

VOLUME 2 / **JOB TO MALACHI**

The background of the cover is a stylized illustration. On the left, there is a tan-colored stone building with a central doorway and two towers topped with yellow flame-like shapes. A large, thick, red cross is painted over the center of the image, extending from the top left to the middle right. In the foreground on the right, a grey silhouette of a man in a robe points his right hand towards the left. The ground is a mix of yellow and tan wavy lines, and the sky is light blue with white clouds.

THE GLORY OF CHRIST

IN THE OLD TESTAMENT

Gareth Crossley

GENERAL EDITOR: BOB PENHEAROW

PLUS!
INCLUDES
STUDY
GUIDE

THE GLORY OF CHRIST IN THE OLD TESTAMENT

The Old Testament can be difficult to understand and is often neglected today. We may find it confusing, harsh, full of rules, laws and prophecies, strange events or just plain difficult to navigate. We want to get on to the “good stuff” in the New Testament! But Jesus himself stressed the importance of the Old Testament—and it is in studying the Old Testament that we understand his person and work more fully.

The *entire* Bible is God’s message about his Son, our Saviour—the whole Bible finds meaning in him. If we are to be gripped by the unfolding historical drama of the Old Testament, thrilled by the evidences of the providence and purpose of God or enthralled by the developing picture of the promised Messiah, we need to first understand the flow of Old Testament narrative and how it fits into God’s redemptive purposes. Author Gareth Crossley encourages the people of God with an Old Testament survey that focuses on this thread. The patriarchs, the nation of Israel, the kings and prophets, the widow and the poor, all have great purposes in God’s unfolding plan of salvation.

In its history, poetry and prophecies, the Old Testament is a glorious message of hope—of looking forward, of seeing God move in both ordinary and miraculous ways as he shows himself to be a gracious and promise-keeping God—and whose Son comes to bring salvation to sinners everywhere and in every age!

What a welcome survey and overview of the Old Testament! Written to encourage reading of an often overlooked part of Scripture, Dr. Crossley provides an orderly, systematic, clear view of each book, using tables, figures and maps to guide the reader. *The Glory of Christ in the Old Testament* should prove helpful to lay readers as well as to church leaders in their preparation for teaching and preaching. May it receive wide circulation around the world.—**DR. PAUL ENGLE** (USA), professor, pastor, author



Gareth Crossley (Ph.D.) is an international lecturer and trainer of church leaders. He holds a Ph.D. in theology from Birmingham University (U.K.) and an MA in counselling from Keele University (U.K.). During fifty years of ministry, he served as pastor of West Park Church, Wolverhampton, and as a church planter/pastor in Leicester, Harrogate and Ashbourne.

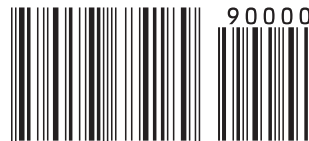
In his counselling, Dr. Crossley seeks to apply the Word of God to the problems of living. He receives referrals from Christian agencies, physicians and church leaders. He is the author

of *Growing Church Leaders* and *Everyday Evangelism* and uses social media to train church leaders and strengthen the church universal.

CAREY
PRINTING PRESS

www.careyuniversity.org

ISBN 978-0-9876841-8-9



9 780987 684189

Old Testament / Theology / Bible Survey

THE GLORY OF CHRIST IN THE OLD TESTAMENT

VOLUME 2 / **JOB TO MALACHI**

“Dr. Crossley has produced a clear and concise summary of the Old Testament books Job to Malachi. This work will greatly assist the scholar, but is written in a style that makes it accessible to all people. For each book of Scripture, Crossley provides background, context and guidance concerning the genre. He has masterfully demonstrated how Christ is the central figure of the Old Testament, carefully pointing out all of the types and prophecies that point to him. This work helps unpack the true meaning of the Old Testament, which is to prepare the way for the coming of the One whose glory it reveals, even the LORD Jesus Christ. I highly recommend it.”

RON BARNES (Canada), pastor, professor

“The best of its kind. As one who has taught Old Testament for more than a decade, I have read more than my fair share of such books, looking for the one to use for classes and to recommend to others. This is that book.”

BENJAMIN SHAW (USA), associate professor of Old Testament, Greenville Presbyterian Seminary, Indiana

“I can say with no reservations, this is THE BEST REVIEW OF THE OLD TESTAMENT that I have ever come across! Every Bible student and every pastor should order this book and use it. There is nothing out there that is any better in my opinion!”

D.J. DICKEY (USA), pastor emeritus, Glencullen Baptist Church, Portland, Oregon

“Having used the book profitably for a year in the classroom as a high school Bible teacher, I would especially commend it to students at this level or new Christians. It will prove a valuable resource for Sabbath schools, church libraries and homeschooling families.”

DAVID WHITLA (USA), senior pastor, Southside Reformed Presbyterian Church, Indianapolis

“This is a book among books. It is like a manual to the Old Testament. We are now abreast with stuff of the Word. The church is enjoying these books, and I also now have new material to teach and preach about.”

MOFYA DANWELL (Zambia), pastor

“This book is very well appreciated in Romania. In fact, it is the book that is used in all the theological schools here. It is *the* Old Testament Introduction manual for the students here in Emanuel University.”

DINU MOGA (Romania), general manager, Facilia Publishing House

“What a wonderful means to understanding both Old and New Testament Scriptures! Dr. Crossley’s timely work is immensely needed by the church today. It is both deep and easy to read and understand by all. It is a thrilling tool to promote revival and a true hungering and thirsting for God’s Word. It points us back to what the early church learned from Christ during his forty-day ministry on earth between his resurrection and ascension—that *all* Scripture (at that time, Genesis to Malachi) is about his life, ministry and redemptive work. The early church did not have the New Testament yet, but it faithfully and fruitfully proclaimed the gospel from the Old Testament. Much of the misunderstanding and confusion in the evangelical world today did not exist for the early church because it learned and applied Christ’s vital teaching about his fulfilment of all Old Testament content. We are ordering dozens of this new edition for ministry staff in Middle East Reformed Fellowship’s fields and will promptly start the efforts to translate this volume into Arabic, Farsi, Bahasa Indonesia and Urdu.”

VICTOR ATALLAH (Cyprus), pastor, Middle East Reformed Fellowship (MERF)

“This superb overview of the Old Testament is the best for the general reader that I have seen to date. Buy it, and you will not need another Old Testament Survey.”

JOHN BRETNALL (UK), editor, *Peace and Truth*

THE GLORY OF CHRIST IN THE OLD TESTAMENT

VOLUME 2 / JOB TO MALACHI

Gareth Crossley

GENERAL EDITOR: BOB PENHEAROW

CAREY
PRINTING PRESS

CAREY

PRINTING PRESS

Published by

Carey International University of Theology Inc., The Villages, Florida, USA

www.careyuniversity.org

About us

Carey Printing Press is the publishing arm of Carey International University of Theology, an international Christian organization that provides theological training to spiritual leaders to shape the church and influence the nations.

General editor: Bob Penhearow

First published in 2002 as *The Old Testament Explained and Applied*.

This revised edition published in 2021 by Carey Printing Press.

© 2021 Gareth Crossley. All rights reserved. This Carey edition may not be reproduced, in whole or in part, without written permission from the publishers.

The Glory of Christ in the Old Testament

Volume 1 / Genesis to Esther

ISBN 978-0-9876841-5-8 (paperback)

ISBN 978-0-9876841-6-5 (hardcover)

Cover and book design: Janice Van Eck

Unless otherwise indicated, all Scripture quotations are from the New King James Version® (NKJV). Copyright © 1982 by Thomas Nelson. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

The Glory of Christ in the Old Testament

Volume 2 / Job to Malachi

Author: Gareth Crossley

ISBN 978-0-9876841-8-9 (paperback)

ISBN 978-0-9876841-7-2 (hardcover)

*Dedicated to the pastors and church leaders in
Belarus, Egypt, India, Indonesia, Kenya, Lebanon, Madagascar,
Romania, Sri Lanka, Sudan, The Philippines and the Far East
who warmly welcomed me and are faithfully serving
the Lord Jesus Christ*

Contents

Foreword	xi
List of maps, tables and figures	xiii
Introduction	1
The inspiration of Scripture	9
The central theme of Old Testament Scripture	23
Job	39
Psalms	63
Proverbs	101
Ecclesiastes	117
Song of Solomon	137
Isaiah	159
Jeremiah	193
Lamentations	225
Ezekiel	239
Daniel	263
Hosea	289
Joel	311
Amos	327
Obadiah	347
Jonah	369
Micah	389
Nahum	405
Habakkuk	421
Zephaniah	437
Haggai	455
Zechariah	469
Malachi	487

Select bibliography	505
Appendix: A study guide	511
Application index	567
General index	569

Foreword

The Glory of Christ in the Old Testament / Volume 2 is the second of a two-part survey of the Old Testament. The first volume focuses on the historical development of the Old Testament: Creation to Esther, while this volume focuses on Old Testament poetry and prophetic dynamics within the Old Testament: Job to Malachi.

I vividly recall the joy of meeting Dr. Crossley while in the UK a few years ago. On the train travelling back from Leeds to Paddington Station, London, I started to read Gareth's "Introduction." I had never come across a Bible survey book like this before. I clearly recall, that as the train pulled into Paddington Station, I bowed my head and was filled with worship and praise to my beautiful, glorious Saviour—and that was based on the introduction!

Gareth's skills in writing and research clearly demonstrate a man devoted to Scripture; one who not only loves the truth of the Word but

seeks to live out the truth contained within the sacred Word. His pastoral heart, honed over many decades, comes to life as the reader is not only intellectually informed but heart-warmed by the wonderful truths contained within this book.

There are numerous Bible survey books on the market today, but the methodology Dr. Crossley employs in *The Glory of Christ in the Old Testament*, I believe, has exciting and valuable distinctives. Have you ever wondered about the chronology of the Bible, where each book fits in? Are you confused as to how each book is structured, the theological theme of each book? Do you know where and why the Old Testament is filled with Christology? Have you asked yourself after reading an Old Testament book: “So what?” I believe Dr. Crossley’s book has the answers. In fact, each of the Old Testament books is viewed in a four-fold approach that makes this book exciting and rather unique.

First, like most Bible survey books, the historical data is presented in a clear, logical, sequential manner. Dates are clearly set forth, together with various charts. Second, Dr. Crossley draws out the primary theological themes within each Bible book and shows their significance for us today. Third, the Christology of each book is carefully and wonderfully developed. Here, the reader is confronted with the preincarnate Saviour marching through every sacred Old Testament chapter, guiding and directing the course of history in preparation for his ultimate incarnation. Finally, each of the Old Testament books has a practical and heart-searching pastoral application. The combination of all four dynamics makes this book alive, exciting and distinct.

This volume will enrich lives. It confronts the reader with the glory of Christ in the Old Testament, and it is suitable for both the young Christian and the seasoned pastor.

A Study Guide by Rev. Paul Hudson is included as an Appendix. This can be used with profit by individuals as well as study groups, and forms part of the requirements for Old Testament Survey courses offered by Carey International University of Theology.

BOB PENHEAROW

General Editor

www.careyuniversity.org

List of maps, tables and figures

MAPS

Map 1. The prophecies of Amos	337
Map 2. Jonah’s commission and response	375

TABLES

Table 1. The Hebrew Old Testament is divided into three major sections	8
Table 2. The English Old Testament is arranged under four headings	8
Table 3. Chart comparing life under the sun in Ecclesiastes with life in relationship with Christ	131
Table 4. Comparison of Nebuchadnezzar’s dream and Daniel’s later visions	277
Table 5. Comparison of Jonah’s prayer and the Psalms	378

Table 6. Dates relating to Zechariah and Haggai according to the day, month and year of the reign of King Darius of the Medes and Persians	473
Table 7. The message of the writing prophets	492

FIGURES

Figure 1. Chronology of the Old Testament	36
Figure 2. Isaiah in relation to the kings and prophets of the divided kingdom	166
Figure 3. Josiah and his successors as kings of Judah	199
Figure 4. Jeremiah in relation to Judah and its prophets and kings: before, during and after the exile	201
Figure 5. Ezekiel in relation to Judah and its prophets and kings: before, during and after the exile	245
Figure 6. Daniel in relation to Judah and its prophets and kings: before, during and after the exile	270
Figure 7. The people of Judah during the empire of the Medes and Persians	279
Figure 8. Hosea in relation to the kings and prophets of the divided kingdom	295
Figure 9. Joel in relation to the kings and prophets of the divided kingdom	315
Figure 10. Amos in relation to the kings and prophets of the divided kingdom	333
Figure 11. Jonah in relation to the kings and prophets of the divided kingdom	373
Figure 12. Micah in relation to the kings and prophets of the divided kingdom	393
Figure 13. Nahum in relation to the kings and prophets of the southern kingdom	409
Figure 14. Habakkuk in relation to Judah and its prophets and kings: before, during and after the exile	425
Figure 15. Zephaniah in relation to Judah and its prophets and kings: before, during and after the exile	441
Figure 16. Haggai in relation to Judah and its prophets and kings: before, during and after the exile	459
Figure 17. Malachi in relation to Judah and its prophets and kings: before, during and after the exile	491

Introduction

Many Christians find the reading of the Old Testament difficult. The self-discipline imposed by a commitment to read through the whole Bible in three years, or in some cases in twelve months, may indicate the reluctance with which some believers approach the Old Testament Scriptures. Like the man who continually beat his head against the wall because he felt so good when he stopped, the enforced reading of the Old Testament may produce only a similar benefit—the sense of achievement at completion.

There may be a number of reasons for reticence in turning to the Old Testament with enthusiasm. It may reside in the fact that the Old Testament is often read like irrelevant history. Does the average Christian see his or her own history in its pages? What are the possible applications for today of the particulars of the law in Deuteronomy, or the details of the sacrifices in Leviticus, or the histories of the kings

or the philosophies of Ecclesiastes?

A second reason for reticence may be that so many of those who preach from the Old Testament seem to spiritualize every text and often betray more of a vivid imagination than clear principles of biblical interpretation. Lacking such imaginative skills, the average Christian avoids these thirty-nine books except for the occasional dip into well-worn passages in the Psalms, or Isaiah or a favourite story in Genesis.

A third explanation may be in the fact that few Christians see the thread or understand the flow of the Old Testament. They are not gripped by the unfolding historical drama, not thrilled by the evidences of the providence and purpose of God or enthralled by the developing picture of the promised Messiah, the Christ.

The major incentive for Christians to read and seek to understand the Old Testament is given by the Lord Jesus himself on many occasions. He points out that the prophecies of the Old Testament are essential to our understanding of his life and work and, most crucially, they authenticate the person of Christ. Jesus predicted that many would come claiming they are the Christ or prophets of God: "For false christs and false prophets will rise and show great signs and wonders to deceive" (Matthew 24:24).

For this reason, the Lord Jesus did not expect anyone to take his word alone that he is the promised Messiah. He based the recognition of his sonship on the fulfilment of the Old Testament Scriptures. In fact he said, "If I bear witness of Myself, My witness is not true" (John 5:31). Of course, this declaration has to be taken in context. Jesus is in effect saying, "If there is no other witness to who I am then there is no reason for anyone to believe me. Anyone could make such a claim." The Lord then follows his words by presenting other witnesses to his sonship: John the Baptist's testimony, the miracles he performed, the Scriptures he fulfilled and God the Father's witness (see John 5:31–47). Who told John the Baptist? Who worked the miracles through Jesus? Who gave the Scriptures? The answer in each case is God the Father and God the Holy Spirit (John 1:31–34; Acts 2:22; Hebrews 2:4; 2 Timothy 3:16; 2 Peter 1:21). Who else, but the heavenly Father and the Holy Spirit, could testify to the true Sonship of the Saviour?

John the Baptist is no longer with us. The miracles of Jesus are no

longer performed before us. Yet we have abiding proof to authenticate the true Christ. The Scriptures of the Old Testament are the proof that Jesus of Nazareth is the Christ of God.

Furthermore, on the day of our Lord's resurrection from the dead, he made a notable appearance to two of his disciples on the road to Emmaus (Luke 24:13–27). These two address Jesus as if he were a stranger (v.16). They disclose their great sadness at recent events in Jerusalem. They tell of the visit of women to the tomb and their seeing a vision of angels who reported that Jesus was alive.

Jesus gently rebukes them, but not for their failure to believe the testimony of the women, nor their unwillingness to accept the word of the angels. He is critical because they have not believed the Old Testament Scriptures!

“O foolish ones, and slow of heart to believe in all that the prophets have spoken! Ought not the Christ to have suffered these things and to enter into His glory?” And beginning at Moses and all the Prophets, He expounded to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning Himself (Luke 24:25–27).

Later that same day, the Lord appears to ten of the apostles in the upper room. Again, he challenges them regarding their lack of confidence in the Old Testament:

“These are the words which I spoke to you while I was still with you, that all things must be fulfilled which were written in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms concerning Me.” And He opened their understanding, that they might comprehend the Scriptures (Luke 24:44–45).

The Old Testament Scriptures are the abiding proof that Jesus of Nazareth is the Christ, the Son of the living God. “The chief object of prophecy was to prepare the way for Christ, that, when He should come, He might be identified by a comparison of the prediction with its fulfilment.”¹

¹ Ernest W. Hengstenberg, *Christology of the Old Testament and a Commentary on the Messianic Predictions* (1847; Grand Rapids: Kregel, 1970), 10.

All may know the true identity of Jesus from the prophecies given by God spanning more than 4,000 years. Even in the beginning, when disaster fell and the first humans disobeyed the one simple commandment of God, a promise was given. Addressing the serpent, the Lord said,

And I will put enmity
Between you and the woman,
And between your seed and her Seed;
He shall bruise your head,
And you shall bruise His heel (Genesis 3:15).

The Lord is addressing Satan who is using the serpent. In the great Revelation, the Evil One is described as “that serpent of old, called the Devil and Satan, who deceives the whole world” (Revelation 12:9; cf. 20:2).

Note the development of the text in Genesis 3:15: the Lord establishes enmity between Satan and the woman, followed by enmity between the seed of Satan and the seed of the woman. It goes on to refer to the seed of the woman as “he” or “it.” Here it is made clear that one Person will struggle with another person. The one Seed of Eve will suffer but succeed! Satan will be destroyed!

Through 4,000 years of prophecies, promises and predictions, the living and true God revealed details about this one unique and glorious Seed of Eve. Gradually, the full picture emerges.

The family line of that special Seed of Eve (Genesis 3:15) is carefully mapped out. He will be of the Seed of Abraham (Genesis 26:4; cf. Galatians 3:16); of the Seed of Jacob (Genesis 28:14); of the Seed of David (2 Samuel 7:12). By the time of his appearance, the promised Seed of Eve would be revealed as no other than the Son of God. “But when the fullness of the time had come, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman” (Galatians 4:4)

Numerous details about this conquering Seed of Eve had been revealed before his eventual birth. Details of his tribe, his unique conception, his birthplace, his ministry, his miracles, his betrayal, his arrest, trial and sentence to death, his crucifixion, his grave, his resurrection and ascension, and details of his character, power and glory.

There are many threads of prophecy throughout the Old Testament. Here are some suggestions for your personal study:

1. Prophecy: The suffering successful Saviour
 - a. The *message* of the Saviour's suffering and success Genesis 3:15
 - b. The *manner* of the Saviour's suffering and success Psalm 22
 - c. The *meaning* of the Saviour's suffering and success Isaiah 53
 - d. The *moment* of the Saviour's suffering and success Daniel 9:24

2. Prophecy: The all-conquering King
 - a. The Lion of Judah Genesis 49:10
 - b. The Star of Jacob Numbers 24:17
 - c. The Son of David 2 Samuel 7:12
 - d. Birthplace, Bethlehem Micah 5:2
 - e. The Son of God Psalm 45:6–7; cf. Hebrews 1:8–9

3. Prophecy: The great High Priest
 - a. Abraham and Melchizedek Genesis 14:18–20
 - b. Messiah and Melchizedek Psalm 110:4
 - c. Jesus and Melchizedek Hebrews 7:1–9

4. Prophecy: The Spirit-filled Messiah
 - a. The Rod of Jesse Isaiah 11:1–2
 - b. The beloved Servant of God Isaiah 42:1–4
 - c. John the Baptist's testimony Matthew 3:11–17
 - d. The Lord's testimony Luke 4:18–19; cf. Isaiah 61:1–2
 - e. The miracles of Jesus Matthew 11:4–5; cf. Isaiah 35:5–6

5. Prophecy: The spotless Lamb
 - a. Abel and a lamb Genesis 4:3–7
 - b. Abraham and a lamb Genesis 22:8
 - c. Moses and a lamb Exodus 12:3
 - d. Isaiah and a lamb Isaiah 53:7
 - e. John the Baptist and the Lamb John 1:29, 36
 - f. Peter and the Lamb 1 Peter 1:19
 - g. New creation and the Lamb Revelation 5:6
 - h. The church and the Lamb Revelation 19:6–9

The importance of the Old Testament for present-day Christians cannot be overstated. From the earliest days of the Christian era, these thirty-nine books have held a vital place. The new Christian converts on the Day of Pentecost, once baptized, committed themselves with great enthusiasm to the apostles' doctrine, fellowship with other believers, the breaking of bread and united prayer (Acts 2:42).

"The apostles' doctrine" was composed of a number of elements: the teaching they received directly from the Lord Jesus Christ, the things concerning the Lord which they had seen and heard for themselves and interpreting and applying the Old Testament Scriptures with specific reference to the Lord Jesus Christ. The apostles were at great pains, whether among unbelieving Jews or believing Christians, to relate everything that Jesus said and did to the thirty-nine books of the Old Testament (Acts 2:22–36; 4:9–12, 24–28; 13:29–41). The Scriptures, as composed at that time, were the firm foundation for understanding and explaining the ministry, life, suffering, death, resurrection, ascension and glorification of the Lord Jesus Christ. This was the basis of the doctrine, or teaching, of the apostles.

From the beginning, the apostles' doctrine was a vital ingredient of Christian worship. There is abundant evidence throughout the book of Acts that this teaching played an important part in church life (e.g. Acts 2:42; 6:2, 4). The Old Testament was to be read and carefully and faithfully explained to the church (1 Timothy 4:13; 2 Timothy 2:15).

Knowledge and understanding of the Scriptures was not, however, to be restricted to that which was gained through meetings for worship and teaching. The private study of God's Word was invaluable. How else could believers maintain a Berean mentality and investigate what the preacher said? (Acts 17:11). Without personal study of the Scriptures, believers would be vulnerable, all too easily "tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine" (Ephesians 4:14).

Today, however, the central feature of apostolic doctrine, the relating of the person and work of the Lord Jesus Christ to the Old Testament Scriptures, seems largely to have been eliminated from preaching and teaching. With many distractions, the Bible has been sidelined and marginalized. In many quarters, enthusiasm for the New Testament is waning, and appreciation of the Old Testament is almost gone.

This book has a clear goal in mind—to encourage the people of God in their private reading and study of the Old Testament Scriptures.

The approach

This is an *overview* of the thirty-nine books of the Old Testament. It is not intended to be an *exhaustive* study. The objective for this book is to present a glimpse of the contents of each Old Testament book so that the overall plan and purpose of God might be clearly perceived.

The Old and New Testaments are treated as the inspired Word of God and therefore to be regarded as without error and without lack as originally given; therefore a chapter is included on the nature of inspiration. (It is usual in all definitions of inspiration to distinguish between the original Scriptures in Hebrew and Greek and any subsequent translations into Latin, English, etc. Translations are not believed to be inspired in the same sense as the original writings.)

Beneficial study of God's Word requires clear perspective—seeing each book in relation to its neighbours. See Tables 1 and 2.

The overall theme of God's revelation needs to be kept in mind. The controlling thought for the whole of the Old Testament is *preparation for the coming of the Messiah*, the Son of God. For those of a more academic bent, there is a chapter presenting the reasoned argument for this central theme. For others this chapter may be passed over without loss of benefit.

Throughout this overview, there are many biblical references cited. Consulting these references at the first reading will interrupt the flow and cause discontinuity of perspective. It will also take hours. Copious references are provided for the benefit of the preacher, the student or anyone unconvinced about any particular point being made.

Each chapter will follow an outline like this:

- Introduction
- Author
- Historical setting
- Outline
- Christ and his church
- Conclusion
- Application and reflection

So as to ensure the historical integrity of each book, the Christological content and the present-day applications will be kept separate.

Table 1. The Hebrew Old Testament is divided into three major sections

Law	Prophets		Writings
<i>(Torah)</i> Genesis Exodus Leviticus Numbers Deuteronomy	<i>Former Prophets</i> Joshua Judges Samuel Kings	<i>Latter Prophets</i> Isaiah Jeremiah Ezekiel Hosea Joel Amos Obadiah Jonah Micah Nahum Habakkuk Zephaniah Haggai Zechariah Malachi	<i>(a) Poetical books</i> Psalm Proverbs Job <i>(b) Five Rolls</i> <i>(Megilloth)</i> Song of Songs Ruth Lamentations Ecclesiastes Esther <i>(c) Historical books</i> Daniel Ezra / Nehemiah Chronicles

Table 2. The English Old Testament is arranged under four headings

Law	History	Poetry	Prophecy	
Genesis Exodus Leviticus Numbers Deuteronomy	Joshua Judges Ruth 1 Samuel 2 Samuel 1 Kings 2 Kings 1 Chronicles 2 Chronicles Ezra Nehemiah Esther	Job Psalms Proverbs Ecclesiastes Song of Solomon	<i>Major</i> Isaiah Jeremiah Lamentations Ezekiel Daniel	<i>Minor</i> Hosea Joel Amos Obadiah Jonah Micah Nahum Habakkuk Zephaniah Haggai Zechariah Malachi

The inspiration of Scripture

For twenty centuries, Christians recognized the vital importance of the Scriptures. Over recent years that conviction and confidence has been seriously eroded. The question might well be asked: “If the foundations are destroyed, what can the righteous do?” (Psalm 11:3). Take away the Scriptures as the authoritative and utterly reliable Word from God, and chaos will soon ensue. So many believers seem to be “tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine” (Ephesians 4:14). In teaching and in practice—in the home, in the church and in society—human ideas and the counsel of the ungodly are prevalent (Colossians 2:8; Psalm 1:1). A return to confidence in the Scriptures as the Word of God is urgently needed.

Because of the confusion which is permeating the Christian church, it is important to crystallize the view of the Bible which is taken throughout this present book. Quoting 2 Timothy 3:16–17, which

states, "All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work," seems insufficient for some of God's people today. It is necessary, therefore, to be more specific about the actual stance taken on Scripture throughout these pages.

The understanding of inspiration basic to this book is that the written Scriptures are the Word which God spoke and still speaks to his church. This is the final and sufficient source and authority for Christian faith and Christian living. Here in Scripture, the Lord has provided "all things that pertain to life and godliness" (2 Peter 1:3). To know God's Word is to know God's revealed will. And we can trust that Word. It is infallible (without error, entirely dependable) because an infallible God has spoken an infallible Word. He is sovereign Lord over all things. "Whatever the LORD pleases He does, in heaven and in earth" (Psalm 135:6). There is nothing incongruous, therefore, about God's producing a book which, while arising out of the experience of his children, is also, through his sovereign ordering, his precise Word to them.¹ If God is not sovereign in his revelation of himself to human beings, then he is not sovereign in anything.

It is nonsense to believe in an all-powerful God if he is incapable of communicating accurately and infallibly to his human creatures.

The relationship between the Word of God and the words of men in the writing of the Bible may be expressed like this:

The Holy Spirit moved men to write. He allowed them to use their own style, culture, gifts and character, to use the results of their own study and research, to write of their own experiences and to express what was in their mind. At the same time, the Holy Spirit did not allow sin to influence their writings; he overruled in the expression of thought and in the choice of words. Thus they recorded accurately all that God wanted them to say and exactly how he wanted them to say it, in their own character, style and language.²

¹ Bruce Milne, *Know the Truth: A Handbook of Christian Belief* (Leicester: Inter-Varsity Press, 1982), 39.

² Brian H. Edwards, *Nothing but the Truth* (Welwyn: Evangelical Press, 1978), 38.

God inspired the Bible word for word (this is known as “verbal inspiration”). The Bible throughout exhibits a God who speaks. He uses words. He communicates predominantly, though not exclusively, through words. Throughout the Scriptures, there is clear evidence that these things were spoken by the Lord and were spoken in words. The living God spoke them.³

What Scripture says, God says. The Bible is inspired in the sense of being word-for-word God-given.... The Bible, therefore, does not need to be supplemented and interpreted by tradition, or revised and corrected by reason. Instead, it demands to sit in judgement on the dictates of both; for the words of men must be tried by the Word of God.⁴

The men who recorded Scripture knew full well what they were doing. They were not in a trance. They were not “taken over” by a spirit personality. They were fully conscious, fully rational. They did not, however, always understand the *meaning* and *significance* of what they said or wrote. The prophets were “curious,” in the best sense of that word, to comprehend God’s purposes and timing, and went to considerable effort to discover answers (1 Peter 1:10–12).

God inspired the whole Bible, from Genesis to Revelation. All sixty-six books are infallible and inerrant. They are entirely without error as originally given. As Francis Schaeffer declares, “the Bible is without error not only when it speaks of values, the meaning system and religious things, but it is also without error when it speaks of history and the cosmos.”⁵

One Author: many authors!

There are at least thirty different authors of the books of the Bible, the first writer living more than 1,500 years before the last. God used Amos the farm labourer as well as Ezekiel the priest. God used uneducated

³ R.C.H. Lenski, *Commentary on Colossians, Thessalonians, Timothy, Titus and Philemon* (Minnesota: Augsburg, 1964), 845.

⁴ J.I. Packer, “Fundamentalism” and the Word of God: *Some Evangelical Principles* (Leicester: Inter-Varsity Press, 1958), 47–48.

⁵ Francis A. Schaeffer, *The Great Evangelical Disaster* (Westchester: Crossway, 1984), 57.

working-class men, like the apostles Peter and John (Acts 4:13), together with middle-class intellectuals like the apostle Paul (Acts 22:3; Galatians 1:14) and Dr. Luke, author of the third Gospel and the Acts of the Apostles. God used diverse men and welded their work together into one great and glorious composition—the Scriptures, the Word of God. These human agents appear to have been “of every kind of temperament, of every degree of endowment, of every time of life, of every grade of attainment, of every condition in the social scale.”⁶ The personality of each writer shines through the pages of his writings. The letters of Peter are distinct from those of John. The epistle of James contrasts with those of Paul.

God loves variety. This is obvious in *natural revelation*, in creation, where there is such an assortment of colours, sizes, shapes, sounds, textures, tastes and smells. It is also evident in *special revelation*, in the Scriptures, where God’s “chosen vessels” are of such differing backgrounds, experiences and abilities. Not only are the human authors different, but the *kinds* of written composition are equally varied. There are historic records, biographies, extracts from civic documents, moral laws, civil and ceremonial rules and regulations, laws of hygiene, sermons, theological discourses, official decrees, personal letters, visions, dreams, poems and songs. The Bible is anything but monotonous and dull.

Authors of the biblical books retained their own temperaments, their unique experiences, their personal strengths and their personal weaknesses. Their biblical writings were infallible—the men themselves were not. In their personal lives, they were capable of making mistakes—sometimes serious mistakes, such as when Peter behaved inconsistently to New Covenant principles (Galatians 2:11–21). One author, David, was responsible for sins in relation to Bathsheba and Uriah when lust led to adultery and murder (2 Samuel 11). In spite of their sins and imperfections, God chose them and God used them. He made sure that what they recorded as Scripture was accurate. Firstly, the impulse to write was given from God. Secondly, their understanding was enlightened by the Holy Spirit so that their writings were

⁶ Benjamin B. Warfield, *Revelation and Inspiration in The Works of Benjamin B. Warfield*, 10 vol. (1927; Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1981), 1:436.

preserved from all material error. Thirdly, they were divinely guided in the selection of their materials so that nothing was omitted or added against the will of God. And, fourthly, they received special divine help in order to complete their work accurately.⁷

One further point about the inspiration of Scripture needs to be made. As God used imperfect human instruments to communicate his Word, so he also chose to record the uninspired words of sinful men. While the words of sinful men found in Scripture were not inspired, the *record* of those words was inspired by God. An example of this distinction is seen in the book of Job. The Scriptures accurately record the words that Job's three friends used when they came to comfort him in his great distress. Many of those words are clearly contrary to some of the teaching of the Bible—they were not inspired words, but the record of them was inspired.⁸ When the whole incident reached its climax, the Lord reprimanded Eliphaz: "My wrath is aroused against you and your two friends, for you have not spoken of Me what is right, as My servant Job has" (Job 42:7). This strikes a note of real caution in evaluating the arguments which form the bulk of the book of Job. The account is thoroughly inspired and consequently totally infallible—the arguments are neither. Assessment and analysis of the advice found there must be made by comparing it with other Scriptures where truth from God is clearly stated.

Without a clear grasp and a decided conviction concerning the nature of biblical inspiration, there can be no confident and beneficial study of its contents. "Grant [or accept] that the Bible is (in its original manuscripts) inerrant and infallible, and you reach the place where study of its contents is both practicable and profitable."⁹

The Old Testament Scriptures

"Your word is truth," says the Lord Jesus Christ in prayer to his heavenly Father (John 17:17). "What Christ has said concerning the authority of the Bible must itself always be regarded as having the utmost

⁷ C. Sydney Carter, *The Reformers and Holy Scripture: A Historical Investigation* (London: Thynne and Jarvis, 1928), 17.

⁸ G.J. Collier, "Notes on Inspiration," *Gospel Tidings*, Vol. 9, No. 5 (1984): 200.

⁹ Arthur W. Pink, *The Divine Inspiration of the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Guardian Press, 1976), 5.

authority.”¹⁰ The Lord Jesus clearly indicates that the Spirit of God was the author of the Old Testament Scriptures (e.g. Matthew 19:3–5; 22:41–44; cf. Psalm 110:1). He refers to twenty Old Testament characters. He quotes from nineteen different books. From *Genesis* he refers to the creation of man, the institution of marriage, the history of Noah, Abraham and Lot and to the overthrow of Sodom and Gomorrah; from *Exodus*, to the appearing of God to Moses in the bush, the manna, the Ten Commandments and the tribute money. He refers to the ceremonial law for the purification of lepers and the great moral law, “You shall love your neighbour as yourself,” both contained in *Leviticus*, the bronze serpent and the law regarding vows in *Numbers*. At our Lord’s temptation, we have three quotations from *Deuteronomy*. He refers to David’s flight to Abiathar the priest at Nob, the glory of Solomon and the visit of the Queen of Sheba, Elijah’s stay with the widow of Zarephath, the healing of Naaman and the killing of Zechariah—from various *historical books*. The ground of Christ’s constant appeal is: “Have you not read?” or “It is written...” His constant assertion is: “The Scripture cannot be broken,” “the Scriptures testify of me” and “the Scripture must be fulfilled.”¹¹

The writers of the New Testament consistently shared this view of the Old Testament Scriptures. There is an undisputed acceptance of their full inspiration and absolute authority. It is not sufficient that the Lord should inspire the Scriptures; he must also lead the church to recognize those Scriptures. Accuracy in the formation of the canon, the finished collection of Scripture, is as vital as its original inspiration. Christians must be confident that what is placed in their hands is the full, unabridged and entire Word of God.

It was not enough that God inspired the writing of each book of the Bible. He also gave to His people, in a collective sense, the spiritual perception to *recognize* in each of those books the genuine marks of divine inspiration and authority. With the Holy Spirit’s guidance, they knew what spurious writings to

¹⁰ Edward J. Young, *Thy Word Is Truth* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1963), 47.

¹¹ A.M. Hodgkin, *Christ in All the Scriptures* (London: Pickering and Inglis, 1907), 3.

reject, as well as what genuine writings to accept. Thus, over the centuries as the Old Testament books were being written, the Old Testament canon (list or group of inspired books) kept growing until it reached its completed form.¹²

Fifty-six times the New Testament writers refer to God as the author of the Old Testament. And even where the human writer is known, the divine authorship is often stated instead.¹³ In Hebrews 1:5–13, for example, quotations are taken from 2 Samuel 7:14; Psalm 2:7; 104:4; 45:6–7; 102:25–27 and 110:1. The human writers are ignored and five times the apostle introduces a quotation with the phrase: “He [i.e. God] says...” The four Gospel historians refer to Old Testament writings and declare them to be words which were “spoken by the Lord through the prophet” (Matthew 1:22–23) or words of Scripture which must be fulfilled (John 19:24; cf. 19:36–37). The early church praised God for his prophetic words recorded in the book of Psalms (Acts 4:24–26; cf. Psalm 2:1–2). Then, some years later, the apostle Paul refers to God’s Word in Psalm 2:7, Isaiah 55:3 and Psalm 16:10 (Acts 13:33–35).

The attitude of the Lord Jesus Christ to the Old Testament Scriptures and the attitude of the New Testament writers to the Old Testament Scriptures lead us to understand that everything from Genesis 1:1 through to Malachi 4:6 should be received, “not as the word of men, but as it is in truth, the word of God” (1 Thessalonians 2:13).

In spite of the multifarious human authors, there is only *one* divine author. The prophets of the Old Testament knew they were speaking under the influence of the living God (e.g. Isaiah 28:16; Jeremiah 7:20; Ezekiel 3:11; Amos 3:11). The consistent view of the New Testament writers is that God was speaking in and through those prophets. They were convinced that what was recorded in the Old Testament Scriptures was and is the actual Word of God (2 Timothy 3:16–17; Hebrews 1:1–2; 2 Peter 1:20–21).

¹² Irving L. Jensen, *Jensen’s Survey of the Old Testament: Search and Discover* (Chicago: Moody, 1978), 21.

¹³ Edwards, *Nothing but the Truth*, 50.

The New Testament Scriptures

In arguing for the inspiration of the *Old Testament* Scriptures, that they are God-breathed and hence without error, the authority of the Lord Jesus Christ, his apostles and the other writers of the New Testament has been presented as conclusive proof. This, however, begs the question of the inspiration and reliability of the *New Testament* Scriptures. What is the ground upon which Christians may place their entire confidence in the twenty-seven books and letters of the New Testament?

The New Testament has two overlapping and interwoven parts. The first is an infallible (error-free as originally given) record of the life, ministry, suffering, death and resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God. The second is an infallible record of the teaching of God through the apostles of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Confidence that the New Testament provides an infallible record concerning the person and work of the Saviour and the teaching of God through the apostles is based upon a number of considerations.

The Spirit of truth

Before his departure back to the Father, the Lord Jesus Christ promised the assistance and supernatural help of the Holy Spirit:

These things I have spoken to you while being present with you. But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in My name, He will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all things that I said to you (John 14:25–26).

The Lord did not need to choose special men with outstanding memories. Nor did the apostles need to worry about forgetting vital information entrusted to them by the Lord. The Son of God promised the Spirit of God, especially under his name as “the Spirit of truth.”

The work of the Spirit of God was not, however, restricted to the ability to recall information already received. Jesus had not communicated everything during his earthly lifetime (John 16:12). The Holy Spirit would eventually supply additional information:

However, when He, the Spirit of truth, has come, He will guide you into all truth; for He will not speak on His own authority, but

whatever He hears He will speak; and *He will tell you things to come*. He will glorify Me, for He will take of what is Mine and declare it to you (John 16:13–14, emphasis added).

The last book of the New Testament is one of many testimonies to this promise. In “the Revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave Him to show His servants—things which must shortly take place” (Revelation 1:1), the Saviour communicates with the apostle John. Later we learn that the risen Christ used the services of the Holy Spirit as his agent. At the end of each of the letters to the seven churches in Asia Minor are the words: “He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches” (Revelation 2:7,11,17,29; 3:6,13,22).

Three facts are implied by the Lord’s promise of the Holy Spirit to assist the apostles:

1. That which depended upon their memory was kept free from error.
2. That which was recorded of their own observations was kept free from error.
3. God also gave them “truths imparted...directly by the Spirit of God, which they could never have arrived at by the unaided exercise of their own minds.”¹⁴

The internal testimony

The Lord Jesus promised the Holy Spirit to his twelve apostles. Consequently the record of the life and teaching of the Lord Jesus Christ as found in Matthew and John (both apostles of Christ) is accepted as bearing the marks of that promise. But what about the writings of Luke and Mark? They were not apostles. There is no record to show that they were included in the promise concerning the Spirit.

It is evident that Luke was a respected member of the early Christian church. He accompanied the apostle Paul on many of his travels. Paul refers to Luke as “the beloved physician” present with him as he writes the letter to the Colossians (Colossians 4:14). Paul also mentions the presence of Luke when he writes his second letter to Timothy: “Only

¹⁴ Albert Barnes, *Notes on the New Testament—Explanatory and Practical: Thessalonians, Timothy, Titus, and Philemon* (London: Blackie and Son, 1900), vol. 8, 241.

Luke is with me” (2 Timothy 4:11). A further reference is found in Paul’s letter to his good friend Philemon. At the conclusion Paul writes, “Epaphras, my fellow prisoner in Christ Jesus, greets you, as do Mark, Aristarchus, Demas, Luke, my fellow labourers” (Philemon 23–24).

Luke accompanied Paul on his missionary journeys. He met other apostles and was ideally suited to draw together a mass of information and detail. As he states at the beginning of his record of the life and teaching of the Lord Jesus Christ,

Inasmuch as many have taken in hand to set in order a narrative of those things which have been fulfilled among us, just as those who from the beginning were eyewitnesses and ministers of the word delivered them to us, it seemed good to me also, having had perfect [i.e. a complete or full] understanding of all things from the very first, to write to you an orderly account, most excellent Theophilus, that you may know the certainty of those things in which you were instructed (Luke 1:1–4).

Luke gathered together all the available information, both oral (by word of mouth) and written. He examined the material carefully and verified it with the eyewitnesses, apostles and disciples, and then set it down in a coherent fashion. Nevertheless, his claim alone does not demonstrate the confidence of the apostles in this record of the life and teaching of the Lord Jesus Christ. True, he was a respected member of the church, a gifted and able man. He had spent many hours, weeks, months, even years, with apostles of Christ. He had researched his subject carefully and painstakingly. But what did the apostles think of the finished result? The apostle Paul supplies an answer, almost inadvertently. He evidently accepted Luke’s record as Scripture, as can be seen from his first letter to Timothy: “For the Scripture says, ‘You shall not muzzle an ox while it treads out the grain,’ and, ‘The laborer is worthy of his wages’” (1 Timothy 5:18).

The first quotation is taken from Deuteronomy 25:4 and the second from Luke 10:7. There could be no clearer association of the writings of Luke and the Old Testament Scriptures. The Bible is bearing its own testimony to the writings of Luke. The Gospel according to Luke and the Acts of the Apostles are therefore authenticated as Scripture breathed out by God. The promise of the assistance of the Holy Spirit

was not given to Luke. He did not bring teaching of Christ back to memory, nor did he experience revelations of things to come. He merely recorded accurately the remembrance and revelations of the apostles and eyewitnesses. He is an accurate historian authenticated by an apostle.

The apostles' scribes

The second New Testament historian who is not an apostle is Mark, the nephew of Barnabas, sometimes called John Mark (Acts 12:12,25; 15:37). While there is no internal verification of Mark's record as inspired Scripture, it has been generally agreed in the church through the ages that the apostle Peter provided the eyewitness material. The early church fathers Papias and Tertullian, both of whom lived in the middle of the second century A.D., claimed that Mark wrote his Gospel in partnership with the apostle Peter. Papias says, "Mark, having become Peter's interpreter, wrote accurately all that he remembered." Tertullian was even more clear in his statement: "That which Mark had published may be affirmed to be Peter's whose interpreter Mark was."¹⁵ A careful study of the Gospel of Mark will substantially support this conclusion.

Both Peter and Paul used others, on occasions, to write their letters for them (1 Peter 5:12; Romans 16:22).

The apostles' authentication

It is important to see the unique position of these apostles. They were a personally chosen and a uniquely authenticated group of men (John 15:16). Speaking of our "great salvation," the writer to the Hebrews continues, "which at the first began to be spoken by the Lord, and was confirmed to us by those who heard Him, *God also bearing witness both with signs and wonders, with various miracles, and gifts of the Holy Spirit, according to His own will*" (Hebrews 2:3–4, emphasis added). Here it is clearly stated that God authenticated the Lord Jesus Christ and his apostles by the demonstration of supernatural miracles.

Peter spoke of this endorsement of Christ when he preached to a large Jewish congregation on the Day of Pentecost: "Men of Israel, hear these words: Jesus of Nazareth, a Man attested by God to you by

¹⁵ Edwards, *Nothing but the Truth*, 112–113.

miracles, wonders, and signs which God did through Him in your midst, as you yourselves also know..." (Acts 2:22).

Paul speaks of the authorization of the apostles when he wrote to the Corinthian church: "Truly the signs of an apostle were accomplished among you with all perseverance, in signs and wonders and mighty deeds" (2 Corinthians 12:12).

The Lord Jesus is attested to be the Christ of God and the Son of God through the miraculous signs he performed (John 5:36; Matthew 11:3–5; John 3:2). Miraculous signs were also given to attest the twelve disciples and Paul as apostles of Christ and consequently they were authorized to act as the Saviour's unique representatives (Acts 5:12; Hebrews 2:3–4; 2 Corinthians 12:12).

The apostles' awareness

Together with this authentication from the Holy Spirit, the apostles had also a personal awareness, a personal consciousness of authority in the church of Christ:

We are of God. He who knows God hears us; he who is not of God does not hear us. By this we know the spirit of truth and the spirit of error (1 John 4:6).

These things we also speak, not in words which man's wisdom teaches but which the Holy Spirit teaches (1 Corinthians 2:13).

For I received from the Lord that which I also delivered to you (1 Corinthians 11:23).

If anyone thinks himself to be a prophet or spiritual, let him acknowledge that the things which I write to you are the commandments of the Lord (1 Corinthians 14:37).

Therefore he who rejects this does not reject man, but God, who has also given us His Holy Spirit (1 Thessalonians 4:8).

Consequently it is a failure to understand and believe the Scriptures' own testimony that results in the suggestion, by some, that the

teaching of Paul is not *as important* as the teaching of the Lord Jesus Christ. In reality, Paul often refers to Christ as the source of his teaching (1 Corinthians 11:23; 14:37). He is conscious of receiving authority from Christ to function as an apostle (Galatians 1:1; 1 Timothy 2:7). The apostles were the servants of Christ. They would not knowingly transmit incorrect information or communicate inaccurate commandments to the church. Paul says he and his colleagues should be considered “as servants of Christ and stewards of the mysteries of God.” He then adds, “Moreover it is required in stewards that one be found faithful” (1 Corinthians 4:1–2). The teaching which is found in the New Testament Scriptures is *all* the teaching of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Along with this individual consciousness of authority, the apostles also possessed a sense of *collective authority*. This is a very important aspect of the New Testament. In spite of their great differences in personality, background and experiences, the apostles had a great respect for each other as apostles. Some twenty or thirty years after Pentecost, the apostle Peter places his words, along with those of the other apostles, on the same level with, and bearing the same authority as, the Scriptures of the Old Testament:

Beloved, I now write to you this second epistle (in both of which I stir up your pure minds by way of reminder), that you may be mindful of the words which were spoken before by the holy prophets, and of the commandment of us, the apostles of the Lord and Savior (2 Peter 3:1–2).

The New Testament was already almost entirely formed during the lifetime of the apostles. They understood their writings to be on a par with Old Testament Scripture. Hence, Peter writes of the letters of Paul that there are “some things hard to understand, which untaught and unstable people twist to their own destruction, as they do also the rest of the Scriptures” (2 Peter 3:16). Considering the public rebuke which Peter received from Paul at Antioch (Galatians 2:11–14), the reference to Paul as “our beloved brother Paul” (2 Peter 3:15), and the acknowledgement of his writings as Scripture, is all the more powerful a testimony!

Conclusion

In this brief and broad sweep, the inspiration—and therefore the reliability—of the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments has been examined. The living God has given the necessary confirmation that the writings of the prophets and the writings of the apostles are to be regarded as breathed out by God. Holy men of God not only spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit (2 Peter 1:20–21), they also wrote the Old Testament, and they wrote the New Testament, as moved by the same Spirit. Thus the solid “foundation of the apostles and prophets” is laid, “Jesus Christ Himself being the chief cornerstone” (Ephesians 2:20).

The Holy Spirit was the overseer who personally ensured that the thirty-nine books of the Old Testament are the truth which God wants to reveal to his church, and nothing but the truth. The Holy Spirit ensured that the Jewish nation first, and then the Christian church later, recognized these books which had been given by inspiration of God. The same Spirit of truth guarded the recording, the communication and the selection of the New Testament Scriptures.

But the work of the Holy Spirit in relation to the Scriptures is by no means over. As the Spirit of God alone inspired the Scriptures, safeguarded the transmission of the Scriptures and gave the perception to recognize those Scriptures, so he alone *interprets* the Scriptures. The reading of the Bible in and of itself does not bring illumination and understanding. In the days of the apostle Paul, there were Jews reading the Old Testament without understanding. They lacked enlightenment from the Spirit because they had not turned in faith to Christ (2 Corinthians 3:14–18). Even those who have turned to Christ need constantly to reiterate the prayer of the psalmist: “Open my eyes, that I may see wondrous things from Your law” (Psalm 119:18).

Here is the reliable Word from God which needs faithful translation from the original languages to communicate its truth; prayerful meditation to understand its truth; careful interpretation, comparing Scripture with Scripture, to apply its truth; and living devotion to obey its truth.

The central theme of Old Testament Scripture

The central theme of the Old Testament is Christ and his church. It is a great blessing to look back from a vantage point 2,400 to 6,000 years after the events—seeing so many of the fulfilments, the extent of which could not have been envisaged by the Old Testament authors. But lest it be thought that prophecy, types and revelations can be so easily coloured in a favourable light by a backward glance, the predictions concerning Christ and his church will be seen to have been in the heart of God from eternity:

you were not redeemed with corruptible things...but with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot. *He indeed was foreordained before the foundation of the world*, but was manifest in these last times for you who through Him believe in God, who raised Him from the dead and gave Him

glory, so that your faith and hope are in God (1 Peter 1:18–21, emphasis added).

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ, *just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world* (Ephesians 1:3–4, emphasis added).

In answering the question, “Where does the story of Jesus Christ begin?” we see that Matthew points to Abraham (Matthew 1:1–16), Luke to Adam (Luke 3:23–38) and John to eternity before time and creation (John 1:1–3). The Old Testament is shown to be the unfolding of a carefully prepared plan for the coming of his Son into the world which the Master Architect slowly and painstakingly reveals.

Jesus Christ the Son of God is the grand subject, the central theme, of the Old Testament. When the Lord Jesus is challenged about his claims to unique sonship, he presents as one of a number of proofs the content of Old Testament Scripture:

You search the Scriptures, for in them you think you have eternal life; and these are they which testify of Me. But you are not willing to come to Me that you may have life.... Do not think that I shall accuse you to the Father; there is one who accuses you—Moses, in whom you trust. For if you believed Moses, you would believe Me; for he wrote about Me (John 5:39–40, 45–46).

Again and again, Jesus points his disciples to the Old Testament Scriptures and their fulfilment in him.

The apostle Paul also insists on the same solid Old Testament base for the death, burial and resurrection of Christ. Not only the events, but also the theological significance of those events is declared to be “according to the Scriptures” (1 Corinthians 15:3–4). Christ was seen by Paul in the Old Testament just as vividly as we can see him in the New Testament. Paul saw Christ in the first institution of marriage (Ephesians 5:31–32); the promise to Abraham’s seed (Galatians 3:16); the rock in the wilderness journey (1 Corinthians 10:4); and the words of Moses in Deuteronomy 30:12–14 (Romans 10:6–8).

We see from the way that Paul argues before the Jews that Christ is

the *subject* of the Old Testament. At Achaia, “he vigorously refuted the Jews publicly, showing from the Scriptures that Jesus is the Christ” (Acts 18:28). Before King Agrippa, Paul makes a bold claim:

Therefore, having obtained help from God, to this day I stand, witnessing both to small and great, *saying no other things than those which the prophets and Moses said would come*— that the Christ would suffer, that He would be the first to rise from the dead, and would proclaim light to the Jewish people and to the Gentiles (Acts 26:22–23, emphasis added).

The secret of the Messiah is out. That mystery is revealed which was “kept secret since the world began but now made manifest, and by the prophetic Scriptures made known to all nations, according to the commandment of the everlasting God” (Romans 16:25–26). This “mystery, which from the beginning of the ages has been hidden in God who created all things through Jesus Christ” (Ephesians 3:9). The living God has had an “eternal purpose which He accomplished in Christ Jesus our Lord” (Ephesians 3:11).

It is not that the Old Testament has a great theme to which are added occasional prophecies and predictions about the coming of the Messiah. Nor is it a random history with the occasional spiritual gem hidden here or there. Everything found in the Old Testament has relevance at some point to the incarnation, humiliation, death, resurrection, ascension, glorification, triumphant return or future kingdom of the Lord Jesus Christ, Son of the living God (cf. Luke 24:27). Without undermining the literal and historical sense of Old Testament Scripture, this principle will be applied throughout this entire book. Andrew Bonar took the same approach to the Psalms when he said:

our principle is, that having once found the literal sense, the exact meaning of the terms, and the primary application...we are then to ask what the Holy Spirit intended to teach in all ages by this formula.¹

¹ Andrew A. Bonar, *Christ and His Church in the Book of Psalms* (1861; Grand Rapids: Kregel, 1978), viii.

Bonar made no apology in seeing Christ and his church throughout the Psalms. This principle of looking for Christ will be basic to this overview of the thirty-nine books of the Old Testament.

Revelation concerning Christ occurs in three major forms in the Old Testament: theophanies, types and prophecies. The Son of God appears in a theophany after the fall of Adam and Eve. He speaks of the woman's seed, and he predicts a violent contest with a victorious outcome (Genesis 3:15).² Revelation by theophany, type and prophecy has begun. Frequent new revelations will keep the expectation of the people alive, and make it continually more and more definite. Consequently, the doctrine of a coming Redeemer, even when partially misunderstood by the people at the time, becomes "the soul and centre of all theocratic expectations."³ Each subsequent revelation in history contributes to the development, progress and enlargement of the grand and glorious purpose of God in Christ.

THEOPHANIES

Theophanies are temporary appearances of God in human form. "Christ-ophanies" might be a more accurate term for them, as any manifestation of God in human form is an appearance of the second person of the Godhead, for "No one has seen God at any time. The only begotten Son, who is in the bosom of the Father, He has declared Him" (John 1:18).

Christophanies are

those unsought, intermittent and temporary, visible and audible manifestations of God the Son in human form, by which God communicated something to certain conscious human beings on earth prior to the birth of Jesus Christ.⁴

² Franz Delitzsch, *Messianic Prophecies* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1880), 27.

³ Ernest W. Hengstenberg, *Christology of the Old Testament and a Commentary on the Messianic Predictions* (1847; Grand Rapids: Kregel, 1970), 8.

⁴ James A. Borland, *Christ in the Old Testament: A Comprehensive Study of Old Testament Appearances of Christ in Human Form* (Chicago: Moody, 1978), 10.

Distinguishing Christophanies from dreams, visions, the pillar of cloud, the Shekinah glory and the incarnation of Christ, James Borland contends that the purpose of Christophanies “was not only to provide immediate revelation but also to prepare...for the incarnation of Christ.”⁵

Each appearance of the Son of God in human form reveals something about the Godhead, or something about God’s will. There is an implied reference to regular appearances, or Christophanies, for fellowship with Adam and Eve before the Fall (Genesis 3:8), but after the Fall, with the exception of fellowship with Enoch (Genesis 5:22,24), the appearances have specific functions, such as the giving of a warning, a promise, an instruction or a blessing. By this means, God gave warnings of judgement to the serpent and to Adam and Eve (Genesis 3:14–19), to Cain (Genesis 4:9–12), to Noah (Genesis 6:9,13–14) and in response to the sin of Sodom and Gomorrah (Genesis 18:20–21). He made promises to Hagar (Genesis 16:7–13), to Abraham (Genesis 17:1–22), to both Abraham and Sarah (Genesis 18) and to Isaac (Genesis 26:2,24). He blessed Jacob at Peniel (Genesis 32:24–30; cf. 35:1,9–13). He gave instructions to Joshua outside Jericho (Joshua 5:13–15), to Gideon in Ophrah (Judges 6:11–23) and to Manoah and his wife about their as yet unborn son Samson (Judges 13:3–6,8–23).

Borland suggests the following purposes behind the theophanies:

- God the Son anticipated his future incarnation, intimated its possibility, prefigured its human form and even prophesied its coming reality.
- God was using a form of revelation suited to his purposes in the early history of his redemptive plan.
- God connected his work in the Old and New Testaments by appearing in human form in both.
- God was able to reveal aspects of his person in this way that no other form of revelation allowed.
- God may have sought to intimate Christ’s deity and the Godhead.⁶

⁵ Borland, *Christ in the Old Testament*, 4.

⁶ Borland, *Christ in the Old Testament*, 21.

TYPES

A more difficult area of revelation is that of *types*. The Old Testament gives us types that foreshadow the New Testament fulfilment. A type is a form of analogy that is distinctive to the Bible. Like all analogies, a type combines identity and difference. David is a type of Christ; David and Christ were both given kingly power and rule. "In spite of the vast differences between David's royalty and Christ's, there are points of formal identity that make the comparison meaningful."⁷

This is the area of Christology (the study of Christ) which is most susceptible to a vivid imagination rather than the application of carefully determined principles of interpretation. We must not make an Old Testament passage mean what we would like it to mean. We must not impose our ideas upon the text. But how to safeguard against such abuse is not easy to define. The typology of Scripture does not depend upon the usage or meaning of the word *type* in the Scriptures. It is grounded upon a whole series of references where an object, person or event in the Old Testament is seen to reflect in the natural realm a truth or feature in the New Testament in the spiritual realm.

A *type* may be defined as *a figure, episode, or symbolic factor resembling some future reality in such a way as to foreshadow or prefigure it*. An *antitype* is *the future reality of the symbol*. Just as little children are taught with the help of pictures and models, so the Lord graciously teaches his people with the assistance of visual aids. But these pictures and emblems are not restricted to those young in the faith. Their significance may be best discovered by those who have a thorough acquaintance with the Scriptures.

Andrew Jukes suggests that the neglect of the study of the types in Scripture may be explained in part in

that they require more spiritual intelligence than many Christians can bring to them. To apprehend them requires a certain measure of spiritual capacity and habitual exercise in the things of God, which all do not possess, for want of abiding fellowship with Jesus.... The types are, indeed, pictures, but to understand the

⁷ Edmund P. Clowney, *The Unfolding Mystery: Discovering Christ in the Old Testament* (Leicester: Inter-Varsity Press, 1988), 14.

picture it is necessary we should know something of the reality. . . . The real secret of our difficulty is that we know so little, and, what is worse, we do not know our ignorance.⁸

As it is “by reason of use” that mature Christians “have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil” (Hebrews 5:14), so it is by that same using of truth already possessed that spiritual advancement is made and spiritual growth takes place.

By the use of types, the Lord gives detailed insight into the person and work of his Son that no mere words could ever convey:

Though sacrifices and ceremonies can be no ground or foundation to build up—that is, though we can prove nought with them—yet, when we have once found out Christ and His mysteries, then we may borrow figures, that is to say, allegories, similitudes, and examples, to open Christ, and the secrets of God hid in Christ . . . and can declare them more lively and sensibly with them than with all the words of the world. For similitudes have more virtue and power with them than bare words, and lead a man’s understanding further into the pith and marrow and spiritual understanding of the thing, than all the words that can be imagined.⁹

The institution of *marriage* is shown to be a type of Christ and his church (Genesis 2:24; Ephesians 5:31–32). The *flood* is seen as the type of Christian baptism (Genesis 7:1,4,10; 1 Peter 3:21). *Melchizedek* is a type of Christ in his priesthood (Genesis 14:18–20; Psalm 110:4; Hebrews 6:20–7:28). The whole structure of the *tabernacle*, with its ministry and services, is designated “a copy and shadow of . . . heavenly things” (Hebrews 8:5; cf. Exodus 25:1–28:43; Leviticus 23:3–43). It gives symbolic expression to the great truths and principles of the spiritual life: truths respecting sin and salvation, the purification of the heart and the dedication of the person and the life to God; truths and principles common to both Old and New Testament times but

⁸ Andrew Jukes, *The Law of the Offerings* (1854; Grand Rapids: Kregel, 1976), 14–15.

⁹ William Tyndale cited by Andrew A. Bonar, *A Commentary on Leviticus* (1846; Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1966), 4.

which could only find their proper development and full realization in the New Testament revelation of Christ and his church.

As well as the clear identifications of types of Christ in the New Testament, such as the *Passover* (1 Corinthians 5:7), the *water-giving rock* (1 Corinthians 10:4) and the whole *sacrificial system* (Hebrews 10:1–10), there are others by implication, such as the *manna* in the wilderness (John 6:31–33), the *ladder* in Jacob's dream (John 1:51) and the *temple* (John 2:19). These are not the results of coincidence. They are the outworking of a brilliantly conceived and carefully executed divine plan, for resemblance or coincidence alone is not sufficient:

to constitute one thing the type of another, something more is wanted than mere resemblance. The former must not only resemble the latter, but must have been designed to resemble the latter. The type as well as the antitype must have been preordained; and they must have been preordained as constituent parts of the same general scheme of Divine Providence.¹⁰

Old Testament religious buildings, ceremonies and priesthood, chosen articles and objects—whether actual, or seen in dreams or visions—are types of Christ and his unique work of salvation. But are only Old Testament symbols to be seen as types of Christ? Could it not be that historic events recorded in the Old Testament are also designed and overruled to provide glorious types of Christ and his unique saving work? Is not this the principle by which the Lord Jesus points to the serpent raised up in the wilderness? (John 3:14–15). It is not simply in the coincidence of elevation into the vertical position that the connection is made.

There are features about that period in Israel's history which shed a profound light upon the crucified One: the people had sinned (Numbers 21:5,7); the Lord sent punishment (Numbers 21:6); the people repented and sought forgiveness (Numbers 21:7); and the Lord provided the means of healing which required faith and obedience (Numbers 21:8).

¹⁰ Bishop Marsh cited by Patrick Fairbairn, *The Typology of Scripture: Viewed in Connection with the Whole Series of the Divine Dispensations* (1900; Grand Rapids: Baker, 1975), 46.

Now it is to be noted that the means which the Lord adopted was horrific. The serpent is the symbol of everything that is evil, from the first book of the Bible even to the last. It was the serpent in the Garden of Eden that Satan used as his agent in tempting Adam and Eve to sin. In the book of Revelation, the devil is referred to as “that serpent of old” (Revelation 12:9). The associations could not be more unpalatable. Nevertheless, the Lord’s self-identification with the serpent in the wilderness cannot be passed over lightly. He identified himself with the solution to the problem of sin. That solution was itself related to the curse of God (the poisonous serpents). Christ is seen therefore as identified, at great personal cost, with the sin (2 Corinthians 5:21), with the curse (Galatians 3:13) and with the cure (John 3:14–16; cf. Numbers 21:9). “There is life for a look at the crucified One!”¹¹

Christians may derive great benefit from these divinely inspired Scriptures of the Old Testament: “For whatever things were written before were written for our learning, that we through the patience and comfort of the Scriptures might have hope” (Romans 15:4). Speaking of God’s dealings with the Israelites during the wilderness journey, Paul affirms: “Now all these things happened to them *as examples*, and they were written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the ages have come” (1 Corinthians 10:11, emphasis added).

In Israel’s history we can trace the providential workings of God. We can follow also a pattern, or type of things spiritual, concerning Christ and his church—things to come. Who can read the history of Joseph without reflecting upon the circumstances surrounding the life, suffering, death and resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ? Born among brethren and persecuted in infancy, he finds sanctuary in Egypt, is sold by someone close to him, falsely accused, treated as an outcast, envied and persecuted, yet remains upright and blameless through trials and imprisonment; he is raised up to the right hand of power and glory and given a wife; the hostility of his fellow Israelites leads to blessing for the Gentiles; we see him distributing life-giving resources, receiving his brethren again through repentance and providing a home of plenty, safety and peace for all persons under his charge.

Joseph displays a deep spiritual discernment regarding the providence of God. Speaking to his brothers he says, “You meant evil against

¹¹ Line from a hymn of that name by Amelia M. Hull (c. 1832).

me; but God meant it for good, in order to bring it about as it is this day, to save many people alive" (Genesis 50:20). Joseph skilfully distinguishes between the wicked purposes in the minds of his brothers and the gracious purpose in the mind of God. The seriousness and evil of their deeds is not reduced in the slightest degree. The selling of Joseph was a despicable crime. Yet, at one and the same time, he was sold by the will of God. The Lord did not permit Joseph's death; the Lord did permit Joseph's enslavement. The Lord "used" the expression of human hostility for his own greater purposes: "Joseph was sold by the wicked consent of his brethren, and by the secret providence of God."¹²

Years later, a similar crime would be perpetrated, but this time upon the only begotten Son of God. He was betrayed by his "brethren" and sold, not to slavery, but to death. Following Christ's resurrection and the outpouring of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost, the apostle Peter views the Saviour's death from two vastly different perspectives: "Jesus of Nazareth...being delivered by the determined purpose and foreknowledge of God, you have taken by lawless hands, have crucified, and put to death" (Acts 2:22–23).

As with Joseph's words, so with the apostle Peter's: no lessening of guilt is permitted. The Lord of glory was falsely accused, disgracefully tried, unlawfully sentenced and viciously executed by corrupt men.

Having traced the central theme of the Old Testament revelation of Christ by means of Christophanies and types, we still need to explore one further area, that of *prophecies*. In the numerous Messianic predictions of the Old Testament we find the clearest, most detailed anticipation of Christ and his church.

PROPHECIES

"The chief object of prophecy," declares Ernest Hengstenberg, "was to prepare the way for Christ, that, when He should come, He might be identified by a comparison of the prediction with its fulfilment."¹³ "For the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy" (Revelation 19:10). Like a skilful artist, God begins with light sketches which to the

¹² John Calvin, *A Commentary on Genesis* (1554; Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1965), 487.

¹³ Hengstenberg, *Christology of the Old Testament*, 10.

onlooker may appear quite indistinct and unrecognizable. Little by little, colour and detail are added—nothing is rushed—until it is quite obvious what the finished product will be like. The lack of clarity and the shortage of specific detail must not be misconstrued as marks of error. Nothing is calculated to mislead. The great Artist has the finished picture in his mind’s eye.

As Patrick Fairbairn, Geerhardus Vos and others have shown, there is a fundamental connection throughout. Fairbairn speaks of “the inter-connected and progressive character of prophecy” and uses the analogy of an acorn and an oak tree:

At first, the word of God is as a seed, it may be of the oak, or of any other plant, in which the whole majestic form and various parts of the future lie undisclosed, ready to reveal themselves when the times and the seasons, and other conditions which God has appointed to determine its being, shall have taken their course. And there is no break, nor leap, nor start in its course, which proceeds by a slow, and sweet, and beautiful progression, to perfect that purpose or word of God, which said at the beginning, “Let the earth bring forth grass, the herb that yields seed, and the fruit tree that yields fruit according to its kind, whose seed is in itself.”¹⁴

Vos insists that “in the seed-form the minimum of indispensable knowledge was already present.”¹⁵ From the first moment of creation, God has one overriding thought in his mind—his Son and his people. Even as God creates Eve from the side of Adam and presents her back to him, so we glimpse the creation of a people through the Son to be returned to him, bound to him by love in the closest of ties, for all eternity. The centre and soul of the Old Testament is the same as that of the New Testament. It is Christ and his church.

In the Old Testament, it is evident that a divinely determined principle of selectivity is in operation. In the formula, “Thus says the

¹⁴ Patrick Fairbairn, *Prophecy: Viewed in Respect to Its Distinctive Nature, Its Special Function, and Proper Interpretation* (1865; Grand Rapids: Baker, 1976), 178.

¹⁵ Geerhardus Vos, *Biblical Theology: Old and New Testaments* (1948; Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1975), 7.

LORD,” there is a single principle, a single understanding of all prophetic revelation which left the prophets and the people in no doubt concerning the divine disclosure: “no prophecy of Scripture is of any private interpretation, for prophecy never came by the will of man, but holy men of God spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit” (2 Peter 1:20–21).

If the *key*, then, for an orderly and progressive arrangement of the subjects, themes and teachings of the Old Testament is *Christ and his church*, then a related question arises: Were the Old Testament authors consciously aware of this theme? Did the prophets understand what they uttered? The apostle Peter provides the answer. Writing to New Covenant believers in the dispersion he says,

Of this salvation the prophets have inquired and searched carefully, who prophesied of the grace that would come to you, searching what, or what manner of time, the Spirit of Christ who was in them was indicating when He testified beforehand the sufferings of Christ and the glories that would follow. To them it was revealed that, not to themselves, but to us they were ministering the things which now have been reported to you through those who have preached the gospel to you by the Holy Spirit sent from heaven—things which angels desire to look into (1 Peter 1:10–12).

It would seem that not only the *prophets* wanted to understand God’s purposes in Christ—the *angels* in heaven were also intrigued by what God was doing and revealing to the Old Testament church (Romans 16:25–26; Ephesians 3:9). Yet while the prophets studied the revelation at the time to understand its meaning and its application, they were not ignorant of the general drift or scheme which united their words with the past and pointed on toward the future.

By theophany, type and prophecy the way is prepared for the coming of the Son of God to earth. Israel’s history is itself part of the prophetic preparation. With Patrick Fairbairn we affirm: “Christ...is the end of the *history* as well as of the *law* of the Old Testament” (emphasis added).¹⁶

¹⁶ Fairbairn, *The Typology of Scripture*, 72.

The author of Hebrews welds together the revelation of God in the Old Testament and the revelation of God in Christ when he says, “God, who at various times and in various ways spoke in time past to the fathers by the prophets, has in these last days spoken to us by His Son” (Hebrews 1:1–2).

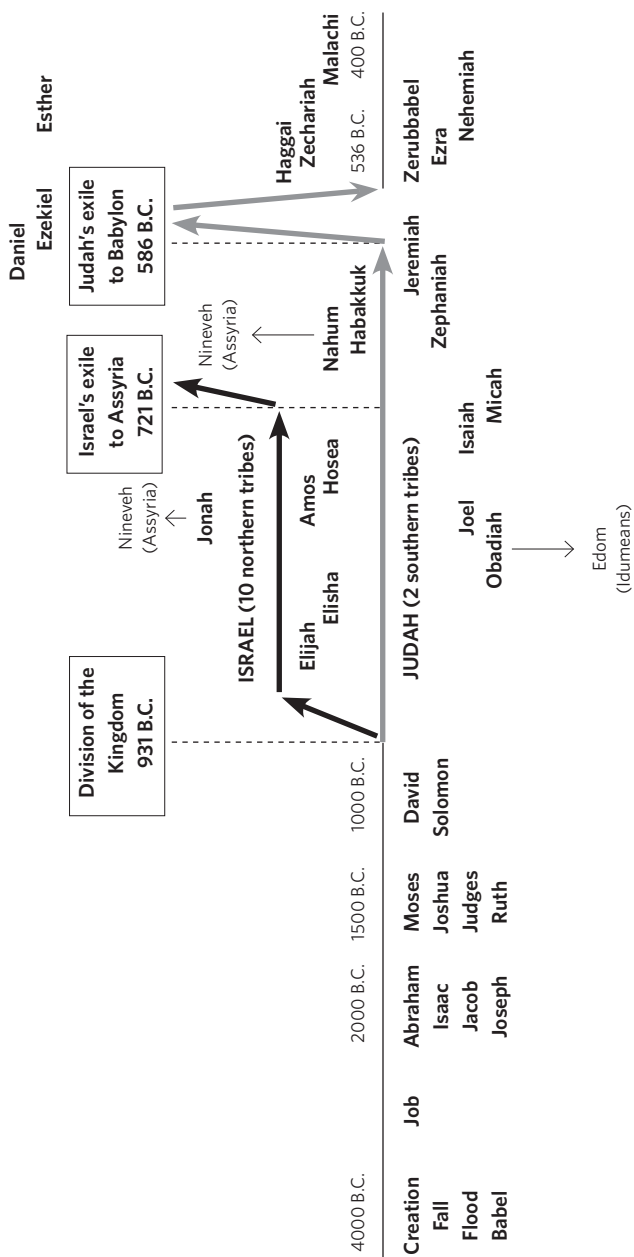
The history of Israel is the history of the Old Testament church preparing for the coming of the Redeemer. It also provides analogies and insights into the New Testament church in its conflicts and ultimate victory in Christ. Since the days of Eve, the church (i.e. the Old Testament church) has been “with child”—crying “out in labour and in pain to give birth” (Revelation 12:2). Satan has been constantly active seeking to destroy “her child [i.e. Christ] as soon as it was born” (Revelation 12:4). Once the child-king is born, he is “caught up to God and to His throne” (Revelation 12:5). Unable to molest the child further, Satan turns his attention back to the woman (now the New Testament church) who “fled into the wilderness, where she has a place prepared by God, that they should feed her there” (Revelation 12:6).

There is a living *union* between the Old Testament church and the New Testament church. The unity of the people of God in all ages is not simply the participation in a common salvation. It is an integral unity which means that the blessings of the inheritance promised to the remnant in the Old Testament are blessings shared by the church in the New. We share the same faith, the same hope, as the believing Jews of the Old Testament. United under our common Head, we will *together* inherit the promised blessings: “And all these, having obtained a good testimony through faith, did not receive the promise, God having provided something better for us, that they should not be made perfect apart from us” (Hebrews 11:39–40).

It is not only our Lord and Saviour who has this solid bond with the past, and especially with the history recorded in the books of the Old Testament (see Figure 1); we too have an unbroken (and unbreakable) link with Old Testament history. It is not only Christ who is to be seen there, it is his church also. Christians have an inseparable bond with the history of the Old Testament: “Israel’s theology—and ours—is rooted in history.”¹⁷ Furthermore, the history of Israel is *our* history:

¹⁷ Walter C. Kaiser Jr., *Toward an Old Testament Theology* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1978), 41.

