

Kings and Prophets



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Introduction: Overview

Lesson 1

Introduction—The period of the kings and writing prophets spanned from 1050-432 BC. The kings only ruled from 1050-586 BC whereas the prophets continued to preach and write to the needs of the nation of Israel.

Beginning with the settlement of Canaan, and through the period of the judges, Israel was merely a group of scattered, unorganized tribes. They had little connection with each other, almost living as separate peoples.

Samuel was the bridge between this original, isolated condition of the people, and the period when the kingdom was united under its first king. This prophet—priest ushered in a period of transition and radical changes in Hebrew life, which molded Israel into a united nation.

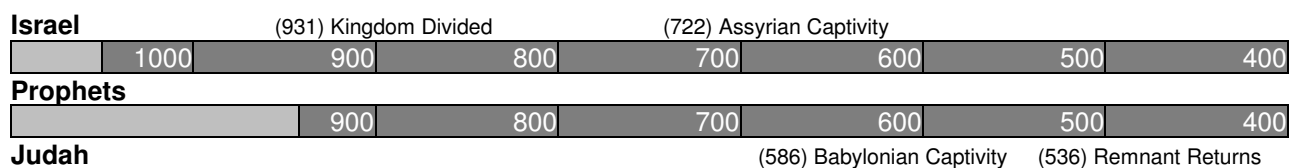
Israel In Transition—Samuel is the key player in this transition (1 Samuel 1-8). He was born in answer to a prayer (1), dedicated to serve before God (2), and called by God (3). He was appointed by God to be a prophet (3:19-4:1a), priest (2:35; 7:2-10,17), and judge (7:5-17).

Samuel would later found a “school of prophets” (19:20; 2 Kings 2:3-7) to keep the kings on the right course (cf. Deuteronomy 17:14-20), and would anoint the first two kings of Israel (10:1,17-25; 16:11-13).

Israel Desires A King—The judgeship and priesthood, as a whole, had become moral failures (2:12-17,22-36; 4:1-22; 8:1-5). This made the people restless and helped prompt their request for a king (8:5-22). They rejected God as their king and wanted a human figurehead to rule over them. Why were they wrong in asking for a king?

- Did God disapprove of a king being set over Israel *or* their rejection of Him as their king (8:7-8)?
- What was the sin of Israel—asking for a king to rule over them *or* the reason they asked (8:7-9,19-22; 12:16-18; see Nehemiah 9:17)?
- God always knew Israel would have a king, and even made provisions before the time came (see Genesis 17:16; 49:1,8-10; Deuteronomy 17:14-20; 28:36).
- Could it be that rather than just making a concession to the people’s stubborn will (as we usually think of it), that God had planned to unite His people under a common head all along?
- God does not seem to be opposed to a king as long as he was the right king (13:13-14). Perhaps God ultimately wanted His people to unite under one head, as a symbol of the future kingdom under the headship of the Christ (2 Samuel 7:11-16; Psalm 2; Luke 1:30-33; Hebrews 1:8-9; Colossians 2:17).
- God warns them of the consequences of such a king, yet they still want one (8:9-22).

Overview Of The Kings And Prophets—A good bird’s eye view of this entire period of Israel’s history will help us put all of the detailed pieces into proper perspective.



The United Kingdom (1 & 2 Samuel, 1 Kings 1-11; 1 Chronicles; 2 Chronicles 1-9)

Saul was anointed as the first king of Israel in response to Israel’s rejection of God’s rule and demand for a king like the nations around them. He reigned for 40 years. David was anointed as the next king of Israel. He was “*a man after God’s own heart*” (1 Samuel 13:14; Acts 13:22). He subdued all of the nations afflicting Israel and spread the borders of their kingdom.

God promised David that his kingdom would endure forever (2 Samuel 7:11-16). His son Solomon was next to sit upon his throne, and he built the empire to its peak of earthly glory (1 Kings 4:20-25).

The Divided Kingdom (1 Kings 12-2 Kings 25; 2 Chronicles 10-36; Joel, Amos, Hosea, Isaiah, Micah, Nahum, Jeremiah, Zephaniah, Habakkuk, Lamentations, Daniel, Ezekiel)

Following Solomon’s death, the kingdom was divided into two separate kingdoms in 931 BC. They were comprised of the 10 northern tribes (Israel) with its capital in Samaria, and the 2 southern tribes (Judah) with its capital in Jerusalem.

Israel—From the beginning of its history, Israel succumbed to idolatrous worship. She never had even one good king of the 20 who ruled her. Israel sank into terrible depths of idolatry and sin, but God did not give up on her without a fight. He sent His prophets to turn back the hearts of the people (2 Kings 17:7-13,22-23).

- Elijah (1 Kings 17-2 Kings 2)
- Elisha (2 Kings 2-13)
- Amos (755 BC). Amos condemned the unjust social practices, the extravagant but empty formal worship, and the political corruptions in Israel. His preaching was stern “*prepare to meet your God*” (4:12).
- Hosea (750-725 BC). Hosea was instructed to take a wife of harlotry, Gomer, who left him and played the harlot. He was then told to take her back, and this would be parallel to God’s willingness to forgive and accept the spiritually adulterous Israel (11:8; 14:1-4).

Assyrian Captivity—Israel did not heed God’s warnings, so she fell to the nation of Assyria in 722 BC (2 Kings 17).

Judah—Judah had some good kings among those who ruled her. They attempted to destroy idolatry and restore the worship God had commanded. When Assyria tried to overthrow Judah, God spared her because of the righteousness of King Hezekiah and the influence of prominent prophets (2 Kings 19:35-37).

- Joel (830 BC?). Joel’s prophecy was occasioned by a calamity of locust which befell the nation. He saw this plague as a precursor to an even greater judgment on the nation by God. “*The day of the Lord*” is the dominant theme in his message (2:11)
- Isaiah (740-690 BC). Isaiah prophesied before, during, and after the Assyrian captivity. He prophesied against Judah’s vices, warned her of God’s wrath, and painted a bright picture of the

| | | | | | | | | | | |
|-----------------|-----------------|-----|-----|-----|-----------|-------|------|--------------------|-----|-----|
| Israel | Kingdom Divided | | | | | | | Assyrian Captivity | | |
| | 1000 | 950 | 900 | 850 | 800 | 750 | | | | 700 |
| Prophets | | | | | Obad Joel | Jonah | Amos | Isa | Mic | Hos |
| | 1000 | 950 | 900 | 850 | 800 | 750 | | | | 700 |

Judah

future glory awaiting Israel after her redemption. He painted more pictures of the coming Messiah and His kingdom than any other prophet (John 12:41).

- Micah (735-700 BC). Micah was contemporary with Isaiah, and he too cried out against the injustices of the evils which came with the nation's prosperity (6:8). He also spoke of the Messiah and Zion's future triumph.

God spared Judah for another 135 years because of the good influence of kings Hezekiah and Josiah. Josiah cast down all of the idolatrous images, but could not take them from the people's hearts. God sent more prophets to warn them of impending doom unless they repented.

- Zephaniah (630-625 BC). Zephaniah saw the Chaldeans (Babylonians) as a growing threat to world judgment, including Judah (1:14-16; 2:3).
- Jeremiah (625-586 BC). Jeremiah prophesied boldly for 40 years trying to avert Babylonian captivity. He represented Judah's last chance to avoid enslavement. He told them they would be deported to Babylon as slaves for 70 years (25:1-14).
- Habakkuk (612-606 BC). Habakkuk cried to God because of the wickedness of Judah. God assured him that His judgment was coming on Judah in the form of the Babylonians (1:5-6).

Babylonian Captivity—The nation of Judah fell to Babylon in 606 BC. Jerusalem was captured in 597 BC, and the temple was destroyed in 586 BC. God sent more prophets to the people, while in exile, to comfort and reassure them that they would return to their homeland.

- Lamentations (586 BC). Jeremiah wrote a poem, weeping and lamenting the fall of Jerusalem and the affliction of his people, because of God's wrath (1:12).
- Daniel (606-536 BC). Daniel prophesied of God's protection, the restoration of His people to their land, and the promise of the Messianic kingdom (4:25).
- Ezekiel (593-573 BC). Ezekiel prophesied to the fragments of a shattered nation. They saw no light at the end of the tunnel and Ezekiel gave them hope (37:1-14).

Restoration Of A Remnant (Ezra, Nehemiah, Esther, Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi)

Return Of The Remnant—True to God's promises (Isaiah 44:24-45:7; Jeremiah 25:11-12; 29:10), after 70 years in captivity, Cyrus the Mede defeated the Babylonians. He set up his own world empire, and allowed God's people to return to their homeland (536 BC).

First Group—Returned from captivity under Joshua and Zerubbabel (Ezra 1-4). The altar was restored and the foundation of the temple laid. Then the work stopped as people went about their own business. About 16 years later, God raised up two prophets to spark the people to complete the temple.

- Haggai (520 BC). Haggai moved the people to action. His message was simple—build the temple (1:1-11).

| | | | | | | | | |
|-----------------|----------------------|-----|-------------------------------|-----|-----------------|----------|-----|--|
| Israel | Assyrian Captivity | | | | | | | |
| | 750 | 700 | 650 | 600 | 550 | 500 | 450 | |
| Prophets | Isa Mic | | Nah Zeph Jer Hab Dan Lam Ezek | | | Hag Zech | | |
| | 750 | 700 | 650 | 600 | 550 | 500 | 450 | |
| Judah | Babylonian Captivity | | | | Remnant Returns | | | |

- Zechariah (520-518 BC). Zechariah looked beyond the present temple to the Messiah and spiritual temple of God. He had many prophetic visions of the coming king.

Second Group—This group returned to Jerusalem under Ezra’s leadership in 458 BC (Ezra 7-10)

Third Group—Nehemiah brought back a third group in 444 BC and led a campaign to rebuild the city walls of Jerusalem (Nehemiah 2:18). The faithful remnant that was spared through the Assyrian and Babylonian captivities returned to their homeland just as God promised (Jeremiah 32:42-44; Ezra 2:70; Nehemiah 7:73).

- Malachi (432 BC). Malachi cried out against the corruptions of the nation which again had brought worship and morality into a state of decay. God sent His final writing prophet of the era to His people with His last message for a long time. That message was to keep the Law of Moses and watch for the coming of Elijah the prophet before the great and terrible day of the Lord (3:1; 4:4-6).

Prophets To The Nations (Obadiah, Jonah, Nahum)

Even though the majority of the Old Testament record follows the history of the nation of Israel and God’s dealings with them, some of the prophets were sent to surrounding nations. God did not leave Himself without witness even among the heathen nations. He still held them accountable.

- Obadiah (845 BC?). Obadiah was sent to the nation of Edom (descendants of Esau) to prophesy of their fall because of their pride and cruelty against Israel (1:10-11).
- Jonah (780 BC). Jonah was a prophet to the nation of Israel, but God sent him to Ninevah (capital city of Assyria) with a message from God that He would destroy them if they did not repent. They did repent and God spared them from judgment—much to Jonah’s disgust (4:1-3,10-11).
- Nahum (630-612 BC). Nahum was sent to Ninevah with the message that God is slow to wrath, but that He avenges sin and unrighteousness (1:2-3). He spared them once, but they had finally reached a point where He could no longer show them mercy.

Israel

| | | | | | | |
|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|
| 700 | 650 | 600 | 550 | 500 | 450 | 400 |
|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|

Prophets

| | | | | | | |
|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|
| 700 | 650 | 600 | 550 | 500 | 450 | 400 |
|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|

Judah

Babylonian Captivity Remnant Returns

Important Biblical Dates And Events

| Date | Event |
|---------|---|
| 1445 BC | Giving of the Law of Moses at Mt. Sinai |
| 1405 BC | Beginning of Conquest of Canaan |
| 1050 BC | Saul Becomes King of Israel |
| 1010 BC | David Becomes King of Israel |
| 970 BC | Solomon Becomes King of Israel |
| 931 BC | Kingdom Divided into Israel and Judah |
| 722 BC | Israel Taken into Captivity by Assyrians |
| 606 BC | Judah Taken into Captivity by Babylon (first group) |
| 597 BC | Jerusalem Captured by Babylon (second group) |
| 586 BC | Jerusalem Falls and Temple is Destroyed (third group) |
| 536 BC | First Group Returns with Joshua and Zerubbabel |
| 516 BC | Temple Rebuilt |
| 458 BC | Second Group Returns with Ezra |
| 444 BC | Third Group Returns with Nehemiah who Rebuilds City Walls |
| | |
| | |
| | |

United Kingdom: Reign Of Saul

Lesson 2

Scriptures Under Consideration (1 Samuel 8-31; 1 Chronicles 10:1-14)

Short Reading (1 Samuel 8-10; 13:1-14; 15; 18:1-16; 23:14; 28; 31)

The People Demand A King (1 Samuel 8)—As Samuel grew older, the people grew restless and demanded a king like the nations around them. There were several reasons.

- Samuel’s sons were disappointments (8:1-5)
- The surrounding nations were threatening them (8:20)
- They wanted to be like the other nations (8:5)
- They rejected the rule of God over them (8:7-8)

The Reign Of Saul (1 Samuel 9-11)—Saul was God’s first choice to be their leader. He looked like a leader (9:2). Samuel anointed him privately (9:1-10:16), then presented him to the people (10:17-27). After he saved the city of Jabesh Gilead, the people accepted him (10:17-27). He was off to a good start, having exhibited meekness, humility, and compassion (9:21; 10:21-23; 11:11-13).

Saul Fell From Grace (1 Samuel 13-15)—He rashly offered sacrifices to God, thus usurping the priestly office (13:1-14). Because of his insolence God determined to take away the kingdom from him (13:13-14). In his war with the Philistines, Saul’s rash vow almost cost Jonathan his life (13:15-14:52).

Saul’s most notable sin of rebellion came when he spared King Agag and some of the spoils of war, in direct contradiction to God’s instructions (15). He insisted that he did obey God (15:13), that the people brought back the spoils (15:14-15). He claimed that he did obey God even though he brought back Agag (15:18-20), and the people were the ones who disobeyed (15:21-22).

God condemned him for his rebellion, and promised to take the kingdom away from him and give it to another (15:22-31).

Saul Became Troubled And Jealous (1 Samuel 16-31)—A distressing spirit came upon him—perhaps producing fear, anxiety, or even madness (16:14-23). It afflicted him for the rest of his reign.

After David defeated Goliath (17), Saul became very jealous of David (18:1-9). He repeatedly tried to kill David. It became his obsession, as he conspired against David for the rest of his life.

- Tried to pin him to the wall with a spear (18:10-11)

| Israel | (1050) Saul | (1010) David | (970) Solomon | (931) Kingdom Divided | | | |
|--------|-------------|--------------|---------------|-----------------------|-----|-----|-----|
| | 1050 | 1025 | 1000 | 975 | 950 | 925 | 900 |

| Prophets | | | | | | | |
|----------|--|--|--|--|-----|-----|-----|
| | | | | | 950 | 925 | 900 |

Judah

- Conspired against him through marriages with his daughters (18:17-29)
- Conspired to get Jonathan to kill him (19:1-7)
- Sent messengers to watch David's house and kill him (19:11-12)
- Pursued David to Naioth until God confounded him by causing him to prophesy (19:18-24)
- Pursued David to Nob where he slew the defenseless priests of the city (21)
- Pursued David all through the wilderness (22-26)

Saul Died A Pitiful, God-Forsaken Man (1 Samuel 28-31)—God refused to respond to him or give him guidance (28:6). In desperation he turned to a witch to contact Samuel. Samuel told him of his impending death (28:16-19). Saul died tragically, at his own hand, in the field of battle (31).

God passed judgment on Saul. The kingdom was taken away from him because of his rebellion (15:22-29). He died in battle with his enemies because of his unfaithfulness to God, and his consultation with the witch (1 Chronicles 10:13-14).

United Kingdom: Reign Of David

Lesson 3

Scriptures Under Consideration (1 Samuel 16-31; 2 Samuel 1-24; 1 Chronicles 11-29)

Short Reading (1 Samuel 16-18:9; 21-22, 31; 2 Samuel 1-2:7; 5-7; 11-12; 22-23:7)

Anointed To Be King (1 Samuel 16-20)—David was anointed to be the next king of Israel while he was still a youth (16:1-13). God chose him to succeed Saul because David had a heart like God’s (16:7). He proved that courage and faith in slaying Goliath (17).

David became attached to Saul’s court (18-20). He received much praise for his victories and Saul began to resent him (18:1-9). He married Saul’s daughter, became knit to the soul of Jonathan, and became a captain Saul’s army. But the praise he received from the people caused Saul to be jealous, and David had to flee for his life (19-20).

David’s Years As A Fugitive (1 Samuel 21-31)—Although a fugitive and an outlaw, he was not fleeing from justice but rather injustice. God used the events of that period to mold and prepare David to become king.

- Wandered in the wilderness (21-23). He was constantly on the move because Saul pursued him—even fleeing to the enemy because he feared Saul so much (21:10-15). He assembled a small army of misfits (22:1-5). Saul murdered the priests who helped David—there were always consequences when David took matters into his own hands (22:6-23).
- Spared Saul’s life twice (24,26). He proved his loyalty to the king by refusing to kill Saul when he had the chance.
- Fled to the Philistines (27-31). Again, through his deceit, he foolishly placed himself in the position of having to fight against his own people.

David Reigns Over Israel (2 Samuel 1-10)—David laments the death of his enemy Saul (1). He then reigned seven years in Hebron over the southern tribe of Judah (2-4). When he was established in Judah, then the rest of Israel submitted to him (5:1-5). He defeated the city of Jerusalem and made it his capital, bringing the ark of the covenant and the tabernacle there, to establish it as the religious center of the nation (5-6).

Because of David’s desire to build a temple for God, He made a covenant with David to establish his throne and kingdom forever (7:11-29; cf. Acts 13:22-23; Luke 1:26-33). David continued defeating the surrounding enemies, thus establishing the borders of his kingdom (8-10).

David’s Sin (2 Samuel 11-20)—What made David different from Saul was not that David was without sin, but rather the extent of his repentance after his sin (Psalm 32,51). David’s sin with Bathsheba (11), carried severe consequences (12). God forgave him, but violence and trouble would not depart from his family (12:10-12).

- Crimes of Amnon and Absalom (13-14). Amnon raped his half-sister and Absalom murdered him

| Israel | (1050) Saul | (1025) | (1010) David | (975) | (950) Solomon | (925) | (931) Kingdom Divided | 900 |
|--------|-------------|--------|--------------|-------|---------------|-------|-----------------------|-----|
| | 1050 | 1025 | 1000 | 975 | 950 | 925 | | 900 |

Prophets

| | | | | | | | | |
|--|--|--|--|--|-----|--|-----|-----|
| | | | | | 950 | | 925 | 900 |
|--|--|--|--|--|-----|--|-----|-----|

Judah

- Absalom's rebellion (15-19:8). He turned the hearts of the people away from David (15:6). David fled from Jerusalem (15-17). Eventually Absalom was defeated and killed (18). David mourned for his son and discouraged and angered his followers (19).
- David's restoration to the throne (19:9-21). After Absalom's death.

Close Of David's Reign (2 Samuel 21-24, 1 Kings 1-2)—David praised and honored God for the deliverance from his enemies over the years (22). Then he uttered what the Bible calls his “last words” (23:1-7).

David further sinned by taking a census of the people, and arousing God's wrath (24). As his last act, David chose his son Solomon to be his successor (1 Kings 1-2).

United Kingdom: Reign Of Solomon

Lesson 4

Scriptures Under Consideration (1 Kings 1-11; 2 Chronicles 1-9)

Short Reading (1 Kings 2:1-12; 3:1-28; 4:20-34; 6:1-13,22; 8:1-13,27-40; 10:1-10; 11:1-13)

Ascension To The Throne (1 Kings 1-2)—David appointed him as successor. Later Solomon had Adonijah and Joab executed to secure and protect his kingdom from those unscrupulous men.

Solomon Requests Wisdom (1 Kings 3)—In a dream, God asked the king what he wanted above anything else. He requested wisdom (3:1-15). He became world renowned for that wisdom (3:16-28; 4:29-34; 10:1-13).

Solomon had tremendous worldly wisdom and comprehension. His proverbs show real insight into human nature. He also saw the folly of sin and the wisdom of virtue. Sadly he did not heed his own wisdom.

Prosperity Of Solomon’s Reign (1 Kings 4-10)—Without a doubt, the glory days of the nation of Israel were under the reign of this king. They had unimaginable riches.

- Extent of Solomon’s reign (4:20-25). This was the full extent that God had promised to the descendants of Abraham (cf. Genesis 15:18-21).
- Luxury of Solomon’s reign (4:22-28; 10:14-29). His court was very extravagant, and wealth poured in until “*silver was as common in Israel as stones.*”
- Solomon built the temple (5-8). It was very lavish and impressive, and became “*the joy of all the earth*” (Psalm 48:2).
- Solomon’s other accomplishments (7:1-12; 9:15-28; cf. Ecclesiastes 2:4-11).

Solomon’s Sins (1 Kings 11)—His alliances with other nations became his downfall. To seal the relationships and covenants, he took wives and concubines of those nations. They turned his heart away from God. He built shrines and worshipped foreign gods with them.

