	Naama	41	17 Years	931-913	Shemaiah	Evil
Abijam/Abijah	Maacah		3 Years	913-911		Evil
Asa	Maacah		41 Years	911-870		Righteous Diseased Feet
Jehosaphat	Azubah	35	25 Years	870-848	Micaiah Elijah Elisha	Good
Jehoram <small>Married Athaliah</small>		32	8 Years	848-841		Evil
Ahaziah <small>Related to Ahab</small>	Athaliah	22	1 Years	841	Elisha	Evil Assassinated
Athaliah <small>Daughter of Ahab</small>			6 Years	841-835		Evil Assassinated
Jehoash	Zibiah	7 (Jehoiada)	40 Years	835-796		Mixed Assassinated
Amaziah	Jehoaddin	25	29 Years	796-767		Good Assassinated
Uzziah (Azariah)	Jecoliah	16	52 Years	767-740	Isaiah	Good
Jotham	Jerusha	25	16 Years	740-735	Isaiah	Good
Ahaz		20	16 Years	735-715	Isaiah	Evil
Hezekiah	Abijah	25	29 Years	715-686	Isaiah	Good
Manasseh	Hephzibah	12	55 Years	686-640		Evil
Amon	Meshullemeth	22	2 Years	640		Evil Assassinated
Josiah	Jedidah	8	31 Years	640-609	Huldah Jeremiah Zepheniah	Good Killed in Battle
Jehoahaz	Hamutal	23	3 Months	609	Jeremiah	Taken to Egypt
Jehoiakim	Zebidah	25	11 Years	609-597	Jeremiah	Evil
Jehoiachin	Nehushta	18	3 Months	597	Jeremiah	Evil Taken to Babylon
Zedekiah (Mattaniah)	Hamutal	21	11 Years	597-586	Jeremiah Ezekiel	
THE FALL OF JUDAH	First Exile: March 19, 597	10,000 Exiles 8,000 Exiles 3,023 Exiles	2 Kings 24:14 2 Kings 24:16 Jeremiah 52:28	Siege Begun: January 15, 588	Second Exile: July 19, 586 832 Exiles	Jeremiah 52:29

CHRONOLOGY OF THE PROPHETS

Prophet	Date	From	Children	Main Message	Key Verses	Messianic Contribution
Amos: <i>Burden</i> Call: 7:14 Profession: Shepherd & Sycamore Trees	750	Tekoa Judah Israel		<i>To Bethel (Israel)</i> Righteousness and Justice	Amos 5:21-24 Hosea 6:6	The Day of the Lord and Restoration of Davidic Monarchy (9:11-12)
Hosea <i>Salvation</i> <i>Deliverance</i> Wife: Gomer	755	Moresbeth	Jezeel (Son) God Sows Lorhanah (Daughter) <i>Not Pitted</i> <i>No more mercy</i> La-ammi <i>Not my people</i> <i>No longer my people</i>	<i>To Israel</i> Love and Mercy	Micah 6:6-8	He comes out of Egypt (11:1)
Micah <i>Who is like Yahweh</i>	742-687 742/0-	Judah (1:1) Judah		<i>To Israel & Judah</i> What the Lord Requires		He will be born in Bethlehem (5:2 & Matthew 2:5-6)
Isaiah <i>Yahweh gives Salvation</i> Wife a Prophetess (8:3) Sawed in Half	687		Shear-jashub <i>A remnant shall return</i> <i>Only a remnant will return</i> Mahe-shalah-hash-baz <i>The spoil speeds</i> <i>The prey hasties</i>	<i>To Judah</i> Social Justice Faith in a Holy God Reward for Faithfulness Punishment for Unfaithfulness	Isaiah 6:1-13	Virgin Birth & Immanuel (7:14) & Matt. 1:18-25 Messianic Titles (9:6-7) Branch & Root of Jesse (4:2 & 11:1) Age of Peace (11:6-9) Cornerstone in Zion (28:16)
Zephaniah <i>The Lord Protects</i> Related to Hezekiah (1:1)	630-621	Judah		<i>To Judah</i> God will judge All Nations including Judah	Zephaniah 1:12	Day of the Lord (1:7 & 14) Restoration of the Remnant (3:9)
Nahum <i>Compassionate</i> <i>Comfort</i>	630-612	Elkosh Judah		<i>To Judah</i> The Lion (3:11-12) and Harlot (3:4) will fall	Nahum 1:15	
Habbakuk <i>A Garden Plant</i>	612-597	Judah		<i>To Judah</i> Just Shall Live by Faith	Habakkuk 2:4b	