Figure 1. Chronology of the Old Testament



How far the prophets extended into each reign is not known. Other, lesser-known prophets also ministered in the days before the Babylonian exile.

For you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus. For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus. And if you are Christ's, then you are Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise (Galatians 3:26–29).

Conclusion

The Bible's story is about Christ. History is *his story*. The Old Testament Scriptures outline the remarkable steps which the Father took to prepare for the coming of his Son. Those who believe the Old Testament Scriptures receive Jesus Christ as that long-awaited Son and deliverer (John 5:39–40, 45–47). These sacred writings “are able to make you wise for salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus” (2 Timothy 3:15). They act as “our tutor to bring us to Christ, that we might be justified by faith” (Galatians 3:24).

The Old Testament is the logical introduction, the firm foundation and the ultimate authority for the life of Christ recorded in the New Testament. The *whole* Bible is God's message about his Son, our Saviour. *God's chief purpose in writing this book was to reveal Christ*. The Old Testament is the *preparation* for Christ. The New Testament is the *manifestation* of Christ. The Scriptures reveal Christ from Genesis to Revelation. The entire Bible finds meaning in him. Jesus Christ is the origin, the substance and the object of all divine revelation:

In a word, the blessed Redeemer, whom the Gospel reveals, is Himself the beginning and the end of the scheme of God's dispensations; in Him is found alike the centre of Heaven's plan, and the one foundation of human confidence and hope. So that before His coming into the world, all things of necessity pointed toward Him; types and prophecies bore testimony to the things that concerned His work and kingdom; the children of blessing were blessed in anticipation of His promised redemption; and with His coming, the grand reality itself came, and the higher purposes of Heaven entered on their fulfilment.¹⁸

¹⁸ Fairbairn, *The Typology of Scripture*, 48.

As William Hendriksen asserts, no Old Testament book is “interpreted fully until it is viewed in the light of New Testament revelation.”¹⁹ The fulfilment is always greater than the promise, and the reality than the expectation. To the prophets of the Old Testament, the vision of the Coming One, the promised Seed, was indeed glorious. But greater far is that reality by which we now know the One who loved us and gave himself for us. The mystery of Christ as the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world could only be known in part by the church of the Old Testament.

Christ in all his fulness is presented in the Old Testament: Christ in his offices—as Prophet, Priest and King; Christ in his character—as holy, harmless, undefiled; Christ in his person—as God and man; Christ in his relation to God and humanity; Christ in his body the church; Christ as giving to God all that God requires from his people; Christ as bringing to his people all that they require from God; Christ seen in his suffering; Christ viewed in glory; Christ as the first and the last; the all in all to his people.

“The different books are but God’s chapters in which He arranges and illustrates some one or more of these or other aspects of His Beloved.”²⁰

¹⁹ William Hendriksen, *Survey of the Bible: A Treasury of Bible Information* (Welwyn: Evangelical Press, 1976), 298.

²⁰ Jukes, *The Law of the Offerings*, 18.



JOB

MEANING

(after main character)

AUTHOR

Unknown
(maybe Elihu)

KEY THOUGHT

Trial

THEME

The mystery of suffering

THEME VERSE

***But He knows the way that I take;
When He has tested me, I shall come forth as gold.***

JOB 23:10

JOB / SUMMARY

PART 1 / INTRODUCING JOB	1:1-5
Prosperous and godly Job before his trials	1:1-5
PART 2 / THE HEAVENLY COURT	1:6-12
Satan's first request to afflict Job	1:6-12
PART 3 / DISASTER STRIKES	1:13-22
a. Severe calamity on Job's children, servants and livestock	1:13-19
b. Job's remarkable response	1:20-22
PART 4 / THE HEAVENLY COURT AGAIN	2:1-6
Satan's second request to afflict Job	2:1-6
PART 5 / DISASTER STRIKES AGAIN	2:7-10
Job is infected with a horrible disease	2:7-10
PART 6 / JOB'S FRIENDS ARRIVE	2:11-13
They sit in silence for a week	2:11-13
PART 7 / JOB'S PATIENCE IS EXHAUSTED	3:1-26
a. Job complains about the day of his birth	3:1-5
b. Job desires that the night of his birth be destroyed	3:6-10
c. Job asks why he was born and survived	3:11-16
d. Job declares the grave to be a place of rest	3:17-19
e. Job asks why the suffering man should live when life is unbearable	3:20-26

PART 8 / THE THREE FRIENDS SPEAK**4:1-31:40****1. Round one**

- | | |
|--------------------------|------------|
| a. Eliphaz' first speech | 4:1-5:27 |
| b. Job's first reply | 6:1-7:21 |
| c. Bildad's first speech | 8:1-22 |
| d. Job's second reply | 9:1-10:22 |
| e. Zophar's first speech | 11:1-20 |
| f. Job's third reply | 12:1-14:22 |

2. Round two

- | | |
|---------------------------|------------|
| a. Eliphaz' second speech | 15:1-35 |
| b. Job's fourth reply | 16:1-17:16 |
| c. Bildad's second speech | 18:1-21 |
| d. Job's fifth reply | 19:1-29 |
| e. Zophar's second speech | 20:1-29 |
| f. Job's sixth reply | 21:1-34 |

3. Round three

- | | |
|-------------------------------------|------------|
| a. Eliphaz' third speech | 22:1-30 |
| b. Job's seventh reply | 23:1-24:25 |
| c. Bildad's third speech | 25:1-6 |
| d. Job's eighth reply | 26:1-14 |
| e. Job's final reply to his friends | 27:1-31:40 |

PART 9 / ELIHU ENTERS THE DISCUSSION**32:1-37:24**

- | | |
|--|-------------|
| a. Elihu contradicts Job's three friends | 32:1-22 |
| b. Elihu contradicts Job | 33:1-33 |
| c. Elihu declares God's justice | 34:1-37 |
| d. Elihu condemns self-righteousness | 35:1-16 |
| e. Elihu declares God's goodness | 36:1-23 |
| f. Elihu declares God's majesty | 36:24-37:24 |

PART 10 / THE LORD SPEAKS**38:1-41:34**

JOB / **SUMMARY**

PART 11 / **JOB RESPONDS TO THE LORD**

42:1-6

PART 12 / **THE FINALE—JOB RESTORED
BY THE LORD**

42:7-17

JOB

The Hebrew Old Testament is divided into three major sections: law (*Torah*), prophets (*Nebhiim*) and writings (*Kethubhim*). The Protestant Old Testament is arranged quite differently under four sections: law, history, poetry and prophecy.¹ In our studies so far we have covered the first seventeen books that compose the law (Genesis to Deuteronomy) and history (Joshua to Esther). The book of Job, the eighteenth book of our Protestant Bible, begins the section on poetry (Job to Song of Solomon). The fourth and final section comes under prophecy, and is further subdivided into the major prophets (Isaiah to Daniel) and minor prophets (Hosea to Malachi).

With the exception of the first two chapters and part of the last chapter, the book of Job is written in verse, in the form of poetry—that is, Hebrew poetry, not classical English poetry. Although it is largely written in a poetic style, the people and the events recorded are real. The book of Job is fact, not fiction (James 5:11; cf. Ezekiel 14:14–20).

JOB / AUTHOR

The author is unknown. The fact that the name of the author is nowhere mentioned, either in the book itself or elsewhere in the Bible, means that his identity cannot be determined with any certainty. There may be a hint in Job 32 that Elihu, who remonstrated with Job and his three friends, wrote down the record, but as we have repeatedly noted, certainty about the divine authorship is the point that really matters. The book of Job holds its rightful place in the canon of Scripture.

JOB / HISTORICAL SETTING

The book of Job has been the subject of a great deal of discussion. Many Bible scholars regard this as the oldest book in the Bible. Others place it as late as the Babylonian exile. In favour of the earlier date, we might

¹ See introduction in *The Glory of Christ in the Old Testament / Volume 1: Genesis to Esther* (The Villages: Carey Printing Press, 2020), 1–8.

consider the following factors:

- The length of Job's life; he lived for another 140 years after the experiences described in this book (42:16), placing him in the days of the patriarchs, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob (cf. Genesis 11:10–26; 25:7);
- The fact that Job acts as high priest in his family, in the manner of Abraham, which was not allowed after the Exodus;
- The total silence of Job's "friends" on the miracles surrounding the Exodus and the journey to the land of Canaan. These events are often used to illustrate how God delivers his friends and destroys his enemies;
- The absence of any reference to Jewish festivals and feasts, ceremonies, customs, Sabbaths or priesthood, all of which were established at Mount Sinai.

Eliphaz was a Temanite (2:11) and therefore a descendant of Esau through his eldest son (who was also called Eliphaz) and his grandson Teman (Genesis 36:10–11). These considerations would place Job sometime during or immediately after the time of Jacob. While of the opinion that Job was a contemporary of the patriarchs, E.J. Young presents arguments in favour of the opinion that the book was not actually written until the time of Solomon.²

JOB / **OUTLINE**

PART 1 / **INTRODUCING JOB (1:1–5)**

Job lives in the land of Uz (1:1). The prophet Jeremiah refers to this country: "Rejoice and be glad, O daughter of Edom, you who dwell in the land of Uz!" (Lamentations 4:21). This may be thought to indicate that the land of Uz is identical to, or at least a part of, the land of Edom; however, a more likely explanation is that the land of Uz was not the same as the country of Edom but that the Edomites (also known as Idumeans) had conquered this country that they did not originally

² Edward J. Young, *An Introduction to the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1949), 319–323.

possess. Consequently, Jeremiah speaks of the “daughter of Edom,” not as dwelling in her own country properly, but as dwelling “in the land of Uz,” that is, in a foreign country, of which she had somehow obtained possession.³

Since Job is from the east (1:3), near the wilderness (1:19), and Edom (Idumea) lies to the south of Israel, the majority of commentators favour the location of Uz as east of Israel in the Arabian Desert, probably between Damascus and the Euphrates River, the present-day borderland of Jordan, Iraq and Saudi Arabia.

Though enjoying great prosperity, Job is a truly godly man. He appears as the priest of his household and offers burnt offerings for his large family (1:5).

PART 2 / **THE HEAVENLY COURT (1:6-12)**

The scene changes to the heavenly court. The “sons of God” (later used in a way that could only mean angels, 38:7) assemble, and Satan challenges the sincerity of Job’s piety: “Does Job fear God for nothing?” (1:9). This insinuates that Job is good only for what he can get. This is the crux of the whole book. “Touch all that he has,” says Satan, “and he will surely curse you to your face!” (1:11). In consequence, dreadful calamities are to fall upon Job.

PART 3 / **DISASTER STRIKES (1:13-20)**

Four messengers come to Job. Wave after wave of devastation floods over him. If the blows had not fallen so suddenly and in such quick succession, he might have had time to cope with one before the next bursts upon him. But these calamities fall thick and fast. There is no time to absorb the first shock before the second, and then the third, and then the fourth hit him with merciless ferocity. All Job’s oxen are taken; all his sheep are incinerated; all his camels are stolen and all his servants with them are put to death. Then the fourth messenger appears, informing Job that a great wind has blown down the house where all his children, seven sons and three daughters, were gathered.

³ Albert Barnes, *Notes, Critical, Illustrative, and Practical, on the Book of Job*, 2 vol. (Glasgow: Blackie & Son, 1847), 1:x.

Not one child has escaped. Job responds to the dreadful news:

Naked I came from my mother's womb,
And naked shall I return there.
The LORD gave, and the LORD has taken away;
Blessed be the name of the LORD. (1:21).

This is not the resignation of a man who yields to an inevitable fate which cannot be undone; nor is it surrender to an almighty Ruler who has the right to do as he will with his own; nor is it even the submission of a God-fearing man who surrenders to the sovereign purpose of the living God. There is far more to these words than mere resignation, surrender or godly submission. Job declares the goodness and kindness of God. "The bitterness of his loss is made the measure of the preciousness of the blessings God had given" him.⁴ The *magnitude* of his loss makes him aware of the *magnitude* of God's kindness in giving such blessings in the first place. The more deeply he feels the taking of his children, his servants and his possessions, the greater is his appreciation of God's kindness toward him. Consequently, the more profoundly he grieves, the more fervently he blesses the Lord his God. This is a staggeringly revolutionary way to think about suffering and affliction.

God's testimony to Job is recorded: "In all this Job did not sin nor charge God with wrong" (1:22).

PART 4 / THE HEAVENLY COURT AGAIN (2:1-6)

Back in the heavenly court, Satan makes excuses for the continued piety and godliness of Job, and urges further measures against him: "But stretch out Your hand now, and touch his bone and his flesh, and he will surely curse You to Your face!" (2:5). Permission is granted for Satan to afflict Job in his body, but not to take his life. God has confidence in his servant Job.

⁴ William Henry Green, *The Argument of the Book of Job Unfolded* (1874; Minneapolis: James & Klock, 1977), 88–89.

PART 5 / **DISASTER STRIKES AGAIN (2:7-10)**

Job is afflicted with a dreadful disease. This may have been the disease of elephantiasis, also called black leprosy, a loathsome and dangerous form of leprosy.⁵ The English word “boils” indicates sores—painful, angry, inflamed swellings below the skin. The Hebrew word, here in the singular, suggests a burning sore, an inflamed ulcer, not localized in certain areas but covering the whole surface of the body. Job’s disease seems to have involved ulcerations from head to toe, constantly erupting, accompanied by violent pain and constant restlessness. In elephantiasis, the skin is covered with hard scabs, the legs swell, there is a loss of hair and sense of touch, a swelling of the face and a hoarse, nasal voice. It affects the whole body; the bones as well as the skin are covered with spots and tumours, at first red, but afterward black.⁶ The Scriptures record in some detail the symptoms of Job’s terrible malady:

- He scrapes his body with a broken piece of pot to bring some kind of relief (2:8).
- He suffers insomnia, with constant tossing and turning through the night, longing for the dawn to come. His flesh is covered “with worms and dust.” His skin is ulcerated and constantly breaking out afresh (7:4–5).
- The pain is so intense at times that he bites his flesh (13:14).
- His body is rotting. He is like a moth-eaten piece of clothing (13:28).
- His whole body is wrinkled and emaciated. He is like a walking skeleton (16:8).
- His face is red with crying. His eyelids are dark and shaded like death (16:16).
- He has “one foot in the grave” (17:1).
- His bones cling to his skin and flesh (19:20).
- He has pain in his bones, and constant gnawing pains in his body (30:17).
- His skin turns black and peels away. His bones burn with fever (30:30).

⁵ Young, *An Introduction to the Old Testament*, 324.

⁶ Barnes, *Book of Job*, 1:116.

All this time, Job is oblivious of what is going on in the heavenly court. We have the advantage of reading the additional inspired information. Only the Lord could have communicated these details. Job's total ignorance and absolute bewilderment as to the cause of his suffering must only add far greater distress to this man of God. Job knows nothing of Satan's malicious designs in seeking to prove that his piety is pretence. Job knows nothing of the sovereign purpose of God who means to demonstrate before the world the reality and power of Job's godliness. He is on trial, but not merely for himself: the cause of true religion is represented in him, the cause of God on earth. He is unconscious of the dignity of his position. He does not know that the living God watches him with favour and approval, and confidently predicts the outcome of his trials.⁷

PART 6 / **JOB'S FRIENDS ARRIVE (2:11-13)**

Three friends, Eliphaz, Bildad and Zophar, visit Job to comfort him and sympathize with him in his distress. They are so affected and overwhelmed by the sight of Job's condition that they sit on the ground in silence for "seven days and seven nights...for they saw that his grief was very great" (2:13).

PART 7 / **JOB'S PATIENCE IS EXHAUSTED (3:1-26)**

The visit of his three friends, their long silence and the increasing severity of his pain causes Job to pour out his heart. He complains. He complains about his birth. He asks why he was born. He longs for death. He asks why one suffering so much should live when life is so utterly unbearable.

PART 8 / **THE THREE FRIENDS SPEAK (4:1-31:40)**

The discussions between Job and his three friends go in three cycles. Eliphaz, Bildad and Zophar take turns in presenting their arguments. Immediately following each contribution, there is an account of Job's reply. One friend speaks; Job replies. The second friend speaks; Job

⁷ Green, *The Argument of the Book of Job Unfolded*, 75–76.

replies. The third friend speaks; Job replies. This procedure is followed three times, except in the final round Zophar does not offer any further contribution. Instead, Job makes a final response to all three friends.

The debates, at times heated, are futile philosophical speculations concerning the mystery of suffering. The arguments presented by Job's friends are basically the same: all suffering is the result of personal sin. Job's great sufferings, therefore, must prove him to be a great sinner and a great hypocrite.

Round one

In the first round of discussions, Eliphaz, Bildad and Zophar present their case. Eliphaz says, "Remember now, who ever perished being innocent? Or where were the upright ever cut off?" (4:7). Bildad, more outspoken than Eliphaz, thinks that the death of Job's children is a sign of God's judgement: "If your sons have sinned against Him, He has cast them away for their transgression" (8:4). Zophar is more impetuous than the other two. He condemns what he calls "the multitude of words" and "empty talk" (11:2,3). In the opinion of E.J. Young, part of Zophar's speech (11:7–20) "is of unsurpassed beauty."⁸ Zophar expresses profound and beautiful teaching that the being and ways of the living God are far beyond our comprehension and grasp. Nevertheless, the abiding undercurrent is one of rebuke and censure. Zophar, along with his two companions, assumes that Job is wicked, that he is a hypocrite and consequently abandoned by God. On the basis of this wrong assumption, each of the friends concludes his speech with an appeal to Job to repent so that his prosperity will return. Such misguided treatment can only add further pain to the sufferings of Job.

In Job's replies there is good evidence to suggest that he often shares his friends' outlook as to the connection between suffering and punishment by God. He too, has a low view and limited understanding of the mystery of suffering.

Round two

In the second round, Eliphaz, Bildad and Zophar begin by criticizing Job for the empty words of his replies. They then concentrate on the terrible sufferings and end of the wicked. Bildad begins by criticizing

⁸ Young, *An Introduction to the Old Testament*, 326.

Job and then describes the terrors that await the wicked. He is still holding to his pagan philosophy in regard to suffering. It is during his reply to this fifth challenge and rebuke that Job confesses his unshakable confidence in God and utters the immortal words:

Oh, that my words were written!
 Oh, that they were inscribed in a book!
 That they were engraved on a rock
 With an iron pen and lead, forever!
 For I know that my Redeemer lives,
 And He shall stand at last on the earth;
 And after my skin is destroyed, this I know,
 That in my flesh I shall see God,
 Whom I shall see for myself,
 And my eyes shall behold, and not another.
 How my heart yearns within me! (19:23–27).

Round three

In the third round, the arguments of Eliphaz and Bildad revert back to those of the first round. They maintain that suffering is the result of personal sin. Job defends himself and protests his innocence.

Eliphaz, Bildad and Zophar end their discussions with Job because they think him to be self-righteous.

PART 9 / ELIHU ENTERS THE DISCUSSION (32:1–37:24)

Elihu the Buzite comes nearer the truth in recognizing Job's primary concern for his own integrity. He is angry with Job "because he justified himself rather than God" (32:2). Elihu rebukes the three brethren because they have condemned Job yet provided him with no answer to his problem. Elihu shows that suffering is sometimes God's discipline to restore the backslider:

Man is also chastened with pain on his bed,
 And with strong pain in many of his bones,
 So that his life abhors bread,
 And his soul succulent food.
 His flesh wastes away from sight,

And his bones stick out which once were not seen.
 Yes, his soul draws near the Pit,
 And his life to the executioners.

If there is a messenger for him,
 A mediator, one among a thousand,
 To show man His uprightness,
 Then He is gracious to him, and says,
 “Deliver him from going down to the Pit;
 I have found a ransom”;
 His flesh shall be young like a child’s,
 He shall return to the days of his youth.
 He shall pray to God, and He will delight in him,
 He shall see His face with joy,
 For He restores to man His righteousness.
 Then he looks at men and says,
 “I have sinned, and perverted what was right,
 And it did not profit me.”
 He will redeem his soul from going down to the Pit,
 And his life shall see the light.

Behold, God works all these things,
 Twice, in fact, three times with a man,
 To bring back his soul from the Pit,
 That he may be enlightened with the light of life (33:19–30).

Elihu declares the justice of God, the goodness of God, the righteousness of God and the majesty of God. There is a severity and harshness in his speeches that is stronger than that of the other three friends. What he says seems true enough in itself, but he is still missing the point.

PART 10 / **THE LORD SPEAKS (38:1–41:34)**

God forcefully makes the point that Job, as well as every other human being, has great ignorance about the mysteries of the universe. If he is unable to explain the ordinary and well-known facts of natural history and science, how can he hope to understand and interpret the mystery of the Creator’s dealings with his creation, or even his treatment of his

children? The Lord enumerates a whole range of natural phenomena about which, even to this day, we know so little. He not only challenges Job as to his knowledge and understanding but also as to his power and control.

Can you bind the cluster of the Pleiades,
Or loose the belt of Orion?
Can you bring out Mazzaroth in its season?
Or can you guide the Great Bear with its cubs?
Do you know the ordinances of the heavens?
Can you set their dominion over the earth?

Can you lift up your voice to the clouds,
That an abundance of water may cover you? (38:31–34).

Up until the end of chapter 37, the book has been full of reasoned arguments. When the Lord speaks, he does not use argument to explain himself or convince Job. In fact, the Lord points out the extreme ignorance and limitations in power of the whole of humanity.

PART 11 / **JOB RESPONDS TO THE LORD (42:1–6)**

Job has been humbled by the Lord and senses his appalling ignorance. Job has found peace, a God-given peace, even though all his questions have not been answered. He is released from the confines of his earlier thinking. Job and his sufferings have their place in God's all-wise, incomprehensible providence. Job does not need to understand. He needs no explanation. God is on his throne. God will do what is best. That is to be enough for Job, and that is to be enough for every child of God. Job regrets his questioning and complaining. He repents and yields gladly to the rule of an all-glorious and all-gracious God.

PART 12 / **THE FINALE: JOB RESTORED BY THE LORD (42:7–17)**

The final scene pictures the Lord rebuking Eliphaz, Bildad and Zophar. He commands the three to take sacrifices and to go to Job so that Job may function as a priest and pray for them—"for the LORD had accepted

Job” (42:9). Job readily responded and, after he prayed for his friends, the Lord restored all his losses. Members of his family and his old acquaintances brought him gifts of silver and gold. The Lord gave Job seven sons and three daughters and extended his life “one hundred and forty years, and saw his children and grandchildren for four generations” (42:16). Job received many thousands of sheep, camels, oxen and donkeys. “Indeed the LORD gave Job twice as much as he had before” (42:10).

Job had been fiercely attacked by Satan, and had successfully resisted him. All the ingenuity and power of the Tempter were used to cause Job to turn from his faithfulness to God. He remained steadfast and immovable.

Thus, the Lord vindicates the integrity of Job before his friends, his family and all who read of him. Job is richly blessed and ultimately dies “old and full of days” (42:17).

JOB / CHRIST AND HIS CHURCH

TYPES & PROPHECIES

1. The mystery of suffering

The connection between suffering and the punishment of an individual’s sin has often been wrongly construed. Job’s friends seemed incapable of drawing any other conclusion. Many years later the disciples of the Lord Jesus, seeing a man blind from birth, displayed the same kind of error in their question to the Lord: “Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?” (John 9:2). On that occasion the Lord declared, “Neither this man nor his parents sinned, but that the works of God should be revealed in him” (John 9:3).

In one sense, suffering is indeed the result of sin, for “the whole creation groans and labors with birth pangs” and “eagerly waits for the revealing of the sons of God” (Romans 8:22,19). Sometimes there is a direct connection between an individual’s sin and consequent suffering. Sometimes there is a direct connection between the sin of a parent and the suffering of a child. But often there is no such direct connection. Some human beings suffer more than others. Some suffer “that the works of God should be revealed” in them (John 9:3). Some of the

most godly and spiritual people suffer extraordinarily. Job was tested in this manner. He did not know the reason behind his sufferings. It was for the glory and honour of God.

To jump to the conclusion that all suffering is directly connected to personal sin inevitably increases the suffering of the individual by adding guilt, or shame, and the burden of being seriously misunderstood. Job's sufferings of bereavement, illness and disease were intensified by the rejection he experienced from his friends, grandchildren and wife (19:13–19). He pleads for their sympathy and support: "Have pity on me, have pity on me, O you my friends, for the hand of God has struck me!" (19:21).

One man suffered more in this respect even than Job. He not only suffered the physical and mental agonies associated with crucifixion, together with the inexpressible sufferings of being "made...sin for us" (2 Corinthians 5:21) but he also experienced utter rejection (Matthew 27:46). The psalmist writes prophetically of the Saviour's suffering:

You know my reproach, my shame, and my dishonor;
My adversaries are all before You.
Reproach has broken my heart,
And I am full of heaviness;
I looked for someone to take pity, but there was none;
And for comforters, but I found none (Psalm 69:19–20).

Isaiah prophesied of the Messiah:

He is despised and rejected by men,
A Man of sorrows and acquainted with grief.
And we hid, as it were, our faces from Him;
He was despised, and we did not esteem Him.

Surely He has borne our griefs
And carried our sorrows;
Yet we esteemed Him stricken,
Smitten by God, and afflicted. (Isaiah 53:3–4).

Isaiah confesses his earlier ignorance in misunderstanding the sufferings of the Saviour. He mistakenly assumed that God was punishing

the sufferer for his own sins. Nothing could have been further from the truth. The Saviour provides a wonderful example of how to deal with unjust suffering:

When He suffered, He did not threaten, but committed Himself to Him who judges righteously; who Himself bore our sins in His own body on the tree, that we, having died to sins, might live for righteousness—by whose stripes you were healed (1 Peter 2:23–24).

His sufferings bring an end to our sufferings.

2. The glory of the resurrection

From Job is also drawn the most profound prophecy concerning the resurrection of Christ and his church:

For I know that my Redeemer lives,
And He shall stand at last on the earth;
And after my skin is destroyed, this I know,
That in my flesh I shall see God,
Whom I shall see for myself,
And my eyes shall behold, and not another.
How my heart yearns within me! (19:25–27).

Disease had attacked Job's skin. He was covered with ulcers. The process of decay was so rapid and widespread that he expected he would be utterly consumed. If that were to be his end, he would still hold fast his confidence in God. Job is certain, as Albert Barnes expresses: "He will at length come forth, and I shall be permitted to see him, and shall have the delightful assurance that he settles this controversy in my favour, and declares that I am his friend."⁹ Whatever Job intended by these words, they nevertheless contain a glorious prophecy of the Messiah and the future resurrection.

⁹ Barnes, *Book of Job*, 1:329.

JOB / **CONCLUSION**

The book of Job is about the physical and spiritual experience of a believer of long ago whose faith was tested to the utmost. Its main purpose is not to teach Israelite history, reveal Messianic prophecy, show the necessary steps for salvation or disclose the mission of the church. The underlying message of Job demonstrates, “*Who God is determines what He does*; therefore, we must *trust Him without reservation*.”¹⁰ God always knows what he is doing and why. Our task is to “walk by faith, not by sight” (2 Corinthians 5:7).

Suffering may be the consequences of personal sin, the sin of others or of the sin of the human race. The Lord uses the sufferings of his children for discipline or education. Sometimes he uses our sufferings for purposes that we may never know—to manifest his glory before unbelievers, before friends, before his enemies. The children of God are those

who are kept by the power of God through faith for salvation ready to be revealed in the last time.

In this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while, if need be, you have been grieved by various trials, that the genuineness of your faith, being much more precious than gold that perishes, though it is tested by fire, may be found to praise, honor, and glory at the revelation of Jesus Christ (1 Peter 1:5–7).

God is not obliged to explain himself to us. This is the message of the book of Job.

¹⁰ Irving L. Jensen, *Jensen's Survey of the Old Testament: Search and Discover* (Chicago: Moody, 1978), 261.

JOB / APPLICATION AND REFLECTION

1. God rules

Nothing happens on earth until it is sanctioned in heaven. King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon also learned the great lesson of God's sovereign rule. After behaving for some years as a brute beast, the humbled king declares:

I, Nebuchadnezzar, lifted my eyes to heaven, and my understanding returned to me; and I blessed the Most High and praised and honored Him who lives forever:

For His dominion is an everlasting dominion,
And His kingdom is from generation to generation.
All the inhabitants of the earth are reputed as nothing;
He does according to His will in the army of heaven
And among the inhabitants of the earth.
No one can restrain His hand
Or say to Him, "What have You done?" (Daniel 4:34-35).

The sovereignty of God over all creation is a cause of great reassurance and comfort to those who love him:

Who has directed the Spirit of the Lord,
Or as His counselor has taught Him?
With whom did He take counsel, and who instructed Him,
And taught Him in the path of justice?
Who taught Him knowledge,
And showed Him the way of understanding? (Isaiah 40:13-14).

The apostle Paul reassures all Christians when he declares that God "works all things according to the counsel of His will" (Ephesians 1:11). We who believe rejoice for "our God is in heaven; He does whatever He pleases" (Psalm 115:3). We could not be in better or safer hands!

2. The great adversary

The Lord Jesus likened Satan to "a strong man" (Mark 3:27) powerfully controlling his kingdom. In the book of Job, although the devil is powerful, he is also depicted as subordinate to the living God. The extent of Satan's

power and influence is limited by the Lord:

There is a profound meaning in his appearing here among the sons of God before the Lord. It is designed to express his subordination and subjection to divine control. He cannot act untrammelled and at his own discretion. He is not at liberty to pursue his mischievous designs to whatever extent he may choose. There is a superior restraint to which he is obliged to bow, a superior will that sets limits to his rage.... It is Satan actually exhibited in the attitude of a servant of God, and made subservient to the discipline and training of his people.¹¹

Satan's presence and power in the world are part of God's strategy to discipline and educate his chosen people. Mock combat cannot reflect the real battle. Pretend fighting has no urgency, no motivation, no life-and-death struggle. Spiritual warfare is real. The devil is a formidable foe, an extremely powerful enemy. We underestimate him at our peril. Like the apostle Paul, we should not be ignorant of Satan's devices (2 Corinthians 2:11).

In the book of Job, Satan is seen as mustering a two-pronged attack: open hostility in the form of disasters and affliction, and subtle insinuation through the counsel of Job's friends. In the one, he is the "adversary the devil...like a roaring lion" (1 Peter 5:8). In the other, "Satan himself transforms himself into an angel of light" (2 Corinthians 11:14).

The Lord Jesus faced the full impact of Satan's attack. At the commencement of his ministry, immediately following his anointing, he "was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil" (Matthew 4:1). The Saviour faced the same kind of challenges that confronted Eve in the Garden of Eden: "the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life" (1 John 2:16; cf. Genesis 3:6; Luke 4:3,5,9). Whereas Eve succumbed, the Saviour succeeded. Throughout his life and ministry he "was in all points tempted as we are, yet without sin" (Hebrews 4:15). He knows the power of the Evil One through personal experience. That "serpent of old, called the Devil and Satan, who deceives the whole world" (Revelation 12:9), waited for the coming of the promised child, that he might destroy him (Revelation 12:4). At Calvary, the battle was won. Satan did his worst against the Saviour but the Saviour triumphed. The first gospel promise was fulfilled: Satan inflicted pain upon Christ but Christ inflicted a death blow upon Satan

¹¹ Green, *The Argument of the Book of Job Unfolded*, 42–43.

(Genesis 3:15). In Christ, the church will have the victory for “the God of peace will crush Satan under [our] feet shortly” (Romans 16:20).

“Therefore take up the whole armor of God, that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand” (Ephesians 6:13). Our Father has promised that we will not be tempted beyond what we can endure (1 Corinthians 10:13).

3. Discerning the will of God

Job lived in the years well before the giving of the law at Sinai. Discerning the will of God in the days of the patriarchs was fraught with difficulty. People were dependent on oral tradition (information communicated from one generation to another), infrequent theophanies (appearances of God or “the Angel of the LORD”), dreams (Genesis 20:3; 28:12; 31:11,24; 37:5) and visions (Genesis 15:1). God’s dealings with Moses gave clarity of revelation unknown before (Numbers 12:6–8). The covenant, with its law, sacrifices and priesthood, provided detailed guidelines for all who wanted to faithfully serve the living God. Now that we have the completed Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments, the Lord no longer reveals his will by those former means.

Job’s three friends claimed to know the will of God as they sought to interpret his predicament. Throughout the discussion, Eliphaz backs up his argument by what he has learned from dreams and visions (4:12–16); Bildad substantiates his position by using traditions passed down from previous generations (8:8–10); while Zophar appeals to experience and reason (20:2–3).

Four-thousand years later, in spite of receiving the complete inspired and trustworthy Word of God, the people of God are in danger of being led astray by those who claim a superior knowledge through dreams and visions, worldly wisdom, experience or reason. The apostle Paul warned the Christian church at Colossae:

Beware lest anyone cheat you through philosophy and empty deceit, according to the tradition of men, according to the basic principles of the world, and not according to Christ. For in Him dwells all the fullness of the Godhead bodily; and you are complete in Him, who is the head of all principality and power (Colossians 2:8–10).

Our knowledge and understanding of God, and of God’s dealings with his children, are not to be based on dreams and visions, worldly wisdom,

experience or human reason. “To the law and to the testimony! If they do not speak according to this word, it is because there is no light in them” (Isaiah 8:20). God’s Word alone shall teach us. There is no other foundation on which to build a solid and godly life (Matthew 7:24–25). In his unsurpassed wisdom and great kindness, the Lord by “His divine power has given to us all things that pertain to life and godliness” (2 Peter 1:3). This is contained in the sixty-six books of the Bible.

4. The Lord’s purpose behind suffering

God is equally loving and gracious when He sends affliction and when He sends prosperous abundance.¹²

Job had outstanding faith in God. The Lord described him as “blameless and upright, and one who feared God and shunned evil” (1:1). Nevertheless, Job was not perfect. There was in him that for which he needed to repent, for after being addressed by God and reminded of the Lord’s glory, might and excellence, Job responds, “I abhor *myself*, and repent in dust and ashes” (42:6).

From the beginning of the calamities, Job assumed that all his problems were a result of God’s discipline. He was totally ignorant of what was going on in the hidden, heavenly realm between God and Satan. Engaging in searching self-examination, Job believed himself righteous *before* God and therefore did not deserve the treatment he was receiving *from* God. His treatment was unjust! He questioned God’s goodness, wisdom and justice.

When the Lord confronted him,

[he] answered Job out of the whirlwind, and said:

“Now prepare yourself like a man;

I will question you, and you shall answer Me:

Would you indeed annul My judgment?

Would you condemn Me that you may be justified?” (40:6–8).

The challenge is often heard today, “If God is love and God is almighty, why does he not put an end to suffering?” The answer is complex and begins

¹² Green, *The Argument of the Book of Job Unfolded*, 312.

with the discovery that God himself has experienced the most *unimaginably intense form* of suffering of mind, body and spirit when he allowed Jesus to be crucified at Calvary! That excruciating experience was a unique and outstanding display of God's justice, holiness and amazing, undeserved love to sinners.

For Christians, the love of God *is always* involved in our suffering. The Lord our Creator is always loving, always just, always holy, always gracious, always merciful.

God's Word gives a number of examples of the usefulness of suffering:

a. *Suffering may be an aid to Christian maturity.*

My brethren, count it all joy when you fall into various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces patience. But let patience have its perfect work, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking nothing (James 1:2-4).

b. *Suffering is a means through which the Lord Jesus Christ may be glorified* —“that the Son of God may be glorified through it” (John 11:4; cf. 9:1-3).

that the genuineness of your faith, being much more precious than gold that perishes, though it is tested by fire, may be found to praise, honor, and glory at the revelation of Jesus Christ, whom having not seen you love (1 Peter 1:7-8).

c. *Suffering encourages greater dependence upon God.*

For we do not want you to be ignorant, brethren, of our trouble which came to us in Asia: that we were burdened beyond measure, above strength, so that we despaired even of life. Yes, we had the sentence of death in ourselves, that we should not trust in ourselves but in God who raises the dead (2 Corinthians 1:8-9).

d. *Suffering separates our hearts from this world and prepares us for heaven.*

For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, is working for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory, while we do not look at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen. For

the things which are seen are temporary, but the things which are not seen are eternal (2 Corinthians 4:17-18).

Suffering is to the believer, like a sharp knife that cuts one string after another that binds us to this world and all its glory.

These uses of suffering are by no means the full explanation. Like Job, we are so often ignorant of God's purposes and actions. Trusting in his revealed Word, we know, "His work is perfect; for all His ways are justice, a God of truth and without injustice; righteous and upright is He" (Deuteronomy 32:4).

Oh, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God!
How unsearchable are His judgments and His ways past finding out!

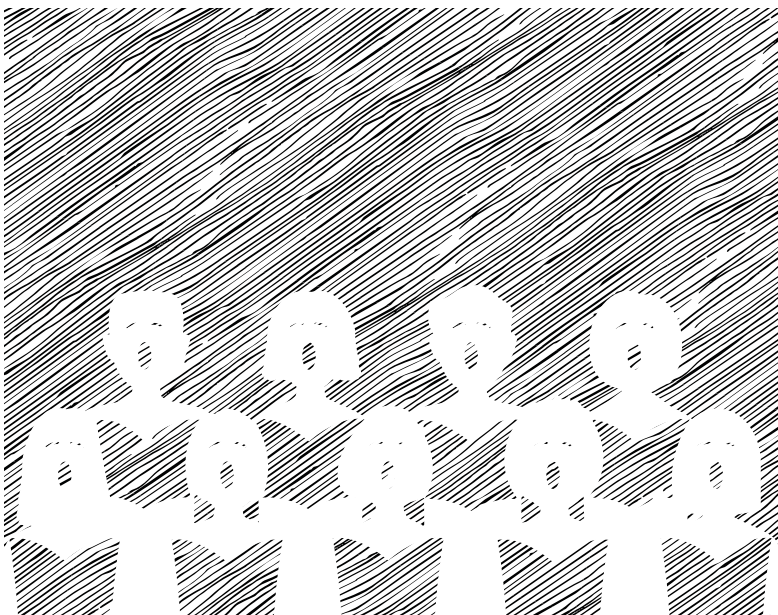
"For who has known the mind of the Lord?
Or who has become His counselor?"

For of Him and through Him and to Him are all things, to whom be glory forever. Amen (Romans 11:33-34,36).

5. All things work together for good

"And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to His purpose" (Romans 8:28). It is easy to understand how God works for our good, when everything is going favourably for us. When all is well with health, family, home, work and church, these things can readily be claimed as evidences of God's blessing. However, the wicked often prosper (Psalm 73:1-16) and the godly often suffer (Psalm 34:19; 2 Thessalonians 1:4-5). Outward circumstances are no indication of God's blessing or his censure. God disciplines those he loves (Hebrews 12:5-11).

When matched against all the spiritual blessings with which we have been blessed "in the heavenly places in Christ" (Ephesians 1:3), any suffering in this present world may be viewed as "our light affliction, which is but for a moment, [and] is working for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory" (2 Corinthians 4:17).



PSALMS

MEANING
**"hymns for
worship"**

AUTHOR
Various

KEY THOUGHT
Worship the Lord

THEME

***Worship: prayer and praise
to the true God***

THEME VERSE

*Oh come, let us worship and bow down;
Let us kneel before the Lord our Maker.
For He is our God.*

PSALM 95:6-7

PSALMS / SUMMARY

The following lists and categories are not intended to be exhaustive.

PSALMS OF WORSHIP

	Psalms
a. Praise	34; 103; 106; 111-113; 115-117; 135; 146-150
b. Thanksgiving	16; 18; 30; 107; 138
c. The God of creation	8; 19; 29; 33; 65; 104; 136; 148
d. The God of history	78; 80-81; 83; 105-106; 136

PSALMS WITH PROPHECIES CONCERNING CHRIST

	Psalms	Fulfilment
a. The humanity of Christ	40:6 8:3-5	Hebrews 10:10 Hebrews 5-9
b. The deity of Christ	110:1-2 45:6-7	Matthew 22:22-45 Hebrews 1:8-9
c. The sonship of Christ	2:7	Acts 13:33; Hebrews 1:5; 5:5
d. The rejection of Christ	118:22-23 41:9	Matthew 21:42; Acts 4:11 Matthew 26:21-25
e. The suffering of Christ	22:1,7-8,16-18 69:20-21 31:5	Matthew 27:35-46; John 20:25 John 19:28-30 Luke 23:46
f. The sacrifice of Christ	40:6-8 34:20	Hebrews 10:5-7 John 19:33,36
g. The resurrection of Christ	16:8-11	Acts 2:25-32
h. The ascension of Christ	68:18	Ephesians 4:8
i. The priesthood of Christ	110:4	Hebrews 5:6,10; 7:21
j. The kingdom of Christ	2:1-2 2:8-9 45:6-7; 72:17; 22:27	Acts 4:25-28 Revelation 2:27; 19:15 Hebrews 1:8-9

PSALMS ABOUT THE EXPERIENCE OF BELIEVERS/THE CHURCH

	Psalms
a. Repentance	6; 32; 38; 51; 102; 130; 143
b. Conversion	32; 40
c. Longing for God	42; 63; 143
d. Cries for help	4; 5; 6; 13; 17; 25; 86; 88
e. Trust and confidence	3; 16; 20; 23; 27; 31; 61; 62; 91; 121
f. Instruction	1; 5; 7; 15; 17; 50; 73; 94; 101
g. The Word of God	1; 19; 119
h. The family	127; 128
i. Old age	71; 92
j. Protection from enemies	35; 52; 58; 59; 69; 83; 109; 137; 140
k. The glory of the church	46; 48; 84; 87; 122; 133

PSALMS

The book of Psalms is a collection of 150 spiritual songs or poems. It is the hymnbook of Israel and contains such breadth and diversity of spiritual experience that it has been a source of inspiration, guidance and comfort to the church of God since its composition. C.H. Spurgeon took twenty years to produce his classic work, *The Treasury of David*. On completion he said,

A tinge of sadness is on my spirit as I quit *The Treasury of David*, never to find on this earth a richer storehouse, though the whole palace of Revelation is open to me. Blessed have been the days spent in meditating, mourning, hoping, believing, and exulting with David. Can I hope to spend hours more joyous on this side of the golden gate? The book of Psalms instructs us in the use of wings as well as words: it sets us both mounting and singing.¹

PSALMS / **AUTHOR**

The Psalms are a collection of works produced by various authors. The superscriptions introducing each psalm are not in the original Scriptures but have been added by scholars of the past who have ascertained the author from the psalm's content or from another part of the Scriptures. David composed at least seventy-three psalms, while twenty-five were composed by David's singers: the descendants of Korah eleven (42; 44–49; 84–85; 87–88), Asaph twelve (50; 73–83), Heman one (88) and Ethan one (89). Of the remaining psalms, Hezekiah composed ten; one or two were written by or for Solomon (72; maybe 127); Moses wrote one (90); and about forty are anonymous. It is likely that David also composed some of this latter group: Psalm 2 is credited to his authorship by the apostles (Acts 4:25).

The sons of Korah were one of the oldest Levitical families, long before the time of David, and related to the still more ancient family of Kohath, the son of Levi. In the time of David, Heman the son of Joel,

¹ Quoted by Robert Lee, *The Outlined Bible: An Outline and Analysis of Every Book in the Bible* (London: Pickering and Inglis, 1930), analysis no. 19.

a member of this family, became noted for his skill in music and song. The Kohathites and Korahites had a reputation for praising “the LORD God of Israel with voices loud and high” (2 Chronicles 20:19).

It is surprising that so few psalms, two at most in this collection, are credited to Solomon, since Scripture testifies, “He spoke three thousand proverbs, and his songs were one thousand and five” (1 Kings 4:32).

PSALMS / HISTORICAL SETTING

The Psalms cover a long period of Jewish history, about 900 years, from the time of Moses (Psalm 90) to the time of the return from the Babylonian exile (Psalm 126), though the vast majority fall within the period 1,000 B.C. to 500 B.C. They comprise the hymnbook of the Old Testament people of God and have long been the inspired praise-and-prayer book of the saints of both the Old and New Covenants.

Hebrew poetry

Hebrew poetry is quite distinct from English poetry, ancient or modern. It is distinguished by certain peculiarities and characteristics. Its principal feature is not rhyme, but *parallelism*, for example:

Do not keep silent, O God!
Do not hold Your peace,
And do not be still, O God! (83:1).

Here we can see that the second and third lines (in the English version) express a thought that is parallel in meaning to the first line.

Three basic forms of parallelism have been identified.

1. *Synonymous parallelism*, in which the same thought is repeated in almost the same words:

Hear this, all peoples;
Give ear, all inhabitants of the world (49:1).

2. *Antithetical parallelism*, in which a thought is expressed by means of contrast with its opposite:

For His anger is but for a moment,
His favor is for life (30:5).

3. *Synthetic parallelism*, in which the second line completes, or fills out, the thought of the first:

Many are the afflictions of the righteous,
But the LORD delivers him out of them all (34:19).

There are many more features of Hebrew poetry, but parallelism is the major characteristic.²

PSALMS / **OUTLINE**

While each psalm is complete in itself, the book of Psalms in the Hebrew text has five sections: 1–41; 42–72; 73–89; 90–106 and 107–150. Many attempts have been made to explain how this fivefold division came into being and why. The only link seems to be some sort of agreement with the fivefold division of the Pentateuch.³ Supposedly there is an attempted comparison between Genesis and Book 1 of the Psalms (1–41), Exodus and Book 2 (42–72), Leviticus and Book 3 (73–89), Numbers and Book 4 (90–106) and Deuteronomy and Book 5 (107–150). Some commentators such as Robert Lee, Irving Jensen and the contributors to *The Companion Bible*, have tried to develop this approach further. Robert Lee, for example, has:

Book 1: Man—his state of blessedness, fall and recovery

Book 2: Israel's ruin, Redeemer and redemption

Book 3: The sanctuary

Book 4: The earth

Book 5: The Word of God.⁴

² For a fuller discussion of the characteristics of Hebrew poetry, see Edward J. Young, *An Introduction to the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1949), 291–296.

³ H.C. Leupold, *Exposition of the Psalms* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1969), 1.

⁴ Lee, *The Outlined Bible*, analysis no. 19; see also Irving L. Jensen, *Jensen's Survey of the Old Testament: Search and Discover* (Chicago: Moody, 1978), 280.

This seems a forced arrangement. Did the Lord really intend that such a structure and such an identity should be understood? By contrast it might be argued that the recurring themes of misery, deliverance, praise and gratitude are so randomly scattered throughout the Psalms, and even on occasions in the same psalm (e.g. 95), that the conclusion of William Hendriksen seems inevitable:

Any attempt to give a material outline of the entire Psalter, with a different descriptive phrase or title for each book, would necessarily fail. The only division that can be made is the merely formal one, into the five recognized books.⁵

Though thoroughly interwoven, nevertheless three major themes can be identified in the book of Psalms: worship, prophecies concerning Christ and the experience of the church.

WORSHIP

1. The worship of God

The prime motive in worship is to acknowledge, praise, magnify and adore the living God who is Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

God is to be worshipped *for who he is*—that is, for the beauty and magnificence of his being and character:

Bless the LORD, O my soul;
And all that is within me, bless His holy name! (103:1).

Great is the LORD, and greatly to be praised
In the city of our God,
In His holy mountain (48:1).

Righteousness and justice are the foundation of Your throne;
Mercy and truth go before Your face.
Blessed are the people who know the joyful sound!
They walk, O LORD, in the light of Your countenance (89:14–15).

⁵ William Hendriksen, *Survey of the Bible: A Treasury of Bible Information* (Welwyn: Evangelical Press, 1976), 282.

Give to the LORD, O families of the peoples,
 Give to the LORD glory and strength.
 Give to the LORD the glory due His name;
 Bring an offering, and come into His courts.
 Oh, worship the LORD in the beauty of holiness!
 Tremble before Him, all the earth (96:7–9).

Not unto us, O LORD, not unto us,
 But to Your name give glory,
 Because of Your mercy,
 Because of Your truth (115:1).

Your mercy, O LORD, is in the heavens;
 Your faithfulness reaches to the clouds.
 Your righteousness is like the great mountains;
 Your judgments are a great deep;
 O LORD, You preserve man and beast (36:5–6).

God is to be worshipped *for what he has done and is doing for all his creation:*

The heavens declare the glory of God;
 And the firmament shows His handiwork (19:1).

O LORD, our Lord,
 How excellent is Your name in all the earth,
 Who have set Your glory above the heavens! (8:1).

The eyes of all look expectantly to You,
 And You give them their food in due season.
 You open Your hand
 And satisfy the desire of every living thing (145:15–16).

God is to be worshipped *for what he has done and is doing for his people:*

Bless the LORD, O my soul,
 And forget not all His benefits (103:2).

I will sing to the LORD,
Because He has dealt bountifully with me (13:6).

I will love You, O LORD, my strength.
The LORD is my rock and my fortress and my deliverer;
My God, my strength, in whom I will trust;
My shield and the horn of my salvation, my stronghold (18:1–2).

I will extol You, O LORD, for You have lifted me up,
And have not let my foes rejoice over me (30:1).

It is good to give thanks to the LORD,
And to sing praises to Your name, O Most High;
To declare Your lovingkindness in the morning,
And Your faithfulness every night (92:1–2).

Oh, sing to the LORD a new song!
For He has done marvelous things;
His right hand and His holy arm have gained Him the victory.
The LORD has made known His salvation;
His righteousness He has revealed in the sight of the nations (98:1–2).

This is the benchmark of true worship. When much of modern-day worship is judged by this criteria, there is a staggering and lamentable lack. Many modern songs are self-centred and fall beneath this standard. Some churches also exhibit a low view of worship when they rush through “the preliminaries” (that is, singing, prayer and the reading of Scripture) in order to reach the sermon as soon as possible.

It is the duty and privilege of every human being to worship the living God. “The wrath of God is revealed from heaven...because, although they knew God, they did not glorify Him as God, nor were thankful” (Romans 1:18,21).

The whole of creation is called upon to worship the Lord:

Praise the LORD!
Praise the LORD from the heavens;
Praise Him in the heights!
Praise Him, all His angels;

Praise Him, all His hosts!
 Praise Him, sun and moon;
 Praise Him, all you stars of light!
 Praise Him, you heavens of heavens,
 And you waters above the heavens!

Let them praise the name of the LORD,
 For He commanded and they were created.
 He also established them forever and ever;
 He made a decree which shall not pass away.

Praise the LORD from the earth,
 You great sea creatures and all the depths;
 Fire and hail, snow and clouds;
 Stormy wind, fulfilling His word;
 Mountains and all hills;
 Fruitful trees and all cedars;
 Beasts and all cattle;
 Creeping things and flying fowl;
 Kings of the earth and all peoples;
 Princes and all judges of the earth;
 Both young men and maidens;
 Old men and children.

Let them praise the name of the LORD,
 For His name alone is exalted;
 His glory is above the earth and heaven (148:1–13).

Other psalms are filled with the praise of God for who he is, what he has done and what he is yet to do (29; 32; 41; 66; 104-106; 111; 113; 116; 117; 124; 129; 135, 136; 138, 139; 146, and 150).

Sing praise to the LORD, you saints of His,
 And give thanks at the remembrance of His holy name. (30:4).

God is to be thanked and praised in every prayer we utter:

Therefore by Him [Jesus] let us continually offer the sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of our lips, giving thanks to His name (Hebrews 13:15).

We worship the Father through his beloved Son and by the enabling power of the Holy Spirit for “true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth” (John 4:23). Conscious of God’s righteousness, glorious grace and wonderful purpose, we extol and magnify his holy name:

Bless the LORD, O my soul;
And all that is within me, bless His holy name!
Bless the LORD, O my soul,
And forget not all His benefits (103:1–2).

2. Congregational blessing

Interwoven with the worship of God are encouragement, stimulus and blessing which one believer gives to another. This is so clearly stated in the New Testament:

Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom, teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord (Colossians 3:16).

Be filled with the Spirit, speaking to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord, giving thanks always for all things to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ (Ephesians 5:18–20).

This aspect of the benefit to others is clearly evident in the Psalms also:

I will bless the LORD at all times;
His praise shall continually be in my mouth.
My soul shall make its boast in the LORD;
The humble shall hear of it and be glad.
Oh, magnify the LORD with me,
And let us exalt His name together (34:1–3).

Rejoice in the LORD, O you righteous!
For praise from the upright is beautiful (33:1).

Congregational singing is to be a source of encouragement and instruction to fellow believers.

3. Personal blessing

A third element in worship is the benefit and blessing believers experience personally, when they engage their minds, hearts and spirits in the enjoyment of God:

Praise the LORD!
For it is good to sing praises to our God;
For it is pleasant, and praise is beautiful (147:1).

God is our refuge and strength,
A very present help in trouble.
Therefore we will not fear (46:1–2).

I will praise You, O LORD, with my whole heart;
I will tell of all Your marvelous works.
I will be glad and rejoice in You;
I will sing praise to Your name, O Most High (9:1–2).

Some of the psalms are both a thanksgiving to God and a testimony to fellow Christians:

I waited patiently for the LORD;
And He inclined to me,
And heard my cry.
He also brought me up out of a horrible pit,
Out of the miry clay,
And set my feet upon a rock,
And established my steps.
He has put a new song in my mouth—
Praise to our God;
Many will see it and fear,
And will trust in the LORD (40:1–3).

4. Types of psalms

The book of Psalms is an assortment of poems, prayers and hymns of worship which address God in praise and adoration. Many of the psalms were regularly used by the Israelites in their worship services. Each psalm is complete in itself, often a spontaneous outpouring of emotion in response to an event or occurrence which has confronted the psalmist. There is no orderly theological reasoning but the impassioned cry of the believer's heart in praise, pleas, confession and intercessions.

a. *Wisdom psalms*

Instruction in righteousness and guidance for life

Many of these psalms contrast the condition of those who reject God with those who delight in God and his rule. They have proved especially helpful to people when they are facing difficult decisions and desire to know God's will and his direction for living (1; 19; 32; 34; 37; 50; 52; 53; 73; 119).

Blessed is the man
Who walks not in the counsel of the ungodly,
Nor stands in the path of sinners,
Nor sits in the seat of the scornful;
But his delight is in the law of the LORD,
And in His law he meditates day and night (1:1–2).

Rest in the LORD, and wait patiently for Him;
Do not fret because of him who prospers in his way,
Because of the man who brings wicked schemes to pass.
Cease from anger, and forsake wrath;
Do not fret—it only causes harm.

For evildoers shall be cut off;
But those who wait on the LORD,
They shall inherit the earth (37:7–9).

The law of the LORD is perfect, converting the soul;
The testimony of the LORD is sure, making wise the simple;

The statutes of the LORD *are* right, rejoicing the heart;
 The commandment of the LORD is pure, enlightening the eyes;
 The fear of the LORD is clean, enduring forever;
 The judgments of the LORD are true *and* righteous altogether.
 More to be desired *are they* than gold,
 Yea, than much fine gold;
 Sweeter also than honey and the honeycomb.
 Moreover by them Your servant is warned,
 And in keeping them *there is* great reward (19:7–11).

b. Royal psalms

Prayers regarding the king and the King of kings

These psalms relate both to the earthly king—often David—and the heavenly King—Christ (2; 18; 20; 21; 45; 72; 89; 101; 110; 132). Sometimes the earthly and the heavenly are combined.

“Yet I have set My King
 On My holy hill of Zion.”

“I will declare the decree:
 The LORD has said to Me,
 ‘You *are* My Son,
 Today I have begotten You.
 Ask of Me, and I will give You
 The nations *for* Your inheritance,
 And the ends of the earth *for* Your possession” (2:6–8).

Give the king Your judgments, O God,
 And Your righteousness to the king’s Son.
 He will judge Your people with righteousness,
 And Your poor with justice.
 The mountains will bring peace to the people,
 And the little hills, by righteousness.
 He will bring justice to the poor of the people;
 He will save the children of the needy,
 And will break in pieces the oppressor.

They shall fear You
 As long as the sun and moon endure,
 Throughout all generations (72:1–5).

The New Testament apostle Paul wrote in similar fashion:

Therefore I exhort first of all that supplications, prayers, intercessions, *and* giving of thanks be made for all men, for kings and all who are in authority, that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and reverence. For this is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Savior, who desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth. For *there* is one God and one Mediator between God and men, *the* Man Christ Jesus, who gave Himself a ransom for all (1 Timothy 2:1–6).

This prayer is focused on the honour and praise of the King of kings and the promotion of his gospel.

c. Lament psalms

A passionate expression of grief or sorrow

These psalms pour from a broken heart seeking consolation and comfort. Sometimes there is a cry of repentance, at other times deep sorrow caused by suffering—physical, emotional or spiritual (4; 6; 13; 25; 38; 39; 42; 43; 44; 51; 60; 80; 88; 90; 102; 120; 130).

For my days are consumed like smoke,
 And my bones are burned like a hearth.
 My heart is stricken and withered like grass,
 So that I forget to eat my bread.
 Because of the sound of my groaning
 My bones cling to my skin (102:3–5).

Why are you cast down, O my soul?
 And why are you disquieted within me?
 Hope in God;
 For I shall yet praise Him,
 The help of my countenance and my God (42:11).

Have mercy upon me, O God,
 According to Your lovingkindness;
 According to the multitude of Your tender mercies,
 Blot out my transgressions.
 Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity,
 And cleanse me from my sin.

For I acknowledge my transgressions,
 And my sin is always before me (51:1–3).

d. Deliverance psalms

A longing for God to intervene and rescue

These psalms express the thoughts and emotions of believers in times of desperation and anxiety. There are those that spring from the heart of an individual believer and some that flow from a company of believers (7; 13; 22; 54; 59; 71; 74; 85; 140; 141; 143).

Deliver me from my enemies, O my God;
 Defend me from those who rise up against me.
 Deliver me from the workers of iniquity,
 And save me from bloodthirsty men (59:1–2).

Keep me, O LORD, from the hands of the wicked;
 Preserve me from violent men,
 Who have purposed to make my steps stumble.
 The proud have hidden a snare for me, and cords;
 They have spread a net by the wayside;
 They have set traps for me. *Selah*

I said to the LORD: “You *are* my God;
 Hear the voice of my supplications, O LORD (140:4–6).

But You, O LORD, do not be far from Me;
 O My Strength, hasten to help Me!
 Deliver Me from the sword,
 My precious *life* from the power of the dog (22:19–20).

e. Pilgrimage psalms

On the journey to the annual festivals

These psalms may have been sung by thousands of worshippers as they recounted God's kindness in the history of Israel (48; 84; 87; 120–137; 147). There is a sweet combination of reverence and celebration.

I was glad when they said to me,
 "Let us go into the house of the LORD."
 Our feet have been standing
 Within your gates, O Jerusalem!

Jerusalem is built
 As a city that is compact together,
 Where the tribes go up,
 The tribes of the LORD,
 To the Testimony of Israel,
 To give thanks to the name of the LORD (122:1–4).

Great is the LORD, and greatly to be praised
 In the city of our God,
 In His holy mountain.
 Beautiful in elevation,
 The joy of the whole earth,
 Is Mount Zion on the sides of the north,
 The city of the great King (48:1–2).

Praise the LORD, O Jerusalem!
 Praise your God, O Zion!
 For He has strengthened the bars of your gates;
 He has blessed your children within you.
 He makes peace in your borders,
 And fills you with the finest wheat (147:12–14).

To Him who divided the Red Sea in two,
 For His mercy *endures* forever;
 And made Israel pass through the midst of it,
 For His mercy *endures* forever;

But overthrew Pharaoh and his army in the Red Sea,
 For His mercy *endures* forever;
 To Him who led His people through the wilderness,
 For His mercy *endures* forever (136:13–16).

f. Enthronement psalms

Rejoicing in the sovereignty of God over all

These psalms describe God's sovereign rule over all (47; 93; 96–99). Through them we acknowledge God as the powerful Creator and sovereign Lord over all his creation.

Oh, clap your hands, all you peoples!
 Shout to God with the voice of triumph!
 For the Lord Most High is awesome;
 He is a great King over all the earth...
 Sing praises to God, sing praises!
 Sing praises to our King, sing praises!
 For God is the King of all the earth;
 Sing praises with understanding.

God reigns over the nations;
 God sits on His holy throne (47:1–2,6–8).

The LORD reigns;
 Let the earth rejoice;
 Let the multitude of isles be glad!
 Clouds and darkness surround Him;
 Righteousness and justice *are* the foundation of His throne

The heavens declare His righteousness,
 And all the peoples see His glory (97:1–2,6).

Every day we are happily to submit to his sovereign rule over everything that exists, including our personal lives.

g. Confidence psalms*Faith and trust in God's love and care*

These psalms express faith in God's care for, and guidance of, his people (4; 16; 23; 27; 31; 61; 62; 86; 125).

Preserve me, O God, for in You I put my trust.

O my soul, you have said to the Lord,

"You are my Lord,

My goodness is nothing apart from You."

As for the saints who are on the earth,

"They are the excellent ones, in whom is all my delight" (16:1–3).

My soul, wait silently for God alone,

For my expectation is from Him.

He only is my rock and my salvation;

He is my defense;

I shall not be moved.

In God is my salvation and my glory;

The rock of my strength,

And my refuge, is in God.

Trust in Him at all times, you people;

Pour out your heart before Him;

God is a refuge for us. Selah (62:5–8).

Those who trust in the LORD

Are like Mount Zion,

Which cannot be moved, but abides forever.

As the mountains surround Jerusalem,

So the LORD surrounds His people

From this time forth and forever (125:1–2).

*h. Justice psalms**Cries for God's righteous justice for those who have been wronged*

These psalms are often called *imprecatory* psalms yet such a title suggests the psalmist is imploring God to put a curse on an enemy or a wicked person. However, they do not contain a curse but rather an *appeal* for the Lord to punish according to his righteous judgment because of the great injustices that have been perpetrated against his people. They call for divine justice rather than human vengeance and ask God to punish the wicked in order that his righteousness be vindicated (5; 12; 35; 40; 55; 58; 59; 69; 70; 79; 83; 109; 139; 140; 143; 144).

Attend to me, and hear me;
 I am restless in my complaint, and moan noisily,
 Because of the voice of the enemy,
 Because of the oppression of the wicked;
 For they bring down trouble upon me,
 And in wrath they hate me.

My heart is severely pained within me,
 And the terrors of death have fallen upon me.
 Fearfulness and trembling have come upon me,
 And horror has overwhelmed me....
 Let death seize them;
 Let them go down alive into hell,
 For wickedness is in their dwellings *and* among them (55:2–5,15).

Draw near to my soul, *and* redeem it;
 Deliver me because of my enemies.

You know my reproach, my shame, and my dishonor;
 My adversaries are all before You.
 Reproach has broken my heart,
 And I am full of heaviness;
 I looked *for someone* to take pity, but *there was none*;
 And for comforters, but I found none.
 They also gave me gall for my food,
 And for my thirst they gave me vinegar to drink.

Let their table become a snare before them,
 And their well-being a trap.
 Let their eyes be darkened, so that they do not see;
 And make their loins shake continually.
 Pour out Your indignation upon them,
 And let Your wrathful anger take hold of them.
 Let their dwelling place be desolate;
 Let no one live in their tents.
 For they persecute the *ones* You have struck,
 And talk of the grief of those You have wounded.
 Add iniquity to their iniquity,
 And let them not come into Your righteousness.
 Let them be blotted out of the book of the living,
 And not be written with the righteous (69:18–28).

Six quotations from Psalm 69 are found in the New Testament.⁶ None of these imply that this psalm is associated with personal revenge. It is justice that is sought from the all-righteous God. There are many incidents which stir up anger and a longing for redress or punishment to be inflicted—the sexual abuse of a child, the beating of an elderly woman, the loss of work through religious persecution or the breakup of a marriage through infidelity. These problems when they arise in our own families are felt acutely, but they are often also sensed intensely when pain is brought on our friends, close neighbours and particularly upon our brothers and sisters in Christ.

The desire for retaliation or revenge can be experienced keenly and there is often anger when something unjust or dreadfully wrong happens. Anger is not necessarily sinful. God himself counsels, “Be angry, and do not sin” (Psalm 4:4; Ephesians 4:26). The safest way to avoid sin in anger is to take the matter immediately to the Lord. After all, the Lord says, “Vengeance is Mine” (Deuteronomy 32:35). The same truth is reiterated and applied in the New Testament. The apostle Paul writes, “Beloved, do not avenge yourselves, but *rather* give place to wrath; for it is written, ‘Vengeance is Mine, I will repay,’ says the Lord” (Romans 12:19). Revenge is never appropriate for a believer. Old Testament saints were taught,

⁶ John 2:17; 15:25; 19:28–29; Acts 1:20; Romans 11:26–27; 15:3.

If your enemy is hungry, give him bread to eat;
 And if he is thirsty, give him water to drink;
 For so you will heap coals of fire on his head,
 And the LORD will reward you (Proverbs 25:21–22).

The same teaching is repeated in the New Testament (Romans 12:19–20).

These justice psalms ask God to deal with the offender. The psalmist is suffering because something wicked has occurred, and he calls on the Lord because evil, wickedness and sin are an affront to God's holiness and righteousness. The psalmist may be thinking about justice for God's servants:

We have become a reproach to our neighbors,
 A scorn and derision to those who are around us.

How long, LORD?
 Will You be angry forever?
 Will Your jealousy burn like fire?
 Pour out Your wrath on the nations that do not know You,
 And on the kingdoms that do not call on Your name (79:4–6).

The psalmist may be confronting the wicked over their contempt for God:

Why do the wicked renounce God?
 He has said in his heart,
 "You will not require *an account*."

But You have seen, for You observe trouble and grief,
 To repay *it* by Your hand.
 The helpless commits himself to You;
 You are the helper of the fatherless.
 Break the arm of the wicked and the evil *man*;
 Seek out his wickedness *until* You find none (10:13–15).

The psalmist may be seeking the encouragement of the righteous and shame of the wicked:

Plead *my cause*, O LORD, with those who strive with me;
 Fight against those who fight against me.
 Take hold of shield and buckler,
 And stand up for my help.
 Also draw out the spear,
 And stop those who pursue me.
 Say to my soul,
 “I *am* your salvation.”

Let those be put to shame and brought to dishonor
 Who seek after my life;
 Let those be turned back and brought to confusion
 Who plot my hurt (35:1–4).

The psalmist may desire the wicked to be taught to fear God:

But God shall shoot at them *with* an arrow;
 Suddenly they shall be wounded.
 So He will make them stumble over their own tongue;
 All who see them shall flee away.
 All men shall fear,
 And shall declare the work of God;
 For they shall wisely consider His doing (64:7–9).

The Lord will take the appropriate action, when and as he chooses:

My defense is of God,
 Who saves the upright in heart.

God is a just judge,
 And God is angry *with the wicked* every day (7:10–11)

In this way, the godly are encouraged to go straight to God in prayer and song and to express their true feelings, thoughts and desires. The people of God are protected against despair by handing their problems over to God:

Cast your burden on the LORD,
 And He shall sustain you;
 He shall never permit the righteous to be moved (55:22).

PSALMS / CHRIST AND HIS CHURCH

PROPHECIES

For 2,000 years there has been difficulty in determining how much of the content of the Psalms is to be understood to refer specifically to the Lord Jesus Christ. Augustine regarded virtually all the Psalms as Messianic.⁷ Few Christian Bible scholars have agreed. Herbert Leupold, for example, claims that Augustine “was, indeed, carrying a New Testament approach beyond the limits that the facts warrant.”⁸ Among modern commentators, the pendulum has swung to the opposite extreme. Even an evangelical like Leupold cautiously concludes, “The Messianic element is by far not as common in the Psalter as we might have supposed.”⁹

In order to avoid the two extremes—regarding most, if not all, of the Psalms as Messianic on the one hand, or regarding few, if any, of them as Messianic on the other—the safe “middle ground” will be adopted: recognizing the Messianic element of the Psalms where there is New Testament authority to do so. This is far from limiting, since the New Testament writers cite from the Psalms more than from any other Old Testament book, with the possible exception of Isaiah. There are at least 70 quotations. Jensen claims there are as many as 116.¹⁰ The actual number depends upon whether certain statements and phrases warrant being designated a quotation.

With the remainder of the Psalms, we will not go far astray if, with Joseph Amyrauld, we keep “our left eye on David, while we have our right eye full on Christ.”¹¹ As Christians throughout the ages have read the

⁷ Augustine, *Expositions on the Book of Psalms*, in *A Select Library of the Nicene and Post Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church*, Philip Schaff, ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1974), vol. 8.

⁸ Leupold, *Exposition of the Psalms*, 20.

⁹ Leupold, *Exposition of the Psalms*, 21–22.

¹⁰ Jensen, *Jensen's Survey of the Old Testament*, 272.

¹¹ Cited by Andrew A. Bonar, *Christ and His Church in the Book of Psalms* (1861; Grand Rapids: Kregel, 1978), ix.

Psalms, they have found “their thoughts wandering to their Lord, as the one Person in whom these breathings, these praises, these desires, these hopes, these deep feelings, found their only true and full realization.”¹²

The Psalms are full of Christ and his church, in prophecy and in personal experience, as expressed by Irving Jensen,

There is a strong prophetic character of the Psalms. Many of the hymns prophesy the suffering and sorrows of God’s people, Israel, and their coming deliverance, restoration, and blessing in a future glorious Kingdom. But, most of all, they prophesy of Christ in His two advents: His first advent in humiliation, and His second advent in glory. Such psalms are called Messianic Psalms. Some of the Old Testament’s most minute prophecies of Christ are found here. They are about His person (God and man); His character (righteous and holy); His work (death and resurrection); and His offices (priest, judge, and king).¹³

On the day of our Lord’s resurrection he appeared to two disciples on the Emmaus Road. As the three of them travelled along the road the Lord reminded them of the Old Testament predictions concerning the sufferings of the Messiah: “‘Ought not the Christ to have suffered these things and to enter into His glory?’ And beginning at Moses and all the Prophets, He expounded to them *in all the Scriptures* the things concerning Himself” (Luke 24:26–27, emphasis added)

That evening, the Lord appeared to the gathering of disciples in the upper room. Here our Lord’s reference to the Psalms is specifically stated: “These are the words which I spoke to you while I was still with you, that all things must be fulfilled which were written in the Law of Moses and the Prophets *and the Psalms* concerning Me” (Luke 24:44, emphasis added).

1. The humanity of Christ

In Psalm 8, the author of Hebrews sees the necessity for the full humanity of Messiah:

¹² Bonar, *Christ and His Church in the Book of Psalms*, ix.

¹³ Jensen, *Jensen’s Survey of the Old Testament*, 275–276.

When I consider Your heavens, the work of Your fingers,
 The moon and the stars, which You have ordained,
 What is man that You are mindful of him,
 And the son of man that You visit him?
 For *You have made him a little lower than the angels*,
 And You have crowned him with glory and honor (8:3–5, emphasis
 added; cf. Hebrews 2:5–9).

Psalms 40:6 also contains explicit reference to the humanity of Christ, as is evident from the quotation found in the letter to the Hebrews.¹⁴ This is confirmed when the author of Hebrews concludes: “By that will we have been sanctified through the offering of *the body of Jesus Christ* once for all” (Hebrews 10:10, emphasis added).

2. The deity of Christ

The words “Messiah,” “Christ” and “Anointed” are interchangeable since they are the Hebrew, Greek and English equivalents respectively. The one Hebrew word for Messiah occurs ten times in the book of Psalms (2:2; 18:50; 20:6; 28:8; 84:9; 89:38,51; 105:15; 132:10,17). In Psalm 105:15, the word is in the plural and refers to Israel. In Psalm 132, the immediate reference appears to be to Solomon. The other seven instances refer to David. The transition in thought from David to the promised Messiah/King is often imperceptible:

It is therefore here invariably applied to the king. The step in advance in the Psalms, however, is, that the Messiah gleams forth occasionally as a King far transcending David, or Solomon, or any mere man. The chief instance of this is in the second Psalm, where the Lord's Anointed is described as the King, the Son of God, the heir of the heavens and of the uttermost parts of the earth, to whom homage is due, whose wrath is perdition, and whose grace is salvation. This Messiah evidently transcends the

¹⁴ See Ernest W. Hengstenberg, *Christology of the Old Testament and a Commentary on the Messianic Predictions* (1847; Grand Rapids: Kregel, 1970), 91–92. It is not easy to explain the insertion of “A body you have prepared for me” in place of “My ears you have opened” (Hebrews 10:5).

limits of humanity; and the ideal once revealed only grows in lustre till it becomes real in the Christ of the New Testament.¹⁵

The Lord Jesus quotes Psalm 110 in order to demonstrate that he is greater than David and existed before David, the clear implication being that of deity.

The LORD said to my Lord,
 “Sit at My right hand,
 Till I make Your enemies Your footstool.”
 The LORD shall send the rod of Your strength out of Zion.
 Rule in the midst of Your enemies! (110:1–2; cf. Matthew 22:42–45).

Many of the Messianic Psalms contain a variety of truths concerning the promised Messiah. Consequently, within a psalm that is predominantly concerned with Christ as King, there may be an explicit declaration of his deity. For example, in Psalm 45: “Your throne, O God, is forever and ever... Therefore God, Your God, has anointed You...” (45:6–7; cf. Hebrews 1:8–9).

3. The sonship of Christ

God the Father declares that Messiah is his unique Son:

I will declare the decree:
 The Lord has said to Me,
 “You are My Son,
 Today I have begotten You” (2:7; cf. Acts 13:33; Hebrews 1:5; 5:5).

The Anointed (that is, Messiah or Christ) against whom the nations react and arise (2:2) is the King of Israel (2:6) and the Son of God (2:7) to whom the Father has given the nations (2:8) and to whom all must yield if they are to find pardon and peace with God (2:10–12).