Even though he built a splendid temple for the Lord, he desecrated the area with idolatrous shrines. Because of it, God determined to tear the kingdom from his son’s hands. He was a man who had great potential to serve God, who knew what was right, but lacked the strength to measure up to it in his own behavior.

Solomon’s Contributions—Solomon’s contribution to the nation was mostly in the material realm. In the end, his riches, luxury, and policy of compromise left him restless and unsatisfied. He concluded that those things were vanity, and that life without God was futile (Ecclesiastes 12:13-14).

Solomon authored most of the snippets of wisdom contained in the book of Proverbs. He wrote the book of

| Israel | (1050) Saul | (1010) David | (970) Solomon | (931) Kingdom Divided |
|-----------------|-------------|--------------|---------------|-----------------------|
| | 1050 | 1025 | 1000 | 975 |
| | | | | 950 |
| | | | | 925 |
| | | | | 900 |
| Prophets | | | | |
| | | | | 950 |
| | | | | 925 |
| | | | | 900 |

Judah

Ecclesiastes that included the hard lessons he learned about *life*. He also wrote the Song of Solomon that included the hard lessons he learned about *love*.

End Of The United Kingdom—Solomon's reign concluded with the end of the United Kingdom, and the beginning of rivals (Israel and Judah) in a Divided Kingdom. In that short period of 120 years, Israel went from scattered tribes to a mighty nation. She reached her greatest position of material splendor and fame under David and Solomon.

In the three kings of that period, we see classic examples of three kinds of sin. Saul's sin was rebellion against God. David's sin was the weakness of the flesh. Solomon's sin was the weakness of conviction that causes a man to compromise God's laws.

Divided Kingdom: The Division

Scriptures Under Consideration (1 Kings 12-22; 2 Kings 1-25; 2 Chronicles 10-36)
Short Reading (1 Kings 12,14,17-18; 2 Kings 2,17-19,22-23,25)

Introduction—Israel’s place of world prominence achieved under David and Solomon was surrendered when the nation was divided after Solomon’s death. From that time we observe two separate nations—the ten northern tribes designated “Israel” and the two southern tribes designated “Judah.”

For two centuries, the nations never reunited. Israel chose Samaria as its capital and Judah chose Jerusalem. Israel was ultimately overthrown during the Assyrian invasion in 722 BC, and Judah fell later to Babylon in 586 BC. The reign of those subsequent kings was a period of ups and downs, nationally, morally, and religiously. It was also a period of intensive prophetic work, trying to keep the nation intact, and turning the people and kings back to God.

The Cause Of The Division—There were three crucial factors that divided the kingdom.

- Solomon’s idolatry (1 Kings 11:1-13). The kingdom would be torn from his son and ten tribes would be given to Jeroboam (1 Kings 11:26-40).
- Longstanding rivalry between the strong southern tribe of Judah and some of the northern tribes. This was first seen when Saul died. Judah was quick to accept David as king, while Israel set up a rival kingdom under Saul’s son Ishbosheth (2 Samuel 2-4). Later in David’s reign Sheba launched a rebellion among the northern tribes to reject the rule of David (2 Samuel 20).
- Rehoboam’s foolishness (1 Kings 12:1-24). When the people pleaded with him to loosen the heavy tax burden invoked on them by his father, he threatened them with even greater taxes (1 Kings 12:14).

The Rival Kingdoms—In size, Israel was three or four times larger than Judah. Israel was in a better position for trade and commerce among the other nations. Judah was in a better position religiously because she had the capital city, Jerusalem, with the temple and the priesthood.

The dynasty of David was established in Judah, and his heirs always succeeded one another. Thus, God’s promise to David was fulfilled (2 Samuel 7:11-16). Israel never had a good king, and the monarchy was in turmoil as assassination was the order of the day.

The relations between these two kingdoms varied. For the first 60 years there was almost unbroken strife between them. There was a period during which intermarriage among the two factions helped to establish a more peaceful relationship between them. Even that broke down though.

Israel was carried off into Assyrian captivity in 722 BC because of her idolatry, and because she had rejected the prophets whom God sent to warn her (2 Kings 17:3-23). Judah retained her sovereignty until she eventually fell too because of idolatry (2 Kings 25:1-21).

| Israel | Kingdom Divided | | | | | Assyrian Captivity | | |
|----------|-----------------|-----|-----|-----|-----|--------------------|-----|--|
| 950 | 900 | 850 | 800 | 750 | | 700 | 650 | |
| Prophets | | 900 | 850 | 800 | 750 | 700 | 650 | |

Judah

The Written Records—Although the books of 1 & 2 Kings, and 2 Chronicles cover the same historical periods, these written records have very different purposes. Therefore they follow different trails. **Kings** traces the history from the *prophetic* viewpoint, **Chronicles** from the *priestly* standpoint, emphasizing the temple ritual.

- 1 & 2 Kings. These books were written with the specific purpose of passing judgment on the rules of each king as either good or bad. They relate the unique rules of **all** the kings of Israel and Judah.

The writer jumps back and forth between the kings of Israel and Judah, painting a chronological picture and giving us pertinent information about each king's life and reign. Then he passes a verdict on each as either good or bad. In the particular case of Israel, the political changes (assassinations, alliances with foreign nations) were given to show the religious condition.

- 2 Chronicles. This book was written with the specific purpose of chronicling the religious movements during that same time. The writer emphasized the law, the removal of idolatry, and the restoration of the temple and Jehovah worship.

Since Israel had no such religious revivals, the book of Chronicles deals almost solely with the rulers of Judah.

The primary purpose of these historical records was to justify God's punishment of these nations. The kings of Judah were judged in accordance with the promise God made to David (2 Samuel 7:12-16). Whereas those kings of the northern kingdom were condemned because they continued in the sin of Jeroboam who caused them to sin by introducing the golden calves for them to worship (1 Kings 15:34; 16:18-19,26,31; 22:52; etc.).

A second purpose was to show how ineffective human governments were, and point to the need of a righteous king whom God would send as sovereign over all (2 Samuel 7:16; Psalm 45:6-7).

Kings Of The Divided Kingdom

| Kings Of Israel | | | Years (B.C.) | | Kings of Judah | | |
|-----------------|------|-------------|--------------|---------|----------------|------|----------------|
| Prophet | Type | King | | | King | Type | Prophet |
| | B | Jeroboam | 931-910 | 931-913 | Rehoboam | B | |
| | | | | 913-911 | Abijam | B | |
| | B | Nadab | 910-909 | 911-870 | Asa | G | |
| | B | Baasha | 909-886 | | | | |
| | B | Elah | 886-885 | | | | |
| | B | Zimri | 885 | | | | |
| | B | Tibni | 885-880 | | | | |
| | B | Omri | 885-874 | | | | |
| Elijah | B | Ahab | 874-853 | 873-848 | Jehoshaphat | G | |
| | B | Ahaziah | 853-852 | | | | |
| Elisha | B | Jehoram | 852-841 | 853-841 | Jehoram | B | |
| | B | Jehu | 841-814 | 841 | Ahaziah | B | |
| | | | | 841-835 | Athaliah | B | |
| | | | | 835-796 | Joash | G | Joel |
| | B | Jehoahaz | 814-798 | | | | |
| | B | Jehoash | 798-782 | 796-767 | Amaziah | G | |
| Jonah | B | Jeroboam II | 793-753 | | | | |
| | | | | 792-740 | Uzziah | G | |
| Amos | B | Zechariah | 753-752 | | | | |
| | B | Shallum | 752 | | | | |
| | B | Menahem | 752-742 | | | | |
| | | | | 750-731 | Jotham | G | |
| | B | Pekahiah | 742-740 | | | | |
| Hosea | B | Pekah | 752-732 | 735-715 | Ahaz | B | |
| | B | Hoshea | 732-722 | | | | |
| | | | | 715-686 | Hezekiah | G | Isaiah/Micah |
| | | | | 695-642 | Manasseh | B | Nahum |
| | | | | 642-640 | Amon | B | |
| | | | | 640-609 | Josiah | G | Jeremiah/Zeph. |
| | | | | 609 | Jehoahaz | B | Habakkuk |
| | | | | 609-597 | Jehoiakim | B | Daniel |
| | | | | 597 | Jehoiachin | B | |
| | | | | 597-586 | Zedekiah | B | Ezekiel/Lam. |
| | | | | | | | |
| | | | | | | | |

Divided Kingdom: Kings Of Israel

Scriptures Under Consideration (1 Kings 12 -- 2 Kings 17)

Short Reading (1 Kings 12-13; 16:29-18:46; 2 Kings 2; 4-5; 9-10; 17)

Characteristics Of Northern Tribes (Israel)—The northern kingdom was characterized by political turmoil, assassination, overthrow of dynasties, and many power struggles. Nine different dynasties ruled in the short period of Israel’s history—just over 200 years. Out of 20 different kings Israel did not have even *one* good king.

The reigns of some of the kings of this period overlapped and there were some co-regencies, where more than one king was ruling at the same time. This explains some of the difficulty in pinpointing the years they reigned, and the way some of their rules overlapped each other.

The religious life of the northern kingdom was characterized by idolatry. Jeroboam introduced calf worship to Israel, cutting the people off from Jehovah worship in the Jerusalem temple (1 Kings 12:25-33). Others followed in his footsteps (1 Kings 15:34; 16:18-19,26,31; 22:52; etc.). This set the stage to introduce the idolatrous gods of surrounding nations at a later time, when Ahab and Jezebel led Israel into full-scale idolatry (1 Kings 16:29-34).

Ultimately, it was that idolatry, and the failure of the nation to heed God’s warnings through His prophets, that caused the nation to fall. It was taken captive by Assyria in 722 BC (2 Kings 17:5-23).

Summary Of Major Kings And Prophets—We will take a quick survey of some of the major kings and prophets of Israel now, and look at them a little more in depth when we study some of the writing prophets later.

- **Jeroboam (1 Kings 12:1-14:20).** He set up golden calves (representing Jehovah) in Dan and Bethel to keep the northern 10 tribes from returning to Jerusalem to worship, and possibly reuniting with the two southern tribes (12:25-33).

God sent a young prophet to condemn Jeroboam’s actions (13:1-6). Unfortunately, that prophet did not completely obey God’s commands and was slain (13:7-32). The prophet Ahijah passed judgment on the house of Jeroboam (14:1-18). Jeroboam became infamous as the father of so many other kings who *“did evil in the sight of Jehovah, in walking in the way of Jeroboam...”*

- **Ahab (1 Kings 16:29-22:40).** He did more evil than any other king of Israel—and if that wasn’t enough he took the wicked Jezebel to be his wife (16:29-34). They introduced full-scale idolatry to Israel, and continually battled God’s great prophet Elijah. God condemned Ahab, as Elijah prophesied that Ahab would be killed in battle and Jezebel eaten by the dogs (21:17-29; 2 Kings 9:30-37).
- **Elijah (1 Kings 17:1- 2 Kings 2:11).** One of the greatest prophets of the Old Testament period. He was the champion of Jehovah worship, withstanding the dastardly duo of Ahab and Jezebel. He proclaimed a drought on the land which lasted 3 ½ years (17:1; 18:41-46), miraculously supplied a widow with oil and meal until the drought was over, and raised her son from the dead (17:8-24).

He challenged 850 priests of Baal and Asherah to determine whose god was really God. It was time for a

| Israel | Kingdom Divided | | | | Assyrian Captivity | | | | |
|----------|-----------------|--------|--------|-----|--------------------|------|-------|--|--|
| 950 | 900 | 850 | 800 | 750 | 700 | 650 | | | |
| Prophets | | Elijah | Elisha | | Jonah | Amos | Hosea | | |
| 950 | 900 | 850 | 800 | 750 | 700 | 650 | | | |

Judah

showdown between God and Baal for the people to witness (18:21). He executed the priests after the contest on Mt. Carmel (18:17-40).

- **Elisha (1 Kings 19:16-21; 2 Kings 2:1-13:21).** Although gentler and less colorful than his predecessor, Elisha was a powerful and effective prophet of God. He took up the mantle of that great prophet Elijah and continued his ministry to the kings of Israel.

Many of Elisha's miracles are recorded—among the best remembered are providing oil for a widow (4:1-7), raising the Shunammite woman's son (4:8-37), and healing Naaman of leprosy (5:1-19).

- **Jehoram (2 Kings 1:17-9:26).** He was the last king in the lineage of Ahab. His reign is important chiefly because of the work of Elijah and Elisha at the same time. He died a bloody death in battle at the hand of Jehu in the field of Naboth (9:21-26), and Ahab's house came to a bloody end (9:14-26; 10:1-11).
- **Jehu (2 Kings 9:1-10:36).** Jehu was a captain in Jehoram's army and was anointed by Elisha as the next king over Israel. He carried out God's bloody judgment against the house of Ahab, killing his son Jehoram in battle, calling on the eunuchs to throw Jezebel out of the window, slaying 70 sons of Ahab, and executing all of the priests and followers of Baal in their temple.

He dealt a ruthless blow to Baal worship, but reestablished calf worship in Dan and Bethel. Later the prophet Hosea condemned his actions of cruelty (Hosea 1:4).

- **Jeroboam II (2 Kings 14:23-29).** He enlarged the borders of the kingdom and brought prosperity to the land of Israel like they had not enjoyed in a long time. But accompanying that prosperity was a decline in moral and religious life.
- **Amos and Hosea.** Contemporary with the prophet Jonah, this king's reign set the scene for the appearance of the mighty prophets Amos and Hosea who condemned the people in their prosperity for leaving God and turning to idols.

The Fall Of Samaria (2 Kings 17)—After being besieged for three years, the capital Samaria fell in 722 BC. Israel was destroyed because of her idolatry, her rejection of God's prophets, and her wicked ways (17:7-18).

They were carried away captive to Assyria where they were subsequently scattered among the other nations of the world (17:5-6). In keeping with their policy of occupation, Assyria also brought people from other nations to resettle Samaria, thus disrupting any national pride or unity, and keeping the people from revolting (17:24-41).

Israel and her people were virtually lost from sight forever, except for the small remnant from each tribe who remained faithful and distinct, returning later with the exiles of Judah in accordance with the decree of Cyrus king of Persia in 536 BC (cf. Zechariah 8:11-13; Jeremiah 30:3-4; Luke 2:36).

Kings Of Israel During The Divided Kingdom

| Kings Of Israel During Divided Kingdom | | | | | |
|--|----------|------|-----------------------|-----------------------------------|---|
| King | Dates BC | Type | Prophets | References | Principle Events |
| Jeroboam | 931-910 | Bad | Ahijah Man of God | 1K 11:26-14:20 2Ch 10,13 | Introduction of calf worship In Dan and Bethel |
| Nadab | 910-909 | Bad | | 1K 15:25-31 | Slain in conspiracy by Baasha |
| Baasha | 909-886 | Bad | Jehu | 1K 15:27-16:7 2Ch 16:1-6 | |
| Elah | 886-885 | Bad | | 1K 16:8-14 | Slain by his servant Zimri while drunk |
| Zimri | 885 | Bad | | 1K 16:9-20 | Ruled only seven days, burned palace down around himself. |
| Tibni | 885-880 | Bad | | 1K 16:21-22 | Israel was divided, half following Tibni and half following Omri |
| Omri | 885-874 | Bad | | 1K 16:16-28 | Built city of Samaria for capital of Israel |
| Ahab | 874-853 | Bad | Elijah, Micaiah | 1K 16:28-22:40 2Ch 18:1-34 | Most evil king of Israel, introduced Baal worship |
| Ahaziah | 853-852 | Bad | Elijah | 1K 22:51- 2K 1:18 2Ch 20:35-37 | Elijah prophesied his death after falling through lattice |
| Jehoram | 852-841 | Bad | Elisha | 2K 3:1-8:15 2Ch 22:5-8 | End of Ahab's dynasty, killed by Jehu |
| Jehu | 841-814 | Bad | Elisha | 2K 9:1-10:36 2Ch 22:7-9 | Killed all Ahab's family, worshipped golden calves. |
| Jehoahaz | 814-798 | Bad | | 2K 13:1-9 | |
| Jehoash | 798-782 | Bad | Elisha | 2K 13:10-14:16 2Ch 25:17-24 | Smote Syria three times and overtook cities of Israel |
| Jeroboam II | 793-753 | Bad | Jonah, Amos, Hosea | 2K 14:23-29 | Restored Israel's territory and prosperity |
| Zechariah | 753-752 | Bad | Hosea | 2K 15:8-12 | Killed in conspiracy |
| Shallum | 752 | Bad | Hosea | 2K 15:13-15 | Ruled one month |
| Menahem | 752-742 | Bad | Hosea | 2K 15:16-22 | Paid tribute to Pul (Tiglath-Pileser III of Assyria) |
| Pekahiah | 742-740 | Bad | Hosea | 2K 15:23-26 | Killed in conspiracy |
| Pekah | 752-732 | Bad | Hosea | 2K 15:27-31 2Ch 28:5-8 | Allied with Resin (Syria) against Assyria |
| Hoshea | 732-722 | Bad | Hosea | 2K 17:1-41 | Fall of Samaria, Assyrian captivity |

Divided Kingdom: Kings Of Judah

Scriptures Under Consideration (1 Kings 12 – 2 Kings 17; 2 Chronicles 10-32)
Short Reading (1 Kings 12-13; 2 Kings 11-12; 15:1-7; 16:1-18; 18-20)

Characteristics Of Southern Tribes (Judah)—The southern kingdom had many good rulers along with the bad ones. Unlike the northern kingdom, the dynasty of David continued unbroken in the south, except for the usurper Athaliah. The nations of Israel and Judah faced similar problems but followed different paths.

From a religious standpoint, the kings of Judah were far superior to the kings of Israel. The books of Chronicles—written from a religious standpoint—trace the spiritual condition of the people and only find favorable things in the nation of Judah. Israel is barely mentioned, except where it somehow interacts with Judah.

Although idolatry was introduced to Judah (and ultimately proved to be her downfall 136 years later), there were many good kings who reversed that trend during their reigns, thus saving Judah from the same fate experienced by Israel in the Assyrian Captivity of 722 BC.

Judah had several distinct advantages over Israel—a united government under the house of David, the priesthood and temple in the capital city of Jerusalem, and strong prophets who condemned apostasy and called the nation back to repentance.

Summary Of Major Kings And Prophets—We will take a quick survey of some of the major kings and prophets of Judah now, and look at them a little more in depth when we study some of the writing prophets later.

- **Rehoboam (1 Kings 12:1-33; 14:21-31; 2 Chronicles 10-12).** He was infamous for causing the split in the nation by adding to the heavy tax burden of his father Solomon. His efforts to force them back into a united nation afterward failed. He also led the people to sin and serve the idols of the land (14:23-24).
- **Asa (1 Kings 15:9-24; 2 Chronicles 14-16).** He was a good king who banished religious prostitutes and cut down the graven images, also establishing Jehovah worship during his reign. His latter years were characterized by an apparent loss of faith—in making a treaty with Syria for deliverance from Israel.
- **Jehoram (2 Kings 8:16-24; 2 Chronicles 21).** This was a dark period in Judah’s history. The alliance between his father Jehoshaphat (Judah) and Ahab (Israel) proved to be Jehoram’s undoing. He married Athaliah, the daughter of Ahab and Jezebel, who influenced him to support Baal worship. He died after suffering an intestinal disease for two years, as prophesied in a letter from Elijah.
- **Joash (2 Kings 11-12; 2 Chronicles 23-24).** As an infant he escaped the sword of his grandmother Athaliah who usurped the throne after killing all of her grandsons. When Joash was 7 years old (legal age for coronation), Jehoiada the priest coronated him before the people. During the first part of his reign (under the influence of Jehoiada) the temple was repaired and Jehovah worship reinstated. After Jehoiada’s death Joash forsook God and killed the prophet Zechariah.

| Israel | Kingdom Divided | | | | Assyrian Captivity | | | |
|----------|-----------------|-----|-----|------|--------------------|-----|--------------|--|
| 950 | 900 | 850 | 800 | 750 | 700 | 650 | | |
| Prophets | | | | Joel | | | Isaiah Micah | |
| 950 | 900 | 850 | 800 | 750 | 700 | 650 | | |

Judah

- **Uzziah (2 Kings 15:1-7; 2 Chronicles 26).** Also called Azariah, he reigned for 52 long and distinguished years. He brought power and prosperity to Judah. In his early years he was loyal to God and zealous for the true worship. But in later life his heart was lifted up in pride, and he entered the temple to burn incense on the altar of incense. Eighty priests withstood him and he was struck with leprosy by God for the rest of his life.
- **Ahaz (2 Kings 16; 2 Chronicles 28).** He openly rejected Jehovah worship, adopting the idolatrous practices of Israel and the surrounding nations—including the sacrifice of children. He closed the temple, placed pagan altars all over Jerusalem, and inaugurated the immoral rites of the Canaanites.
- **Hezekiah (2 Kings 18-20; 2 Chronicles 29-32).** He was one of the very best kings that Judah ever had. He began a reform in religious practices by destroying all the altars to foreign gods, reopened the temple and cleansed it, offered sacrifices with the priests and Levites officiating, and reestablished the Mosaic pattern of worship.