Prophet	Date	From	Children	Main Message	Key Verses	Messianic Contribution
Jeremiah <i>The Lord exalts Stoned in Egypt</i>	627-582	Anathoth Judah	No Family (16:2)	Submit to Babylon Enter the New Covenant	Jeremiah 31:31-34	The Branch (23:5-6; 33:14-16) The New Covenant (31:31-34)
Ezekiel <i>God Strengthens</i>	597-571		Wife (24:15-27)	Vision of the Fall of Judah Vision of the Restoration	Ezekiel 11:19-20 Ezekiel 37:1-28	The Branch (17:22-23) The Horn (29:21) The Shepherd (David) (34:23-24) A New Heart (36:25-28) A New Covenant & Messiah (37:24-28)
Second Isaiah				Vision of the Servant, Suffering, and the Mission of his People	Isaiah 53	Servant Songs 42:1-4: The Task of Justice 49:1-6: A Light to the Nations 50:4-9: The Suffering Servant 52:13—53:12: The Suffering Servant
Haggai <i>Festal</i>	520	Exile in Babylon		Rebuild the Temple	Haggai 1:13 and 2:4	The Servant Messiah(2:23)
Zechariah <i>"Yahweh Remembers"</i>	520-518			Rebuild the Temple		The Branch (3:8 & 6:12)
Third Isaiah						A New Covenant (59:21)
Obadiah <i>Servant of the Lord Worshiper of Yahweh</i>	During the Exile			Judgment against Edom	Obadiah 1:17 & 21	Mount Zion (17 & 21)

Prophet	Date	From	Children	Main Message	Key Verses	Messianic Contribution
Joel <i>The Lord is God</i> Son of Pethuel (1:1) Temple Prophet	500-350	Near Jerusalem		The Day of the Lord is Coming Return to the Lord	Joel 2:28-29	
Malachi <i>My Messenger</i> <i>My Angel</i>	500-450			Return to the Lord	Malachi 3:7-10	Return of the Forerunner <i>Elijah</i> (3:1-4 & 4:5)
Jonah <i>Dove</i>	786-746 (2 Kings 14:25) 5-4 Century	Gath-hepher (Zebulun)		God will accomplish his saving purpose in spite of the imperfect way in which we carry out his will		
Zechariah <i>The Lord Remembers</i>	300 B.C.			The Messiah will establish the Kingdom of God	Zechariah 14:9	Palm Sunday (9:9-10) The Cornerstone (10:3-4) Pierced (12:10) The Remnant (13:8-9)
Daniel Belteshazzar <i>God is my Judge</i>	605 B.C. 167-64 B.C.	Babylon		Encouragement for those living in tough times	Daniel 12:2	Desolating Sacrilege Matthew 24:15 (9:25-27; 11:31; 12:11)

BIBLE STUDY SCHEDULE

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NOTE

All quotations are taken from the NRSV Bible. Selecting key passages is a very subjective exercise. Most of the passages I have selected are familiar passages to me. Others may select different passages. I encourage the reader to select his or her own.

THE AFTERWORD

I have enjoyed working through the prophets, particularly when I am doing it within a class setting where everyone feels free to share their insights and feelings about what these persons have to say to us in the twenty-first century. It has always been my belief that one must first examine the context in which Scripture was written before attempting to interpret what Scripture means in our own time and particularly to us.

I struggled with a title between “Thus Says the Lord” and “Time is Running Out.” It seems to me that both are appropriate and both express the concerns of the prophets. I finally chose “Time is Running Out” because this better expresses the urgency of the prophetic message, but that message is based on what the prophets heard God say to them. They didn’t quote Moses. They heard and felt the voice of God, and so they prefaced their message with the simple phrase, “Thus Says the Lord.”

You may have some different knowledge, insights and wisdom on the messages of the prophets, and I would love to hear from you. If you find mistakes in what I have written, I urge you to tell me. I can always fix the mistakes. If it’s just a difference of opinion, I can’t promise to change my view, but I’m always ready to include differing points of view and opinions.

You can contact me by email at Jim@Reuteler.org. I also have a web site, where I will post additional information on the prophets as I become aware of new insights. My web site is: www.jim.Reuteler.org.

Thank you for purchasing this Bible Study Guide, and I hope you enjoy studying the prophets as much as I have.

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