¹⁵ James G. Murphy, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Book of Psalms* (1876; Minneapolis: James Family, 1977), 29.

4. The rejection of Christ

The Messiah is hated without a cause (35:19; 69:4; cf. John 15:25) and rejected:

The stone which the builders rejected
Has become the chief cornerstone.
This was the LORD's doing;
It is marvelous in our eyes (118:22–23; cf. Matthew 21:42; Mark 12:10; Luke 20:17; Acts 4:11; 1 Peter 2:7).

The apostle Peter links the first of these two verses with later prophecies from Isaiah concerning the church:

Behold, I lay in Zion a stone for a foundation,
A tried stone, a precious cornerstone, a sure foundation;
Whoever believes will not act hastily (Isaiah 28:16; cf. 1 Peter 2:6).

He will be as a sanctuary,
But a stone of stumbling and a rock of offense (Isaiah 8:14; cf. 1 Peter 2:8).

Here Peter demonstrates the two extremes of rejection and acceptance. With the apostle, we testify of Christ that to us “who believe, He is precious” (1 Peter 2:7).

5. The sufferings of Christ

Although the expression, “that the Scriptures may be fulfilled,” often appears in the New Testament (e.g. John 19:24; 13:18) no words are spoken or actions performed in order that the Scriptures may be fulfilled. The nature of prophecy is that predictions are made of that which will be said and done *spontaneously* at a later date. This is particularly relevant to the sufferings of Christ. When he cried out from the cross, he was not consciously searching for an appropriate Scripture to quote—he cried out spontaneously from his agony. Christ did not quote David; David quoted Christ, for the Spirit of Christ told David the words the Saviour would utter 1,000 years before the event (1 Peter 1:11).

Prophecies from Psalm 22 describing the suffering of the Saviour include the following:

My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me? (22:1; cf. Matthew 27:46; Mark 15:34).

All those who see Me ridicule Me;
They shoot out the lip, they shake the head, saying,
“He trusted in the LORD, let Him rescue Him;
Let Him deliver Him, since He delights in Him!” (22:7–8; cf. Matthew 27:39–43; Mark 15:29–32).

For dogs have surrounded Me;
The congregation of the wicked has enclosed Me.
They pierced My hands and My feet;
I can count all My bones.
They look and stare at Me.
They divide My garments among them,
And for My clothing they cast lots (22:16–18; cf. John 20:25; Matthew 27:35; John 19:23–24).

I will declare Your name to My brethren;
In the midst of the assembly I will praise You (22:22; cf. Hebrews 2:11–12).

And from Psalm 31, there is a reference to Jesus’ final moment on the cross:

Into Your hand I commit my spirit;
You have redeemed me, O LORD God of truth (31:5; cf. Luke 23:46).

The New Testament records the sufferings of Christ largely in terms of the external facts: the Lord Jesus is falsely accused, unjustly sentenced, brutally crucified and lovingly buried. But little is recorded in the New Testament about the Saviour’s thoughts and feelings throughout his ordeal. It is in the Psalms that such disclosures are found. Here is insight into the Saviour’s inner agony:

Reproach has broken my heart,
And I am full of heaviness;
I looked for someone to take pity, but there was none;

And for comforters, but I found none.
 They also gave me gall for my food,
 And for my thirst they gave me vinegar to drink (69:20–21; cf.
 John 19:28–30).

The Lord Jesus quotes Psalm 41:9 when he refers to the treachery of Judas. The words that follow in that psalm are particularly pertinent to the Saviour:

Even my own familiar friend in whom I trusted,
 Who ate my bread,
 Has lifted up his heel against me.

But You, O LORD, be merciful to me, and raise me up,
 That I may repay them.
 By this I know that You are well pleased with me,
 Because my enemy does not triumph over me.
 As for me, You uphold me in my integrity,
 And set me before Your face forever (41:9–12; cf. John 13:18).

The experience of the Lord Jesus Christ is strongly connected with the experience of David. The correlation between the Lord and Judas and the relationship of David and Ahithophel goes beyond mere coincidence. Judas and Ahithophel were both trusted friends; both were guilty of terrible betrayal (2 Samuel 15:31; John 13:21; Luke 22:47–48; Matthew 27:3); both committed suicide by hanging themselves when their treachery was disclosed (2 Samuel 17:23; Matthew 27:5). The anguish of David reflects the pain of the Saviour in being betrayed by a close and trusted friend:

For it is not an enemy who reproaches me;
 Then I could bear it.
 Nor is it one who hates me who has exalted himself against me;
 Then I could hide from him.
 But it was you, a man my equal,
 My companion and my acquaintance.
 We took sweet counsel together,
 And walked to the house of God in the throng (55:12–14).

6. The sacrifice of Christ

Sacrifice and offering You did not desire;
 My ears You have opened.
 Burnt offering and sin offering You did not require.
 Then I said, “Behold, I come;
 In the scroll of the book it is written of me.
 I delight to do Your will, O my God,
 And Your law is within my heart” (40:6–8; cf. Hebrews 10:5–10).

This quotation from the Psalms links the death of Christ as a sacrifice with the whole range of sacrifices instituted by God under the Old Covenant at Sinai. The use of the various expressions—sacrifice, offering, burnt offering and sin offering—brings the Levitical sacrifices into sharp focus and emphasizes that the Lord Jesus is the sacrifice to end all sacrifices (Hebrews 10:8–10). His sacrifice was prefigured in the whole range of sacrifices ordained in the past.¹⁶

A connection to the sacrifice of Christ is also made in Psalm 34 where reference is made to the bones of the righteous:

Many are the afflictions of the righteous,
 But the LORD delivers him out of them all.
 He guards all his bones;
 Not one of them is broken (34:19–20).

The apostle John establishes this correlation immediately upon recording the death of the Saviour (John 19:36). The link goes back beyond the psalm to the days of Moses and the insistence that the Passover lamb should not have one of its bones broken (Exodus 12:46; Numbers 9:12). The Passover lamb, first sacrificed in Egypt, was a type of “the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world” (John 1:29). No doubt Satan understood the connection and implications, even if the Jews did not, when he incited the Jewish leadership to ask for the breaking of the legs of the three crucified ones (John 19:31). God once more overruled so that the perfection of the sacrifice of Christ would be utterly and absolutely maintained.

¹⁶ See the chapter on Leviticus in volume 1.

7. The resurrection of Christ

I have set the LORD always before me;
 Because He is at my right hand I shall not be moved.
 Therefore my heart is glad, and my glory rejoices;
 My flesh also will rest in hope.
 For You will not leave my soul in Sheol,
 Nor will You allow Your Holy One to see corruption (16:8–10;
 Acts 2:25–32).

The apostle Peter explains the grounds on which this psalm could not have referred to David but most certainly referred to the Messiah: David died and his body decayed (Acts 2:29–31).

What remarkable insight the Holy Spirit gave to David! “So clear a light was shed over the greatness, the extent, and the range of the divine plan of salvation.”¹⁷ This servant of God not only speaks prophetically of the experiences of Messiah, he is confident of his own resurrection too. As he says later, “As for me, I will see Your face in righteousness; I shall be satisfied when I awake in Your likeness” (17:15); and, “I will dwell in the house of the LORD forever” (23:6).

8. The ascension of Christ

You have ascended on high,
 You have led captivity captive;
 You have received gifts among men (68:18; cf. Ephesians 4:8).

To lead “captivity captive” indicates Messiah’s complete victory; he has led all his enemies captive. The language may also express the idea that he has made captive to himself those who were captives to others, or who were in subjection to another.¹⁸ The Saviour delivers his people from the clutches of Satan. He captures the captured. Slaves of sin are set free in order to become slaves of righteousness (Romans 6:17–18).

¹⁷ F.W. Krummacher, *David—the King of Israel* (1868; Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1982), 509.

¹⁸ Albert Barnes, *Notes, Critical, Illustrative, and Practical, on the Book of Psalms*, 3 vol. (Glasgow: Blackie & Son, 1869) 2:212.

Being a slave of Jesus Christ (Romans 1:1) is real freedom (John 8:31–32, 34–36).

David would have been all too conscious of an apparent conflict in the prophecies between a suffering and a glorified Messiah. He was, however, among those prophets who tried extremely hard to understand the meaning and the timing “of the sufferings of Christ and the glories that would follow” (1 Peter 1:11).

9. The priesthood of Christ

The LORD has sworn
And will not relent,
“You are a priest forever
According to the order of Melchizedek” (110:4; cf. Hebrews 5:6).

Once more the Psalms provide a link between the Old Covenant and the New, for David reveals that the priesthood of Messiah will be “according to the order of Melchizedek,” thus providing a foundation from which great doctrines are developed in relation to the priesthood of Christ (Hebrews 7:1–8:6). It is in being able to trace the Spirit of God behind the events recorded in the Old Testament, and seeing their fulfilment in the Lord Jesus, that Christians are confirmed in their confidence in the living God, the God who breathed out the Scriptures (2 Timothy 3:16; cf. John 5:39). Only God could introduce Melchizedek to Abraham, inspire David with prophetic insight and enlighten the writer to the Hebrews to make the connections.

The writer of Hebrews 7 explains that the priesthood of Christ:

- unites kingship and priesthood together in one (Hebrews 7:1; cf. Zechariah 6:12–13) which was not permitted under the Old Covenant law of Sinai (cf. Hebrews 7:14);
- is a permanent priesthood lasting to eternity (Hebrews 7:3, 25);
- is superior to the priesthood of Aaron (Hebrews 7:7–10).

10. The kingdom of Christ

Why do the nations rage,
And the people plot a vain thing?

The kings of the earth set themselves,
 And the rulers take counsel together,
 Against the LORD and against His Anointed (2:1–2; cf. Acts 4:25–26).

In Acts, the apostles interpret Psalm 2, as applying to the Lord Jesus Christ, to Herod, Pontius Pilate, the Gentiles and the Jews: “For truly against Your holy Servant Jesus, whom You anointed, both Herod and Pontius Pilate, with the Gentiles and the people of Israel, were gathered together” (Acts 4:27). Paul connects the same psalm to the resurrection of Jesus and to the Father’s giving to him “the sure mercies of David” (Isaiah 55:3; Acts 13:33–37). The kingdom of Christ is established after his resurrection: “For He must reign till He has put all enemies under His feet. The last enemy that will be destroyed is death” (1 Corinthians 15:25–26; cf. Ephesians 1:20–23).

Messiah’s kingdom is everlasting:

Your throne, O God, is forever and ever;
 A scepter of righteousness is the scepter of Your kingdom.
 You love righteousness and hate wickedness;
 Therefore God, Your God, has anointed You
 With the oil of gladness more than Your companions (45:6–7;
 cf. Hebrews 1:8–9).

The everlasting reign of Christ is also implicit in Psalm 72. The language of Psalms 45 and 72 is too colourful to apply to earthly kings; the terms are too extravagant if they do not refer to Christ.

There is evident connection in the Messianic Psalms with the prophecy of Nathan concerning David’s kingdom (2 Samuel 7:12–16). Prophecy relating to the covenant with David never, however, loses sight of the covenant with Abraham. The words in Psalm 72:17, “And men shall be blessed in Him; all nations shall call Him blessed” have evident reference to the promise to Abraham (Genesis 12:3). The same is true of Psalm 22:27:

All the ends of the world
 Shall remember and turn to the LORD,
 And all the families of the nations
 Shall worship before You.

In other words, then the blessing of Abraham will have come upon the Gentiles in the person of Christ.¹⁹

PSALMS / **CONCLUSION**

At the time it was written, Psalm 23 was a great blessing to believing Israelites as they celebrated the Lord's goodness and mercy, but it took on even greater significance with the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ. When believers now read, "The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want" (23:1), their thoughts turn to the Good Shepherd who came into the world to lay down his life for the sheep (John 10:11,15). The clearer light of the New Testament has not dimmed the quality of the Psalms and the blessings to be derived from them. In fact, the very opposite is the case. The content of this praise-and-prayer book of God shines all the brighter when seen from a Christ-centred perspective.

The 150 psalms make a unique contribution to the Scriptures. Here are instructions as to how God is to be worshipped and adored "in spirit and truth" (John 4:24), profound insights into the person and work of the Saviour and the deepest spiritual experiences of the human heart.

¹⁹ Patrick Fairbairn, *Prophecy: Viewed in Respect to Its Distinctive Nature, Its Special Function, and Proper Interpretation* (1865; Grand Rapids: Baker, 1976), 182–183.

PSALMS / APPLICATION AND REFLECTION

The experience of the church

Every psalm has relevance, application and blessing for the Christian. Together they contain the longings of the human soul. Here, poetry is adapted to be sung with the accompaniment of the harp or lyre. Such poetry is mainly

an expression of deep *feeling*, and has its foundation in *feeling* or emotion. It is not so much the fruit of the understanding as of the heart; not so much the creation of the imagination as the utterance of deep personal emotion.²⁰

There are psalms for every occasion in life and for every spiritual condition, and they form an ideal basis for personal devotional life. There is no experience of the believer that is not reflected here.²¹ There is the expression of distress, anguish of heart, fear, hope, joy, trust, comfort, thankfulness, devotion to God, deep repentance for sin and delight in God's mercy, pardon and peace. There is a distinctly spiritual purpose behind all of these songs. They are designed to raise the mind above the things of the world, to lift the heart toward God, to inspire confidence in God, to provide comfort in times of trial and affliction and to point forward to a better life ahead for the people of God. Through these lyrics, worshippers hear "soul-stirring truths, uttered with ear-piercing words, but suited to their feelings and pressed on their consciences, and riveted there by the most mighty sanctions of life and death, present and eternal."²²

Through the main contributor, King David, "the sweet psalmist of Israel" (2 Samuel 23:1), God fashioned songs and prayers for all occasions. The Lord raised David in the sheep pasture so that he might identify with the lowly and simple. God took him to war so that he might be filled with thoughts of victory and glory. He placed him in a palace so that his thinking might soar to the heights of majesty and sovereign power. He delivered him to the solitude of the wilderness so that he might quietly contemplate the glorious person and the mighty deeds of the living God. He kept him there for years

²⁰ Barnes, *Book of Psalms*, 1:xix.

²¹ For a sample of the subjects, see the outline at the beginning of this chapter.

²² Bonar, *Christ and His Church in the Book of Psalms*, vi.

within a hair's breadth of death, so that David might be disciplined to trust and to depend upon the providence of God. "His trials were but the tuning of the instrument with which the Spirit might express the various melodies which He designed to utter by him for the consolation and edification of spiritual men."²³

David's personal testimony that he was inspired by the triune God rings clear:

The Spirit of the LORD spoke by me,
And His word was on my tongue.
The God of Israel said,
The Rock of Israel spoke to me (2 Samuel 23:2-3).

The psalms of David provide the church of God with its greatest prayers and greatest praises. There is a prayer for every condition of life. David was an outstanding man of God who, like Elijah, was "a man with a nature like ours" and, also like that prophet, knew how to pray earnestly to the Lord (James 5:17). This man David, with all his faults and failings, soared to the spiritual heights. In him, the grace of God is magnified. God is the friend of sinners. This is the "man after [God's] own heart" (1 Samuel 13:14).

Commenting on the Christian application of Psalm 149:6-9, C.H. Spurgeon wrote,

Under the new covenant, the enemies of the "spiritual house" are spiritual enemies (Ephesians 6:12).... In this Israel was not an example, but a type: we will not copy the chosen people in making literal war, but we will fulfil the emblem by carrying on spiritual war. We praise God and contend with our corruptions; we sing joyfully and war earnestly with evil of every kind. Our weapons are not carnal, but they are mighty, and wound with both back and edge. The word of God is all edge; whichever way we turn it, it strikes deadly blows at falsehood and wickedness. If we do not praise we shall grow sad in our conflict; and if we do not fight we shall become presumptuous in our song. [Verse 6] indicates a happy blending of the chorister and the crusader.²⁴

²³ Bonar, *Christ and His Church in the Book of Psalms*, vii.

²⁴ Charles Haddon Spurgeon, *The Treasury of David*, 3 vol. (1876; Grand Rapids: Hendrickson, 1990), 3:454.



PROVERBS

MEANING

"brief sayings expressing wisdom"

AUTHOR

Solomon
(mainly)

KEY THOUGHT

The fear of the Lord

THEME

Godliness is intensely practical

THEME VERSE

***The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge,
But fools despise wisdom and instruction.***

PROVERBS 1:7

PROVERBS / **SUMMARY**

PART 1 / **CONDUCT APPROPRIATE FOR YOUTH 1:1-9:18**

- | | |
|---|----------|
| 1. Introduction | 1:1-6 |
| 2. Proverbs for Solomon
Fourteen addresses introduced by the phrase
"My son" | 1:7-9:18 |

PART 2 / **CONDUCT APPROPRIATE FOR THE MATURE YEARS 10:1-24:34**

- | | |
|---|-------------|
| 1. Proverbs by Solomon
Contrasts between good and evil, wisdom
and foolishness | 10:1-19:26 |
| 2. Proverbs for Solomon
Six addresses introduced by the phrase
"My son" | 19:27-24:34 |

PART 3 / **VARIOUS COMPARISONS, CONTRASTS AND DESCRIPTIONS 25:1-31:31**

- | | |
|--|------------|
| 1. Proverbs by Solomon
Edited by King Hezekiah's scribes | 25:1-26:28 |
| 2. Proverbs for Solomon | 27:1-29:27 |
| 3. Proverbs by Augur, son of Jakeh | 30:1-33 |
| 4. Proverbs by the mother of King Lemuel
The verses in the final section (31:10-31) are
arranged in Hebrew in acrostic form | 31:1-31 |

PROVERBS

The Protestant Old Testament is arranged in four sections:

Law	Genesis to Deuteronomy
History	Joshua to Esther
Poetry	Job to Song of Solomon
Prophecy	Major Prophets: Isaiah to Daniel Minor Prophets: Hosea to Malachi

Proverbs is the third book in the poetry division. Sometimes it is combined with Job and Ecclesiastes under the collective title of “Wisdom Literature.”

The English word *proverb* is a translation of the Hebrew word *mashal*, which comes from a root word meaning “to be like,” or “to represent.” Most of the proverbs use comparison in order to communicate their truths, for example: “The refining pot is for silver and the furnace for gold, but the LORD tests the hearts” (17:3). In the KJV, *mashal* is translated nineteen times by the word *proverb* and eighteen times by the word *parable*. *Mashal* has been defined as: “a brief, pithy saying which expresses wisdom.”¹

Every culture has its proverbial sayings, its witticisms. This book, however, is not simply a collection of such maxims or wise sayings from the nation of Israel. “Underneath the superficial resemblance there is a fundamental difference between the witticisms of the nations and the proverbs of God’s Word.”² These proverbs are included in the literature which is “given by inspiration of God” (2 Timothy 3:16–17). This is wisdom from God. These proverbs or maxims set out what is right and what is wrong in the sight of the living God, who is all-wise and all-holy. They show the practical outworking of godliness in the spiritual, moral and social spheres. There is a universal appeal: neither Israel nor Jerusalem are referred to in Proverbs (nor incidentally in

¹ Edward J. Young, *An Introduction to the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1949), 311.

² William Hendriksen, *Survey of the Bible: A Treasury of Bible Information* (Welwyn: Evangelical Press, 1976), 283.

the other wisdom literature in Job and Ecclesiastes). Here the wise man is the one who lives his life according to the revealed will of God. He walks in the way of truth and righteousness. Consequently, he is blessed by God and he knows real contentment and peace.

PROVERBS / **AUTHOR**

The book itself contains indications of its authorship:

- “The proverbs of Solomon the son of David, king of Israel” (1:1; cf. 10:1).
- “The words of the wise” (22:17; 24:23; cf. Ethan, Heman, etc., in 1 Kings 4:31).
- “These also are proverbs of Solomon which the men of Hezekiah king of Judah copied” (25:1). These proverbs were added to the collection about 200 years after Solomon’s death in 931 B.C. The “men of Hezekiah” may have included the prophets Isaiah and Micah, who were engaged in their ministries at that time.
- “The words of Agur the son of Jakeh, his utterance” (30:1).
- “The words of King Lemuel, the utterance which his mother taught him” (31:1).

These references strongly suggest that Solomon was responsible for composing or compiling the majority of the proverbs and pithy sayings contained in this book. It was King Solomon, son of King David, who “spoke three thousand proverbs, and his songs were one thousand and five” (1 Kings 4:32).³ From this vast number of proverbs, the Spirit of God led him to choose a much smaller collection for the instruction of believers in all ages and cultures. Solomon probably had this collection of proverbs in mind when he wrote elsewhere: “because the Preacher was wise, he still taught the people knowledge; yes, he pondered and sought out *and set in order many proverbs*” (Ecclesiastes 12:9, emphasis added).

Solomon was given an outstanding degree of wisdom. In the early days of his life, the Lord appeared to him at Gibeon and said, “Ask!

³ About 800 are preserved in the final collection that forms the book of Proverbs.

What shall I give you?" (1 Kings 3:5). Solomon responded with great respect and reverence. Aware of the tremendous responsibility of being king over Israel, he said, "Therefore give to Your servant an understanding heart to judge Your people, that I may discern between good and evil. For who is able to judge this great people of Yours?" (1 Kings 3:9). The Lord was pleased with this request and responded, "I have given you a wise and understanding heart, so that there has not been anyone like you before you, nor shall any like you arise after you" (1 Kings 3:12).

Solomon's wisdom extended to all branches of natural science. He "spoke of trees...of animals, of birds, of creeping things, and of fish" (1 Kings 4:33). He was a philosopher, musician, poet, botanist, zoologist, architect, businessman, administrator and king. But the wisdom God gave him also embraced the profound depths of true religion and personal godliness. We have no record of Solomon's knowledge in the natural sciences. Rather, it has pleased God to provide an accurate record of his knowledge of practical wisdom. This indicates the real intention of Scripture, "not to teach philosophy, but religion; not to make men of science, but men of sound godliness."⁴

Solomon had a keen eye for observation. He displays a profound understanding of human nature: a discernment of character and insight into motives behind actions. His teaching is intensely practical. The contents of this book make a great contribution to that body of teaching by which "the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work" (2 Timothy 3:17). William Arnot aptly entitled his commentary, *Studies in Proverbs: Laws from Heaven for Life on Earth*.⁵

Solomon was the wisest of men and yet, in his latter years, he did not live out the wisdom he taught. In him we might see the fulfilment of the maxim which says, "Do as I say, not as I do." Solomon's son, Rehoboam, followed the example of his father in his latter years, rather than his instruction, and became a foolish and evil king.

⁴ Charles Bridges, *A Commentary on Proverbs* (1846; London: Banner of Truth Trust, 1968), iv.

⁵ William Arnot, *Studies in Proverbs: Laws from Heaven for Life on Earth* (1884; Grand Rapids: Kregel, 1978).

PROVERBS / HISTORICAL SETTING

Solomon died in 931 B.C., which dates the composition and compilation of his proverbs to around 970–931 B.C., but they are in no way bound by time or culture. There is no mention of Israel or Jerusalem, since these proverbial sayings are intended for all people of all nations. The frequent address to the reader as “my son” (twenty-three times), rather than to “Israel,” may have been used in anticipation of the day when the church would extend throughout the world.

Solomon is the author of three books of the Bible. It is quite likely that these books were written during different periods of his life. It has been suggested that the Song of Solomon may have been written when he was young and in love; Proverbs may have been compiled when he was in his middle age, when it is evident that his intellectual powers were at their height; and Ecclesiastes may have been written in old age, when he was disappointed and disillusioned at his own spiritual state and the weakness of his sinful nature.

Hebrew poetry

As has been pointed out in the chapter on the book of Psalms, Hebrew poetry is quite distinct from English poetry, ancient or modern. It is distinguished by certain peculiarities and characteristics of its own. Its principal feature is not rhyme, but *parallelism*,⁶ for example:

Honest weights and scales are the LORD's;
All the weights in the bag are His work (16:11).

Here it will be seen that the second line expresses a thought that is parallel in meaning to the first line.

Three basic forms of parallelism have been identified:

1. *Synonymous parallelism*, in which the same thought is repeated in almost the same words:

⁶ For a fuller discussion of the characteristics of Hebrew poetry see Young, *An Introduction to the Old Testament*, 291–296.

Pride goes before destruction,
And a haughty spirit before a fall (16:18).

2. *Antithetical parallelism*, in which a thought is expressed by means of contrast with its opposite:

A soft answer turns away wrath,
But a harsh word stirs up anger (15:1).

3. *Synthetic parallelism*, in which the second line completes or fills out the thought of the first:

Keep your heart with all diligence,
For out of it spring the issues of life (4:23).

PROVERBS / **OUTLINE**

The underlying theme of the whole book is contained in the seventh verse of the first chapter: “The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge, but fools despise wisdom and instruction” (1:7).

The book of Proverbs falls into three sections, with each division beginning with the phrase: “The proverbs of Solomon” (1:1; 10:1; 25:1). Some Bible scholars have identified what they see as a significant change in the pronouns. In some cases these pronouns are in the second person, and in others the third person. On this basis they suggest that when “you” and “your” predominate in a section it indicates instruction for Solomon by his teacher. On the other hand, when “he” and “his” predominate that means instruction by Solomon. It is, however, safer to view the whole collection as part of the God-breathed Scriptures and consequently “profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness” (2 Timothy 3:16).

The opening verses set out the purpose for which these proverbs were compiled:

To know wisdom and instruction,
To perceive the words of understanding,
To receive the instruction of wisdom,
Justice, judgment, and equity;

To give prudence⁷ to the simple,⁸
 To the young man knowledge and discretion—
 A wise man will hear and increase learning,
 And a man of understanding will attain wise counsel,
 To understand a proverb and an enigma,⁹
 The words of the wise and their riddles (1:2–6).

In Ecclesiastes, Solomon also gives the reason for his collection of proverbs:

And moreover, because the Preacher was wise, he still taught the people knowledge; yes, he pondered and sought out and set in order many proverbs. The Preacher sought to find acceptable words; and what was written was upright—words of truth. The words of the wise are like goads, and the words of scholars are like well-driven nails, given by one Shepherd. And further, my son, be admonished by these. Of making many books there is no end, and much study is wearisome to the flesh.

Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter:

Fear God and keep His commandments,
 For this is man's all.
 For God will bring every work into judgment,
 Including every secret thing,
 Whether good or evil (Ecclesiastes 12:9–14).

Solomon uses poetry, parables, short stories, maxims and wise sayings to warn against:

- the influence of bad company
- backbiting and gossip
- lying and deceit in business and trade
- taking bribes

⁷ Literally, “wisdom.”

⁸ Literally, the “open”—that is, the open-minded.

⁹ Literally, “interpretation.”

- quarrelling, anger, controversies
- impurity of mind and body
- apathy and laziness
- pride and boasting
- greed and craving for money
- the exploitation of workers and the neglect of the poor.

The style of these maxims facilitates memorization.

The concept of the family underlies many of the sayings: *father* occurs in fifteen verses, *mother* in eleven, *son* in forty-four. Husband and wife are exhorted to maintain an exclusively monogamous relationship (in spite of Solomon's own confused and complex unions and the polygamy that was rife at the time). Parents share responsibility for the raising of their offspring and great respect is to be paid to mothers as well as fathers. Attacks on family life and relationships are roundly condemned.

PROVERBS / CHRIST AND HIS CHURCH

No prophecies, types or theophanies are found in the book of Proverbs. There are nevertheless a number of verses which provide interesting insights into the character of the Son of God.

1. The eternal generation of the Son of God

The Lord possessed me at the beginning of His way,
 Before His works of old.
 I have been established from everlasting,
 From the beginning, before there was ever an earth.
 When there were no depths I was brought forth,
 When there were no fountains abounding with water...
 Then I was beside Him as a master craftsman;
 And I was daily His delight,
 Rejoicing always before Him,
 Rejoicing in His inhabited world,
 And my delight was with the sons of men (8:22–24,30–31).

In the New Testament the Lord Jesus Christ is designated “the only begotten Son” (John 1:18), “the only begotten of the Father” (John 1:14), “the only begotten Son of God” (John 3:18) and “His only begotten Son” (John 3:16; 1 John 4:9). These words of Scripture, confirmed and supported by many more, lead to the conclusion that Jesus Christ

is not the Son of his Father in the sense that he had a beginning. Nor is the phrase merely an exalted title, like that applied to earthly rulers. Nor is it simply a device to remind us that he became a man by supernatural means, and not by ordinary generation—though of course it does remind us of that (Luke 1:35). The First Person of the Trinity is called “Father” to show to us what is his eternal relationship with the Son. The Second Person of the Trinity is called “Son” to show us what relationship he in turn has to the First Person. “Father” and “Son” are everyday titles. But they help to convey to our poor minds something of the relationship which these two persons eternally enjoy between themselves.¹⁰

The Son owes his generation to the Father, but the same cannot be said the other way round. It is also said that the Son is “the brightness of [the Father’s] glory and the express image of His person” (Hebrews 1:3). It would be impossible for him to be that without the Father. But God the Father is never said to be the express image of God the Son. Yet, as it would be impossible for the Son to be what he is without the Father, so the Father could not find expression without God the Son (John 1:18; Matthew 11:27; John 14:9). This is the relationship that the First and Second Persons of the Trinity have to each other.

That the being of God is beyond our comprehension should come as no surprise. Many years ago, Zophar asked his friend Job a profound question:

Can you search out the deep things of God?
 Can you find out the limits of the Almighty?
 They are higher than heaven—what can you do?
 Deeper than Sheol—what can you know?

¹⁰ Stuart Olyott, *The Three Are One: What the Bible Teaches About the Trinity* (Welwyn: Evangelical Press, 1979), 65.

Their measure is longer than the earth
And broader than the sea (Job 11:7–9).

The Lord Jesus Christ is not a creature; he is God, as the Father is God. “Both are God; both are God equally; both are God eternally, and both are God in the same sense.”¹¹ The Athanasian Creed is right to affirm, “The Son is from the Father alone, neither made, nor created, but begotten.”

2. The Son’s sovereignty over nature

Who has ascended into heaven, or descended?
Who has gathered the wind in His fists?
Who has bound the waters in a garment?
Who has established all the ends of the earth?
What is His name, and what is His Son’s name,
If you know? (30:4).

This wisdom of Agur, son of Jakeh (see 30:1), should be compared with the teaching of the New Testament regarding the involvement of the Son of God in creation (John 1:1–3; Colossians 1:15–17; Hebrews 1:1–3). The control of nature exercised by the Lord Jesus Christ is further confirmation of his *unique sonship*. He twice stilled a storm (Mark 4:39; 6:51) and he walked on water (John 6:18–21; cf. Psalm 107:23–30; Job 9:8,11; Mark 6:48). When he walked on the sea and stilled the storm, the disciples could form only one conclusion: they “worshiped Him, saying, ‘Truly You are the Son of God’” (Matthew 14:33; cf. 1 John 5:20).

3. The Son personifies wisdom

The wisdom of Solomon is a foreshadowing of the Lord Jesus Christ, “in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge” (Colossians 2:3). The Lord Jesus said to the Jews of his day,

The queen of the South will rise up in the judgment with the men
of this generation and condemn them, for she came from the

¹¹ Olyott, *The Three Are One*, 65.

ends of the earth to hear the wisdom of Solomon; and indeed a greater than Solomon is here (Luke 11:31).

The wise man, the subject of these proverbs, is a godly man, a righteous man, a holy man. The wisdom spoken of here is found entirely and completely in Christ (Colossians 2:3; cf. Proverbs 8:35–36). His people have wisdom and righteousness and sanctification and redemption only as they are *in Christ*. For he “became for us wisdom from God—and righteousness and sanctification and redemption—that, as it is written, ‘He who glories, let him glory in the LORD’” (1 Corinthians 1:30–31).

PROVERBS / **CONCLUSION**

The book of Proverbs presents a high view of the living God. Throughout its pages, the Lord is respected and honoured. The Lord Jesus taught his disciples to begin prayer with the words: “Our Father in heaven, *hallowed* be Your name” (Matthew 6:9, emphasis added). As the Lord is to be honoured and revered in the prayers of his people, so he must be honoured and revered in the principles and practices of his people. Whereas Psalms give insight into the worship of almighty God, Proverbs gives understanding for the daily life of God’s people. Proverbs is mainly about personal ethics, “not as the sinner’s way to God, but as the believer’s walk with God on this earth.”¹²

The prophets who come later show more clearly the way of salvation and call people to a saving knowledge of God. We are saved by grace through faith, not by grace through good works. We are pardoned on account of our trusting, not on the basis of our trying. But having been saved by grace through faith, we then seek to pursue a life of obedience. The order is vital: faith, salvation and then good works. As the apostle Paul clearly expresses,

For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast. For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for

¹² Irving L. Jensen, *Jensen’s Survey of the Old Testament: Search and Discover* (Chicago: Moody, 1978), 291.

good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them (Ephesians 2:8–10).

The letter of James has been described as the New Testament equivalent to the book of Proverbs. Both have a keen interest in God's people gaining wisdom from heaven to guide them into practical, godly living:

Who is wise and understanding among you? Let him show by good conduct that his works are done in the meekness of wisdom. But if you have bitter envy and self-seeking in your hearts, do not boast and lie against the truth. This wisdom does not descend from above, but is earthly, sensual, demonic. For where envy and self-seeking exist, confusion and every evil thing are there. But the wisdom that is from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, willing to yield, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality and without hypocrisy (James 3:13–17).

PROVERBS / **APPLICATION AND REFLECTION**

The book of Proverbs does not have a distinct structure. It is not the unfolding of history or the development of doctrine. It is a collection of wise sayings, stated succinctly. Probably the best method of study is the topical method. This can be achieved either with the aid of a concordance, or by slow and careful reading of the text, forming categories in the process. Words to be located might include: fear, anger, children, fool/fools, friend/friends and tongue. Individual proverbs could then be grouped to give a composite view of a subject, such as in the following example:

The discipline of children

He who spares his rod hates his son,
But he who loves him disciplines him promptly (13:24).

Chasten your son while there is hope,
And do not set your heart on his destruction (19:18).

Train up a child in the way he should go,
And when he is old he will not depart from it (22:6).

An example of a topical study

<i>Anger</i>	14:17,29; 15:18; 16:32; 19:11
<i>Benevolence</i>	3:9-10; 11:24-26; 14:21; 19:17; 22:9
<i>Children</i>	13:24; 17:6; 19:18; 22:6,15; 23:13-14
<i>Fear of God</i>	1:7; 3:7; 9:10; 10:27; 14:26-27; 15:16,33; 16:6; 19:23; 23:17; 24:21
<i>Fools</i>	10:18,21,23; 12:15-16; 14:9,16; 15:2; 17:10,12,24; 20:3; 23:9; 27:22; 28:26
<i>Friendship</i>	17:17; 18:24; 19:4; 27:10,17
<i>Indolence</i>	6:6-11; 10:4-5,26; 12:27; 13:4; 15:19; 18:9; 19:15,24; 20:4,13; 24:30-34; 26:13-16
<i>Oppression</i>	14:31; 22:22; 28:16
<i>Pride</i>	6:17; 11:2; 13:10; 15:25; 16:18-19; 18:12; 21:4,24; 29:23; 30:13

<i>Strife</i>	3:30; 10:12; 15:18; 16:28; 17:1,14,19; 18:6,19; 20:3; 22:10; 25:8; 30:33
<i>The tongue</i>	4:24; 10:11-14,17-21,31-32; 12:6,17-19,22; 13:3; 14:3; 15:1-2,4-5,7,23; 16:13,23,27; 17:4; 18:6-7,21; 19:1
<i>Wealth</i>	10:2,15; 11:4,28; 13:7,11,22; 15:6; 16:8; 18:11; 19:4; 27:24; 28:6,22
<i>Women</i>	(evil) 2:16-19; 5:3-14,20; 6:24-35; 7:5-27; 9:13-18; 23:27-28 (good) 5:18-19; 11:16; 18:22; 19:14; 31:10-31
<i>Wisdom</i>	1:7,20-22; 2:6-7,10-11; 3:13-18,19,21; 4:5-9; 8:1-16; 9:1-6; 12:8; 14:8; 18:4; 19:8; 24:3

New Testament references to Proverbs

A further method of study is to look at the New Testament quotations from Proverbs. There are seven references (one proverb is quoted twice):

My son, do not despise the chastening of the LORD,
Nor be discouraged when you are rebuked by Him;
For whom the LORD loves He chastens,
And scourges every son whom He receives (Hebrews 12:5-6; cf.
Proverbs 3:11-12).

God resists the proud,
But gives grace to the humble (James 4:6; 1 Peter 5:5; cf. Proverbs 3:34).

Love will cover a multitude of sins (1 Peter 4:8; cf. Proverbs 10:12).

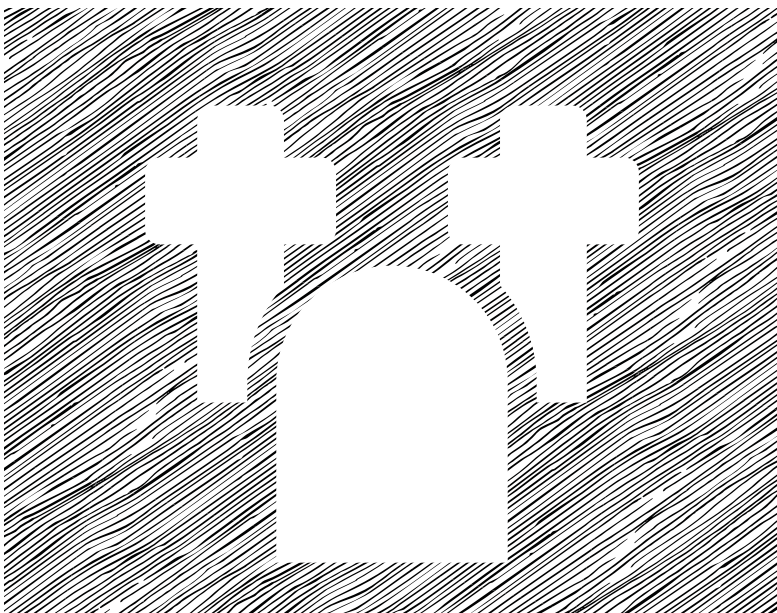
If the righteous one is scarcely saved,
Where will the ungodly and the sinner appear? (1 Peter 4:18; cf.
Proverbs 11:31).

If your enemy is hungry, feed him;
If he is thirsty, give him a drink;
For in so doing you will heap coals of fire on his head (Romans 12:20;
cf. Proverbs 25:21-22).

A dog returns to his own vomit (2 Peter 2:22; Proverbs 26:11).

There are also a number of probable allusions to a proverb:

Romans 12:16	cf. Proverbs 3:7
Hebrews 12:13	cf. Proverbs 4:26
1 Peter 2:17	cf. Proverbs 24:21
Luke 14:8-10	cf. Proverbs 25:6-7
James 4:13-14	cf. Proverbs 27:1



ECCLESIASTES

MEANING

"the preacher"

AUTHOR

Solomon
(probably)

KEY THOUGHT

Vanity

THEME

***Life is meaningless
without God***

THEME VERSE

"Vanity of vanities," says the Preacher;

"Vanity of vanities, all is vanity."

ECCLESIASTES 1:2

ECCLESIASTES / SUMMARY

INTRODUCTION	1:1-11
a. Everything in life appears meaningless	1:1-3
b. Reflections on the monotonous cycle of nature and human existence	1:4-11
PART 1 / THE MEANINGLESSNESS OF EVERYTHING IN LIFE	1:12-6:12
a. Seeking satisfaction in wisdom is meaningless	1:12-18
b. Seeking satisfaction in experience is futile —pleasure, drinking, building, farming, gardening, possessions, wealth and music	2:1-11
c. Seeking satisfaction in wisdom and work is meaningless	2:12-26
d. Seeking satisfaction in this present world is meaningless	
(1) Fatalism to the unbeliever; sovereignty for the believer	3:1-15
(2) Wickedness and oppression abound	3:16-4:6
(3) In many situations, two can achieve more than one alone	4:7-12
(4) Popularity passes away	4:13-16
(5) Duty to God: worship, service and reverence	5:1-7
e. Seeking satisfaction in wealth is futile	5:8-6:12
PART 2 / HOW TO LIVE WITH MEANINGLESSNESS	7:1-12:7
a. Practical advice for a well-ordered life	7:1-14
b. All have sinned	7:15-29
c. Respect the king	8:1-8
d. Wickedness appears to succeed, but God will be the judge	8:9-17

-
- | | | |
|----|--|-----------|
| e. | That death comes to all is no cause for pessimism or inactivity | 9:1-10 |
| f. | There is a higher power over this world | 9:11-12 |
| g. | Widsom is beneficial for a nation | 9:13-18 |
| h. | Encouragement to sober living | 10:1-20 |
| i. | Encouragement to benevolence and positive thinking | 11:1-8 |
| j. | Encouragement to youth: serve God joyfully before old age and death come | 11:9-12:7 |

CONCLUSION

12:8-14

- | | | |
|----|---|----------|
| a. | The conclusion for those who are without hope and without God | 12:8 |
| b. | The lasting value of the preacher's work | 12:9-12 |
| c. | The ultimate conclusion for those who know the living God | 12:13-14 |

ECCLESIASTES

Ecclesiastes is a remarkably relevant book. It “gives the appearance of being written with our time in mind,” for there is “a scepticism that sounds modern.”¹ In a world full of disillusioned people, the writer speaks as one who has tasted all the world has to offer—the best of pleasures, the height of power, the ultimate in prestige, worldwide popularity—and still he remains unsatisfied. Nothing has any meaning. There is a futility and purposelessness about life when there is no living relationship with God. To rejoice in the gifts without delighting in the Giver leaves life empty—without meaning and without purpose. As the hymnwriter testifies, “The waters of the earth have failed; and I am thirsty still.”²

In the Hebrew Bible, the title of this book is *Qoheleth* or, more fully, “The Words of *Qoheleth*, the son of David, king in Jerusalem.” The word *Qoheleth* is rare. It is found seven times in Ecclesiastes (1:1,2,12; 7:27; 12:8,9,10) but nowhere else in the Old Testament. It is not an easy word to translate; in fact it has been called an “untranslatable title.”³

The English title, “Ecclesiastes,” is a simple transliteration of the Greek. The writers of the Septuagint, who translated the Hebrew Old Testament into Greek, chose the title *Ekklesiastes*, which carries the basic meaning of “assembly” (the same root word used in the Greek New Testament for “the church,” e.g., Matthew 16:18). *Qoheleth* is a speaker before an assembly, someone who addresses a congregation (as when Solomon assembled the people at the dedication of the temple in 1 Kings 8:1,2,5). One who addresses an assembly became associated with the function of a preacher; consequently, our English version begins: “The words of the Preacher” (1:1). The content of Ecclesiastes suggests that this translation is only an approximation, since *Qoheleth* “appears to be philosophising rather than preaching.”⁴ Here is a public

¹ Raymond B. Dillard and Tremper Longman III, *An Introduction to the Old Testament* (Leicester: Apollos, 1995), 247.

² From the hymn “My heart is resting” by Anna L. Waring (1823–1910).

³ Derek Kidner, *The Message of Ecclesiastes: A Time to Mourn, and a Time to Dance* (Leicester: Inter-Varsity, 1976), 13.

⁴ R.K. Harrison, *Introduction to the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1969), 1072.

speaker, a preacher maybe, a speaker in an assembly, debating before an audience the ultimate meaning of life.

ECCLESIASTES / **AUTHOR**

There is something intriguing about the way in which the author announces himself. He comes remarkably close to calling himself Solomon, yet holds back. The name *Solomon* does not appear in Ecclesiastes, whereas in Proverbs and the Song of Solomon, Solomon is openly declared to be the author (Proverbs 1:1; Song of Solomon 1:1). Why this silence? Why no open declaration that it is by Solomon? As much of it is autobiographical, perhaps he was too ashamed to put his name to it.

Both tradition and some recent scholars maintain that the author is Solomon:

Who else could possibly have described himself as “the son of David, king in Jerusalem”? We have before us the words of a man who, because of his privileged position, has sampled all that life has to offer. But he is now king and carries the responsibility of ruling others. He also takes upon himself the responsibility of teaching them and calls himself “the Preacher.”⁵

There is also internal evidence in favour of the traditional view that Solomon is the author:

- He calls himself “the son of David, king in Jerusalem” (1:1; cf. v.12).
- He possesses unequalled wisdom (1:16; cf. 1 Kings 3:12; 4:29–30).
- He has indulged himself in every pleasure (2:1–3).
- He has great wealth (2:8; cf. 1 Kings 10:14–29).
- He undertook extensive building projects (2:4–6; cf. 1 Kings 5:1–7:51).
- He had a fine collection of proverbs (12:9; cf. 1 Kings 4:32).

⁵ Stuart Olyott, *A Life Worth Living and a Lord Worth Loving: Ecclesiastes & Song of Solomon* (Welwyn: Evangelical Press, 1983), 15.

- The proverbs contained in this book are like those found in the book of Proverbs.

Many Christian scholars do not agree with this traditional view. The reasons against regarding Solomon as the author are:

- The name *Solomon* does not occur. There is no explicit claim to be from his pen.
- All the writings of Solomon bear his name in their titles. Here, the unusual designation *Qoheleth* appears.
- The words, “I, *Qoheleth*, was king...in Jerusalem” (1:12), suggest that the writer has ceased to be king, whereas Solomon was King of Israel to the day of his death.
- The background of the book does not fit the time of Solomon: it was a time of misery and futility (1:2–11); the splendour of Solomon’s age was gone (1:12–2:26); a time of death had begun for Israel (3:1–15); injustice and violence were present (4:1–3); there was heathen tyranny (5:7,9–19); death was preferred to life (7:1); “one man ruled over other men to their hurt” (8:9).⁶

These comments cannot be substantiated by the texts; also, there was rebellion at the end of Solomon’s reign. The evidence is strongly in favour of Solomon as the author of the book of Ecclesiastes.

If the Preacher is identified as Solomon, Ecclesiastes was written from a unique vantage-point. Possessing the greatest mental, material and political resources ever combined in one man, he was qualified beyond all others to write this book.⁷

⁶ Edward J. Young, *An Introduction to the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1949), 348.

⁷ Bruce Wilkinson and Kenneth Boa, *Talk Thru the Old Testament* (Nashville: Nelson, 1983), 172.

ECCLESIASTES / HISTORICAL SETTING

The book reflects the latter part of Solomon's life, immediately following a period of serious backsliding and probably close to his death (931 B.C.) when he saw himself as "an old and foolish king" (4:13). In his early days, "Solomon loved the LORD, walking in the statutes of his father David" (1 Kings 3:3). But in mid-life, Solomon turned from God (1 Kings 11:1–10) and used his outstanding wisdom (1 Kings 3:5–12) in the search for satisfaction and happiness—without God. Consequently, everything in life turned out to be futile and meaningless. "Vanity of vanities, all is vanity" (1:2). All that he knew or experienced in the world seemed empty and pointless. Eventually, he turned back to God:

Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter:

Fear God and keep His commandments,
For this is man's all (12:13).

If Solomon was the author of the book of Ecclesiastes, then 12:13–14 might be seen to indicate that, close to his death, he was restored into a right relationship with the Lord.⁸

The book of Ecclesiastes is not, like so many of the messages of the prophets, directed at one particular nation at a distinct moment in its history. This book, "with all its lessons and illustrations, is the property of the Church and of the world in every age."⁹

ECCLESIASTES / INTERPRETATION

Before attempting an outline of this book, it is necessary to discuss how it should be understood. Unlike other books in the Bible, any definition of the structure of Ecclesiastes will be greatly influenced by determining its purpose and why it is included in the divinely inspired

⁸ The issue of Solomon's serious backsliding and restoration is discussed in the chapter on 1 Kings in volume 1.

⁹ Charles Bridges, *A Commentary on Ecclesiastes* (1860; Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1961), xvi.

Scripture. H.C. Leupold declares, “There are few biblical books with regard to whose purpose there is a greater lack of unanimity,”¹⁰ and William Hendriksen admits that the interpretation of this book “is not at all an easy task.”¹¹ Of all the books of the Bible, Ecclesiastes requires particularly careful handling (2 Timothy 2:15).

Hendriksen follows Martin Wyngaarden’s analysis by seeing Ecclesiastes as a book containing a whole series of problems and solutions. The key, for him, is found in the last chapter: “The words of the wise are like goads, and the words of scholars are like well-driven nails, given by one Shepherd” (12:11). Goads are interpreted as the problems, and nails are viewed as the solutions. Working on this basis, Hendriksen divides Ecclesiastes into four discourses (1:1–3:15; 3:16–5:20; 6:1–7:29; 8:1–12:14), with at least one goad and one nail in each section.¹² *Qoheleth* repeatedly introduces problems of various kinds and then describes his struggle to arrive at solutions to these problems. Stuart Olyott identifies a similar structure (based on Jensen’s outline) but calls the four sections four sermons.¹³

By contrast, Derek Kidner rejects this kind of structure and takes the approach that here we have “a man of conviction with a faith to share.”¹⁴ In his opinion, the writer of Ecclesiastes is not expressing his own thoughts but the views of *others*:

At bottom we can find the axiom of all the wise men of the Bible, that the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom. But Qoheleth plans to bring us to that point last of all, when we are desperate for an answer. There are hints of it in passing, but his main approach is from the other end; the resolve to see how far a man will get with no such basis. He puts himself—and us—in the shoes of the humanist or secularist. Not the atheist, for atheism was hardly a going concern in his day, but the person who starts

¹⁰ H.C. Leupold, *Exposition of Ecclesiastes* (Welwyn: Evangelical Press, 1952), 18.

¹¹ William Hendriksen, *Survey of the Bible: A Treasury of Bible Information* (Welwyn: Evangelical Press, 1976), 302.

¹² Hendriksen, *Survey of the Bible*, 302–303.

¹³ Olyott, *A Life Worth Living and a Lord Worth Loving*; Irving L. Jensen, *Jensen’s Survey of the Old Testament: Search and Discover* (Chicago: Moody, 1978), 303.

¹⁴ Kidner, *The Message of Ecclesiastes*, 12.

his thinking from man and the observable world, and knows God only from a distance.¹⁵

The New Testament gives no help toward the interpretation of the book of Ecclesiastes. Although attempts have been made to link verses from this book to New Testament teaching, they have failed. William Bridges admits, with regard to the book of Ecclesiastes, “The writers of the New Testament have not given any express reference to it.”¹⁶

It is difficult to know how much of what Solomon has written is from his own bitter experience. Some is obviously so, and he is looking back over his life and assessing where he went wrong:

And I set my heart to know wisdom and to know madness and folly. I perceived that this also is grasping for the wind.

For in much wisdom is much grief,
And he who increases knowledge increases sorrow (1:17–18).

I said, “I will be wise”;
But it was far from me (7:23).

Although Solomon knew much wisdom, he was unable to apply it to himself. Women were his downfall and he confesses it:

And I find more bitter than death
The woman whose heart is snares and nets,
Whose hands are fetters.
He who pleases God shall escape from her,
But the sinner shall be trapped by her (7:26).

When Solomon was old, his wives turned his heart after other gods (1 Kings 11:4). He probably has his own life in mind when he writes,

Dead flies putrefy the perfumer’s ointment,
And cause it to give off a foul odor;

¹⁵ Kidner, *The Message of Ecclesiastes*, 12.

¹⁶ Bridges, *A Commentary on Ecclesiastes*, xi.

So does a little folly to one respected for wisdom
and honor (10:1).

There is also the possibility of the same connection when he considers his horrific backsliding and idolatry and likens himself to “a living dog” that “is better than a dead lion” (9:4). Does he mourn that there was no prophet like Nathan to challenge him and say, “What are you doing?” (8:4 cf. 2 Samuel 12:7–9). Viewed in the light of an author under deep conviction by God, the book of Ecclesiastes takes on another dimension: it is deeply personal and sorrowful—it is a warning to all.

ECCLESIASTES / **OUTLINE**

Apart from the general outline, it is difficult to discover an underlying structure. The style is that of a philosopher reflecting on all aspects of life: observations, reasonings, deductions, conclusions. Death is a prominent subject throughout the book of Ecclesiastes, featuring in eleven of the twelve chapters. Solomon contends that the pursuit of all things is futile because, whether they are attained or not, at death they will all be left behind:

Then I hated all my labor in which I had toiled under the sun, because I must leave it to the man who will come after me. And who knows whether he will be wise or a fool? Yet he will rule over all my labor in which I toiled and in which I have shown myself wise under the sun. This also is vanity (2:18–19).

INTRODUCTION (1:1–11)

The theme is introduced in the first eleven verses: everything in life is vanity. The word “vanity” occurs thirty-seven times. It is not a good translation of the Hebrew, since “vanity” means empty pride, arrogance or conceit. The Hebrew word here means “something without substance, which quickly passes away.”¹⁷ It is better translated “futility,” “meaninglessness” or “pointlessness.” Linked with this word are

¹⁷ Olyott, *A Life Worth Living and a Lord Worth Loving*, 15.

expressions such as, “under the sun” (twenty-nine times), “upon the earth” (seven times) and “under heaven” (three times). Consequently, Ecclesiastes has been called “the book of the natural man.”¹⁸

The expression “under the sun” is a key phrase throughout the pages of Ecclesiastes. Every aspect of life is considered from a purely mundane, earthly point of view. As Leupold expresses, “The presence of the little phrase ‘under the sun’ always says in effect, ‘What I claim is true if one deals with purely earthly values.’”¹⁹

PART 1 / THE MEANINGLESSNESS OF EVERYTHING IN LIFE (1:12–6:12)

Everything in life has been tried and tested by Solomon to find fulfilment, satisfaction and happiness: science, worldly wisdom and philosophy, pleasure, drinking, building, farming, gardening, amassing possessions, accumulating wealth, pursuing music. He searched, but found no answer in materialism, fatalism (the theory that everything is predetermined and nothing can be changed), deism (religion without revelation). Nothing answered the deepest longings of his heart and mind. He realized there was only futility, if life was lived exclusively in these pursuits. Exclude God from the world and nothing makes sense anymore.

Solomon had engaged himself in the pursuit of happiness, purpose, meaning and satisfaction. He had undertaken this quest with commitment and zeal. He looks back upon the time and energy expended and concludes it has all been pointless, a sheer waste of time. Wherever he turned his attention, the result was eventually the same: nothing has any point—whether power, popularity, prestige or pleasure. Apart from God, nothing satisfies or answers the deepest longings of the human heart. All earthly goals and ambitions, when undertaken without reference to God, end in dissatisfaction and frustration. The world is full of oppression, envy, greed and loneliness. Human beings are ultimately no better than animals, as the bodies of both return to dust. Solomon asserts that it is better to eat and drink and be content daily

¹⁸ Robert Lee, *The Outlined Bible: An Outline and Analysis of Every Book in the Bible* (London: Pickering and Inglis, 1930), analysis no. 21.

¹⁹ Leupold, *Exposition of Ecclesiastes*, 43.

in one's labours than to have "laboured for the wind" (5:16). God's own work is the only work that lasts forever (3:14).

In his disillusionment, Solomon recognizes that the only meaningful purpose in life is to keep oneself alive and to take care of one's soul, because true wisdom, knowledge and joy come from obedience to God (2:26). It is possible to have wealth and honour and yet have no enjoyment in them: greed and avarice are never quenched, because a person whose "soul is not satisfied" has no rest even though "he lacks nothing for himself of all he desires" (6:2,3,5). The honour, pleasure, wealth and wisdom he had so abundantly enjoyed, left him dissatisfied and disillusioned. Solomon writes from the perspective of one who has learned the meaninglessness of everything in life by bitter experience and prolonged pursuit.

By reasoning the futility and meaninglessness of all earthly pursuits with such emphasis, "the author first disillusiones his hearers," and thus prepares for the second half of the book, which gives "counsel and comfort for evil days."²⁰

PART 2 / HOW TO LIVE WITH MEANINGLESSNESS (7:1-12:7)

Solomon gives practical advice on how to be sober-minded and forward-looking. He recommends making the best of all life's circumstances (7:14). Negative thoughts paralyze (11:4), and there is work to be done for God, even in the fading days of life (11:6). Solomon finds the answer to life, in the fear of God:

Though a sinner does evil a hundred times, and his days are prolonged, yet I surely know that it will be well with those who fear God, who fear before Him (8:12; cf. 5:7; 7:18; 12:13).

A person's effort should be in living in the fear of God, not in good works—they are of no lasting value—for no one is just; all have sinned (7:20). Death comes to all, no matter how powerful a person may be in life: "No one has power over the spirit to retain the spirit" (8:8). The prospect of death weighs heavily on Solomon, and he recognizes he is at the mercy of God (9:1) and will be judged by him (11:9). The

²⁰ Leupold, *Exposition of Ecclesiastes*, 17.

outcome is one of hope and confidence in God:

As you do not know what is the way of the wind,
 Or how the bones grow in the womb of her who is with child,
 So you do not know the works of God who makes everything.
 In the morning sow your seed,
 And in the evening do not withhold your hand;
 For you do not know which will prosper,
 Either this or that,
 Or whether both alike will be good (11:5–6).

CONCLUSION (12:8–14)

Solomon remembers the days before his backsliding when he “set in order many proverbs” and wrote “words of truth”—they were meaningful days. In a world of uncertainties, inequalities and injustice, the only way to find meaning and satisfaction is to respect the living God. God is morally perfect, and he will bring every human being to account. Nothing will escape his attention. He notices every detail, even the hidden matters of heart and mind. The secret of life is to live in obedience to God and trust him for his goodness, wisdom and justice. Wisdom is seeing life from God’s standpoint and trusting him when life makes no sense whatsoever. Solomon finds the antidote to disillusionment, cynicism and meaninglessness in fearing God and keeping his commandments. He writes,

Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter:

Fear God and keep His commandments,
 For this is man’s all.
 For God will bring every work into judgment,
 Including every secret thing,
 Whether good or evil (12:13–14).

ECCLESIASTES / CHRIST AND HIS CHURCH

There are no prophecies, theophanies or types of Christ found in the book of Ecclesiastes, and yet it makes a valuable contribution to “the

holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus" (2 Timothy 3:15). The power of this book is in the absence, rather than in the presence, of Christ. This is a testimony to everything that is good and virtuous in life being tested and tried, and found wanting.

In the book of Ecclesiastes, there are powerful descriptions of life without meaning and without purpose—"having no hope and without God in the world" (Ephesians 2:12). Every aspect of human experience and endeavour has been tasted and tested to the full, and the result is always the same—disappointment, dissatisfaction and disillusionment. The way is paved for the One who reveals the secret of life, for only Christ can provide ultimate satisfaction—only he can reveal the true meaning and purpose of our existence. The prophet Jeremiah expresses God's displeasure when people, especially his people Israel, reject him and turn to other things to find meaning and satisfaction:

For My people have committed two evils:
They have forsaken Me, the fountain of living waters,
And hewn themselves cisterns—broken cisterns that can hold no
water (Jeremiah 2:13).

Only when sinners realize that they are drinking bitter water—that is, they understand the futility and meaninglessness of life without God—will they seek for the "fountain of living water." As the Lord Jesus said to the woman of Samaria, "If you knew the gift of God, and who it is who says to you, 'Give Me a drink,' you would have asked Him, and He would have given you living water" (John 4:10; cf. 7:37).

The Saviour has come to put meaning back into life and to fill it with richness and vitality. To his people who hear his voice, love him and follow him, he says, "I have come that they may have life, and that they may have it more abundantly" (John 10:10).

Bruce Wilkinson and Kenneth Boa contrast "life under the sun," as in the book of Ecclesiastes, with the believer's "life under the Son" (see Table 3).²¹

²¹ Wilkinson and Boa, *Talk Thru the Old Testament*, 172.

Table 3. Chart comparing life under the sun in Ecclesiastes with life in relationship with Christ

	Life under the sun	Life under the Son
1:3	What advantage is work under the sun?	Being confident of this very thing, that He who has begun a good work in you will complete it until the day of Jesus Christ (Philippians 1:6).
1:9	Nothing new under the sun.	Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new (2 Corinthians 5:17).
1:14	All deeds are vanity under the sun.	Therefore, my beloved brethren, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that your labor is not in vain in the Lord (1 Corinthians 15:58).
2:18	The fruit of labour is hated under the sun.	That you may walk worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing Him, being fruitful in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God (Colossians 1:10).
6:12	Men and women are mortal under the sun.	For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life (John 3:16).
8:15	Pleasure is temporary under the sun.	For it is God who works in you both to will and to do for His good pleasure (Philippians 2:13).
8:17	Men and women cannot discover God's work under the sun.	For now we see in a mirror, dimly, but then face to face. Now I know in part, but then I shall know just as I also am known (1 Corinthians 13:12).
9:3	All men and women die under the sun.	And this is the testimony: that God has given us eternal life, and this life is in His Son (1 John 5:11).
9:11	Strength and speed under the sun.	But God has chosen the foolish things of the world to put to shame the wise, and God has chosen the weak things of the world to put to shame the things which are mighty (1 Corinthians 1:27).
12:2	Life under the sun will cease.	These things I have written to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, that you may know that you have eternal life, and that you may continue to believe in the name of the Son of God (1 John 5:13).

ECCLESIASTES / **CONCLUSION**

The goal of the whole book is to warn believers not to get caught up in pursuits, however good and commendable, that lead them away from God. The whole duty of human beings is the enjoyment and service of God. If we are without God, then nothing in the world has lasting benefit or value. On the other hand, if we have God, though we are poor, ill, neglected or abused in this world, we have all that really matters:

If God is for us, who can be against us? He who did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, how shall He not with Him also freely give us all things? (Romans 8:31–32).

Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world—the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life—is not of the Father but is of the world. And the world is passing away, and the lust of it; but he who does the will of God abides forever (1 John 2:15–17).

Ecclesiastes is found in the poetry section of the Protestant Old Testament. This includes the books from Job to the Song of Solomon. These five books can be seen as connected in the spiritual dimension:

In *Job* we have the death of the self-life. In *Psalms* the resurrection-life and the idea of worship. In *Proverbs* “Laws from Heaven for life on Earth” (Dr. Arnot). In *Ecclesiastes* the powerlessness of the world to satisfy the soul. In the *Song of Songs* the satisfaction of the soul in the Beloved.²²

The disillusionment of the book of Ecclesiastes paves the way for the delights of the Song of Solomon.

²² A.M. Hodgkin, *Christ in All the Scriptures* (London: Pickering and Inglis, 1907), 120.

ECCLESIASTES / APPLICATION AND REFLECTION

1. The fear of God

Two essential aspects are contained in the fear of God: the Lord we love and the life we live.

The first involves *respect, worship and service given to God as the sovereign Lord of all life*. It encompasses the commandments of Sinai, especially that he alone is to be worshipped, no visual representations are to be made of him and his name is to be honoured in all situations and on all occasions: “Serve the LORD with fear, and rejoice with trembling” (Psalm 2:11).

Much that passes for modern Christian worship is a thinly disguised form of self-centredness. Worship does not honour God when it centres in the thoughts, feelings, aspirations, experiences and blessings of the worshipper. While these have their place in worship, the central and overriding concern must be the adoration, exultation, praise and honouring of God. True worship renders devotion to God in prayer, song, reading the Scriptures and preaching and teaching. The Father is the primary focus of worship: Christians are to worship the Father, *through* the Son, *by* the Holy Spirit. Any major shift in worship dishonours all three persons of the Godhead.

The second element in “the fear of God” involves *holy living*. Solomon disobeyed God by marrying foreign women who influenced him into idolatry. “Solomon did evil in the sight of the LORD, and did not fully follow the LORD, as did his father David” (1 Kings 11:6). True wisdom leads to pure and holy living (12:13) in obedience to God’s revealed will: “Behold, the fear of the Lord, that is wisdom, and to depart from evil is understanding” (Job 28:28).

The “Spirit of the LORD” rested on Christ, “the Spirit of wisdom and understanding, the Spirit of counsel and might, the Spirit of knowledge and of the fear of the LORD” (Isaiah 11:2). As Solomon said elsewhere, “The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge” (Proverbs 1:7), upon which Matthew Henry commented,

Those know enough who know how to fear God, who are careful in everything to please him and fearful of offending him in anything; this is the Alpha and Omega of knowledge.²³

²³ Matthew Henry’s *Commentary on the Whole Bible*, <https://www.christianity.com/bible/commentary.php?com=mh&b=20&c=1>; accessed May 14, 2020.

2. The wisdom of the world

As a young man, Solomon knew the fear of the Lord, but later he turned his allegiance from God and, as he says, "I set my heart to seek and search out by wisdom concerning all that is done under heaven" (1:13). He confesses, "Look, I have attained greatness, and have gained more wisdom than all who were before me in Jerusalem" (1:16). But a wisdom devoid of the love of God and a commitment to his honour is not wisdom from above:

Who is wise and understanding among you? Let him show by good conduct that his works are done in the meekness of wisdom. But if you have bitter envy and self-seeking in your hearts, do not boast and lie against the truth. This wisdom does not descend from above, but is earthly, sensual, demonic. For where envy and self-seeking exist, confusion and every evil thing are there. But the wisdom that is from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, willing to yield, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality and without hypocrisy (James 3:13-17).

True wisdom, wisdom which descends from above, always leads sinners to "fear God" (5:7; 8:12) and "keep his commandments" (12:13). There is a wisdom in the world, but it does not lead to God or to godly living. As Paul says, "The world through wisdom did not know God" (1 Corinthians 1:21). Christians come to understand that true wisdom always centres on Jesus Christ, who is "the wisdom of God" (1 Corinthians 1:24). Hence we are to take care not to be led astray: "Beware lest anyone cheat you through philosophy and empty deceit, according to the tradition of men, according to the basic principles of the world, and not according to Christ" (Colossians 2:8).

3. Worldliness

King Solomon had everything for which the heart could wish:

A large, well-defined, fertile territory, peace within and around his kingdom; an enormous revenue to spend, wealth practically limitless; all the interests of new commerce and exploration. Insight and penetration above all men, sympathy with all men and things, the interest of starting classifications of science, and of forming books of maxims and songs. The respect and admiration of all his contemporaries. The power of expressing his thoughts in words.²⁴

²⁴ Hodgkin, *Christ in All the Scriptures*, 123.

The only thing he lacked in the latter years of his reign was a good and right relationship with God! The result was that everything in his life was spoiled: "For what will it profit a man if he gains the whole world, and loses his own soul? Or what will a man give in exchange for his soul?" (Mark 8:36–37).

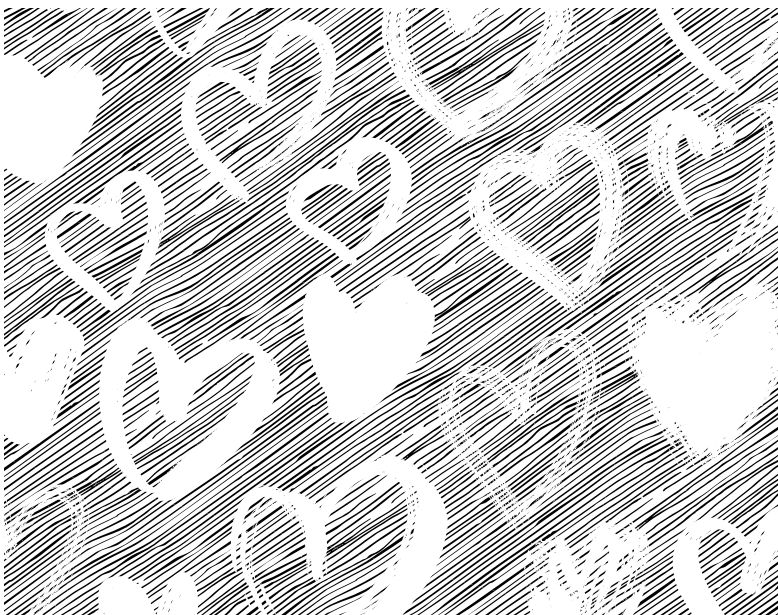
Work, hobbies, sport, recreation, holidays and family may receive more attention, time and energy than is appropriate. Spiritual concerns must always take priority and regulate all else. The only way to interpret the world is to see it as a creation of God and to use and enjoy it *for his glory*.

4. Death

The backslidden Solomon was the epitome of all that humans aspire to be without God. The underlying concern of the successful man or woman of the world is leaving it all behind them. For years, Solomon had not set his mind on things above, but on things on the earth (cf. Colossians 3:2). He was not excited at the prospect of heaven because all that he had laboured for was here on earth. Therefore, he feared death because he was leaving everything behind.

Christians can experience deep significance precisely in those areas where *Qohelet* felt most oppressed. Jesus has restored meaning to wisdom, labour, love, and life. After all, by facing death, Jesus conquered the biggest fear facing *Qohelet*, and he showed that death is not the end of all meaning, but the entrance into the very presence of God.²⁵

²⁵ Dillard and Longman, *An Introduction to the Old Testament*, 255.



SONG OF SOLOMON

MEANING

"a collection of songs"

AUTHOR

Solomon

KEY THOUGHT

My beloved

THEME

The love between Christ and his church

THEME VERSE

***Yes, he is altogether lovely.
This is my beloved,
And this is my friend,
O daughters of Jerusalem!***

SONG OF SOLOMON 5:16

SONG OF SOLOMON / SUMMARY

PART 1 / **OLD COVENANT RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN CHRIST AND HIS CHURCH** 1:1-4:16

- | | | |
|----|--|---------|
| a. | The Shulamite longs for her beloved | 1:1-7 |
| b. | They sing of their love for one another | 1:8-2:7 |
| c. | Their love increases | 2:8-17 |
| d. | In a dream, she loses him and finds him again | 3:1-5 |
| e. | The arrival of the beloved is predicted | 3:6-11 |
| f. | The beloved is enraptured by the Shulamite | 4:1-15 |
| g. | The Shulamite longs for the arrival of her beloved | 4:16 |

PART 2 / **NEW COVENANT RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN CHRIST AND HIS CHURCH** 5:1-8:14

- | | | |
|----|---|---------|
| a. | The arrival of the beloved | 5:1 |
| b. | Rejection and departure of the beloved | 5:2-6 |
| c. | The Shulamite searches for her beloved | 5:7-9 |
| d. | The Shulamite describes her beloved | 5:10-16 |
| e. | Where is the beloved? | 6:1-3 |
| f. | The beloved describes the Shulamite | 6:4-7:9 |
| g. | The Shulamite delights in her beloved | 7:9-8:7 |
| h. | Closing declarations | 8:8-13 |
| i. | The Shulamite longs for the return of her beloved | 8:14 |

SONG OF SOLOMON

Song of Solomon derives its name from the opening verse: “The song of songs, which is Solomon’s” (1:1). It is also sometimes called *Canticles*, derived from the Latin, meaning “a series of songs,” since it is a collection of thirteen individual, though interwoven, songs. Because of the introductory verse, a third title is also used, *Song of Songs*. This indicates that of the 1,005 songs which Solomon composed, this ranks highest of them all. In the same way that the expression the “King of kings and Lord of lords” (1 Timothy 6:15; Revelation 17:14; 19:16) means that over all kings and over all lords there is one King and Lord, the Lord Jesus Christ—who is the highest, the most powerful and the most glorious—so the title *Song of Songs* indicates this composition is the superlative song of all songs. This is not only the Song of Songs out of Solomon’s repertoire; it is *the* Song of Songs of all songs in the world. There is no other like it, in excellence.

In the English Bible, Song of Solomon is the fifth of the poetical books: Job, Psalms, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Song of Solomon. The Jews have, for the most part, revered this poem as uniquely sublime despite the fact that there is no reference to God, no mention of sin or any religious theme whatsoever! To the Israelites, the apostle Paul says, “were committed the oracles of God” (Romans 3:2). It is interesting to note that one of their ancient scholars acknowledges that Solomon composed it “by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit.” The Jews compare Proverbs to the outer court of the temple, Ecclesiastes to the holy place and the Song of Solomon to the Most Holy Place.¹ Yet though this book is held in the highest esteem, it is forbidden reading for Hebrew children and young people until they reach thirty years of age.²

Some Christians have challenged its inclusion in the canon of Scripture because of its amorous tone, distinct lack of religious content and the disputable fact that it neither quotes from, nor is quoted in, other books of the Bible. The Christian church has continued,

¹ Irving L. Jensen, *Jensen’s Survey of the Old Testament: Search and Discover* (Chicago: Moody, 1978), 306.

² John Gill, *An Exposition of the Song of Solomon* (1854; Grand Rapids: Sovereign Grace, 1971), 1.

however, with these few exceptions, in the confidence that this book belongs in the Old Testament collection. Jonathan Edwards testified: "The whole book of Canticles used to be pleasant to me, and I used to be much in reading it...and found, from time to time, an increased sweetness that would carry me away in my contemplation."³ John Gill declares, "Its style is lovely and majestic; the manner of its composition neat and beautiful; and the matter of it full and comprehensive, being suited to all believers."⁴ Some of the most godly people in the world have been spiritually elevated and enraptured by the contents of this inspired poem.

SONG OF SOLOMON / **AUTHOR**

It is fair to say that the opening words in Hebrew, "The song of songs, which is Solomon's" (1:1), may be translated either "which is of Solomon" or "which is about Solomon." This means either that it was written by him, or that it was written in his honour. In spite of this apparent ambiguity, the Jews and the Christian church have consistently held that it was composed by Solomon, the son of David and Bathsheba (2 Samuel 12:24). In other words, King Solomon, ruler of all Israel, wrote this masterpiece of poetry. His name appears within the text, implying authorship (1:1). His name recurs a further six times in this composition (1:5; 3:7,9,11; 8:11,12). Of Solomon it is said,

He spoke three thousand proverbs, and his songs were one thousand and five. Also he spoke of trees, from the cedar tree of Lebanon even to the hyssop that springs out of the wall; he spoke also of animals, of birds, of creeping things, and of fish. And men of all nations, from all the kings of the earth who had heard of his wisdom, came to hear the wisdom of Solomon (1 Kings 4:32–34).