After the Assyrians destroyed Samaria and took Israel captive, it was the faith and godly influence of Hezekiah and the prophets Isaiah and Micah which helped stop Assyria from overthrowing Judah too. The Assyrian army turned back after 185,000 soldiers died at the hands of an angel of God in one night (19:32-37). These men stood faithful in the midst of crisis and God spared Judah for another century.

- **Isaiah (2 Kings 19-20; 2 Chronicles 26:22; 32:20).** Beginning his work in the year Uzziah died, his ministry spanned 50 years. He was a prophet to Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah. He counseled kings, recorded their deeds, and was God's messenger to them. He also foresaw the coming Messiah more clearly than any other prophet.
- **Micah (Jeremiah 26:17-19).** Contemporary with Isaiah, Micah was known as a country prophet and Isaiah a city prophet. Judah had become prosperous. Along with that prosperity came all the attendant social evils of greed and oppression. Micah cried out against these injustices. He also spoke of the Messiah and Zion's future triumph.

Idolatry Would Be Judah's Ultimate Downfall Too—Idolatry became the downfall of Israel in 722 BC at the hands of the Assyrians, and ultimately would be the undoing of Judah in 586 BC at the hands of the Babylonians. God said idolatry would destroy them (Numbers 33:51-56; Judges 2:11-3:6).

Israel reaped the consequences of her idolatry. Judah was spared for a while longer.

Good kings came on the scene in Judah, but even though they tore down the altars and destroyed the idols, they could not take idolatry out of the people's hearts. There was only one way that the nation could be purged from idolatry once and for all—the Assyrian and Babylonian captivities accomplished that.

Kings Of Judah During The Divided Kingdom

| Kings Of Judah During Divided Kingdom | | | | | |
|---------------------------------------|----------|------|-------------------------|------------------------------|--|
| King | Dates BC | Type | Prophets | References | Principle Events |
| Rehoboam | 931-913 | Bad | Shemaiah | 1K 12; 14:21-31 2Ch 10-12 | Rejected people's appeal for lighter taxes—split nation |
| Abijam | 913-911 | Bad | | 1K 15:1-8 2Ch 13 | Took Bethel and defeated Jeroboam |
| Asa | 911-870 | Good | Azariah, Hanani | 1K 15:9-24 2Ch 14-16 | Put away evil and idolatry |
| Jehoshaphat | 873-848 | Good | Jehu, Eliezer, Jahaziel | 1K 22:41-50 2Ch 17-20 | Made alliance with Israel and defeated many nations |
| Jehoram | 853-841 | Bad | Elijah | 2K 8:16-24 2Ch 21 | Married Athaliah and turned to Baal worship |
| Ahaziah | 841 | Bad | Elijah | 2K 8:25- 9:29 2Ch 22:1-9 | Died from wounds in battle with Syria |
| Athaliah | 841-835 | Bad | | 2K 11 2Ch 22:10- 23:21 | Woman, usurped throne, killed her grandsons |
| Joash | 835-796 | Good | Zechariah Joel? | 2K 11:21-12:21 2Ch 24 | King at 7 years old, made extensive repairs to temple |
| Amaziah | 796-767 | Good | Man of God | 2K 14:1-22 2Ch 25 | Waged civil war and was subjected by Israel for only time |
| Uzziah | 792-740 | Good | Zechariah, Isaiah | 2K 15:1-7 2Ch 26 | Entered temple to burn incense and was stricken with leprosy |
| Jotham | 750-731 | Good | Isaiah, Micah | 2K 15:32-38 2Ch 27 | Prepared his ways before Lord |
| Ahaz | 735-715 | Bad | Isaiah, Oded, Micah | 2K 16 2Ch 28 | Turned to idolatry and worship of Baal |

| Kings Of Judah After Fall Of Israel | | | | | |
|-------------------------------------|---------|------|----------------------------|--------------------------------|---|
| Hezekiah | 715-686 | Good | Isaiah, Micah | 2K 18-20 2Ch 29-32 | Removed idols, destroyed brazen serpent, saved Judah from capt. |
| Manasseh | 695-642 | Bad | | 2K 21:1-18 2Ch 33:1-20 | Reestablished idols, repented in later years |
| Amon | 642-640 | Bad | | 2K 21:19-26 2Ch 33:21-25 | Idolatrous, killed by own servants |
| Josiah | 640-609 | Good | Huldah, Jer. Zeph. Hab. | 2K 22:1- 23:30 2Ch 34-35 | Destroyed idols, false religions, one of Judah's best kings |
| Jehoahaz | 609 | Bad | Jeremiah, Habakkuk | 2K 23:31-34 2Ch 36:1-4 | Imprisoned by Pharaoh-Necho, died in Egypt |
| Jehoiakim | 609-597 | Bad | Jeremiah, Habakkuk | 2K 23:34-24:7 2Ch 36:5-8 | Defeated by Babylonians |
| Jehoiachin | 597 | Bad | Jeremiah | 2K 24:8-17 2Ch 36:9-10 | Jerusalem besieged, temple stripped of treasures |
| Zedekiah | 597-586 | Bad | Jeremiah | 2K 24:18- 25:7 2Ch 36:11-21 | Made king by Nebuchadnezzar, taken into captivity |

Divided Kingdom: Introduction To The Prophets

Lesson 8

Introduction—The books of Kings and Chronicles set the scene, giving us a historical backdrop for the ministries of each of the prophets who preached to the kingdom of Israel.

We need to remember that the Old Testament prophets were not concerned with giving new laws to God’s people, but calling them back to the Law of Moses (2 Kings 17:13). Their message could be summed up in one word—“repent.” These prophets addressed the sins of Israel, Judah, and the surrounding nations, and stressed the promise of a coming Messiah (Acts 3:19-26; 1 Peter 1:10-12; Matthew 5:17-18).

What Is A Prophet? A prophet was a spokesman, or a mouth for God. He was sent with a message from God, and acted as God’s own mouth speaking to the people.

- Inspired definition of a “*prophet*” (Exodus 4:14-16; 7:1-2). In a figurative sense, Moses would be as “God” to Aaron, and Aaron was to be like Moses’ prophet (or mouth).
- Prophet’s words were as authoritative as God’s words (Jeremiah 15:19). They carried **God’s** approval.
- Prophets relayed a message from God (Deuteronomy 18:18-19; Hosea 12:10; Ezekiel 3:4). Through God’s grace He sent the prophets to Israel so they would know His will (Jeremiah 7:25; Amos 2:10-11).
- Prophets were “forth-tellers” more than “foretellers.” Although they did sometimes predict the future, God primarily used them to reveal His plans and will to His people.
- Prophets did have other functions—serving as counselors to kings (Isaiah 37:2-3; 2 Kings 22:12-20; 1 Kings 22:1ff; 2 Samuel 7:1-17), and keeping official court records (1 Chronicles 29:29; 2 Chronicles 9:29; 12:15). Thus, God always had contact with the leaders of His people in order to guide and instruct them (Deuteronomy 17:14,18-20).

They reminded God’s people of the **past**—what God had done for them, how their fathers had transgressed. They had a message for the **present**—calling them back to God and giving them practical suggestions for living. Their work also related to the **future**—promising rewards for righteous living, threatening punishment for sin, proclaiming God’s purpose for Israel, and pointing men forward to Christ and His coming kingdom.

Origin Of Prophets—God has always had His spokesmen for relaying His will to His people (Hebrews 1:1). But there was a flourish of prophetic activity beginning with Samuel, and associated with the kingdom of Israel.

- Origin of the prophetic office. Beginning with Samuel, the place of prophets became much more prominent (1 Samuel 3:20; Acts 3:24). The origin of the prophetic office as an institution (like the priests and kings) evidently had its formal beginning with the kings. It became the guardian of the theocracy, building on the foundation of Moses’ law, then pointing people back to God’s law (cf. Deuteronomy 17:18-20).
- School of prophets. Samuel may have been instrumental in forming some sort of “school of prophets,” developing this group of men to relay God’s messages to the kings and perform other duties (cf. 1 Samuel 3:1; 10:10-12; 19:20-24; 2 Kings 9:1-13).
 - They seem to have been organized into communities or schools. These prophets gathered in certain cities from which their influence went out—Gibeah (1 Samuel 10:5,10), Ramah (1 Samuel 14:18-24), Bethel (2 Kings 2:3), Jericho (2 Kings 2:5), and Gilgal (2 Kings 4:38).

- Their work must have been very important to the kingdom because of the many references to them (1 Kings 18:4; 20:35; 2 Kings 2:3-15; 4:1,38; 6:1; 9:1).

Prominent Prophets—Not all of the prophets left recorded messages. Some of the most prominent, non-writing prophets during the united kingdom were Nathan (2 Samuel 7:2-17; 12:1-25), Gad (1 Samuel 22:5; 2 Samuel 24:11-19), and Ahijah the Shilonite (1 Kings 11:29-40). Some of the prominent, non-writing prophets during the divided kingdom were Elijah (1 Kings 17- 2 Kings 2), Micaiah (1 Kings 22:13-28), and Elisha (1 Kings 19:16- 2 Kings 13:21).

Periods Of Prophetic Activity—Although there were always prophets who tried to keep Israel’s rulers on the right track, there were some prominent periods of prophetic activity.

- Assyrian Period—The threats of Assyrian domination and captivity were very real because of the idolatrous course the northern ten tribes were following. Assyria would bring God’s judgment upon Israel (Isaiah 10:5-12), and He sent His prophets to warn them about it. Prophetic activity flourished during this time.
 - Obadiah (845 BC). Warned Edom of God’s judgment against them (1-4,10-11,15)
 - Joel (830 BC). Warned of the coming “*day of the Lord.*” (2:11)
 - Jonah (780 BC). Warned Assyria of judgment if they did not repent (1:1-3; 3:1-5; 4:1-2,9-11)
 - Amos (755 BC). Cried out against injustices in Israel (4:12; 5:1-4).
 - Hosea (750-725 BC). Married a woman of harlotry, illustrating God’s love for His people who had played the harlot with idolatrous gods (1-3; 11:8; 14:1-9).
 - Isaiah (740-690 BC). Prophesied extensively of the coming Messiah.
 - Micah (735-700 BC). Spoke out against injustices in Israel (6:8).
- Babylonian Period—Israel was finally overthrown in 722 BC, but Judah continued to exist for over a century because of the influence of some good kings and righteous prophets. Eventually though, she too turned completely away from God. He sent the Babylonians as His rod of punishment (Jeremiah 51:20-26).
 - Zephaniah (630-625 BC). Warned of the Babylonians becoming a growing threat to world judgment (1:14-16; 2:3).
 - Nahum (630-612 BC). Warned of the fall of Ninevah (1:1-3; 3:18-19).
 - Jeremiah (627-586 BC). Warned of Babylonian captivity for 40 years without results (25:1-14; 30:11). Also wrote the book of Lamentations after the fall of Jerusalem (Lamentations 1:12).
 - Habakkuk (612-606 BC). Struggled to accept the judgment which God was sending against Judah (2:4; 3:16-19).
 - Daniel (606-536 BC). Prophesied as God’s representative to the heathen kings. He reminded them of who appointed and overthrew world rulers (2:24-25; 4:25).
 - Ezekiel (592-570 BC). Prophesied to God’s people in captivity to give them hope of a remnant returning to their homeland (11:14-21; 37:1-14).

- Persian Period—After Israel’s return to Palestine, she began rebuilding the temple, the city of Jerusalem, and the nation. God sent prophets to those people to remind them of their purpose and objective as a nation, and to keep them morally pure until the arrival of the Messianic period.
 - Haggai (520 BC). Prophesied to the remnant who had forgotten why they had returned to Jerusalem. His message was to “build the temple” (1:4-9).
 - Zechariah (520-518 BC). Prophesied to encourage the completion of the temple, and also saw visions of the Messianic period (1:3; 8:3; 14:9).
 - Malachi (445-432 BC). Warned the people to return to God, and to watch for the coming of Elijah before the coming of “*the great and terrible day of the Lord*” (1:6-8,12-14; 3:1-3,8; 4:5-6).

Understanding And Interpreting The Prophets—A few simple guidelines will greatly aid our understanding of their message.

- These three things are suggested by Homer Hailey, to constantly keep in mind as one studies a work of the prophets (*A Commentary on the Minor Prophets*, pp. 23-24):
 - “First, it is necessary to understand the political, moral, social, and religious conditions at the time in which the prophet lived and preached, and how he proposed to meet these conditions.
 - “A second point... what the prophets consider is God’s relation to the heathen nations with whom the Jewish people came in contact.
 - “A final point... is the prophet’s teaching of a future kingdom and king to be fulfilled in one who was to come... a lasting king who should rule in righteousness was the true hope of the future.”
- Consider these helpful guides for interpreting the message of the prophets. They are found in the *Zondervan Pictorial Encyclopedia of the Bible*, Vol. 4, pp. 894-896.
 - “Everything that God caused to be included in the Bible is of real importance for His people throughout the ages, yet the prophets spoke directly to men of their time. In interpreting any part of the prophetic books it is very important to consider whatever can be learned of its historical background.
 - “One should advance his understanding by proceeding from the simple to the less simple and from the clear to the less clear... Proper method requires that the passages that are fairly obvious or simple to interpret should be carefully examined first, and that principles drawn from them provide the light in which the more difficult passages can be understood.
 - “Like all literature, prophecy contains figures of speech. This does not mean that it is necessarily obscure.
 - “God inspired the writers in such a way that what was written down for permanent retention as part of His enduring message to His people should be complete in itself. Proper interpretation of the prophetic messages requires comparison of Scripture with other Scripture. Everything that can possibly be learned from the Bible alone about the historical background of the prophetic messages is important for their interpretation... All the principles necessary for correct interpretation of prophecy can be found in the Bible... External material can be helpful, but is not essential...”

Looking Ahead To The Messiah—The most direct application of the prophets' message was to the people of their time. But in the distance—on the horizon—they also saw the coming of the Messiah and His kingdom. Ultimately the hope of their messages pointed to the coming Christ (Luke 24:44-46; Acts 3:18-24; 1 Peter 1:10-12).

There is a consistent thread that runs through the message of these prophets—that thread is the coming Messiah and His eternal kingdom.

- Isaiah (2:2-3; 7:14; 11:1-2; 42:1-3; 53:1-12; 61:1)
- Jeremiah (23:5-6; 30:18-22; 31:31-34; 33:14-18)
- Ezekiel (34:23-31; 37:1-28)
- Daniel (2:44; 7:13-14; 9:24-27)
- Hosea (1:10-11; 2:16-23; 11:1)
- Joel (2:28-32; 3:18-21)
- Amos (9:11-15)
- Obadiah (17-21)
- Jonah—a type of Christ (Matthew 12:40-41)
- Micah (2:12-13; 4:1-5; 5:2; 7:14-17)
- Nahum
- Habakkuk (3:12-13)?
- Zephaniah (3:14-20)
- Haggai (2:6-9,23)
- Zechariah (9:9; 11:12-13; 12:10; 13:7)
- Malachi (3;1; 4:5-6)

Writing Prophets Of Israel

| Writing Prophets Of Israel | | | |
|----------------------------|---------|-------------------|--|
| Prophet | Date BC | Prophesied To... | Message |
| Obadiah | 845 | Edom | <i>"In the day that you stood on the other side... even you were as one of them" (1:11)</i> |
| Joel | 830 | Israel and Judah | <i>"For the day of the Lord is great, and very terrible; who can endure it?" (2:11)</i> |
| Jonah | 780 | Ninevah | <i>"Yet forty days and Ninevah shall be overthrown" (3:4)</i> |
| Amos | 755 | Israel | <i>"Prepare to meet your God, O Israel" (4:12)</i> |
| Hosea | 750-725 | Israel | <i>"How can I give you up Ephraim? How can I hand you over Israel? My heart churns within me; my sympathy is stirred" (11:8)</i> |
| Isaiah | 740-690 | Israel and Judah | <i>"Come now and let us reason together, says the Lord, though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow" (1:18)</i> |
| Micah | 735-700 | Israel and Judah | <i>"He has shown you, O man, what is good; and what does the Lord require of you but to do justly, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with your God?" (6:8)</i> |
| Zephaniah | 630-625 | Judah | <i>"Seek righteousness, seek humility. It may be that you will be hidden in the day of the Lord's anger" (2:3)</i> |
| Nahum | 630-612 | Ninevah | <i>"God is jealous and the Lord avenges... The Lord is slow to anger and great in power, and will not at all acquit the wicked" (1:2-3)</i> |
| Jeremiah | 627-586 | Judah | <i>"Though I make a full end of all nations where I have scattered you, yet I will not make a complete end of you" (30:11)</i> |
| Habakkuk | 612-606 | Judah | <i>"Behold the proud, his soul is not upright in him; but the just shall live by his faith" (2:4)</i> |
| Daniel | 606-536 | Babylonian Kings | <i>"The Most High rules in the kingdom of men, and gives it to whomever He chooses" (4:25)</i> |
| Ezekiel | 592-570 | Captives | <i>"Although I have scattered them among the countries, yet I shall be a little sanctuary for them in the countries where they have gone" (11:16)</i> |
| Haggai | 520 | Remnant of Israel | <i>"Is it time for you yourselves to dwell in your paneled houses, and this temple to lie in ruins" (1:4)</i> |
| Zechariah | 520-518 | Remnant of Israel | <i>"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" (1:3)</i> |
| Malachi | 445-432 | Israel | <i>"Will a man rob God? Yet you have robbed me!" (3:8)</i> |

Divided Kingdom: Prophets To The Nations (*Obadiah, Jonah*)

Lesson 9

Scriptures Under Consideration (Obadiah; Jonah; 2 Kings 14:23-29)

Short Reading (Same)

Dates (Obadiah [845 BC], Jonah [780 BC])

Historical Background Of Obadiah—Edom was the nation descended from Esau (Genesis 36:8-9), and Israel was the nation descended from his younger brother Jacob. The conflict between the two brothers began before they were even born (Genesis 25:22-26). God chose the nation from the younger brother over the nation from the older.

Their descendants became bitter rivals even though God commanded peace among them (Deuteronomy 23:7; Numbers 20:14-21). War against Edom was forbidden, yet occurred often (1 Samuel 14:47; 2 Samuel 8:11-14; 1 Kings 11:15-16; 2 Kings 8:20-22; 14:7; Ezekiel 25:12-14; 35:3-9). Prophet refers to attack on Jerusalem (2 Chronicles 21:8-10,16-17) during the days of Jehoram?

Message Of Obadiah—The summary of Obadiah’s prophecy is twofold. First, he prophesied of the fall of Edom because of their pride and cruelty against Israel (1:1-16). Second, he prophesied of the exaltation of Zion when Seir (capital of Edom) would be cast down (1:17-21).

- Edom’s Punishment (1:1-9). Exalted in the cliffs and mountains, and thinking themselves impregnable, Edom’s cities would be laid waste and his pride be brought low (1:1-4). His destruction would be complete—the utter annihilation of a nation (5-9).
- Edom’s Sin (1:10-14). The prophet explains the reason for God’s judgment. Edom had been vicious and cruel to his Israelite kinsmen (1:10), and had stood by on the other side and rejoiced in the captivity of his brother (1:11-14; cf. 2 Chronicles 21:8-10,16-17).
- Guilt Of The Nations (1:15-16). All the nations would reap what they had sown, including Edom (1:15-16).
- Israel Shall Be Restored (1:17-21). He concludes his prophecy with the hope of Israel’s glory under the Messiah and His kingdom (cf. Luke 1:33).

Lessons From Obadiah—Pride is deceitful and goes before destruction (1:3-4). God will avenge the cruelty and injustice between nations (1:10,15). One is just as guilty when he shares in the spoils of someone else’s sins (1:11). God provides a way of escape in time of judgment for those who turn to Him (1:17,21).

Historical Background Of Jonah—Jonah was a prophet of Israel, yet the account of his book concerns his prophecy to Ninevah, capital of Assyria.

In Israel—Jeroboam II, Israel’s most powerful king, reigned during Jonah’s ministry (2 Kings 14:23-29). He found the kingdom weakened from paying tribute to Assyria since the time of Jehu. Jeroboam II restored large tracts of Israel’s territory. Times were prosperous; nationalism and patriotism were running high as seen in Jonah’s actions.

| Israel | Kingdom Divided | | | | | | Assyrian Captivity |
|----------|-----------------|-----|-----|---------|-------|-----|--------------------|
| 1000 | 950 | 900 | 850 | 800 | 750 | 700 | |
| Prophets | | | | Obadiah | Jonah | | |
| 1000 | 950 | 900 | 850 | 800 | 750 | 700 | |

Judah

In Assyria—Ninevah was a great city and the capital of Assyria (Jon. 1:2; 4:11)—the dominant world power at that time. Ninevah had great palaces, libraries, wealth, and power. The Assyrians were also a very cruel and ruthless nation.

Message Of Jonah—This book carries a message of God’s love for all men and man’s hatred for his fellow man. Jonah is best remembered for being swallowed by the great fish, but his problem was that he was swallowed by great national pride that led him to hatred.