According to one authority, reference is made in the Song of Solomon to fifteen animal species and twenty-one varieties of plants.⁵

³ Cited by Robert Lee, *The Outlined Bible: An Outline and Analysis of Every Book in the Bible* (London: Pickering and Inglis, 1930), analysis no. 22.

⁴ Gill, *An Exposition of the Song of Solomon*, 10.

⁵ Edward J. Young, *An Introduction to the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1949), 332.

The Song of Solomon was obviously composed during a period of Solomon's life when he was in a healthy spiritual state—in other words, before his tragic decline:

And he had seven hundred wives, princesses, and three hundred concubines; and his wives turned away his heart. For it was so, when Solomon was old, that his wives turned his heart after other gods; and his heart was not loyal to the Lord his God, as was the heart of his father David (1 Kings 11:3–4).

The unusually large number of foreign words in the original text might indicate that Solomon had by this time established widespread contact with surrounding nations. With this in mind, Jensen, Olyott and others suggest that it was composed somewhere around 965 B.C.,⁶ which would place it at about the time of the building of the first temple in Jerusalem (966–959 B.C.).

The author speaks of many places throughout the country as though they belong to the same kingdom—Jerusalem, Kedar, En Gedi, Sharon, Bethel, Lebanon, Carmel, Mount Gilead, Hermon and Tirzah. It was only during the reign of Solomon that this was the case. The comparison of the bridegroom with “my favourite foal among Pharaoh's chariots” (1:9) is also interesting since it was Solomon who introduced horses from Egypt (1 Kings 10:28).

SONG OF SOLOMON / **INTERPRETATION AND OUTLINE**

In twenty of the twenty-one books of the Bible that we have studied so far, it has been possible to trace an outline of the contents before entering into the interpretation and seeking the abiding message for the church of Jesus Christ. This twenty-second book in the inspired “library” cannot be dealt with in the same way. To give an outline of the contents of this book depends largely on the interpretation which is placed upon it.

If, as some suppose, there are three main characters, Solomon, the Shulamite maiden and her shepherd lover, then an overview like this

⁶ Stuart Olyott, *A Life Worth Living and a Lord Worth Loving: Ecclesiastes & Song of Solomon* (Welwyn: Evangelical Press, 1983), 74.

will emerge:

It is a record of the real history of a humble and virtuous woman engaged to be married to a young man of like humble circumstances, who was tempted to transfer her affections to one of the richest and most famous men that ever lived. It celebrates the victory of chaste love in humble life over all the attractions of worldly advantage, and all the allurements of courtly grandeur. It is a revelation of the chaste and virtuous love which no splendour can dazzle, and no flattery seduce.⁷

With this view, we are asked to believe that Solomon cast himself in the role of the worst kind of tempter. William Hendriksen points out that this interpretation has been generally rejected because it does not fit a “clear and consistent analysis of the book.”⁸

Another interpretation is that there are three main characters, Solomon, a Shulamite woman, and a group called the “daughters of Jerusalem.” The scene is set like this:

King Solomon had a vineyard in the hill country of Ephraim, about fifty miles north of Jerusalem (8:11). He let it out to keepers (8:11), consisting of a mother, two sons (1:6) and two daughters—the Shulamite (6:13), and a little sister (8:8). The Shulamite was “the Cinderella” of the family (1:5), naturally beautiful but unnoticed. Her brothers were probably half-brothers (since she speaks of them as “my mother’s sons”) (1:6). They made her work very hard tending the vineyards, so that she had little opportunity to care for her own personal appearance (1:6). She pruned the vines and set traps for the little foxes (2:15). She also kept the flocks (1:8). Being out in the open so much, she became sunburned (1:5).

One day a handsome stranger came along to the vineyard. It was Solomon disguised. He showed interest in her. She became embarrassed concerning her personal appearance (1:6). She took

⁷ Lee, *The Outlined Bible*, analysis no. 22. A similar approach is taken in William Still’s *Eleven Sermons on the Song of Solomon* (Aberdeen: Didasko Press, 1971).

⁸ William Hendriksen, *Survey of the Bible: A Treasury of Bible Information* (Welwyn: Evangelical Press, 1976), 297.

him for a shepherd and asked about his flocks (1:7). He answered her evasively (1:8), but also spoke loving words to her (1:8–10), and promised rich gifts for the future (1:11). He won her heart and left with the promise that some day he would return. She dreamed of him at night and sometimes thought he was near (3:1). Finally he did return in all his kingly splendour to make her his bride (3:6–7).⁹

E.J. Young gives a survey of the various interpretations that have been put forward over the years:

1. A Jewish allegory representing God's love for his chosen people.
2. A Christian allegory representing Christ's dealings with his church. This, E.J. Young admits, is the dominant view among Christians. (In some copies of the AV/KJV, you will find headings such as: "The mutual love of Christ and his church," "The graces of the church," "Christ's love to it," "The church professeth her faith and desire" and "The church's love to Christ.")
3. A drama in which "King Solomon falls in love with a Shulamite girl and takes her to his capital Jerusalem, his love being purified from sensual to pure love."
4. A collection of love songs.
5. A type, which means that the literal interpretation is first insisted upon. Then it is seen as bearing a typical character illustrating the love of Christ for his church.
6. An adaptation of a pagan liturgy to bring it into harmony with the religion of Israel.
7. A scene in a harem (the living quarters of wives and concubines) in which Solomon speaks to the girl from Shunem. Discussion ensues between Solomon, the girl and the women of the harem.
8. A parable—a mere song of human love, written by Solomon, possibly on the occasion of his marriage to the daughter of Pharaoh.

⁹ Adapted from H.A. Ironside, *Addresses on the Song of Solomon*, cited in Jensen's *Survey of the Old Testament*, 308; Olyott, *A Life Worth Living and a Lord Worth Loving*, also follows this approach.

Dismissing seven of these eight interpretations, E.J. Young favours the last:

There is certainly an important element of truth in this interpretation.... The Song does celebrate the dignity and purity of human love.... The Song...is didactic [instructive] and moral in its purpose. It comes to us in this world of sin, where lust and passion are on every hand, where fierce temptations assail us and try to turn us aside from the God-given standard of marriage. And it reminds us, in particularly beautiful fashion, how pure and noble true love is...in the sophisticated modern world, unfaithfulness may easily be regarded as something light and trivial.... So long as there is impurity in the world, we need, and need badly, the Song of Solomon.¹⁰

But is it likely that this book would find a place in the collection of inspired Scripture on these grounds alone? Burrowes gives the answer: "Impossible!" "The universal genius and method of the sacred books exclude the idea of admitting among them songs about the ordinary love of man and woman."¹¹

There is no doubt that the message of this book clarifies the position of intimacy in God-honouring marriage; it denounces asceticism on the one hand and lust on the other.¹² All may learn here that there is a God-ordained place for the enjoyment of physical love between husband and wife and that there is no other place for physical love except in the confines of the covenant of marriage. Within that covenant relationship there is freedom for the enjoyment, the delight and the pleasure of physical intimacy. That is highlighted and confirmed by the Song of Songs.

Convinced as he is that there is no warrant for saying this book is a type of Christ, E.J. Young nevertheless admits,

¹⁰ Young, *An Introduction to the Old Testament*, 333–337.

¹¹ Rosenmüller, cited by George Burrowes, *A Commentary on the Song of Solomon* (1853; London: Banner of Truth Trust, 1958), 24.

¹² Jensen, *Jensen's Survey of the Old Testament*, p.311.

The book does turn one's eyes to Christ.... The eye of faith, as it beholds this picture of exalted human love, will be reminded of the one Love that is above all earthly and human affections—even the love of the Son of God for lost humanity.¹³

As illustrated, there are numerous interpretations, with arguments for and against, by a host of Christian scholars and commentators. We are left with the Saviour's challenge: "What is your reading of it?" (Luke 10:26).

The song is poetry

As the first verse makes abundantly clear, this is "the Song of Songs." There is no claim that it is narrating historical events. The mention of Solomon, of towns and cities, of animals and plants, does not indicate any factual basis to the story. It is a love song. Stuart Olyott cautions all readers when he says, "At no point in our study must we lose sight of the fact that we are reading an oriental love poem."¹⁴ It is poetry, not factual account. Much greater licence is given to the poet than to the historian. Furthermore, it is Oriental. Natives of countries to the east of the Mediterranean delight in figures of speech that we in the West find most disconcerting and indecorous. At least, to those of the older generation in Western culture, some of the language appears singularly inappropriate for public reading. We are nevertheless assured, "There is nothing here that would offend the most modest oriental."¹⁵ It is a poem, a love story, a parable.

In 1879, Henry Law, Dean of Gloucester, divided this book into fifty-two portions for family reading on the Lord's Day. At the outset he cautions,

It is a Song. It is not an historic narrative, relating in plain terms the annals of the past. It is not a prophetic portrait, foreshadowing in shrouded form the semblance of the coming future. It is no scientific treatise, developing God's plan in the arrangement of nature's multitudinous wonders. It is no chain of moral

¹³ Young, *An Introduction to the Old Testament*, 336.

¹⁴ Olyott, *A Life Worth Living and a Lord Worth Loving*, 74.

¹⁵ Lee, *The Outlined Bible*, analysis no. 22.

precepts, directing to the beauties and bliss of holy life. It is a Song. It mounts on the wings of metaphor and figure.... Thus large scope is given for lively interpretation. But to this licence strict limits are erected. No conclusion may be enforced but the obvious lessons of sound judgement and indisputable truth.¹⁶

Thompson's Chain Reference Bible warns: "It is an oriental poem, the ardent expressions of which can only be properly interpreted by a mature spiritual mind." Robert Lee points out that this Song of Songs is sung annually by the Jews on the eighth day of the Passover Feast, which leads him to make an interesting observation: "Only those who know the Lord Jesus as their Passover Lamb can possibly understand it."¹⁷

The song viewed in the light of New Testament revelation

"What is true of every Old Testament book," writes William Hendriksen, "holds also with respect to the Song of Solomon: it is never interpreted fully until it is viewed in the light of New Testament revelation."¹⁸ In searching for the true interpretation of the Song of Solomon, like the Ethiopian minister of state on the road to Gaza, we should be asking the question: "Of whom does the prophet say this, of himself or of some other man?" (Acts 8:34). Our conclusion will be the same in both cases. The Ethiopian was questioning Philip about Isaiah 53:7–8. Was Isaiah speaking about himself or someone else? Philip shows him that the subject of Isaiah 53 is not Isaiah the prophet, but Jesus the Christ (Acts 8:35). In the same way, in this Song of Solomon, the author is not speaking about himself; he is speaking about the Lord Jesus Christ! If we expect to find Christ in this book because Christ is to be found "in all the Scriptures" (Luke 24:27), we shall not be disappointed.

Looking at the outline of this book, it is difficult to detect a flow to its contents. Many see three sections: courtship days (1:2–3:5), wedding (3:6–5:1) and married life (5:2–8:14). Then they try to fit Christian

¹⁶ Henry Law, *The Song of Solomon: Arranged for Sunday Reading with Meditations on Each Portion* (London: Hamilton, Adams and Co, 1879), 1–2.

¹⁷ Lee, *The Outlined Bible*, analysis no.22.

¹⁸ Hendriksen, *Survey of the Bible*, 298.

experience into this pattern: equating courtship days with the believer's experience of Christ before conversion, the wedding with conversion itself and married life with life lived in union with Christ. Trying to span the book in this way leads to insurmountable difficulties. Why does Christ leave us? Where is the justification for talking about pre-conversion days in terms of these first two chapters? We must search for another key.

Hendriksen points in a better direction:

Canticles extols real, pure, unquenchable love between two human lovers: a bridegroom and a bride. This must be our starting point in the interpretation.... This love between bridegroom and bride is a symbol not only of the love between Jehovah and Israel (Isaiah 50:1; 54:5; 62:4; Jeremiah 2:2; 3:1–13; Ezekiel 16; 23), but also of the love between Christ and his church. Not only is Solomon a type of Christ (2 Samuel 7:12–17; Psalm 72; Matthew 12:42; Luke 11:31), but the love between husband and wife is a symbol of the close relationship which exists between our Lord and his church (Ephesians 5:31–32). Moreover, the progress in our experience of this relationship is sometimes illustrated by the various elements that pertain to an Oriental wedding (Revelation 19:7; 21:9).¹⁹

All these features—the love between Jehovah and Israel, the love between Christ and his church, and the elements of an Oriental wedding—dovetail beautifully if we go a little further than William Hendriksen and understand that the Song of Songs may be divided into two parts of four chapters each. Chapters 1–4 refer to Christ and the church under the Old Covenant—or Jehovah and Israel—and chapters 5–8 refer to Christ and the church under the New Covenant. The key is to be found in the last verse of chapter 4 and the first verse of chapter 5. The Old Testament church cries out, “Let my beloved come to his garden and eat its pleasant fruits” (4:16). The New Testament opens with the Beloved declaring, “I have come to my garden, my sister, my spouse” (5:1). Charles Alexander asserts,

¹⁹ Hendriksen, *Survey of the Bible*, 298; cf. William Hendriksen, *More Than Conquerors: An Interpretation of the Book of Revelation* (London: Tyndale, 1940), 179–181.

The key to the understanding of the Song of Songs lies where few have sought for it. It is found at the centre of this great poetic drama, at the point where the Church passes from her Old Testament state into the full glory and experience of the New Covenant ushered in by the long-expected coming of the Saviour into the world.²⁰

SONG OF SOLOMON / CHRIST AND HIS CHURCH

TYPES

1. Christ's first advent: the betrothal

The long-awaited Messiah comes, but the church is asleep (5:2). He knocks at Israel's door but Israel is taken up with her present comfort. Her feet are washed (5:3). The outward washing of the law of Moses is good enough for her. Why should she defile her feet by leaving her Old Testament bed to go into the night? The bridegroom is unwelcome. Of Christ's first coming we read, "He came to His own, and His own did not receive Him" (John 1:11). "He is despised and rejected by men." The Israelites hid their "faces from Him; He was despised, and we did not esteem Him" (Isaiah 53:3).

It is claimed that the New Testament writers never quote from the Song of Solomon. This may not be so. The stirring bride, representing the spiritually awakening Israelites, testifies,

I sleep, but my heart is awake;
It is the voice of my beloved!
He knocks, saying,
"Open for me, my sister, my love,
My dove, my perfect one" (5:2).

To the church at Laodicea the risen Christ says, "Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and dine with him, and he with Me" (Revelation 3:20).

After the bridegroom's departure there is an awakening in Israel.

²⁰ Charles D. Alexander, *The Heavenly Mystery of the Song of Songs* (Liverpool: Bible Exposition Fellowship, 1965), 21.

Spurned and rejected, Christ has departed, but many are now stirred to seek after him. God the Father pours

on the house of David and on the inhabitants of Jerusalem the Spirit of grace and supplication; then they will look on Me whom they pierced. Yes, they will mourn for Him as one mourns for his only son, and grieve for Him as one grieves for a firstborn (Zechariah 12:10).

I arose to open for my beloved...
 I opened for my beloved,
 But my beloved had turned away and was gone.
 My heart leaped up when he spoke.
 I sought him, but I could not find him;
 I called him, but he gave me no answer (5:5–6).

The aroused Israelites go out into the night, the dark night of Israel, seeking for him whom they have despised and rejected. They are met by Israel's cruel watchmen, the scribes and Pharisees. They are beaten and put to shame (5:7). The proud priesthood and eldership of Israel disown them, but "the daughters of Jerusalem," the Gentiles,²¹ join the remnant of Israel to seek him whom their souls desire (5:8). They find the bruised and persecuted bride and ask her for a description of her missing Lord. In her response (5:10–16) there is such "an unveiling of the beauty and glory of Christ as will fit only Deity Itself."²² This is the full unveiling of Christ which is to be made in the New Testament revelation.

The Lord often uses the analogy of marriage for his relationship with his people. In Isaiah we read,

You shall no longer be termed Forsaken,
 Nor shall your land any more be termed Desolate;
 But you shall be called Hephzibah, and your land Beulah;
 For the Lord delights in you,
 And your land shall be married.

²¹ Cf. Ezekiel 16:61 and Calvin's commentary on that verse; also Gill, *An Exposition of the Song of Solomon*, 19–21, 27–28, 201–202.

²² Alexander, *The Heavenly Mystery of the Song of Songs*, 21.

For as a young man marries a virgin,
 So shall your sons marry you;
 And as the bridegroom rejoices over the bride,
 So shall your God rejoice over you (Isaiah 62:4–5).

The first advent, the incarnation of Christ, is for the purpose of betrothal. The apostle Paul tells the Corinthian Christians, “I have betrothed you to one husband, that I may present you as a chaste virgin to Christ” (2 Corinthians 11:2).

John the Baptist testifies,

He who has the bride is the bridegroom; but the friend of the bridegroom, who stands and hears him, rejoices greatly because of the bridegroom’s voice. Therefore this joy of mine is fulfilled. He must increase, but I must decrease. *He who comes* from above is above all; he who is of the earth is earthly and speaks of the earth. *He who comes* from heaven is above all (John 3:29–31, emphasis added).

2. Christ’s second advent: the marriage feast

The Shulamite longs for the return of her Beloved:

Make haste, my beloved,
 And be like a gazelle
 Or a young stag
 On the mountains of spices (8:14).

“Hurry back to me,” cries the church to her Lord, and years later this sentiment is repeated at the close of the final book of the Bible. The Lord promises to return and his people yearn, “‘Surely I am coming quickly.’ Amen. Even so, come, Lord Jesus!” (Revelation 22:20). The Saviour promises to return for the marriage feast and to take his people home—never to be parted again.

Marriage among the Hebrews was quite different from marriage in modern Western culture. In the first place, it was an *arranged marriage*. Secondly, instead of engagement, there was *betrothal*, or legal marriage, and then, some time later, the *marriage feast* took place, after which the couple began to live together as husband and wife.

This arrangement served a wonderful purpose in the incarnation of the Son of God:

Now the birth of Jesus Christ was as follows: After His mother Mary was betrothed to Joseph, before they came together, she was found with child of the Holy Spirit. Then Joseph her husband, being a just man, and not wanting to make her a public example, was minded to put her away secretly (Matthew 1:18–19).

This marriage arrangement safeguarded the honour and integrity of Jesus' mother, Mary, ensuring that his birth was not illegitimate, and yet enabling prophecy to be fulfilled (Isaiah 7:14). In Mary's own testimony, she responds to the announcement of the angel that she was to be a mother, "How can this be, since I do not know a man?" (Luke 1:34). She indicates by a discreet euphemism that she was still a virgin (Matthew 1:22–23).

This marriage arrangement is also crucial to the work of the Saviour in relation to his people. Jesus "came into the world to save sinners" (1 Timothy 1:15); the bridegroom came for his bride (John 3:29). It is an *arranged marriage*, for Jesus said, "All that the Father gives Me will come to Me" (John 6:37). The only question the bride is asked is in effect: "Will you go with this man?" (Genesis 24:58). Responding gladly, new converts are betrothed. They are committed to Christ as to a husband (2 Corinthians 11:2; cf. Romans 7:4). But the *marriage feast*, followed by permanently living together, is still in the future. One day, the whole believing community will join with the heavenly host in saying,

"Alleluia! For the Lord God Omnipotent reigns! Let us be glad and rejoice and give Him glory, for the marriage of the Lamb has come, and His wife has made herself ready." And to her it was granted to be arrayed in fine linen, clean and bright, for the fine linen is the righteous acts of the saints.

Then he said to me, "Write: 'Blessed are those who are called to the marriage supper of the Lamb!'" And he said to me, "These are the true sayings of God" (Revelation 19:6–9).

There is even more which confirms and consolidates the place of the Song of Solomon at the very centre of Old Testament revelation.

This book forges an unbreakable link with earlier prophecy. Solomon is intimately connected with the “Shiloh” of Jacob’s prophecy (Genesis 49:10).

3. Shiloh has come

Over and over again, the Saviour indicates his connection with the Song of Solomon: “*I have come* to my garden, my sister, my spouse” (5:1, emphasis added). When Christ came into the world, he said, “Behold, *I have come*—in the volume of the book it is written of Me—to do Your will, O God” (Hebrews 10:7, emphasis added). In John’s Gospel he says, “The thief does not come except to steal, and to kill, and to destroy. *I have come* that they may have life, and that they may have it more abundantly” (John 10:10, emphasis added). And again he says, “*I have come* as a light into the world” (John 12:46, emphasis added). “*I have come* in My Father’s name, and you do not receive Me” (John 5:43, emphasis added). John the Baptist sends two of his disciples to the Lord Jesus with the question: “Are You *the Coming One*, or do we look for another?” (Matthew 11:3, emphasis added).

This emphasis in the words of the Lord Jesus Christ and John the Baptist sends our minds back to the book of Genesis and one of the most profound prophecies found within that book. In blessing his twelve sons, Jacob prophesies of his fourth son, Judah, and of the tribe that will descend from him,

The sceptre shall not depart from Judah,
Nor a lawgiver from between his feet,
Until Shiloh comes;
And to Him shall be the obedience of the people (Genesis 49:10,
emphasis added).

Solomon knew that the subject of his Song of Songs, “both by intention and by inspiration, was none other than the Messiah, the Christ, the Eternal and Only Begotten Son of God, the King of kings and Lord of lords, the long-promised Redeemer of mankind.”²³ Charles Alexander argues strongly in favour of Solomon’s knowing that he was writing under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit about the promised Deliverer:

²³ Alexander, *The Heavenly Mystery of the Song of Songs*, 1.

He [Solomon] was expounding the prophecy of his ancestor Jacob [Genesis 49:10]. More, he was dwelling in the 45th Psalm of his father David, and was enlarging upon that glorious description of the marriage of Christ with His redeemed church, in which he [Solomon] comes face to face with one who is “fairer than the children of men” (verse 2)—nay, who is, according to the literal meaning of the remarkable double word used in the Hebrew—One who is the “fair-fair,” the incomparable, the unique, the “only fair” flower of all creation, into whose lips grace is poured; whom God the Father has blessed for ever, to whom it is given to go forth conquering and to conquer; who girds upon His thigh the irresistible sword of deliverance for His bride. His arrows bring down the pride of the foe; and to Him is given an eternal throne. His royal garments savour of myrrh, aloes and cassia, out of the Ivory Palaces of that gentile world from which He draws to Himself the rich reward given to Him in the love of the Father before all creation.

Solomon lived for many years in that 45th Psalm . He saw his own destiny foreshadowing the great Solomon who was to come, that Man of Peace who should make peace by the blood of His atonement, and should rise to occupy that eternal throne which was always His by right; but now doubly so, for He proved Himself and won His divine destiny by the merit of that love which gave itself to death. He would not reign alone, but would have beside Him to all eternity a Bride, a Queen. Upon Her He would place His own beauty and with Her He would reign for ever in that Upper Garden fair, the heavenly Eden, the Paradise of God.²⁴

The claim that Solomon knew he was writing about the promised Redeemer must be confirmed and consolidated if it is to be taken seriously. Is it possible to deduce this clearly and decisively from the pages of Scripture?

When Solomon entitled his composition, “The Song of Songs,” that is “the most excellent of songs,” he was either presumptuous in the extreme (What about the songs of Miriam, Moses and his father David?) or aware that his subject was the greatest, most glorious

²⁴ Alexander, *The Heavenly Mystery of the Song of Songs*, 10.

subject in the whole world. It would seem that he was aware and was writing about the promised Seed.

The proof that Solomon knew he was writing under divine inspiration, not of himself and his own life history, but concerning the hope of Israel, concerning the promised Redeemer, the Seed of the woman who was to bruise the serpent's head (Genesis 3:15), "lies in the deliberate use of his own name throughout the Song... exactly seven times, and this indicates beyond doubt with what deliberation and insight he saw himself to be a type of Israel's messianic hope,"²⁵ asserts Charles Alexander. Solomon could not have been ignorant of Jacob's great prophecy concerning Solomon's own tribe of Judah, that the sceptre of rule would continue with the tribe until the coming of the mysterious Shiloh (Genesis 49:10).

Nor could he fail to appreciate that his own name, Solomon, was derived from Shiloh, and had the meaning, "peace." In Hebrew, the name Solomon is spelled *Shelomoh*. In the Song of Songs, the bride of *Shelomoh* is *Shulamith*, which is derived from the same root, *Shiloh*. (*Shelomoh* and *Shulamith* differ from each other only as Cornelius differs from Cornelia).²⁶ *Shelomoh* means "prince of peace," and *Shulamith* means the bride of *Shelomoh*, "the princess of peace." There is no other person in Scripture bearing the name Shiloh or Solomon. The sacred name Shiloh was reserved for the Saviour of the world, and given to Solomon prophetically as the son of David to point to "great David's greater Son" (cf. Psalm 110:1; Matthew 22:41–45), the Lord of glory himself, the Prince of peace (Isaiah 9:6). The prophet Micah declares Bethlehem Ephrathah to be the place of the Saviour's birth and adds, "This man shall be peace" (Micah 5:2,5 KJV). And the apostle Paul says that Christ Jesus "Himself is our peace" (Ephesians 2:14), "having made peace through the blood of His cross" (Colossians 1:20).

Solomon also received another name, a name given by the Lord:

Then David comforted Bathsheba his wife, and went in to her and lay with her. So she bore a son, and he called his name Solomon. *And the LORD loved him.* And he sent word by the hand

²⁵ Alexander, *The Heavenly Mystery of the Song of Songs*, 1–2.

²⁶ Burrowes, *A Commentary on the Song of Solomon*, 38.

of Nathan the prophet; so he called his name *Jedidiah*, because of the LORD (2 Samuel 12:24–25, emphasis added).

Jedidiah means, “Beloved of the LORD.” Of Christ, God the Father says, “Behold, My servant whom I have chosen, My *beloved* in whom My soul is well pleased” (Matthew 12:18, emphasis added; cf. Isaiah 42:1). And again he says, “This is My *beloved Son*, in whom I am well pleased” (Matthew 3:17, emphasis added; cf. Matthew 17:5).

Is any further proof required that Solomon understood what he wrote, that he composed this song of all songs under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit and that he was privileged to be part of the great purpose of God—lifting back the curtain on Christ and his church?

SONG OF SOLOMON / **CONCLUSION**

We simply cannot help seeing Christ here. The theme of love causes regenerate minds to turn naturally to thinking of him. Every mention of love causes us to meditate on *his* and to bemoan the poverty of our own response. We think of our union with him and long for a closer communion. We find ourselves overwhelmed at his tenderness toward us and the sheer bliss of belonging to him for ever. . . many expressions of the book become the language of our own devotion. Our typical approach ceases to be an academic approach and our reading of the book becomes a precious spiritual experience.²⁷

Happy are those who hear in the bridegroom’s words the love of Christ addressed to their own souls. Happy are those who can respond, who know that the words of the bride (the church) are the pure experience of their inmost feelings. Robert Murray M’Cheyne wrote,

No book furnishes a better test than does the Song of the depth of a man’s Christianity. If his religion be in his head only, a dry form of doctrines; or if it hath place merely in his fancy, like Pliable in *Pilgrim’s Progress*, he will see nothing here to attract

²⁷ Olyott, *A Life Worth Living and a Lord Worth Loving*, 79.

him. But if his religion have a hold on his heart, this will be a favourite portion of the word of God.²⁸

The Song of Solomon is a prophecy in the form of an epic poem. Here is the meaning of all things—the meaning of creation, the meaning of our existence. Here too is laid bare the heart of God, the wisdom of God, the hidden purpose of God. Nothing in all creation matters to God like his Son and his church. Everything else serves this end—the glory, the honour, the blessing of Christ and his church. God, through his Son, will bind the church to himself in an eternal marriage of Creator and creature “in an ecstasy of exquisite and eternal love.”²⁹

At the close of the New Testament, we hear the bridegroom promising to return: “Surely I am coming quickly” (Revelation 22:20). The concluding words in the Song of Solomon are those of the bride crying in longing:

Make haste, my beloved,
And be like a gazelle
Or a young stag
On the mountains of spices (8:14).

In the penultimate verse of the completed Scriptures, the bride cries: “Amen. Even so, come, Lord Jesus!” (Revelation 22:20).

²⁸ Cited by Burrowes, *A Commentary on the Song of Solomon*, 26. Robert Murray M'Cheyne (1813–1843) was a nineteenth-century Scottish pastor known for his zeal for the gospel and deep concern for souls, his godly life and his legacy in Dundee.

²⁹ Alexander, *The Heavenly Mystery of the Song of Songs*, 2.

SONG OF SOLOMON / APPLICATION AND REFLECTION

1. Marital love

Though the Lord's primary purpose in the Song of Solomon is no doubt to communicate truth concerning Christ and his church, there is also a powerful message within the inspired story about human marital love (confined within marriage by the Word of God). In a day when sexual love is debased, exploited and publicly paraded, there is need for Christian married couples to know that sexual relationships can be pure, holy and God-honouring. "Marriage is honourable among all, and the bed undefiled; but fornicators and adulterers God will judge" (Hebrews 13:4).

Time and again over recent years in Britain and the USA, the church of Christ has been rocked by the serious fall of leading Christian preachers and teachers. While occasionally this has been due to financial greed, more often than not it is due to sinful, uncontrolled sexual impulse—the vice of lust! In many cases of marital dysfunction among believers, one area of ignorance constantly appears: the couple do not know, understand or apply the fundamental biblical principles of sexual relations. These principles may be clearly deduced from Paul's discussion of the subject in 1 Corinthians 7: intimacy between a husband and his wife is encouraged by God, may lead to temptations if unilaterally terminated and is to be governed by mutual respect and mutual concern.³⁰

The instance of Solomon, coupled with recent cases of adultery among prominent Christians, might lead to the conclusion that men in particular are especially vulnerable in middle age. The warning of Jesus in a different context might be appropriate here to the married couple: "Watch and pray, lest you [either of you] enter into temptation" (Matthew 26:41).

2. Christ alone!

Solomon obviously took enormous delight in the beauty of his bride, but he took even greater delight in knowing that this beautiful woman had reserved herself for him, and him alone. The images Solomon uses to describe her convey this delight. He refers to her here as "a garden enclosed," as "a spring shut up" and as "a fountain sealed" (4:12).

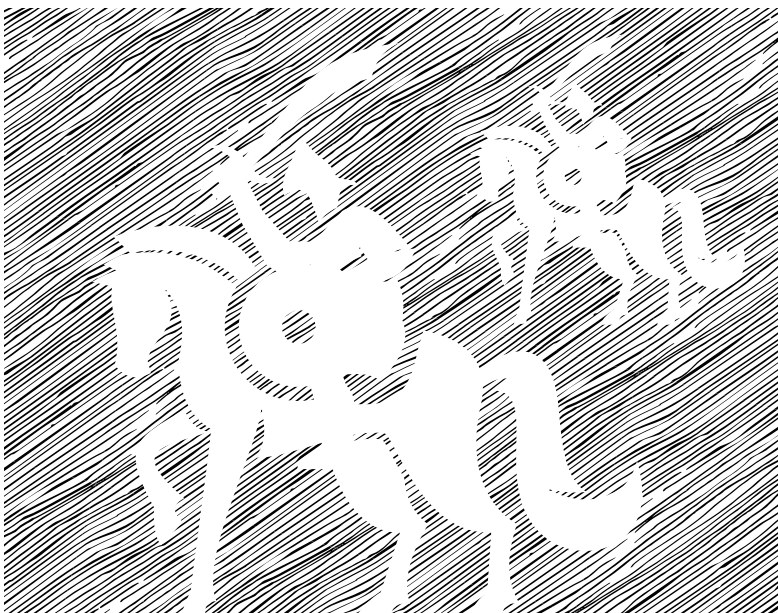
³⁰ Jay E. Adams, *The Christian Counsellor's Manual* (Phillipsburg: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1973), 392.

These are terms of exclusiveness. Solomon's bride did not give herself to anyone, but only to him. A walled garden is one that only the owner and the gardener can enter. The waters of a spring that has been "shut up" and a fountain that has been "sealed" are not available to all, but only to the one who has placed them out of bounds.³¹

The Lord Jesus Christ, the Saviour and Lord of his church, is to be loved *exclusively*. The church is to glorify Christ alone, love Christ alone, proclaim Christ alone and serve Christ alone. This is not, however, a response to a command so much as a response to the person and work of the Saviour. In this book, Solomon paints a picture of the beloved as one of singularly fine character, lovely in disposition and temperament and resplendent in all the virtues. When Christians add to this contemplation the wonderful work that Christ achieved at Calvary, then adoration, love, devotion, delight, obedience and service flow from the believer's grateful heart. The motive is not law but love. To quote Burrowes, "Love to Jesus Christ becomes through sanctification, the strongest passion that can take possession of the human heart."³²

³¹ Roger Ellsworth, *He Is Altogether Lovely: Discovering Christ in the Song of Solomon* (Darlington: Evangelical Press, 1998), 175–176.

³² Burrowes, *A Commentary on the Song of Solomon*, 16.



ISAIAH

MEANING

"Jehovah has saved"

AUTHOR

Isaiah

KEY THOUGHT

The Holy One of Israel

THEME

Salvation by the living God through judgement and grace

THEME VERSE

***For I am the Lord your God,
The Holy One of Israel, your Savior.***

ISAIAH 43:3

ISAIAH / SUMMARY

PART 1 / PROPHECIES AGAINST JUDAH AND THE NATIONS

1:1-35:10

- 1. Judgements on Judah in the days of Uzziah and Jotham** **1:1-6:13**
 - a. The wickedness of Judah 1:1-31
 - b. The day of the Lord: his future reign 2:1-4:6
 - c. Th parable of a disappointing vineyard 5:1-7
 - d. Woes and judgements against Judah 5:8-30
 - e. The vision of Isaiah: his call and commission 6:1-13
- 2. Prophecies concering Judah in the days of Ahaz** **7:1-12:6**
 - a. Invasion by Syria and Israel—a message to encourage King Ahaz 7:1-9
 - b. Prophecy concerning Immanuel, “God with us” 7:10-17
 - c. Trials to come for Judah 7:18-25
 - d. Assyria will invade Judah but not succeed 8:1-10
 - e. Fear God and obey his Word 8:11-22
 - f. Light will shine at the coming of Messiah 9:1-7
 - g. Overthrow of the northern kingdom of Israel 9:8-10:4
 - h. Assyria will be overthrown 10:5-19
 - i. Only a righteous remnant will return 10:20-34
 - j. Spirit-anointed righteous Messiah and his reign 11:1-16
 - k. A hymn of praise 12:1-6
- 3. Prophecies against other nations** **13:1-23:18**
- 4. Prophecies concerning the day of the Lord** **24:1-27:13**
- 5. Prophetic warnings** **28:1-35:10**

PART 2 / HISTORICAL INTERLUDE**36:1-39:8**

- | | | |
|----|--------------------------------|---------|
| a. | Assyria challenges the Lord | 36:1-22 |
| b. | The Lord destroys Assyria | 37:1-38 |
| c. | Hezekiah's illness and healing | 38:1-22 |
| d. | Hezekiah's foolishness | 39:1-8 |

**PART 3 / PROPHECIES OF THE NATURE AND
FUTURE OF THE CHURCH OF GOD****40:1-66:24****1. Spiritual Israel's delivery 40:1-48:12**

- | | | |
|----|---|------------|
| a. | Comfort: God himself will deliver his people | 40:1-31 |
| b. | Comfort: God is great | 41:1-29 |
| c. | Comfort: the coming Servant of God | 42:1-25 |
| d. | Comfort: Israel will be redeemed by
the living God | 43:1-44:28 |
| e. | Comfort: God's use of Cyrus the Persian | 45:1-48:22 |

2. Spiritual Israel's Deliverer 49:1-57:21

- | | | |
|----|--|-------------|
| a. | The Servant of God: a light to the Gentiles | 49:1-26 |
| b. | The Servant of God: Israel's hope | 50:1-11 |
| c. | The Servant of God: comfort to Jerusalem | 51:1-52:12 |
| d. | The Servant of God: sin-bearer | 52:13-53:12 |
| e. | Promise of restoration, invitation,
punishment for the wicked | 54:1-57:21 |

3. Spiritual Israel's glorious future 58:1-66:24

- | | | |
|----|---|-------------|
| a. | Worship that pleases the Lord | 58:1-14 |
| b. | Sins that separate from God | 59:1-21 |
| c. | Israel a blessing to the nations | 60:1-22 |
| d. | The Spirit-anointed Messiah | 61:1-11 |
| e. | A glorious future for Zion
(spiritual Jerusalem) | 62:1-12 |
| f. | Messiah will punish the wicked and
remember his people | 63:1-65:16 |
| g. | The Lord's glorious new creation | 65:17-66:24 |

ISAIAH

The book of Isaiah ranks as one of the finest compositions in the Old Testament Scriptures. Written in the form of Hebrew poetic parallelism, in terms of sheer grandeur and majesty it is unparalleled. It is frequently quoted by our Lord and the New Testament writers. It contains outstanding insights into the character and mission of our Saviour and his wonderful relationship with his Father and with his people. Arranged into sixty-six chapters, the book parallels the sixty-six books of the Bible. The first thirty-nine chapters correspond to the books of the Old Testament and stress the holiness, justice and righteousness of God. The last twenty-seven chapters correspond to the New Testament books and display God's incomparable glory and grace.

ISAIAH / **AUTHOR**

Unsurpassed for magnificence, the book of Isaiah has nevertheless been subjected, in more recent years, to repeated criticism in regard to its unity and its authorship. Until the last two centuries, Jewish and Christian interpreters regarded Isaiah, the son of Amoz—the eighth-century prophet who was a friend and confidant of King Hezekiah—as the author of the *entire* book. Modern-day critical scholarship, which began in the late eighteenth century, maintains that the book is the product of at least two (1–39; 40–66) or three (1–39; 40–54; 55–66) *different* authors, spanning many years and from widely separated geographic locations.¹

For those who are governed by the testimony of the New Testament, the evidence is overwhelmingly in favour of *single* authorship. In the New Testament, Isaiah is quoted more than all the other prophets combined and in such a way as to leave no doubt the New Testament writers regarded Isaiah as the author of the entire book. Isaiah is referred to twenty-one times—by name—with quotations taken from

¹ A brief outline of the arguments for and against a single authorship is provided in Raymond B. Dillard and Tremper Longman III, *An Introduction to the Old Testament* (Leicester: Apollos, 1995), 268–275.

twelve different chapters (seven from Isaiah 1–39, and fourteen from Isaiah 40–66). Three examples will illustrate the point:

1. The apostle John makes reference to Isaiah 6:10 and 53:1 in consecutive verses, identifying both with the prophet Isaiah (John 12:38–41).
2. In Acts 8:28 the Ethiopian is said to be “reading Isaiah the prophet” as he struggles over the meaning of Isaiah 53:7–8. (Where there is a dispute over authorship, it is the second part, chapters 40–66, that is in question.)
3. In Romans 9 and 10, Paul quotes extensively from Isaiah (10:22–23; 1:9; 53:1; 65:1–2) and, whether quoting from the early chapters or from the latter, in each case he attributes the authorship to Isaiah.

As E.J. Young concludes, “To every Christian believer this testimony of the New Testament should be decisive.”²

The fact that the second half of Isaiah contains details of people, places, events and situations which had not yet occurred in Isaiah’s day, and would not occur for at least 150 years, indicates, not the later addition by a second “Isaiah,” but the *prophetic inspiration* given by the Holy Spirit to the first (and only) Isaiah, enabling him to accurately predict the future.

Isaiah actively prophesied for well over forty years—until after the deliverance of Jerusalem from King Sennacherib of Assyria (705–681 B.C.). The name *Isaiah* translates the shortened form of the Hebrew name *Yesha`yah*. Its full form is *Yesha`yahuw* and translates as “Jehovah saves,” “Jehovah is salvation” or “Salvation is of Jehovah.”

Isaiah was the son of Amoz (1:1; 2:1), who is not to be confused with Amos the prophet. The fact that the Old Testament refers to Isaiah as “the son of Amoz” thirteen times has led some Bible scholars to conclude that Isaiah’s father was a man of some prominence. Tradition (the Jewish Talmud) maintains that Isaiah was born into nobility and mixed freely with royalty. He is said to have been a brother of King Amaziah, and so a cousin of King Uzziah. The prophet lived in

² For full list see Edward J. Young, *An Introduction to the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1949), 206.

Jerusalem at least until the death of Sennacherib (681 B.C.), which he records (37:38). The author of Chronicles credits Isaiah with having written a full account of the history of King Uzziah (2 Chronicles 26:22). There is a tradition (in the Jewish Talmud), unsupported by any biblical evidence, that he was sawn in two during the reign of King Manasseh of Judah (cf. Hebrews 11:37).

Little is known about Isaiah's personal history. The emphasis in Scripture is placed upon the message, not the man. Isaiah calls his wife "the prophetess" (8:3). They had two sons, Shear-Jashub (7:3), meaning, "A remnant shall return," and Maher-Shalal-Hash-Baz (8:3), meaning, "Hastening to the spoil; hurrying to the prey" (cf. 8:4). The names of these two sons signify the twofold message of the prophet. On the one hand, there is a resounding warning; on the other, a reassuring promise. If the people will not turn away from idolatry and sin, God will punish them by raising up a foreign power to conquer them and carry them away captive. Like a wild animal pouncing on its weaker prey, so will Assyria carry Israel away. Nevertheless God will remain faithful to his ancient promises. A remnant will return to their own land.

Isaiah was evidently of keen and able intellect, one who had received a good education. He had a thorough grasp of the Scriptures and a penetrating awareness of the political circumstances of his day. The outstanding characteristic of this man is, however, his deep spirituality. He manifests an undoubted love for God and a zeal for the Lord's honour and glory. He feared God and feared no man. There is no partiality in his preaching; no toning down of judgement when addressing particular classes. He loved the people and knew the faithful communication of the Word of God was the only way to demonstrate the reality and sincerity of that love (cf. the apostle Paul in 1 Thessalonians 2:4-7). Isaiah was absolutely sincere. He was bold and courageous. Jensen goes so far as to say that "Isaiah was a many-sided genius" and "his ministry of prophecy was enhanced by his being gifted as a poet, a statesman, and an orator."³

Isaiah was certainly a gifted communicator. He spoke to the people of Judah in plain, uncompromising language. He exhibited a broad

³ Irving L. Jensen, *Jensen's Survey of the Old Testament: Search and Discover* (Chicago: Moody, 1978), 328.

range of vocabulary and carefully employed words to their maximum effect. Occasionally he resorted to irony to expose or rebuke behaviour and attitudes (e.g. 40:19–20; 41:6–7; 44:13–20). Isaiah probably composed the last twenty-seven chapters during his later life. Whether the prophet actually preached his messages or only committed them to writing is not made clear.

ISAIAH / HISTORICAL SETTING

Solomon reigned in Israel for forty years (1 Kings 11:42). On his death (931 B.C.), the kingdom of Israel was divided. Jeroboam the son of Nebat became king of the ten tribes based at Samaria and known as “Israel,” or the northern kingdom. Rehoboam, the son of Solomon, became king of the two tribes (Judah and Benjamin) based at Jerusalem and known as “Judah” or the southern kingdom. Generally, the people had turned from God: they forgot his law, violated his covenant and disobeyed his commands. They turned to the heathen and pagan gods of the surrounding nations. God’s judgement fell on the twelve tribes.

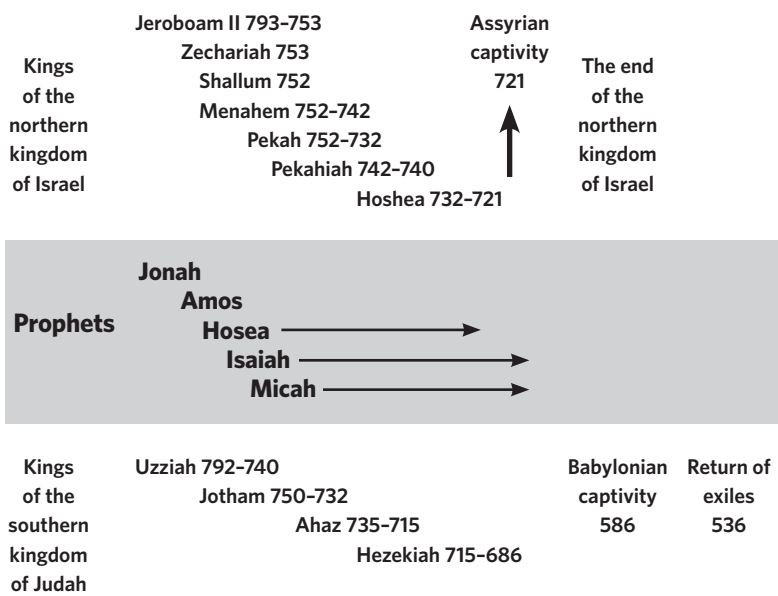
From the time of the division of the kingdom in 931 B.C., the history of the two nations is a history of general decline and disintegration (1 Kings 12–2 Kings 25; 2 Chronicles 10–36). Israel (the northern kingdom of the ten tribes) deteriorated more speedily, surviving as a nation for only 200 years. With the exile to Assyria in 721 B.C., the nation of Israel ceased to exist. Judah survived longer, a total of almost 350 years. Exile to Babylon in 586 B.C. destroyed the nation, but the people retained their identity as “Jews” (the name derived in exile from “Judeans”).

Nearly 200 years after the death of King Solomon, Isaiah received his call to the prophetic office. This is “in the year that King Uzziah⁴ died” (6:1)—that is, in 740 B.C. Isaiah continued to function as a prophet in Judah, the southern kingdom, during the reigns of Jotham, Ahaz and Hezekiah (1:1) (see Figure 2). The combined history of these four kings is recorded in 2 Kings 15:1–20:21 and 2 Chronicles 26:1–32:33.

Isaiah followed a long line of worthies in the prophetic office. There had been key figures such as Samuel and Nathan in the early days of the united kingdom of Israel and Judah, and men like Obadiah and

⁴ Also called Azariah in 2 Kings 15:1.

Figure 2. Isaiah in relation to the kings and prophets of the divided kingdom



**Years are in B.C.*

Joel serving, like himself, mainly the southern kingdom of Judah. In the northern kingdom of Israel, men such as Elijah and Elisha, Jonah and Amos had earlier served as prophets.

Hosea, a prophet to Israel, preceded Isaiah in his appointment to the prophetic office by less than ten years (Hosea 1:1). Micah, serving mainly in Judah, became a prophet about ten years after Isaiah commenced his ministry. Consequently, these three—Hosea, Isaiah and Micah—were contemporaries.

ISAIAH / OUTLINE

In order to understand the book of Isaiah, it is necessary to keep in mind the complex political situation to which Isaiah speaks. These were critical days in the history of God's people. The Assyrian empire

was threatening from the north-east and, among the people of Judah, two political solutions were being promoted. There were those who favoured a coalition with Egypt to the west, and those who preferred an alliance with Assyria. The prophet Isaiah took the middle ground and called respective kings and the people to rely entirely and exclusively on the living God.

PART 1 / **PROPHECIES AGAINST JUDAH AND THE NATIONS (1:1-35:10)**

Judgements on Judah in the days of Uzziah and Jotham (1:1-6:13)

Uzziah (Azariah) became king of the southern kingdom of Judah at the age of sixteen. He reigned for fifty-two years, although for the last ten years or so he was king in name only. His son Jotham was the effective ruler for the latter period. During Uzziah's reign, Judah experienced a period of prosperity. Uzziah freed Judah from the control of the northern kingdom of Israel. He also defeated the Philistines to the west, as well as the Ammonites to the east. He substantially strengthened the army and made elaborate improvements to the fortifications of the city of Jerusalem (2 Chronicles 26:1-15). For the people as a whole, these were days of self-indulgence and godlessness. Paganism and worldliness were rife in the land (2:1-3:26).

Up in the northern kingdom of Israel, Jeroboam II was king. Jeroboam's military success was even more impressive than that of Uzziah. He extended his territory and resisted Syria to the extent that he even captured its capital, Damascus (2 Kings 14:28). This, however, was to prove a rash move. By weakening Syria, Israel was left open to attack from another powerful enemy: the Assyrians.

On the death of Uzziah in Judah, his son Jotham continued on the throne and Isaiah was called to the prophetic office (6:1). Jotham reigned as sole monarch for about five years in Judah, after which his son Ahaz joined him and they exercised a co-regency until Jotham's death.

Jotham was a good king, a God-fearing man, for "He did what was right in the sight of the LORD" (2 Chronicles 27:2). He was a man of prayer, for "Jotham became mighty, because he prepared his ways before the LORD his God" (2 Chronicles 27:6). He was not able, however, to influence the nation in spiritual and moral concerns: "But still the people acted corruptly" (2 Chronicles 27:2). The prophets Isaiah

and Micah specifically address the sinfulness of the people (2:5–9; 5:7–30; Micah 1:5; 2:1–2). Jotham was not without blame in respect to the people's sin, for while he extended the building of the temple (2 Chronicles 27:3), he did not remove the many pagan temples scattered throughout Judah and "the people still sacrificed and burned incense on the high places" (2 Kings 15:35). Consequently, "In those days the LORD began to send Rezin king of Syria and Pekah [the king of Israel] the son of Remaliah against Judah" (2 Kings 15:37). Syria and Israel were sent against Judah because the king and the people were not being entirely true to the living God.

Prophecies concerning Judah in the days of Ahaz (7:1–12:6)

During the overlap of the reigns of Jotham and Ahaz, the Assyrian empire under Tiglath-Pileser III (745–727 B.C.) was growing stronger. Syria and the northern kingdom of Israel were becoming increasingly concerned about the threat from the north-east. Rezin, the king of Syria, and Pekah, the king of Israel, tried to persuade King Ahaz of Judah to join them against Assyria. Isaiah warned Ahaz against participating in an anti-Assyrian coalition. When Ahaz refused to join them, Syria and Israel attacked Judah. They intended not only to overthrow Judah, but also to remove the descendants of David from the throne in Jerusalem (7:6).

Isaiah received a commission to inform Ahaz that he must not yield to the attack from Syria and Israel, but must trust in Jehovah. The Lord would protect him and the nation. Ahaz was encouraged to ask for a sign from the Lord of assurance of his protection. In spite of the offer from Isaiah the prophet of God, Ahaz refused to ask for a sign, on the pretext that he would not dream of testing the Lord in such a manner. The sign was nevertheless given. It forms one of the amazing prophecies concerning Messiah: "Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a Son, and shall call His name Immanuel [which means, "God with us"]" (7:14).

Ahaz refused to trust in the Lord and turned to Assyria for help. Assyria, however, had plans of her own. Instead of assisting Judah, Assyria interpreted the request as a sign of weakness and began to assert greater authority over Judah (2 Chronicles 28:16–25).

The reason why Judah was being brought low like this—pressured by the Syrians, the Israelites, the Edomites, the Philistines and the

Assyrians—is explained in 2 Chronicles. The issue, as always in the fortunes of the ancient people of God, is not military but *moral*, not an issue of strategy, but a question of *spirituality*:

For the LORD brought Judah low because of Ahaz king of Israel, for he had encouraged moral decline in Judah and had been continually unfaithful to the LORD. Also Tiglath-Pileser king of Assyria came to him and distressed him, and did not assist him. For Ahaz took part of the treasures from the house of the LORD, from the house of the king, and from the leaders, and he gave it to the king of Assyria; but he did not help him.

Now in the time of his distress King Ahaz became increasingly unfaithful to the LORD. This is that King Ahaz. For he sacrificed to the gods of Damascus which had defeated him, saying, “Because the gods of the kings of Syria help them, I will sacrifice to them that they may help me.” But they were the ruin of him and of all Israel (2 Chronicles 28:19–23).

After the death of Tiglath-Pileser III, the Assyrian king, his successors Shalmaneser V and Sargon II moved against the northern kingdom of Israel. In 721 B.C., they destroyed the capital of Samaria, deported all the Israelites and brought in immigrants from Babylon, Cuthah, Ava, Hamath and Sepharvaim to repopulate the land (2 Kings 17:24). These people were the ancestors of the Samaritans of New Testament times.

Prophecies against other nations (13:1–23:18)

As well as declaring God’s judgement on the unfaithful in Judah and the wicked in Israel, Isaiah also prophesies against the surrounding nations. He proclaims the fall and total destruction of Babylon at the hands of the Medes (13:17). A terrible judgement is brought upon the empire (13:1–14:23). Prophecies are given against Assyria (14:24–27), Philistia (14:28–32), Moab (15:1–16:14), Syria and Israel (17:1–14), Ethiopia (18:1–7), Egypt (19:1–20:6), Babylon (21:1–10), Edom (21:11–12), Arabia (21:13–17) and Tyre (23:1–18). In the midst of these terrible prophecies against the nations, there is also a prophecy against Jerusalem and her unfaithful leaders (22:1–25).

Prophecies concerning the day of the Lord (24:1-27:13)

Great distress is prophesied: “Behold, the LORD makes the earth empty and makes it waste” (24:1). This devastation will come:

Because they have transgressed the laws,
 Changed the ordinance,
 Broken the everlasting covenant.
 Therefore the curse has devoured the earth,
 And those who dwell in it are desolate.
 Therefore the inhabitants of the earth are burned,
 And few men are left (24:5–6).

Intermingled with the prophecies of universal judgement and the description of the sins and misery of the people, there are promises of salvation, a song of confidence in God and his care over his people, his “vineyard” (24:14–15,23; 25:6–9; 26:3–4; 27:2,12–13).

PART 2 / HISTORICAL INTERLUDE (36:1-39:8)

Hezekiah, the son of Ahaz, became king and ruled Judah for twenty-nine years (715–686 B.C.). He is generally considered as one of the wisest and best of the kings of Judah. He has also been called “the virtuous king,” and certainly the record of the many things he did during his reign give evidence of his God-fearing and God-honouring character.

He trusted in the LORD God of Israel, so that after him was none like him among all the kings of Judah, nor who were before him. For he held fast to the LORD; he did not depart from following Him, but kept His commandments, which the LORD had commanded Moses. The LORD was with him; he prospered wherever he went. And he rebelled against the king of Assyria and did not serve him (2 Kings 18:5–7).

At the very beginning of his reign, Hezekiah entirely reversed the wicked policy of his father Ahaz, and with true zeal, destroyed the idols and heathen temples that had been set up in the land, and restored and purified the worship of Jehovah, calling the nation to a great

Passover (2 Chronicles 30:5). His reign is distinguished not only by this reformation of religion, but also by the many public improvements he brought about.

About ten years into his reign, King Sargon II of Assyria died (705 B.C.) and his successor, King Sennacherib (705–681 B.C.), faced rebellion from various quarters. There was unrest in Syria, and Babylon to the south-east was beginning to flex her muscles. In 701 B.C., Sennacherib turned his attention to Judah and her capital Jerusalem (36:1; 2 Kings 18:13).

When Sennacherib and the Assyrians came up against Jerusalem, Hezekiah placed his entire confidence in Jehovah. Tearing his clothes and covering himself with sackcloth, he “went into the house of the LORD” (37:1). On receiving a further communication from Sennacherib, Hezekiah prayed:

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

The future for Jerusalem looked bleak, utterly impossible. The prophet Isaiah was sent to reassure King Hezekiah that his prayers had been heard and his confidence in the living God would be rewarded. The miraculous delivery is described:

Then the angel of the LORD went out, and killed in the camp of the Assyrians one hundred and eighty-five thousand; and when people arose early in the morning, there were the corpses—all dead (37:36).

Shortly after this event, King Hezekiah of Judah became seriously ill. Isaiah visited the king and said to him, “Set your house in order, for you shall die, and not live” (2 Kings 20:1). The reaction of Hezekiah once more indicates his godliness. He prayed and wept before the Lord. The Lord responded by giving a message to Isaiah:

Return and tell Hezekiah the leader of My people, “Thus says the LORD, the God of David your father: ‘I have heard your prayer, I have seen your tears; surely I will heal you. On the third day you shall go up to the house of the LORD. And I will add to your days fifteen years. I will deliver you and this city from the hand of the king of Assyria; and I will defend this city for My own sake, and for the sake of My servant David’” (2 Kings 20:5–6).

The illness and recovery of Hezekiah led him to compose a beautiful psalm (38:10–20).

When King Merodach-Baladan⁵ of Babylon sent envoys to King Hezekiah to enlist his support in a revolt against King Sennacherib of Assyria, Hezekiah unwisely showed them all his treasure (39:2). When Isaiah heard of this, he informed the king that one day all the wealth of the royal household would be carried away to Babylon.

This prophetic announcement provides the transition between the two parts of the book of Isaiah. The first part (1–39) is concerned with the Assyrian crisis, whereas the second (40–66) pays attention to the future concerns of the Jewish exiles in Babylon. Under the Spirit of the Lord, Isaiah sees things that are to come. While some of the details of the second half of this book concern prophecies of actual events in the exile in Babylon and in the return to Jerusalem, Isaiah’s prophecies also range far into the future. They may have an application in three periods of time and find fulfilment in the days of the return of the exiles and/or intermediate fulfilment in the days of the Messiah on earth and/or reach to the end times and find fulfilment in the new creation. The interweaving of these strands of prophecy does not make interpretation or application an easy task.

⁵ Spelled “Berodach-Baladan” in 2 Kings 20:12.

PART 3 / **PROPHECIES OF THE NATURE AND FUTURE OF THE CHURCH OF GOD (40:1-66:24)**

The prophecies in the last twenty-seven chapters of Isaiah form a composite whole. Probably composed in the latter years of Isaiah's ministry, they are intended not just for the prophet's contemporaries, but also for the future church of God.

Prophecies in the Old Testament often have more than one application and fulfilment. Four distinct periods may be identified for the application of prophecies by Isaiah:

1. The days of the prophet
2. The days of the captivity in Babylon and the return of the exiles
3. The days of Messiah on earth
4. The days of the new creation, when the Lord will create a new heavens and a new earth

ISAIAH / **CHRIST AND HIS CHURCH**

The prophet Isaiah is remembered best for his Messianic prophecies—that is, his Holy Spirit-inspired predictions concerning the Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God.

PROPHECIES

1. Messiah's virgin birth (7:14)

Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a Son, and shall call His name Immanuel [which means, "God with us"] (7:14).

Matthew, the apostle of Jesus, sees the fulfilment of this prophecy in the miraculous conception and birth of the Lord Jesus Christ (Matthew 1:20–23). In the passage from Isaiah, it is also predicted that Messiah will have a simple lifestyle (7:15).

2. Messiah's unique character (9:6-7)

Messiah is none other than the Son of God on the throne of David:

For unto us a Child is born,
 Unto us a Son is given;
 And the government will be upon His shoulder.
 And His name will be called
 Wonderful, Counselor, Mighty God,
 Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.
 Of the increase of His government and peace
 There will be no end,
 Upon the throne of David and over His kingdom,
 To order it and establish it with judgment and justice
 From that time forward, even forever.
 The zeal of the Lord of hosts will perform this (9:6–7).

More than 700 years later, an angel announces the arrival of the Son of God to Mary:

And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bring forth a Son, and shall call His name JESUS. He will be great, and will be called the Son of the Highest; and the Lord God will give Him the throne of His father David. And He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of His kingdom there will be no end (Luke 1:31–33).

Can there be any doubt of the connection between the words of the angel in Luke and the prophecy of Isaiah so many years earlier?

3. Messiah's outstanding qualities (11:1–12)

There shall come forth a Rod from the stem of Jesse,
 And a Branch shall grow out of his roots.
 The Spirit of the LORD shall rest upon Him,
 The Spirit of wisdom and understanding,
 The Spirit of counsel and might,
 The Spirit of knowledge and of the fear of the LORD (11:1–2).

This prophecy teaches that Messiah will be a descendant of King David's father Jesse, and he will be filled with the Holy Spirit (cf. John 3:34; Matthew 3:16). He will be a faithful and righteous judge of the world (11:3–5; cf. Revelation 19:11). His reign will be characterized

by peace and harmony (11:6–9). Gentile believers and Israel’s faithful remnant will be gathered to him (11:10–12; Romans 15:8–12).

4. Messiah’s distinctive glory (6:1–3)

At his call to the prophetic office, Isaiah records:

In the year that King Uzziah died, I saw the LORD sitting on a throne, high and lifted up, and the train of His robe filled the temple. Above it stood seraphim; each one had six wings: with two he covered his face, with two he covered his feet, and with two he flew. And one cried to another and said:

“Holy, holy, holy is the LORD of hosts;
The whole earth is full of His glory!” (6:1–3).

To remove all possible doubt and uncertainty as to whom he saw Isaiah testifies:

“Woe is me, for I am undone!
Because I am a man of unclean lips,
And I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips;
For my eyes have seen the King,
The LORD of hosts” (6:5).

In this vision, Isaiah saw the living God. The apostle John states that Isaiah the prophet saw the glory of Messiah when he saw that vision. Having quoted from Isaiah 6, John adds, “These things Isaiah said when he saw His glory and spoke of Him” (John 12:41). That verse alone proves the deity of Jesus Christ. He is none other than Jehovah, the Son of Jehovah!

5. Messiah’s gracious ministry (61:1–2)

Leaving the wilderness after the temptations of Satan, our Lord returned home to Galilee:

So He came to Nazareth, where He had been brought up. And as His custom was, He went into the synagogue on the Sabbath day, and stood up to read. And He was handed the book of the prophet

Isaiah. And when He had opened the book, He found the place where it was written:

“The Spirit of the Lord is upon Me,
Because He has anointed Me
To preach the gospel to the poor;
He has sent Me to heal the brokenhearted,
To proclaim liberty to the captives
And recovery of sight to the blind,
To set at liberty those who are oppressed;
To proclaim the acceptable year of the LORD.”

Then He closed the book, and gave it back to the attendant and sat down. And the eyes of all who were in the synagogue were fixed on Him. And He began to say to them, “Today this Scripture is fulfilled in your hearing” (Luke 4:16–21).

In declaring the fulfilment of the prophecy in Isaiah 61:1–2, Jesus is disclosing that he is the promised Messiah.

6. Messiah’s excellent herald (40:3–5)

And [John the Baptist] went into all the region around the Jordan, preaching a baptism of repentance for the remission of sins, as it is written in the book of the words of Isaiah the prophet, saying:

“The voice of one crying in the wilderness:
‘Prepare the way of the Lord;
Make His paths straight.
Every valley shall be filled
And every mountain and hill brought low;
The crooked places shall be made straight
And the rough ways smooth;
And all flesh shall see the salvation of God’ ” (Luke 3:3–6).

John the Baptist understood his relationship to the Messiah in terms of the prophecy of Isaiah 40:3–5. Each of the four Gospel writers records this connection and fulfilment (Matthew 3:3; Mark 1:3; Luke

3:4–5; John 1:23). Mark also connects this prophecy with the prophecy of Malachi 3:1 (Mark 1:2–3; cf. Matthew 11:10).

7. Messiah's incomparable brilliance (9:1–2)

And leaving Nazareth, [Jesus] came and dwelt in Capernaum, which is by the sea, in the regions of Zebulun and Naphtali, that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by Isaiah the prophet, saying:

“The land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali,
By the way of the sea, beyond the Jordan,
Galilee of the Gentiles:
The people who sat in darkness have seen a great light,
And upon those who sat in the region and shadow of death
Light has dawned.”

From that time Jesus began to preach and to say, “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand” (Matthew 4:13–17).

8. Messiah's puzzling preaching (6:9–10)

When our Lord Jesus explains why he so often uses parables in his public preaching, he says:

Therefore I speak to them in parables, because seeing they do not see, and hearing they do not hear, nor do they understand. And in them the prophecy of Isaiah is fulfilled, which says:

“Hearing you will hear and shall not understand,
And seeing you will see and not perceive;
For the hearts of this people have grown dull.
Their ears are hard of hearing,
And their eyes they have closed,
Lest they should see with their eyes and hear with their ears,
Lest they should understand with their hearts and turn,
So that I should heal them.”

But blessed are your eyes for they see, and your ears for they hear (Matthew 13:13–16).

9. Messiah in the four Servant Songs (42; 49; 50; 52-53)

Messiah is a gentle Servant (42:1-4)

When faced with the hostility of the Pharisees in a Galilean town, Jesus withdrew to the coast. He was followed by a great crowd from all over the region, from Galilee, Judea, Jerusalem, Idumea and beyond the Jordan, and from Tyre and Sidon (Mark 3:7-8). Jesus warned this vast company “not to make Him known” (Matthew 12:16). Matthew, his apostle, sees this as fulfilling another prophecy of Isaiah:

“Behold! My Servant whom I have chosen,
My Beloved in whom My soul is well pleased!
I will put My Spirit upon Him,
And He will declare justice to the Gentiles.
He will not quarrel nor cry out,
Nor will anyone hear His voice in the streets.
A bruised reed He will not break,
And smoking flax He will not quench,
Till He sends forth justice to victory;
And in His name Gentiles will trust” (Matthew 12:18-21;
cf. Isaiah 42:1-4).

Messiah is a glorious Servant (49:1-6)

Identifying this Servant with our Saviour, Leupold declares, “He is in the last analysis none less than the Messiah.”⁶ There is, in the opening verses of Isaiah 49, a note of disappointment at the poor evidence of success. The Servant has laboured and seen little encouragement. For a short time, Jesus’ ministry was marked by the suffering that disappointment brings. As a Man, he had to hold on to the prophecy: “He shall see the labor of His soul, and be satisfied” (53:11). Isaiah also predicts that what Jesus achieves will have worldwide significance.

“And now the LORD says,
Who formed Me from the womb to be His Servant,
To bring Jacob back to Him,

⁶ H.C. Leupold, *Exposition of Isaiah*, 2 vol. (Welwyn: Evangelical Press, 1977), 2:176.

So that Israel is gathered to Him
 (For I shall be glorious in the eyes of the LORD,
 And My God shall be My strength),
 Indeed He says,
 'It is too small a thing that You should be My Servant
 To raise up the tribes of Jacob,
 And to restore the preserved ones of Israel;
 I will also give You as a light to the Gentiles,
 That You should be My salvation to the ends of the earth'"

(49:5–6; cf. Luke 2:32).

Messiah is a competent Servant (50:4–9)

The LORD God has given Me
 The tongue of the learned,
 That I should know how to speak
 A word in season to him who is weary.
 He awakens Me morning by morning,
 He awakens My ear
 To hear as the learned.
 The LORD God has opened My ear;
 And I was not rebellious,
 Nor did I turn away.
 I gave My back to those who struck Me,
 And My cheeks to those who plucked out the beard;
 I did not hide My face from shame and spitting.

For the LORD God will help Me;
 Therefore I will not be disgraced;
 Therefore I have set My face like a flint,
 And I know that I will not be ashamed (50:4–7).

When the Lord Jesus was arrested and brought to the high priest, Caiaphas, he stood before the assembled scribes and elders to be interrogated. Exasperated by the responses of the Son of God, "they spat in His face and beat Him; and others struck Him with the palms of their hands" (Matthew 26:67).

Messiah is a suffering Servant (52:13–53:12)

Messiah will be exalted (52:13; cf. Philippians 2:9–10), and yet he will be disfigured by suffering (52:14; cf. Mark 15:15–19; John 19:1). Relatively few will gladly receive the gospel of Christ (53:1; cf. John 12:37–38). Messiah is to be ordinary in appearance (53:2). He will be widely rejected and despised (53:3; cf. John 1:10–11). He is to be the substitutionary atonement for sinners (53:5; cf. 1 Peter 3:18). He will bear our griefs and sorrows, our sins and sickness (53:4; cf. Matthew 8:16–17). He will be our substitute (53:6,8; cf. Romans 5:6,8; 2 Corinthians 5:21). He will exercise a voluntary silence (53:7; Mark 15:3–5; cf. Acts 8:27–35). He will willingly accept our guilt and punishment (53:8; cf. John 10:17–18). His body will be buried in a rich man's tomb (53:9; cf. Matthew 27:57–60). He will deliver all who believe in him (53:11; John 3:16; Acts 16:30–31). He will die with transgressors (53:12; cf. Luke 22:37; Mark 15:27–28) and pray for transgressors (53:12; Luke 23:34; Hebrews 7:25).

10. Messiah's enemy (7:6)

As noted earlier, when Syria joined Israel (the ten tribes of the northern kingdom) to attack Judah, they intended not only to overthrow Judah, but also to remove the descendants of David from the throne in Jerusalem. This was clearly Satanic, for Satan was the enemy of God from the very beginning, and violently opposed to the purposes of God. His hatred was frequently unleashed against Christ. Sometimes it was an attempt to destroy the Messianic line. At other times, it was focused on the annihilation of the whole nation. The devil was active in the wickedness of Haman, the Idumaeon (Edomite) who planned the eradication of the Jews, for "Haman sought to destroy all the Jews who were throughout the whole kingdom of Ahasuerus" (Esther 3:6). Except for one man's sleepless night and prompted memory, Haman might well have succeeded! (Esther 6:1–3)

Years later, another Idumaeon, Herod the Great, was out to destroy the promised King of Israel. When the wise men came from the east and arrived in Jerusalem, they asked King Herod, "Where is He who has been born King of the Jews?" (Matthew 2:2). Although King Herod could not answer at the time, he soon discovered the location of the birth from his councillors who pointed to the prophecy of Micah 5:3. It was Bethlehem. And so King Herod ordered the murder of "all the

male children who were in Bethlehem and in all its districts, from two years old and under, according to the time which he had determined from the wise men" (Matthew 2:16). However, he was too late, for Joseph and Mary had been warned in a dream and had fled with the child to Egypt.

In view of the curse placed on King Jeconiah (Coniah), as recorded by Jeremiah (Jeremiah 22:28–30), Satan might well have been delighted to see him included in the ancestral line of Jesus (Matthew 1:11). In the amazing providence of God, Matthew provides the hereditary, *legal line* of Jesus through his supposed father, Joseph, traced back to David's son Solomon (Matthew 1:6). Luke presents the *family line* of Jesus through his mother, Mary, traced back to David's son Nathan (Luke 3:31). However, Mary was a virgin when she conceived and bore Jesus (Matthew 1:22–24; Isaiah 7:14) and so Jesus was not a descendant of Jeconiah. Thus, the ancient prophecy was fulfilled, for it is the Seed of the woman, not the seed of the man (Genesis 3:15) who will be the Christ, the Saviour of the world.

Had any of these attempts succeeded, they would have destroyed the covenant promise that God made to David:

When your days are fulfilled and you rest with your fathers, I will set up your seed after you, who will come from your body, and I will establish his kingdom. He shall build a house for My name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever (2 Samuel 7:12–13).

11. Messiah's feast (25:6–9)

And in this mountain
 The LORD of hosts will make for all people
 A feast of choice pieces,
 A feast of wines on the lees,
 Of fat things full of marrow,
 Of well-refined wines on the lees.
 And He will destroy on this mountain
 The surface of the covering cast over all people,
 And the veil that is spread over all nations.
 He will swallow up death forever,

And the LORD God will wipe away tears from all faces;
 The rebuke of His people
 He will take away from all the earth;
 For the Lord has spoken.

And it will be said in that day:
 “Behold, this is our God;
 We have waited for Him, and He will save us.
 This is the LORD;
 We have waited for Him;
 We will be glad and rejoice in His salvation” (25:6–9).

The blessings of that new day, the day of the Lord, are described in terms of a feast. The guests are all people of the world (cf. Revelation 7:9–10; 19:1,6–9) for the dividing wall between Jew and Gentile will be torn down forever. The covering and the veil (25:7) “would seem to argue for a state of dense blindness before these obstacles are eliminated”⁷ (cf. 2 Corinthians 4:4,6). They have come to worship on Mount Zion, which means that the feast is a sacrificial meal (cf. Psalm 22:26–29; Matthew 8:11; 22:2–14; Luke 14:15–24).

As Zion here is to be taken in a figurative sense, referring to the Church of God, so also is the banquet to be understood figuratively, as signifying the spiritual blessings that God brings to mankind through His kingdom.⁸

12. Messiah’s universal reign (2:2–4)

Now it shall come to pass in the latter days
 That the mountain of the LORD’s house
 Shall be established on the top of the mountains,
 And shall be exalted above the hills;
 And all nations shall flow to it.
 Many people shall come and say,

⁷ Leupold, *Exposition of Isaiah*, 2:397.

⁸ Edward J. Young, *The Book of Isaiah*, 2 vol. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1969), 2:192.

“Come, and let us go up to the mountain of the LORD,
 To the house of the God of Jacob;
 He will teach us His ways,
 And we shall walk in His paths.”
 For out of Zion shall go forth the law,
 And the word of the LORD from Jerusalem.
 He shall judge between the nations,
 And rebuke many people;
 They shall beat their swords into plowshares,
 And their spears into pruning hooks;
 Nation shall not lift up sword against nation,
 Neither shall they learn war anymore (2:2–4).

The prophets frequently employed the formula, “in the latter days,” to refer to the time of the Messiah, because the definite time was unknown to them. Isaiah is seeing the glorious effects of Messiah’s coming into the world—a time of deliverance and salvation. In Isaiah’s day, the temple was situated on Mount Zion. The false gods had their mountains too: the Capitol, Olympus, Albordash, Meru and Zaphon. The promise of the Lord is that the insignificant Mount Zion will one day surpass all the others. Even Sinai, the mountain of the law, will fade into the background for the glorious New Covenant of grace is superior to the Old Covenant of law.

The church of Christ will be exalted above all false religions, human ideologies and earthly powers. The church may look weak and insignificant, but a day will dawn when she will be exalted. The Lord Jesus gave the same message through a different simile.

Another parable He put forth to them, saying: “The kingdom of heaven is like a mustard seed, which a man took and sowed in his field, which indeed is the least of all the seeds; but when it is grown it is greater than the herbs and becomes a tree, so that the birds of the air come and nest in its branches” (Matthew 13:31–32).

This little mountain, now eclipsed by the others, will be raised and “established on the top of the mountains, and shall be exalted above the hills; and all nations shall flow to it” (2:2). The picture is either of the little mountain being lifted and placed firmly upon the top of all other peaks, or of this little mountain growing larger, taller and higher than all surrounding mountains:

A mountain of God is the mountain of Bashan;
 A mountain of many peaks is the mountain of Bashan.
 Why do you fume with envy, you mountains of many peaks?
 This is the mountain which God desires to dwell in;
 Yes, the LORD will dwell in it forever (Psalm 68:15–16).