- Jonah’s Disobedience (1:1-17). Jonah was commanded to go to Ninevah and call on them to repent. Instead he went the other direction. The last thing that prophet wanted God to do was forgive the people of Ninevah and withhold Himself from destroying that nation. Jonah was “*running from God.*”
- Jonah’s Prayer (2:1-10). From the belly of the fish, Jonah prayed for three days and nights in sorrow and repentance, and turned his heart back to God. Now Jonah was “*running to God.*”
- Jonah’s Preaching (3:1-10). He went to Ninevah and preached repentance to them. They humbled themselves before God, repented of their sinfulness, and God determined not to destroy them. Now Jonah was “*running with God.*”
- Jonah’s Complaints (4:1-11). Jonah had the greatest response of any other preacher in history—and he was mad about it (4:1-4). Then with a gourd and a worm, God taught the prophet a lesson about “the contrast between the infinite love of heaven and the selfish coldness of man. The growth of a night can be pitied when it touches ourselves; but unspeakably higher claims too often awaken no tenderness where we are not personally concerned” (Geike, *Hours With the Bible*, IV, pp. 186-189).

Lessons From Jonah—God loves all men and extends mercy to all who will repent, no matter how wicked (1:1-3; 4:10-11). Man cannot hide from God (1:3-16; Psalm 139:7-12). The greatest lesson stressed is the great difference between God’s *spiritual* interests and man’s *material* concerns (4:9-11; cf. Colossians 3:1-2).

Divided Kingdom: Prophet To Israel And Judah (*Joel*)

Scriptures Under Consideration (Joel; 2 Kings 11-12; 2 Chronicles 22:10-24:27)

Short Reading (Joel; 2 Chronicles 23-24)

Dates (830 BC)

Historical Background Of Joel—The reign of Joash (835-796 BC) seems to be the most appropriate setting for the prophecies of Joel. Joel makes no mention of a king in his book—it is significant to remember that Joash was a boy when crowned king, and remained under the guardianship of Jehoiada the high priest.

The reign of Joash is recorded in 2 Kings 11-12 and 2 Chronicles 22:10-24:27. When Ahaziah died, his wicked mother Athaliah assumed the throne and killed all of the heirs, except for Joash who was hidden by the high priest in the temple. When he was seven years old Jehoiada presented him to the nation as their rightful king, and put Athaliah to death.

Joash began as a faithful king, and set his heart to repair the temple desecrated by Athaliah. Following Jehoiada’s death though, he turned to idols. God’s wrath came upon Judah, ushered in by the warnings of the prophets (2 Chronicles 24:17-22). Perhaps Joel is one of those prophets referenced. God delivered Judah into the hands of the Syrians because of their apostasy (2 Chronicles 24:23-26; cf. 2 Kings 12:17-18; Joel 3:4-5).

Joel also identifies Israel’s enemies as the Phoenicians and Philistines (3:4) and the Egyptians and Edomites (3:19), which would point to an earlier period in Israel’s history. In later years, it was the Assyrians and Babylonians who harassed God’s people.

References to the temple and the official priesthood suggest an origin of this prophecy in Judah, or perhaps even Jerusalem itself, which he often mentions (2:15,23,32; 3:1,6).

An estimated 27 phrases, clauses, and expressions used by the prophet Joel have parallels in other Old Testament writings. This may indicate that Joel’s prophecy was early, and that subsequent prophets were already familiar with it. Joel’s work was quoted by Amos, Isaiah, Micah, Nahum, Zephaniah, Ezekiel, Malachi, and some psalmists.

Message Of Joel—Summarized in the statement “*For the day of the Lord is great, and very terrible; who can endure it?*” (2:11). Israel was infested with a devastating locust plague (1:2-7). They suffered the consequences for years (2:25). It may have even been the fulfillment of Moses’ promise of a curse on the land if Israel disobeyed God (cf. Deuteronomy 28:15,38-42).

- Devastation Of The Locust Plague (1:1-12). Joel uses this calamity to describe the greater destruction and desolation that would come from God unless the nation repented. He calls on them to “*awake...lament...be ashamed...and wail*” (1:5-12). The locust plague is heralding the “*day of the Lord.*” It is merely a foretaste of what awaits them. God sends such correction to bring men back to Himself (cf. Amos 4:6-12).
- Mourning For The Land (1:13-20). It has been consumed and only their repentance toward God can help. The “*day of the Lord*” is at hand, and its destruction will be even worse.

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| Israel | Kingdom Divided | | | | | | Assyrian Captivity | |
| 1000 | 950 | 900 | 850 | 800 | 750 | | 700 | |
| Prophets | | | | Obadiah Joel | | Jonah | | |
| 1000 | 950 | 900 | 850 | 800 | 750 | | 700 | |

Judah

- Call For Repentance (2:1-17). That plague foreshadowed the greater judgment decreed against the nation unless they repent. The prophet literally describes the dreadful and severity of the locust plague (2:3-10), but its imagery foreshadowed an even greater army that would come against them to destroy them (2:1-11). Since they would face the “*day of the Lord*” and its terrible judgment, he warns them to “*rend your heart and not your garments*” and bring God genuine repentance (2:12-17).
- Blessing And Restoration For The Faithful (2:18-32). After the devastation that comes to the unrighteous in the nation, God will restore the righteous. Joel relates the blessings of prosperity that would follow a genuine repentance, as proof that God is in their midst (2:18-27). He then relates God’s promise to bless mankind through the outpouring of the Holy Spirit (2:28-32; cf. Acts 2:16-21).
- God Judges The Nations (3:1-17). After judging His own people, then God would bring into judgment all those nations who have oppressed them. They would gather together with Him in the “*Valley of Jehoshaphat (Jehovah judges)*.” It would be a day of destruction and judgment for the wicked nations. Then they would know that the Lord is God.
- God Blesses His People (3:18-21). The “*day of the Lord*” will also be a day of deliverance and salvation for God’s righteous people.

The Day Of The Lord—This is an important theme that runs through the prophetic books (Isaiah 2:12f; Ezekiel 13:5; Amos 5:18-20; Zephaniah 1:7,14; Zechariah 14:1; Revelation 6:17; 16:14; etc.). It occurs over 30 times in the Old Testament. It occurs 5 times in the book of Joel (1:15; 2:1,11,31; 3:14)

It is almost a proverbial phrase which signifies “the moment when Jehovah grasps the reigns, which he seems to have held slackly before, when the currents of his moral rule, which had been running sluggishly, receive a mysterious quickening, and the Lord’s work upon the earth is at last fully performed.” (Davidson).

The “*day of the Lord*” is both a day of terror and blessing—the day when God punishes the unrighteous and delivers, or redeems, the faithful. It is a day in which we find out Who is really in charge.

The “*day of the Lord*” was not only judgment coming against Israel and Judah, but was also reserved for Babylon (Isaiah 13:1,6), Egypt (Jeremiah 46:10), and the other nations (Joel 3:14).

The phrase does not always refer to the return of Christ at the end—although the ultimate “*day of the Lord,*” foreshadowed by all these other periods of judgment in history, does refer to the Lord coming in judgment to punish the guilty and reward the faithful for eternity (2 Peter 3:10-13).

Divided Kingdom: Prophet Of Doom (*Amos*)

Scriptures Under Consideration (Amos; 2 Kings 14:23-15:7; 2 Chronicles 26)

Short Reading (Amos)

Dates (755 BC)

Historical Background Of Amos—This great prophet came from the countryside with a message of doom for Israel. He was a herdsman and a tender of sycamore fruit (7:14). Pastoral scenes abound throughout his book (1:2; 2:13; 3:4-5; 4:7; 6:12; 7:1; 8:1; 9:6). A religious reformer, Amos came out of the wilderness to call a remnant of the people back to justice and righteousness before it was too late.

Josephus says that the earthquake mentioned in the book (1:1) took place when Uzziah attempted to usurp the priestly functions (2 Chronicles 26: 2 Kings 15:1-7; see *Antiquities of the Jews*, IX,10,4)

In Israel—The borders of both Israel and Judah had stretched out to their greatest extent since the time of Solomon, and prosperity had returned to both kingdoms (Israel under Jeroboam II [2 Kings 14:25-27] and Judah under Uzziah [2 Chronicles 26:6-15]).

With this prosperity came numerous evils and a general decay of right values. There was the problem of excessive luxury (3:12,15; 5:11; 6:1,4-7). Along with that was social corruption as the rich oppressed the poor (2:6-8; 5:11-12; 8:4). There was also the problem of religious corruption, complete with idolatry (4:4-5; 5:25-27) and heartless, mindless worship offered to God (5:21-24; 8:4-6).

All of these vices were leading to the ultimate doom and destruction of the nation within that generation (722 BC). Amos and Hosea (750-725 BC) worked concurrently to warn the people of imminent destruction.

In Assyria—“During the ninth century BC, Assyria had been increasing in power and in the exertion of that power in the east, gradually extending it into the west. However for sixty years following 805 BC, ‘the west was given a breathing space because the rulers of Assyria were not strong men’ (*Westminster Atlas*, p.73). It was during this period that Jonah had visited Ninevah. This sixty years respite from the east gave Judah and Israel the opportunity needed to strengthen the power of each nation.” (Homer Hailey, *A Commentary on the Minor Prophets*, p.84).

Message Of Amos—Summarized in the statement “*Prepare to meet your God, O Israel!*” (4:12). The national prosperity of Israel was at its peak resulting in spiritual idleness and national decay (6:1-6). Amos came as a great social reformer.

- Judgment Coming On The Nations (1:1-2:5). Amos went to Bethel (center for worship of golden calves) to deliver his bold prophecy. He denounces in succession the surrounding nations. He begins with the more distant and alien peoples—Damascus, Gaza, Tyre (1:3-10). He then addresses the nearer and more kindred people—Edom, Ammon, Moab (1:11-2:3). He then turns his attention to the sister nation of Judah (2:4-5).
- Judgment Coming On Israel (2:6-16). After condemning these others, gaining the hearty approval of Israel, he then zeroes in on the bull’s-eye and condemns the northern kingdom—the true subject of this prophecy.

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|-----------------|-----------------|-----|-----|--------------|-----|-------|--------------------|--|
| Israel | Kingdom Divided | | | | | | Assyrian Captivity | |
| 1000 | 950 | 900 | 850 | 800 | 750 | | 700 | |
| Prophets | | | | Obadiah Joel | | Jonah | Amos | |
| 1000 | 950 | 900 | 850 | 800 | 750 | | 700 | |

Judah

- Israel Condemned For Her Transgressions (3:1-4:13). Punishment was coming to Israel because of her sins, and only a remnant would be spared (3:12). The rest of the nation—especially the rich—would be plundered (3:13-4:3). God had chastened them before, yet they had not returned to Him (4:6-11). Now they are warned to “*prepare to meet your God*” (4:12).
- Warnings And Call To Repentance (5:1-6:14). God called on Israel to repent (5:4-15), to “*seek good and not evil that you may live*” (5:14-15). If not, then the “*day of the Lord*” would be a day of darkness for them (5:16-27). “*Woe to those who are at ease in Zion*” because God would raise up a nation that would afflict them throughout all the land (6:1-14).
- Visions Of Judgment (7:1-9:10). Amos’ prophecy winds down with five visions that illustrate the coming judgment—the vision of the locusts (7:1-3), the fire (7:4-6), and the plumb line (7:7-9). A prophet of Bethel, Amaziah, interrupts Amos’ message and was condemned by God for rejecting it (7:10-17). Then Amos relays the vision of summer fruit (8:1-14) and the destruction of the altar (9:1-10).
- Israel’s Restoration In Messianic Kingdom (9:11-15). Amos closes his message with a ray of hope. There will be a spiritual remnant that will be sifted out and saved (9:8-10; cf. Romans 11:5). Israel will be restored—not as a physical nation, but—a spiritual kingdom (9:11-15) under the Messiah from the house of David (9:11; cf. Acts 15:15-18; Luke 1:67-79).

Amos is the first of the prophets to declare the inevitable and unalterable doom of Israel (5:2; 8:1-2). They have reached the point of no return. The time and opportunity for healing as a nation is past—the only ones who can be saved from destruction are the faithful remnant.

Lessons From Amos—What can we learn from the book of Amos? Much of the problems faced by Israel mirror those faced by the modern church. We learn that privilege involves responsibility (3:2). We see the meaning and purpose for calamity when it comes from God (4:6-12). The most elaborate worship, if not done sincerely, is loathsome to God (5:21-24; 8:4-6).

Divided Kingdom: Prophet Of Doom (*Hosea*)

Scriptures Under Consideration (Hosea; 2 Kings 15:8-17:23)

Short Reading (Hosea 1-3; 4:1-6,11-18; 5:11-15; 6:4-6; 8:1-7,11-14; 10:5-8,12-13; 11:1-12; 14:1-9)

Dates (750-725 BC)

Historical Background Of Hosea—Hosea was the last of the prophets sent to Israel before her fall (2 Kings 17:13-14). His ministry began prior to the death of Jeroboam II (1:1,4). The mention of Assyria (8:9) may be an allusion to the tribute paid by Menahem to Tiglath-Pileser III about 739 BC (2 Kings 15:19-20). Furthermore, the mention of relations with Egypt (7:11; 9:6; 12:1) likely points to the political activity of Hoshea, the last king of Israel (2 Kings 17:3-4).

Religiously—Jeroboam I had introduced calf worship. Later Ahab and Jezebel led the people into Baal worship. Hosea summarized God’s indictments against Israel in one word—“*harlotry*.” Israel had joined herself to many false gods as an adulteress would join herself to many men (2:5,12-13). They had prostituted themselves with these false gods for so long that they had forgotten who their God really was (4:6; 5:4; 8:12). Hosea’s marriage to Gomer—a wife of harlotry—showed him the immeasurable love of God like nothing else could.

Morally—The nation was in ruin and decay. They attempted to be religious even though they were vile, immoral, and ungodly (4:1-2; 6:8-9). Even their priests and moral leaders were corrupt (4:9).

Politically—*Conspiracy* was the keyword of this period. These were years of treachery, treason, and murder. Assassination was the key political tool.

- Zechariah reigned 6 months then was murdered by Shallum (2 Kings 15:8-12; Hosea 1:4)
- Shallum reigned 1 month then was murdered by Menahem (2 Kings 15:13-15)
- Menahem reigned 10 years and paid tribute to Pul, King of Assyria (2 Kings 15:16-22)
- Pekahiah reigned 2 years and was murdered by a conspiring captain, Pekah (2 Kings 15:23-26)
- Pekah reigned 20 years and was eventually murdered by Hoshea (2 Kings 15:27-31)
- Hoshea reigned 9 years until the nation was taken into Assyrian Captivity in 722 BC

God Was No Longer In Their Thoughts—They had passed the point of no return. They rebelled against all constituted authority (7:1-7; 8:4; 13:10), and began to depend on human defenses and foreign alliances rather than God (5:13; 7:11-13; 10:13; 14:3).

Message Of Hosea—Summarized in the statement “*How can I give you up Ephraim? How can I hand you over Israel? My heart churns within me; my sympathy is stirred.*” (11:8). The first three chapters of Hosea’s message relate his personal experience with Gomer. That experience impressed on the prophet God’s feeling for His people who were committing spiritual adultery against Him.

- Hosea And Gomer Parallel God And Israel (1:2-2:2). The prophet took a “*wife of harlotry*” and had three children with Gomer. The names of each were symbolic. A son was named “*Jezreel*,” implying that God would punish the dynasty of Jehu for the bloodshed of Jezreel (1:4-5; cf. 2 Kings 10:1-31). A daughter was named “*Lo-ruhamah*,” literally meaning “no mercy.” This was a prophecy of the imminent Assyrian

| Israel | Kingdom Divided | | | | | | Assyrian Captivity |
|----------|-----------------|-----|-----|--------------|-----|------------------|--------------------|
| 1000 | 950 | 900 | 850 | 800 | 750 | 700 | |
| Prophets | | | | Obadiah Joel | | Jonah Amos Hosea | |
| 1000 | 950 | 900 | 850 | 800 | 750 | 700 | |

Judah

captivity (1:6-7). A third son was born named “*Lo-Ammi*,” which literally means “not my people.” This indicated the rejection of Israel (1:8-9). But eventually, Gomer would be restored and the children’s names would be changed (1:11; 2:1,22-23).

- Israel Would Be Cast Off But God Would Love Her Again (2:3-3:5). Because of her whoredoms with false gods, Israel would be cast off (2:2-13). But after a time, God would love her again and take her back to be His wife (2:14-23). Hosea was instructed to take Gomer back as a symbol of God’s mercy to Israel (3:1-5).
- God’s Controversy With Israel (4-6). God brings charges against His people (4:1-10). They had joined themselves to idols and rejected God (4:11-19). Because of these things, judgment was coming on Israel, with the hope that such calamity would bring them back to God (5:1-15). God calls on Israel to repent (6:1-3), and demands that their repentance be sincere (6:4-11).
- Israel’s Corrupt Political Condition (7-8). All of their kings had fallen away from God, and flitted from one nation to another to find security (7:1-16). Israel had forgotten their maker and made many altars for sinful idolatry (8:1-14).
- Israel’s Religious And Moral Apostasy (9-11). Israel had looked for blessings from false gods, and lost their moral perspective. They had become corrupt and were now an abomination to God (9:1-16). They would go away into captivity because of their idolatry (9:17-10:11). It was time for them to seek after God (10:12-15). God expressed His tender feelings and continued love for Israel (11:1-12).
- Israel’s Apostasy And God’s Faithfulness (12-13). As unfaithful as Israel had been to God, He always remained faithful to her (12:1-14). Because of their idolatry, relentless judgment was coming on them (13:1-16).
- Israel’s Conversion And Pardon (14). When they have learned their lesson, God would be ready to heal their spiritual wounds and love them freely (14:1-9). Ultimately they would be restored under the Messiah (cf. 1:10-2:1; 3:4-5; 1 Peter 2:9-10; Romans 9:25-26).

Lessons From Hosea—The most important lesson was the extent of God’s love for His unfaithful people. “Hosea’s personal history, which he interpreted as a symbol of Jehovah’s experience with Israel may be regarded as the master-key of his teaching... It burned two ideas into his soul: Jehovah’s loving faithfulness to Israel, and Israel’s thankless unfaithfulness to Jehovah...” (George Robinson, *The 12 Minor Prophets*, pp. 19-20).

Hosea’s message to us in the present day is that inward corruption in a nation is more dangerous to its existence than its external enemies. He presents the causes of Israel’s downfall for us to learn— immorality (4:1-2,13-14), lack of knowledge (4:6), pride (5:5; 7:10), insincerity (6:4,6), worldliness (7:8), corruption (9:9), backsliding (11:7), and idolatry (13:2-3).

Divided Kingdom: Assyrian Captivity

Lesson 13

Scriptures Under Consideration (2 Kings 17; 18:9-12)

Short Reading (Same)

Dates (722 BC)

The captivity of Israel is one of the saddest chapters in the history of God's people. They had such potential. They had such blessings. They had such a unique relationship with God among the nations of the world. Their destiny was greatness, and all they had to do to claim it was obey and serve God (Deuteronomy 6:10-19). They chose to sell out that birthright.

Prophecies Of Captivity—God first warned that Israel's apostasy would end in captivity before they even settled into the Promised Land (Leviticus 26:27-39; Deuteronomy 4:23-28; 28:58-68). That was 700 years before the Assyrian captivity!

God's prophets cried out continually about the captivity that was coming— Amos (3:11-15; 6:3-7,14; 9:1-4,8-10). Then Hosea (9:1-4; 10:5-8; 11:5-6). Then finally Isaiah (6:11-13; 7:8; 8:3-4; 17:3-8; 28:1-4).

Assyria And Israel—Assyria itself was a nation firmly established for almost as many centuries as Israel. Many conflicts arose between the two nations.

780 BC—Assyria was at low ebb nationally, so Israel and Judah both took advantage of it. Jeroboam II grew strong in Israel and expanded national borders as prophesied by Jonah (2 Kings 14:25). That same prophet was told to go to Ninevah, capital of Assyria, and preach repentance to avert the disaster God was determined to bring upon them (Jonah 1:1-2). Jonah wavered as his national pride at this time overcame his sacred duty (Jonah 1:3; 3:10; 4:1-3).

738 BC—The Assyrians came into Israel first under Tiglath-Pileser (2 Kings 15:19-20) and exacted a heavy tribute from them and king Menahem.

733 BC—When Pekah, king of Israel, conspired with Damascus against Assyria, then Tiglath-Pileser returned to overrun northern Israel and take away captives (2 Kings 15:29).

727 BC—Tiglath-Pileser died and was succeeded by Shalmaneser. Hoshea, king of Israel, revolted against Assyria, refusing to pay the annual tribute (2 Kings 17:4). Shalmaneser promptly imprisoned him, then laid siege to Samaria for three years beginning in 725 BC.

722 BC—Shalmaneser died before completing the conquest, and his successor, Sargon, then conquered Samaria. He exiled the captive nation, scattering the people throughout many other nations (2 Kings 17:6; 18:9-12). In the Assyrian annals of Sargon's reign, he recorded the deportation of 27,290 people from Samaria alone (F.F. Bruce, *Israel and the Nations*, p. 66)

As the years passed and Israel became more wicked, God chose Assyria as His rod of wrath against His own people (Isaiah 10:5-6). God ruled in the destiny of Israel and Assyria. In spite of all of Assyria's power and domination, it was merely an instrument in the hand of God.