David compares the peaks of Mount Hermon, which lie on the northern perimeter of Bashan and tower more than 3,000 metres above sea level, with insignificant Mount Zion.⁹

In the days of Messiah, God manifested his glory on Mount Zion:

And of Zion it will be said,
 “This one and that one were born in her;
 And the Most High Himself shall establish her.”
 The LORD will record,
 When He registers the peoples:
 “This one was born there” (Psalm 87:5–6; cf. John 3:3–8).

Isaiah envisages the worldwide church of Jesus Christ and his universal reign:

And all nations shall flow to it.
 Many people shall come and say,
 “Come, and let us go up to the mountain of the LORD,
 To the house of the God of Jacob” (2:2–3).

This is the “great multitude which no one could number, of all nations, tribes, peoples, and tongues” (Revelation 7:9). They flood to Zion because it has become the centre of true knowledge:

⁹ H.C. Leupold, *Exposition of the Psalms* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1969), 494.

The Gentiles shall come to your light,
And kings to the brightness of your rising.

“Lift up your eyes all around, and see:
They all gather together, they come to you;
Your sons shall come from afar,
And your daughters shall be nursed at your side...

They shall ascend with acceptance on My altar,
And I will glorify the house of My glory...

Also the sons of those who afflicted you
Shall come bowing to you,
And all those who despised you shall fall prostrate at the soles
of your feet;
And they shall call you The City of the LORD,
Zion of the Holy One of Israel (60:3–4,7,14).

13. Messiah's remnant

The name of one of Isaiah's sons, Shear-Jashub (7:3), means, “A remnant shall return” and highlights a recurring theme in the prophet's ministry (10:20–23; 11:11,16; 28:5; cf. Amos 5:15¹⁰). In every generation the Lord preserves “a remnant according to the election of grace” (Romans 11:5).

At the time of Isaiah's call to office, the Lord reveals his severe judgement against Israel: only one tenth of the nation will survive the exile, and even that tenth will be rigorously tried. Yet no matter how close the people come to being totally destroyed, there will still be a surviving remnant:

But yet a tenth will be in it,
And will return and be for consuming,
As a terebinth tree or as an oak,
Whose stump remains when it is cut down.
So the holy seed shall be its stump (6:13).

¹⁰ See the section entitled “The remnant of Israel” in the chapter on the book of Amos.

A remnant who can be called holy is a spiritual remnant in whom the promises of salvation are to be realized. Although judgement must fall time after time upon the chosen people, yet no judgement will utterly wipe out the nation until the promises are fulfilled in Christ.¹¹ Confident of the Lord's preserving grace, the prophet declares:

Unless the LORD of hosts
Had left to us a very small remnant,
We would have become like Sodom,
We would have been made like Gomorrah (1:9).

A confirmation that the remnant is intimately connected with the person and work of the Messiah is given by a further word from the Lord through Isaiah:

Here am I and the children whom the LORD has given me!
We are for signs and wonders in Israel
From the LORD of hosts,
Who dwells in Mount Zion (8:18).

The writer to the Hebrews confirms the interpretation by identifying this prophecy in relation to the Lord Jesus Christ (Hebrews 2:13).

ISAIAH / **CONCLUSION**

The basic theme of the book of Isaiah harmonizes with the prophet's name—"Jehovah is salvation," or "Salvation is of Jehovah [the LORD]." While the context of the message is punishment under the righteous judgement of God, there are many remarkable revelations of grace and mercy. After the Psalms, Isaiah contains more Messianic prophecies than any other book of the Old Testament. Isaiah displays Messiah's humanity and humility, his obedience and suffering, his devotion and sacrifice, his deity and glory. He calls on the people of God to be faithful and patient as they wait the unfolding of God's purposes. He sets before the church of God a wonderful hope for the future—"The new heavens and the new earth" (66:22), where all who love God will worship him forever.

¹¹ Young, *Book of Isaiah*, 1:265.

ISAIAH / APPLICATION AND REFLECTION

1. A form of religion

One of the great concerns of Isaiah, which is regularly repeated throughout his ministry, is what Paul later described as “having a form of godliness but denying its power” (2 Timothy 3:5). False religion is a blatant disregard of the true God, but those who engage in the outward expressions of true religion without any reality in their hearts or minds show a more insidious disrespect:

He who kills a bull is as if he slays a man;
 He who sacrifices a lamb, as if he breaks a dog's neck;
 He who offers a grain offering, as if he offers swine's blood;
 He who burns incense, as if he blesses an idol.
 Just as they have chosen their own ways,
 And their soul delights in their abominations,
 So will I choose their delusions,
 And bring their fears on them;
 Because, when I called, no one answered,
 When I spoke they did not hear;
 But they did evil before My eyes,
 And chose that in which I do not delight (66:3–4).

When you spread out your hands,
 I will hide My eyes from you;
 Even though you make many prayers,
 I will not hear.
 Your hands are full of blood (1:15).

The Lord Jesus was equally concerned about outward, empty show. He applied Isaiah 29:13 to the Pharisees and scribes of his day:

He answered and said to them, “Well did Isaiah prophesy of you hypocrites, as it is written:

‘This people honors Me with their lips,
 But their heart is far from Me.
 And in vain they worship Me,

Teaching as doctrines the commandments of men”
(Mark 7:6-7).

The true worship of God consists not only in the engagement of the heart and mind in worship and spiritual exercises, but also the practical outworking of service and life. Isaiah, like other great prophets of God, links the true worship of God with the practice of social justice, business integrity, active concern for the poor and oppressed and the upholding of truth and honesty in civil affairs (58:1-14; 59:14). A right relationship with God has always required a right relationship with other people. The law of God is summarized under two commands:

Jesus said to him, “‘You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind.’ This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like it: ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’ On these two commandments hang all the Law and the Prophets” (Matthew 22:37-40).

2. Worldly counsel

The people of God are constantly in danger of being influenced by worldly considerations or ungodly counsel:

“Woe to the rebellious children,” says the LORD,
“Who take counsel, but not of Me,
And who devise plans, but not of My Spirit,
That they may add sin to sin” (30:1).

Living this side of Calvary and Pentecost, Christians are in the privileged position of having a complete, written revelation from God. We need neither teacups nor horoscopes, neither chat shows nor advice centres to determine how to live life for God: “To the law and to the testimony! If they do not speak according to this word, it is because there is no light in them” (8:20).

Only God can reveal his will:

“For My thoughts are not your thoughts,
Nor are your ways My ways,” says the LORD.
“For as the heavens are higher than the earth,

So are My ways higher than your ways,
And My thoughts than your thoughts" (55:8-9; cf. 1 Corinthians 2:12).

In the Scriptures, God "has given to us all things that pertain to life and godliness" (2 Peter 1:3), "that the man of God may be complete" (2 Timothy 3:17; cf. v.16). Paul warns,

For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine, but according to their own desires, because they have itching ears, they will heap up for themselves teachers; and they will turn their ears away from the truth, and be turned aside to fables (2 Timothy 4:3-4).

Blessed is the man
Who walks not in the counsel of the ungodly,
Nor stands in the path of sinners,
Nor sits in the seat of the scornful;
But his delight is in the law of the LORD,
And in His law he meditates day and night (Psalm 1:1-2).

3. Affliction

A nation under the judgement of God may nevertheless have a number of citizens who are seeking faithfully to love and serve him. They suffer alongside the wicked and the temptation is to respond with Asaph of old:

Surely I have cleansed my heart in vain,
And washed my hands in innocence.
For all day long I have been plagued,
And chastened every morning (Psalm 73:13-14).

In this context, the prophet Isaiah is the messenger of encouragement and hope:

And though the LORD gives you
The bread of adversity and the water of affliction,
Yet your teachers will not be moved into a corner anymore,
But your eyes shall see your teachers.
Your ears shall hear a word behind you, saying,
"This is the way, walk in it,"

Whenever you turn to the right hand
Or whenever you turn to the left (30:20-21).

When you pass through the waters, I will be with you;
And through the rivers, they shall not overflow you.
When you walk through the fire, you shall not be burned,
Nor shall the flame scorch you.
For I am the LORD your God,
The Holy One of Israel, your Savior (43:2-3).

Who among you fears the LORD?
Who obeys the voice of His Servant?
Who walks in darkness
And has no light?
Let him trust in the name of the LORD
And rely upon his God (50:10).

By “darkness” the Prophet here means not the ignorance or blindness of the human understanding, but the afflictions by which the children of God are almost always overwhelmed...he promises that they who have hitherto been discouraged and almost overwhelmed by so many distresses shall receive consolation.¹²

Though the Lord has every reason to punish his people, two considerations hold him back: firstly, if he deals with them as harshly as they deserve, their heathen victors might conclude “that God has left his own in the lurch, and so the honour of which he was deserving might wrongfully be attributed to other gods” (48:9-11);¹³ and, secondly, though severely provoked, God will not forget his covenant:

“For a mere moment I have forsaken you,
But with great mercies I will gather you.
With a little wrath I hid My face from you for a moment;
But with everlasting kindness I will have mercy on you,”

¹² John Calvin, *Commentary on the Book of the Prophet Isaiah: Volume 4*, trans. William Pringle (Edinburgh: T. Constable, 1853), 62.

¹³ Leupold, *Exposition of Isaiah*, 2:167.

Says the LORD, your Redeemer.
"For this is like the waters of Noah to Me;
For as I have sworn
That the waters of Noah would no longer cover the earth,
So have I sworn
That I would not be angry with you, nor rebuke you.
For the mountains shall depart
And the hills be removed,
But My kindness shall not depart from you,
Nor shall My covenant of peace be removed,"
Says the LORD, who has mercy on you (54:7-10).



JEREMIAH

MEANING
**"Jehovah
is high"**

AUTHOR
Jeremiah

KEY THOUGHT
Early warnings

THEME

***The certainty of God's judgement
and the eternity of God's love***

THEME VERSE

*The LORD has appeared of old to me, saying:
"Yes, I have loved you with an everlasting love;
Therefore with lovingkindness I have drawn you."*

JEREMIAH 31:3

JEREMIAH / SUMMARY

INTRODUCTION / JEREMIAH'S CALL AND COMMISSION		1:1-19
PART 1 / PROPHECIES AGAINST JUDAH AND JERUSALEM		2:1-25:38
1. Judah has rejected the Lord		2:1-3:5
2. Punishment by a northern nation		3:6-6:30
3. Judah's hypocrisy in worship		7:1-10:25
a. Idolatry and formality in worship		7:1-8:3
b. Judah's judgement is imminent		8:4-10:25
4. Judah has broken the covenant		11:1-12:17
5. Judah's pride will be dashed		13:1-27
a. The sign of the ruined sash		13:1-11
b. The sign of the filled wine bottles		13:12-27
6. Punishment and prayer		14:1-15:21
a. Drought and famine		14:1-6
b. The prophet intercedes		14:7-15:18
c. The Lord reassures Jeremiah		15:19-21
7. Jeremiah's lifestyle is a sign		16:1-17:27
a. Jeremiah is to remain unmarried		16:1-9
b. The sin of idolatry		16:10-13
c. Promised restoration		16:14-21
d. Judah's sins are enumerated		17:1-18
e. Jeremiah calls for Sabbath observance		17:19-27
8. Lessons from the potter		18:1-20:18
a. The potter and the clay		18:1-17
b. A plot against Jeremiah		18:18-23
c. The sign of the broken flask		19:1-15

d. Persecution and prayer	20:1-18
9. Kings of Judah	21:1-23:8
a. Zedekiah, Jehoahaz, Jehoiakim and Jehoiachin	21:1-22:30
b. The righteous King	23:1-8
10. False prophets and priests in Judah	23:9-40
11. The sign of a basket of good figs and a basket of bad figs	24:1-10
12. The prophecy of seventy years in exile	25:1-38
PART 2 / CONFLICTS WITH RELIGIOUS LEADERS IN JUDAH AND BABYLON	
	26:1-29:32
a. Conflict in the temple in Jerusalem	26:1-24
b. Conflict with false prophets	27:1-22
c. Conflict with the prophet Hananiah	28:1-17
d. Conflict with Shemaiah: letters to the exiles in Babylon	29:1-32
PART 3 / THE FUTURE RESTORATION OF ISRAEL AND JUDAH	
	30:1-33:26
a. Restoration to the land	30:1-24
b. A new covenant will be established	31:1-40
c. Jerusalem will be rebuilt	32:1-44
d. The New Covenant confirmed	33:1-26
PART 4 / THE FALL OF JERUSALEM	
	34:1-45:5
a. Messages before the fall of Jerusalem	34:1-36:32
b. Events before the fall of Jerusalem	37:1-38:28
c. Events during the fall of Jerusalem	39:1-18

JEREMIAH / **SUMMARY**

- | | | |
|----|----------------------------------|------------|
| d. | Ministry to the remnant in Judah | 40:1-42:22 |
| e. | Ministry to the remnant in Egypt | 43:1-44:30 |
| f. | Assurance to Baruch the scribe | 45:1-5 |

PART 5 / **PROPHECIES AGAINST THE NATIONS 46:1-51:64**

PART 6 / **THE FINAL FALL OF JERUSALEM AND THE CAPTIVITY OF JUDAH 52:1-34**

JEREMIAH

About sixty years after the death of the prophet Isaiah the Lord raised up a young man to proclaim the imminent judgement that was about to fall on Judah and Jerusalem. That young man, Jeremiah, is known as “the weeping prophet,” for he delivered the message of judgement with a broken heart (9:1; 13:15–17).

JEREMIAH / **AUTHOR**

The book of Jeremiah is the personal account of Jeremiah (1:1–2), some or all of which may have been dictated to his secretary Baruch (36:4). Jeremiah was born in 648 B.C., in Anathoth, a village a little more than two miles north-east of the city of Jerusalem. A priest by birth, Jeremiah is called to the prophetic office while still young (1:1,6). Like Moses before him (Exodus 4:10), he pleads his inexperience and inability as a speaker. The Lord reassures Jeremiah that he had been ordained to the work before his birth, and he will be given the words to speak, the authority to deliver the message and divine protection (1:7–10).

As a living symbol of the terrible judgement to come on Judah, the prophet is commanded not to marry (16:2). His prophecies are not well received: his neighbours threaten to take his life (11:21); his own brothers spurn him (12:6); his friends turn against him (20:10); the inhabitants of Jerusalem plot against him (18:18); the priests and prophets despise him (20:1–2) and kings reject him (36:23). He is beaten, fastened in the stocks (20:2), threatened repeatedly and narrowly escapes death (26:8,11,24). He is imprisoned several times, including incarceration in a dungeon and then a muddy cistern (37:15; 38:6,28). At the fall of Jerusalem, the Babylonians release him. He is given his freedom and chooses to remain in Jerusalem. Against the express command of God, the last inhabitants of Judah evacuate to Egypt taking Jeremiah with them (43:5–7). There the prophet dies.

The impending judgement is so severe, and his love for his people so intense, that it breaks his heart.

JEREMIAH / **HISTORICAL SETTING**

More is known about the life of Jeremiah than that of any other Old Testament prophet. He began his ministry in the year 627 B.C., the thirteenth year of Josiah's reign over Judah (1:2). Josiah came to the throne at the age of eight and, by his mid-teens, he gave evidence of true conversion. At twenty, he began a thorough religious reformation throughout the land of Judah (2 Chronicles 34:1–3). So both the call of Jeremiah to the prophetic office and the beginning of the extensive reformation of religion spearheaded by King Josiah, occurred within a period of twelve months.

Jeremiah ministered during the remaining eighteen years of godly King Josiah's reign and throughout the fateful reigns of four godless kings: Jehoahaz, Jehoiakim, Jehoiachin and Zedekiah (see Figure 3).

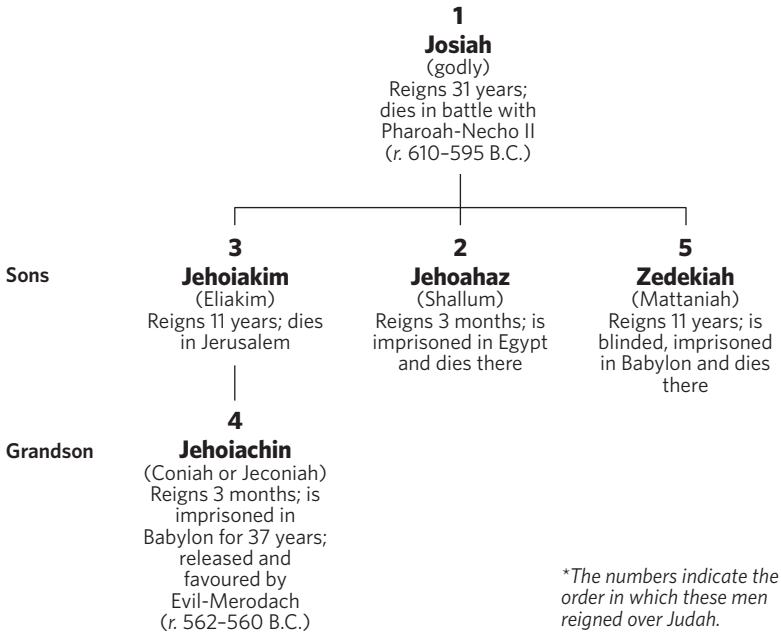
He was a contemporary of the prophets Nahum, Zephaniah and Habakkuk in Jerusalem, and Daniel and Ezekiel in Babylon. Daniel and Ezekiel probably spent their early days under Jeremiah's ministry in Jerusalem before they were taken into exile. (see Figure 4).

Jeremiah served God for over forty years (from 627 until 586 B.C. and beyond). He prophesied for twenty-two years while Judah was under threat from Assyria and Egypt. He prophesied for nineteen years while Judah was threatened and besieged by Babylon, being a witness to the three waves of invasion and subsequent captivities (605 B.C., 597 B.C. and 586 B.C.). He prophesied in Egypt after the destruction of Jerusalem. Thus he saw the final days of the great Assyrian empire that had destroyed the northern kingdom of Israel and dominated the Near East for over 200 years. Following the death of Ashurbanipal of Assyria (627 B.C.) the Assyrian empire went into decline. Egypt and Babylon began to assert themselves. Babylon conquered Nineveh, the capital of Assyria, in 612 B.C. and seven years later, in the inevitable confrontation, the Babylonians defeated the Egyptians at the battle of Carchemish (605 B.C.). Jeremiah exercised his ministry during these tempestuous days when the tiny nation of Judah was trying to maintain her own independence.

JEREMIAH / **OUTLINE**

This book is a combination of history, biography and prophecy. It is

Figure 3. Josiah and his successors as kings of Judah*



not written in chronological order, nor is the material grouped together according to subject. It is like a collection of sermons recorded at random:

Jeremiah's prophecies may seem to be somewhat scattered, but their arrangement enables the prophet to emphasize *repetition*. The themes of Jeremiah are *recurring* ones—the sinfulness of the nation and the approaching doom. Into his book he weaves these thoughts, and as we read on we meet them over and over again until the impression which they have made upon us is truly powerful and tremendous.¹

One element in the communication that God gives to the prophet Jeremiah is the use of signs and stories, in the manner of parables. A

¹ Edward J. Young, *An Introduction to the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1949), 234.

number of these messages are dramatized parables, such as, the linen sash (13:1–11), the potter and the clay (18:1–10) and the broken clay jar (19:1–13).

Through his preaching, Jeremiah clearly communicates that the only way to avoid the devastating impact of God's judgement is to repent, willingly yield in allegiance to the living God and take up once more the terms and obligations of the covenant. The basic message is clear: "the inevitable and inescapable judgement of God upon Israel for her rebellion and disobedience."² These are dark days for the southern kingdom of Judah.

Jeremiah has the unenviable task of bringing rebuke, warning, pleas and words of hope to his people. By this means, the Lord prepares them to some extent for the trials and difficulties that lie ahead.

In the division that follows, Jeremiah's prophecies have been chronologically arranged under the reign of the appropriate king.

INTRODUCTION / JEREMIAH'S CALL AND COMMISSION (1:1-19)

Jeremiah is called to the prophetic office while still young. He pleads his immaturity and lack of experience as rendering him quite unsuitable for the task. He learns that the destruction of Jerusalem is certain and that it will be carried out by a nation from the north.

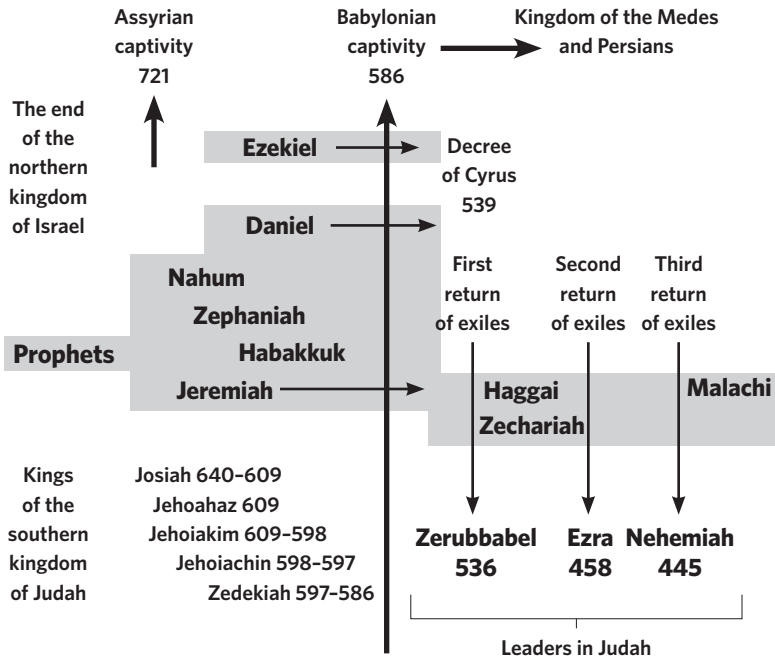
Jeremiah ministers during the reign of five kings: Josiah, his three sons and a grandson.

PART 1 / JUDAH IN THE REIGN OF KING JOSIAH (640-609 B.C.)

Five years after Jeremiah's call to ministry, in the eighteenth year of Josiah's reign, the Book of the Law is discovered in the temple (2 Kings 22:8). The message about the breaking of the covenant and obedience to "the words of this covenant which I commanded your fathers in the day that I brought them out of the land of Egypt" (11:3–4), sounds like a direct reference to the rediscovered written law of Moses.

² Thomas Nelson, *Nelson's Complete Book of Bible Maps and Charts* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1996), 215.

Figure 4. Jeremiah in relation to Judah and its prophets and kings: before, during and after the exile*



*Years are in B.C.

The thirteen years of ministry during the reign of Josiah were probably the happiest for the prophet Jeremiah, although he was no doubt constantly warning the people, during that period of religious reformation, that outward change is not sufficient for the Lord (2:22).

Jeremiah is deeply grieved when King Josiah dies in battle (609 B.C.) and probably composes a lament for his funeral (2 Chronicles 35:25).

Godly Josiah is followed on the throne by three sons and a grandson, all of whom are ungodly and react with hostility and aggression to any suggestion that they should repent of their wickedness and seek the Lord. Jeremiah is uncompromising in his denunciation of these men, even though as kings they exercise the power of life and death over him.

PART 2 / JUDAH IN THE REIGN OF KING JEHOAHAZ (609 B.C.)

As he announces the king's downfall, Jeremiah gives King Jehoahaz the nickname "Shallum," meaning "retribution" (22:11–12). The prophet speaks out against the lack of justice in the nation and the absence of equity in trade and employment. Meanwhile over in Babylon (also called the land of the Chaldeans),³ the prophet Ezekiel compares Jehoahaz to a young lion who has learned to catch and devour men. Ezekiel also prophesies the capture, exile and imprisonment of King Jehoahaz and his deportation to Egypt (Ezekiel 19:3–4).

PART 3 / JUDAH IN THE REIGN OF KING JEHOIAKIM (609–598 B.C.)

When Pharaoh Necho II takes Jehoahaz back with him to Egypt, he places his older brother Eliakim (whom he renames Jehoiakim) on the throne to rule Judah as a vassal of Egypt.

During the reign of King Jehoiakim, there is the famous Battle of Carchemish, in which the Babylonians defeat the Egyptians and then turn against Judah. Jeremiah foretells the invasion, calls the people to repentance, warns of the dreadful outcome of rejecting the Lord and prophesies the destruction of Jerusalem and the seventy-year exile in Babylon (25:1,11). The king and the people refuse to heed his warning. King Nebuchadnezzar (r. 605–562 B.C.) successfully besieges Jerusalem and takes captives (among whom is Daniel) and items from the temple back to Babylon (Daniel 1:1–2,6).

Although the overall message committed to Jeremiah is one of terrible judgement, there is nevertheless the recurring appeal to the people to return to the living God:

But this is what I commanded them, saying, "Obey My voice, and I will be your God, and you shall be My people. And walk in all the ways that I have commanded you, that it may be well with

³ Different names being used to refer to the same place is not uncommon. For example, depending on the context, a group travelling from York may be described as coming from the town itself, from Yorkshire, from England, from Great Britain or from the United Kingdom.

you.” Yet they did not obey or incline their ear, but followed the counsels and the dictates of their evil hearts, and went backward and not forward (7:23–24).

God hates idolatry and the immorality it produces. During the reign of Jehoiakim, Jeremiah denounces the false shepherds and false prophets who mislead the people (23:1–2; 27:1,9–10); he preaches in the temple pronouncing doom on the nation unless they obey God’s laws. Priests, prophets and people react with great hostility and demand Jeremiah’s execution (26:1,8). The threats upon his life are only too real—when Urijah, who is also a prophet of the Lord, loses his nerve and flees to Egypt, he is followed, captured, brought back and executed (26:20–23).

During the reign of Jehoiakim, the Lord instructs Jeremiah to make a permanent record of all the prophecies that God has given him. These are dictated to Baruch, who acts as Jeremiah’s secretary. When Jeremiah is banned from the temple, Baruch goes and reads the prophecies to the people. When the king hears this, he is so angry that he cuts the scroll into pieces with a penknife, throws them into the fire and orders the arrest of Baruch and Jeremiah, “but the LORD hid them” (36:26). A little later, Jeremiah dictates a second copy to Baruch with the inclusion of additional material. Baruch, the secretary and friend of Jeremiah, has every reason to fear for his safety, but the Lord gives him a reassuring prophecy (45:1–5).

Jeremiah prophesies the ignominious death of King Jehoiakim:

He shall be buried with the burial of a donkey,
Dragged and cast out beyond the gates of Jerusalem (22:19).

PART 4 / JUDAH IN THE REIGN OF KING JEHOIACHIN (598–597 B.C.)

Jehoiachin (Coniah or Jeconiah) reigns only three months and is taken into captivity in Babylon, just as Jeremiah predicts (22:24–30; 2 Kings 24:8–16; Ezekiel 19:9). Jehoiachin spends thirty-seven years in prison. When Evil-Merodach (r. 562–560 B.C.) comes to the throne in Babylon, he releases him and treats him kindly (52:31–34). Among the aristocracy, priests, servants and army officers transported to Babylon with

Jehoiachin is young Ezekiel, who within a few years will be called to the prophetic office among the exiles.

PART 5 / JUDAH IN THE REIGN OF KING ZEDEKIAH (597–586 B.C.)

When King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon deports Jehoiachin, he places Mattaniah (whose name he changes to Zedekiah) on the throne of Judah. Nebuchadnezzar establishes a covenant with Zedekiah (Ezekiel 17:12–13), though what transpires suggests that Zedekiah has no intention of honouring this contract. Only a short time later, he sends ambassadors to Babylon and, judging from the letter that Jeremiah the prophet sends with those same men, urging the captives to stay submissive in Babylon (29:3–28), Zedekiah has his mind on rebellion.

In the fourth year of his reign, Zedekiah travels to Babylon in person (51:59), presumably to reassure the king of Babylon of his loyalty and to ascertain the situation with regard to the exiles. Five years later, no doubt with the collusion of the kings of Edom, Moab, Ammon, Tyre and Sidon (27:3), “Zedekiah rebelled against the king of Babylon” (2 Kings 24:20). This rebellion is seen as a serious sin against God, because Nebuchadnezzar “had made him swear an oath by God” (2 Chronicles 36:13; cf. Ezekiel 17:13–21).

That same year (28:1; cf. 51:59), the prophet Jeremiah faces serious problems from Hananiah, a false prophet. Hananiah publicly contradicts the prophecy of Jeremiah and proclaims the delivery of Judah from the domination of Babylon and the return to Jerusalem of all the temple treasures removed by Nebuchadnezzar. Jeremiah exposes the lies of Hananiah, and privately foretells his death within the year, as a judgement from God (28:16; cf. Deuteronomy 18:20).

Nebuchadnezzar once more marches against Judah. He lays siege to Jerusalem (52:4). The very same day, the prophet Ezekiel receives a revelation from the Lord in Babylon that the siege has started (Ezekiel 24:1–2).

It appears that the commencement of the invasion causes King Zedekiah and his nobles to reflect on the covenant made between the living God and his people Israel, and in particular the law on slavery: “If you buy a Hebrew servant, he shall serve six years; and in the seventh he shall go out free and pay nothing” (Exodus 21:2). The people obey the law and set free their Hebrew slaves. But after a short time,

they change their minds and subjugate them once more. The Lord is angry at this further demonstration of disrespect and disobedience. Jeremiah communicates God's intense displeasure (34:13–17).

During a short respite from the siege, while Nebuchadnezzar turns his attention to the approaching Egyptians (37:5), Zedekiah sends men to Jeremiah to enquire of the Lord as to the outcome of the war (21:1–2). Jeremiah informs the king's ambassadors that God is fighting against Judah. He recommends that the people defect to Babylon (21:9), and that Zedekiah should surrender and seek clemency. No one listens to the word from God. Jeremiah warns the people not to resist the Babylonians and some of the nobles charge him with treachery against the king, the army and the nation. He is thrown into dungeon (37:15), and then into a muddy cistern (38:6) and remains in appalling conditions until Ebed-Melech, an Ethiopian, intervenes and pleads for the king to show clemency toward the prophet. Consequently, Jeremiah is brought into "the court of the prison" (38:13).

Although Jeremiah has to communicate a message of severe judgement against Judah, he also delivers words of singular hope. The wonderful words of chapters 30 and 31 belong to this period of Judah's suffering:

Thus says the LORD:

"Behold, I will bring back the captivity of Jacob's tents,
And have mercy on his dwelling places...
You shall be My people,
And I will be your God" (30:18, 22).

"Yes, I have loved you with an everlasting love;
Therefore with lovingkindness I have drawn you" (31:3).

Jeremiah's letter to the exiles in Babylon also contains wonderful encouragement:

After seventy years⁴ are completed at Babylon, I will visit you and perform My good word toward you, and cause you to return to

⁴ The prophet Daniel cites this prophecy and pleads with the Lord to forgive Israel's sins and fulfil his promise to restore his people to their own land (Daniel 9:2,19).

this place. For I know the thoughts that I think toward you, says the LORD, thoughts of peace and not of evil, to give you a future and a hope (29:10–11).

Only months before the fall of Jerusalem, the Lord instructs Jeremiah to buy a field from his cousin Hanamel (32:6–7). The price is paid and a contract of purchase is signed before witnesses. This is a symbolic act to show, “Houses and fields and vineyards shall be possessed again in this land” (32:15).

The city resists the Babylonian siege for eighteen months until the wall is penetrated (39:1–2). When Jerusalem is taken, Zedekiah tries to escape. He is captured on the plains of Jericho, and blinded (2 Kings 25:7). Two seemingly contradictory prophecies come true:

Zedekiah king of Judah shall not escape from the hand of the Chaldeans, but shall surely be delivered into the hand of the king of Babylon, and shall speak with him face to face, and see him eye to eye (32:4)

I will bring him to Babylon, to the land of the Chaldeans; yet he shall not see it, though he shall die there (Ezekiel 12:13).

The Babylonians sack Jerusalem, destroy the temple, the palace, all substantial houses and the city wall. Jeremiah is set free and given the choice to return with the captain of the Babylonian army and live in peace in Babylon, to remain in Judah with the new governor or to go wherever he wishes (40:4). He chooses to remain in Judah. All the civil and religious leaders are taken to Babylon where they are executed (52:24–27). The remaining people of Jerusalem are taken captive to Babylon, with the exception of poor vine-dressers and farmers who are left to tend the land (2 Kings 25:12), with Gedaliah as governor. In three invasions, Nebuchadnezzar takes a total of 4,600 captives (52:30).

The remaining inhabitants experience internal strife and, following the assassination of governor Gedaliah, flee to Egypt against the express word of the Lord (43:5–7). Jeremiah is forced to accompany them, and he continues his ministry among the Jews in that land

(43:8–13; 44:1–30). The people of Judah have broken their covenant with the living God. Even the devastating events of recent years have not brought them to their senses. In Egypt, they forsake the Lord and turn to local idols.

PART 6 / **PROPHECIES AGAINST THE NATIONS (46:1–51:64)**

The nations which had been hostile toward Israel and Judah come under divine censure. Prophecies are directed at Egypt, the Philistines, Moab, Ammon, Edom, Damascus (i.e. Syria), Kedar (part of Arabia), Elam and Babylon. Only four of the nine nations—Egypt, Moab, Ammon and Elam—are given hope of restoration to their lands (46:26; 48:47; 49:6,39).

JEREMIAH / **CHRIST AND HIS CHURCH**

Against the dark background of threat and punishment, there appears some of the most glorious Messianic prophecies of the entire Old Testament.⁵

PROPHECIES AND TYPES

1. The weeping prophet

Jeremiah prophesied during the forty years leading up to the fall of Jerusalem, through it and after it. He was present in Jerusalem during the three separate invasions. Thousands were taken captive on each occasion. He witnessed the demolition of the temple and the destruction of the city.

He was the only prophet forbidden to marry or have children (16:1–4). His God-given prophecies were largely composed of severe judgements against Jerusalem and Judah for their rebellion against God. Being a sensitive man, he delivered the messages with a broken heart that reflected the heart of God. He cried out,

Oh, that my head were waters,
And my eyes a fountain of tears,

⁵ Young, *An Introduction to the Old Testament*, 233.

That I might weep day and night
For the slain of the daughter of my people! (9:1).

As we have noted, Jeremiah is often called “the weeping prophet” or “the prophet with a broken heart” because of his great grief for his people and their stubbornness in failing to repent. Instead of turning from their idols, they became more and more obsessed with them. They were rejecting the love of the only true God. The five mournful songs in the book of Lamentations are further proof of the agony of Jeremiah’s heart.

Jeremiah calls on the Lord to spare his people. He weeps because no one will listen. He weeps because he is often all alone. In the end, no one listens and the people of Judah and Benjamin are sent into exile in Babylon.

There is in this the strongest connection between the prophet Jeremiah and the Great Prophet who came over 600 years later. The God/Man Jesus Christ wept and for the same reasons as Jeremiah—the waywardness, sin and wickedness of the people of Israel.

After three years itinerating throughout Judah and Galilee, preaching, teaching and healing, Jesus came on his last journey to Jerusalem. Known as the triumphal entry, Jesus rode into the city on a donkey (Zechariah 9:9). But it was not with joy that he approached the capital:

Now as He drew near, He saw the city and wept over it, saying, “If you had known, even you, especially in this your day, the things *that make* for your peace! But now they are hidden from your eyes. For days will come upon you when your enemies will build an embankment around you, surround you and close you in on every side, and level you, and your children within you, to the ground; and they will not leave in you one stone upon another, because you did not know the time of your visitation” (Luke 19:41–44).

The Saviour was deeply grieved by the sin and blindness of the Jews!

This was not the first recording of the Saviour’s tears. Earlier, near the home of Mary and Martha, Jesus wept when he saw the suffering of those he loved because of the death of their brother—and his friend—Lazarus (John 11:35).

These were not isolated incidents in the earthly life of the Son of God. He was the suffering Saviour of Isaiah's prophecy, which includes the prediction, "He is despised and rejected by men, a Man of sorrows and acquainted with grief" (Isaiah 53:3). The writer to the Hebrews, inspired by the Holy Spirit, reveals the Lord's deep anguish when recounting,

who, in the days of His flesh, when He had offered up prayers and supplications, with vehement cries and tears to Him who was able to save Him from death, and was heard because of His godly fear, though He was a Son, yet He learned obedience by the things which He suffered (Hebrews 5:7–8).

Furthermore, it is inconceivable that the Saviour could pray as he did in the Garden of Gethsemane, without passionate "cries and tears" to his heavenly Father (Matthew 26:36–37).

The Lord Jesus has personal experience of the agony of prayer for the lost and prayer for the saved. As Jeremiah is called, "the weeping prophet" so Christ the King may be called "the weeping Saviour." The Son of God suffered for us; the Son of God still suffers with us (Philippians 3:10; Romans 8:17). In the former, he suffered alone, bearing our sins and making atonement. In the latter, he sympathizes with his people in their weaknesses, "For we have not an high priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities" (Hebrews 4:15, KJV).

2. The ark of the covenant

"Return, O backsliding children," says the LORD; "for I am married to you. I will take you, one from a city and two from a family, and I will bring you to Zion. And I will give you shepherds according to My heart, who will feed you with knowledge and understanding.

"Then it shall come to pass, when you are multiplied and increased in the land in those days," says the LORD, "that they will say no more, 'The ark of the covenant of the LORD.' It shall not come to mind, nor shall they remember it, nor shall they visit it, nor shall it be made anymore.

"At that time Jerusalem shall be called The Throne of the

LORD, and all the nations shall be gathered to it, to the name of the LORD, to Jerusalem. No more shall they follow the dictates of their evil hearts.

“In those days the house of Judah shall walk with the house of Israel, and they shall come together out of the land of the north to the land that I have given as an inheritance to your fathers” (3:14–18).

The ark symbolized the presence of God among his people:

You shall make a mercy seat of pure gold... And you shall make two cherubim of gold ... at the two ends of the mercy seat... You shall put the mercy seat on top of the ark, and in the ark you shall put the Testimony that I will give you. And there I will meet with you, and I will speak with you from above the mercy seat, from between the two cherubim which are on the ark of the Testimony (Exodus 25:17–18, 21–22).

The true “God, who made the world and everything in it,” “the Most High” who “does not dwell in temples made with hands” (Acts 17:24; 7:48), had chosen to become Israel’s God and bind himself in a covenant relationship which stipulated privileges and obligations, blessings and curses. In order to aid people in their understanding and prepare for the coming of his Son into the world, the Lord gave *types* (symbolic representations)⁶ during the period of the Old Covenant, one of which is the ark of the covenant. Whoever “would seek Him as the God of Israel, could find Him only in the temple, and over the ark of the covenant.”⁷

A day is foretold in Jeremiah 3 when there will be no need, or even thought, for the ark of the covenant. “God will supply so rich a compensation for that which is lost, that men will no longer desire it, nor, driven by this desire, make an effort to produce it again by their own hands.”⁸ This is a reference to the coming Messiah.

⁶ For a fuller explanation of “types,” see Introduction.

⁷ Ernest W. Hengstenberg, *Christology of the Old Testament and a Commentary on the Messianic Predictions* (1847; Grand Rapids: Kregel, 1970), 632.

⁸ Hengstenberg, *Christology of the Old Testament*, 629.

The mercy seat which formed the lid of the ark is the symbol of the throne of God. When the people of God are urged to “come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need” (Hebrews 4:16), it is evident that “Christ is designated as the true mercy seat, as the true ark of the covenant.”⁹ In the prophecy of Jeremiah, the necessity for the ark will cease when “Jerusalem shall be called The Throne of the LORD” (3:17).

For the LORD has chosen Zion;
He has desired it for His dwelling place:
“This is My resting place forever;
Here I will dwell, for I have desired it” (Psalm 132:13–14).

Thus says the LORD of hosts:

“I am zealous for Zion with great zeal;
With great fervor I am zealous for her.”

Thus says the LORD:

“I will return to Zion,
And dwell in the midst of Jerusalem.
Jerusalem shall be called the City of Truth,
The Mountain of the LORD of hosts,
The Holy Mountain” (Zechariah 8:2–3).

These, and so many prophecies like them, came wonderfully true when Christ came:

And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth (John 1:14).

⁹ Hengstenberg, *Christology of the Old Testament*, 634.

Zion

The first mention of Zion in the Bible is in 2 Samuel 5:7: “David took the stronghold of Zion (that is, the City of David).” Zion, therefore, was the name of the ancient Jebusite fortress situated on the south-east hill of Jerusalem at the junction of the Kidron Valley and the Tyropoeon Valley. The name came to stand not only for the fortress, but also for the hill on which the fortress stood. After David captured “the stronghold of Zion” by defeating the Jebusites, he called Zion “the City of David” (1 Kings 8:1; 1 Chronicles 11:5; 2 Chronicles 5:2).

When Solomon built the temple on Mount Moriah (a hill distinct and separate from Mount Zion) and moved the ark of the covenant there, the word “Zion” expanded in meaning to include the temple and the temple area (Psalm 2:6; 48:2,1–12; 132:13). It was only a short step until Zion was used as a name for the city of Jerusalem, the land of Judah and the people of Israel as a whole (Isaiah 40:9; Jeremiah 31:12). The prophet Zechariah spoke of “the sons of Zion” (Zechariah 9:13). By this time, the word “Zion” had come to mean the entire nation of Israel.

The most important use of the word “Zion” is in a religious or theological sense. Zion is used figuratively of Israel as the people of God (Isaiah 60:14). The spiritual meaning of Zion (KJV: Sion), is continued in the New Testament, where it is given the Christian meaning of God’s spiritual kingdom, the church of God, the heavenly Jerusalem (Hebrews 12:22; Revelation 14:1).¹⁰

3. The righteous King

The curse on Jehoiachin/Coniah (22:28–30) meant that no physical descendant of his would succeed to the throne of David. When Matthew traces the genealogy of the Lord Jesus from David through Jehoiachin (Matthew 1:12), he is tracing the *legal* descent through his stepfather Joseph. Luke traces the *natural* descent of the Lord from David through Nathan (Luke 3:31)—and by implication through Mary—which does not include Jehoiachin. Messiah could not be born

¹⁰ This section on Zion was adapted from *Nelson’s Illustrated Bible Dictionary* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1986).

under any curse, otherwise he could not be the promised King and righteous Branch:

“Behold, the days are coming,” says the LORD,
 “That I will raise to David a Branch of righteousness;
 A King shall reign and prosper,
 And execute judgment and righteousness in the earth.
 In His days Judah will be saved,
 And Israel will dwell safely;
 Now this is His name by which He will be called:

THE LORD OUR RIGHTEOUSNESS” (23:5–6).

Since “all our righteousnesses are like filthy rags” (Isaiah 64:6), the Lord has provided *his own righteousness* as a gift for those who believe (Romans 4:5–6; Psalm 24:5). “For He made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him” (2 Corinthians 5:21). Through his substitutionary death at Calvary, the Lord Jesus became righteousness for us (1 Corinthians 1:30). He is most gloriously *YHWH Tsidkenu*, “THE LORD OUR RIGHTEOUSNESS.”

4. The New Covenant

All the prophets based their accusations and challenges on the special covenant between the Lord and his people. Israel was a nation in covenant with God.

When the Lord chose Abraham and led him from his homeland and people, he entered into covenant with him to be God to him and bless him with a land, a great nation and a great privilege; for through Abraham “all the families of the earth shall be blessed” (Genesis 12:1–3; 17:1–8). That covenant continued through Isaac and Jacob and was to form the chief hope of the Israelite nation. When the Lord delivered the Israelites from slavery in Egypt it is this covenant which he was honouring: “So God heard their groaning, and God remembered His covenant with Abraham, with Isaac, and with Jacob. And God looked upon the children of Israel, and God acknowledged them” (Exodus 2:24–25).

On Mount Sinai, the Lord distinguished the Israelites from all other nations by giving them the covenant law, the covenant tabernacle and

the covenant priesthood. Moses made a record in “the Book of the Covenant” of all that the Lord had said to him (Exodus 24:7). Forty years later, just before the death of Moses and the entry of the Israelites into the promised land, Moses and the people renewed their covenant with God (Deuteronomy 28:1–30:20). The continuing history of Israel is a story of frequent disobedience and often a total disregard of their covenantal obligations to worship the Lord only and to obey his law.

Even where there was faithfulness toward God, and an earnest desire to live according to his commands, the law was a heavy and unbearable “yoke on the neck” (Acts 15:10). There was nothing wrong with the law itself, for “the law is holy, and the commandment holy and just and good” (Romans 7:12). The problem was “it was weak through the flesh” (Romans 8:3). Furthermore, Paul explains that the *purpose* of the law was to show us that redemption could not be accomplished through the law (Romans 3:19–25). No one is able to fully keep the law, except Christ—and so he is able to be our propitiation “by His blood.”

Jeremiah was even more explicit than other prophets about the fact that disobedience to the covenant would bring the curses of the covenant upon the Israelites. Judah, like the northern kingdom of Israel before her, had broken that covenant (11:2–10; 31:32). The vast majority of the people had no interest in worshipping or serving the true God. Their lives were filled with corruption. Yet within these dark days of apostasy the light of a new day was prophesied. The Lord would establish a *new* covenant, and this time he will change the hearts of his people so that they will *want* to keep it:

“Behold, the days are coming, says the *Lord*, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah— not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers in the day that I took them by the hand to lead them out of the land of Egypt, My covenant which they broke, though I was a husband to them, says the LORD. But this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the LORD: I will put My law in their minds, and write it on their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people. No more shall every man teach his neighbor, and every man his brother, saying, ‘Know the LORD,’ for they all shall know Me, from

the least of them to the greatest of them, says the LORD. For I will forgive their iniquity, and their sin I will remember no more” (31:31–34).

The author of Hebrews addresses Jews who have received the Lord Jesus Christ as Messiah and Saviour. He shows how the New Covenant promises given through the prophet Jeremiah are wonderfully fulfilled in the crucified Son of God. The inadequacies of the Old Covenant and the glories of the New Covenant are spelled out:

For if that first covenant had been faultless, then no place would have been sought for a second. Because finding fault with them, He says: “Behold, the days are coming, says the LORD, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah” (Hebrews 8:7–8, quoting Jeremiah 31:31–34).

The New Covenant totally replaces the Old Covenant (Hebrews 8:13). At its centre, is the life and death of the Lord Jesus Christ. When Jesus instituted the Lord’s Supper, he said, “This cup is the new covenant in My blood, which is shed for you” (Luke 22:20).

The New Covenant is a covenant of *grace* (Ephesians 2:8–9).

It is of grace because it originated in the mysterious love of God for sinners who deserved only his wrath and curse. Secondly, because it promises salvation, not on the condition of works or anything meritorious on our part, but as an unmerited gift. And, thirdly, because its benefits are secured and applied not in the course of nature, or in the exercise of the natural powers of the sinner, but by the supernatural influence of the Holy Spirit, granted to him as an unmerited gift.¹¹

The Lord Jesus Christ is the “Mediator of a better covenant, which was established on better promises” (Hebrews 8:6). He is the “one Mediator between God and men” (1 Timothy 2:5). The Son of God is called the “mediator of a better covenant” and the “surety of a better

¹¹ Charles Hodge, *Systematic Theology*, 3 vol. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1977), 2:357.

covenant” (Hebrews 7:22), both phrases meaning that the Lord Jesus Christ is the personal guarantee of the terms of the new and better covenant, secured on the basis of his perfect sacrifice:

He undertook to answer, as the surety of the covenant, for all the sins of those who are to be and are made partakers of the benefits of it; that is, to undergo the punishment due unto their sins; to make an atonement for them, by offering himself as a propitiatory sacrifice, redeeming them by the price of his blood from their state of misery and bondage under the law and the curse of it. He also undertook that those who were to be taken into this covenant should receive grace, enabling them to comply with the terms of it, fulfil its conditions, and yield the obedience therein required by God.¹²

Under the New Covenant (31:31–34), the laws of God are written on the mind to make us *know* them, and on our hearts to make us *love* them—and we receive the indwelling Spirit to enable us to *do* them.

5. Signs and parables

As well as direct word communication, the Lord uses visual signs to teach Jeremiah. A number of these messages are dramatized parables, such as the linen sash (13:1–11), the potter and the clay (18:1–10) and the broken clay jar (19:1–13). Sometimes there is no visual presentation, but a vivid word picture conjuring up an imaginary scene, as in the case of the wine bottles (13:12–14). In each case, the objective is to teach important spiritual lessons.

The Lord Jesus Christ was an expert in the use of signs and parables to communicate in a vivid and dramatic manner. So many of the miracles he performed not only demonstrated that he was authenticated as Messiah by God himself (Acts 2:22; Hebrews 2:4; cf. Matthew 11:3–5) but also conveyed an underlying spiritual message relevant to each miracle.

The apostle John explains his selection of Christ’s miracles in his Gospel on this basis, “These are written that you may believe that Jesus

¹² John Owen, *Hebrews: The Epistle of Warning* [abridged] (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 1953), 129.

is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you may have life” (John 20:31). His use of the word “signs” in the preceding verse indicates that he has chosen miracles with a profound spiritual meaning. A few examples will illustrate the point: feeding the 5,000 is a miracle indicating that Jesus is the Bread of Heaven (John 6:11,35) who thoroughly satisfies the hungry soul; changing water into wine communicates the powerful truth that the purification ceremonies of the Old Covenant are inadequate and are replaced by the precious blood of the New Covenant Lamb of God, the Lord having saved the best till last (John 2:9–11; cf. Hebrews 11:40); the raising of Lazarus becomes a glorious demonstration that Jesus is in himself the resurrection and the life (John 11:43–44,25); the man born blind who receives his sight at the touch of Jesus (John 9:1,6–7) represents every sinner born in sin and spiritually blind until light is commanded to shine out of darkness (2 Corinthians 4:4–6); casting the net on the other side of the boat and catching numerous fish, after the resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ, becomes a vivid prediction of the ingathering of believing Gentiles along with believing Jews (John 21:6; cf. 10:16).

God used signs and parables to communicate in a clear and distinct manner to the prophet Jeremiah, but the Lord Jesus indicates that signs and parables, when publicly demonstrated and spoken, have another aspect to them. They restrict communication to certain people, for they have the property both to *reveal* and to *conceal* at the same time (Matthew 11:25; cf. 16:17). When asked why he spoke in parables, the Lord Jesus replied,

Therefore I speak to them in parables, because seeing they do not see, and hearing they do not hear, nor do they understand. And in them the prophecy of Isaiah is fulfilled, which says:

‘Hearing you will hear and shall not understand,
And seeing you will see and not perceive;
For the hearts of this people have grown dull.
Their ears are hard of hearing,
And their eyes they have closed,
Lest they should see with their eyes and hear with their ears,
Lest they should understand with their hearts and turn,
So that I should heal them.’

But blessed are your eyes for they see, and your ears for they hear
(Matthew 13:13–16, quoting Isaiah 6:9–10).

JEREMIAH / **CONCLUSION**

The phrase “rising up early and speaking/sending” occurs six times in this book (7:13,25; 26:5; 29:19; 32:33; 35:15). The only other occurrence of this expression is found in 2 Chronicles 36:15, where Ezra probably borrowed it from Jeremiah. It has particular relevance to a book that is so full of warning, rebuke, challenge, judgement and punishment. God grants Judah many early warnings. It is a great evidence of God’s mercy that he reveals judgement while there is still time to repent and avert the punishment. The prophecies of Jeremiah are sober illustrations of a greater condemnation, for “it is appointed for men to die once, but after this the judgment” (Hebrews 9:27). “For if the word spoken through angels proved steadfast, and every transgression and disobedience received a just reward, how shall we escape if we neglect so great a salvation?” (Hebrews 2:2–3)—salvation that is *only* to be found in the Promised One, the Messiah, Jesus the Christ.

There is also the promise that a faithful remnant will be restored. For example,

“In those days and in that time,” says the LORD,
“The iniquity of Israel shall be sought, but there shall be none;
And the sins of Judah, but they shall not be found;
For I will pardon those whom I preserve” (50:20).

This is an important promise and hope, not only for the return of the exiles from Babylon, but for the church in the twenty-first century. Despite persecution and apostasy, God will preserve a faithful remnant for himself and there will be “a great multitude which no one could number, of all nations, tribes, peoples, and tongues, standing before the throne and before the Lamb” (Revelation 7:9).

JEREMIAH / APPLICATION AND REFLECTION

1. The amazing love of God

At first glance, Jeremiah seems an unlikely choice as a prophet of judgement. A more robust and sturdy character like Elijah might have suited the role better. Jeremiah comes across as a highly sensitive individual with a very tender heart, who grieves at having to deliver such messages:

Oh, that my head were waters,
And my eyes a fountain of tears,
That I might weep day and night
For the slain of the daughter of my people! (9:1).

Give glory to the LORD your God
Before He causes darkness...
But if you will not hear it,
My soul will weep in secret for your pride;
My eyes will weep bitterly
And run down with tears,
Because the LORD's flock has been taken captive (13:16-17).

Jeremiah is the prophet of the broken heart, and who better to be an ambassador for the Lord than one who exhibits such tenderness and sensitivity himself? Seven-hundred years after Jeremiah, another would express the same pain and grief over the capital:

O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the one who kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to her! How often I wanted to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but you were not willing! (Matthew 23:37).

Although Jeremiah had to deliver many words of warning, rebuke, judgement and imminent punishment to the people, he nevertheless expresses some remarkable words of grace from God: "For I know the thoughts that I think toward you, says the LORD, thoughts of peace and not of evil, to give you a future and a hope" (29:11). "Yes, I have loved you with an everlasting love; therefore with lovingkindness I have drawn you" (31:3). In spite of the unfaithfulness of the people, the Lord displays amazing love and compassion.

2. Declaring the judgement of God

In spite of the evident tenderness of Jeremiah's heart and his obvious love for sinners, he faithfully delivers God's message of judgement. In uncompromising fashion, he declares the wrath of God toward a wayward and rebellious people:

Therefore thus says the LORD God: "Behold, My anger and My fury will be poured out on this place—on man and on beast, on the trees of the field and on the fruit of the ground. And it will burn and not be quenched.... For the children of Judah have done evil in My sight," says the Lord. "They have set their abominations in the house which is called by My name, to pollute it.... The corpses of this people will be food for the birds of the heaven and for the beasts of the earth. And no one will frighten them away. Then I will cause to cease from the cities of Judah and from the streets of Jerusalem the voice of mirth and the voice of gladness, the voice of the bridegroom and the voice of the bride. For the land shall be desolate" (7:20,30,33-34).

Indeed, there are more references in Scripture to the anger, fury and wrath of God than there are to his love and tenderness: "Who knows the power of Your anger? For as the fear of You, so is Your wrath" (Psalm 90:11).

It is the Lord Jesus Christ who speaks most about the terrors of hell and everlasting punishment. "It may come as a surprise to some readers that the strongest support for the doctrine of unending conscious torment for the impenitent is to be found in the teaching of Jesus Christ."¹³ Jesus said, "If your hand causes you to sin, cut it off. It is better for you to enter into life maimed, rather than having two hands, to go to hell, into the fire that shall never be quenched" (Mark 9:43; cf. 47-48; Matthew 5:22; 7:13; 8:12; 22:13; 25:41-43).

The apostles do not deal with the subjects to the same degree, and this is entirely understandable:

For as none but God has the right, and would dare, to sentence a soul to eternal misery, for sin; and as none but God has the right, and would dare, to execute the sentence; so none but God has the right, and

¹³ Robert L. Reymond. *A New Systematic Theology of the Christian Faith*, 2nd ed. (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1998), 1073.

should presume, to delineate the nature and consequences of this sentence. This is the reason why most of the awful imagery in which the sufferings of the lost are described is found in the discourses of our Lord and Saviour.¹⁴

Love for the lost demands a declaration of the judgement and justice of God. Without an awareness of the holiness and righteousness of God, without recognition of the judgement of God falling upon impenitent sinners, there will be no turning to the Saviour, no calling upon the Lord for salvation (Romans 10:13-14). The message of the gospel is not the satisfying of human need, but the satisfaction of God's holy justice. Conviction of sin, in the awareness of the holiness and righteousness of God, is an essential prerequisite to confession and conversion (Psalm 32:3-5).

The vileness of our sin necessitated the sacrifice of the holy God-man; God's judgement on our sin exacted his Son's agonizing suffering and death by crucifixion, bearing "our sins in his own body on the tree" (1 Peter 2:24). Nowhere is God's wrath toward sin seen in greater clarity than at Calvary when he gave up his Son, his only Son, whom he loved (cf. Genesis 22:2).

The terrors of hell are vividly portrayed in the anguish of Calvary and that inexpressibly awful cry, "My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?" (Matthew 27:46; Psalm 22:1). Christ tasted death and hell for his people. He bore that excruciating agony so that none of his people, for whom he died, would ever experience hell for themselves. The terrors of hell for the impenitent and unbelieving will be as unending as the delights and joys of heaven for the penitent and believing. Paul reveals the judgement of God as one of the motives behind his preaching: "Knowing, therefore, the terror of the Lord, we persuade men" (2 Corinthians 5:11).

At Athens, there was a fine example of this apostle's ministry and his faithfulness in declaring the judgement of God:

Truly, these times of ignorance God overlooked, but now commands all men everywhere to repent, because He has appointed a day on which He will judge the world in righteousness by the Man whom He has ordained. He has given assurance of this to all by raising Him from the dead (Acts 17:30-31).

¹⁴ William G.T. Shedd, *The Doctrine of Endless Punishment* (1886; Minneapolis: Klock and Klock, 1980), 12-13.

3. The condition of the human heart by nature

In sharp contrast to the revelation of the *divine* heart is the shocking disclosure of the *human* heart:

The heart is deceitful above all things,
And desperately wicked;
Who can know it?
I, the LORD, search the heart,
I test the mind,
Even to give every man according to his ways,
According to the fruit of his doings (17:9-10).

The Lord Jesus clarified the corruption of the human heart:

For from within, out of the heart of men, proceed evil thoughts, adulteries, fornications, murders, thefts, covetousness, wickedness, deceit, lewdness, an evil eye, blasphemy, pride, foolishness. All these evil things come from within and defile a man (Mark 7:21-23).

The heart in its natural state not only produces these evils, but is also incapable of right judgement. While some consciousness of what is right and what is wrong is present to one degree or another in every human being, the effects of sin have been to distort and corrupt.

The biblical doctrine of total depravity does not teach that every human being is as wicked as he or she could be, but that sin has infected every *aspect* of every human personality—in thought, mind and will. In the natural condition, therefore, no one is righteous (Psalm 14:1-3; Romans 3:23); no one understands spiritual truth (1 Corinthians 2:14); no one can please God (Romans 8:7-8); and no one can enter the kingdom of God (John 3:5). The need for a radical change in the human condition is evident. God alone works that miracle. In Ezekiel's prophecy, there is the promise of "a new heart and ...a new spirit within" (Ezekiel 36:26).

4. Plea to backsliders

In spite of the reforms brought about by good King Josiah, the nation continued in its spiritual and moral decline. The idolatry and immorality outstripped the corruptions of the northern kingdom of Israel before her exile to Assyria (3:11). Nevertheless certain words appear frequently in the

prophecies of Jeremiah: “forsaken” / “forsake” (twenty-four times); “backsliding” (nine times); and “return” (forty-five times). These chapters are full of words for backsliders. Judah had forsaken the Lord; Jeremiah was commissioned to warn of impending judgement; there was still time for the people to repent and avert condemnation:

“Return, backsliding Israel,” says the LORD;
 “I will not cause My anger to fall on you.
 For I am merciful,” says the LORD;
 “I will not remain angry forever.
 Only acknowledge your iniquity,
 That you have transgressed against the LORD your God,
 And have scattered your charms
 To alien deities under every green tree,
 And you have not obeyed My voice,” says the LORD (3:12-13).

Events at the potter’s house serve to illustrate the importance of returning to God quickly. A spoiled pot could be reworked and reshaped while the clay was still wet (18:4-6), but when hard and dry it can only be smashed in pieces (19:11). The opportunity for repentance is not indefinite.

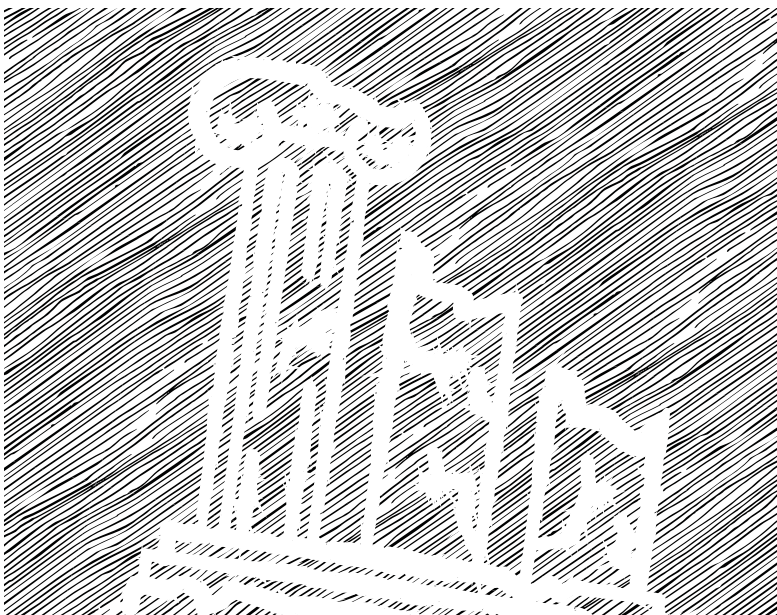
A wonderful promise (reminiscent of Isaiah 55:6-7) is given to all who hear or read: “And you will seek Me and find Me, when you search for Me with all your heart. I will be found by you, says the LORD” (29:13-14).

5. Standing alone

A terrible sense of isolation and loneliness must have gripped Jeremiah through those dark years. No one wanted to hear his messages from God. His family, friends and neighbours, the people and rulers all rejected his preaching and turned against him. Even the religious leaders despised him. Prophets and priests stood against him and sought his death. Jeremiah suffered like the greater Prophet of whom it was written: “He is despised and rejected by men, a Man of sorrows and acquainted with grief” (Isaiah 53:3).

How relevant are the faithfulness and fortitude of Jeremiah for our day! With Western nations seemingly hell-bent on undermining every ethical law based on the Scriptures, with institutional religion denying the major doctrines of the faith and actively and publicly promoting immorality and interfaith initiatives, with mysticism and existentialism dominating even evangelical churches, the sense of aloneness and pressure for conformity is almost

unbearable. Religious leaders of our own day do not know “how to blush” (8:12; cf. v. 11).



LAMENTATIONS

MEANING

"poems for a funeral"

AUTHOR

Jeremiah
(probably)

KEY THOUGHT

Threatened judgement

THEME

The misery that results from sin

THEME VERSE

"Is it nothing to you, all you who pass by?

Behold and see

If there is any sorrow like my sorrow."

LAMENTATIONS 1:12

LAMENTATIONS / SUMMARY

PART 1 / **POEM ONE: THE DESTRUCTION OF JERUSALEM**

1:1-22

1. The grief of the prophet

- | | | |
|----|-------------------------|--------|
| a. | Jerusalem lies desolate | 1:1-7 |
| b. | Acknowledgement of sin | 1:8-11 |

2. The grief of the city

- | | | |
|----|----------------------|---------|
| a. | Appeal to passers-by | 1:12-19 |
| b. | Prayer to the Lord | 1:20-22 |

PART 2 / **POEM TWO: THE RIGHTEOUS ANGER OF GOD**

2:1-22

- | | | |
|----|---------------------------------------|---------|
| a. | The anger of God | 2:1-14 |
| b. | Passers-by mock | 2:15-16 |
| c. | The Lord's long-threatened punishment | 2:17 |
| d. | The city cries out to the Lord | 2:18-22 |

PART 3 / **POEM THREE: THE ANGUISH AND HOPE OF THE PROPHET AND PEOPLE**

3:1-66

- | | | |
|----|--|---------|
| a. | The afflictions of the prophet | 3:1-20 |
| b. | The hope of the prophet | 3:21-36 |
| c. | The Lord's sovereignty and justice | 3:37-39 |
| d. | An appeal to the nation | 3:40-54 |
| e. | Confidence in the God who answers prayer | 3:55-66 |

PART 4 / **POEM FOUR: THE SEIGE OF JERUSALEM**

4:1-22

- | | | |
|----|--|---------|
| a. | The horrors of the seige illustrated | 4:1-10 |
| b. | The cause of the seige: the righteous judgement of God | 4:11-16 |
| c. | The cruelty of Edom | 4:17-20 |
| d. | The punishment of Edom | 4:21-22 |

**PART 5 / POEM FIVE: A PLEA FOR THE
RESTORATION OF ISRAEL**

5:1-22

- | | | |
|----|--|---------|
| a. | Appeal for pity for the misery of Israel | 5:1-6 |
| b. | Confessin of sin | 5:7 |
| c. | Intense suffering | 5:8-18 |
| d. | An earnest plea for restoration | 5:19-22 |

LAMENTATIONS

Funerals are never the happiest of occasions. Even when there is the “sure and certain hope of the resurrection to eternal life,”¹ there is still the grief and pain of those left behind. While believers do not “sorrow as others who have no hope” (1 Thessalonians 4:13), they do grieve. The book of Lamentations is a collection of funeral poems. It is a sad book, probably the most distressing in the whole of the Old Testament. The “weeping prophet,” Jeremiah, composes five poems as he grieves over the capital city of Jerusalem. This once proud monument to God’s glory, goodness and grace is now reduced to rubble. The people have been defeated, humiliated, slaughtered or forced into exile. The terrible punishment, so long threatened by the living God, had burst in full fury upon the nation. For years, the people had been in the habit of turning to idolatry, seeking only political solutions for their ills, and blindly and arrogantly refusing to acknowledge the Lord and return to him in repentance and obedience. Whereas other Scriptures describe the events in their historic detail (2 Kings 25:1–21; Jeremiah 52:7–30), the book of Lamentations expresses the feelings of utter dejection, of uncontrollable grief and of abject misery experienced by those who care about the purposes of God and the well-being of the people of God.

LAMENTATIONS / **AUTHOR**

Although there is no mention of the name of the author, either in this book or in any other part of the Scriptures, the content, style, language and circumstances all suit Jeremiah the prophet, as tradition maintains. The authorship, however, “is not worth argument, since the text does not insist on it and its interpretation does not depend on it.”²

LAMENTATIONS / **HISTORICAL SETTING**

The continued presence of Israel in the promised land depended on their fulfilling the terms of the covenant that God had established at

¹ From “At the Burial of the Dead” in *Book of Common Prayer* (Church of England).

² Raymond B. Dillard and Tremper Longman III, *An Introduction to the Old Testament* (Leicester: Apollos, 1995), 304.

Sinai (Deuteronomy 28:63–29:1). In spite of repeated acts of rebellion, wilful idolatry and immorality, the Lord had faithfully urged them to repentance and restoration of relationship. Following the death of King Josiah, the people of the small southern kingdom of Judah, the last remaining Israelites in the promised land, began the final stage on the slippery slope to destruction. Now, after twenty-three years of turmoil and tragedy, four evil kings and three major invasions by Babylon, the destruction is complete. The nation is mutilated and dispersed; the city of Jerusalem lies in total ruin.

The book of Lamentations was written shortly after the third invasion of Jerusalem by the Babylonian forces of King Nebuchadnezzar (586 B.C., following earlier invasions in 605 B.C. and 597 B.C.). On this final occasion Jerusalem was sacked; the temple was destroyed, along with the king's palace, all substantial houses and the city walls (Jeremiah 52:12–14; 2 Kings 25:9–10). The prophecies entrusted to Jeremiah by the Lord, regarding the judgement of God on the nation, had been faithfully delivered and recorded (Jeremiah 36:2,27–28) and now they have been fulfilled to the letter. But there is no satisfaction in the heart of the prophet, no comfort that his predictions have proved true and that he has been vindicated as a genuine prophet of the living God. Rather he sits and weeps. He is in agony, for he grieves over his people: many have been killed; many have been taken captive; the few survivors have become refugees, and the city lies in ruin. It is a sad sight and testifies to the arrival of the long-predicted, well-deserved, righteous judgement of God.

Jeremiah may have composed these lamentations as he sat on a hillside overlooking the ruins and desolation shortly before being taken to Egypt (Jeremiah 43:1–7).

LAMENTATIONS / **OUTLINE**

Four of the five chapters in Lamentations are written in acrostic form, based on the twenty-two letters of the Hebrew alphabet, each verse beginning with a letter in the order of the alphabet. Chapter 5, though it contains twenty-two verses, is nevertheless not written as an acrostic.

Chapter 3 contains sixty-six verses, three verses beginning with

Aleph,³ the first letter of the alphabet, three verses beginning with Beth, the second letter of the alphabet, and so on through the whole alphabet. This acrostic form was probably adopted as an aid to memorization.

Each chapter contains a poem: in each there is a reference to the sad, ruined state of Jerusalem, a vindication of the Lord in dealing so drastically with his people and a reference to those passing by. The first three poems each end with a prayer to the Lord. The fourth (chapter 4) has no prayer, but the fifth poem (chapter 5) is given over entirely to prayer.

PART 1 / **POEM ONE: THE DESTRUCTION OF JERUSALEM (1:1-22)**

Lamentations describes “the funeral of a city.”⁴ It contains all the hallmarks of an eyewitness account of the fall of Jerusalem and the resulting desolation and despair. The city—temple, palace, houses and walls—lies in ruins. The terror so long threatened and so consistently disregarded has now fallen upon Jerusalem. Jeremiah describes the ruin of Jerusalem and the misery of the exiles. The capital is personified as a weeping widow deprived of her husband and children. Deserted, she cries out, “See, O LORD, and consider, for I am scorned” (1:11). The nation through whom the great salvation was to come has become so idolatrous and wicked that the Lord has had to punish her severely. The devastation of Jerusalem is horrific!

Throughout the lamentations, the prophet plainly declares that the present judgement is the result of rebellion and sin (1:8). He pictures Zion⁵ speaking and grieving over her misery. She acknowledges her punishment is deserved and the Lord is entirely just in inflicting the penalty: “The LORD is righteous, for I rebelled against His commandment” (1:18).

Although the destruction of Jerusalem is a judgement from God, nevertheless the call goes out for those who have brought about the desolation to be punished (1:21–22). While the Lord has used the

³ The letters of the Hebrew alphabet are shown in Psalm 119. This psalm is also presented in acrostic form.

⁴ Thomas Nelson, *Nelsons's Complete Book of Bible Maps and Charts* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1996), 220.

⁵ See explanation in the chapter on Jeremiah.

neighbouring nations to punish his people, those nations are not free from guilt for their atrocities and wickedness.

PART 2 / POEM TWO: THE RIGHTEOUS ANGER OF GOD (2:1-22)

Although it was the Babylonians who invaded, overcame and destroyed Jerusalem, they were merely the *agents*. It was *the Lord* who was punishing his people through the Babylonian forces. The Lord, the defender of Israel, has given up his people to their awful doom:

Standing like an enemy, He has bent His bow;
 With His right hand, like an adversary,
 He has slain all who were pleasing to His eye;
 On the tent of the daughter of Zion,
 He has poured out His fury like fire (2:4).

It is the Lord who has destroyed the temple, terminated the feasts and displaced king and priest (2:6).

The reasons for the anger of God upon the nation of Israel are spelled out. The remaining people are urged: “Pour out your heart like water before the face of the Lord” (2:19). Although the Israelites deserve everything they have received, nevertheless they are still the people of God (2:20). The prophet speaks on behalf of the people, pleading with the Lord to look with compassion upon their misery and to show mercy.

PART 3 / POEM THREE: THE ANGUISH AND HOPE OF THE PROPHET AND PEOPLE (3:1-66)

The prophet identifies with the people, making their miseries and sorrows his own. He pours out his heart in anguish over the afflictions, yet in the midst of grief and agony he remains confident in the God of Israel, whose character and promises are such that the people of God can be confident—they can trust in the Lord when all the evidence before them cries out, “Hopeless!” The believer responds:

Great is Your faithfulness.
 “The Lord is my portion,” says my soul,

“Therefore I hope in Him!” (3:23–24).

In the face of death and destruction, with life seemingly coming apart at the seams, Jeremiah turns tragedy into a triumph of faith. God has never failed him in the past. God has promised to remain faithful in the future. In the light of the God he knows and loves, Jeremiah finds hope and comfort.⁶

Even though he knows the punishment is entirely deserved and the Lord is absolutely righteous and just in his dealings with Israel, the prophet is confident in the compassion of God: “For He does not afflict willingly, nor grieve the children of men” (3:33).

While the dominant and recurring theme is that of the wretched condition of the people of Judah, there is also a clear acknowledgement of what brought this about—unfaithfulness, disobedience and rebellion in relation to the living God. So the prophet cries out to the people:

Let us search out and examine our ways,
And turn back to the LORD;
Let us lift our hearts and hands
To God in heaven.
We have transgressed and rebelled;
You have not pardoned (3:40–42).

PART 4 / **POEM FOUR: THE SIEGE OF JERUSALEM (4:1–22)**

The former glory of Israel is contrasted with her present misery. The prophet again describes the fearful judgements that have fallen upon Jerusalem. A series of images are used to describe the appalling conditions during the three-and-a-half year siege. The prophecies in Deuteronomy 28:53 and Jeremiah 19:9 are being fulfilled: precious stones as worthless as clay; nursing infants and young children starving; mothers cooking and eating their own children; the well-to-do living in squalor. Under siege, the people resemble the walking dead (4:8).

⁶ Bruce Wilkinson and Kenneth Boa, *Talk Thru the Old Testament* (Nashville: Nelson, 1983), 207.

The Lord gave Israel many grave warnings of these things. Through Moses, for example, God told them that their enemy would overpower them,

They shall besiege you at all your gates until your high and fortified walls, in which you trust, come down throughout all your land; and they shall besiege you at all your gates throughout all your land which the LORD your God has given you. You shall eat the fruit of your own body, the flesh of your sons and your daughters whom the LORD your God has given you, in the siege and desperate straits in which your enemy shall distress you (Deuteronomy 28:52–53).

And why? “Because you did not serve the LORD your God with joy and gladness of heart, for the abundance of everything” (Deuteronomy 28:47).

Jeremiah once more presents a vivid description of the fall of Jerusalem. Tragedy has struck hard; conditions are horrific: invasions, destruction, ruin and utter hopelessness.

PART 5 / **POEM FIVE: A PLEA FOR THE RESTORATION OF ISRAEL (5:1-22)**

Judah’s punishment is complete. In a poem devoted to prayer for mercy, an appeal is made for the Lord’s compassion: “Look, and behold our reproach!” (5:1). The Israelites speak and make confession and appeal to God for forgiveness and delivery. The nation has become so wicked that the Lord has left the temple, the city, the land and the people. There is no certainty of his return. The only appeal, the only hope, is that the Lord will take pity upon his people.

LAMENTATIONS / **CHRIST AND HIS CHURCH**

TYPES

1. Jeremiah as a type of Christ

Jeremiah, the weeping prophet, expresses profound grief over Jerusalem. Six-hundred years later, another sees the impending doom of

Jerusalem once more looming on the horizon. Of the Lord Jesus Christ it is recorded,

Now as He drew near, He saw the city and wept over it, saying, "If you had known, even you, especially in this your day, the things that make for your peace! But now they are hidden from your eyes. For days will come upon you when your enemies will build an embankment around you, surround you and close you in on every side, and level you, and your children within you, to the ground; and they will not leave in you one stone upon another, because you did not know the time of your visitation" (Luke 19:41–44).

This prophecy of the Lord Jesus was fulfilled in A.D. 70 with a four-month siege by Roman general Titus, and the burning and destruction of the second temple.

Jeremiah cried out:

The LORD has fulfilled His fury,
He has poured out His fierce anger.
He kindled a fire in Zion,
And it has devoured its foundations...
Because of the sins of her prophets
And the iniquities of her priests,
Who shed in her midst
The blood of the just (4:11,13; cf. Acts 3:14–15).

The Lord Jesus cried out: "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the one who kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to her!" (Matthew 23:37)

2. The suffering Saviour

While the book of Lamentations contains no direct prophecies concerning the promised Messiah, there are a number of verses that suggestively foreshadow the Saviour's crucifixion:

Is it nothing to you, all you who pass by?
Behold and see
If there is any sorrow like my sorrow (1:12).

All who pass by clap their hands at you;
 They hiss and shake their heads...
 All your enemies have opened their mouth against you;
 They hiss and gnash their teeth (2:15–16; cf. Psalm 22:13;
 Matthew 27:39–44).

Even when I cry and shout,
 He shuts out my prayer (3:8; cf. Matthew 27:46).

I have become the ridicule of all my people—
 Their taunting song all the day (3:14; cf. Psalm 69:12; Matthew
 26:67–68).

Remember my affliction and roaming,
 The wormwood⁷ and the gall (3:19; cf. Psalm 69:21; Matthew
 27:34).

Let him give his cheek to the one who strikes him,
 And be full of reproach (3:30; cf. Psalm 69:20; Isaiah 50:6;
 Luke 22:63–64).

LAMENTATIONS / CONCLUSION

Jeremiah wrote two books: the first, a collection of prophecies, history and biography in the years leading up to the fall of Jerusalem, a book of warnings and challenge; the second, a set of poems looking back after the fall of Jerusalem, a book of grief and deep distress. This second book is the book of Lamentations, throughout which Jeremiah expresses the deepest agony of mind and heart, yet continually declares God's holiness, justice and sovereignty in the judgements he has sent upon Judah.

No one could charge the Lord with impatience. After hundreds of years of repeated warnings, threats and pleas, the punishment of the Lord has fallen upon Judah. Jeremiah speaks for himself and his compatriots, responding to this righteous judgement with sorrow, confession and repentance, and pleading with God for mercy. In the midst

⁷ A woody plant with a bitter flavour.

of the bleak, agonizing laments there is a ray of hope. The Lord will be faithful to his covenant promises; he will restore the nation. Great is his faithfulness (3:23). Even in the final words there is an implied hope for the future:

Turn us back to You, O LORD, and we will be restored;
Renew our days as of old,
Unless You have utterly rejected us,
And are very angry with us! (5:21–22).

The situation is critical; humanly speaking, it is hopeless. Nevertheless Jeremiah is trusting in the promises of God. The covenant promises to Abraham, Moses, David and Judah will not be broken. Like Abraham years before, of Jeremiah it may also be recorded that he, “contrary to hope, in hope believed” (Romans 4:18). Outward circumstances, common sense and all the reason in the world cannot remove the believer’s confidence in the Word of God: “Let God be true but every man a liar” (Romans 3:4).

LAMENTATIONS / APPLICATION AND REFLECTION

1. Life without God

The condition of a people without God is described in terms of having “no rest” (1:3), “no pasture” (1:6) and “no comforter” (1:9). In Christ, these deficiencies are rectified.⁸ “Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and *I will give you rest*” (Matthew 11:28, emphasis added). “I am the door. If anyone enters by Me, he will be saved, and will go in and out *and find pasture*” (John 10:9, emphasis added, cf. Psalm 23:2). “If you love Me, keep My commandments. And I will pray the Father, *and He will give you another Helper* [κλν: Comforter], that He may abide with you forever— the Spirit of truth” (John 14:15–17, emphasis added).

2. The faithfulness of God

Though the present circumstances are so depressing for Jeremiah and the people of God, the note of true faith and confidence rings out:

Through the LORD’s mercies we are not consumed,
Because His compassions fail not.
They are new every morning;
Great is Your faithfulness (3:22–23).

Even in the bleakest circumstances the Lord’s people can rely on their God:

Who among you fears the LORD?
Who obeys the voice of His Servant?
Who walks in darkness
And has no light?
Let him trust in the name of the LORD
And rely upon his God (Isaiah 50:10).

⁸ A.M. Hodgkin, *Christ in All the Scriptures* (London: Pickering and Inglis, 1907), 172–173.



EZEKIEL

MEANING "God strengthens"	AUTHOR Ezekiel	KEY THOUGHT The glory of God
-------------------------------------	--------------------------	--

THEME

The severity and goodness of God

THEME VERSE

And behold, the glory of the God of Israel came from the way of the east. His voice was like the sound of many waters; and the earth shone with His glory.

EZEKIEL 43:2

EZEKIEL / SUMMARY

PART 1 / THE LORD COMMISSIONS EZEKIEL 1:1-3:27

- | | |
|--------------------------------------|-----------------|
| 1. Visions from the Lord | 1:1-28 |
| a. The time of the vision | 1:1-3 |
| b. The four living creatures | 1:4-14 |
| c. The four wheels | 1:15-21 |
| d. The firmament | 1:22-25 |
| e. The appearance of a man | 1:26-28 |
| 2. The task assigned | 2:1-3:27 |
| a. The message is for the Israelites | 2:1-10 |
| b. "Food" for the prophet | 3:1-3 |
| c. The content of the message | 3:4-11 |
| d. The prophet carried by the Spirit | 3:12-14 |
| e. Responsibilities outlined | 3:15-21 |
| f. The glory of the Lord appears | 3:22-27 |

PART 2 / JUDGEMENTS AGAINST JUDAH BEFORE THE FALL OF JERUSALEM 4:1-24:27

- | | |
|---|------------------|
| 1. Four signs indicating the forthcoming siege of Jerusalem | 4:1-5:17 |
| a. The clay tablet | 4:1-3 |
| b. The prophet lying on his side | 4:4-8 |
| c. Eating defiled bread | 4:9-17 |
| d. Hair shaved from head and beard | 5:1-4 |
| e. The signs explained | 5:5-17 |
| 2. Two messages of impending judgement | 6:1-7:27 |
| a. Destruction of Judah | 6:1-14 |
| b. Destruction of the whole nation | 7:1-27 |
| 3. Visions of Jerusalem's destruction and a promised remnant | 8:1-11:25 |
| a. Vision of the glory of God in the city | 8:1-4 |
| b. Vision of the abominations in the temple | 8:5-18 |

-
- | | | |
|----|--------------------------------------|----------|
| c. | Vision of the slaying of citizens | 9:1-11 |
| d. | Vision of the glory departing | 10:1-8 |
| e. | Vision of wheels and cherubim | 10:9-22 |
| f. | Vision of twenty-five wicked princes | 11:1-12 |
| g. | A promised remnant | 11:13-25 |

3. Symbols of judgement **12:1-24:27**

- | | | |
|----|---|------------|
| a. | Preparing for captivity | 12:1-16 |
| b. | Eating with trembling and anxiety | 12:17-28 |
| c. | Warning to false prophets | 13:1-23 |
| d. | Warning to the elders | 14:1-23 |
| e. | Jerusalem like a vine fit only for burning | 15:1-8 |
| f. | Israel's marriage and unfaithfulness | 16:1-63 |
| g. | The parable of the eagles and the vine | 17:1-24 |
| h. | Personal responsibility for sin | 18:1-32 |
| i. | Lamentations for Israel's princes | 19:1-14 |
| j. | Final warnings before the fall of Jerusalem | 20:1-24:27 |

PART 3 / JUDGEMENTS AGAINST THE SURROUNDING NATIONS

25:1-32:32

PART 4 / PROPHECIES OF RETURN AND RESTORATION

33:1-48:35

1. The return of the Israelites to their own land **33:1-39:29**

- | | | |
|----|---|------------|
| a. | The responsibility of the watchman | 33:1-33 |
| b. | Irresponsible shepherds | 34:1-31 |
| c. | Judgement on Mount Seir (Edom) | 35:1-15 |
| d. | Blessings on Israel | 36:1-37:28 |
| e. | Judgement against Gog, Magog and others | 38:1-39:29 |

2. The restoration of Israel **40:1-48:35**

- | | | |
|----|--------------------------|------------|
| a. | The new temple | 40:1-43:27 |
| b. | New worship | 44:1-46:24 |
| c. | The restored city of God | 47:1-48:35 |

EZEKIEL

The name *Ezekiel* means, “God strengthens.” This prophet, taken into captivity and meeting hard opposition from fellow Israelites in exile (3:8–9), needed the courage and resolution that the Lord alone could supply. His ministry was quite extraordinary. The book bearing his name displays a man of firm resolution, thoroughly convinced of the seriousness of obeying the law of God, yet with a shepherd’s tender heart. Well versed in practical theology, he had a deep love for the people of God. The prophet declares the sovereignty and glory of God on the one hand, and the personal responsibility of the sinner on the other.

The book is difficult to interpret because it is so full of imagery. The author uses visions, prophecies, parables, allegories, signs and symbolic acts to dramatize the message of God to his people in captivity and to those still in Jerusalem. Centuries later, the apostle Peter was to say of the writings of his fellow-apostle Paul, “in which are some things hard to understand, which untaught and unstable people twist to their own destruction, as they do also the rest of the Scriptures” (2 Peter 3:16). The book of Ezekiel is open to similar misinterpretation. The complexities must not be allowed, however, to overshadow the clear and wonderful lessons which this great prophetic book contains.

EZEKIEL / AUTHOR

Ezekiel prophesied while in exile in the land of Babylon. The book is autobiographical—the first person singular is used throughout. Many of the prophecies are carefully dated and the locations where they were received is described. The similarity of thought and arrangement throughout make it clear that the entire book is the work of one mind.¹ The prophet is not mentioned in the Old Testament outside his own book (1:3; 24:24).

The phrase, “in the thirtieth year” (1:1), is most probably a reference to Ezekiel’s age. If so then he was born in 622 B.C. during the reign of good King Josiah (640–609 B.C.). A year later, the Book of the Law

¹ Edward J. Young, *An Introduction to the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1949), 241.

was discovered while the temple was being renovated (2 Chronicles 34:14). So Ezekiel grew up in the days of reformation (2 Kings 22:1–23:25). As the son of a priest, he would have had firsthand experience of Josiah's reforms in the temple and in worship. Later, as a young teenager, he would have heard the sad news of Josiah's death at the hands of Pharaoh Necho II at Megiddo (2 Kings 23:29; 2 Chronicles 35:20–25) and witnessed the terrible spiritual and moral decline during the years immediately following.

Ezekiel probably belonged to Jerusalem's aristocracy (1:1–3; 2 Kings 24:14) and, like Jeremiah, was of the priestly line. While still in Jerusalem, Ezekiel would no doubt have heard Jeremiah preaching on numerous occasions. The message of Ezekiel has distinct similarities to that of Jeremiah (see Jeremiah 29). It is evident throughout the book that in his thinking, outlook and life, Ezekiel had been affected by the prophetic message of Jeremiah: "He never melted to tears as did Jeremiah, but his vision of the ultimate deliverance of the people by the triumph of Jehovah was even clearer."²

The young Ezekiel may also have known of the prophets Habakkuk and Zephaniah, since they were prophesying in Judah during the same period (see Figure 5). Another contemporary of Ezekiel was Daniel, who was about the same age, and also grew up within the vicinity of the city of Jerusalem. Daniel was taken captive in the first invasion of Jerusalem by King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon (605 B.C.), in his mid-teens, and began his prophetic ministry that same year (Daniel 1:1–7). Ezekiel was taken captive eight years later (597 B.C.) following Nebuchadnezzar's second invasion of Jerusalem (2 Kings 24:10–16). By this time, Daniel was well known in Babylon through his involvement at the king's court.³ Jeremiah was not taken captive but remained in Jerusalem.

EZEKIEL / HISTORICAL SETTING

After Josiah's death, Pharaoh Necho II of Egypt deposed Josiah's successor, Jehoahaz, imprisoning him in Riblah (2 Kings 23:33–34), and

² G. Campbell Morgan, *Student Survey of the Bible* (Iowa Falls: World Bible Publishers, 1993), 240.

³ The prophet Daniel is mentioned three times in the book of Ezekiel (14:14,20; 28:3). The prophet Jeremiah is mentioned in the prophecy of Daniel (Daniel 9:2).

placed his older brother Eliakim (renamed Jehoiakim) on the throne of Judah as vassal to Egypt. When the Babylonians defeated Egypt at Carchemish (605 B.C.; see Jeremiah 46:2), they turned against Judah.

In the first Babylonian⁴ invasion of Jerusalem (also 605 B.C.), Jehoiakim of Judah was taken captive, subsequently released and allowed to remain on the throne of Judah after swearing allegiance to Nebuchadnezzar. King Jehoiakim's descendants, some nobles and some children were, however, taken captive into Babylon (Daniel 1:1–3; cf. 2 Chronicles 36:5–6). After a short time, Jehoiakim rebelled against Babylon and realigned himself with Egypt.

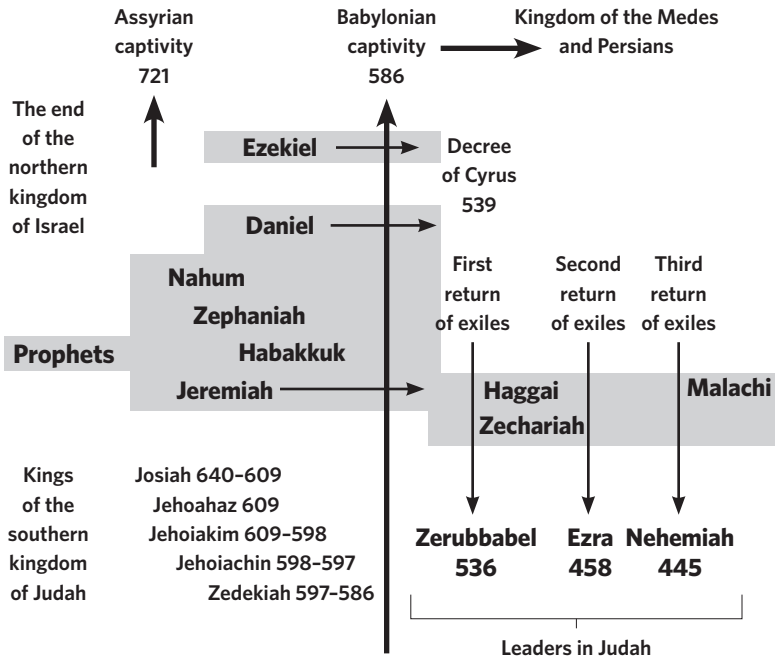
Eight years after this first invasion, the Babylonians once again attacked Jerusalem (597 B.C.). Jehoiakim's eighteen-year-old son, Jehoiachin, had succeeded to the throne of Judah. After a reign of just over three months (2 Chronicles 36:9–10), Jehoiachin was taken captive, along with the rest of the nobility, soldiers and craftsmen of Judah (2 Kings 24:12–16). Included among the captives was the twenty-five-year-old Ezekiel (1:1–2; 33:21). The temple was plundered; all the treasures of the house of the Lord, the articles of gold having been cut in pieces, were carried away. Only the poorest people still remained in Jerusalem (2 Kings 24:12–16). Nebuchadnezzar appointed Zedekiah, Jehoiachin's uncle, as king (2 Kings 24:15–20). Eleven years later, Zedekiah himself rebelled against Babylon. This prompted a third invasion by Babylon (586 B.C.), which left Jerusalem and the “house of the LORD” utterly destroyed (2 Kings 25:9).

After five years in exile in the land of Babylon, Ezekiel began his prophetic ministry (1:1–2). He was called to this office at the age of thirty, the same year he would have commenced service as a priest, had he remained in Jerusalem (Numbers 4:3). His ministry was to span at least twenty-two years (1:2; cf. 29:17; c. 592–570 B.C.).

Some of the exiles were imprisoned or placed under house arrest; others were made slaves; the remainder were allowed to live freely in their own homes (Jeremiah 29:1–7; Ezra 2:59; Nehemiah 7:61). Ezekiel was among the privileged ones—permitted to live in his own house (8:1) in Tel Abib, one of the main Jewish ghettos near the city of Babylon (3:15). Ezekiel's home became a frequent meeting place for the Jewish elders in exile (8:1; 14:1; 20:1).

⁴ The Babylonians are also known as Chaldeans (e.g., Jeremiah 32:5; Daniel 1:4).

Figure 5. Ezekiel in relation to Judah and its prophets and kings: before, during and after the exile*



*Years are in B.C.

Concurrently, Jeremiah was ministering to the small community of Israelites back in Jerusalem, Daniel was serving in the court of King Nebuchadnezzar and Ezekiel was ministering to the Jewish exiles. Jeremiah faced problems in Jerusalem; Daniel met with fierce opposition from within the Babylonian court; and Ezekiel faced considerable resistance from the Jewish exiles and needed to have a forehead “like adamant stone, harder than flint,” because of the rebellious spirit that confronted him (3:9).

EZEKIEL / **OUTLINE**

The city of Jerusalem has barely survived two major invasions, but God’s judgement on Jerusalem is not yet over. The certainty of further

judgement is illustrated in Ezekiel's vision of the glory of the Lord departing first from the temple and then from the city. The surrounding Gentiles will also come under divine punishment.

PART 1 / THE LORD COMMISSIONS EZEKIEL (1:1-3:27)

Ezekiel begins his autobiographical account by declaring that "The heavens were opened and I saw visions of God" (1:1; cf. Isaiah 6:1-5). "A vision in Bible days was a miraculous experience of a man of God on a special occasion, whereby God revealed truth to him in some pictorial and audible form."⁵ Visions and dreams given to prophets are "dark sayings" and not always easy to interpret:

If there is a prophet among you,
I, the Lord, make Myself known to him in a vision;
I speak to him in a dream.
Not so with My servant Moses;
He is faithful in all My house.
I speak with him face to face,
Even plainly, and not in dark sayings;
And he sees the form of the LORD (Numbers 12:6-8).

The exiles, among whom Ezekiel lives and works, come from the upper and skilled classes of Judean society. They are a privileged group, not known for listening to warnings from prophets (2:3-8). They hope for a short period in exile and a speedy return to their wealth, rank and status in Judah. False prophets in Babylon lead the Israelite captives to believe that Jerusalem will not be destroyed and that the exiles will soon be allowed to return to their own land. The growing bond between King Zedekiah of Judah and the pharaoh in Egypt no doubt encourages the hope of entire restoration. The prophet Jeremiah hears of this and sends the Jewish exiles a letter instructing them to settle down in Babylon,

⁵ Irving L. Jensen, *Jensen's Survey of the Old Testament: Search and Discover* (Chicago: Moody, 1978), 365.

Build houses and dwell in them; plant gardens and eat their fruit. . . . And seek the peace of the city where I have caused you to be carried away captive, and pray to the LORD for it; for in its peace you will have peace.... For thus says the LORD: After seventy years are completed at Babylon, I will visit you and perform My good word toward you, and cause you to return to this place (Jeremiah 29:5,7,10).

Ezekiel is called to be a watchman for Israel and to give warnings from God (3:17). He begins his ministry confirming all that Jeremiah has said and seeking to convince the exiles that they must *return to the Lord* before they can ever hope to return to Jerusalem. His task is difficult; he meets with opposition. The idolatry that Ezekiel had witnessed among the Jews in Jerusalem is also all too evident among the exiles in Babylon. The punishment of God in the first wave of captivity did not stir the first exiles to repentance. They did not believe that Jerusalem would actually be destroyed by the Babylonians. The second invasion and subsequent exile of more Israelites fail to quell the rising optimism. It is unpalatable for them to accept that the Lord has given world domination to Babylon and that the Jews should not only submit willingly to their captors but also work and pray for the peace of their enemies (Jeremiah 29:7). The prophets Jeremiah and Ezekiel have a united message: Jerusalem will fall and the Jews will be in exile for many years. Jeremiah predicts an exile lasting seventy years (Jeremiah 25:11; 29:10).⁶ The land would keep Sabbaths. For “as long as she lay desolate she kept Sabbath, to fulfill seventy years” (2 Chronicles 36:21).

PART 2 / JUDGEMENTS AGAINST JUDAH BEFORE THE FALL OF JERUSALEM (4:1-24:27)

This section contains mainly visions, warnings and predictions concerning the guilt of the people of Judah and the coming destruction of Jerusalem. It is sin that has brought the judgement of God upon the people with the resulting captivity:

⁶ Cf. Daniel 9:2; Zechariah 1:12; 7:5; 2 Chronicles 36:21; Ezra 1:1.

Therefore thus says the LORD God: “Because you have multiplied disobedience more than the nations that are all around you, have not walked in My statutes nor kept My judgments, nor even done according to the judgments of the nations that are all around you”—therefore thus says the LORD God: “Indeed I, even I, am against you and will execute judgments in your midst in the sight of the nations. And I will do among you what I have never done, and the like of which I will never do again, because of all your abominations” (5:7–9).

In a vision, Ezekiel sees sins charged against the elders of the house of Israel: idols in the temple, women weeping for the fertility god Tammuz and men worshipping the sun (8:10,14,16). Following the practice of the Egyptians, they are worshipping “crocodiles, cats, moles, beetles.”⁷

In the many visions recorded by Ezekiel, those that concern the glory of God are the most significant. The departure of the glory of God from the temple and from the city is pictured: in vision the prophet sees wheels on the ark of the covenant (10:9); he watches as the glory of the Lord moves to the threshold of the temple (10:4), to the east gate (10:19) and then from the city to Mount Olivet (11:23). The departure of the glory of God from the sanctuary and the city is slow, reluctant, dignified. The “glory of the Lord” is mentioned twelve times in the first eleven chapters. Then there is a prolonged silence. But the glory of the Lord will return (43:2,4–5; 44:4).

Ezekiel communicates not just by word of mouth, but also by the symbolic actions he performs. The Lord says to him, “I have made you a sign to the house of Israel” (12:6). Ezekiel willingly sacrifices his personal comfort and private interests. He is willing to do anything at God’s command:

The prophet enacted the siege of Jerusalem by using an iron pan, sketching the events on a clay tablet (4:1–8), and eating siege rations (4:9–17). He shaved his beard, divided and discarded the hair in ways that foresaw the fate of the citizens of Jerusalem (5). He packed his belongings and dug through a wall to depict the

⁷ William Greenhill, *An Exposition of Ezekiel* (1645; Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1994), 199.

exile of the population (12:1–20). A kind of “sword dance” became an object lesson about the sword the king of Babylon was bringing against Jerusalem; the king’s strategy was portrayed in a map drawn in the sand (21:8–23). Everything—from a scorched cooking pot to the death of his own wife—could serve as an object lesson about the coming fate of the nation (24).⁸

When the contents of Ezekiel’s earlier prophecies are reported back to Jerusalem, King Zedekiah hears what he considers to be contradictory prophecies from Ezekiel and Jeremiah. The one states that the king will not see Babylon (12:13); the other says he will be taken captive into Babylon (Jeremiah 21:7). On this ground it seems Zedekiah concludes that Jeremiah and Ezekiel are false prophets. But the Lord is to prove these two servants to be accurate in their prophecies. Both speak the inspired Word from God. Within a short time Nebuchadnezzar will come, besiege Jerusalem, take Zedekiah captive, put out his eyes, “[bind] him with bronze fetters, and [take] him to Babylon” (2 Kings 25:7).

When Nebuchadnezzar first installed Zedekiah as king of Judah, he established a covenant with him (17:13). Five years later, no doubt with the collusion of the kings of Edom, Moab, Ammon, Tyre and Sidon (Jeremiah 27:3), “Zedekiah rebelled against the king of Babylon” (2 Kings 24:20). This rebellion is seen as a serious sin against God because Nebuchadnezzar “had made him swear an oath by God” (2 Chronicles 36:13; cf. Ezekiel 17:13–21).

Ezekiel speaks of the Israelites in Egypt in the days of the Exodus more than any other prophet. It is only here in the prophecy of Ezekiel that God records the idolatry of Israel in Egypt and tells of his deliberation to destroy them there because of it (20:1–9). The reason why he did not destroy them there and then in Egypt was for his own glory:

But I acted for My name’s sake, that it should not be profaned before the Gentiles among whom they were, in whose sight I had made Myself known to them, to bring them out of the land of Egypt (20:9).

⁸ Raymond B. Dillard and Tremper Longman III, *An Introduction to the Old Testament* (Leicester: Apollos, 1995), 324.

Ezekiel's dearly loved wife dies eleven years after his exile to Babylon, in the sixth year of his prophetic office, the year that the final siege of Jerusalem begins (24:2,18). His wife's death is revealed to be a sign from God that Jerusalem will not be spared (24:16–24).

PART 3 / JUDGEMENTS AGAINST THE SURROUNDING NATIONS (25:1–32:32)

After declaring the severity of the judgement against Judah, the prophet is led to declare the Lord's judgements upon the seven surrounding nations. God is against these nations not just because of their sin of idolatry, but also because of their hostility toward, and persecution of, Israel. These nations openly gloated over the downfall of Jerusalem, and they assisted Israel's oppressor.

The prophecies against Egypt (29:1–32:32) describe that country's influence over Israel spanning many years. The Egyptians had frequently brought trouble on Israel, whether by outright hostility or pretended friendship. There are six prophecies against Egypt, each with a date calculated from the day of Jehoiachin's exile (1:2).⁹ The pharaoh addressed is Pharaoh Hophra (Jeremiah 44:30), the successor of Pharaoh Necho II.

Unlike the nations mentioned earlier which were destroyed by Nebuchadnezzar, Egypt will continue to exist, but as "the lowliest of kingdoms; it shall never again exalt itself above the nations" (29:15). Since that time it has not recovered its former power or influence.

⁹ 29:1 (12th day of the 10th month in the 10th year); 29:17 (1st day of the 1st month of the 27th year); 30:20 (7th day of the first month of the 11th year); 31:1 (1st day of the 3rd month of the 11th year); 32:1 (1st day of the 12th month of the 12th year); 32:17 (15th day of ? month in the 12th year).

The reason for the departure from the strict chronological order of the second prophecy is explained in that the first two prophecies belong together. The second is a "complement" of, or "appendix" to, the first. See Patrick Fairbairn, *An Exposition of Ezekiel* (1851; Minneapolis: Klock and Klock, 1979), 326; Ernest W. Hengstenberg, *The Prophecies of the Prophet Ezekiel Elucidated* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1874), 250.

**PART 4 / PROPHECIES OF RETURN AND
RESTORATION (33:1-48:35)**

Jerusalem fell in 586 B.C. After the severe judgements of God have been unleashed against Jerusalem and Judah, and the temple and the city have been destroyed, the message of the prophet changes drastically. In the aftermath of judgement there rises a clear and decisive note of hope. Up to 24:2 the prophet's message is basically: "Jerusalem will fall." From 34:11 onward he looks forward and predicts, "Jerusalem will be restored." When Jerusalem falls the prophet's tongue is freed to speak of future hope (24:25–27). Once the misguided belief that Jerusalem would not be taken has been shattered, the people begin to give Ezekiel a hearing. There is to be a future restoration of Israel, a spiritual awakening of unique proportions. While the vast majority of adults will not see the day personally, nevertheless many of their children will have the opportunity to return to the land of Israel.

The closing chapters are packed with predictions and promises about the restoration. The means by which the glory of the nation is to be restored are spelled out:¹⁰

- By listening to the warning of the spiritual watchmen and repenting of sin (chapter 33).
- By removing the false shepherds and by the arrival of the Good Shepherd who will care for the flock. The time will come when the people will recognize the Lord and a true prophet will be among them (34).
- By a total reformation of religion—a new exodus, God's people returning from exile, a new covenant, a new heart and a new spirit for the restored community (36).
- By the empowering of the Holy Spirit (37).
- By the overthrow of the enemies of Israel (38–39).
- By the building of the new sanctuary (40–42).
- By the return of the glory of the Lord (43).
- By the ministry of a loyal priesthood (44).
- By life-giving waters (spiritual life) flowing from the sanctuary (47).
- By Israel's restoration to her own land (48).

¹⁰ Based on suggestions in the Thompson Chain Reference Bible.

EZEKIEL / **CHRIST AND HIS CHURCH****PROPHECIES AND TYPES****1. The Good Shepherd**

Condemnation of the irresponsible leaders of Israel leads to the promise of God's intervention:

For thus says the Lord God: "Indeed I Myself will search for My sheep and seek them out. As a shepherd seeks out his flock on the day he is among his scattered sheep, so will I seek out My sheep and deliver them from all the places where they were scattered on a cloudy and dark day. And I will bring them out from the peoples and gather them from the countries, and will bring them to their own land; I will feed them on the mountains of Israel, in the valleys and in all the inhabited places of the country. I will feed them in good pasture, and their fold shall be on the high mountains of Israel. There they shall lie down in a good fold and feed in rich pasture on the mountains of Israel (34:11–14).

With a clear allusion to the shepherd psalm (Psalm 23), another prophecy is given of the coming of David's Son as King and Shepherd:

I will establish one shepherd over them, and he shall feed them—My servant David. He shall feed them and be their shepherd. And I, the LORD, will be their God, and My servant David a prince among them; I, the LORD, have spoken (34:23–24).

This is an obvious reference to Messiah, as David is dead and in his tomb (cf. Acts 2:29). The shepherd prophecies are fulfilled in the arrival of the Lord Jesus Christ as the Good Shepherd (John 10:11–16), the Chief Shepherd (1 Peter 5:4) and the Great Shepherd (Hebrews 13:20). The Son of God comes to gather into one flock "the lost sheep of the house of Israel" (Matthew 15:24) and the lost sheep from among the Gentiles. As he made clear, "And other sheep I have which are not of this fold [that is, Judaism]; them also I must bring, and they will hear My voice; and there will be one flock [Jew and Gentile] and one shepherd (John 10:16).

2. The new temple

The destruction of Jerusalem and the temple by the invading forces of the Babylonians (586 B.C.) brought dismay to the Jews in Babylon (Psalm 137).

Thirteen years after the fall of the city, Ezekiel is given the vision of a new temple in Jerusalem (40:1; cf. 33:21). When the exiles return following the decree of Cyrus (539 B.C.) Zerubbabel, encouraged by the prophets Haggai and Zechariah, rebuilds the temple in Jerusalem (Ezra 5:2; 6:14–16). But it is not as spectacular as that prophesied by Ezekiel. Some elements of his vision seem to go beyond a reasonable literal understanding (47:1–12). Interpretation should therefore proceed with caution: “A fair amount of mischief has been done to Ezekiel by interpreters committed to reading visions and allegories in a highly literalistic way.”¹¹

Ezekiel’s temple is a symbolic picture of Christ.¹² He is the true and living temple (John 2:19–22), who draws together his people as “living stones” to be “built up as a spiritual house” (1 Peter 2:5), “in whom the whole building, being joined together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord” (Ephesians 2:21; cf. 1 Corinthians 3:16; 6:19). Of Ezekiel 40 to 48, E.J. Young concludes,

This elaborate representation is a picture of the Messianic age. The Lord dwells in the midst of His people.... Ezekiel was speaking of Christ.... He was, in a manner peculiar to himself, preaching Jesus Christ.¹³

As Stephen says:

However, the Most High does not dwell in temples made with hands, as the prophet says:

“Heaven is My throne,
And earth is My footstool.
What house will you build for Me? says the LORD,

¹¹ Dillard and Longman, *An Introduction to the Old Testament*, 322.

¹² See the chapter on 2 Chronicles in volume 1, section on “Solomon’s temple.”

¹³ Young, *An Introduction to the Old Testament*, 248.

Or what is the place of My rest?
Has My hand not made all these things?” (Acts 7:48–50,
quoting Isaiah 66:1–2).

3. The river of life

Pouring from the temple is a stream (47:1). Everywhere this water flows, it brings life where previously there had been nothing but death (47:9):

That the description given of this stream and its effects must be understood in an ideal manner, not of any actual river, but, like all the rest of the vision, of spiritual things shadowed forth under it, is so evident as scarcely to require any proof. The source of it alone (the summit of an elevated mountain), and the manner of its increase, should put this beyond a doubt with all who would not convert the Bible into a nursery of extravagance and credulity. For a natural river like this would of necessity be in contravention of the established laws of nature, and could only exist as a perpetual miracle.¹⁴

The picture of healing waters flowing from the altar in the temple holds a remarkable Christological message. The temple symbolizes Christ; the altar symbolizes Christ crucified; the healing water indicates the spiritual life that flows from the crucified Saviour (cf. John 19:34). To the woman of Samaria the Lord offered “living water” (John 4:10), which he clearly indicated was *spiritual* in nature. The “water” that he gives becomes “a fountain of water springing up into everlasting life” (John 4:14). A little later, at the Feast of Tabernacles, the Lord Jesus cried out:

“If anyone thirsts, let him come to Me and drink. He who believes in Me, as the Scripture has said, out of his heart will flow rivers of living water.” But this He spoke concerning the Spirit, whom those believing in Him would receive; for the Holy Spirit was not yet given, because Jesus was not yet glorified (John 7:37–39).

¹⁴ Fairbairn, *Exposition of Ezekiel*, 492.

The river of life is flowing from the temple (47:1; Joel 3:18; Zechariah 14:8–9). This is the “river whose streams shall make glad the city of God, the holy place of the tabernacle of the Most High” (Psalm 46:4). Along its banks are trees that provide food and medicine, “for the healing of the nations” (47:12; Revelation 22:1–2). Ezekiel’s temple is to be spiritually understood. It symbolizes the Lord Jesus Christ and the spiritual life and spiritual healing which he alone supplies.

4. The New Covenant

The prophet Ezekiel makes a valuable contribution to the promises of the New Covenant. God is going to make an everlasting covenant of peace with the Israelites after they have returned to their own land (37:26–28). The context shows that there is to be a wonderful spiritual awakening; the Lord will breathe his Spirit into those who are spiritually dead (37:1–14). This will be accompanied by a remarkable transformation in the people:

Then I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you shall be clean; I will cleanse you from all your filthiness and from all your idols. I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you; I will take the heart of stone out of your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. I will put My Spirit within you and cause you to walk in My statutes, and you will keep My judgments and do them (36:25–27).

This message communicated through the prophet Ezekiel in Babylon expressed similar blessings to those communicated, around that same time, through the prophet Jeremiah in Judah:

But this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the LORD: I will put My law in their minds, and write it on their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people. No more shall every man teach his neighbor, and every man his brother, saying, “Know the LORD,” for they all shall know Me, from the least of them to the greatest of them, says the LORD. For I will forgive their iniquity, and their sin I will remember no more (Jeremiah 31:33–34).¹⁵

¹⁵ See the section on “The New Covenant” in the chapter on Jeremiah.

The significant addition promised by God and prophesied by Ezekiel is the *indwelling of the Holy Spirit* in believers. This is one of the glories of the New Covenant. The indwelling of the Holy Spirit was dependent upon the completed work of the Messiah, the Lord Jesus Christ. He must be glorified (John 7:37–39), which means he must suffer and die in the place of his people, must rise again from the dead, must ascend to the Father and sit down “at the right hand of the Majesty on high” (Hebrews 1:3). After accomplishing his unique work, he is glorified by the Father and “highly exalted” (Philippians 2:9). The New Covenant blessing of the indwelling Holy Spirit began forty-nine days after our Lord’s resurrection, when the Jews were celebrating the annual Feast of Weeks, also called Pentecost (Acts 2:1–4). The promise of the Lord Jesus is fulfilled: “He dwells with you and *will be in you*” (John 14:17, emphasis added; see context vv.15–17).

The primary blessings of the New Covenant are:

- The complete removal of sin through the blood of the New Covenant—the everlasting covenant (36:25; Jeremiah 31:34; Luke 22:20; Hebrews 13:20; cf. 10:1–4,10).
- The law of God written on a new heart—a heart of flesh which replaces the heart of stone (36:26; Jeremiah 31:33; cf. 2 Corinthians 3:3; 5:17).
- The Holy Spirit of God indwelling all believers (Romans 8:9; 1 Corinthians 3:16; 6:19).

5. The tender twig

Thus says the Lord God: “I will take also one of the highest branches of the high cedar and set it out. I will crop off from the topmost of its young twigs a tender one, and will plant it on a high and prominent mountain. On the mountain height of Israel I will plant it; and it will bring forth boughs, and bear fruit, and be a majestic cedar. Under it will dwell birds of every sort; in the shadow of its branches they will dwell. And all the trees of the field shall know that I, the LORD, have brought down the high tree and exalted the low tree, dried up the green tree and made the dry tree flourish; I, the LORD, have spoken and have done it” (17:22–24).

In contrast to Jehoiachin (a young twig, 17:4) and Zedekiah (a vine, 17:7), Messiah appears as a tender twig which Jehovah plucks from the cedar of the house of David, plants upon Zion and causes to grow to a high tree, exalted above all the trees of the field, under which the birds of heaven build their nests (cf. Matthew 13:31–32). This occurs after Jehoiachin, the topmost twig of the cedar, has been removed by the Chaldean eagle to Babylon, and Zedekiah, the vine which thirsted for the Nile water of the Egyptian eagle, has been rooted up and withered.¹⁶ Messiah is the King who has the right to rule (21:26–27). There are several Messianic prophecies which refer to Christ as a branch (Isaiah 4:2; 11:1; Jeremiah 23:5; 33:15; Zechariah 3:8; 6:12) and a tender plant and a root (Isaiah 53:2).

EZEKIEL / CONCLUSION

Ezekiel was commissioned by God to convince the Israelites their captivity would be prolonged, to strengthen Jeremiah's prophecy and to encourage believers in Babylon. While his opening prophecies concern judgement, once the temple and the city of Jerusalem have fallen, the note of doom is replaced by one of great optimism. Ezekiel sees success as the people return to their Lord. He tells them of God's promise of restoration to their own land.

The great and lasting impact of this prophetic book is beyond dispute. There are at least sixty-five direct or indirect quotations of Ezekiel in the New Testament, forty-eight of them in the book of Revelation. Hodgkin identifies "over eighty points of contact" between the book of Ezekiel and the book of Revelation.¹⁷ Ezekiel's eschatological visions of Israel's restoration clearly have a Messianic dimension. The title "son of man" occurs over ninety times in reference to Ezekiel. The Lord Jesus used this title as his favourite self-designation. There are almost ninety references in the Gospels.

When the Saviour comes to his church then the city shall from that day be *Jehovah-Shammah*—"The Lord is there" (Ezekiel 48:35). When God left the temple and city of Jerusalem, there was great misery

¹⁶ Franz Delitzsch, *Messianic Prophecies* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1880), 82.

¹⁷ A.M. Hodgkin, *Christ in All the Scriptures* (London: Pickering and Inglis, 1907), 175.

(Hosea 9:12). “His presence in heaven makes it heaven; and his presence in the church makes it happy.”¹⁸

And He who sits on the throne will dwell among them. They shall neither hunger anymore nor thirst anymore; the sun shall not strike them, nor any heat; for the Lamb who is in the midst of the throne will shepherd them and lead them to living fountains of waters. And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes (Revelation 7:15–17).

¹⁸ Greenhill, *An Exposition of Ezekiel*, 830.

EZEKIEL / APPLICATION AND REFLECTION

1. Individual responsibility

Ezekiel's task is to convince the exiles that their predicament is the direct consequence of their sin. While the sovereignty of God is consistently portrayed throughout this book, this in no way removes personal responsibility from sinners: "The soul who sins shall die" (18:4,20). The Lord does not delight in the death of the wicked (33:11; 18:23,32). He sincerely urges sinners to turn to him: "Repent, and turn from all your transgressions, so that iniquity will not be your ruin" (18:30); and again, "Turn...and live!" (33:11). In these incomparable terms, the Lord declares his love for sinners:

Let the wicked forsake his way,
And the unrighteous man his thoughts;
Let him return to the LORD,
And He will have mercy on him;
And to our God,
For He will abundantly pardon (Isaiah 55:7).

In a society where governments are blamed for crime, and parents for the behaviour of their grown offspring, it is not fashionable to emphasize personal responsibility. Since the earliest days in the Garden of Eden, the tendency of sinners has always been to incriminate others. Adam blamed Eve and God; Eve blamed the serpent. The Lord calls each one to give account of himself (18:20; Romans 14:12).

2. A new heart

The corruption and sin of Israel have earned the Israelites the disapproval of God (36:16–20). Nothing in them, or in their behaviour, warrants even the least mercy or smallest degree of love from the Lord:

Thus says the LORD God: "I do not do this for your sake, O house of Israel, but for My holy name's sake, which you have profaned among the nations wherever you went. And I will sanctify My great name, which has been profaned among the nations, which you have profaned in their midst; and the nations shall know that I am the LORD," says the Lord God, "when I am hallowed in you before their eyes" (36:22–23).

What God is about to do will be revolutionary and radical: cleansing believers from all filthiness and from all idolatry, removing the old heart (cf. Jeremiah 17:9-10), implanting a new heart filled with love for God and giving a new spirit of obedience (36:25-27; 11:19-20). These promises were preeminently fulfilled in the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ (Titus 3:3-6; 1 John 1:9; John 14:17; 1 Corinthians 6:19). When God gives a new heart and puts his Spirit within there is also a true conviction of sin (36:31; John 16:8-11; Acts 2:37-39).

3. Born of the Spirit

Twenty-five times Ezekiel refers to the Spirit of God (eg. 2:2; 3:12,14,24).¹⁹ The unique work of the Holy Spirit is brought to attention in the vision of the valley of dry bones (37:1-14). Here the spiritual destitution, recovery and restoration of the Israelites are envisaged. The vision denotes the collective misery of the Israelites in exile. It is not concerned with their political condition but with the absence of spiritual life. The bones are "very dry" (37:2), indicating not so much how long those bones had been lying there but "the depth of the misery into which Israel had fallen."²⁰ The real misery of the people is their revolt against God and his Word, the dominion of sin and the subsequent moral ruin into which they have sunk.

The Lord commands Ezekiel to prophesy both to the bones and to the breath; in other words, he is directed to preach and to pray. He is to address "the dead bones"—that is, to preach to spiritually dead sinners (cf. John 5:25; Ephesians 2:1-5); he is also to call upon the Spirit of God to work his regenerating and renewing power (cf. Titus 3:5).

From this and other Old Testament Scriptures, the Pharisee Nicodemus, the teacher of Israel, should have understood the words of the Lord Jesus, "You must be born again" (John 3:7; cf. Psalm 87:5-6). In that conversation, the Lord Jesus is probably making reference to the breath coming to the valley of dry bones when he says, "The wind blows where it wishes, and you hear the sound of it, but cannot tell where it comes from and where it goes. So is everyone who is born of the Spirit" (John 3:8).

On the Day of Pentecost, there were phenomena that linked the coming of the Holy Spirit with the prophecy of Ezekiel: "And suddenly there came a

¹⁹ Ezekiel, Isaiah and Jeremiah together emphasize the Trinity: Jeremiah highlights the Father, Isaiah the Son and Ezekiel the Spirit.

²⁰ Hengstenberg, *Prophecies of Ezekiel Elucidated*, 321.

sound from heaven, as of a rushing mighty wind, and it filled the whole house where they were sitting.... And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit" (Acts 2:2,4).

Again the coming of the Holy Spirit in New Covenant blessing is associated with preaching to spiritually dead sinners (Acts 2:6,11,14; 4:31,33). The valley of dry bones is no longer confined to Israel. It is of *universal* proportions. Hence the Saviour commands, "Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations" (Matthew 28:19).

4. Church leaders

Ezekiel condemns false prophets for their self-interest (13:1-23) and leaders for their irresponsibility:

The weak you have not strengthened, nor have you healed those who were sick, nor bound up the broken, nor brought back what was driven away, nor sought what was lost; but with force and cruelty you have ruled them. So they were scattered because there was no shepherd; and they became food for all the beasts of the field when they were scattered (34:4-5).

In difficult circumstances, when the going was hard, there was no one prepared to "stand in the gap," like Moses before an angry God on behalf of a guilty Israel (22:30; Psalm 106:23). Ultimately, it was the Son of God who came as a man to stand in the breach between God and sinful human beings so that those who believe would not be destroyed.

In Old Testament times, the responsibility of prophets was to discharge their obligations as watchmen and sound a clear note of warning to sinners (33:1-11). The duty of shepherds was the tender care of the flock: the sick, the broken, the lost (34:1-10). Leadership of the church of Jesus Christ is no less significant: the gospel must be preached to the lost and the people of God must be lovingly pastored. The New Testament is replete with exhortations about this (Acts 20:28; Colossians 4:17; 1 Timothy 4:16; 1 Peter 5:2-4; James 3:1). "A shepherd's work cannot be done effectively without a shepherd's heart."²¹

²¹ J. Oswald Sanders, *Spiritual Leadership* (Basingstoke: Marshall Morgan and Scott, 1967), 39.



DANIEL

MEANING

"God is judge"

AUTHOR

Daniel

KEY THOUGHT

**God's universal
sovereignty**

THEME

Jehovah is Lord of all

THEME VERSE

He does according to His will in the army of heaven

And among the inhabitants of the earth.

No one can restrain His hand

Or say to Him, "What have You done?"

DANIEL 4:35

DANIEL / SUMMARY

PART 1 / GENERAL INTRODUCTION	1:1-21
a. Daniel taken to Babylon	1:1-7
b. Daniel and his companions faithful in Babylon	1:8-16
c. Daniel honoured by God and the king of Babylon	1:17-21
PART 2 / OUTSTANDING EVENTS IN THE LIFE OF DANIEL	2:1-6:28
1. Nebuchadnezzar's dream of a great image	2:1-49
a. Nebuchadnezzar is troubled by a dream	2:1-4
b. Nebuchadnezzar will not disclose the dream	2:5-11
c. Nebuchadnezzar issues a decree to slay all the wise men	2:12-13
d. God reveals the dream and its interpretation to Daniel	2:14-23
e. Daniel interprets the dream	2:24-45
f. Nebuchadnezzar promotes Daniel	2:46-49
2. Nebuchadnezzar erects a golden image	3:1-30
a. Nebuchadnezzar commands worship of the image of gold	3:1-7
b. Shadrach, Meshach and Abed-Nego disobey the king	3:8-18
c. Shadrach, Meshach and Abed-Nego are thrown into the furnace	3:19-25
d. Shadrach, Meshach and Abed-Nego are promoted by the king	3:26-30
3. Nebuchadnezzar's dream of a great tree	4:1-37
a. Nebuchadnezzar's second dream	4:1-18
b. Daniel interprets the dream	4:19-27
c. The dream fulfilled: King Nebuchadnezzar is humbled	4:28-33

-
- d. King Nebuchadnezzar's sanity is restored 4:34-37

- 4. Belshazzar's feast 5:1-31**
 - a. The temple vessels dishonoured 5:1-4
 - b. The handwriting on the wall 5:5-9
 - c. Daniel interprets the handwriting 5:10-29
 - d. The death of Belshazzar 5:30-31

- 5. The decree of Darius 6:1-28**
 - a. The promotion of Daniel arouses jealousy 6:1-9
 - b. Daniel accused and sentenced to death 6:10-17
 - c. Daniel unharmed in the lion's den 6:18-24
 - d. King Darius issues a wide decree 6:25-28

PART 3 / VISIONS AND PROPHECIES ILLUSTRATING GOD'S CONTROL OVER ALL NATIONS 7:1-12:13

- 1. Vision of the four beasts 7:1-28**
 - a. The vision 7:1-14
 - b. The interpretation 7:15-28

- 2. Vision of the ram and male goat 8:1-27**
 - a. The vision 8:1-14
 - b. The angel Gabriel gives the interpretation 8:15-27

- 3. Daniel's prayer and the prophecy of seventy weeks 9:1-27**
 - a. Daniel prays for the people 9:1-19
 - b. Prophecy of seventy weeks 9:20-27

- 4. Vision of a heavenly messenger 10:1-11:45**
 - a. The vision 10:1-21
 - b. The future for the kings of Persia and Greece 11:1-4
 - c. Wars between the kings of the North and of the South 11:5-45

DANIEL / **SUMMARY**

5. Prophecy of the end time	12:1-13
a. The prophecy	12:1-3
b. The command to seal up the book	12:4
c. Questions concerning the end	12:5-13

DANIEL

Although the name “Daniel” means “God is judge,” his book is a message of comfort for the people of God. It asserts and confirms the sovereign control of the true God over all the kingdoms of the earth. Nothing and no one is outside his authority and command:

For His dominion is an everlasting dominion,
 And His kingdom is from generation to generation.
 All the inhabitants of the earth *are* reputed as nothing;
 He does according to His will in the army of heaven
 And *among* the inhabitants of the earth.
 No one can restrain His hand
 Or say to Him, “What have You done?” (4:34–35).

The Babylonians, the Medes and Persians, the Greeks and the Romans will come and go, but God remains, and his kingdom endures forever. So, while the attention of this book is upon Gentile nations and there are few direct references to Israel as the people of God, the prophecy of Daniel is a spiritual tonic to all believers of any nation or generation who are bewildered or distressed by national or international events.

The book of Daniel is not really a history either of the Israelites or of the Babylonians, nor is it an autobiography. Though the author is a Jewish exile, surrounded by fellow countrymen in exile, there is no reference to the history of his people, no explanation for their exile and no description of their conditions, their struggles or their sufferings in captivity. Though living upward of sixty-seven years in the land of Babylon and having been trained and schooled in their culture, Daniel gives no account of Babylonian history or customs either. The biographical details that are included are chosen simply to illustrate the main thesis of the book: the God of Israel is the sovereign God over all the kingdoms of the world.

The factual incidents recorded to illustrate the theme of God’s sovereignty over all of life are impressive: delivery from a fiery furnace, the temporary insanity of a powerful king, mysterious fingers writing on a wall and safety in a lions’ den. These accounts have the quality of

lodging deep in the memory. Furthermore, the prophecies of Daniel are among the most remarkable in the whole of the Bible.

DANIEL / **AUTHOR**

The entire book is obviously the work of one writer, and as Daniel is named as the one who received the revelations, it follows that he is the author of the entire book.¹ The Lord commanded him to make a permanent record of the words he gave (12:4).

There is nothing of a negative nature written about Daniel. He is presented from start to finish as an outstandingly godly man: "His life was characterized by faith, prayer, courage, consistency, and lack of compromise."² He was a man "greatly beloved" of the Lord (9:23; 10:11,19).

Daniel was taken captive in the first invasion of Jerusalem by King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon (605 B.C.) and began his prophetic ministry the following year (1:6; 2:1,16). He may have belonged to a family of high rank in Judah, and may possibly even have been a member of the royal family (1:3). Taken to Babylon in his mid-teens, he was to remain there for the rest of his life. He was still active in his mid-eighties when Cyrus ruled Babylon (10:1; 536 B.C.), which means that he lived throughout the whole period of the Babylonian exile.

As a respected elder statesman in the land of the Medes and Persians, Daniel was probably instrumental in showing the prophecy of Isaiah (Isaiah 44:24–45:7) to King Cyrus; with the result that Cyrus issued a decree not only allowing, but also encouraging, the Jews to return home to Judah and Jerusalem (2 Chronicles 36:22–23; Ezra 1:1–4). Although he did not accompany them, Daniel witnessed the departure of the first 50,000 exiles returning home under the leadership of Zerubbabel (Ezra 2:1–2,64–65). Daniel spent his last days in Babylon with the Lord's assurance that he would die in peace and enjoy the blessing of the great resurrection (12:13).

As a child in Judah, Daniel would probably have known of the prophets Habakkuk and Zephaniah and no doubt he had heard the

¹ Edward J. Young, *An Introduction to the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1949), 361.

² Thomas Nelson, *Nelson's Complete Book of Bible Maps and Charts* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1996), 234.

prophet Jeremiah who was exercising his ministry in Jerusalem at the time (see Figure 6). Daniel refers to Jeremiah, and in particular to his prophecy concerning the duration of the exile in Babylon (9:2).

Along with other intelligent and fit young men, Daniel was selected for special training in the court of Nebuchadnezzar (1:3–4). With his three Israelite colleagues, he excelled “in all matters of wisdom and understanding” and was found to be “ten times better than all the magicians and astrologers” throughout the whole empire (1:20). In the Babylonian royal court, Daniel earned a reputation for godliness. The prophet Ezekiel, who was also taken captive to Babylon eight years after Daniel, testified to the wisdom of Daniel (Ezekiel 28:3) and the righteousness of Daniel, numbering him with Noah and Job (Ezekiel 14:14–20). Though an exile, Daniel rose, without spiritual compromise, to the highest rank in the kingdoms of Babylon, Media and Persia. Initially elevated by Nebuchadnezzar, Daniel did not continue in high office during the reign of his successor King Belshazzar, but when the Medes and Persians conquered Babylon, Daniel once more came into a position of considerable importance and influence under King Darius.

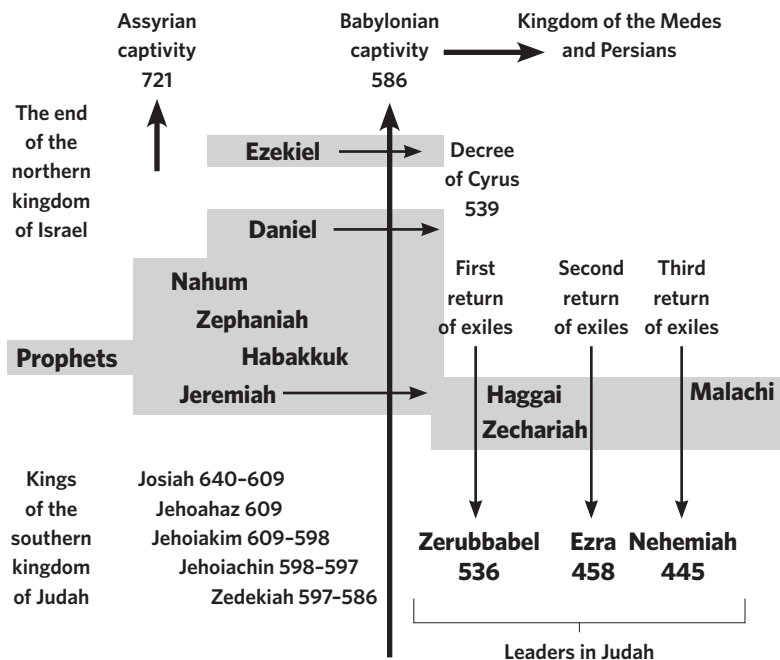
Daniel was primarily a statesman. Though he had the gift of prophecy, his responsibility was to represent the Lord in a heathen royal court and to testify before the great of the land that earthly kingdoms will rise and fall but the kingdom of God stands forever.

DANIEL / **HISTORICAL SETTING**

The death of King Ashurbanipal of Assyria (668–627 B.C.) marked the decline of the Assyrian Empire (the empire that 120 years earlier had destroyed the northern kingdom of Israel). Three unimportant kings followed until 612 B.C. when Assyria fell to the armies of King Nabopolassar of Babylon.

The fall of Nineveh, the capital, and the conquest of Assyria left two empires to determine domination of the region: Babylon and Egypt. After seven years, the conflict reached its deciding moment when Nabopolassar's son, Nebuchadnezzar, led the Babylonian army against Pharaoh Necho II (d. 595 B.C.) and the Egyptians at the great battle of Carchemish (605 B.C.; Jeremiah 46:2–12). Nebuchadnezzar was victorious. He recovered Coele-Syria, Phoenicia and Israel, took

Figure 6. Daniel in relation to Judah and its prophets and kings: before, during and after the exile*



*Years are in B.C.

Jerusalem (1:1-2) and was pressing forward to Egypt when news of his father's death reached him. He hurried back to Babylon accompanied only by light troops and a group of captives from Judah, including young Daniel (1:1-3; 2 Chronicles 36:6-7). It was a long journey; Babylon, in the heart of present-day Iraq, lies almost 700 miles north-east of Israel.

Nebuchadnezzar succeeded his father Nabopolassar, founder of the Babylonian empire. He reigned in Babylon for forty-four years (cf. 2 Kings 25:27; 605-561 B.C.), during which time he led two more invasions of Judah. At the final assault, he destroyed the temple, buildings and walls of Jerusalem, leaving it decimated (2 Kings 25:9; 2 Chronicles 36:19; 586 B.C.).

The Babylonian exile was a period in which the anger of God was revealed toward his chosen people. In founding the nation of Israel,

Moses had warned the people not to turn away from the Lord into idolatry and sin. The consequences had been clearly articulated:

Then My anger shall be aroused against them in that day, and I will forsake them, and I will hide My face from them, and they shall be devoured. And many evils and troubles shall befall them, so that they will say in that day, “Have not these evils come upon us because our God is not among us?” And I will surely hide My face in that day because of all the evil which they have done, in that they have turned to other gods (Deuteronomy 31:17–18).

DANIEL / **OUTLINE**

The book of Daniel is often called an apocalyptic writing (from the Greek word *apokalupsis*, “to take off the cover”; hence “revelation,” especially of the end of the world—2 Thessalonians 1:7), but it must be distinguished from the later non-biblical Jewish apocalyptic writings. There is only one other apocalypse which may be compared to it, and that is the New Testament book of Revelation.³

The book of Daniel was originally written in two languages: Hebrew and Aramaic. The section from the second half of 2:4 up to 7:28 was written in Aramaic and describes life in Babylon. The rest of the book was written in Hebrew.

PART 1 / **GENERAL INTRODUCTION (1:1–21)**

Daniel, the young Israelite exile, is selected for training in the court of King Nebuchadnezzar.

The Hebrews were a captive people. It was natural to suppose that they would be restless, and perhaps insubordinate, in their condition, and it was a matter of policy to do all that could be done to conciliate them. Nothing would better tend to this than to select some of their own number who were of their most distinguished families; to place them at court; to provide for them

³ Edward J. Young, *A Commentary on Daniel* (London: Banner of Truth Trust, 1949), 22.

from the royal bounty; to give them the advantages of the best education that the capital afforded; to make an arrangement that contemplated their future employment in the service of the state; and to furnish them every opportunity of promotion.⁴

Evidently trained in childhood and early youth in the true faith, the religion of the Hebrews, Daniel knows the law of Moses and determines, with his three colleagues, to uphold rigorously the commandments of the Lord even in the environment of a heathen land. Given permission to abstain from certain food and drink, he is blessed by the Lord with health of body and mind. After an intensive three-year training period, Daniel passes the examination and is appointed to the Babylonian civil service.

**PART 2 / OUTSTANDING EVENTS IN THE LIFE OF DANIEL
(2: 1-6:28)**

Following the interpretation of a dream, which none of the Chaldean wise men were able to accomplish, Daniel is elevated to a high position as governor of the whole province of Babylon and chief administrator over the Chaldean wise men (2:48). King Nebuchadnezzar is impressed with Daniel's wisdom and perception. He acknowledges Daniel's God as "God of gods" and "Lord of kings" (2:47), but he is not converted. He is still a pagan at heart. He has not renounced his pagan gods to turn in genuine faith to the only true and living God. This is evident by the construction of a golden image and the command that everyone should bow down and worship it—on pain of death in a fiery furnace. Daniel's three colleagues display outstanding faith and courage in their refusal to obey the edict. Hananiah, Mishael and Azariah (Babylonian names: Shadrach, Meshach and Abed-Nego⁵) declare their confidence in the Lord:

⁴ Albert Barnes, *Notes on the Old Testament: Critical, Explanatory, and Practical. The Book of the Prophet Daniel*, 2 vol. (London: Blackie and Son, 1851), 1:2.

⁵ Their names were changed no doubt to weaken their connection with the past—their race and their religion—for each Judean name bears an illusion to the true God: Dani(el), Hanan(iah), Misha(el), and Azar(iah).

our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the burning fiery furnace, and He will deliver us from your hand, O king. But if not, let it be known to you, O king, that we do not serve your gods, nor will we worship the gold image which you have set up (3:17–18).

The remarkable delivery of these three young Israelites from the fiery furnace once more impresses Nebuchadnezzar, but he is still filled with pride and arrogance.

Some time later, Nebuchadnezzar has another dream. He seems to have been reluctant to turn immediately to Daniel for an interpretation. Consulting all the magicians, astrologers and soothsayers, he finds no answer. Eventually, he consults Daniel. Daniel informs the king that, in consequence of his pride, he will be deprived for a while of his sanity and his throne. Living like an animal, he will eventually learn to acknowledge the true God of heaven and earth. Then his sanity and his kingdom will be restored to him. Daniel adds a tender appeal that the king might repent of his sins and show mercy to the poor in order that the threatened judgement of God might be averted (4:27).

The interpretation of the dream has no permanent effect on Nebuchadnezzar. Twelve months later he is walking in the palace, feeling pleased with himself and proud of all his achievements, when a voice from heaven brings judgement. The dream is now to become reality, for “a long time afterwards, when God touched his mind, he very properly recognized this punishment to have been divinely inflicted. Hence this dream was a kind of entrance and preparation for repentance.”⁶ After the period appointed by God, Nebuchadnezzar’s sanity returns and he acknowledges the Lord: “Now I, Nebuchadnezzar, praise and extol and honor the King of heaven, all of whose works are truth, and His ways justice. And those who walk in pride He is able to put down” (4:37).

With the death of Nebuchadnezzar some years later, Daniel occupies a less important position. Nothing is heard of him during the two year reign of Nebuchadnezzar’s successor, his son Evil-Merodach (561–560 B.C.), nor of his successor, Neriglissar (560–556 B.C.). It is not until the

⁶ John Calvin, *Calvin’s Commentaries*, vol. 5, *Ezekiel and Daniel* (1554; Grand Rapids: Associated Publishers and Authors Inc., n.d.), 419.

last days of King Belshazzar some twenty years later that Daniel once more rises to prominence (5:11–12).⁷

Interpreting the writing on the wall that appeared during the feast of Belshazzar, Daniel informs the king of the impending destruction of his kingdom. The rank and status subsequently promised to Daniel are not forthcoming, as that night Babylon is conquered by the Medes and Persians.

Under the reign of the new king, Darius the Mede, Daniel is once more raised to a position of great influence (6:1–2). The reason for this elevation by the king of a conquering power is not stated but may not be hard to find. Darius would benefit from having someone familiar with the affairs of state in the Babylonian empire. Daniel was unsurpassed in qualification, with thorough knowledge of the court, the laws, customs and culture of the nation. He would know how best to secure the peace and stability of that portion of the now vast empire of the Medes and Persians. Furthermore, Daniel was a foreigner and less likely to react to the domination of outsiders than would a native Chaldean.

Those who hoped to be promoted instead of Daniel react with jealousy. Using the rule of the Medes and Persians that no law once enacted by the king can be rescinded (cf. Esther 1:19), they achieve the passing of a law that effectively alienates Daniel because of his religious principles and practices. Daniel, accused and sentenced, is ordered with great reluctance to the lions' den by King Darius. Daniel is miraculously delivered by the Lord. His accusers immediately meet their end among the lions.

As a result of this providence of God, Daniel is exalted to the place of highest honour in the land. From this advantageous position, he is able to promote the best interests of his people, the Israelites. His influence with King Cyrus (died c. 529 B.C.) no doubt secures the return of the exiles to their own country (6:28; 2 Chronicles 36:22–23; decree of Cyrus 539 B.C.). Daniel, an octogenarian by this time, may have felt it wise not to attempt the 700-mile journey back to Jerusalem. Alternatively, he may have been convinced that he would be of more use to his own people by remaining in the court of King Cyrus.

⁷ A full explanation of the relationship between King Nabonidus (the official king) and King Belshazzar (co-regent) is given in Young, *A Commentary on Daniel*, 115–118.

**PART 3 / VISIONS AND PROPHECIES ILLUSTRATING
GOD'S CONTROL OVER THE NATIONS (7: 1-12:13)**

The latter half of the book is given over to a record of the visions and prophecies which Daniel received concerning the future of the nations of the earth. The Old Testament people of God are to understand that the return to Jerusalem from exile will not be an immediate prelude to a happy, peaceful and quiet life. The Holy Spirit teaches the people of God that nations are to rise and fall and Israel will often find herself tossed from pillar to post in international turmoil. Through it all and beyond it all, God is building his unique kingdom that shall never be destroyed.

The visions Daniel receives during the first and third years of Belshazzar's reign (7:1–8:27) have much in common with the dream of Nebuchadnezzar (2:31–45) (see Table 4). The use of imagery is understandable since the people of God at that time are in an alien land and this method of communication both conceals and reveals at the same time.⁸

Whatever may be the detailed interpretation, the overall message is unequivocal: the indisputable "power and grotesqueness of human evil, especially on the level of the state."⁹ In both the dream and visions, each kingdom feeds upon its predecessor: Medo-Persia upon Babylon, Greece upon Medo-Persia, Rome upon Greece. Represented by monstrous wild beasts, these empires are driven by human pride and arrogance; as Nebuchadnezzar boasts, "Is not this great Babylon, that I have built for a royal dwelling by my mighty power and for the honor of my majesty?" (4:30).

There is nevertheless another kingdom of quite a different kind, represented not by beasts but by human beings: "the Ancient of Days" and "the Son of Man" (7:9–10, 13–14):

Then the kingdom and dominion,
And the greatness of the kingdoms under the whole heaven,

⁸ Compare our Lord's use of parables (Matthew 13:13–16) and the visions recorded in the book of Revelation.

⁹ Raymond B. Dillard and Tremper Longman III, *An Introduction to the Old Testament* (Leicester: Apollos, 1995), 350.

Shall be given to the people, the saints of the Most High.
His kingdom is an everlasting kingdom,
And all dominions shall serve and obey Him (7:27).

Since the early days in the Garden of Eden, the battle has raged on earth between God and Satan, good and evil.

Sin rules the world; although it does not distort men diabolically yet it does brutally. Therefore animals are emblems of the world powers, but the one who overthrows the world empire and who becomes an everlasting king of an everlasting kingdom is in contrast to the secularized, bestialized human race an ideal, holy man, who in such a superhuman and yet so human way brings the history of mankind to its ideal conclusion.¹⁰

Daniel prays, confessing the sins of God's people, and he receives a wonderful revelation in response (9:3–27).

The vision by the River Tigris (10:4), granted to Daniel in the third year of Cyrus, presents the future history of the great nations of the earth until the coming of Christ and then on to the final day of the resurrection.¹¹ The Lord has previously foretold the future condition of the Israelites after their return from Babylon and up to the advent of Christ (7:1–8:27), but in Daniel 11 a more distinct prediction is given.

Daniel records his personal commitment to fasting and prayer over a period of three weeks. He then receives a vision from God. He describes the heavenly messenger (10:5–6) and outlines his own reaction, for what he experiences has a profound effect upon him: “No strength remained in me; for my vigor was turned to frailty in me, and I retained no strength” (10:8). The scene is set for a momentous revelation, “for the vision refers to many days yet to come” (10:14). Daniel again notes his reaction: “My lord, because of the vision my sorrows have overwhelmed me, and I have retained no strength.... nor is any breath left in me” (10:16–17).

¹⁰ Franz Delitzsch, *Messianic Prophecies* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1880), 91.

¹¹ Calvin, *Calvin's Commentaries: Ezekiel and Daniel*, 601.

Table 4. Comparison of Nebuchadnezzar's dream and Daniel's later visions

Daniel 2	Daniel 7	Daniel 8	Interpretation of all ¹²
Image	Beast	Beast	
Head of fine gold	Lion with eagle's wings		Babylon
Chest and arms silver	Like a bear	Ram with two horns	Medo-Persia
Belly and thighs bronze	Leopard with four wings and four heads	Male goat with one great horn, four horns and a little horn	Greece
Legs of iron, feet of iron and clay	Terrible monster with ten horns and a little horn		Rome
A stone that becomes a great mountain	Messiah and saints receive the kingdom		Kingdom of God

The angel explains his delay in attending Daniel: he was engaged in Persia in defending and safeguarding the people of God. Cambyses II, son of Cyrus and king of Persia, had issued a cruel decree to prevent the Jews from rebuilding the temple in Jerusalem, and he would have gone much further in his hostility toward the restoration work had it not been for the resistance imposed by the angel (10:13; Ezra 4:5).

The three kings of Persia (11:2) are Cyrus, Cambyses II and Darius I. The fourth, who will be "far richer than them all" (11:2) is Khshayarsh (known among the Greeks as Xerxes and among the Hebrews as Ahasuerus,¹³ and the husband of Esther).¹⁴ He was very rich (11:2; cf. Esther 1:1–7). See Figure 7.

¹² Young, *A Commentary on Daniel*, 373–374. This interpretation is favoured by Dillard and Longman, *An Introduction to the Old Testament*, 350.

¹³ See the book of Esther (Esther 1:1, etc.).

¹⁴ Calvin, *Calvin's Commentaries: Ezekiel and Daniel*, 620. E.J. Young sets out a number of alternative interpretations but all end with Xerxes identified as the fourth and far richer king (See Young, *A Commentary on Daniel*, 231–232).

The “mighty king” (11:3) who will arise against the Persians is Alexander the Great, king of Greece. No sooner had he risen to the height of power, ruling over a vast empire, than he became ill and within a short time he died. The empire was eventually divided into four: Egypt, Syria, Greece and Asia Minor. The angel predicts, 100 years before the birth of Alexander, that no posterity will succeed him to the throne (11:4).

The angel concentrates attention on two sections of the divided kingdom, probably because these are the near neighbours to Judah and the nations with the greatest impact upon Judah and the people of God. Intrigue and wars follow between the King of the South (Egypt) and the King of the North (Syria). Secular history from that period serves to illustrate the remarkable detail and accuracy of the angel’s predictions.

The people of God will be assaulted by the forces of evil (12:1) but the Lord will deliver them. These are the elect, the true people of God, whom Satan cannot destroy.

The foretelling of international events serves the purpose of consoling the people of God. God is sovereign—he knows what he will do. He reveals the future to Old Testament saints so that when it comes to pass they may be confident in the One in whom they believe. The Lord Jesus Christ revealed the future to his disciples for the same reason: “And now I have told you before it comes, that when it does come to pass, you may believe” (John 14:29; cf. 16:1,4).

The message of Daniel is emphatic, dogmatic: God will be victorious—definitely, entirely and eternally. Here is the true comfort for the people of God.

DANIEL / CHRIST AND HIS CHURCH

THEOPHANY

When Shadrach, Meshach and Abed-Nego are thrown into the fiery furnace, a phenomenon occurs which brings an outstanding declaration from Nebuchadnezzar:

Then King Nebuchadnezzar was astonished; and he rose in haste and spoke, saying to his counselors, “Did we not cast three men

Figure 7. The people of Judah during the empire of the Medes and Persians*

Cyrus 539-529	Cambyses II 529-522	Darius I 522-486	Xerxes 486-465	Artaxerxes I 465-425	Darius II 423-404 Artaxerxes II 404-359 Artaxerxes II 359-338 Arses 338-336 Darius III 336-330	Alexander the Great establishes the Greek empire 336-323
520 Haggai and Zechariah prophecy						
536 First return of the exiles under Zerubbabel (Ezra 1-3)	Rebuilding of the temple halted (Ezra 4)	516 The temple completed (Ezra 5-6)	458 Second return under Ezra (Ezra 7-10)	445 Third return under Nehemiah (Nehemiah 1-2)	432-420 Malachi prophecies	

*Years are in B.C.

bound into the midst of the fire?”

They answered and said to the king, “True, O king.”

“Look!” he answered, “I see four men loose, walking in the midst of the fire; and they are not hurt, and the form of the fourth is like the Son of God” (3:24–25).

The king is astonished to see the three men walking freely without the ropes or chains with which they had been bound. But it is the sight of a *fourth* person that is the most remarkable sight to the king. Nebuchadnezzar is not to be understood as knowingly speaking of the Son of God who became the human being Jesus Christ. As a pagan, Nebuchadnezzar uses words describing a supernatural being, a deity figure, for his words are strictly translated, “a son of the gods.” The meaning is, “son of deity, that is, a Divine Person, one of the race of the gods, a supernatural being.”¹⁵ Something about the fourth figure, maybe his countenance or demeanour, declared him to be of heavenly origin. It cannot be concluded with any certainty that this was a Christophany, for there is no internal evidence in Scripture to lead to such a solid conclusion—yet that is a strong probability. It may be that the Lord willed that Nebuchadnezzar should utter these profound words, like Caiaphas, Pilate and others have done, without understanding their significance (John 11:49–52; 19:19–22).