Assyria did not acknowledge God's control, but attributed such power to itself (Isaiah 10:7-11). It was that very arrogance that God would punish, but only after they had served His purpose in bringing punishment upon Israel (Isaiah 10:12-16). Because God was in control of the destiny of Assyria, He could reassure His people that after His

wrath against Israel was appeased, then His wrath against Assyria would burn hot—so hot that there would never again be anything left of that nation.

Zephaniah predicted the ultimate end of Assyria in words so hot they scorch the page (Zephaniah 2:13-15). Nahum prophesied of Ninevah's burial in the wilderness (Nahum 1:14; 3:1-19).

For 25 centuries the remains of Assyria lay buried in the sands and dust of the wilderness. Only in recent years, since excavations have been done, have we had any tangible evidence of the former greatness of that nation. God laid them low and they never recovered!

Reasons For Captivity—The Assyrian captivity came as a result of Israel's sins. The inspired writer gives an explanation (and justification) for the severity of God's judgment upon His people (2 Kings 17:5-23).

- Idolatry (17:7-12,16-23). The great sin of Israel was idolatry. Hosea had called it "*harlotry*." They had been unfaithful to their God and turned to other gods, thus cutting themselves off from the true God.
- Rejected His Prophets (17:13-14). God sent many prophets to call the people back to repentance, to avert the judgment that was coming, and to turn the hearts of the people back to God. They rejected these prophets with hard hearts and stiff necks. God did not punish them without first giving them sufficient warning and without pleading with them.
- Rejected His Covenant (17:15). They had promised to keep the covenant confirmed by the Ten Commandments (Exodus 19-20). They had even pronounced curses upon themselves at Mt. Ebal and Mt. Gerizim if they did not keep that covenant (Deuteronomy 27). They were reaping what they had sown.

Israel lost her identity as a nation. In later years, when a remnant would return to the land of their inheritance, it would never be the nation like it was before. Along with the promise of judgment, most all of the prophets included a message of hope for God's people (Jeremiah 3:18; Ezekiel 20:40-41; 37:1-14; Hosea 14:1-8; Amos 9:11-15).

Divided Kingdom: Prophet Of Doom (*Isaiah*)

Scriptures Under Consideration (Isaiah, 2 Kings 15:17-20:21; 2 Chronicles 26-32)

Short Reading (Isaiah 1; 6; 8-11; 24; 26:1-6; 32:1-4; 35-37; 40; 49:1-13; 52:13-53:12; 55:1-7; 62:1-4)

Dates (740-690 BC)

Historical Background Of Isaiah—Isaiah’s ministry spanned the rule of four kings of Judah (1:1). We also find historical markers throughout his book which pinpoint certain dates for us—his call to be a prophet in the year that king Uzziah died (6:1 [740 BC]), the Syro-Ephraimitic War (7:1 [734 BC]), the year king Ahaz died (14:28 [727 BC]), the year Sargon of Assyria conquered Ashdod, a chief city of Philistia (20:1 [711 BC]), and Sennacherib’s siege against Jerusalem (36:1 [701 BC]).

Reign Of Uzziah (740 BC)—Judah attained its highest degree of prosperity since the time of Solomon (2 Kings 14:22; 2 Chronicles 26).

Reign Of Jotham (750-732 BC)—He continued with the building and fortification of the capital begun by his father (2 Kings 15:35; 2 Chronicles 27:3).

Reign Of Ahaz (736-716 BC)—When Pekah, king of Israel and Rezin, king of Damascus planned an alliance against Assyria, Ahaz, king of Judah refused to join their confederacy. In response they tried to dethrone him. The ensuing struggle became known as the Syro-Ephraimitic War (734 BC). Judah was brought very low (2 Chronicles 28:6,8,19) and Ahaz sent to Tiglath-Pileser, king of Assyria for help (Isaiah 7). He received rich rewards from Ahaz because of his help (2 Kings 16:7-9; 15:29; Isaiah 9:1).

Reign Of Hezekiah (716-687 BC)—In response to the captivity of the northern kingdom, Hezekiah began his reign in Judah with a reformation (2 Kings 18:4,22). Judah barely escaped captivity herself and paid rich tribute to Assyria. When Sargon was assassinated and Sennacherib came to the throne (705 BC), Hezekiah refused to pay tribute any more (2 Kings 18:7). Consequently Sennacherib marched westward with a large army, overrunning nations and cities until even Jerusalem was besieged (2 Kings 18:17-19:8; Isaiah 36:2-37:8).

Through the influence of the prophet Isaiah, the prayers of Hezekiah, and the angel who smote 185,000 soldiers in the Assyrian army, the kingdom of Judah withstood.

Message Of Isaiah—The first half of Isaiah’s prophecies deal with God’s judgment (1-35). It is summarized in the statement, “*Come now and let us reason together, says the Lord...*” (1:18).

- Prophecies About Judah And Jerusalem (1-12). Isaiah describes Judah’s apostasy and God’s plea for their repentance (1). The devastation Judah will experience because of her sins is contrasted with the renewal of Zion under the Messiah (2-5). Then Isaiah relates his credentials as a qualified spokesman for God by recounting his vision and call to be a prophet (6).

As good as many of Judah’s kings had been—David, Uzziah, Hezekiah—they had all failed to establish justice and righteousness. Isaiah points to the Messiah’s reign which will be characterized by such principles (7-12). Assyria is identified as God’s rod of anger for punishing the nations (10:5-6,11-12).

| Israel | Kingdom Divided | | | | Assyrian Captivity | | | | |
|----------|-----------------|--------|--------|-----|--------------------|------|-------|--------|--|
| 950 | 900 | 850 | 800 | 750 | 700 | 650 | | | |
| Prophets | | Elijah | Elisha | | Jonah | Amos | Hosea | Isaiah | |
| 950 | | 900 | 850 | 800 | 750 | | 700 | 650 | |

Judah

- Prophecies About Foreign Nations (13-23). Isaiah delivers his burden of doom against various nations—including Babylon, Assyria, Philistia, Moab, Syria, Israel, Ethiopia, Egypt, Edom, Arabia, Jerusalem, and Tyre.
- Prophecies About World Judgment (24-27). He then summarizes God’s judgments on the entire earth because of sin, and praises God who delivers those who trust in Him. The kingdoms of earth pass away, but the kingdom of heaven remains (24:21-23; 26:1-6).
- Warnings To Judah And Assyria (28-35). God’s judgment is depicted in a series of woes pronounced against Ephraim (28), Jerusalem (29), the Egyptian alliance (30-31), Assyria (33), and the nations (34). He then contrasts those things with God’s graciousness in the coming King of righteousness (32) and His joyful kingdom, Zion of the redeemed (35).

A historical interlude divides the two main sections of the book (36-39). Assyria threatens to destroy Jerusalem and the nation of Judah (36). God intervenes in response to the faith of Isaiah and prayers of Hezekiah, thus upsetting Assyria’s plans to take Jerusalem (37). Hezekiah’s life was extended after suffering a life-threatening sickness, but his foolish pride in displaying his wealth to the Babylonian envoy resulted in the promise that all he had would ultimately be taken as booty into Babylon (38-39).

The second section of Isaiah’s prophecies deals with God’s comfort for His people after the exile, and ultimately in the Messiah (40-66). It is summarized in the statement “*Fear not for I am with you; be not dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you, yes, I will help you, I will uphold you with my righteous right hand.*” (41:10). Intertwined throughout this section are also prophecies about the ultimate hope of God’s people—the Messiah.

- Comfort From God (40-48). He will not forget them, but will help them. They will be comforted through their coming affliction (40). They are assured of God’s care over them during the coming Babylonian exile (41-48). They must not trust in idols that have no life within themselves (40:18-20; 44:6-20).

Isaiah even identifies who will send them back to their homes—Cyrus (44:28-45:13). He ultimately points them forward to the Lord’s Servant (Messiah) who will eventually redeem them from their sins (40:3-5; 42:1-9).

- Comfort In The Lord’s Servant (49-57). With the coming of the Lord’s Servant, there will also appear a glorious kingdom that will extend even to the Gentiles. God will redeem and glorify the nation and Israel will be comforted by the Lord’s Servant (Messiah) (49:1-13; 52:13-53:12; 56:6-8).
- Comfort In The Prospect Of Israel’s Future Glory (58-66). The book closes with the inference that sin is a wall of separation between God and Judah (58-59). The old order will pass, and God will establish a new order—a new heaven and new earth—in the reign of the Messiah. There will be a spiritual renewal in His eternal kingdom (60-66).

The Messiah In Isaiah’s Prophecy—Even though most of the Old Testament prophets gave glimpses of the coming Messiah (Acts 3:24), Isaiah presented the most vivid, detailed picture of the Messiah and His coming kingdom. His rule would be righteous like none other had ever been.

A partial list is found on the following page.

Messianic Prophecies Of Isaiah

| Prophecies Of Messiah And His Kingdom | | |
|---------------------------------------|---|-----------------------|
| Prophecy | Summary | NT Reference |
| 2:2-4 | Mountain of the Lord's house established | |
| 7:14 | Born of a virgin—Immanuel | <i>Matt. 1:21-23</i> |
| 9:1-2 | Light shines in darkness for those in Galilee | <i>Matt. 4:13-16</i> |
| 9:6-7 | The government and unending kingdom of the Son | <i>Lk. 1:32-33</i> |
| 11:1-11 | Branch from root of Jesse, peace in His kingdom | <i>Rom. 15:12</i> |
| 16:5 | Messiah will rule in justice and righteousness | |
| 28:16-17 | Stone laid in Zion for a foundation, rule is just and righteous | <i>1 Pet. 2:6-8</i> |
| 32:1-4,16-19 | A reign of righteousness, peace, and security | |
| 33:17-24 | Majesty of the Lord—judge, lawgiver, and king | |
| 35:5-10 | Highway of holiness for the redeemed, sorrow shall flee away | |
| 40:3-5 | Voice of one crying in the wilderness "Prepare the way of the Lord" | <i>Lk. 3:3-6</i> |
| 42:1-9 | God would put His Spirit on His Servant | <i>Matt. 12:15-21</i> |
| 49:1-13 | The Lord's Servant would be a light to the Gentiles | <i>Lk. 2:32</i> |
| 50:4-9 | The Lord's Servant would willingly give Himself | |
| 52:13-53:12 | The suffering of the Lord's Servant | <i>Matt. 27:11-54</i> |
| 55:1-7 | Invitation to seek the Lord while He may be found | |
| 60:18-22 | In Zion will be salvation and praise, God will be glory of His people | |
| 61:1-3 | The good news of salvation will be preached | <i>Lk. 4:17-22</i> |
| 62:1-4 | No more forsaken or desolate, Zion would receive a new name | |
| 65:17-19,25 | A new heavens and new earth | |
| 66:12-13,22-24 | Peace like a river in the Messiah's reign | |

Divided Kingdom: Prophet Of Doom (*Micah*)

Scriptures Under Consideration (Micah; 2 Kings 15:17- 20:21; 2 Chronicles 26-30)

Short Reading (Micah)

Dates (735-700 BC)

Historical Background Of Micah-- Micah’s ministry spanned the rule of three kings of Judah (1:1). Compare with the historical background of Isaiah and his prophecies. He began prophesying before the destruction of Samaria in 722 BC (1:5-7; 6:9-16) and continued into the reign of Hezekiah (3:12; cf. Jeremiah 26:17-19).

Unlike Isaiah who was a city prophet, Micah was a prophet of the country. He was a prophet to the common people. He championed the cause of the poor and cried out against social and moral injustices. Their actual messages are so similar though, that Micah has been called “Isaiah in shorthand.”

Micah was the last of the cluster of writing prophets sent to announce the doom of Israel, and of Judah if she didn’t repent. Amos and Hosea were prophets of Israel sent directly with a message to Israel. Isaiah and Micah were prophets of Judah who announced the imminent destruction of Israel and the threat coming from the ungodliness that had spread to Judah (1:3-9).

Micah denounced the same things in Judah that Amos and Hosea had condemned in Israel. The wealthy were corrupt and robbed the poor (2:1-2,8-9; 6:11). Religious leaders were corrupt (2:11; 3:6,11). Rulers and judges were corrupt (3:1-3,9; 7:3). The people were idolatrous (6:16).

Message Of Micah—Summarized in the statement “*He has shown you, O man, what is good; and what does the Lord require of you but to do justly, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with your God?*” (Micah 6:8). Micah’s prophecy is divided into three collections of speeches.

- Hear All You Peoples (1-2). Micah begins with a general cry against God’s people announcing God’s punishment coming upon both Israel and Judah (1). God is coming in fierce, relentless judgment upon Samaria (1:2-7). Israel’s “*wounds are incurable*” and the infection has spread to Judah too (1:8-16). He then relates the reasons for this punishment (2:1-11), also promising the restoration of a remnant (2:12-13).
- Hear Now O Heads Of Jacob (3-5). Micah then points an accusing finger at the national and spiritual leaders as the force that has brought the wrath of God upon the nation (3).

Then he shines a bright ray of hope for God’s people. Following their captivity in Babylon (4:10), they will share in the glory and triumph of Zion under the reign of the Messiah (4-5). They will be the army of a great king who will be born in Bethlehem (5:2; cf. Matthew 2:1-11).

- Hear Now What The Lord Says (6-7). Micah closes by relating God’s complaint against His people (6). God wonders why they have treated Him the way they have (6:1-5). Then Micah contrasts what God expects with what man gives Him (6:6-8). His punishment for their wickedness will be severe (6:9-16).

| Israel | Kingdom Divided | | | | Assyrian Captivity | | | |
|----------|-----------------|--------|--------|-----|--------------------|------------|--------------|--|
| 950 | 900 | 850 | 800 | 750 | 700 | 650 | | |
| Prophets | | Elijah | Elisha | | Jonah | Amos Hosea | Isaiah Micah | |
| 950 | 900 | 850 | 800 | 750 | 700 | 650 | | |

Judah

Micah laments the full-scale wickedness of Jerusalem (7:1-7), followed by a picture of the latter days when God's people have repented and been restored to favor (7:8-17). Micah concludes by praising God, rejoicing in the abundance of His mercy, and uttering a majestic tribute to Jehovah (7:18-20).

Three Great Texts Of Micah—Among the inspired words of this prophet, there are three great texts that stand out and cry out for our attention.

- *“Therefore because of you Zion shall be plowed like a field, Jerusalem shall become heaps of ruins, and the mountain of the temple like the bare hills of the forest.”* (3:12). This verse is the keystone and climax of Micah's message of judgment. It was so noteworthy that it was remembered for more than a century and was instrumental in saving the prophet Jeremiah's life (see Jeremiah 26:17-19).
- *“But you, Bethlehem Ephrathah, though you are little among the thousands of Judah, yet out of you shall come forth to me the one to be ruler in Israel, whose goings forth have been from of old, from everlasting.”* (5:2). Micah focused the people's attention on a humble birthplace for their king, not a palace in the capital—He would share the common man's burden and be their deliverer (see Matthew 2:1-11).
- *“He has shown you, O man, what is good; and what does the Lord require of you but to do justly, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with your God?”* (6:8). God's prophet summarized the cardinal teachings of his contemporaries Amos, Hosea, and Isaiah in this simple yet profound statement. Amos was the prophet of justice (Amos 5:24), Hosea declared God's unfailing mercy (Hosea 11:8; 14:4-7), and Isaiah pleaded with Israel to walk in communion with God (Isaiah 1:16-20).

Judah Alone: Kings Of Judah

Scriptures Under Consideration (2 Kings 18-25; 2 Chronicles 29-36)

Short Reading (2 Kings 18-25)

Dates (722-586 BC)

Characteristics Of Judah—Israel had fallen to Assyria, Samaria had been ransacked, and throngs of people had been taken into captivity and scattered through the northern nations (722 BC) because of Israel’s unfaithfulness (2 Kings 18:9-12). Because of the positive influence of Hezekiah, Isaiah, and Micah the nation of Judah continued to exist for another 135 years.

As we consider the nation of Judah alone we find that there were a few positive notes. Hezekiah turned to God at the beginning of his reign (2 Chronicles 29:1-11). When threatened by the same Assyrian nation that destroyed Israel, Hezekiah prayed and God delivered Judah (2 Chronicles 32:20-22).

Josiah’s religious reforms were more sweeping than those of any other king of Judah. Following his death though, it became obvious that the idols could be taken out of the people’s *hands*, but not out of their *hearts*! Judah was headed down the slide to moral ruin, and although it could be slowed down temporarily, it would not be stopped. God was raising the Chaldeans (Babylonians) to inflict His wrath on Judah (Habakkuk 1:5-8; Jeremiah 51:20-23).

Summary Of Major Kings And Prophets—We will take a quick survey of some of the major kings and prophets of Judah now, and look at them a little more in depth when we study some of the writing prophets later.

- **Hezekiah (2 Kings 18-20)**. One of the best kings Judah ever had (18:3-6), he did much to restore Jehovah worship (2 Chronicles 29:1-11). The Assyrians overran all of Judah’s neighbors, but thanks to his faithfulness, God spared the nation of Judah (19:32-34). In the latter years of his reign he sinned in pride, and God told him that all of his wealth would eventually be taken captive into Babylon (20:12-19).
- **Manasseh (2 Kings 21:1-18)**. Hezekiah’s son became the most wicked king Judah ever had. He restored every idol that had been cast down, and encouraged more evil practices among the people than any of the nations that were in Canaan before Israel (21:1-9). He filled the city with innocent blood, and God determined to wipe the city of Jerusalem clean like a plate (21:12-15).

Manasseh was taken captive into Assyria (2 Chronicles 33:10-13). That imprisonment humbled him, so when he returned to Jerusalem he enacted reforms (2 Chronicles 33:14-17). But Judah never recovered from the evil and idolatry that he introduced to the nation. All of his zeal could not undo what he had done!

- **Josiah (2 Kings 22:1-23:30)**. He was eight years old when coronated and became one of the greatest kings Judah ever had (22:2; 23:25). He instituted sweeping reforms, restoring the true worship of Jehovah. While repairing the temple, they found the book of God’s law that prophesied of calamity on Jerusalem because of the multiplied sins of the people and their kings—but it would not come in Josiah’s lifetime (22).

Josiah restored true worship (23:1-25). He cast out and destroyed every outward vestige of idolatry—altars, idols, priests, religious prostitutes, bones of dead priests. He even tore down the altar set up by Jeroboam as

| | | | | | | | |
|-----------------|--------------------|-----|------------------|----------------------|-----|-----------------|-----|
| Israel | Assyrian Captivity | | | | | | |
| | 750 | 700 | 650 | 600 | 550 | 500 | 450 |
| Prophets | Isa Mic | | Zeph Nah Jer Hab | | | | |
| | 750 | 700 | 650 | 600 | 550 | 500 | 450 |
| Judah | | | | Babylonian Captivity | | Remnant Returns | |

prophesied centuries earlier (23:17-18; cf. 1 Kings 13:1-3). Josiah could not take the idols out of the hearts of the people though.

- **Jehoiakim (2 Kings 23:36-24:6).** Pharaoh Necho set him up as a puppet king, and he paid tribute to Egypt until Babylon overran Egypt draining her of her power. Judah then came under control of Babylon. Nebuchadnezzar laid siege to Jerusalem in 606 BC and returned to Babylon with many captives (24:1-2). Among these captives were Daniel, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-Nego (Daniel 1:1-4).
- **Jehoiachin (2 Kings 24:8-16).** He reigned only three months before Nebuchadnezzar besieged Jerusalem. He surrendered and Nebuchadnezzar took 10,000 of the skilled workers and leaders of Judah, along with the articles of the temple to Babylon. This was the second group taken into captivity. It also included Ezekiel (Ezekiel 1:1-3). With Jehoiachin (Coniah) came the end of the direct lineage of kings (Jeremiah 22:24-30). He would die in the land of captivity (Jeremiah 22:24-27; 2 Kings 25:27-30), and Israel, as a nation under an earthly king, would be no more.
- **Zedekiah (2 Kings 24:17-25:26).** Nebuchadnezzar set him up as a puppet king. Later, Zedekiah rebelled against Babylon and Jerusalem was sieged. Zedekiah appealed to the prophet Jeremiah to inquire of God for him (Jeremiah 21:1-10). God decreed that Jerusalem would fall, Zedekiah would be taken captive, and the people must choose whether they would remain in Jerusalem and die, or be exported to Babylon and live.

Jerusalem and its temple were leveled in 586 BC. The gold was stripped from the temple; everything else precious was taken away. Only the poor people were left to tend the land. Jeremiah said it would remain desolate until the land had enjoyed the Sabbaths that the people had failed to keep (2 Chronicles 36:21; cf. Leviticus 25:1-12; 26:33-35).