Whether the angel (3:28) was *the* Angel of the LORD, or *an* angel of the Lord, the abiding message is clear: “The vision must have been sublime; and it is a beautiful image of the children of God often walking unhurt amidst dangers, safe beneath the Divine protection.”¹⁶ “The angel of the Lord encamps all around those who fear Him” (Psalm 34:7; cf. 91:11). This is especially fulfilled in the life of Christ, but it is extended to the whole church of Christ—God’s children are under the eye and protection of these heavenly messengers (Psalm 103:20; cf. 2 Kings 6:15–17).

Similarities between the prophet Daniel’s visitor by the River Tigris (10:5–6) and the apostle John’s visitor on the Isle of Patmos (Revelation 1:12–16) would suggest that this is an appearance of the Lord in human form, in other words, a Christophany. Here is another example of the

¹⁵ Young, *A Commentary on Daniel*, 94.

¹⁶ Barnes, *Notes on the Old Testament: Daniel*, 1:221.

Lord, the Son of God, controlling all things for the good of his church (cf. Ephesians 1:22–23).

PROPHECIES

1. The death of Christ

Seventy weeks are determined
 For your people and for your holy city,
 To finish the transgression,
 To make an end of sins,
 To make reconciliation for iniquity,
 To bring in everlasting righteousness,
 To seal up vision and prophecy,
 And to anoint the Most Holy.

Know therefore and understand,
That from the going forth of the command
 To restore and build Jerusalem
 Until Messiah the Prince,
There shall be seven weeks and sixty-two weeks;
 The street shall be built again, and the wall,
 Even in troublesome times.

And after the sixty-two weeks
 Messiah shall be cut off, but not for Himself;
 And the people of the prince who is to come
 Shall destroy the city and the sanctuary.
 The end of it *shall be* with a flood,
 And till the end of the war desolations are determined (9:24–26).

Here the totality of sin is defined as “transgression,” “sins” and “iniquity.” These three are often combined in the Scriptures (Exodus 34:7; Psalm 51:1–2); they refer to law-breaking, guilt and wickedness respectively and “represent in its fulness the nature of that curse which has separated man from God.”¹⁷ This threefold designation of sin is

¹⁷ Barnes, *Notes on the Old Testament: Daniel*, 1:199.

matched by a threefold response: to “finish” (lit., “shut up”), to “make an end” (lit., “to seal”) and to “make reconciliation” (lit., to “cover”), which contains the idea of removal out of sight. Hengstenberg writes:

Sin, which hitherto lay naked and open before the eyes of the righteous God, is now by his mercy, shut up, sealed, and covered, so that it can no more be regarded as existing; a figurative designation of the forgiveness of sin, analogous to those, where it is said, “to hide the face from sin.”¹⁸

Messiah is to achieve this great work. A new clarity is given from heaven. From this time forward, the spiritually enlightened people of God who understand biblical prophecy will not only await “the Lion of the tribe of Judah, but also the sacrificial Lamb; not only a new covenant but also a mediator between God and man; not only a reconciliation with God, but also a human reconciler.”¹⁹

2. The return of Christ

The assertion of Daniel that God will be victorious (7:13–14) finds its fulfilment in the battle the Saviour won against Satan at Calvary. Ironically, Jesus defeated evil by his death on the cross:

And you, being dead in your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, He has made alive together with Him, having forgiven you all trespasses, having wiped out the handwriting of requirements that was against us, which was contrary to us. And He has taken it out of the way, having nailed it to the cross. Having disarmed principalities and powers, He made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them in it (Colossians 2:13–15).

Yet though the victory is assured, the war still rages, for only at the return of the Saviour in power and glory will the final curtain fall on this dramatic conflict. The day will dawn when Christ will put “an end to all rule and all authority and power” (1 Corinthians 15:24):

¹⁸ Ernest W. Hengstenberg, *Christology of the Old Testament and a Commentary on the Messianic Predictions* (1847; Grand Rapids: Kregel, 1970), 406.

¹⁹ Delitzsch, *Messianic Prophecies*, 93.

I was watching in the night visions,
 And behold, *One like the Son of Man*,
Coming with the clouds of heaven!
 He came to the Ancient of Days,
 And they brought Him near before Him.
 Then to Him was given dominion and glory and a kingdom,
 That all peoples, nations, and languages should serve Him.
 His dominion is an everlasting dominion,
 Which shall not pass away,
 And His kingdom *the one*
 Which shall not be destroyed (7:13–14, emphasis added).

The Lord Jesus Christ identified himself with this prophecy and foretold his glorious return. At his trial before the Jewish council just hours before his death, Jesus was challenged by Caiaphas, the high priest:

“I put You under oath by the living God: Tell us if You are the Christ, the Son of God!”

Jesus said to him, “It is as you said. Nevertheless, I say to you, hereafter you will see *the Son of Man* sitting at the right hand of the Power, and *coming on the clouds of heaven*” (Matthew 26:63–64, emphasis added).

DANIEL / **CONCLUSION**

The four great prophets, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel and Daniel, form a glorious and harmonious quartet, declaring the sovereignty of the living God. Isaiah speaks of God’s sovereignty in salvation; Jeremiah of God’s sovereignty in judgement; Ezekiel of God’s sovereignty in glory; and Daniel of God’s sovereignty in his kingdom.

Daniel ministered in the land of exile. Along with his people, he had been torn from his home in Judah. The judgement of God rested on the people of Israel. But it was to be of a fixed duration—seventy years in exile and then the Lord would restore them to their own land, the land of the covenant promise. Daniel prophesied from a Gentile royal court and declared in graphic terms the limitations of power granted to the nations. Empires may come and go, rise and fall, but God’s

kingdom will stand for eternity. The day will dawn when all God's people of every generation and of every nation will be raised to eternal life: "And at that time your people shall be delivered, every one who is found written in the book" (12:1).

That book is "the book of life" (Revelation 3:5; 13:8; 20:12,15) which is "the Lamb's book of life" (Revelation 21:27). It is the heavenly record of those who have been loved "from the foundation of the world" (Revelation 17:8), those who have put their wholehearted trust in God and his Christ.

DANIEL / APPLICATION AND REFLECTION

1. The sovereign rule of God

There is only one God and he rules over everything and everyone (4:34–35; cf. 4:32). In the record which the Holy Spirit inspired Daniel to write, Gentile kings confess the sovereignty of God:

The king [Nebuchadnezzar] answered Daniel, and said, “Truly your God is the God of gods, the Lord of kings, and a revealer of secrets, since you could reveal this secret” (2:47).

Now I, Nebuchadnezzar, praise and extol and honor the King of heaven, all of whose works are truth, and His ways justice. And those who walk in pride He is able to put down (4:37).

Then King Darius wrote:

To all peoples, nations, and languages that dwell in all the earth:
Peace be multiplied to you.

I make a decree that in every dominion of my kingdom *men must* tremble and fear before the God of Daniel.

For He *is* the living God,
And steadfast forever;
His kingdom *is the one* which shall not be destroyed,
And His dominion *shall endure* to the end (6:25–26).

2. Prayer

Daniel was a man of prayer. The wicked scheming of jealous colleagues was based upon their confidence that Daniel would continue to pray to the Lord even though his life would depend upon his not doing so (6:5–7). They persuaded the king to pass the necessary law and then they spied on the prophet so they could bring an accusation and have him put to death. The Lord wonderfully preserved Daniel in his subsequent incarceration in the lions’ den.

In chapter 9, there is a record of the content of one of his prayers. Daniel has been thinking hard about the prophecy of Jeremiah and the number of years that Jerusalem is to be desolate. The predicted time is almost complete and yet there is not the slightest indication of a possible return to Jerusalem.

Daniel knows that the exile in Babylon is a punishment for Judah's sins so, rather than enquiring about the exact meaning of Jeremiah's prophecy, he pours out his heart to the Lord in confession of the people's sins. Daniel pleads with the Lord to show mercy.

The prophet begins his prayer by addressing God and acknowledging his character, promise and behaviour:

And I prayed to the LORD my God, and made confession, and said, "O Lord, great and awesome God, who keeps His covenant and mercy with those who love Him, and with those who keep His commandments" (9:4).

Daniel acknowledges the Lord to be his own God; for God only hears the prayers of those who truly know him. He addresses the Lord as great and awesome and recognizes that he punishes sinful Israel on the basis of the covenant (9:4,11). The prophet appeals to the Lord on the same basis of this special covenant relationship. Even when the people of God are faithless, "He remains faithful; He cannot deny Himself" (2 Timothy 2:13).

In a similar manner, Asaph makes his request:

Help us, O God of our salvation,
For the glory of Your name;
 And deliver us, and provide atonement for our sins,
For Your name's sake! (Psalm 79:9, emphasis added).

Although Daniel's plea is based on God's covenant mercy, he still pours out his heart in contrition, confessing a whole multitude of sins and iniquities. So when calamity, affliction and trials fall upon us and we go to God and pray that the evil may be removed, the first thing required of us is to confess our sins and acknowledge the justice of God in the judgements that have come upon us.²⁰

The Lord Jesus promised answered prayer to his disciples under similar conditions: "And whatever you ask in My name, that I will do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son. If you ask anything in My name, I will do it. If you love Me, keep My commandments" (John 14:13-15).

²⁰ Barnes, *Notes on the Old Testament: Daniel*, 1:129.

In his great mercy, the Lord answers Daniel: "O Daniel, man greatly beloved... Do not fear, Daniel, for from the first day that you set your heart to understand, and to humble yourself before your God, your words were heard" (10:11-12).

3. The believer and the state

Daniel was promoted to the highest rank in the Babylonian kingdom next to the king (2:48). Like Joseph in Egypt, Daniel served without compromise. Being loyal to the king did not make him unfaithful to God. The Lord gave him favour with his tutor and his king (1:9,20; 2:48-49). For his part, Daniel remained devoted to the Lord and obedient to the law and covenant of Sinai (1:8). He could not prevent every evil in government but, keeping himself from sin, he influenced the course of the nation. There is nothing inappropriate about a godly person's elevation to a position of responsibility and trust by an ungodly government or by a pagan king.

Yet, it is not without its dangers. Jealousy from others may lead to serious problems. In spite of great provocation at times, Daniel maintained his spiritual life in the unfriendly atmosphere of a Gentile court (6:10). When tensions arose between serving God and serving the king, Daniel did not waver for a moment. He left the consequences and outcome in God's hands. The same teaching continues under the New Covenant, for the apostle Peter exhorts Christians, "Fear God. Honour the king" (1 Peter 2:17). The apostle Paul, likewise, urges the church of God to pray and intercede "for kings and all who are in authority, that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and reverence" (1 Timothy 2:2).

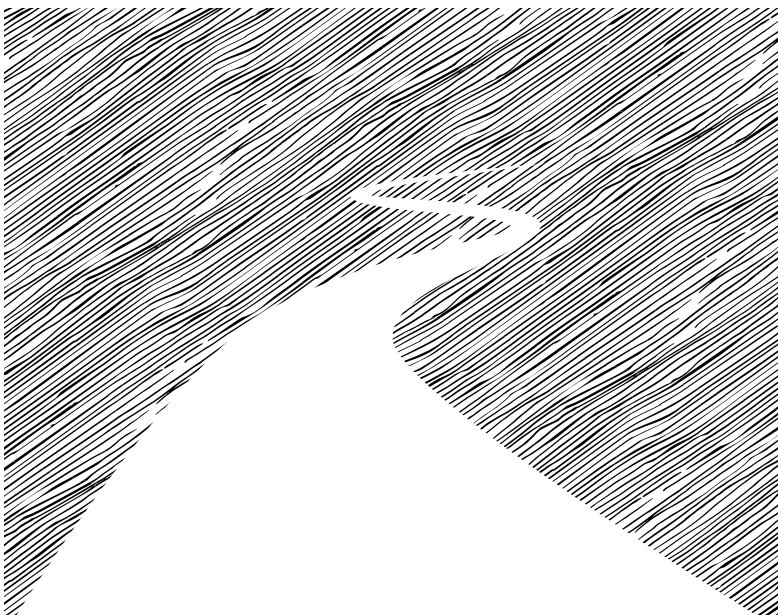
4. The final resurrection

The book of Daniel contains the clearest prophecy of the resurrection in the Old Testament Scriptures:

And many of those who sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake,
Some to everlasting life,
Some to shame *and* everlasting contempt.
Those who are wise shall shine
Like the brightness of the firmament,
And those who turn many to righteousness
Like the stars forever and ever (12:2-3).

Although our physical bodies will return to the dust, nevertheless they will rise, “implying the hope of a resurrection not founded on natural causes, but depending upon the inestimable power of God, which surpasses all our senses.”²¹ Both the children of God and the wicked will be reduced to earth and dust, yet this will present no obstacle to God in raising them up again.

²¹ Calvin, *Calvin's Commentaries: Ezekiel and Daniel*, 671.



HOSEA

MEANING "salvation"	AUTHOR Hosea	KEY THOUGHT Return
-------------------------------	------------------------	------------------------------

THEME

God's love for his wayward people

THEME VERSE

*I will heal their backsliding,
I will love them freely,
For My anger has turned away from him.*

HOSEA 14:4

HOSEA / SUMMARY

PART 1 / HOSEA'S MARRIAGE SYMBOLIC OF GOD'S RELATIONSHIP WITH ISRAEL 1:1-3:5

- | | |
|--|----------------|
| 1. Hosea, Gomer and their children | 1:1-2:1 |
| a. Instruction to marry | 1:3 |
| b. Names for the children and their meaning | 1:4-9 |
| c. The restoration of Israel and Judah | 1:10-2:1 |
| 2. The Lord's marriage to Israel | 2:2-23 |
| a. The relationship broken by the unfaithfulness of Israel | 2:2-13 |
| b. The relationship restored by the mercy of God | 2:14-23 |
| 3. Hosea's marriage relationship restored, and its spiritual significance | 3:1-5 |

PART 2 / JUDGEMENTS AGAINST ISRAEL 4:1-11:11

- | | |
|--|-----------|
| a. Israel's guilt | 4:1-19 |
| b. Israel's punishment | 5:1-15 |
| c. Hosea's plea for the nation to repent | 6:1-3 |
| d. Israel's refusal to repent | 6:4-7:16 |
| e. Israel's rebellion against God | 8:1-14 |
| f. The Lord's punishment of Israel | 9:1-10:15 |
| g. God's love for his people is greater than his anger | 11:1-11 |

PART 3 / ISRAEL'S SIN AND GOD'S ANGER 11:12-13:16

- | | |
|----------------------------------|-------------|
| a. The Lord exposes Israel's sin | 11:12-12:14 |
| b. God is angry with his people | 13:1-16 |

PART 4 / ISRAEL'S ULTIMATE RESTORATION 14:1-9

HOSEA

The book of Hosea is one of the more difficult books of Old Testament Scripture. It is preeminently a book for the backslider. As the Lord's parable of the lost son pictures God as a loving Father yearning for the return of his wayward son (Luke 15:11–24), so Hosea pictures God as a loving husband yearning for the return of his wayward wife. In these pages, God's methods of restoring backslidden people is vividly exposed.

In the opening verses, the reader is confronted with difficulties that are virtually impossible to resolve. Hosea is commanded to marry a prostitute. Many godly students of the Scriptures have concluded that this did not take place in reality but was a vision, an analogy or symbolism, which was set by God before the prophet Hosea. E.J. Young, the respected Old Testament scholar, while admitting that "The prophecy reads as straightforward narrative" and at "first sight, we receive the impression that these things are to be understood as actually having taken place," nevertheless declares that he has "become more and more convinced that the whole episode has a symbolical significance."¹ Calvin, too, objects to any suggestion that this actually took place. He argues that for the prophet to take a prostitute as a wife would have made this servant of God contemptible and a reproach.

Priests were not permitted to marry a harlot (Leviticus 21:7,14) but Hosea was not a priest. Such a command of God to a church leader would not be issued under the New Covenant, for, "A bishop then must be blameless.... Moreover he must have a good testimony among those who are outside, lest he fall into reproach and the snare of the devil" (1 Timothy 3:2,7; cf. Titus 1:7). Nevertheless, in spite of the discomfort we feel at such a command being given in reality:

a straightforward reading of the text leads most naturally to the conclusion that Hosea was ordered by God to marry a promiscuous woman in order to symbolize God's relationship with Israel. It is methodologically dangerous to depart from this reading based on

¹ Edward J. Young, *An Introduction to the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1949), 253.

what we consider to be moral problems with the command, and indeed this latter may be questioned. Nowhere does God command anyone but priests to avoid marriage with a prostitute.²

Though attended by complex ethical problems, the message itself is indisputable. Hosea's marriage to Gomer, whether history, vision or allegory, is used by God to indicate both his loathing of Israel's unfaithfulness and his yearning love for his people.

HOSEA / **AUTHOR**

The name *Hosea* (Hebrew, *Hoshea*) means "salvation." It was the original name of Joshua, the man who led the children of Israel into the promised land. During the wilderness journey Moses renamed Hoshea, later to become his successor, as Joshua, meaning "Jehovah is salvation" (Numbers 13:16). By this suffix, Moses indicates the source or origin of salvation—Jehovah, the living and true God.

Hosea the son of Beeri is the author of the whole book bearing his name. He prophesies against Israel, the northern kingdom of the ten tribes. These people have turned away from the lawful worship of Jehovah. They are ripe for destruction. Hosea, however, has a message of God's tender love for a sinful and rebellious people. The people of Israel are pictured as an unfaithful wife committing spiritual adultery. Through the prophet, God pleads with the people to repent and to turn from their sinful ways. They must pass a period of humbling, but they will be restored.

Hosea has been called "the prophet of the broken heart."³ His commission was to plead with Israel to return to God. He probably preached for over forty years, but the people persisted in their stubborn resistance. These were days of idolatry and immorality. There was no fear of the Lord among the people. They refused to take notice of the prophet's warnings and the result was captivity. Hosea was still ministering during the Assyrian exile although there is no mention in his book of this event having taken place (cf. 2 Kings 17:5–23).

² Raymond B. Dillard and Tremper Longman III, *An Introduction to the Old Testament* (Leicester: Apollos, 1995), 357.

³ Irving L. Jensen, *Jensen's Survey of the Old Testament: Search and Discover* (Chicago: Moody, 1978), 412.

Hosea may have been a native of the northern kingdom since his style and language have a “northern” flavour and he refers to the king of Israel as “our king” (7:5), but this is too slight a comment to form a dogmatic conclusion.⁴ If he did originate from the northern kingdom of the ten tribes, then he was the only writing prophet who came *from* Israel and wrote *to* Israel. He was certainly familiar with the evil conditions existing in Israel at that time.

Hosea addresses the northern kingdom of the ten tribes as “Israel,” “Samaria,” “Jacob” and “Ephraim.” The name *Ephraim* is used because that tribe was the largest of the ten and the leader of the rebellion against the Lord.

Hosea uses graphic illustrations to drive home his arguments:

- “Ephraim is joined to idols” (4:17).
- “Ephraim has mixed himself among the peoples” (7:8), for they are no longer a separated people.
- “Ephraim is a cake unturned” (7:8)—that is, one which is still uncooked dough on one side, but burnt on the other—expressing a divided heart.
- “Grey hairs are here and there on him, yet he does not know it” (7:9), signifying premature old age and unconscious deterioration.
- “Aliens have devoured his strength” (7:9), indicating that they are weakened by evil associations.
- “Ephraim also is like a silly dove, without sense” (7:11). Israel flies here and there seeking assistance—to Egypt, to Assyria, but never to the living God.
- “Israel is swallowed up” (8:8)—their national identity is lost.
- “A vessel in which there is no pleasure” (8:8)—they are useless in the service of God.
- “Her king is cut off like a twig on the water” (10:7)—one which is carried away by the current and vanishes without a trace.
- “A cunning Canaanite! Deceitful scales are in his hand” (12:7), referring to commercial trickery in business.⁵

⁴ Keil argues for Hosea as a citizen of the ten tribes of the northern kingdom [see Carl F. Keil, *The Twelve Minor Prophets* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1949), 11–12].

⁵ Thompson Chain Reference Bible.

Hosea shows himself to be a man of deep feeling, and at times his anger against sin manifests itself in language that is somewhat harsh and severe. On the other hand, “When the prophet sets before the nation the sublime love of the Lord, the language of the book is filled with beautiful imagery.”⁶

HOSEA / HISTORICAL SETTING

Although Hosea mentions only one king of Israel, the reference to the four kings of Judah places his ministry during the reigns of the last seven kings to rule over Israel (c. 750–710 B.C.)—from Jeroboam II, one of her most powerful kings, to Hoshea (2 Kings 14:23–29; 15:8–31; 17:1–4).

A contemporary of Isaiah, Micah and possibly of Amos,⁷ Hosea exercised a ministry, predominantly in Israel, which extended over many years. He prophesied during the reigns of kings Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz and Hezekiah of Judah (see Figure 8). This gives a period of at least forty years, and some have even suggested a ministry lasting as long as seventy-two years.⁸ Hosea’s ministry followed that of Amos (there may have been some overlap). The southern kingdom of Judah, under Uzziah (Azariah), was experiencing a time of prosperity. The northern kingdom of Israel, under Jeroboam II, was also enjoying days of economic prosperity and military success (2 Kings 14:25). But success and prosperity brought their own problems—paganism, materialism, greed, immorality and injustice.

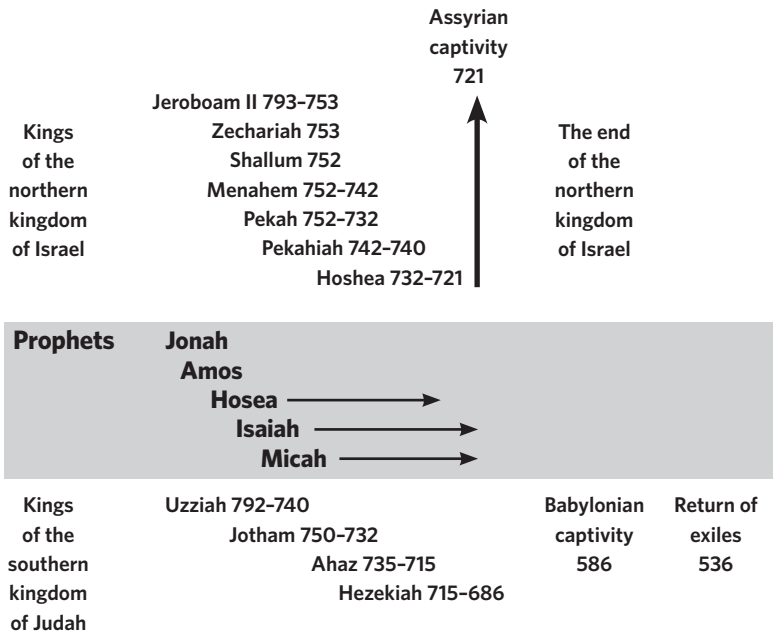
After the death of Jeroboam, Israel fell into rapid decline. Six kings reigned during the last thirty years of the nation’s existence. Hosea does not mention these kings by name. The prophets to Israel only recognize the legitimate rulers of the kingdom of Judah as true kings of the people of God. This may indicate the Lord’s disapproval of the kings of the north: “They set up kings, but not by me; they made princes, and I did not acknowledge it” (8:4; cf. Deuteronomy 17:15). Three of these kings reigned for two years or less, and four were assassinated (2 Kings 15:8–31; 17:1–4; Hosea 7:7; 8:4; 10:3; 13:9–11).

⁶ Young, *An Introduction to the Old Testament*, 254.

⁷ See 1:1; cf. Isaiah 1:1; Micah 1:1; Amos 1:1.

⁸ Robert Lee, *The Outlined Bible: An Outline and Analysis of Every Book in the Bible* (London: Pickering and Inglis, 1930), analysis no. 28.

Figure 8. Hosea in relation to the kings and prophets of the divided kingdom*



*Years are in B.C.

Less than ten years after the death of Jeroboam, Assyria began to exert its military might, becoming more powerful and threatening under Tiglath-Pileser III. His successor, Shalmaneser V, started the aggression against Israel which led to the total defeat and removal of the Israelites as captives to Assyria in 721 B.C. The threat of the Assyrian empire provides the background to the book of Hosea.

No king of the northern kingdom of Israel could put an effective stop to her corruption. Immorality stemmed from idolatry. In turning away from the living God, the Israelites turned away from the ground and foundation of true morality. If he had abolished calf worship, the king of Israel would have undermined the very existence of the northern kingdom. If the religious division between the kingdom of Israel and the kingdom of Judah had been removed, then political union would have soon followed: "Founded as it was in rebellion against the

royal house of David, which God Himself had chosen, [the northern kingdom] bore within itself from the very first the spirit of rebellion and revolution, and therefore the germs of internal self-destruction.”⁹

HOSEA / **OUTLINE**

The structure of the book of Hosea is difficult to establish. Although the first three chapters readily fall into divisions, the remaining eleven chapters are not so easily delineated. The message of the book is, however, clear and forceful. The analogy of marriage is used for God’s relationship with his people. Israel’s unfaithfulness is reflected in the infidelity of Hosea’s wife.

PART 1 / **HOSEA’S MARRIAGE SYMBOLIC OF GOD’S RELATIONSHIP WITH ISRAEL (1:1-3:5)**

In obedience to a divine command, Hosea takes Gomer the daughter of Diblaim as his wife. They have three children. The children of this troubled marriage are given symbolic names indicating Israel’s breaking of their covenant with the Lord.

The first son is called *Jezreel* (meaning “God scatters”). The name *Jezreel* signifies the great slaughter that God would bring on the house of Jehu because of the violent acts he had committed (2 Kings 9).

The name of Hosea’s daughter, *Lo-Ruhamah*, means “No mercy” (1:6). This indicates severe judgement; Israel is like a daughter whom her father casts away and disowns. God will no longer look with pity and love upon Israel. The nation has gone from bad to worse. The Lord “will no longer have mercy on the house of Israel” (1:6). It is as though the Lord says, “Your obstinacy is intolerable; I will not then bear with you any more.”¹⁰

The third child, a son, is named *Lo-Ammi*, meaning “Not my people” (1:9). The period of weaning for *Lo-Ruhamah* (“No mercy”) is ended. The patience of God is exhausted. Israel’s wickedness is beyond healing. The final separation is to take place: “For you are not My people,

⁹ Keil, *The Twelve Minor Prophets*, 20–21.

¹⁰ John Calvin, *Commentaries on the Twelve Minor Prophets*, vol. 1: *Hosea* (1559; Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1986), 55.

and I will not be your *God*" (1:9).

Hosea's wife Gomer proves unfaithful and leaves her husband in search of other lovers (3:1). The sin of adultery is exacerbated by the sin of prostitution. Hosea pursues her and buys her back from harlotry (3:2). He takes her once more to his home. A period is to be spent in seclusion and true sorrow of heart until the time appointed for full restoration.

Within the account of the gross sin of Gomer, the great grief of her husband Hosea and the underlying judgement of God against Israel, there is still evidence of the triumph of grace, for the Lord says to Israel, "I will give her her vineyards from there, and the Valley of Achor as a door of hope" (2:15). The valley was named in the days of Joshua (Joshua 7:24–26). Through the sin of Achan, disobeying the commandment of God and taking spoil from Jericho, the Israelites were defeated in their attack upon Ai (Joshua 7). Through the name *Achor* (meaning "trouble") this valley became a memorial, reminding the people of "how the Lord restores His favour...after the expiation of the guilt by the punishment of the transgressor."¹¹ The prophet Hosea is indicating that Israel's time of trouble and distress will become a door of hope. The Lord will deal with justice and with mercy. He will punish sin, but his grace will be supreme.

PART 2 / JUDGEMENTS AGAINST ISRAEL (4:1-11:11)

After the first three chapters, which are based on Hosea's domestic grief, the remaining chapters have no clear structure. Themes overlap, interweave, interchange, repeat and vary in emphasis as the prophecy unfolds. Hosea faithfully challenges the Israelites about their sin, warns of God's righteous judgement, appeals to them to return to their God and speaks of final hope for the nation that God loves.

Attention turns from the domestic scene to the national arena. The Lord speaks through his servant in a series of addresses. Whether these addresses were oral or written, and where each began and ended, is not stated. This section is probably a summary of Hosea's preaching over a period of forty years or more, commencing in the reign of Jeroboam and concluding only a short while before the Assyrian

¹¹ Keil, *The Twelve Minor Prophets*, 61.

invasion, the conquest of the capital of Samaria and the deportation of the Israelites.

The content is an interweaving of Israel's unfaithfulness with God's righteous anger and his gracious mercy. What a testimony to the character of God!

If we are faithless,
He remains faithful;
He cannot deny Himself (2 Timothy 2:13).

The main topics are repeated over and over again: the calf worship at Bethel, the idolatry and the immorality. The spiritual and moral state of Israel is as bad as it could possibly be. The evils which Jeroboam I, son of Nebat, had introduced (1 Kings 12:25–33) have been perpetuated and strengthened in the intervening 150 years or so:

There is no truth or mercy
Or knowledge of God in the land.
By swearing and lying,
Killing and stealing and committing adultery,
They break all restraint,
With bloodshed upon bloodshed (4:1–2).

There is far-reaching corruption among the priests, as among the people. The rulers in Israel are seeking alliances with powerful nations: "They call to Egypt; they go to Assyria" (7:11).

The sternest warnings and the severest censure are interwoven with the tenderest appeals:

Come, and let us return to the LORD;
For He has torn, but He will heal us;
He has stricken, but He will bind us up (6:1).

PART 3 / ISRAEL'S SIN AND GOD'S ANGER (11:12-13:16)

In many ways the third section is a repeat of the second in dealing with issues of Israel's sin and God's righteous anger. The purpose is to

ensure that the Israelites are thoroughly aware of their gross sinfulness. Hosea demonstrates that the impending doom falling upon them is just and inevitable because of their long history of rebellion and sin against the Lord. It is the Lord's punishment. They have wilfully turned from the ways of Jacob their father and fallen into the godless practices of the Canaanites; and this in spite of the continual love and compassion of God toward them and in spite of the punishments which he has already inflicted in order to bring them to their senses. But neither the appeals of love nor the pains of affliction have turned the people back to God. They continue in idolatry and immorality. Nevertheless, the compassion of God will not permit them to be utterly destroyed. God will redeem Israel even from death and hell.

There is a repeated rebuke to the nation for turning to Assyria and Egypt for help. "They make a covenant with the Assyrians, and oil is carried to Egypt" (12:1; cf. 7:11). These events took place during the reign of Hoshea (2 Kings 17:1–4).

PART 4 / ISRAEL'S ULTIMATE RESTORATION (14:1–9)

In words reminiscent of the Song of Solomon, the book of Hosea concludes with a remarkable picture of a people restored to God. Urged to godly grief (cf. 2 Corinthians 7:10), Israel is called back to God. Reassurance is given that the Lord will have mercy, "heal their backsliding" and "love them freely" (14:4). But restoring the backslider means more than forgiveness alone. It means that the Lord will also remove the cause of the backsliding. Their *hearts* will be changed. There will be a new principle in operation within them:

Ephraim *shall* say, "What have I to do anymore with idols?"
 I have heard and observed him.
 I *am* like a green cypress tree;
 Your fruit is found in Me (14:8).

And so in just fourteen chapters, the sin of Israel is exposed, the judgement of God is disclosed and the triumph of the grace of God is proposed.

HOSEA / **CHRIST AND HIS CHURCH**

The beautiful theme of love and marriage as a picture of Jehovah and Israel, Christ and his church, which flows from the Song of Solomon, passes under a dark cloud here in the book of Hosea through the unfaithfulness of the spouse to her covenant. Yet even as infidelity is exposed, the love of the grieving husband reveals the agony of God in his love for sinners.

William Hendriksen draws out the symbolic significance of the book of Hosea like this:

- Just as Hosea had married Gomer, so Jehovah had become Israel's "husband."
- Just as Gomer had become untrue to Hosea, so Israel had become unfaithful to Jehovah.
- Just as Gomer was enslaved by her paramours, so the Israelites would be enslaved by those very nations in which they were putting their trust.
- Just as Hosea restored Gomer, so Jehovah would restore the remnant of Israel.
- Just as Hosea, in order to restore Gomer, redeemed her with the price of silver and barley, so Christ would redeem the true Israel with the price of his own blood.¹²

The bride is chosen while still in sin (1:2; cf. Ezekiel 16:4–14; cf. Ephesians 2:1–10). She is thoroughly washed, purified and adorned with beautiful clothing (cf. Titus 3:3–5). The Lord takes her as his own. But the heart of the wife turns away from its primary love (cf. Revelation 2:4). She hankers after other lovers, other gods (3:1; Ezekiel 16:15–34; cf. James 4:4; 1 John 2:15–16). The Lord will not forget her. He redeems her and restores her (3:2–5; Ezekiel 16:60–63). God's pain will reach its zenith at Calvary (John 3:16; Romans 5:8).

¹² William Hendriksen, *Survey of the Bible: A Treasury of Bible Information* (Welwyn: Evangelical Press, 1976), 235–236.

TYPES AND PROPHECIES

1. Called out of Egypt

In the prophecies of Hosea there is an allusion to a second exodus (2:14–15). God will deliver them again. The Israelites must experience bondage and slavery once more, for they have forgotten the goodness and kindness of God in bringing their fathers out of Egypt. They are an ungrateful people. God loved them in those early days, for he says, “When Israel was a child, I loved him” (11:1). The first exodus was like the birth of the nation of Israel. God loved Israel before the nation was born. The Lord’s love for Israel was such that he called the nation out of Egypt: “And out of Egypt I called My son” (11:1).

This text had a preliminary fulfilment in Israel as a type of Christ. Its ultimate fulfilment is to be found in the Lord Jesus. Matthew applies these words to the Saviour (Matthew 2:15). Calvin reasons,

There is no doubt, but that God in his wonderful providence intended that his Son should come forth from Egypt, that he might be a redeemer to the faithful; and thus he shows that a true, real, and perfect deliverance was at length effected, when the promised Redeemer appeared.¹³

Egypt represents the spiritual state of bondage and Christ came to identify with those in bondage, to set them free and lead them out. Christ is the Son of God in quite a different way from the people of Israel. Adoption made the children of Israel the children of God, but Christ is by nature the only begotten Son of God (John 1:18; 3:16). A further difference is also evident in that Israel was ungrateful to God and no such ingratitude ever entered the Saviour’s mind. In biblical types, comparison and contrast belong together. No type is perfect for there is always a great difference between the reality and its symbols.

2. Israel’s rejection and restoration

Although Israel’s imminent rejection and restoration is prophesied by Hosea, the state of the nation of Israel from A.D. 70 onward is also

¹³ Calvin, *Hosea*, 387.

foretold: "Without king or prince, without sacrifice or sacred pillar, without ephod or teraphim" (3:4).

The apostle Paul appeals to Hosea (2:23; 1:10) as an indication of the call of the Gentiles,

What if God, wanting to show His wrath and to make His power known, endured with much longsuffering the vessels of wrath prepared for destruction, and that He might make known the riches of His glory on the vessels of mercy, which He had prepared beforehand for glory, even us whom He called, not of the Jews only, but also of the Gentiles?

As He says also in Hosea:

"I will call them My people, who were not My people,
And her beloved, who was not beloved."
"And it shall come to pass in the place where it was
said to them,
'You are not My people,'
There they shall be called sons of the living God"
(Romans 9:22–26).

There might at first sight appear a discrepancy between the prophet's words and the apostle's interpretation of them. In Hosea, the reference is to the tribes of Israel and not to the Gentile nations. Paul recognizes that the rejection and restoration of Israel of which Hosea spoke have their parallel in the exclusion of the Gentiles from God's favour, followed by their reception back into that favour.¹⁴ The apostle Peter also takes up this theme: "who once *were* not a people but *are* now the people of God, who had not obtained mercy but now have obtained mercy" (1 Peter 2:10). It may, of course, be argued that the apostle Peter was addressing Jewish Christians whereas the apostle Paul was seeing the wider implications in a church composed of believing Jews and believing Gentiles. Both Peter's and Paul's usage of this passage constitute further evidence that the apostles interpreted Old Testament prophecy as being fulfilled in Christ and his church.

¹⁴ John Murray, *The Epistle to the Romans* (London: Marshall, Morgan and Scott, 1967), part 2, 38.

3. Resurrection for Christ and his church

After two days He will revive us;
On the third day He will raise us up,
That we may live in His sight (6:2).

There is here a beautiful connection between the resurrection of the Son of God and the resurrection of his people. The Lord did not rise from the dead for himself alone, but for his people—he is the firstfruits of those who shall rise (1 Corinthians 15:20). The prophet “here encourages the faithful to entertain hope of salvation, because God would raise up his only-begotten Son, whose resurrection would be the common life of the whole Church.”¹⁵

Another powerful prophecy from Hosea speaks of the great resurrection:

I will ransom them from the power of the grave;
I will redeem them from death.
O Death, I will be your plagues!
O Grave, I will be your destruction!
Pity is hidden from My eyes (13:14).

Ransom means rescue by the payment of a price. *Redeem* relates to one who, as the next of kin, has the right to acquire anything as his own by paying the price. “Both words in their most exact sense describe what Jesus did for us.”¹⁶ The apostle Paul takes up this prophecy and reveals how it will be fulfilled. Because of the suffering of the Saviour at Calvary, a day will dawn when “the dead will be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed” (1 Corinthians 15:52). Having conquered death and the grave, the Lord will abolish death for ever (1 Corinthians 15:54–55). The triumph of Christ in his death and resurrection is the seal of the believer’s resurrection on the great day of the Lord (1 Corinthians 15:23,56–57).

¹⁵ Calvin, *Hosea*, 217.

¹⁶ Edward Pusey, cited by A.M. Hodgkin, *Christ in All the Scriptures* (London: Pickering and Inglis, 1907), 195.

Another New Testament reference to the prophecy of Hosea (10:8) is given by the Lord Jesus on his way to crucifixion:

And a great multitude of the people followed Him, and women who also mourned and lamented Him. But Jesus, turning to them, said, "Daughters of Jerusalem, do not weep for Me, but weep for yourselves and for your children. For indeed the days are coming in which they will say, 'Blessed are the barren, wombs that never bore, and breasts which never nursed!' Then they will begin 'to say to the mountains, "Fall on us!" and to the hills, "Cover us!"'" (Luke 23:27–30).

The Saviour shows his remarkable selflessness even in the most trying circumstances. He warns the women of the impending doom. Quoting these words from Hosea, our Lord shows that there is a devastation coming upon Israel which will be like that experienced in the days of the prophet Hosea. The first fulfilment came with the invasion of the Assyrians and the deportation of the Israelites. Another calamity is being predicted by the Lord Jesus. This is the imminent invasion of the Romans and the destruction of Jerusalem (A.D. 70). But the prophecy of Hosea will have an ultimate fulfilment on the Day of Judgement. Then the godless will cry out "to the mountains and rocks, 'Fall on us and hide us from the face of Him who sits on the throne and from the wrath of the Lamb!'" (Revelation 6:16–17). For when God's judgement appears, unbelievers would rather face appalling death than be faced with the fierceness of his anger.

HOSEA / **CONCLUSION**

The book of Hosea is full of deep feeling. There is deep passion from God toward his people. On the one hand, there is the strongest expression of his righteous anger at their sin—they have turned from the true and living God to the worship of dead idols, and with paganism has also come widespread immorality and corruption. On the other hand, by sharp contrast, there is the tenderest passionate expression of God's yearning love over his sinful people; if they will but return to him they will receive mercy and kindness. The Lord can be like a lion, tearing the wicked and ungodly and taking them away (5:14); or he can be like

gentle rain, bringing life and health to those who return to him (6:3).

The Lord has “no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but that the wicked turn from his way and live” (Ezekiel 33:11). He will not obliterate the rebellious tribes of the children of Israel. He will humble them by long and severe discipline, to bring them to a consciousness of their guilt. He will lead them to repentance so that he might have mercy upon them. He will save them from everlasting destruction.

It is with these goals in mind that the book of Hosea contains threats and punishments interwoven with gracious promises. The Lord not only presents a general hope of better days, he predicts the time of restoration and everlasting peace. By his almighty power and grace, the Lord will ultimately deliver his people from death and from hell.

HOSEA / APPLICATION AND REFLECTION

1. Chosen by grace

The marriage of Hosea and Gomer graphically teaches that God did not choose Israel on the basis of merit. Every believer of every nation and of every generation is “a debtor to mercy alone.” The Lord God says, “There is no savior besides Me” (13:4).

For we ourselves were also once foolish, disobedient, deceived, serving various lusts and pleasures, living in malice and envy, hateful and hating one another. But when the kindness and the love of God our Savior toward man appeared, not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to His mercy He saved us, through the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Spirit (Titus 3:3-5).

But God, who is rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in trespasses, made us alive together with Christ.... For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; *it is the gift of God*, not of works, lest anyone should boast. For we are His workmanship.... (Ephesians 2:4-5,8-10).

Believers are not chosen on the basis of any merit or desert. We are more unworthy to be the bride of Christ than Gomer was to be the bride of Hosea!

Believers are drawn “with the cords of a man, with bands of love” (11:4, alternative reading; cf. Jeremiah 31:3). What a lovely description this is of the Saviour as “a perfect man” (Ephesians 4:13) drawing his people to himself by cords of Calvary love! (John 12:32).

2. Mercy, not sacrifice

After his conversion Levi, the tax collector, called together his friends for a celebration meal. Jesus was the honoured guest (Luke 5:29). The Pharisees objected to the company Jesus was keeping in eating with tax collectors and sinners. They spoke to his disciples challenging the Lord’s behaviour (Matthew 9:11-13). Overhearing their criticism, Jesus responded, “Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick. But go and learn what *this* means: ‘I desire mercy and not sacrifice.’ For I did not come to call the righteous, but sinners, to repentance” (Matthew 9:12-13; cf. Hosea 6:6). The Pharisees showed contempt toward tax collectors and sinners.

They expelled them and made no attempt to reach or help them. In effect, our Lord says they must learn a lesson from Hosea. By quoting this prophet, Jesus is doing more than applying a suitable text of Scripture—he is raising before them the whole message of Hosea. Hosea's relationship with his wife expresses the covenant love and relationship of God with Israel—even wayward and faithless Israel.

Hosea addressed the Israelites of his day who were openly godless and immoral,

There is no truth or mercy
Or knowledge of God in the land.
By swearing and lying,
Killing and stealing and committing adultery,
They break all restraint,
With bloodshed upon bloodshed (4:1-2).

By bringing sacrifices to God in this kind of context, the Israelites were showing great contempt. Sacrifices are not unimportant, but they must be accompanied by a genuine effort among the people to learn from the Lord. Bringing offerings to God is of no value unless there is a real attempt to imitate God's behaviour and attitude. If the Pharisees who confronted the Lord Jesus would learn this great lesson, then they would understand what he was doing in spending time with tax collectors and sinners.

The Lord Jesus refers again to this verse in Hosea when challenged about his disciples plucking ears of corn on the Sabbath (Matthew 12:1-2). Again he shows that the Pharisees had no pity (Matthew 12:7; cf. Hosea 6:6). They did not love kindness. They were critical and condemning, with no compassion or tenderness toward others.

3. Leadership of God's people

The religious and political leadership of Israel come under particular criticism in the book of Hosea. The people have been led astray by their prophets (4:5), their priests (4:6; 5:1; 6:9; 10:5) and their civil rulers (5:1,10; 7:3-7; 9:15). Israel's leaders turn to other nations for political solutions rather than relying upon the living God who has constantly protected and preserved his people (5:13; 7:8-11; 8:9).

Though the Israelites possessed the law of God (8:12), they were generally ignorant of its content and application, because of the failure of their

religious leaders (4:6). In our own day, there have never been so many Bibles owned by people and yet such darkness as to the contents of God's Word. The vast majority of those appointed as Christian teachers and preachers are teaching anything but the message of the Word of God. Even within the believing community there is a dearth of Bible teaching. Emphasis is often on "experience" and there is little evidence of that diligence in study that produces "a worker who does not need to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth" (2 Timothy 2:15). Relatively few are likely to exhaust themselves by their labour in the Word and doctrine (1 Timothy 5:17).

Leadership in the church of Christ is a serious responsibility. Each leader, as a watcher of souls, "must give account" to God (Hebrews 13:17). The great task of leadership is to equip "the saints for the work of ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ" (Ephesians 4:12). Together with this ongoing task is the assignment to find other potential leaders and teachers (2 Timothy 2:2). Without this careful and thorough teaching from God's Word, people will be "tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine" (Ephesians 4:14)—a situation which is all too prevalent today.

4. Restoring the backslider

Jehovah had taken Israel as his wife—cared for her, protected her, provided for her. He had treated her kindly and done so over many years. But Israel played fast and loose. She chased after other lovers, other gods. As she becomes thoroughly involved with these idols, the Lord complains of Israel, "But Me she forgot" (2:13; cf. Revelation 2:4).

There are many beautiful illustrations of the Lord's pleading with backsliders, and healing and restoring them. A century after Hosea, the prophet Jeremiah would plead: "'Return, O backsliding children,' says the Lord; 'for I am married to you'" (Jeremiah 3:14). "Return, you backsliding children, and I will heal your backslidings" (Jeremiah 3:22).

In the New Testament, the same tenderness is seen in the appeals that are made to those who have known the Lord and turned away from him. The parable of the lost son is arguably the finest revelation of the Lord's heart toward a returning backslider:

Bring out the best robe and put *it* on him, and put a ring on his hand and sandals on *his* feet. And bring the fatted calf here and kill *it*, and let us eat and be merry; for this my son was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found" (Luke 15:22-24).

This younger son went away into “a far country” and experienced deprivations and want before he “came to himself.” In similar fashion in Hosea’s day, the Israelites were taken to Assyria and humbled until the time appointed for their restoration and recovery.

Restoration of backsliders is a recurring theme in Scripture. There is mercy for all who will return to the Lord and pardon for all who come back to God (Isaiah 55:7). In the New Testament church, spiritually mature believers are called to care for those who fall. Paul charges the Galatians: “Brethren, if a man is overtaken in any trespass, you who *are* spiritual restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness, considering yourself lest you also be tempted” (Galatians 6:1).



JOEL

MEANING

"Jehovah is God"

AUTHOR

Joel

KEY THOUGHT

**The day of
the Lord**

THEME

***The value and importance
of repentance***

THEME VERSE

***For the day of the LORD is great and very terrible;
Who can endure it?***

JOEL 2:11

JOEL / SUMMARY

PART 1 / THE PLAGUE OF LOCUSTS		1:1-2:11
a.	An unparalleled calamity	1:1-3
b.	The devastation: locusts and drought	1:4-12
c.	Call for a fast and national assembly	1:13-14
d.	The day of the Lord is at hand	1:15
e.	Food supplies are seriously depleted	1:16-20
f.	The enemy is about to invade	2:1-11
PART 2 / REPENTANCE AND RESTORATION		2:12-27
a.	A call to repentance	2:12-17
b.	The Lord will deliver and restore	2:18-27
PART 3 / JUDGEMENT IN THE VALLEY OF DECISION		2:28-3:21
a.	Prophecy: the outpouring of God's Spirit	2:28-32
b.	Judgement on the nations of earth	3:1-16
c.	Everlasting blessing for the people of God	3:17-21

JOEL

A devastating infestation of locusts has hit the southern kingdom of Judah and stripped the fields bare. A drought has left the earth parched. The prophet Joel uses these events to declare a message from God: the people of Judah will be judged and punished for their sins. Their only recourse is to turn in true heart repentance to the Lord. God will ultimately bring all nations to judgement and only those among the nations who have called “on the name of the LORD shall be saved” (2:32). It is a timeless message, forth-telling and foretelling “the day of the LORD”:

Alas for the day!
 For the day of the LORD is at hand;
 It shall come as destruction from the Almighty (1:15).

Blow the trumpet in Zion,
 And sound an alarm in My holy mountain!
 Let all the inhabitants of the land tremble;
 For the day of the LORD is coming,
 For it is at hand:
 A day of darkness and gloominess,
 A day of clouds and thick darkness,
 Like the morning *clouds* spread over the mountains.
 A people *come*, great and strong,
 The like of whom has never been;
 Nor will there ever be any *such* after them,
 Even for many successive generations (2:1–2).

The LORD gives voice before His army,
 For His camp is very great;
 For strong is *the One* who executes His word.
 For the day of the LORD is great and very terrible;
 Who can endure it? (2:11).

The sun shall be turned into darkness,
 And the moon into blood,

Before the coming of the great and awesome day of the LORD (2:31).

Multitudes, multitudes in the valley of decision!

For the day of the LORD is near in the valley of decision (3:14).

The prophecy of Joel reveals that all history culminates in Christ and his church.

JOEL / **AUTHOR**

Apart from identifying himself as “Joel the son of Pethuel” (1:1), no other information is given about the author of this little book. The name *Yo’el* means “Jehovah is God,” and *Pethuel* means “the open-heartedness or sincerity of God.” Twelve other men in the Old Testament bear the name Joel. No satisfactory link has been made between any one of those and the prophet and author of this book. The frequent references to Zion and the house of the Lord may indicate that he lived in or near Jerusalem, but that is by no means certain. Nor can it be assumed that he was a priest as well as a prophet simply because he mentions the priesthood (1:13; 2:17). What is sure is that “Joel was a clear, concise, and uncompromising preacher of repentance.”¹

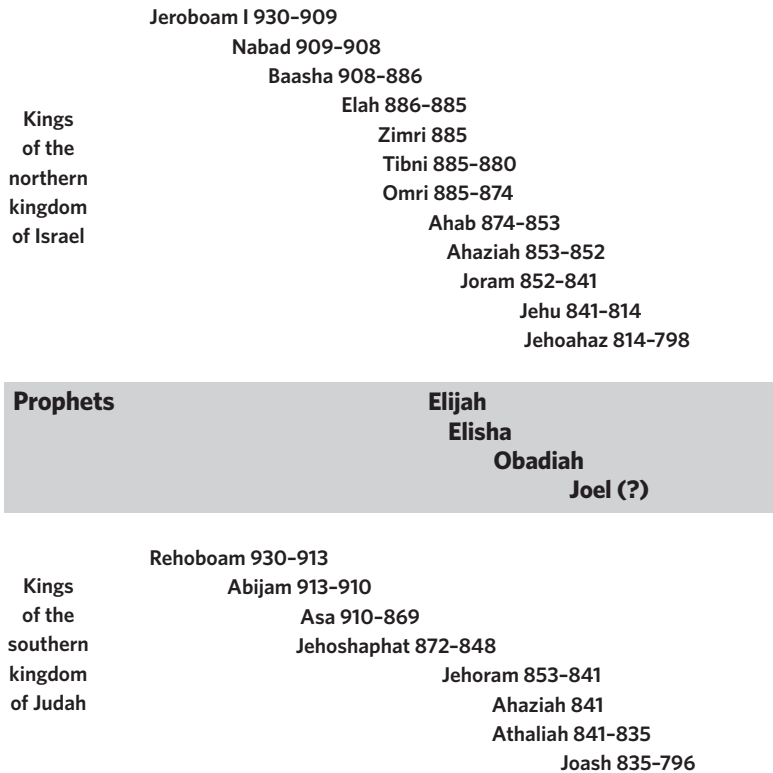
JOEL / **HISTORICAL SETTING**

Unlike Isaiah, Hosea, Amos and others, Joel does not locate his prophecy in a distinct period in Judah’s history. Opinions vary, but the contents would fit comfortably during the early days of the reign of Joash.² The enemies of Judah at that time were the Phoenicians (Tyre and Sidon), the Philistines (3:4), the Egyptians and the Edomites (3:19). There is no reference to Assyria or Babylon, which suggests an earlier date than the mid-700s B.C. Nor is there any mention of a king, but rather of elders and priests (1:14; 2:16; 1:9,13; 2:17). This would accord with the early reign of Joash, since he succeeded to the throne at the tender

¹ Thomas Nelson, *Nelsons’s Complete Book of Bible Maps and Charts* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1996), 246.

² Edward J. Young, *An Introduction to the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1949), 255.

Figure 9. Joel in relation to the kings and prophets of the divided kingdom*



*Years are in B.C.

age of seven (2 Kings 11:21) and was greatly influenced by godly Jehoiada, the high priest. Jehoiada's wife had taken him into their home and secretly raised him after he was rescued as a one-year-old from the clutches of Queen Athaliah (2 Chronicles 22:11-12). This would mean that Joel exercised his prophetic ministry to the southern kingdom of Judah around 820 B.C., after the prophet Obadiah, and there may even have been an overlap in their ministries. At the same time, the prophet Elisha would have been engaged in his long ministry to the northern kingdom of Israel (see Figure 9).

The prophet Amos, who followed some fifty years later, was evidently familiar with the prophecy of Joel and borrowed from his writings when he himself prophesied against the northern kingdom of the ten tribes (3:16; cf. Amos 1:2).

John Calvin was of the opinion that it is better to leave the time in which Joel prophesied undecided, since it is of no great importance.³ The care with which the Holy Spirit has specified the dates of other prophetic books would seem to confirm this view; the precise dating of Joel adds nothing to the understanding or the interpretation of the book.

JOEL / **OUTLINE**

There are three periods of history in mind throughout this book: the present, the near future and a time to come. Each period is associated with the day of the Lord. In the plague of locusts and the devastating drought, the day of the Lord has come (1:15–20); a further day of the Lord is coming (2:1–11); whereas the great and terrible day of the Lord is the finale, the end of this present world (2:31). The day of the Lord is immediate, imminent and ultimate; it is now, it is close, it will be in the end; and for each of these periods described by Joel there is an associated call to repentance (1:13–14; 2:12–13; 2:32).

He saw the near things, the sin of his people, and the locust plague; the imminent things, the coming of judgement, and the restoration following it; the far things, the day of the Spirit in which we are living, and the things beyond.⁴

At the same time, the book of Joel may be regarded as centring around three subjects: plague, penitence and promise.⁵

³ John Calvin, *Commentaries on the Twelve Minor Prophets*, vol. 2: Joel, Amos, Obadiah (1559; Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1986), xv.

⁴ G. Campbell Morgan, *Student Survey of the Bible* (Iowa Falls: World Bible Publishers, 1993), 272.

⁵ William Hendriksen, *Survey of the Bible: A Treasury of Bible Information* (Welwyn: Evangelical Press, 1976), 277.

PART 1 / **THE PLAGUE OF LOCUSTS (1:1– 2:11)**

A devastating plague of locusts has swept through the land—a phenomenon not uncommon in Israel, but the ferocity of this attack makes it unique. Drunkards have no wine, the priests have no offerings and the people have no bread. The people do not recognize that these signs indicate that the nation is under the judgement of God (Deuteronomy 28:15,38; 1 Kings 8:37,39–40). The priests are called to grieve before God. They are to urge the people to fast and to gather in the temple for a national assembly in order to “cry out to the LORD” (1:14). A trumpet is to be blown to draw the attention of the nation to the impending day of the Lord. This invasion of locusts will be eclipsed by an even more devastating invasion of soldiers. It will be a day of darkness and gloom in which the enemy will enter the city. This vast army will sweep through the land and God will be its leader (2:11).⁶

PART 2 / **REPENTANCE AND RESTORATION (2:12–27)**

The revelation of impending judgement is not intended to terrify the people, but to bring them back to God. The people should respond to the news by turning in heartfelt sorrow and repentance to the Lord. He will then respond to their godly grief by bringing deliverance.

“Now, therefore,” says the LORD,
 “Turn to Me with all your heart,
 With fasting, with weeping, and with mourning.”
 So rend your heart, and not your garments;
 Return to the LORD your God,
 For He is gracious and merciful,
 Slow to anger, and of great kindness;
 And He relents from doing harm (2:12–13).

A word in the original Hebrew is missing from this translation. It is the small word “also” or “even”—“Therefore *also* now” (AV), “And *even* now” (Calvin)—for the judgement of God seems disastrous, catastrophic and complete, as though there could be no remedy. Yet *even*

⁶ Calvin, *Joel, Amos, Obadiah*, 53.

now, *even* at this disastrous stage when the situation seems hopeless, when the locusts and the drought have devastated the land, when it seems that there can be no future, that the destruction has gone too far and that nothing can reverse the process—*even* now God can act wondrously.

Who knows *if* He will turn and relent,
And leave a blessing behind Him—
A grain offering and a drink offering
For the LORD your God? (2:14).

The punishment of God will not destroy them. The Lord will change the situation for good. There will be food again. There will be grain and drink offerings for the worship of the Lord.

So I will restore to you the years that the swarming locust
has eaten,
The crawling locust,
The consuming locust,
And the chewing locust,
My great army which I sent among you.
You shall eat in plenty and be satisfied,
And praise the name of the LORD your God,
Who has dealt wondrously with you;
And My people shall never be put to shame (2:25–26).

PART 3 / JUDGEMENT IN THE VALLEY OF DECISION (2:28– 3:21)

The prophet turns from consideration of the present and the immediate future to a time yet to be: “And it shall come to pass afterward” (2:28). The outpouring of the Spirit (2:28) forms a parallel to the outpouring of rain (2:23); the destruction of the hostile nations (3:1–21) corresponds to the destruction of the locusts (1:4). A time will come when all God’s people will receive the Holy Spirit and the gospel of God’s grace will be made known to all: “That whoever calls on the name of the LORD shall be saved” (2:32).

The people of Judah will be exiled, “scattered among the nations,” but the Lord will gather them together and restore them.

The Prophet confirms in these words what he had before taught respecting the restoration...for it was a thing difficult to be believed: when the body of the people was so mutilated, when their name was obliterated, when all power was abolished, when the worship of God also, together with the temple, was subverted, when there was no more any form of a kingdom, or even of any civil government—who could have thought that God had any concern for a people in such a wretched condition? It is then no wonder that the Prophet speaks so much at large of the restoration...he did so, that he might more fully confirm what would have otherwise been incredible.⁷

When the day of the Lord comes there will be deliverance in Zion, but only for those who call on the name of the Lord. Then, too, all the nations who have shown hostility toward God's people will be judged in the valley of decision. The curse of desolation will fall upon Egypt and Edom, whose hostility toward Judah is an example of persistent world hostility toward God's people.

Joel ends his prophecy on a glorious note of blissful promise of a time to come: "For the LORD dwells in Zion" (3:21).

JOEL / CHRIST AND HIS CHURCH

PROPHECIES

Joel's prophecies reach their highest peak when declaring the outpouring of the Holy Spirit on all flesh. Although the extent of the blessing, and the predominantly spiritual nature of that blessing, are clearly perceived and communicated by Joel, there is, however, no "concentration of the work of salvation in one human mediator."⁸ Direct and particular prophecies about Messiah are not to be found in these pages. The connection between the outpouring of the Spirit and the mediatorial work of Christ could not have been envisaged until its full glory was revealed at Calvary and at Pentecost (John 7:39).

⁷ Calvin, *Joel, Amos, Obadiah*, 112.

⁸ Franz Delitzsch, *Messianic Prophecies* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1880), 58.

1. Judgement on the church

The threat of judgement is a clear indication that God will not ignore sin among his own chosen people. The fundamental truth is that, just as “wherever the carcass is, there the eagles will be gathered together” (Matthew 24:28), so “where corruption manifests itself in the Church of the Lord, there will punishment come.”⁹ The apostle Peter declares, “For the time *has come* for judgment to begin at the house of God; and if it *begins* with us first, what will be the end of those who do not obey the gospel of God?” (1 Peter 4:17). Both the wise man in Proverbs and the writer to the Hebrews remind Christians that God disciplines those he loves (Proverbs 3:11–12; Hebrews 12:5–6) and, though it produces beneficial results, it is not a pleasant experience (Hebrews 12:11).

2. New covenant blessing

Joel prophesied of a time coming when the Lord would pour out his Spirit on all flesh (2:28–32). The New Testament reveals the fulfilment of this glorious promise. On the Day of Pentecost, following the death, resurrection and ascension of the Lord Jesus Christ, strange phenomena were witnessed in Jerusalem (Acts 2:1–13). There was the sound of a rushing, mighty wind, and shortly afterward a number of people from Galilee began speaking in a variety of different languages which they had never learned. When people in the huge crowd that gathered made fun of the preachers, and accused them of being under the influence of strong drink, the apostle Peter took the opportunity to preach:

Men of Judea and all who dwell in Jerusalem, let this be known to you, and heed my words. For these are not drunk, as you suppose, since it is *only* the third hour of the day. But this is what was spoken by the prophet Joel:

“And it shall come to pass in the last days, says God,
That I will pour out of My Spirit on all flesh;
Your sons and your daughters shall prophesy,

⁹ Ernest W. Hengstenberg, *Christology of the Old Testament and a Commentary on the Messianic Predictions* (1847; Grand Rapids: Kregel, 1970), 520.

Your young men shall see visions,
 Your old men shall dream dreams.
 And on My menservants and on My maidservants
 I will pour out My Spirit in those days;
 And they shall prophesy (Acts 2:14–18).

So there is no doubt as to the fulfilment of this prophecy of Joel. The Lord has made it clear.

Nevertheless, something else is needed in order to clarify the meaning of the words “on *all flesh*.” The prophecy of Joel might be interpreted as a blessing limited to Judah alone, but the Lord is to further reveal that he means to pour out his Spirit on every *believing* man, woman and child throughout the world. Some weeks after that remarkable Pentecost, the apostle Peter was sent to the home of a Roman centurion named Cornelius. Peter preached the gospel to the gathered company. Then,

While Peter was still speaking these words, the Holy Spirit fell upon all those who heard the word. And those of the circumcision who believed were astonished, as many as came with Peter, because the gift of the Holy Spirit had been poured out on the Gentiles also. For they heard them speak with tongues and magnify God (Acts 10:44–46).

Believing Gentiles are also to be included in the fulfilment of the prophecy.

The result of the Spirit’s coming in those days was the widespread exercise of the gift of prophecy. This does not mean that every individual believer would prophesy. That has never been the case, not even in New Testament days (Romans 12:6; 1 Corinthians 12:29). Under the Old Covenant, the Spirit of God was particularly revealed as the Spirit “that empowers and enables prophecy.”¹⁰ While all true believers were born of the Spirit, repented of their sins and believed in the promises of God, only a few—mainly the prophets and a few kings and priests—were filled with the Spirit of God.

¹⁰ Raymond B. Dillard and Tremper Longman III, *An Introduction to the Old Testament* (Leicester: Apollos, 1995), 370.

Back in the early days of the Exodus, there were seventy elders appointed to assist Moses; they had the blessing of the Spirit:

Then the LORD came down in the cloud, and spoke to him [Moses], and took of the Spirit that was upon him, and placed the same upon the seventy elders; and it happened, when the Spirit rested upon them, that they prophesied, although they never did so again (Numbers 11:25).

Two of the selected men were not assembled with the rest when the Spirit came upon them. These two, Eldad and Medad, received the Spirit and prophesied while still in the camp. Joshua advised Moses to forbid them prophesying, to which Moses replied: “Are you zealous for my sake? Oh, that all the LORD’s people were prophets *and* that the LORD would put His Spirit upon them!” (Numbers 11:29). This desire of Moses was at the same time a prophecy.¹¹ It became a declared prophecy in the words of Joel 2:28: “I will pour out My Spirit on all flesh; your sons and your daughters shall prophesy.”

The complete fulfilment of Joel’s prophecy could not take place until the coming of the Messiah. The promised Saviour must come into the world, suffer, die, rise from the dead and ascend to the right hand of the Father in heaven. *The sending of the Spirit of God was dependent upon the completion of the whole work of Christ on earth in his humanity.* This is made clear in the record of the apostle John:

On the last day, that great *day* of the feast [Feast of Tabernacles], Jesus stood and cried out, saying, “If anyone thirsts, let him come to Me and drink. He who believes in Me, as the Scripture has said, out of his heart will flow rivers of living water.” But this He spoke concerning the Spirit, whom those believing in Him would receive; for the Holy Spirit was not yet *given*, because Jesus was not yet glorified (John 7:37–39).

The gift of the Holy Spirit is no longer to be confined to a few chosen men—prophets, kings priests and judges—but will extend to “all flesh,” without distinction of gender, age or social standing. The

¹¹ Hengstenberg, *Christology of the Old Testament*, 525.

apostle Paul may have had this prophecy in mind when he wrote, “There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus” (Galatians 3:28), which he links with the promise of blessing to Abraham: “in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed” (Genesis 12:3). For, writes Paul, “If you are Christ’s, then you are Abraham’s seed, and heirs according to the promise” (Galatians 3:29).

JOEL / **CONCLUSION**

World history is moving to a climax: “the great and awesome day of the LORD” (2:31). This will be a time of fearful judgement on the people and nations who have rebelled against God. A strong thread of disasters runs throughout this little book of Joel—a plague of locusts, a severe famine, raging fires, invading enemies, strange, uncanny phenomena in the heavens and on the earth. Nevertheless, throughout all the catastrophes and calamities, there is the promise of hope for those who repent and love and trust the Lord.

Joel visualized the unfolding of world history. As he spoke, he was witnessing manifestations of sin and judgement, and he proclaimed the necessity of repentance. The day of the Lord had arrived. He also foresaw another day of the Lord in the near future, a day of even more severe judgement from God. He called on the people to return to the Lord with wholehearted repentance so the coming judgement might be averted. Still further down the ages, he foresaw yet another day of the Lord, great and terrible. This would be the end times, the consummation, the close of this present world. This finale would be preceded by another day when God would pour out his Spirit on every believer, young and old, male and female, servant and master. To them would be entrusted the gospel message for the world: “Whoever calls on the name of the LORD shall be saved” (2:32).

Judgement and punishment are certain, but those who repent and turn to the Lord will be able to rely on his promises and to look forward to abiding fellowship with God. This is the only way to prepare for “the great and awesome day of the LORD” (2:31).

JOEL / APPLICATION AND REFLECTION

1. The day of the Lord

Joel speaks of the coming of the day of the Lord five times. In the Old Testament the phrase occurs over thirty times (eg. Isaiah 2:12; 13:6,9; Amos 5:18; Ezekiel 30:3; Ephesians 1:7,14). The description of this day usually involves judgement and war against sinners—a necessary purge before righteousness can reign.

In the New Testament, the day of the Lord is still anticipated:

But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night, in which the heavens will pass away with a great noise, and the elements will melt with fervent heat; both the earth and the works that are in it will be burned up. Therefore, since all these things will be dissolved, what manner of persons ought you to be in holy conduct and godliness, looking for and hastening the coming of the day of God...? (2 Peter 3:10–12).¹²

2. A universal gospel

“And it shall come to pass that whoever calls on the name of the LORD shall be saved” (Joel 2:32). While in the book of Joel the prophecy is addressed solely to Israel, and in particular to the southern kingdom of Judah, the apostle Paul argues that this promise extends way beyond the bounds of Judah and Israel: “For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek, for the same Lord over all is rich to all who call upon Him. For ‘whoever calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved’” (Romans 10:12–13).

All who are saved form the true Israel of God, that is, the spiritual Israel. The nation of Israel was never composed entirely of believing people: “For they are not all Israel who are of Israel” (Romans 9:6). Conversely, those Gentiles who believe in the Lord are reckoned as true Israelites. The true, or spiritual, Israel is composed, therefore, of believing Jews together with believing Gentiles.

Our task is to follow the example of the prophet Joel and urge men, women and children to turn to God in true repentance of heart so that they may be saved from the judgement of the coming day of the Lord.

¹² Cf. 1 Thessalonians 5:2–8. “The day of the Lord” is also called “the day of our Lord Jesus Christ” (1 Corinthians 1:8; 5:5).

3. Repentance and its fruit

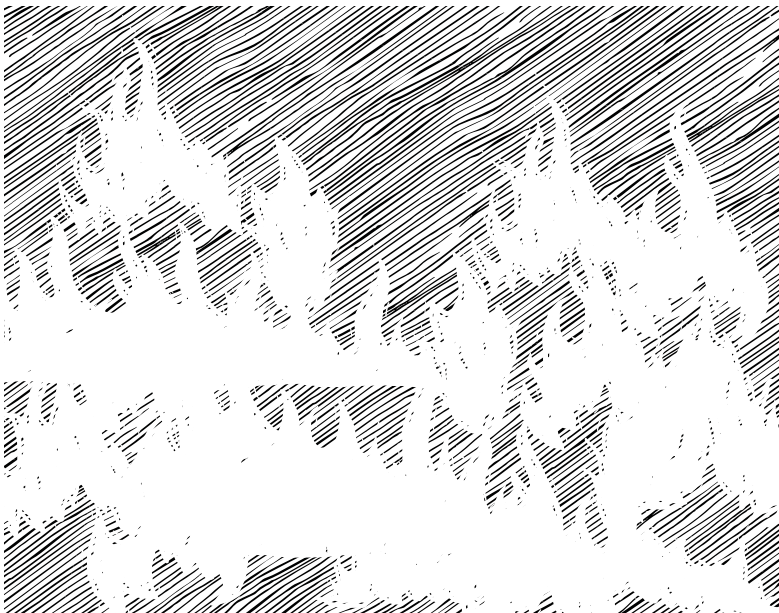
The call to the nation to return to the Lord in true heart repentance is based on the outstanding grace and mercy of the living God. In order to benefit from these wonderful characteristics, the people must be genuine and sincere in heart and mind:

“Now, therefore,” says the LORD,
 “Turn to Me with all your heart,
 With fasting, with weeping, and with mourning.”
 So rend your heart, and not your garments;
 Return to the LORD your God,
 For He is gracious and merciful,
 Slow to anger, and of great kindness;
 And He relents from doing harm (2:12-13).

The people are instructed how to show their repentance in a tangible form: they are to gather together before God as a priority over every other duty, responsibility or interest (2:15-16). The priests are to plead for the people with tears and pray on the basis of the covenant relationship: “Spare Your people, O LORD, and do not give Your heritage to reproach” (2:17).

Years later, the apostle Paul distinguished between “godly sorrow” and “the sorrow of the world” (2 Corinthians 7:10). The sorrow of the world is remorse or regret over a word or action because of the resulting consequences. A thief, when apprehended by the police, may be sorry he has stolen another’s property. There may even be a genuine sense of guilt because of the pain and dishonour he has brought on his family. He may experience heartfelt shame. However, such sorrow, though it may be real, leads to death—it has no spiritual benefit. It does not cause the thief to confess his sins and resolve before God never to steal again. Judas displayed the sorrow of the world when he went out and hung himself after betraying Jesus (Matthew 27:5). In contrast, godly sorrow is the grief of heart that brings a sinner to God in confession and with a genuine commitment to forsake sin: “He who covers his sins will not prosper, but whoever confesses and forsakes *them* will have mercy” (Proverbs 28:13; cf. Psalm 51:1-4; 32:3-5).

John the Baptist challenged the Pharisees, Sadducees, tax collectors and soldiers who came to him for baptism to demonstrate the reality of their repentance in positive action and distinct change of behaviour (Matthew 3:7-8; Luke 3:11-14).



AMOS

MEANING

"burden-bearer"

AUTHOR

Amos

KEY THOUGHT

Punishment

THEME

National sin results in national punishment

THEME VERSE

***"You only have I known of all the families of the earth;
Therefore I will punish you for all your iniquities."***

AMOS 3:2

AMOS / SUMMARY

INTRODUCTION	1:1-2
PART 1 / PROPHECIES AGAINST THE NATIONS	1:3-2:16
1. Judgements on surrounding nations occupying land given to Israel by God	1:3-2:3
a. Against Syria (Damascus)	1:3-5
b. Against Philistia (Gaza)	1:6-8
c. Against Phoenicia (Tyre)	1:9-10
d. Against Edom	1:11-12
e. Against Ammon	1:13-15
f. Against Moab	2:1-3
2. Judgements on the chosen people	2:4-16
a. Against Judah	2:4-5
b. Against Israel	2:6-16
PART 2 / JUDGEMENTS AGAINST ISRAEL	3:1-6:14
1. Israel's present	
God's charge against his people	3:1-15
2. Israel's past	
Punishment has not brought them back to God	4:1-13
3. Israel's future	
The Lord grieves over his people	5:1-6:14
PART 3 / FIVE VISIONS OF JUDGEMENT	7:1-9:10
1. The vision of the locusts	7:1-3
2. The vision of the fire	7:4-6
3. The vision of the plumb line	7:7-9

Historical interlude: Amaziah the idolatrous priest
commands Amos to leave Israel 7:10-17

4. The vision of the summer fruit 8:1-14

5. The vision of the Lord by the altar 9:1-10

PART 4 / RESTORATION AND BLESSING 9:11-15

AMOS

Righteousness and justice *are* the foundation of Your throne;
 Mercy and truth go before Your face.

Blessed *are* the people who know the joyful sound!

They walk, O LORD, in the light of Your countenance (Psalm 89:14–15).

The Lord is a righteous King over all the earth. Because he is righteous, his rule over the earth is a righteous, or just, rule. He punishes evil in individuals and in nations. Individual sins receive individual punishment, especially in the final judgement: For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive the things *done* in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad” (2 Corinthians 5:10). National sins, by contrast, are dealt with distinctly in this life. Under God’s government, national sins receive national punishment. “Righteousness exalts a nation, but sin is a reproach to *any* people” (Proverbs 14:34).

The name *Amos* means “burden-bearer.” This prophet’s burden concerns punishment. He is the messenger delivering serious and sober words for a self-indulgent and godless age. The nations who are Israel’s close neighbours are to be punished for their gross sins. But it is Israel, the people peculiarly owned and blessed by the living God, who face the greatest censure. They should know better. They “*are* Israelites, to whom *pertain* the adoption, the glory, the covenants, the giving of the law, the service of God, and the promises; of whom *are* the fathers” (Romans 9:4–5). Because Israel has sinned so seriously in religion and morality, toward God and toward humanity, they will receive the most severe punishment: “You only have I known of all the families of the earth; therefore I will punish you for all your iniquities” (3:2). They were idolaters, immoral, self-indulgent and complacent. Amos denounces the Israelites and warns of God’s impending judgement.