- **Zephaniah.** Prophesied during the reign of Josiah. He was the first of the cluster of prophets sent to warn Judah of her doom. He saw the Chaldeans (Babylonians) as a growing threat of judgment against the world—including the nation of Judah (1:14-16; 2:3).
- **Nahum.** Prophesied of the doom that was about to befall Ninevah, and offered hope for Judah that the nation threatening them would fall. He assured Ninevah that God is slow to wrath, but that He avenges sin and unrighteousness (1:2-3). He spared them once, but they had finally reached a point where He could no longer show them mercy.
- **Jeremiah.** Prophesied boldly for 40 years trying to prepare the nation for Babylonian captivity. God's mind could be changed *if* they would repent (18:5-11), but if they would not then they would face captivity. He told them they would be taken to Babylon and remain for 70 years (25:1-14). His message of doom was balanced by many bright flashes of Messianic hope (23:5-8; 30:4-11; 31:31-34; 33:15-18).
- **Habakkuk.** He cried out to God because of the wickedness of Judah. God assured him that His judgment was coming on them at the hands of the Babylonians (1:5-6). Then God had to challenge the prophet to believe Him even though he didn't want to believe (2:4). The prophet's questioning of God actually turned into a greater faith and confidence in God's work (3:16-19).

The Babylonian Captivity—The captivity was actually not an event but a process. Three different groups were taken away in 606, 597, and 586 BC. Thus the kingdom of Judah was brought to an end. Why the captivity? Judah brought it upon herself because of her sins (2 Chronicles 36:14-16; 2 Kings 24:3-4). God warned the nation when they *first* entered the Promised Land that there would be consequences for disobedience to Him (Deuteronomy 28).

How long would the captivity last? Jeremiah told the captives to dwell in Babylon peacefully because they would remain there for 70 years. Then they would be restored to their homeland (Jeremiah 25:8-14; 29:4-14). God punished a nation of evildoers so that He could be gracious to a remnant who would serve Him faithfully.

Kings Of Judah After Fall Of Israel

| Kings Of Judah After Fall Of Israel | | | | | |
|-------------------------------------|----------|------|----------------------------|--------------------------------|---|
| King | Dates BC | Type | Prophets | References | Principle Events |
| Hezekiah | 715-686 | Good | Isaiah, Micah | 2K 18-20 2Ch 29-32 | Removed idols, destroyed brazen serpent, saved Judah from capt. |
| Manasseh | 695-642 | Bad | | 2K 21:1-18 2Ch 33:1-20 | Reestablished idols, repented in later years |
| Amon | 642-640 | Bad | | 2K 21:19-26 2Ch 33:21-25 | Idolatrous, killed by own servants |
| Josiah | 640-609 | Good | Huldah, Jer. Zeph. Hab. | 2K 22:1- 23:30 2Ch 34-35 | Destroyed idols, false religions, one of Judah's best kings |
| Jehoahaz | 609 | Bad | Jeremiah, Habakkuk | 2K 23:31-34 2Ch 36:1-4 | Imprisoned by Pharaoh-Necho, died in Egypt |
| Jehoiakim | 609-597 | Bad | Jeremiah, Habakkuk | 2K 23:34-24:7 2Ch 36:5-8 | Defeated by Babylonians |
| Jehoiachin | 597 | Bad | Jeremiah | 2K 24:8-17 2Ch 36:9-10 | Jerusalem besieged, temple stripped of treasures |
| Zedekiah | 597-586 | Bad | Jeremiah | 2K 24:18- 25:7 2Ch 36:11-21 | Made king by Nebuchadnezzar, taken into captivity |

Judah Alone: Prophets Of Doom (*Zephaniah, Nahum*)

Scriptures Under Consideration (Zephaniah; Nahum; 2 Kings 21:1-23:30; 2 Chronicles 33-35)

Short Reading (Zephaniah; Nahum)

Dates (Zephaniah [630-625 BC], Nahum [630-612 BC])

Historical Background Of Zephaniah—Manasseh rebuilt all the high places and restored all the idol worship that his father Hezekiah has eradicated (2 Chronicles 33:1-9). He tried to undo his own work at the end of his life, but to no avail (2 Chronicles 33:10-20). The reign of his son Amon was one of great wickedness too. Josiah was the last good king to reign over Judah. He instituted a time of great religious revival and his fervor to destroy idolatry was unmatched (2 Chronicles 34-35).

Zephaniah prophesied during the reign of Josiah (Zephaniah 1:1), and judging from his description of the people, he prophesied before Josiah’s great reformation was in full force (cf. 2 Kings 23:4ff). The people had become degenerate both religiously and morally (Zephaniah 1:4-12; 3:1-7). About 80 years had passed since seeing God’s great judgment against Israel. It was about time for one to come against Judah, and God was calling them to repentance before it came (Zephaniah 2:1-3).

Message Of Zephaniah—Summarized in the statements “*The great day of the Lord is near... Seek the Lord all you meek of the earth, who have upheld His justice. Seek righteousness, seek humility. It may be that you will be hidden in the day of the Lord’s anger.*” (1:14; 2:3). George Adam Smith said of this little book, “No hotter book lies in all the Old Testament. Neither dew nor grass nor tree nor any blossom lives in it, but it is everywhere fire, smoke, and darkness, drifting chaff, ruins, nettles, saltpits, and owls and ravens looking from the windows of desolate places.” (*The Book of the Twelve Prophets*, Vol. 2, p. 48)

- The Great Day Of The Lord (1:1-2:3). He begins with an awful picture of doom and devastation when God comes in judgment against Judah, announcing it as “*the day of the Lord*” (1:2-18). He then calls on the meek to repent and seek God so they can be part of the remnant that will be delivered and restored (2:1-3).
- Judgment Upon The Nations (2:4-3:7). He turns his attention to the heathen nations that will likewise share in the desolation of “*the day of the Lord*” (2:4-15). This emphasizes that all men and peoples are accountable to God. Then he exposes the sins of Judah and assures her that if the heathen are to be punished, Judah can also expect her share (3:1-7).
- Deliverance Of the Faithful Remnant (3:8-20). He closes on a positive note though. It would be a day of judgment for the wicked, but also a day of blessing for the righteous (3:11-13). After purging them of wickedness, a remnant of God’s people would be gathered from the nations and returned to their homeland (3:18-20).

Lessons From Zephaniah—The great theme of the book is “*the day of the Lord.*” No prophet has made it more vivid and real. Zephaniah mentions that day 20 times (1:7,14-18; 2:2-3; 3:8,11,16; etc.). The “*day of the Lord*” would be a terribly awesome day of judgment for sinners (1:7-18), but it would also be a day of salvation for the righteous (2:1-3; 3:11-13,16-17).

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|-----------------|--------------------|-----|----------|----------------------|-----|-----------------|-----|
| Israel | Assyrian Captivity | | | | | | |
| | 750 | 700 | 650 | 600 | 550 | 500 | 450 |
| Prophets | Isa Mic | | Zeph Nah | | | | |
| | 750 | 700 | 650 | 600 | 550 | 500 | 450 |
| Judah | | | | Babylonian Captivity | | Remnant Returns | |

Historical Background Of Nahum—Nahum’s prophecy occurred sometime between the conquest of No-Amon in Egypt (3:8) by Ashurbanipal king of Assyria (661 BC) and the destruction of Ninevah by the alliance of Cyaxares the Mede and Nabopolassar the Babylonian (612 BC).

Ninevah was the capital city of Assyria, and during the time of Nahum was at the peak of wealth, fame, and power (3:16-17). “Up to this time it (Ninevah) had been impregnable. The city, with its walls one hundred feet high and wide enough for three chariots to drive side by side on its top, has remained unconquered for more than a century. It is said that outside this massive wall was a moat one hundred and forty feet wide and sixty feet deep, dominated by some twelve hundred defense towers.” (H. I. Hester, *The Heart of Hebrew History*, p. 289).

Assyria was a ruthless empire, known for its cruelty and savagery all through its period of world domination. “The Assyrian records leave no doubt but that through all the nation’s history they were always cruel and violent and barbaric; ever boasting of their victories, gloating that ‘space failed for corpses,’ that they ‘made pyramids of human heads,’ and ‘covered pillars with the flayed skins of their rivals.’” (George L. Robinson, *The 12 Minor Prophets*, p. 110). Nahum’s message of doom for this nation was also a message of consolation for Judah.

Message Of Nahum—Summarized in the statement “*God is jealous and the Lord avenges; the Lord avenges and is furious. The Lord will take vengeance on His adversaries, and He reserves wrath for His enemies; The Lord is slow to anger and great in power, and will not at all acquit the wicked.*” (1:2-3).

- Destruction Of Ninevah Decreed (1). The goodness and severity of God is depicted. He begins with an awesome picture of God’s judgment (1:2-8). It will mean destruction for Assyria (1:9-11,14) but at the same time it will mean deliverance for Judah (1:12-13,15).
- Destruction Of Ninevah Described (2). The prophet graphically describes the siege of Ninevah—the city will be flooded (2:6), her people taken captive (2:7), and her treasures plundered (2:8-10). Fear will fill their hearts, and that once self-assured lion’s den will be destroyed (2:11-13).
- Destruction Of Ninevah Deserved (3). Because of their cruelty and idolatry they will reap what they have sown (3:1-13). God challenges them to make their preparations for war then watch their strength desert them (3:14-18), and listen to the applause of the nations as Ninevah disappears forever (3:19; cf. Zephaniah 2:13-15; Psalm 9:17).

Lessons From Nahum—The message of Nahum centers on God’s vengeance upon the impenitent (1:2-3). He had been slow to anger, graciously sending Jonah a century and a half earlier to bring them to repentance. Assyria finally rejected God’s grace, and had to face the consequences (Galatians 6:7-8). Ninevah fell forever in 612 BC.

Nahum also wrote for the benefit of the people of Judah, assuring them that as alarming as their circumstances might be, God was still in control, and the nation threatening them *would* crumble. “So complete was the destruction that the excavations of modern explorers on the site of Ninevah have not yet found one single wall slab earlier than the capture of the city of Arbaces and Balazu. All we possess of the first Ninevah is one broken statue. History has no other example of so complete a destruction.” (F. Lenormant and E. Chevallier, *The Rise and Fall of Assyria*).

Judah Alone: Prophet Of Doom (*Jeremiah*)

Scriptures Under Consideration (Jeremiah; 2 Kings 21-25; 2 Chronicles 33-36)

Short Reading (Jeremiah 1; 7:1-11; 9:1-2; 12:1-6; 15; 17-19; 21; 23:1-6; 24-25; 29-31; 39; 52)

Dates (627-586 BC)

Historical Background Of Jeremiah—The world situation was in an uproar as Assyria, Egypt, and Babylon were vying for world domination. Judah was greatly affected by their lust for power and the ambition of these three nations—it was the geographical link between Egypt in the south and Assyria and Babylon in the north.

Assyria’s power and domination was waning. She had been weakened by numerous rebellions throughout the empire—especially by Babylon. A Medo-Babylonian alliance finally defeated Ninevah in 612 BC under Nabopolassar as prophesied by Nahum. Babylon then defeated the Egyptian armies at Carchemish in 605 BC under Nebuchadnezzar (46:1-2,13,25-26).

Babylon was emerging as the dominant world power. She collected tribute and royal hostages from King Jehoiakim in 606 BC. She also deported Jews from Jerusalem in two more waves (52:28-30) and in 586 BC they finally destroyed Jerusalem (52; cf. 2 Kings 25).

In her pride, Judah had turned away from God and vacillated between alliances with Assyria, Egypt, and Babylon. They had forsaken God and turned to idols (2:13). They had degenerated to such a point that God even forbid Jeremiah from praying for them (7:16; 11:14; 14:11-12). There was still hope if they would repent (18:7-10), but knowing they wouldn’t God decreed that they would go into captivity for 70 years (25:8-11).

Message Of Jeremiah—Summarized in the statements “*And this whole land shall be a desolation and an astonishment, and these nations shall serve the king of Babylon seventy years... Though I make a full end of all nations where I have scattered you, yet I will not make a complete end of you. But I will correct you in justice, and will not let you go altogether unpunished.*” (25:11; 30:11).

The book of Jeremiah does not follow a chronological order. It is comprised of sketches of biography, history, and prophecy. We will follow the chronological arrangement suggested by E. J. Young.

- **Under Josiah (627-609 BC).** Jeremiah received his call to be a prophet in the 13th year of Josiah (1:2-19). His ministry lasted 40 years (1:2-3). He began with a series of seven oracles to the people of Judah.
 - Denounced their idolatry and announced Divine judgment (2:1-3:5).
 - Warned them to learn from Israel’s mistakes or face punishment from the north (3:6-6:30).
 - Warned against false trust and security in the temple (7-10).
 - Appeals with them to keep the covenant their fathers had broken, but they wouldn’t listen (11-13).
 - Depicts some of the punishments of God against the land (14-15).
 - Depicts God’s punishment against Judah and the reason for it (16-17).
 - Illustrates the coming exile with the symbols of the potter and clay, and the broken flask (18-19).
 Jeremiah was struck and imprisoned because of this last message (20:1-6). He expressed a bitter complaint against God for making him a laughing-stock and subject of derision—but there remained a fire burning within him to speak God’s word no matter what happened (20:7-18).

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|-----------------|--------------------|--|--------------|--|-----|--|----------------------|--|-----|-----------------|-----|--|-----|
| Israel | Assyrian Captivity | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| | 750 | | 700 | | 650 | | 600 | | 550 | | 500 | | 450 |
| Prophets | Isa Mic | | Zeph Nah Jer | | | | | | | | | | |
| | 750 | | 700 | | 650 | | 600 | | 550 | | 500 | | 450 |
| Judah | | | | | | | Babylonian Captivity | | | Remnant Returns | | | |

- **Under Jehoahaz (609 BC).** No prophecies are dated during this short reign, but Jeremiah did utter a message concerning him during the reign of Zedekiah (22:11-17).
- **Under Jehoiakim (609-597 BC).** Jeremiah warned Judah from the gates of the Temple again. He survived but another faithful prophet—Urijah—was slain (26). Jeremiah prophesied of the 70 year captivity (25). Later he contrasted the obedience of the Rechabites to their earthly father’s commands with the disobedience of Judah to their heavenly father’s commands (35). Jeremiah recorded his prophecies and sent them to Jehoiakim, who promptly cut them up and threw them into the fire (36).

Jeremiah’s scribe—Baruch—was assured that God would deliver him from calamity and death whenever he delivered the prophecies to the kings (45). Jeremiah’s prophecies against various nations followed, which may have been uttered at this time (46-49).

- **Under Jehoiachin (597 BC).** No prophecies were expressly attributed to this period. Jehoiachin is mentioned however, in a prophecy uttered during the reign of Zedekiah (22:24-30).
- **Under Zedekiah (597-586 BC).** Zedekiah sent messengers to Jeremiah to inquire of the Lord during Nebuchadnezzar’s siege against Jerusalem—God’s message was surrender or die (21). Then Jeremiah evaluated the last three generations of the house of David (22-23). He then related the vision of the two baskets of figs—Nebuchadnezzar would carry away the good *and* the bad out of Judah. The good people would be delivered to prosperity in Babylon and the bad ones to trouble and travail (24).

Jeremiah used yokes that were bound around his neck to symbolize the Babylonian mastery that was decreed by God (27). He was opposed by Hananiah, a false prophet (28).

Jeremiah sent a letter instructing the captives in Babylon how to live while in captivity for 70 years (29). He then assured them that they would be restored to their homeland (30) and God would make a new covenant with His people (31). In the tenth year of Zedekiah, Jeremiah bought a field in his hometown as a symbolic gesture of the promised restoration (32-33).

During the siege, Zedekiah’s captivity and the destruction of Jerusalem were announced (34). Jeremiah was imprisoned for his negative message until the city fell in 586 BC and Nebuchadnezzar set him free (37-39).

- **Under Gedaliah.** Gedaliah was made governor of Judah, then slain by Ishmael. Fearing Babylonian reprisal, those remaining in Jerusalem fled to Egypt against Jeremiah’s word, taking Jeremiah and Baruch with them. In Egypt Jeremiah announced punishment on the Judeans there (40-44).

Chapters 50-51 are the prophecies Jeremiah sent to Babylon that announced Babylon’s doom. They were to be read, then tied to a stone and cast into the Euphrates River, symbolizing Babylon’s downfall (51:59-64). Chapter 52 is a historical appendix added later, reviewing Jerusalem’s fall and reporting on Jehoiachin’s condition.

Lessons From Jeremiah—Jeremiah’s book is a message about judgment *and* a message about hope. Israel and Judah would both be scattered, but God would not make a full end of them as a people (30:11)—the nations that subjugated them are all gone, but the Jews are still here! Judah and Jerusalem would be broken as a potter’s vessel that could not be put together again (19:1-13). From that time, they have never been whole again as a kingdom.

A remnant would return to their homeland after 70 years (25:11; 29:10). Cyrus, king of Persia, made a decree that allowed them to return to their homeland in 536 BC (70 years after the captivity began in 606 BC). The ultimate hope was that a spiritual remnant would be brought back to God under a new covenant to inhabit Zion under David’s righteous branch (22-23), the Messiah (31:31-34; Hebrews 8:6-13).

Judah Alone: Prophet Of Doom (*Habakkuk*)

Scriptures Under Consideration (Habakkuk; 2 Kings 23:35-24:7)

Short Reading (Habakkuk)

Dates (612-606 BC)

Historical Background Of Habakkuk—Habakkuk’s prophecy came after Assyria had fallen and Babylon had arisen as the dominant world power (1:6). Yet the Babylonians had not yet invaded Judah (3:16). This would place the prophecy between 612 and 606 BC. This would coincide with the period of Jehoiakim’s reign (609-597 BC) (2 Kings 23:35-24:7).

The people of Judah transgressed God’s laws and turned to idols. Habakkuk was one of the last of the prophets sent to Judah to address her sins before God’s judgment at the hands of the Babylonians (2 Chronicles 36:14-16). He expected God’s judgment to come upon Judah (1:2-4) but wasn’t quite prepared for how God was going to do it (1:5-13).

Babylon was the new world power sweeping across the breadth of the earth. Within a period of 20 years, beginning in 606 BC, Babylon swept over Judah in waves, taking three groups captive to Babylon and finally destroying the temple in 586 BC.

Message Of Habakkuk—Summarized in the statement “*Behold the proud, his soul is not upright in him; but the just shall live by his faith.*” (2:4). Habakkuk found himself in a moral dilemma, trying to understand the works of God. His message does not teach us as other prophets do—it does not call the people to repentance. Rather it challenges us to accept by faith the work of God, even when it doesn’t make sense to us. His message doesn’t even offer to explain God’s works—just to challenge us to have faith in them.

- Habakkuk’s First Complaint (1:1-11). The prophet is faced with what he sees as a moral dilemma. He first complains about the injustice and unrighteousness in Judah, and wonders how long God can allow it to go unpunished (1:2-4).

God’s answer is an unexpected one—He is raising up the Chaldeans (Babylonians) as His rod of punishment (1:5-11).

- Habakkuk’s Second Complaint (1:12-2:20). The prophet is now faced with an even greater moral dilemma. How can a righteous God use such a wicked nation to carry out righteous plans, and punish a nation that is more righteous than they are (1:12-2:1). He challenges God and waits for an answer.

God doesn’t really answer his question. He tells Habakkuk that He has decreed it to be so, and that the prophet must believe it by faith (2:2-4). God then assures him that “*woe*” does come upon the wicked, and although the righteous may suffer, the wicked will eventually reap what they have sown (2:5-20). The prophet hears the voices of the conquered nations in unison, echoing God’s five woes placed upon the Chaldeans for their arrogance, cruelty, greed, and idolatry.

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| Israel | Assyrian Captivity | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| | 750 | | 700 | | 650 | | 600 | | 550 | | 500 | | 450 |
| Prophets | Isa Mic | | Zeph Nah Jer Hab | | | | | | | | | | |
| | 750 | | 700 | | 650 | | 600 | | 550 | | 500 | | 450 |
| Judah | | | | | | | Babylonian Captivity | | | Remnant Returns | | | |

- Habakkuk's Prayer (3:1-19). He closes his book with a beautiful song, praying for God's compassion in the middle of judgment (3:1-2). He meditates on Israel's history—God's action in punishing the nations has always been for the salvation of His saints (3:3-15). Although he dreaded what was coming he was no longer afraid—his faith and trust were in God no matter what happened to him (3:16-19).

Lessons From Habakkuk—We learn that God is always just and merciful, even when His works don't make sense to us. We do not always have an intellectual answer to the problem of evil, but we do find out how to go on living and believing in spite of certain missing answers. Just like with Job—God did not give him answers but He did come. Habakkuk was assured that the Lord was in control (2:20). And that was good enough for his faith (3:17-19).

We learn that the key to the New Testament gospel—*“the just shall live by his faith”*—had its beginnings in the justifying faith of the Old Testament (Romans 1:16-17; Habakkuk 2:4).

Judah Alone: Babylonian Captivity (*Lamentations*)

Scriptures Under Consideration (2 Kings 25; 2 Chronicles 36:1-21; Jeremiah 34,37-39,52)

Short Reading (2 Kings 25)

Dates (606-586 BC)

After 800 years in the land that God had promised them, His people again found themselves captive in a foreign land. The northern kingdom of Israel had been scattered after the Assyrian invasion (722 BC). The southern kingdom of Judah was being deported to Babylon, leaving only a skeletal population behind in Palestine (586 BC).

But God was not through with His people yet, nor did He forget them while they were in captivity. There would be a restoration of a faithful remnant to their homeland—but first their years in captivity would sift out the spiritual remnant from the rest of the nation. This faithful remnant would restore the true worship of God in Jerusalem at a future time.

The Babylonian Captivity—Judah’s captivity was not so much an event as it was a process occurring over a 20-year period of separate conflicts.

606 BC—Jehoiakim was Nebuchadnezzar’s vassal for three years until he rebelled and the Babylonian king came against Jerusalem. He captured Jehoiakim and brought him bound into Babylon, along with others including Daniel, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-Nego (2 Chronicles 36:5-7; Daniel 1:1-6).

597 BC—Jehoiachin had just begun ruling when Nebuchadnezzar again besieged Jerusalem and took spoils of her. He also carried away Jehoiachin and the prominent men and women—leaders, officers, craftsmen, smiths. Among this group was the prophet Ezekiel (2 Kings 24:8-16; Ezekiel 1:1-3).

586 BC—Zedekiah was appointed by Nebuchadnezzar to rule over Judah, but when he rebelled it was time to put a stop to the Jewish problem. The Babylonian monarch destroyed Jerusalem, burned its houses and temple, and broke down its walls (2 Kings 25:1-10). The captain Nebuzaradan took the last group into captivity and left the poor to tend the land (2 Kings 25:11-21; cf. Leviticus 26:36-37).

Reasons For The Captivity—The primary reason was as a judgment for Judah’s sins (2 Chronicles 36:14). Again God sent His messengers the prophets—Zephaniah, Jeremiah, Habakkuk—to turn the people back to Him. They refused (2 Chronicles 36:15-17).

The captivity also sifted out those who were spiritually committed from those who weren’t. The promises of a restoration stressed by all the prophets became clearer in the captivity. There that promise became the hope of the people. It presented them with an opportunity for a fresh start in the future—to try to get it right when they finally returned to Jerusalem after the 70 years prophesied by Jeremiah (Jeremiah 29:10-14; 30:1-3,10-11).

God’s Use Of Babylon—God spoke of Nebuchadnezzar as His servant who would do His will among the nations (Jeremiah 25:9; 27:6). Babylon had been a golden cup in God’s hand, from which He made all the nations drink of

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|-----------------|--------------------|--|----------------------|--|-----|--|----------------------|--|-----|-----------------|-----|--|-----|
| Israel | Assyrian Captivity | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| | 750 | | 700 | | 650 | | 600 | | 550 | | 500 | | 450 |
| Prophets | Isa Mic | | Zeph Nah Jer Hab Lam | | | | | | | | | | |
| | 750 | | 700 | | 650 | | 600 | | 550 | | 500 | | 450 |
| Judah | | | | | | | Babylonian Captivity | | | Remnant Returns | | | |

His wrath until they were drunk with it (Jeremiah 51:7; 25:15-26). In God's hand, Babylon would be His weapon of war and destruction (Jeremiah 47:6; 51:20).

God had raised up Nebuchadnezzar to carry out His judgment against the nations, but when Nebuchadnezzar began to impute that power to himself, God forcefully reminded him who was really in charge (Daniel 4:10-37; esp. 4:17,25,34-37).

Ultimately, when God was through with Babylon, He would bring judgment against them because of four great sins (Jeremiah 50:14,24,29,38). Her judgment would return upon her in the same measure that she had dispensed it to others (Jeremiah 50:15). Babylon's ultimate destruction would come when God was ready to return His people to their homeland (Jeremiah 25:12).

God's use of Babylon to punish Judah and the surrounding nations (Jeremiah 51:7) parallels His use of Assyria a century earlier to do the same thing (Isaiah 10:5-12). Both nations were instruments in God's hand to carry out His judgment against the nations and His own people. When they had served their purpose, He dispensed of them—forever (Jeremiah 50:17-18).

Jeremiah's Lamentation—The book of Lamentations is a series of funeral dirges, written by Jeremiah, immediately after the capture of Jerusalem (586 BC), while the scenes of the siege, the fall, and the capture of the city were still fresh on his mind. The tears of Jeremiah condense into these sad words, "*Is it nothing to you all you who pass by? Behold and see if there is any sorrow like my sorrow, which has been brought on me, which the Lord has inflicted on me in the day of His fierce anger.*" (Lamentations 1:12).

The book of Lamentations is a set of five short poems of mourning. They are funeral songs. The first four follow an acrostic pattern consistent with the Hebrew alphabet. The last one consists of 22 verses, like three of the previous four.

- First Lamentation (1). The writer portrays Jerusalem's terrible condition after her destruction. He is despondent over her emptiness (1:1-11). Then Jerusalem is personified so that she cries out her own song of mourning for her dreadful condition (1:12-22).
- Second Lamentation (2). He explains that this destruction is also a judgment from God (2:1-10). The prophet's heart is broken but he is powerless to console the people of the city (2:11-17). They cry out to the Lord because of their terrible plight (2:18-22).
- Third Lamentation (3). The writer cries out in anguish for his own affliction during his life and ministry, but also sings of the hope he has because of God's faithfulness and mercy (3:1-39). It is because of God's long-suffering and compassion that they are not altogether destroyed (3:22-23). God's chastisement for their sins was just (3:39-47). Then he prays for vengeance on his adversaries (3:48-66).
- Fourth Lamentation (4). He tells of the reason for their punishment. Their shame and affliction is a result of their great sins before God.
- Fifth Lamentation (5). This is a prayer for mercy and restoration. The prophet reminds God of the affliction of the survivors (5:1-18), and pleads for God to ultimately deliver and restore them (5:19-22).

"Lamentations portrays the reaction of a devout Israelite toward the destruction of the theocracy. The tragic scene presents God's people so corrupt that Jehovah has forsaken His sanctuary and abandoned it to their enemies... The whole note is one of deep tragedy." (*Unger's Bible Handbook*, p. 361).

Contemporary Kings In Assyria And Babylon

| Kings Of Assyria | | | | |
|---|----------|--|---------------------------------|---|
| Assyrian King | Dates BC | Kings Of Israel | Kings Of Judah | Reference |
| Tiglath-Pileser III | 745-727 | Menahem Pekahiah Pekah Hoshea | Uzziah Jotham Ahaz | 2 K 15:17-16:10 1 Ch 5:6, 25-26 2 Ch 28:16-21 |
| Shalmaneser V | 727-722 | Hoshea | Ahaz Hezekiah | 2 K 17:1-6,24-28 2 K 18:9-12 |
| Sargon II | 721-705 | | Hezekiah | Isa. 20:1 |
| Sennacherib | 704-681 | | Hezekiah Manasseh | 2 K 18:13-19:37 2 Ch 32:1-23 Isa 36-37 |
| Esarhaddon | 681-669 | | Manasseh | 2 K 19:37 Isa 37:38 Ezra 4:2 |
| Ashur-banipal | 669-633 | | Manasseh Amon Josiah | |
| Ashur-etil-ilani | 633-622 | | Josiah | |
| Sin-shur-ishkun | 621-612 | | Josiah | |
| Ashur-uballit | 612-608 | | Josiah Jehoahaz Jehoiakim | |
| End of Assyrian Empire 609 BC (Defeated by Babylon) | | | | |

| Kings Of Babylon | | | | |
|--|----------|-----------------|---------------------------------|---|
| Babylonian King | Dates BC | Kings Of Israel | Kings Of Judah | Reference |
| Nabopolassar | 625-605 | | Josiah Jehoahaz Jehoiakim | |
| Nebuchadnezzar | 605-562 | | | 2 K 24-25 2 Chr 36 Jer 21-52, Dan 1-5 |
| Evil-Merodach (Amel-Marduk) | 562-560 | | | 2 K 25:27-30 Jer 52:31-34 |
| Neriglissar | 560-556 | | | |
| Labashi-Marduk | 556 | | | |
| Nabonidus (Nabunaid) | 556-539 | | | |
| Belshazzar | 553-539 | | | Dan 5,7,8 |
| End of Babylonian Empire 539 BC (Defeated by Medo-Persian coalition) | | | | |

Nation Held Captive: Prophet To The Captives (*Daniel*)

Scriptures Under Consideration (Daniel)

Short Reading (Daniel 1-2,4,7-8,12)

Dates (606-536 BC)

Historical Background Of Daniel—The events and prophecies of this book cover at least the full length of the 70 year exile in Babylon—from the first deportation of Hebrew captives (1:1-2; 2 Chronicles 36:5-8) to the first return of the captives to their homeland (Ezra 1-2).

Daniel was a statesman in the foreign courts. Through God’s intervention, he obtained a prominent place in the Babylonian government (2:48-49; 5:11,29; 1:21). During the early years of the Medo-Persian empire he was one of the three governors over the entire realm (6:1-3).

Returning to Babylon to assume the throne of his father, Nebuchadnezzar took many captives, including Daniel and his three friends (606 BC). A second group, including Ezekiel, also went into exile (597 BC). The third group was carried away at the destruction of Jerusalem (586 BC) (Jeremiah 52:28-30). Jeremiah cautioned the captives to live peaceably and prosper in Babylon. It would be 70 years before they returned to their land (Jeremiah 29:1-20).

The Jewish exiles were placed in a rich plain on the river Chebar, which connected Babylon with Nippur (Ezekiel 1:1-3). They apparently enjoyed freedom to govern their own affairs and worship as they wanted—as long as they were loyal to Babylon, and conformed to the religious practice of their captors too.

Visions Of Future World Empires—God gave Daniel insight into the kingdoms of the future, to show (1) the weakness of the kingdoms of men and (2) the permanence and glory of God’s kingdom (2:24-45; 7:1-28; 8:1-27; 9:20-11:45). He used this insight to interpret the dream of Nebuchadnezzar (2:20-22,28).

- **Babylon (625-536 BC).** The great king Nebuchadnezzar, ruler of Babylon was depicted as the head of gold.
- **Medo-Persia (536-330 BC).** Established by Cyrus the king of Persia and Darius the Mede, this coalition was depicted by the breast and arms of silver.
- **Macedonia (330-168 BC).** Established by Alexander the Great, it was then divided among his four generals in 323 BC, and conquered by the Romans in 168 BC. They were the belly and thighs of bronze.
- **Rome (30 BC-330 AD).** Established as the next great world power by Octavius Caesar, Rome was represented by the legs of iron and feet and toes part of iron and part of clay.
- **God’s Kingdom.** Would be established during that fourth world empire and never be destroyed (2:44-45; 7:9-27). Israel’s hope for a splendid world kingdom to rival the others was gone—their hope for the future was in the kingdom of the Messiah.

Message Of Daniel—Summarized in the statement “...the Most High rules in the kingdom of men, and gives it to whomever He chooses.” (4:25). That is the message to the Babylonians, to the people of Judah, and it was the message behind Daniel’s visions of the future. God can describe the future because God controls it.

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| Israel | Assyrian Captivity | | | | | | |
| | 750 | 700 | 650 | 600 | 550 | 500 | 450 |
| Prophets | Isa Mic | | Zeph Nah Jer Hab Dan Lam | | | | |
| | 750 | 700 | 650 | 600 | 550 | 500 | 450 |
| Judah | | | | Babylonian Captivity | | Remnant Returns | |

The book of Daniel is divided into two sections. The first section is historical, dealing with events in Daniel's life and his interaction with the kings of Babylon, Media, and Persia (1-6). The second section is a discussion of Daniel's visions concerning the kingdoms of the future (7-12).

- Daniel's Personal History (1-6). As a youth, Daniel was taken captive and served in the king's palace. He prospered because of his unwavering faith in God (1). Nebuchadnezzar had a troubling dream that Daniel interpreted as a picture of the coming world kingdoms and ultimate establishment of the kingdom of God (2). Later, Nebuchadnezzar set up an image of gold for all to worship. When Shadrach, Meshach and Abed-Nego refused, they were cast into the fiery furnace from which they emerged unharmed (3).

Daniel recorded a letter that Nebuchadnezzar had written acknowledging the lesson God had taught him about pride (4). At the close of Babylon's rule, Belshazzar made a feast and defiled the vessels of God's temple. He saw the handwriting on the wall, died that night, and Babylon was overthrown (5). Darius the Mede set up Daniel as one of three governors over the entire realm. Because of the jealousy of the other governors and satraps Daniel was cast into the lion's den, but God delivered him (6).

- Daniel's Visions Of World Kingdoms (7-12). He saw four beasts and one like the Son of Man coming to the Ancient of Days, representing the four great world kingdoms and the Messiah's (7). Then followed the vision of the ram and the male goat—after which the angel described the overthrow of the Medes and Persians by Greece (8). Daniel then uttered a solemn prayer of confession for the sins of his people (9).

Later he saw the vision of a glorious man who spoke of Persia and Greece (10). He also saw the fourth king of Persia, and Alexander the Great's conquest. At Alexander's death the kingdom would be divided four ways—two of his generals would war against each other; another would rise in the north blaspheming God and defiling the sanctuary (11). He finished with a prophecy of the saint's deliverance in the Messiah (12).

A probable chronological order for the prophecies and events of this book are as follows—chapters 1,2,3,4,7,8,5,6,9,10,11,12

Lessons From Daniel—There are many outstanding lessons that were designed for the nation of Babylon to learn, for the nation of Israel to understand, and for us to recognize about God.

We see God's sovereignty over the entire world—it is by His will that kings rise and fall (2:21; 4:17,25). The destiny of nations is within His hands (5:18ff). We are also reminded of God's covenant with David—it was unalterable (Psalm 89). Even though they were in captivity that did not mean God was being unfaithful to His promise—the sovereignty would be restored to the saints (7:17-18,22,27).

Another great lesson pertains to Divine protection. God does not leave His faithful ones to the mercy of their enemies (1:8-20, 2:12-23; 3:19-27; 6:10-23). One of the greatest spiritual lessons was that all world kingdoms are earthly and temporary while the kingdom of God would be heavenly. They are destined for destruction, while the kingdom under the Messiah is destined for glory (2:24-25; 7:1-28).

Nation Held Captive: Prophet To The Captives (*Ezekiel*)

Scriptures Under Consideration (Ezekiel; 2 Kings 24-25; 2 Chronicles 36)

Short Reading (Ezekiel 3:1-21; 5:5-15; 11:14-25; 16:1-34; 18; 33; 37)

Dates (592-570 BC)

Historical Background Of Ezekiel—Ezekiel was deported to Babylon with the second group of exiles, including King Jehoiachin in 597 BC (1:1-2; cf. 2 Kings 24:10-16). There he prophesied to the remnants of a shattered nation. He showed them that Jerusalem *would be* destroyed for her sins (4-24), but offered them comfort and hope that they would eventually be restored to their homeland (33-48).

The Jewish people lived as captives in Babylon, but were treated as colonists not slaves. They increased in numbers and accumulated great wealth. Some of them (Daniel, Shadrach, Meshach, Abed-Nego) rose to the highest offices.

In Babylon, they actually had religious freedom, but the future of Jehovah worship was in crisis. The prosperity of Babylon and the gods of the nation that conquered them could have easily drawn them away from God. Daniel and Ezekiel helped influence a remnant to remain faithful during this period.

Mission Of Ezekiel—Ezekiel was *the* prophet of the captivity. He lived among the captives and kept many of them from being overcome by Babylonian paganism. His mission was very important.

- **Save the remnant from complete apostasy.** It was Ezekiel’s work to preserve the captives taken in 597 BC (the “*good figs*,” Jeremiah 24:4-7), from the influence of the captives taken in 586 BC (the “*bad figs*,” Jeremiah 24:8-10). It was from this first group that God would gather a remnant to return to Palestine and restore the nation and its worship.
- **Destroy the false hopes of an early return to Jerusalem.** They had to learn the spiritual lesson of the captivity, rethink their faith, and learn the greater spiritual mission of their race. Ezekiel was there to keep them on the right track.
- **Comfort the captives and assure them of their restoration.** The nation was defeated and distraught. But God would breath new life into them again (37:1-14), and all of the twelve tribes would be reunited in their land (37:11,15-28; cf. Jeremiah 3:18).
- **Emphasize the lesson of personal accountability.** The prophets had been emphasizing collective, national responsibility and guilt—a whole society may be held accountable for the nation’s sin and corruption. Salvation and God’s favor would now come on an individual basis (3:16-21; 9:4; 18:1-32). The wicked would not be spared because of the presence of a few good people among them (14:14), and the innocent would not bear the *guilt* of the wicked even though they might have to share in the *consequences* (18:20).

Message Of Ezekiel—Summarized by the statement “*Therefore say, ‘Thus says the Lord God: “Although I have cast them far off among the Gentiles, and although I have scattered them among the countries, yet I shall be a little*

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| Israel | Assyrian Captivity | | | | | | |
| | 750 | 700 | 650 | 600 | 550 | 500 | 450 |
| Prophets | Isa Mic | | Zeph Nah Jer Hab Dan Lam Ezek | | | | |
| | 750 | 700 | 650 | 600 | 550 | 500 | 450 |
| Judah | | | | Babylonian Captivity | | Remnant Returns | |

sanctuary for them in the countries where they have gone... Then I will give them one heart, and I will put a new spirit within them, and take the stony heart out of their flesh... ””” (11:16-21). Ezekiel’s book can easily be divided into four discernible parts.

- Ezekiel’s Call To Be A Prophet (1-3). He saw a marvelous vision of God’s glory (1). God empowered Him to be a prophet and watchman to the nation of captives (2-3). He would be their link with God through the captivity (2:4-7; 3:17-21).
- The Destruction Of Jerusalem (4-24). He depicted the siege against Jerusalem by four symbolic actions—the clay tablet, lying on his side, measuring food and water, and shaving his head then dividing the hair (4:1-5:4). He then explained the significance of his actions (5:5-7:27).

In visions, Ezekiel saw God’s presence departing from the Temple and the Holy City (8-11). God would withdraw from His sinful people and prepare a remnant (11:1-3,14-21). Judah’s captivity was vividly portrayed when Ezekiel took all of his belongings and packed them on his shoulders (12:1-6). Captivity and destruction of the city was coming because of their unbelief, false prophets, and idolatry (12-14).

The nation had played the harlot (16:30-34), so God turned to individuals and pleaded with them to return to Him, then “*the soul who sins shall die*” (15-18). Jerusalem was going to be consumed, and God tells them how and why (19-24; 20:14,33-38; 22:15-22).

- Judgment Upon Surrounding Nations (25-32). God pronounced many prophecies of judgment against those nations who had been enemies of His people, and abused them. He was going to show them that they were accountable to Him too. And if God was punishing His own people for their disobedience, how much more would He punish the heathen for their sins (32:18-32)!
- Prophecies Of The Restoration (33-48). Written after the fall of Jerusalem, these messages present hope for the future. God prepared Ezekiel with a message for the nation when they got the news of Jerusalem’s fall (33). Then God assured the captives that the nation *would be* restored to spiritual life under His leadership (34-37; 36:22-32; 37:1-28). Gog represented all the enemies of God and His people who would rise against them—they would all be defeated and God would be glorified in Israel (38-39; 39:25-29).

The book concludes with Ezekiel’s vision of a new city and new temple—glorious and splendid (40-48). This was not the temple that would be rebuilt upon Israel’s return to Palestine. This vision looked forward to the building of a spiritual temple under the Messiah, where God would again dwell among men (48:35; cf. Ephesians 2:19-22; Hebrews 12:22,28; 2 Corinthians 6:16-7:1 [note Ezekiel 37:27; 20:34,41]).

Benefits From The Captivity—God actually accomplished many positive things through this captivity. The nation was completely cured of idolatry. That was the chief sin which was responsible for the captivity, and they were so effectively broken of it that the Jews have never since been idolaters.

The synagogue evidently came into existence as a center for worship and instruction in the law. They collected and collated their sacred literature and religious writings. Religion became distinctly more personal and spiritual without the elaborate ceremonies connected with the temple worship.

They became more genuinely united in ideals and purposes. They remained a “*separate people*” and clung to each other, giving them the strength to withstand the difficulties they would encounter when they returned to Palestine. They began to understand and appreciate their destiny and mission as a nation. This actually strengthened the restoration movement. Their hope for the future lay in the realization of spiritual ideals and purposes.

The wealth of Babylon appealed to many who were materialistic, and they got caught up in the pursuit of such things in Babylon—so much that they had no desire to return to Palestine when given the chance. This separated those who were committed and spiritually minded from the uncommitted and materially minded.

Restoration Of Israel: Return Of The Captives

Scriptures Under Consideration (Ezra, Nehemiah, Esther, Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi)

Short Reading (Ezra 1; 3; 5:1-5; 6:13-22; 7:1-10; Nehemiah 1-2; 6; 8-9)

Dates (539-432 BC)

The return of Israel and Judah—from their respective captivities—to their homeland spanned a period of just less than 100 years. It was accomplished in three stages under the leadership of three prominent men—Zerubbabel, Ezra, and Nehemiah.

Each of these men, and their groups, were responsible for different aspects of the restoration of the nation. Zerubbabel (536 BC) reconstructed the temple, Ezra (458 BC) reinstructed the people, and Nehemiah (444 BC) rebuilt the walls of Jerusalem.

The captivities and restoration strained out the spiritual remnant of God’s people. Those who were sent into captivity went because the nation turned away from God. Those who returned to their homeland were those who returned to God with their hearts (Deuteronomy 30:1-10; Leviticus 26:40-45).

The Restoration Of Israel—We can point to political reasons among the powerful world nations and see how Israel was allowed to return to Palestine, but the main reason they went home was because God had decreed it.

Prophesied—Babylon’s fall and subsequent destruction was prophesied by the same prophets who predicted Judah’s captivity in Babylon. They even specified the Medes and the Persians as the conquerors (Isaiah 13:17-22; 21:1-10; Jeremiah 50:1-9; 51:11,28,59-64). Babylon finally fell to Cyrus the Persian, whom God had raised up to restore His people to their homeland (Isaiah 44:28-45:13). God was always in control of the outcome of these nations (Daniel 4:25,34-37; 5:25-28).

Policies Of Conquering Nations—Each of these great world powers had different policies concerning the nations that they subjugated. The Assyrians (750-612 BC) practiced deportation and importation, moving people from their homelands, scattering them, and then importing other deposed people into that land (2 Kings 17:6,24). The Babylonians (612-539 BC) practiced deportation of prominent people from their land and brought them to Babylon where they became integrated into Babylonian life (2 Kings 24:10-16; 25:11-12). The Persians (539-331 BC) practiced repatriation, allowing captive peoples to return to their native lands, then asking for the blessings of all of their various gods and deities (Ezra 1:1-11).

Return In Three Waves—The first group of captives returned to Palestine after the edict of Cyrus under the leadership of Zerubbabel the governor and Jeshua the high priest in 536 BC (Ezra 1-6). Only 50,000 of the most faithful and committed children of God returned to rebuild. Worship was restored at Jerusalem (Ezra 3:1-7). The temple restoration began at that time (Ezra 3:8-13), but the work was halted because of resistance from the Samaritans (Ezra 4:1-5). For 16 years the temple lay in ruins until the ministries of Haggai and Zechariah (Ezra 5:1-2; 6:14). Haggai’s message was simple—“build the temple” (Haggai 1:1-15). Zechariah saw brighter days ahead. When the people returned to God, then He would return to them (Zechariah 1:3,12-17; 2:1-5,12; 8:3; 14:9). The temple was completed in 516 BC.

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Prophets

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Judah

Babylonian Captivity Remnant Returns

The second wave returned under the leadership of Ezra in 458 BC (Ezra 7-10). There were only about 1700 who came back with this group, but Ezra encouraged widespread reforms, stressing obedience to the law. The events of the book of Esther fit into the period just prior to this section of the book of Ezra. The story, which likely began about 483 BC, stressed God's providential care over the Jewish people who remained scattered throughout the Persian empire. Thanks to the faith of Esther and Mordecai, the Jewish people were spared from full-scale annihilation.

The third wave came with Nehemiah who had received permission from King Artaxerxes to return to Jerusalem and rebuild the walls of the city (Nehemiah 2:1-18). He encountered much opposition but spurred the people to complete the walls in 52 days (Nehemiah 6:15-16).

God had promised to restore a remnant of *all* Israel to their homeland (Isaiah 10:20-24; Jeremiah 50:3-4; Deuteronomy 30:1-10). A remnant from all Israel *did return* to Palestine—just as God had promised. The prophet Haggai made that claim (Haggai 1:12,14; 2:2), along with Ezra (Ezra 9:8,14-15; 2:70; 6:17), and Nehemiah (Nehemiah 1:3,8-9; 7:73). Many people today erroneously think that God still intends to restore Palestine to the Jewish people.

Last Word From God—The prophet Malachi was contemporary with Nehemiah during his second governorship. He denounced the same sins as Nehemiah did. The people had withheld their loyalty and love from God (Malachi 3:8-10). God wanted to give Himself to them, but first they had to give themselves to Him.

Malachi contains the last recorded messages of Old Testament times. His message is both a conclusion to God's revelation in the Old Testament and a connecting link to God's revelation in the New Testament and the coming of the Christ (Malachi 3:1-3; 4:4-6). God had nothing more to say to His people. All that was left for them was the Messiah. All of His other promises had been fulfilled.

Contemporary Kings In Persia

| Kings Of Persia | | | |
|---|----------|---|--|
| Persian King | Dates BC | Prominent Characters And Events In Israel | Reference |
| Cyrus | 539-530 | Zerubbabel the governor Jeshua the high priest | 2 Ch 36:22-23 Ezra 1-6 Isa. 44:28-45:13 Dan. 1:21; 10:1 |
| Cambyses | 530-522 | Rebuilding at Jerusalem stopped | |
| Darius I | 522-486 | Haggai and Zechariah the prophets Temple completed | Ezra 4:1-5,24; 5-6 Neh 12:22 Hag 1:1,15; 2:10 Zech 1:1,7; 7:1 |
| Xerxes (Ahasuerus) | 486-464 | Esther the queen Deliverance of the Jews | Esther |
| Artaxerxes I | 464-423 | Ezra the scribe Nehemiah the governor Malachi the prophet | Ezra 4:7-23 |
| Darius II | 423-404 | | |
| Artaxerxes II | 404-359 | | |
| Artaxerxes III | 359-338 | | |
| Arses | 338-335 | | |
| Darius III | 335-331 | | Dan 2:39; 8:1-25; 10:1-17 |
| End of Persian Empire 331 BC (Defeated by Alexander the Great of Macedonia) | | | |

Restoration Of Israel: Prophets Of The Return (*Haggai, Zechariah*)

Lesson 24

Scriptures Under Consideration (Haggai; Zechariah; Ezra 1-6)

Short Reading (Haggai; Zechariah 1-3; 6:9-15; 9:9-10; 13-14)

Dates (520-518 BC)

Historical Background Of Haggai—The remnant of Israel returned to Palestine to begin rebuilding in 536 BC (Ezra 1-2). The restoration enthusiasm was soon doused by the monumental task of rebuilding the city from its charred ruins. Add to this the constant danger from their neighbors, the rigorous work before them, and the unyielding resistance they faced, and the work soon ceased (Ezra 4).

The people became concerned with their own personal well-being. They postponed work on God’s house until they took care of their own matters. Thus, all of their energies were expended in struggling to survive in their new home. Once their necessities were met, their spiritual zeal was sapped and they became apathetic toward restoring the temple. Therefore, God sent His messengers Haggai and Zechariah to inspire the remnant to finish the work they had begun 16 years earlier (Ezra 5:1-2; 6:14-15).

Message Of Haggai—Summarized in the statement “*Is it time for you yourselves to dwell in your paneled houses, and this temple to lie in ruins?*” (1:4). They needed to examine their priorities—the time had passed for them to get settled in their homes. They needed to finish rebuilding the temple. The book of Haggai consists of four separate oracles delivered by the prophet.

- **Build The Temple** (1). The prophet rebuked them for pursuing their own prosperity while neglecting their spiritual responsibilities (1:1-11). God had been withholding His blessings from them because of it (1:6,9-11). Haggai’s message had an immediate effect, spurring them to resume work on the temple (1:12-15).
- **Future Glory Of The Temple** (2:1-9). The spiritual glory coming to the Messiah’s temple would be far greater than the material glory of its predecessor—or even the one they were building.
- **God Promises His Blessings** (2:10-19). The prophet showed them how their neglect of the temple had tainted their entire life, but now that the work was resuming God would abundantly bless them.
- **Messianic Assurance** (2:20-23). This message was delivered directly to Zerubbabel the governor. Haggai assured him that he was God’s chosen one in the lineage of the promised Messiah (cf. Matthew 1:12,16).

Lessons From Haggai—The book of Haggai depicts the fruits of procrastination. The group which had returned with such enthusiasm for the Lord’s cause quickly had to face one of man’s greatest obstacles in serving God—apathy and misplaced priorities. His message was about priorities (cf. Matthew 6:33).

Historical Background Of Zechariah—Zechariah began his ministry two months after Haggai’s (1:1; Haggai 1:1). Working in tandem, they prophesied and inspired a renewal of the temple project (Ezra 5:1; 6:14). For these

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Judah

Babylonian Captivity Remnant Returns

two, the important issue of the day was a reconstructed and functioning temple.

Haggai rebuked and admonished the people for their misplaced priorities and Zechariah inspired them through visions of the spiritual greatness of a spiritual temple. They succeeded and the Temple was completed in 516 BC, four short years after they began prophesying.

Message Of Zechariah—Summarized in the statement “*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.*” (1:3). Zechariah is the most difficult Old Testament prophet to interpret. At the same time his messages are the most Messianic. His book divides into four sections.

- Call To Repentance (1:1-6). He opened his message with an appeal to them to repent and receive God’s graces, unlike their disobedient fathers.
- The Night Visions (1:7-6:15). He followed with a series of visions received one night which portrayed the future of God’s people and His kingdom. He saw riders among the myrtle trees and God offering comforting words of His return to Zion—intended to encourage the occupants of Jerusalem (1:7-17).

He also saw four horns and four craftsmen (1:18-21) and a man measuring Jerusalem (2:1-13). He saw the high priest Joshua cleansed of his filthy garments (3:1-10) and a golden lampstand between two olive trees (4:1-14). He saw a flying scroll (5:1-4), a basket with a woman whose name is “*Wickedness*” taken from the land (5:5-11), and the vision of four chariots (6:1-8).

Zechariah was then instructed to fashion an elaborate, beautiful crown and place it on the head of Joshua the high priest symbolizing the Messiah—the branch of David—who would be both priest and king (6:9-15).

- The Question About Fasting (7-8). His next discourse was prompted by a question about the fast days that the people had been observing. He appealed for obedience rather than ritual; obedience would have saved their forefathers (7). God would turn their *fast days* (of sorrow and mourning) into *feast days* (of joy and gladness). He would return to them with an abundance of blessings if they would be faithful to Him (8).
- The Future Under The Messiah (9-14). The prophet related the future of the world powers and God’s kingdom under the reign of the Messiah. This section is comprised of two burdens or oracles.
 - Promise of divine retribution against the heathen nations, and God’s salvation for Israel in the reign of the Messiah (9-11). These prophecies are fulfilled in Jesus (9:9-10; 11:12-13; cf. Matthew 21:1-11; 27:9-10).
 - God’s assurance of deliverance for Israel (12-14). It would come from the pierced Savior (12:10; cf. John 19:37), the smitten shepherd (13:7; cf. Matthew 26:31). In that day a fountain would be opened for cleansing (13:1) and the Lord would be established over all the earth (14:9). Then all nations would come to the house of God to worship Him (14:16-17). This is a beautiful picture of the kingdom and church age!

Lessons From Zechariah—Zechariah encouraged the nation to complete its divinely appointed task, but he looked beyond the building of the present temple to the consummation of God’s plan in the Messiah. The glory of the temple would come from the Messiah’s presence, not from any physical aspects of the temple itself.

Haggai had assured them that temporal things would be shaken and that the eternal would remain (Haggai 2:6-7,22; cf. Hebrews 12:26-28). Zechariah assured them that the glory of the Messiah in His temple was beyond compare. He prophesied at great length concerning the Messiah (3:8; 6:12-13; 9:9-10; 11:12-13; 12:10; 13:1,7-9).

Restoration Of Israel: God’s Last Prophet (*Malachi*)

Scriptures Under Consideration (Malachi; Ezra 7-10; Nehemiah)

Short Reading (Malachi)

Dates (445-432 BC)

Historical Background Of Malachi—Malachi may have written his book around the time of Nehemiah’s visit to Babylon in 433 BC (Nehemiah 13:6). By this time the temple was already complete and the priests had been offering sacrifices according to the Law (1:7-10; 3:1,8). A Persian governor, not Nehemiah, was ruling at that time (1:8).

The sins that Malachi targeted were the same ones that Nehemiah dealt with during his second term as governor—the corruption of the priests (1:6-2:9; Nehemiah 13:1-9), mixed marriages (2:10-16; Nehemiah 13:23-28), and the neglect of tithes (3:7-12; Nehemiah 13:10-13).

The people had again grown indifferent to their spiritual condition. Nehemiah had returned to rebuild the walls of Jerusalem (Nehemiah 2:18). Malachi had come to rebuild the spiritual life of the people (3:10). The people had robbed God by withholding their loyalty, their love, and their gifts.

Message Of Malachi—Summarized in the statement “*Will a man rob God? Yet you have robbed me!*” (3:8). The book of Malachi contains the last recorded words of the Old Testament. It was a sad commentary on a nation that had made so little spiritual progress in the last 1000 years since being delivered from Egyptian bondage. There was nothing more God could do for the nation until the coming of the Messiah and His divinely ordained kingdom. Every other promise had been fulfilled.

- **God’s Love For The People** (1:1-5). The book opens with an affirmation of God’s love for His wayward people and His specific choice of them as His people.
- **The Sins Of The Priests** (1:6-2:9). First he addressed the sins of the priests. They had profaned the temple worship by offering polluted sacrifices (1:6-8), become weary of the ritual (1:13-14), and caused many of the people to stumble (2:7-8). Therefore He would curse them (2:1-2).
- **The Sins Of The People** (2:10-4:3). Second he rebuked the people because of their indifference and their breaking of God’s covenants. They had become unfaithful to God’s marriage covenant (2:10-16). They had come to doubt whether there was even a God of justice (2:17-3:7). They had robbed God of His tithes (3:8-12). They also complained about the vanity of serving Him (3:13-4:3).
- **A Solemn Warning** (4:4-6). His message concludes with an exhortation to keep the Law of Moses and look for the prophet Elijah who would be Israel’s last messenger before God’s great day of reckoning. This was a prophecy of the coming of John the Baptist who would precede the coming of the Messiah (cf. Matthew 11:7-15; 17:11-13).

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Prophets

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Judah

Babylonian Captivity

Remnant Returns

Lessons From Malachi—Malachi uses a very interesting method of instruction in his book. First he makes a charge or accusation against the people, then he voices some objection which they are likely to make (“*yet you say*”). He then proceeds to refute it as if answering their very own objections (1:2,6,7; 2:14,17; 3:7,8,13).

A final appeal and final warning is made to the people to repent and restore their lives to faithfulness before the coming of the great day of the Lord. It would be a great day of joy and spiritual accomplishment and a great day of deliverance for the faithful.

Messianic Thread Through The Prophets

Lesson 26

Introduction—The theme of the entire Bible is Jesus Christ. He is the golden thread that runs through all 66 books. When the Old Testament prophets spoke they had a direct message from God for their contemporaries. But their message also pointed forward to the coming Messiah who would redeem Israel from all her sins and restore her to glory and honor.

When studying the prophets we should also look for references to Christ and the Messianic kingdom that they were promising (Acts 3:24-26; cf. Luke 24:44-47; 1 Peter 1:10-12). They painted an exciting picture of the coming Messiah—even if they didn't always understand the full import of their own words.

The Davidic Covenant—A pivotal promise made to David underscores this entire period of Israel's history in relation to the kings and prophets. That promise highlighted the things that God would do (2 Samuel 7:11-16).

- Establish the kingdom of David's seed (7:13)
- Chasten him if he was unfaithful (7:14)
- Not remove His mercy from him (7:15)
- Establish his house forever (7:16)
- Establish his throne forever (7:16)

Throughout the 460+ years of the united and divided kingdoms, we see God acting consistently with His promises. He was true to His promise to David (Psalm 89:3-4, 19-37), even during their greatest distress when His people thought He was being untrue to that covenant (Psalm 89:38-52).

There were many who thought that the punishment—in the form of captivity in foreign lands—was a violation of God's covenant. Actually it was part of the covenant. There were punitive aspects to God's covenant with the seed of David (2 Samuel 7:14). They were ruled by the Gentiles as chastisement for their kings' sins.

One of Daniel's prominent messages was that God's covenant was not being violated no matter what they experienced. In spite of their captivity, he assured them that the saints would again possess the kingdom (Daniel 7:17-18). God was not being faithless to His promise. Rather, during the fourth world kingdom He would set up the Messianic kingdom in accordance with His promises to David (Daniel 2:36-45). No matter what anyone thought—Babylonian or Jew—God was in control of the workings in the nations (Daniel 2:21, 37-38; 4:17, 25-26, 34-37).

A Restored Kingdom—The kingdom of the Messiah would be a restored kingdom populated by a faithful remnant (Ezekiel 37:15-28; Micah 3:9-4:8; Amos 9:11-15). It would be a kingdom of peace into which the Gentiles would flow (Daniel 2:2-4; 11:1-12). It would be ruled by one who was both God and man (Isaiah 9:6-7). That is where Israel would find her glory again—not in the outward rule of a great king, but in the glory of the Messiah's rule (Zechariah 8:20-23).

- Isaiah 2. It would be established in Jerusalem and all nations would flow to it (Isaiah 2:2-4).
- Daniel 2. It would be established during the fourth great world empire (Daniel 2:36-45).
- Joel 2. It would be accompanied with the outpouring of the Holy Spirit (Joel 2:28-32).

We find the fulfillment of these prophecies in Acts 2—during the time of the Roman Empire, in Jerusalem during Pentecost, when the Holy Spirit was poured out and the apostles preached the message of salvation and restoration.

King And Priest—The prophets foresaw a day when the Davidic authority would be exercised by a descendant of David, while the Mosaic law was not in effect.

- Zechariah 6:9-13. The prophet took some of the gold and silver and made a crown out of it. He was to place it on the head of Joshua the high priest, symbolizing the nature of the rule of their Messiah—both priest and king. The “Branch” was a well-known designation for the Messiah (Isaiah 11:1; Jeremiah 23:5-6).
- Psalm 110. David shows us that his descendant would be David’s own Lord, sitting and ruling at God’s right hand. He would rule in the midst of both His people and His enemies. His kingdom would be worldwide. His priesthood would be unique.

These prophecies had to be staggering and difficult for the people to understand, because they knew that the king must come from the tribe of Judah and family of David, but the priests had to come from the tribe of Levi and family of Aaron. They were not ready to accept what that meant—that the Law of Moses would be done away with and the priesthood changed (cf. Hebrews 7-8).

Glimpses Of The Messiah—The prophets spoke extensively of the coming Messiah (Luke 24:44-47; Acts 3:24-26; 1 Peter 1:10-12). Pictures of the Messiah were interspersed throughout their prophecies.

His Birth—He would be the seed of David (2 Samuel 7:12-16). He would be born of a virgin (Isaiah 7:14) in the city of Bethlehem (Micah 5:2).

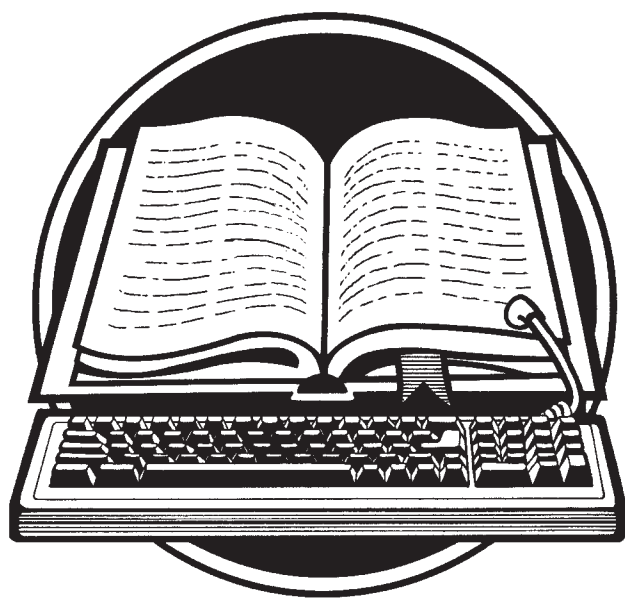
His Life—He would be preceded by a forerunner (Isaiah 40:1-5). Elijah must come before Him (Malachi 3:1; 4:5-6). He would be anointed with the Holy Spirit (Isaiah 42:1-3; 61:1-3). His ministry would be in Galilee of the Gentiles (Isaiah 9:1-2).

His Kingdom—He would ride triumphantly into Jerusalem (Zechariah 9:9-10). He would receive dominion, glory and a kingdom from God (Daniel 7:13-14). His kingdom would be set up in Jerusalem (Isaiah 2:2-4). It would be established during the days of the fourth world empire (Daniel 2:44). It would be a universal kingdom in which He reigned over His people and His enemies (Psalm 2:6-8). It would be a kingdom of justice and righteousness (Isaiah 9:7) just like the rule of God (Psalm 89:14).

His Death—He would be betrayed by a friend (Psalm 41:9) for thirty pieces of silver (Zechariah 11:12-13). He would stand silent before His accusers (Isaiah 53:7) and would be numbered with the transgressors (Isaiah 53:12). His hands and feet would be pierced (Psalm 22:16) along with His side (Zechariah 12:10), but no bones of His would be broken (Psalm 34:20). They would cast lots for His garments (Psalm 22:18) and make His grave with the rich in His death (Isaiah 53:9).

The prophets gave God’s people a clear picture of the coming Messiah. They had no excuse when they rejected Him (Acts 2:22-39).

Conclusion—Man deals in time—minutes, hours, days, weeks, months, years. All of our plans are limited and regulated by time. But God has no such limitations (2 Peter 3:8). He inhabits eternity (Isaiah 57:15). The Old Testament shows us a shadow of God’s schemes, while the New Testament shows us the fulfillment (2 Corinthians 3:14; 1 Peter 1:10-12). Now that the veil has been lifted in Christ, we can see the hand of God in the history of His people—and what all of that means to us!



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