Though the book of Amos is full of judgement and rebuke, there are nevertheless wonderful displays of God’s mercy and grace. In the midst of the judgements there are calls to repentance (5:4,6,14–15). A further display of outstanding grace and mercy comes at the conclusion of the prophecy—in spite of the awful sinfulness and failure of the Israelites

God will not forget his ancient promises. He will respect his covenants. A remnant of the Israelites will be preserved. Consequently, the book of Amos contains excellent examples of the goodness of God to an unworthy people and a wretched nation.

AMOS / **AUTHOR**

The prophet Amos wrote the whole book bearing his name. He originated from Tekoa (1:1), which lay twelve miles south of Jerusalem, six miles south of Bethlehem, overlooking the Dead Sea. He therefore belonged to Judah, the southern kingdom of the divided nation. Tekoa was a rural area and may not have had any permanent housing. The shepherds and their families would have lived in a small cluster of tents. Appropriately, Tekoa is thought to mean “the pitching of tents.” Amos was what we might call a rough diamond, plain and straightforward in life and speech. He was a man of the land, “a herdsman and a tender of sycamore fruit” (7:14). The sycamore fruit grew mainly in the plains (1 Kings 10:27). It was a wild fig eaten by only the poorest people. A “tender” or “dresser” (אֲדָר) means a “nipper” or “pincher” of sycamore figs, since the fruit ripened when pierced.

Seemingly without warning or preparation, the Lord appoints Amos to the task of prophesying against Israel, the northern kingdom. Amos testifies: “I was no prophet, nor was I a son of a prophet” (7:14). Snatched as it were from the duties of a shepherd, he finds himself thrust into the responsibilities of a prophet. The divine call to Amos is irresistible:

A lion has roared!
 Who will not fear?
 The Lord God has spoken!
 Who can but prophesy? (3:8).

Amos is a fitting illustration of the sovereignty and wisdom of God in choosing his servants. God is as able to call prophets and preachers from the tents of shepherds as from the courts of a monarch. Amos was a shepherd—not a courtier like Isaiah, nor a priest like Jeremiah, but an ordinary, working man. The Lord calls and equips each one for the duties to which he assigns him (Exodus 4:10–12).

Though a humble shepherd, Amos has a keen intellect, a sharp wit and a natural skill in communication. His language is strikingly graphic, drawn from experience. He describes his call to office as like the roaring of a lion in his ears (3:8); he compares the Lord's heart burdened with the sinfulness of Israel as being like a cart weighed down with sheaves (2:13). The narrow escape of a remnant of Israel is compared to a shepherd recovering two legs, or a piece of an ear from the mouth of a lion (3:12). The lack of hearing the words of the Lord is likened to a natural famine (8:11–12). His origins may be humble, but he shows all the marks of an educated mind. He is well acquainted with the Scriptures. He has a firm grasp of the political scene. He knows the pressures in society. He understands the human heart.

AMOS / HISTORICAL SETTING

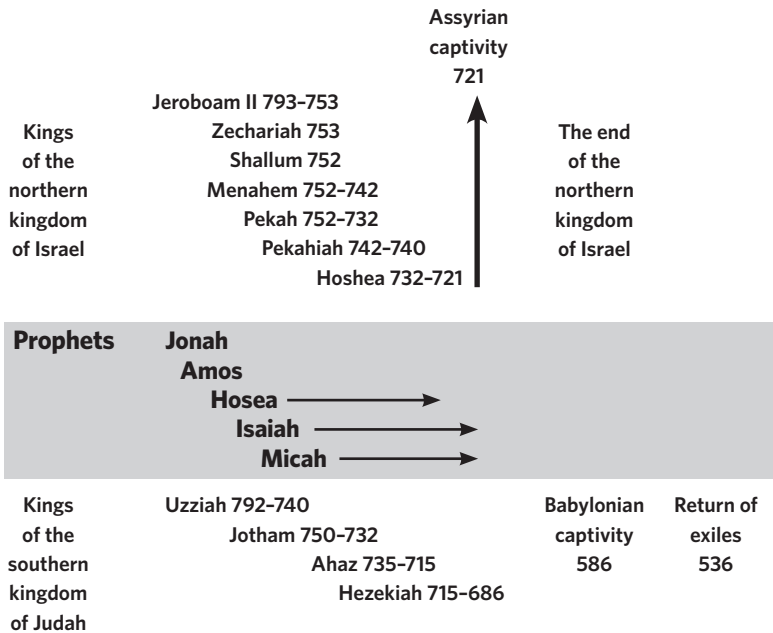
The book of Amos is firmly placed in history by some of its opening words: “in the days of Uzziah king of Judah, and in the days of Jeroboam the son of Joash, king of Israel, two years before the earthquake” (1:1). That earthquake must have been quite exceptional. There seem to be repeated allusions to this great eruption throughout the book (5:8; 6:11; 8:8; 9:5). Two-hundred-and-fifty years later this earthquake is still being mentioned (Zechariah 14:5).

Amos prophesied during the long and prosperous reigns of Jeroboam II of Israel (the ten tribes of the northern kingdom) and Uzziah (or Azariah) of Judah (792–740 B.C.) (see Figure 10). A brief history of Jeroboam II is recorded in 2 Kings 14:23–29 and that of Uzziah (Azariah) in 2 Kings 15:1–7 and 2 Chronicles 26.

It was during the reign of Jeroboam II that the territory of Israel was enlarged. A successful war against Syria restored the ancient boundaries of the kingdom. The prophecy given by the prophet Jonah came to fruition (2 Kings 14:25).¹ However, military success and economic prosperity brought their own problems in the form of materialism, greed, immorality and injustice. These were days when there was no significant world empire: neither Egypt, Syria, Assyria

¹ Keil maintains that this prophecy was given by Jonah directly to Jeroboam II. See Carl F. Keil, *The Twelve Minor Prophets* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1949), 379.

Figure 10. Amos in relation to the kings and prophets of the divided kingdom*



*Years are in B.C.

nor Babylon was a power of such magnitude as to pose an out-and-out threat to the region.

Although Amos lived in Judah, he was sent to prophesy against Israel (7:15). It would be like a farm labourer from Scotland standing on the steps of St. Paul's Cathedral in the city of London and prophesying against England.

Location

Amos prophesied at Bethel, twelve miles north of Jerusalem. It was here, many years before, that Jacob had his remarkable encounter with God. Having received a wonderful revelation through a dream, Jacob named the place *Beth-El*, which means "House of God" (Genesis 28:10-22).

It was also at Bethel that Jeroboam I set up a centre for false worship. Following the division of the kingdom into Israel and Judah (930 B.C.),

he established a corrupted religion to consolidate Israel, the northern kingdom of the ten tribes. He did not want any of his subjects travelling to Jerusalem in Judah to worship God. He feared that such a pilgrimage would lead to their return to the opposition at Judah, with the result that he could face execution for treason. He therefore made “two calves of gold” and said to the people of the ten tribes, “It is too much for you to go up to Jerusalem. Here are your gods, O Israel, which brought you up from the land of Egypt!” and proceeded to offer sacrifices to them (1 Kings 12:28,32).

AMOS / **OUTLINE**

PART 1 / **PROPHECIES AGAINST THE NATIONS (1:3-2:16)**

There is a certain uniformity throughout this first section as one nation after another is threatened with destruction, defeat or exile. In each case, there is the opening phrase: “For three transgressions and for four, I will not turn away.” This is a figurative way of demonstrating that God does not act immediately in judgement, but that he waits in order to give every nation time for repentance.² After this phrase, an account is given of their sins, followed by the punishment to be administered by the Lord. Each foreign nation is to be punished for specific international offences. They are guilty of war crimes and the Lord will punish them.

The six nations, neighbours of Israel and Judah, are occupying land given to Israel by God. Beginning with Syria (Damascus) in the north-east, the prophet deals one by one with the enemies of Israel—Philistia (Gaza), Phoenicia (Tyre), Edom, Ammon and Moab. The first three nations are not blood-relatives of Israel, whereas the last three are.³

Syria is to be punished for her savage cruelty; Philistia for her slave trade; Phoenicia for her slave trade and treaty-breaking; Edom for revenge without mercy; Ammon for sadism and mad aggression; and Moab for violent and vindictive hatred. Sweeping round Israel in an

² G. Campbell Morgan, *Student Survey of the Bible* (Iowa Falls: World Bible Publishers, 1993), 283.

³ Edward J. Young, *An Introduction to the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1949), 259.

ever-decreasing spiral, Amos eventually arrives on the doorstep and pronounces judgement on Judah for idolatry and contempt for the commandments of God (see Map 1). It is only Judah whose sins are directly connected with her relationship to the living God. “The arrangement of the oracles is itself clever and subversive; oracles that construct a circle of despised enemy peoples turn out to be a trap sprung on an unsuspecting Israel.”⁴ What a way to draw the attention of his hearers, the Israelites! No doubt they were delighted by the announcement of God’s displeasure toward the nations. But the Lord had things to say against Israel. With crushing vigour, Amos delivers the first round of scathing judgements. Israel’s behaviour is shameful: her practices are corrupt (2:6–8); her justice is perverted by bribery; the poor are sold into slavery for debts incurred at the hands of greedy landlords; the people are so greedy and land-grabbing, “They would even steal the dust off the head of the poor man who has put on the traditional sackcloth and ashes to bemoan his fate”;⁵ they participate in ceremonial prostitution; they violate God’s law and cause unnecessary suffering (2:8; cf. Deuteronomy 24:12–13); there is alcohol abuse among the women (4:1).

While it is clear that the judgement of God is consistent—judging the nations and giving to each according to its deeds—he does, however, bring a more severe judgement against Israel as his backslidden people. They have turned away from Jehovah and practise a religion which amalgamates the corrupted worship of Jehovah with the pagan practices of the heathen nations.

PART 2 / JUDGEMENTS AGAINST ISRAEL (3:1–6:14)

Although the northern kingdom of Israel is specifically addressed, its links with the southern kingdom of Judah are not overlooked: “Hear this word that the LORD has spoken against you, O children of Israel, against the whole family which I brought up from the land of Egypt” (3:1). Together, the southern kingdom of Judah and the northern kingdom of Israel constitute “the whole family.”

⁴ Raymond B. Dillard and Tremper Longman III, *An Introduction to the Old Testament* (Leicester: Apollos, 1995), 380.

⁵ Ray Beeley, *Amos: Introduction and Commentary* (London: Banner of Truth Trust, 1969), 39–40.

The four chapters (3–6) divide into three discourses, or sermons, each beginning with the phrase: “Hear this word” (3:1; 4:1; 5:1).

In *the first address* (3:1–15), the prophet spells out the nature and ground of the Lord’s quarrel with Israel.

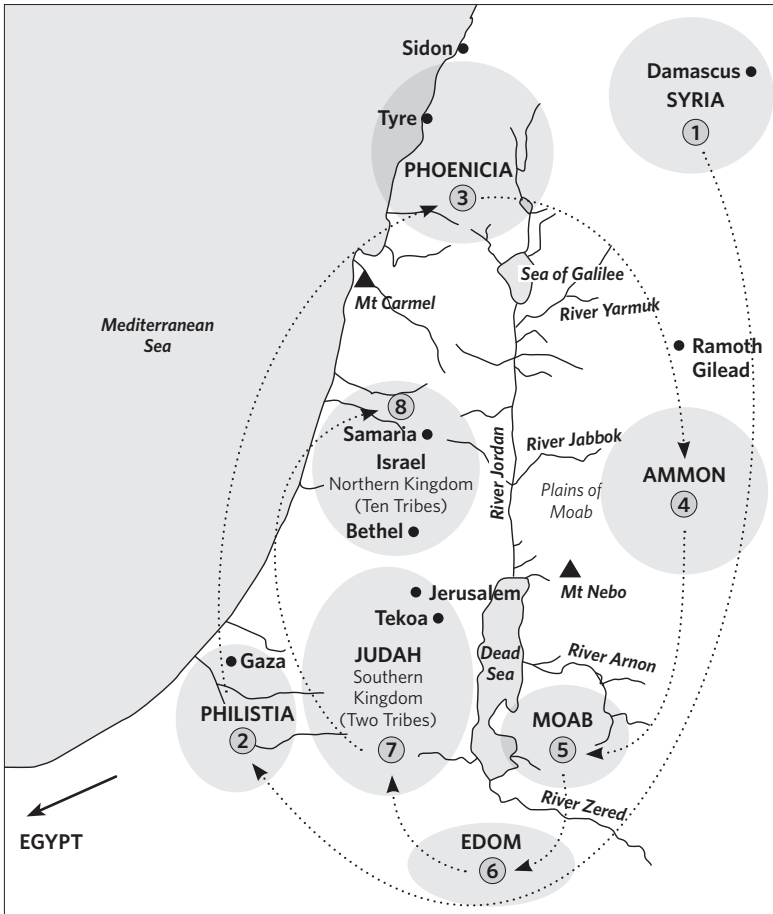
In *the second address* (4:1–13), the prophet points out that, despite past punishments for wickedness and godlessness, the people have not turned in repentance and trust to the Lord. He is grieved at their condition and saddened that further severe punishment is necessary.

The “earthy” language and style of Amos is illustrated in the opening words of the second sermon: “Hear this word, you cows of Bashan” (4:1). Bashan was a farming district noted for the health and size of its livestock. Amos addresses the rich women of Israel: “Hear this, you fat cows” (4:1). This would not have been considered abusive or intemperate language in that day. They are “fat” because they are gorging themselves on more than they need; they are self-indulgent, drinking too much. They greedily hold on to what they have and at the same time are taking more and more from the poor and needy (cf. Ezekiel 34:18,21).

The third address (5:1–6:14) is divided into two by the penetrating cry: “Woe to you who are at ease in Zion, and trust in Mount Samaria...!” (6:1). This cry is a summary of God’s case against Israel. The people are selfish, self-indulgent, greedy and unjust. They practise a perverted religion, formed of a mishmash of pagan ceremonies and a corrupted form of Jehovah worship. In spite of all this, the third address includes a tender call to repentance. In the midst of severe judgement, the Lord urges the people to return to him:

Seek Me and live....
 Seek the LORD and live....
 Seek good and not evil,
 That you may live;
 So the LORD God of hosts will be with you,
 As you have spoken.
 Hate evil, love good;
 Establish justice in the gate.
 It may be that the LORD God of hosts
 Will be gracious to the remnant of Joseph (5:4,6,14–15).

Map 1. The prophecies of Amos



PART 3 / FIVE VISIONS OF JUDGEMENT (7:1-9:10)

The third section contains five visions of judgement. The first four visions have similarities and are distinct from the fifth. In the first four visions, the Lord shows Amos events or objects; in the fifth, Amos sees the Lord himself standing by the altar. The first two visions, the locusts and the fire (possibly denoting a very severe drought), have a devastating effect on the vegetation and the life-support systems of the community. What the locusts leave, the fire will destroy. The prophet intercedes

between the nation and God and the two disasters are withheld.

The third vision, unlike the first two, requires explanation, for the application is not immediately obvious. Amos is shown a plumbline which, he is informed, represents God's requirements. The Lord is to judge the nation by his own criteria. Buildings that are seriously "out of plumb" are unsafe and should be demolished. Israel is to be laid waste because she does not measure up to God's standards.

Historical interlude (7:10–17)

During the presentation of the five visions, there is a historical interlude. Amaziah, the idolatrous priest of Bethel, reacts badly to the prophecies given by Amos. He contacts Jeroboam II and charges Amos with conspiracy. Amaziah speaks to Amos in blunt terms,

Go, you seer!
Flee to the land of Judah.
There eat bread,
And there prophesy.
But never again prophesy at Bethel,
For it is the king's sanctuary,
And it is the royal residence (7:12–13).

Amos responds to the charge of conspiracy by declaring his origins:

I was no prophet,
Nor was I a son of a prophet,
But I was a sheepbreeder
And a tender of sycamore fruit.
Then the LORD took me as I followed the flock,
And the LORD said to me,
"Go, prophesy to My people Israel" (7:14–15).

By referring in this way to his roots as a shepherd in the fields of Tekoa, Amos is seeking to indicate his lack of political connection with the government of Judah.

After this brief historical interlude, the prophet returns to recounting the series of visions. The fourth vision is strongly linked with the preceding one. Here again, the vision of a basket of summer fruit needs

further amplification and application. The Lord explains that Israel is ripe for judgement, “as though he said, that the vices of the people had ripened, that vengeance could no longer be deferred.”⁶

Fifth vision: The Lord by the altar (9:1-10)

The fifth and final vision is distinct from the other four. In this vision, there is no event or object, but the Lord is seen standing by the altar. There is no discussion between the Lord and the prophet, and no action takes place. The prophet simply listens in silence to the words of God. The Lord stands by the altar giving instructions that the temple is to be destroyed so that the whole nation will be buried under its rubble. If anyone escapes, the Lord will personally pursue him and slay him, for the Lord God of hosts is ruler and judge of the whole earth. Israel has become like the heathen and does not deserve to be spared.

Yet, despite all the sinfulness and wickedness of Israel, God will not destroy her entirely. Severe judgement is inevitable, but all is not lost. Though the Lord has been provoked so incessantly and to such an inordinate extent, he will, nevertheless, restore and bless the nation.

In those days of ease and plenty, with substantial military strength and good economic stability, the Israelites would have found it hard to comprehend the disaster which the prophet predicted. There is an allusion to the captivity and exile that were to come upon Israel, but Amos does not mention Assyria by name (9:8–9). Less than forty years were to pass before the final overthrow of Israel’s capital at Samaria and the exile of the Israelites to the land of Assyria (721 B.C.).

PART 4 / RESTORATION AND BLESSING (9:11-15)

Having made allusions to the captivity, the Lord’s final recorded words through the prophet Amos are words of hope and consolation. The nation which is to be destroyed because it is “out of plumb” (7:7–9) is to be rebuilt (9:11). The people who have fallen like overripe fruit (8:1–3) shall be brought back to inhabit a fruitful land (9:13–15).

⁶ John Calvin, *Commentaries on the Twelve Minor Prophets*, vol. 2: *Joel, Amos, Obadiah* (1559; Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1986), 360.

AMOS / **CHRIST AND HIS CHURCH****PROPHECIES****1. Rebuilding the tabernacle of David**

James, “the Lord’s brother” (Galatians 1:19), one of the “pillars” of the church at Jerusalem (Galatians 2:9), quotes from Amos in his address to the Jerusalem Council. The council had met to discern whether Gentile believers should be circumcised and commanded to keep the laws of Moses. The apostle Peter sees no reason why the Gentiles should take on Judaism when God is saving them, giving them the Holy Spirit and making no distinction between Jew and Gentile. James supports Peter’s reasoning by citing Amos:

After this I will return
 And will rebuild the tabernacle of David, which has fallen down;
 I will rebuild its ruins,
 And I will set it up;
 So that the rest of mankind may seek the LORD,
 Even all the Gentiles who are called by My name,
 Says the LORD who does all these things (Acts 15:16–17).

The prophecy as found in Amos itself is as follows:

“On that day I will raise up
 The tabernacle of David, which has fallen down,
 And repair its damages;
 I will raise up its ruins,
 And rebuild it as in the days of old;
 That they may possess the remnant of Edom,
 And all the Gentiles who are called by My name,”
 Says the LORD who does this thing (9:11–12).

The difference in wording may be accounted for by the fact that James is quoting from the Greek version of the Old Testament (Septuagint). There is, however, no real difference in meaning. Edom and Adam (man) are related words in Hebrew. *Edom* (cf. Esau—Genesis 36:1,8) means “red,” while *Adam* (man) means “red earth.” James gives a

remarkable interpretation to the prophecy of Amos. By substituting “men” or “mankind” for “Edom,” he demonstrates that it refers to the nations. The rebuilding of the “tabernacle of David” is to be achieved when God draws to himself “the Gentiles who are called by my name.” In other words, it will be achieved by the election of grace among the Gentiles. The rebuilding of David’s fallen tent, repairing its damages and raising its ruins, does not apply to the physical nation of Israel alone; it includes the ingathering of the nations.⁷

God had very long ago...before-ordained the acceptance of the Gentiles, and had included them in the great plan of Israel, the building-plan of His temple upon earth! Believers of all nations were to be partakers in the sanctuary of Israel, which, after judgment, was again to be restored!

This view is laid open by James to the church at a time when the old temple was not yet destroyed, and when the preaching of the name of God to all nations had only just begun.⁸

James’ interpretation of the prophecy is inspired by the Holy Spirit (otherwise it would not have appeared in the Holy Scriptures in this form). This undisputed reference to the Old Testament concludes the whole debate, pointing out that *God had always intended that the elect from the Gentile nations should be saved.*

Interestingly, James uses “prophets” in the plural, for he says, “And with this the words of the *prophets* agree” (Acts 15:15, emphasis added). He thereby establishes, in the presence of the then leaders of the universal church, “the key to the understanding of the prophets, taking one passage from Amos as the representative of all that class of prophecy, and spiritualizing it.”⁹ Consequently, we may confidently say this is the way the Holy Spirit would have us interpret the Old Testament prophecies—as spiritually fulfilled in Christ and his church!

⁷ Dillard and Longman, *An Introduction to the Old Testament*, 384.

⁸ Rudolf Stier, *The Words of the Apostles* (1869; Minneapolis: Klock and Klock, 1981), 244.

⁹ Charles D. Alexander, *The Six Day War and the Future of Israel: An Examination of the Jewish Theory of Prophecy* (Liverpool: Bible Exposition Fellowship, n.d.), 19.

2. The remnant of Israel

Closely allied to the prophecy of the church of Christ as a community of restored believing Israelites, together with the ingathered believing Gentiles, is the biblical theme of *the righteous remnant*. Seven-hundred-and-fifty years before the birth of the Lord Jesus Christ, Amos had prophesied the downfall of Israel, the northern kingdom of the ten tribes, but he had also predicted the delivery for “the remnant of Joseph” (5:15).

Throughout history, the Lord has preserved a *remnant*. At the time of the great flood, the remnant was only eight people (Genesis 7:13). In the days of Elijah, contrary to that prophet’s assessment of the situation, the Lord revealed that he had “reserved seven thousand in Israel, all whose knees have not bowed to Baal, and every mouth that has not kissed him” (1 Kings 19:18; cf. Romans 11:1–4). Amos graphically portrays the preservation of a remnant as a shepherd taking “two legs or a piece of an ear” from the mouth of a lion (3:12). Isaiah prophesies the return of “the remnant of Israel” from captivity, adding that they “will never again depend on him who defeated them, but will depend on the LORD, the Holy One of Israel, in truth” (Isaiah 10:20; cf. vv. 21–23). Micah will follow this by adding singular words of consolation and hope:

I will surely assemble all of you, O Jacob,
 I will surely gather the remnant of Israel;
 I will put them together like sheep of the fold,
 Like a flock in the midst of their pasture;
 They shall make a loud noise because of *so many* people.
 The one who breaks open will come up before them;
 They will break out,
 Pass through the gate,
 And go out by it;
 Their king will pass before them,
 With the LORD at their head (Micah 2:12–13).

Years later, the apostle Paul refers to the preservation of a small company of believers as “a remnant according to the election of grace” (Romans 11:5). The promises of God are sure—he will always keep a witness alive. There never will be a generation on the earth without

the inclusion of some believers. Not only will there always be believers, but some of those believers will be Jews.

AMOS / **CONCLUSION**

All nations come under the government of God. He sets the standards. Although he is amazingly patient (2 Peter 3:9), he will nevertheless punish the nations for their inhumanity and corruption.

If cruelty makes Him angry, it is because His heart is set upon kindness. If oppression stirs up His wrath, it is because His purpose for man is that he should live in peace. If the sorrows inflicted upon man by man call down His judgement, it is because the one great desire of His heart for humanity is that of its well-being and happiness. His government always moves toward the establishment of the best and highest conditions. God is angry with everything that mars; strife, cruelty, war, oppression, because these are against the aim of His government.¹⁰

God judges and God punishes the nations. But he is far more severe on those who should know better: “For everyone to whom much is given, from him much will be required; and to whom much has been committed, of him they will ask the more” (Luke 12:48). This is a principle that applies to nations as well as to individuals. Israel, with all its privileges, is judged with greater strictness. Amos, like most prophets, exposes the sins of the people, warns of the coming judgement, emphasizes the righteousness of God and, in a most remarkable manner, reveals the outstanding mercy of God in a future deliverance.

¹⁰ Thomas Nelson, *Nelsons's Complete Book of Bible Maps and Charts* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1996), 249.

AMOS / APPLICATION AND REFLECTION

1. Avoid idolatry and false worship

Idolatry is an abiding problem (2:8; 5:26; 8:14; cf. 1 John 5:21). Although some may try to justify the use of images as “aids to worship,” drawings, paintings, stained-glass windows and sculptures can easily assume the role of idols. Furthermore, as in the days of Amos, the worship of God can still become a formality, relying on externals and “going through the motions” (4:4–5; 5:21–24). God deserves worship that engages the mind, is whole-hearted and involves the commitment of the will. He seeks worship that is not only sincere but also according to revealed truth. God is not only to be worshipped as he requires, but in the way that he requires—“in spirit and truth” (John 4:24).

2. Promote social justice

In Amos’ day, “justice” was bought by the wealthy. The poor and needy were crushed by the powerful (2:6–7; cf. James 2:5–9). The Israelites were guilty of neglecting “the weightier matters of the law: justice and mercy and faith” (Matthew 23:23). It is our Christian duty, “as we have opportunity, let us do good to all, especially to those who are of the household of faith” (Galatians 6:10). Churches that neglect social responsibility and place a one-sided emphasis on individualistic salvation clearly indicate that they have not yet caught up with Amos—or with Christ!¹¹

The Lord is a protector of the poor, the widow and the orphan. He defends the downtrodden (Psalm 68:5–6,10). Christians are to share his compassion and practical concern (James 1:27; Acts 2:45; 4:34–35). The godly, virtuous woman “extends her hand to the poor, yes, she reaches out her hands to the needy” (Proverbs 31:20).

Social justice is required of the people of God. God speaks out against the abuse of wealth, power and privilege. The book of Amos “stands as an eloquent witness against those who subordinate human need and dignity to the pursuit of wealth and pleasure.”¹²

¹¹ Campbell Morgan, *Student Survey of the Bible*, 283.

¹² William Hendriksen, *Survey of the Bible: A Treasury of Bible Information* (Welwyn: Evangelical Press, 1976), 231.

3. Shun materialism

Let the wise pray:

Give me neither poverty nor riches—
 Feed me with the food allotted to me;
 Lest I be full and deny You,
 And say, “Who is the LORD?” (Proverbs 30:8-9).

It is all too easy to forget the Lord in times of prosperity and to become complacent, taking credit to oneself, instead of being grateful to the Lord for his provision (Deuteronomy 8:11-18). We are servants entrusted with the Master’s goods.

4. Opposition to the Word

Although Amos was a faithful messenger of the Lord, he experienced opposition from what we might term “church and state.” Amaziah represents religious animosity and Jeroboam civil animosity. The Lord Jesus was crucified as a result of hostile opposition from the religious authorities of Judaism and the civil authorities of Rome.

When the apostles Peter and John were brought before the Sanhedrin, the ruling body of the Jews, they were commanded “not to speak at all nor teach in the name of Jesus” (Acts 4:18). While God requires his people to “be subject to the governing authorities” (Romans 13:1), there is a limit to that submission. Submission to governing authorities is no longer appropriate when it involves a compromise of Christian principle or a violation of God’s Word. Hence, the apostles boldly replied to the Sanhedrin: “Whether it is right in the sight of God to listen to you more than to God, you judge. For we cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard” (Acts 4:19-20).

The church of Jesus Christ has often been persecuted by devotees of false religion and pseudo-Christianity. They have had no hesitation in misrepresenting the true people of God before the civil authorities as troublemakers stirring up strife.



OBADIAH

MEANING

"servant of God"

AUTHOR

Obadiah

KEY THOUGHT

**As you have done, it
shall be done to you**

THEME

***A solemn warning to the enemies
of the people of God***

THEME VERSE

***"As you have done, it shall be done to you;
Your reprisal shall return upon your own head."***

OBADIAH v.15

OBADIAH / **SUMMARY**

PART 1 / **THE DECLARATION OF GOD'S
JUDGEMENT AGAINST EDOM**

vv.1-9

PART 2 / **THE REASON FOR GOD'S
JUDGEMENT AGAINST EDOM**

vv.10-14

PART 3 / **THE OUTCOME OF GOD'S
JUDGEMENT AGAINST EDOM**

vv.15-16

PART 4 / **RESTORATION FOR ISRAEL AND
TRIUMPH OVER EDOM**

vv.17-21

OBADIAH

The book of Obadiah is the shortest book in the Old Testament. Consisting of just twenty-one verses, it deals with the bitter hostility shown by Edom, the descendants of Jacob's twin brother Esau, toward the Israelites, the chosen people of God.

The first impression made upon the mind by the reading of this very brief prophecy is that it has very little in the nature of a message to this age. We may lay it down however, as a principle always to be observed and acted upon, that those passages or books of Scripture which seem to have least in them, need the most careful attention, and invariably yield the most remarkable results.¹

OBADIAH / **AUTHOR**

The introductory verses of the prophetic books often contain the name of the prophet's father, information about the time in which the prophet lived, or reference to his hometown (cf. Isaiah 1:1; Amos 1:1; Micah 1:1). The introductory verses of Obadiah provide no such information. Even the name has been questioned as authentic in so far as *Obadiah* means "worshipper of God" or "servant of God," and may be a pseudonym.²

There are thirteen men in the Old Testament who bear the name Obadiah. There have been many attempts to identify Obadiah the prophet with one or other of them. Some scholars, both Jewish and early Christian, identified the prophet with Obadiah the governor of King Ahab's palace (1 Kings 18:3; c. 860 B.C.). That Obadiah held a position of national importance, was a secret worshipper of Jehovah and kept 100 prophets of the Lord alive and hidden from the persecutions of Queen Jezebel. The prophet Elijah confronted him and, in spite of Obadiah's timidity, he was persuaded to relay a message to Ahab and set up a large-scale national meeting on Mount Carmel.

¹ G. Campbell Morgan, *Student Survey of the Bible* (Iowa Falls: World Bible Publishers, 1993), 291.

² Edward Marbury, *Obadiah and Habakkuk* (1649–1650; Minneapolis: Klock and Klock, 1979), 1.

The internal evidence of this prophetic book suggest other time-frames for its origin.

In the absence of clear testimony from anywhere in the Scriptures, it is unwise to struggle to identify Obadiah the prophet with any other person of the same name.

OBADIAH / HISTORICAL SETTING

Without definite information at the opening of the book, the internal contents of the book itself are the only evidence by which to determine the historical setting. The prophecy of Obadiah is a response to an act of extreme aggression shown by Edom against Israel. This leads to a number of possibilities. Two occasions stand out as the most likely: either following the Babylonian captivity (586 B.C.) or 250 years earlier during, or soon after, the reign of Jehoram, king of Judah (853–841 B.C.). Both fit the contents of the book of Obadiah, and there is no means of resolving the issue from Scripture with any degree of certainty.

1. Following the Babylonian captivity (after 586 B.C.)

Most scholars place the prophecy of Obadiah in the sixth century B.C., either close to the exile of Judah by Nebuchadnezzar or later in that century.³ This means that verses 11–16 are seen as referring to the fall of Jerusalem and the exile of the people of Judah to the land of Babylon:

And the LORD God of their fathers sent *warnings* to them by His messengers, rising up early and sending *them*, because He had compassion on His people and on His dwelling place. But they mocked the messengers of God, despised His words, and scoffed at His prophets, until the wrath of the LORD arose against His people, till *there was no remedy*.

Therefore He brought against them the king of the Chaldeans, who killed their young men with the sword in the house of their sanctuary, and had no compassion on young man or virgin, on the aged or the weak; He gave *them* all into his hand. And all the

³ Raymond B. Dillard and Tremper Longman III, *An Introduction to the Old Testament* (Leicester: Apollos, 1995), 386.

articles from the house of God, great and small, the treasures of the house of the LORD, and the treasures of the king and of his leaders, all *these* he took to Babylon. Then they burned the house of God, broke down the wall of Jerusalem, burned all its palaces with fire, and destroyed all its precious possessions. And those who escaped from the sword he carried away to Babylon, where they became servants to him and his sons until the rule of the kingdom of Persia, to fulfill the word of the LORD by the mouth of Jeremiah, until the land had enjoyed her Sabbaths. As long as she lay desolate she kept Sabbath, to fulfill seventy years (2 Chronicles 36:15–21).

From Psalm 137 it is evident that the Edomites encouraged Nebuchadnezzar to annihilate their old enemy:

By the rivers of Babylon,
There we sat down, yea, we wept
When we remembered Zion....
Remember, O LORD, against the sons of Edom
The day of Jerusalem,
Who said, "Raze it, raze it,
To its very foundation!" (Psalm 137:1,7).

This atrocity is also remembered in the book of Lamentations:

Rejoice and be glad, O daughter of Edom,
You who dwell in the land of Uz!
The cup shall also pass over to you
And you shall become drunk and make yourself naked.

The punishment of your iniquity is accomplished,
O daughter of Zion;
He will no longer send you into captivity.
He will punish your iniquity,
O daughter of Edom;
He will uncover your sins! (Lamentations 4:21–22).

2. During, or soon after, the reign of King Jehoram of Judah (853–841 B.C.)

E.J. Young argues that it is not necessary to interpret verses 11–14 as referring to the destruction of Jerusalem.⁴ These words may also refer to the events that occurred during the reign of Jehoram (2 Kings 8:16–24; 2 Chronicles 21:1–20) when the Philistines and Arabians invaded Judah:

Moreover the LORD stirred up against Jehoram the spirit of the Philistines and the Arabians who were near the Ethiopians. And they came up into Judah and invaded it, and carried away all the possessions that were found in the king's house, and also his sons and his wives, so that there was not a son left to him except Jehoahaz [i.e., Ahaziah, 22:1], the youngest of his sons (2 Chronicles 21:16–17).

Delitzsch is convinced that even the second part of the prophecy of Obadiah may be explained in the light of the circumstances and consequences of this catastrophe in Jerusalem.⁵

Further indications of the severe hostility from Edom toward Israel at that time are found in the books of Amos and Joel. The ministry of the prophet Amos is located during the reigns of Uzziah of Judah and Jeroboam II of Israel (Amos 1:1), which places it somewhere in the period 793–753 B.C. Amos refers to the hostility of Edom toward Israel, and the severity of that ill-feeling would dovetail with Obadiah's prophecy:

Thus says the LORD:

“For three transgressions of Gaza, and for four,
I will not turn away its *punishment*,
Because they took captive the whole captivity
To deliver them up to Edom” (Amos 1:6, emphasis added).

⁴ Edward J. Young, *An Introduction to the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1949), 260.

⁵ Franz Delitzsch, *Messianic Prophecies* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1880), 57.

Egypt shall be a desolation,
 And Edom a desolate wilderness,
 Because of violence *against* the people of Judah,
 For they have shed innocent blood in their land.
 But Judah shall abide forever,
 And Jerusalem from generation to generation.
 For I will acquit them of the guilt of bloodshed, whom I had
 not acquitted;
 For the LORD dwells in Zion (Joel 3:19–21).

The Holy Spirit has not seen fit to provide information that will place the prophecy of Obadiah in a distinct point in Israel's history. This in no way reduces the value of this little book. The hostility displayed by the Edomites toward the Israelites spanned over 800 years. "It must suffice us that we know this prophecy to have been ever received in the canon of the church."⁶ It is God's Word; it is God's judgement on a people hostile and vicious in their attitude and behaviour toward the chosen people of God.

The strong relationship between the prophecy of Obadiah and the words of Jeremiah 49:7–22 suggest that Jeremiah probably relied on the prophecy of Obadiah, or vice versa.

The history of the people of Edom

As the prophecy of Obadiah is confined to the judgement of God on Edom, it will be helpful to trace the history of this people as a background to considering the contents of this book.

Trouble began between Edom and Israel before their two tribal leaders were born. Edom was the tribe descending from Esau; Israel was the tribe descending from Jacob. Esau and Jacob struggled in conflict even in their mother's womb:

Now Isaac pleaded with the LORD for his wife, because she was barren; and the LORD granted his plea, and Rebekah his wife conceived. But the children struggled together within her; and she said, "If *all* is well, why *am I like this*?" So she went to inquire of the LORD.

⁶ Marbury, *Obadiah and Habakkuk*, 2.

And the LORD said to her:

“Two nations *are* in your womb,
Two peoples shall be separated from your body;
One people shall be stronger than the other,
And the older shall serve the younger.”

So when her days were fulfilled *for her* to give birth, indeed *there were* twins in her womb. And the first came out red. *He* was like a hairy garment all over; so they called his name Esau [meaning “hairy”]. Afterward his brother came out, and his hand took hold of Esau’s heel; so his name was called Jacob [meaning “supplanter”]. Isaac was sixty years old when she bore them (Genesis 25:21–26).

As an adult, Esau was to show that he had not the slightest interest in the promises and purposes of God. Arriving home hungry from a hunting trip, he indicated how little he esteemed his birthright (which included the inheritance of the land):

Now Jacob cooked a stew; and Esau came in from the field, and he was weary. And Esau said to Jacob, “Please feed me with that same red stew, for I *am* weary.” Therefore his name was called Edom [meaning, “Red,” cf. v.25].

But Jacob said, “Sell me your birthright as of this day.”

And Esau said, “Look, I *am* about to die; so what is this birthright to me?”

Then Jacob said, “Swear to me as of this day.”

So he swore to him, and sold his birthright to Jacob. And Jacob gave Esau bread and stew of lentils; then he ate and drank, arose, and went his way. Thus Esau despised *his* birthright (Genesis 25:29–34).

Later, their father Isaac blessed Jacob, the younger of the twins, as he was leaving for Padan Aram:

May God Almighty bless you,
And make you fruitful and multiply you,

That you may be an assembly of peoples;
 And give you the blessing of Abraham,
 To you and your descendants with you,
 That you may inherit the land
 In which you are a stranger,
 Which God gave to Abraham (Genesis 28:3–4).

Over twenty years later, after the return of Jacob from his uncle Laban's home in Padan Aram, Jacob settled in Canaan (Genesis 37:1). Esau moved south beyond the Dead Sea to the land inhabited by the Horites.

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

And this is the genealogy of Esau the father of the Edomites in Mount Seir (Genesis 36:6–9: cf. 14:6).

The land of Edom

The territory which Esau and his family took possession of is a tract of land which stretches south from the Dead Sea to the Red Sea (to the port of Ezion Geber on what we now know as the Gulf of Aqabah), and east to the desert. Today this land is part of Jordan, with Saudi Arabia on its eastern border.

Two major north-south routes passed through the region. One was known as "the King's Highway" and it is to this that Moses refers when seeking safe passage through the land for the Israelites (Numbers 20:17). This route passed through a sparse growing area where there was more water, but there were also deep east-west canyons to negotiate. The other route, further east, on the edge of the growing belt, had no such steep canyons to cross. These were the two main trade routes on the east of the River Jordan, linking Europe, Asia and Africa.

Taxes imposed on caravan traders passing along these roads provided the basis for Edom's economy.⁷

The land of Edom is dominated by a range of mountains known as Mount Seir. Here Esau settled after despising his birthright (which included the inheritance of the land), and parting from his brother Jacob.

Some years later, Jacob and his whole family moved from Canaan to Egypt because of the famine.

Edom refuses a safe passage for Israel

Four-hundred years pass and Jacob's family grows from seventy members to over 1.5 million. They are delivered from persecution in Egypt, led through the wilderness and eventually arrive in Kadesh Barnea, to the south of the promised land and to the west of the land of Edom.

When the Lord tells Moses it is time to enter Canaan, Moses seeks permission to pass through the territory of Edom:

Now Moses sent messengers from Kadesh to the king of Edom. "Thus says your brother Israel: 'You know all the hardship that has befallen us, how our fathers went down to Egypt, and we dwelt in Egypt a long time, and the Egyptians afflicted us and our fathers. When we cried out to the LORD, He heard our voice and sent the Angel and brought us up out of Egypt; now here we are in Kadesh, a city on the edge of your border. Please let us pass through your country. We will not pass through fields or vineyards, nor will we drink water from wells; we will go along the King's Highway; we will not turn aside to the right hand or to the left until we have passed through your territory'" (Numbers 20:14–17).

The Edomites refuse to let the Israelites pass through their land and threaten to come against them in war if they set foot in their country. Moses gives a further undertaking that if allowed to pass they will take nothing from the land, and they will pay for any water they drink. But the king of Edom responds by mustering his forces on the border, "so Israel turned away from him" (Numbers 20:21; cf. Judges 11:17–18).

⁷ Dillard and Longman, *An Introduction to the Old Testament*, 387.

Some weeks later, the non-Israelite prophet Balaam is called in by Balak, king of Moab, to curse Israel. Rather than curse, he utters four prophetic blessings. The final prophecy includes these words,

I see Him, but not now;
 I behold Him, but not near;
 A Star shall come out of Jacob;
 A Scepter shall rise out of Israel,
 And batter the brow of Moab,
 And destroy all the sons of tumult.

*And Edom shall be a possession;
 Seir also, his enemies, shall be a possession,
 While Israel does valiantly.
 Out of Jacob One shall have dominion,
 And destroy the remains of the city (Numbers 24:17–19, emphasis added).*

So, through the mouth of Balaam, the Lord predicts the conquest of Edom by Israel.

A little later, there on the plains of Moab, the Lord commands Israel, “You shall not abhor an Edomite, for he is your brother” (Deuteronomy 23:7).

Four hundred years later (c. 1000 B.C.) the kings of the united kingdom of Israel and Judah—Saul, David and Solomon—fight against the Edomites and eventually subdue them for a time (1 Samuel 14:47; 2 Samuel 8:13–14; 1 Kings 9:26; 11:14–22). Around 860 B.C., some seventy years or so after the death of Solomon and the division of the kingdom, Edom allies with Moab and Ammon in an invasion of Judah during the reign of Jehoshaphat (2 Chronicles 20:1,22–23). A few years later, Edom revolts against Jehoram of Judah and lives in freedom for about forty years (2 Kings 8:20–22; 2 Chronicles 21:8–10). Amaziah of Judah then conquers Edom and inflicts heavy casualties—even after the battle has been won (2 Kings 14:7; 2 Chronicles 25:11–12). Sixty years later (c. 725 B.C.), Edom has regained strength and is able to attack Judah and take captives (2 Chronicles 28:17).

In 586 B.C., when Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon attacks and destroys Jerusalem, Edom encourages the annihilation of her old enemy (Psalm 137:1,7). Ezekiel prophesies:

Thus says the Lord GOD: “Because of what Edom did against the house of Judah by taking vengeance, and has greatly offended by avenging itself on them,” therefore thus says the Lord GOD: “I will also stretch out My hand against Edom, cut off man and beast from it, and make it desolate from Teman; Dedan shall fall by the sword. I will lay My vengeance on Edom by the hand of My people Israel, that they may do in Edom according to My anger and according to My fury; and they shall know My vengeance,” says the Lord GOD (Ezekiel 25:12–14).

There were 1,300 years of unabated hostility and aggression on the part of Edom toward Israel. The prophecy of Obadiah is the revealing of God’s judgement on the nation which descended from Esau, because of its persistent and unrelenting hostility and violence against the nation which descended from Jacob.

OBADIAH / **OUTLINE**

PART 1 / **THE DECLARATION OF GOD’S JUDGEMENT AGAINST EDMON (vv.1-9)**

Israel has no greater enemy than the Edomites. The latter are confident in their rocky and supposedly impregnable position, but the Lord will bring them down. Their security will prove to be false. Their hidden treasure will be discovered; their mighty men will be deprived of all strength (Jeremiah 49:7,14–16).

PART 2 / **THE REASON FOR GOD’S JUDGEMENT AGAINST EDMON (vv.10-14)**

The Lord rebukes the Edomites for their heartless treatment of their brethren, the Israelites, and points out the error of their ways:

For violence against your brother Jacob,
 Shame shall cover you,
 And you shall be cut off forever (v.10).

PART 3 / **THE OUTCOME OF GOD'S JUDGEMENT AGAINST EDM (vv.15-16)**

In the day of the Lord, Edom, like other nations, will be punished for her sins.

Obadiah's predictions about Edom were fulfilled in every detail. During the Babylonian supremacy, Edom was involved in a conspiracy against Nebuchadnezzar (Jeremiah 27:1–3, 8–10; etc.). Five years after the destruction of Jerusalem, the people were driven from their rocky homes when Nebuchadnezzar, passing down the valley of Arabah which formed the military road to Egypt, crushed the Edomites.⁸ When the Jews were restored to Jerusalem, Cyrus, king of Persia, conquered Edom and slaughtered thousands of her people. The Edomites lost their existence as a nation in the middle of the second century B.C., when they were crushed by the Maccabees, and their name perished at the capture of Jerusalem by the Romans: "As you have done, it shall be done to you; your reprisal shall return upon your own head" (v. 15). They will receive the just recompense for their evil committed against Israel.

PART 4 / **RESTORATION FOR ISRAEL AND TRIUMPH OVER EDM (vv.17-21)**

In spite of the calamity which has come upon Israel, she will rise again and will return once more to Jerusalem:

But on Mount Zion there shall be deliverance,
 And there shall be holiness;
 The house of Jacob shall possess their possessions (v.17).

⁸ A.M. Hodgkin, *Christ in All the Scriptures* (London: Pickering and Inglis, 1907), 201.

In other words, the people of Judah will be “delivered, sanctified, and enriched.”⁹

The Lord intended the Israelites to be holy because they were loved:

For you are a holy people to the LORD your God; the LORD your God has chosen you to be a people for Himself, a special treasure above all the peoples on the face of the earth The LORD did not set His love on you nor choose you because you were more in number than any other people, for you were the least of all peoples; but because the LORD loves you... (Deuteronomy 7:6–8).

The Israelites suffered a severe defeat in Jerusalem. Captives were taken. The Edomites will not just suffer a similar defeat; they will be eliminated, for “no survivor shall remain of the house of Esau” (v.18). “She is the only neighbour of the Israelites who was not given any promise of mercy from God.”¹⁰ This is not because God is unmerciful, but because Edom had persistently refused that mercy.

Israel will not only possess her own land, but also the mountains of Edom and the lowlands of Philistia. Jewish exiles will return to an enlarged homeland. For, “when the children of Israel should return from exile, God would restore to them their ancient country, that they might possess whatever had been promised to their father Abraham.”¹¹ Deliverance will come to Mount Zion and the kingdom will belong to Jehovah: “And the kingdom shall be the LORD’s” (v.21).

OBADIAH / CHRIST AND HIS CHURCH

The New Testament does not make a single reference to this short prophecy. Nevertheless, there are some interesting insights and parallels to be found in its pages.

⁹ Robert Lee, *The Outlined Bible: An Outline and Analysis of Every Book in the Bible* (London: Pickering and Inglis, 1930), analysis no. 31.

¹⁰ Clyde E. Harrington, “Edom,” in *The Zondervan Pictorial Bible Dictionary*, ed. Merrill C. Tenney (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1975), 234, cited by Irving L. Jensen, *Jensen’s Survey of the Old Testament: Search and Discover* (Chicago: Moody, 1978), 423.

¹¹ John Calvin, *Commentaries on the Twelve Minor Prophets*, vol. 2: *Joel, Amos, Obadiah* (1559; Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1986), 449.

1. Hostility against Christ

The Lord Jesus Christ is the descendant and the ultimate representative of Judah—he is “the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David” (Revelation 5:5). In his days on earth, this descendant of Jacob was confronted by a descendant and representative of Esau. When Jesus was born at Bethlehem, there was one man, an Idumean, an Edomite, a descendant of Esau, who was particularly interested in him. This was none other than Herod the Great, to whom the wise men from the east came saying, “Where is He who has been born King of the Jews? For we have seen His star in the East and have come to worship Him” (Matthew 2:2).

Herod the Great was himself “the King of the Jews,” for in 37 B.C. the Roman emperor Augustus had increased his territory until it included the five districts of Judea, Samaria and Galilee on the west of the River Jordan, and Peraea and Idumaea on the east (what are now known as Israel, Jordan, Syria and Lebanon). *Idumaea* is the Greek form of the name “Edom” (cf. Ezekiel 35:15; 36:5, *av*). Herod the Great was an Idumean—in other words, an Edomite, a descendant of Esau. The hostility continued. Herod tried to annihilate the true King of the Jews when he ordered the slaughter of “all the male children who were in Bethlehem and in all its districts, from two years old and under, according to the time which he had determined from the wise men” (Matthew 2:16).

Herod the Great died in 4 B.C. On his death, his kingdom was divided between his three sons: Archelaus, Herod Antipas and Philip. It was Herod Antipas who was challenged by John the Baptist and subsequently executed him. It was to Herod Antipas that the Lord Jesus sent a message:

Go, tell that fox, “Behold, I cast out demons and perform cures today and tomorrow, and the third *day* I shall be perfected.” Nevertheless I must journey today, tomorrow, and the *day* following; for it cannot be that a prophet should perish outside of Jerusalem (Luke 13:32–33).

A year or two later, following the arrest of the Lord Jesus, Pilate sent him to Herod Antipas:

Now when Herod saw Jesus, he was exceedingly glad; for he had desired for a long *time* to see Him, because he had heard many things about Him, and he hoped to see some miracle done by Him. Then he questioned Him with many words, but He answered him nothing (Luke 23:8–9).

The atrocities of Edom continued in the personage of Herod Antipas.

2. Hostility against the church of Christ

Some commentators see in the prophecy of Obadiah only the hostility of a nation toward the Jews and the Lord's preservation of his ancient people. The Thompson Chain Reference Bible declares this as the one spiritual lesson: "God's special providential care over the Jews, and the certainty of punishment upon those who persecute them." Robert Lee also writes that Obadiah contains a warning "against hating and harming the Jews, whose cause God Himself will undertake, and whose enemies He will destroy."¹²

The message is, however, more profound. Israel, containing as it did, the people of God under the Old Covenant, is pictured as a woman "being with child" crying out "in labour and in pain to give birth" (Revelation 12:2). The child in the womb of Israel is the Messiah. In the earliest days, the Lord God had given a promise (Genesis 3:15) to resolve the devastating impact of human rebellion and sin, together with the control exerted by "the prince of the power of the air" (Ephesians 2:2).

The hostility and violence of Edom toward Israel was yet another devilish attempt to prevent the fulfilment of God's promise (Genesis 3:15). Closely associated with this was an expression of the constant hatred between the godless and the godly.

Esau's hatred of Jacob was another expression of Cain's hatred of Abel.

And why did he murder him? Because his works were evil and his brother's righteous.

Do not marvel, my brethren, if the world hates you. We know that we have passed from death to life, because we love the brethren. He who does not love his brother abides in death. Whoever

¹² Lee, *The Outlined Bible*, analysis no. 31.

hates *his* brother is a murderer, and you know that no murderer has eternal life abiding in him (1 John 3:12–15).

During the days of Obadiah, Israel looked desolate and forsaken, whereas Edom looked prosperous, secure, arrogant, rich and powerful. The Lord promised restoration to Israel and destruction to Edom. The message of Malachi is even more graphic:

“I have loved you,” says the LORD.
 “Yet you say, ‘In what way have You loved us?’
 Was not Esau Jacob’s brother?”
 Says the LORD.
 “Yet Jacob I have loved;
 But Esau I have hated,
 And laid waste his mountains and his heritage
 For the jackals of the wilderness.”

Even though Edom has said,
 “We have been impoverished,
 But we will return and build the desolate places,”

Thus says the LORD of hosts:

“They may build, but I will throw down;
 They shall be called the Territory of Wickedness,
 And the people against whom the LORD will have
 indignation forever.
 Your eyes shall see,
 And you shall say,
 “The LORD is magnified beyond the border of Israel” (Malachi
 1:2–5).

OBADIAH / **CONCLUSION**

We now then perceive the design of the Prophet: as adversity might have weakened the Israelites, and even utterly broken them down, the Prophet here applies comfort and props up their

dejected minds, for the Lord would shortly look on them and take due vengeance on their enemies.¹³

Obadiah's prophecy is not merely concerned to pronounce judgement against Edom.

Obadiah takes the general attitude of Edom toward the people of Jehovah as the groundwork of his prophecy, regards the judgement upon Edom as one feature in the universal judgement upon all nations (cf. vv.15–16), proclaims in the destruction of the power of Edom the overthrow of the power of all nations hostile to God.¹⁴

If the kingdoms of the world shall be the Lord's as Obadiah prophesies, then the kingdoms of the world must become the kingdoms of our Lord and of his Christ. In the book of Revelation, there is recorded the ultimate fulfilment of the prophecy of Obadiah:

Then the seventh angel sounded: And there were loud voices in heaven, saying, "The kingdoms of this world have become *the kingdoms* of our Lord and of His Christ, and He shall reign forever and ever!" (Revelation 11:15).

¹³ Calvin, *Joel, Amos, Obadiah*, 418.

¹⁴ Carl F. Keil, *The Twelve Minor Prophets* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1949), 338.

OBADIAH / APPLICATION AND REFLECTION

1. Jehovah is Lord of the whole world

The underlying message of the book of Obadiah is that the God of Israel is not the God of a single nation—he is the Lord of *all* nations, *all* peoples and *all* places. He is “Lord of all the earth” (Joshua 3:11). Nations rise up against the Lord to their own destruction:

Why do the nations rage,
And the people plot a vain thing?
The kings of the earth set themselves,
And the rulers take counsel together,
Against the LORD and against His Anointed, *saying*,
“Let us break Their bonds in pieces
And cast away Their cords from us.”

He who sits in the heavens shall laugh;
The Lord shall hold them in derision.
Then He shall speak to them in His wrath,
And distress them in His deep displeasure (Psalm 2:1–5).

2. Jehovah keeps his covenant with Abraham

Under the Old Covenant, Edom’s destiny, along with that of all other nations, depended on her behaviour and attitude toward Israel as Abraham’s legitimate heir: “I will bless those who bless you, and I will curse him who curses you” (Genesis 12:3).

The promise of blessing passed to Isaac and then to his son Jacob/Israel (Genesis 26:3–4; 28:13–15). Throughout the history of the Israelites, God continually remembered his covenant with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob (Exodus 2:24–25; Deuteronomy 9:5; 2 Kings 13:23).

3. God administers just reprisals

“As you have done, it shall be done to you; your reprisal shall return upon your own head” (v.15). In the New Testament we read: “Do not be deceived, God is not mocked; for whatever a man sows, that he will also reap” (Galatians 6:7). “Judge not, that you be not judged. For with what judgment you judge, you will be judged; and with the measure you use, it will be measured back to you” (Matthew 7:1–2).

4. Salvation for Edomites

Edom was full of pride. Like their forefather Esau, they had no interest in the promises and purposes of God. They were an independent, arrogant people, so independent they thought they could do without God:

The pride of your heart has deceived you,
You who dwell in the clefts of the rock,
Whose habitation is high;
You who say in your heart, "Who will bring me down to the
ground?" (v.3).

"Pride of heart is that attitude of life which declares its ability to do without God."¹⁵

Esau is described in the New Testament as an immoral and profane person, "who for one morsel of food sold his birthright" (Hebrews 12:16). A profane person is someone who shows contempt for God, who never worships, never prays, never listens to spiritual truth, never gives thought to eternity or eternal realities, and despises those who do. The Edomites looked on the sufferings of the people of God, not just with indifference but with pleasure. This was the supreme manifestation of the evil in the heart of Esau. It was caused by the fact that he hated everything Jacob represented—faith in God, trust in his promises, reliance on God's mercy, concern for the spiritual dimension of life; for, despite all his failings, Jacob was a God-fearing man, one who loved God.

In spite of Edom's hostility, there is hope for them in Jacob's redemption, restoration and realization of the divine purpose. The nation is destroyed, yet there is salvation for Esau's descendants if they will only yield to the younger brother Jacob in his glorious representative—the Lord Jesus Christ. Thus the prophecy of Balaam will come true in the highest and best sense, in the spiritual sense:

And Edom shall be a possession [be owned by another];
Seir also, his enemies, shall be a possession,
While Israel does valiantly.
Out of Jacob One shall have dominion,

¹⁵ G. Campbell Morgan, *Student Survey of the Bible* (Iowa Falls: World Bible Publishers, 1993), 293.

And destroy the remains of the city (Numbers 24:18-19).

Does the fulfilment commence with the inclusion of Edomites in those who sought out the Lord Jesus Christ?

But Jesus withdrew with His disciples to the sea. And a great multitude from Galilee followed Him, and from Judea and Jerusalem *and Idumea* and beyond the Jordan; and those from Tyre and Sidon, a great multitude, when they heard how many things He was doing, came to Him (Mark 3:7-8, emphasis added).



JONAH

MEANING
"the dove"

AUTHOR
Jonah
(probably)

KEY THOUGHT
**A gracious and
merciful God**

THEME

***He is not the God of the Jews only,
but also of the Gentiles***

THEME VERSE

***"I know that You are a gracious and merciful God, slow to anger and
abundant in lovingkindness, One who relents from doing harm."***

JONAH 4:2

JONAH / **SUMMARY**

PART 1 / JONAH'S COMMISSION AND DISOBEDIENCE

1:1-2:10

- | | | |
|----|----------------------|--------|
| a. | Jonah's commission | 1:1-2 |
| b. | Jonah's disobedience | 1:3 |
| c. | Jonah's suffering | 1:4-17 |
| d. | Jonah's prayer | 2:1-9 |
| e. | Jonah's rescue | 2:10 |

PART 2 / JONAH'S RECOMMISSIONING AND OBEDIENCE

3:1-4:11

- | | | |
|----|-------------------------|--------|
| a. | Jonah's recommissioning | 3:1-2 |
| b. | Jonah's obedience | 3:3-4 |
| c. | Jonah's success | 3:5-10 |
| d. | Jonah's prayer | 4:1-3 |
| e. | Jonah's rebuke | 4:4-11 |

JONAH

No Old Testament character is better known than Jonah. No adventure so grips the imagination as the story of the man who was swallowed by a great fish and then, after three days, regurgitated alive on the seashore. Yet how many, knowing the story so well, understand its true import and significance?

“Jonah was a historical figure with a particular mission for God in a definite historical setting and fulfilling a vital role in the real, historical experience of God’s people.”¹ True as this is, the real value of the book of Jonah goes even further. The ordeal of Jonah, brought about as it was through his own disobedience and folly, has a significance that far surpasses any localized concern for either Nineveh, the capital of Assyria, or Israel. In the purposes of God, the history of Jonah stands as a vital link in the unfolding of God’s plan of salvation as found in the Old Testament Scriptures. Jonah’s experiences, here recorded, are distinctly Messianic. They concern God’s Son, Jesus “the Christ, the Saviour of the world” (John 4:42).

JONAH / AUTHOR

Jonah the son of Amittai was a native of Gath Hepher (2 Kings 14:25) in Zebulun. This place has been identified with the present village of El Meshed, just two-and-a-half miles north of Nazareth. The supposed tomb of the prophet Jonah is located there. Jonah may therefore have been a Galilean. This would then suggest that the Pharisees either forgot or blatantly lied when, in their hostility toward the Lord Jesus, they said to Nicodemus, “Search and look, for no prophet has arisen out of Galilee” (John 7:52).²

Many regard this little book as a myth, a story, a legend, an allegory—rather than an account of a *historical* event. Those who are confident in the inspiration of all Scripture (2 Timothy 3:16) find confirmation

¹ Gordon J. Keddie, *Preacher on the Run: The Message of Jonah* (Welwyn: Evangelical Press, 1986), 7.

² There is also the question of the birthplace of the prophet Nahum. Capernaum, in Galilee, means “village of Nahum.” Even if it was not the prophet’s birthplace, its name at least suggests a strong connection with him.

within the pages of the Bible that Jonah was a real prophet (2 Kings 14:25). That the book of Jonah is a historical account of what actually took place has been held down the years, by Jews and Christians alike, until quite recently, when sceptical scientists, who could not accept the possibility of a man being returned alive after being swallowed by a great fish, influenced the reinterpretation of the biblical material. Those who know neither “the Scriptures nor the power of God” (Matthew 22:29) readily discount the miraculous as fictitious.

Jonah’s forthright record of his own faults suggests that the book is a testimony of real experiences. A further pointer to the reality and truthfulness of this account is suggested by the fact that the Jews recognized this book as part of the Scriptures, even “though it militated against their national prejudices in exhibiting God’s mercy to another nation.”³ With remarkable openness, Jonah reveals his flaws and his wrong thinking. His humility is evident in his willingness to record his own serious shortcomings.

The strongest proofs that the incidents recorded in the book of Jonah actually happened as described are found in the New Testament. The Lord Jesus Christ refers to Jonah and his experience in the great fish as a real-life event. He also speaks of the repentance of the Ninevites as an actual occurrence (Matthew 12:40–41; Luke 11:30). That is sufficient to satisfy all Bible-believing Christians.

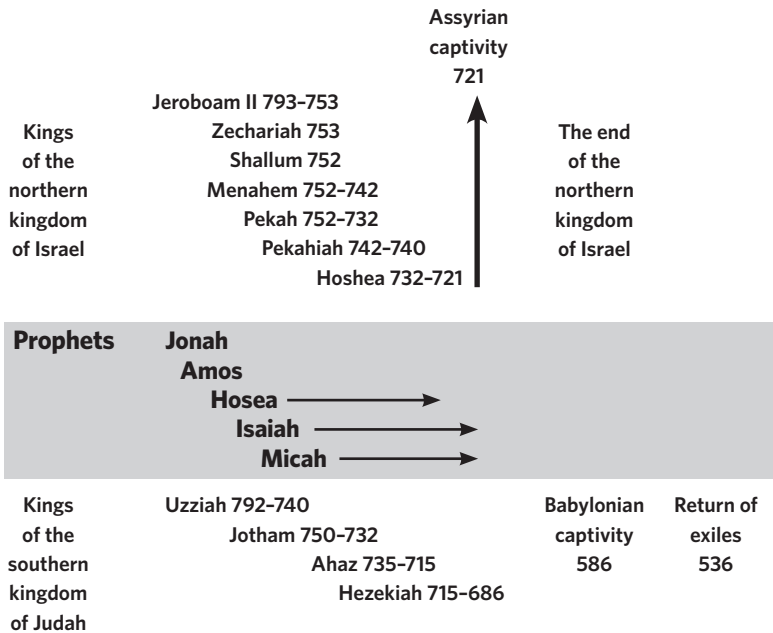
JONAH / HISTORICAL SETTING

Jonah succeeded into the prophetic office in the line of Elijah and Elisha. Some ancient Jewish authorities supposed Jonah to be the son of the widow of Zarephath, whom Elijah raised from the dead, but there is no biblical warrant for this.⁴ It is possible that Jonah was trained in the school of the prophets located at Bethel and Jericho (2 Kings 2:1–18). He prophesied during the reign of Jeroboam II of Israel (793–753 B.C.), which places his ministry just before that of the prophet Amos. So the chronology of the prophets would be Joel, Jonah, Amos, Hosea, Isaiah and Micah (see Figure 11).

³ A.M. Hodgkin, *Christ in All the Scriptures* (London: Pickering and Inglis, 1907), 203.

⁴ Robert Lee, *The Outlined Bible: An Outline and Analysis of Every Book in the Bible* (London: Pickering and Inglis, 1930), analysis no. 32.

Figure 11. Jonah in relation to the kings and prophets of the divided kingdom*



*Years are in B.C.

The only prophecy of Jonah to Israel which has been preserved is in keeping with his name: Jonah, “the dove,” brings a message of comfort and encouragement to his people. The Lord has seen the terrible distress of his people Israel and has determined to deliver them by the hand of Jeroboam II. The historian of 2 Kings records:

He restored the territory of Israel from the entrance of Hamath to the Sea of the Arabah, according to the word of the LORD God of Israel, which He had spoken through His servant Jonah the son of Amittai, the prophet who was from Gath Hepher. For the LORD saw *that* the affliction of Israel was very bitter; and whether bond or free, there was no helper for Israel. And the LORD did not say that He would blot out the name of Israel from under heaven; but He saved them by the hand of Jeroboam the son of Joash (2 Kings 14:25–27).

Israel regained the territory lost through the invasion of the Syrians.

The book of Jonah is not, however, directly related to conditions in Israel. Jonah is commissioned to preach to Gentiles, and in particular to Israel's enemies, the Assyrians, dwelling in the capital of the empire, Nineveh.

JONAH / **OUTLINE**

The book falls into two major divisions with two chapters in each. There is a clear structure and the two sections are paralleled, as can be seen from the summary at the beginning of this chapter.

PART 1 / **JONAH'S COMMISSION AND DISOBEDIENCE (1:1-2:10)**

1. Jonah's commission (1:1-2)

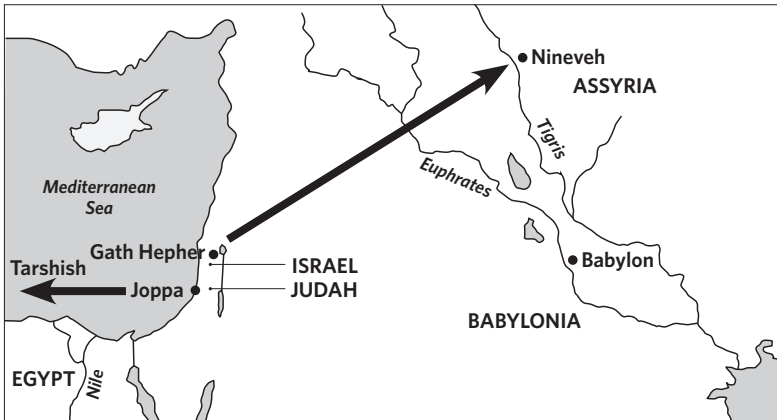
The opening word, "Now," seems to indicate that this is the continuation of his ministry, not its beginning. In other words, Jonah is already an experienced prophet when the commission comes for him to go to Nineveh.

Nineveh is described as "an exceedingly great city." Jonah speaks of it later as being "a three-day journey" (3:3). Does this indicate that it would take three days to walk around the outskirts, or that it would take about three days to walk across from one side to the other? If the former then the circumference would have been about sixty miles, surrounding an area of 286 square miles. If the latter, then the area would have been over three times larger. Jonah may have been thinking about the administrative district of Nineveh rather than the city itself. In any case, the area would have included considerable grassland (since there was "much livestock"—4:11), and an estimated population of 600,000 to 1,000,000 (including 120,000 babies and toddlers—4:11).

2. Jonah's disobedience (1:3)

Why did Jonah disobey the Lord? There is no evidence that he was a coward; indeed, he showed commendable courage at times (1:9–12). Perhaps he was unsympathetic to foreign missions. Maybe he was concerned for his personal honour as a prophet of Israel. It cannot have been the journey which put him off, since the voyage to Tarshish

Map 2. Jonah's commission and response



(if rightly identified as located on the coast of Spain) was a far more hazardous undertaking than the overland trek to Nineveh, which was only 550 miles over land (see Map 2). Tarshish, if in Spain, is located some 2,500 miles by sea—in the opposite direction!

None of these speculations concerning Jonah's disobedience is accurate, for it seems quite evident that Jonah was motivated by patriotism. Assyria was Israel's great enemy, "a vicious and cruel imperial power that constantly threatened his homeland."⁵ The prophet may even have known, by revelation from God, that the Assyrians were to be the means by which the Lord would later punish the Israelites (cf. Hosea 9:3). Jonah wanted to leave the Assyrians to die in their sins. He did not want them to experience the favour of the Lord. To obey the commission to preach to them might lead to their repentance. This in turn would bring forgiveness from God and result in their preservation, rather than destruction. The key to the whole matter of Jonah's disobedience is *his overwhelming awareness of the remarkable mercy of God*. As Jonah later admits, "For I know that You are a gracious and merciful God, slow to anger and abundant in lovingkindness, One who relents from doing harm" (4:2).

⁵ Raymond B. Dillard and Tremper Longman III, *An Introduction to the Old Testament* (Leicester: Apollos, 1995), 395.

Jonah, then, is God's prophet to Israel (2 Kings 14:25) and concerned for his own people. His patriotism is so intense that he is prepared to abandon his ministry and incur God's anger, rather than risk the well-being of his countrymen. Perhaps he even fears that the Lord will transfer his love from Israel to Assyria.⁶ So Jonah deliberately disobeys God—he goes south to the nearest port at Joppa, finds a ship destined for Tarshish and pays the fare. Jonah tries to escape the command of God to preach in Nineveh by flight to Tarshish. He is angry at the thought that God might show mercy to Israel's great enemy. Boarding ship, he sails away from Joppa in a vain attempt to flee “from the presence of the LORD” (1:3).

3. Jonah's suffering (1:4-17)

A violent storm breaks out and threatens the safety of the ship. The crew lightens the vessel by casting the cargo overboard. Meanwhile, Jonah is asleep well below deck. When the captain angrily wakes him and the lot is cast to discover the cause of the disaster, Jonah confesses his sin and recommends that he should be cast overboard, since he is the cause of the dreadful storm. The sailors respond by exerting a more concerted effort to row the vessel to land, but to no avail. Accepting his punishment, Jonah is cast into the sea. But the Lord has not abandoned him; a fish is prepared to keep Jonah alive.

4. Jonah's prayer (2:1-9)

From within the great fish Jonah utters a psalm of praise. Prayer for delivery, rather than praise for delivery, might have seemed more fitting in this predicament! But Jonah functions according to the principle of faith—he understands the fact that he is alive in the great fish as “a pledge of ultimate deliverance.”⁷ In prayer, he praises God for delivering him from drowning. Jonah has been swallowed alive by a great fish. The fish is not an agent of judgement but a vehicle of salvation. There is a distinct note of confidence as to the final outcome: Jonah sings of deliverance, as though aware that his miraculous

⁶ William Hendriksen, *Survey of the Bible: A Treasury of Bible Information* (Welwyn: Evangelical Press, 1976), 233.

⁷ John L. Mackay, *God's Just Demands: A Commentary on Jonah, Micah and Nahum* (Fearn: Christian Focus, 1993), 34.

preservation in the innards of the great fish indicates that the Lord will deliver him up once more, even as from the dead.

There are many points of comparison between Jonah's psalm and the psalms of David and his contemporaries (see Table 5). In Jonah's prayer, there are many allusions to those sacred hymns, not in the sense that he quotes from them verbatim, but more in that he is thoroughly acquainted with them and "talks their language."

5. Jonah's rescue (2:10)

Whether other men have been restored after being swallowed by a great fish is of little concern here. Even if others have lived through such an ordeal, this is vastly different. Jonah not only survives the ordeal, but he is fully conscious and coherent, both mentally and emotionally, being able to compose a psalm and worship God before being regurgitated by the great fish. For many modernists, this is a major obstacle to accepting a literal interpretation of this account.⁸ They are heedless of the fact that Jonah's experience is in the realm of the miraculous: "The LORD had prepared a great fish to swallow Jonah" (1:17). An even more remarkable miracle is yet to come in the dramatic conversion of many of the pagan Ninevites to serve the living and true God.

In response to Jonah's prayer, the Lord causes the fish to disgorge the prophet on to dry ground.

PART 2 / JONAH'S RECOMMISSIONING AND OBEDIENCE (3:1-4:11)

1. Jonah's recommissioning (3:1-2)

The story begins over again. The second half of the book draws a close parallel with the first half. The outcome this time is, however, quite different. Instead of rebelling and turning from the task, Jonah responds in obedience. It will later transpire that Jonah has not really had a change of heart. He is still harbouring resentment against the Lord for his display of compassion toward the Assyrians.

⁸ R.K. Harrison, *Introduction to the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1969), 908.

Table 5. Comparison of Jonah's prayer and the Psalms

Jonah's prayer		Psalm	
2:2	I cried out to the LORD because of my affliction, And He answered me.	34:6	This poor man cried out, and the LORD heard <i>him</i> , And saved him out of all his troubles.
2:2	Out of the belly of Sheol I cried, And You heard my voice.	139:8 16:9-10	If I make my bed in hell [i.e., Sheol], behold, You <i>are there</i> . Therefore my heart is glad, and my glory rejoices; My flesh also will rest in hope. For You will not leave my soul in Sheol.
2:3	All Your billows and Your waves passed over me.	42:7	All Your waves and billows have gone over me.
2:4	Yet I will look again toward Your holy temple.	18:6	In my distress I called upon the LORD, And cried out to my God; He heard my voice from His temple, And my cry came before Him, <i>even</i> to His ears.
2:5	The waters surrounded me, even to my soul; The deep closed around me; Weeds were wrapped around my head.	69:1-2, 14-15	Save me, O God! For the waters have come up to <i>my neck</i> . I sink in deep mire, Where <i>there is</i> no standing; I have come into deep waters, Where the floods overflow me.... Deliver me out of the mire, And let me not sink; Let me be delivered from those who hate me, And out of the deep waters. Let not the floodwater overflow me, Nor let the deep swallow me up; And let not the pit shut its mouth on me.

Jonah's prayer	Psalm
<p>2:6 I went down to the moorings of the mountains; The earth with its bars closed behind me forever; Yet You have brought up my life from the pit, O LORD, my God.</p>	<p>88:3-7 For my soul is full of troubles, And my life draws near to the grave. I am counted with those who go down to the pit;... Adrift among the dead, Like the slain who lie in the grave.... You have laid me in the lowest pit, In darkness, in the depths. Your wrath lies heavy upon me, And You have afflicted <i>me</i> with all Your waves.</p> <p>40:2 He also brought me up out of a horrible pit....</p>
<p>2:8 Those who regard worthless idols Forsake their own Mercy.</p>	<p>31:7 I will be glad and rejoice in Your mercy, For You have considered my trouble; You have known my soul in adversities.</p>
<p>2:9 But I will sacrifice to You With the voice of thanksgiving; I will pay what I have vowed. Salvation is of the LORD.</p>	<p>26:7 That I may proclaim with the voice of thanksgiving, And tell of all Your wondrous works.</p> <p>50:14-15, 23 Offer to God thanksgiving, And pay your vows to the Most High. Call upon Me in the day of trouble; I will deliver you, and you shall glorify Me.... Whoever offers praise glorifies Me; And to him who orders his conduct <i>aright</i> I will show the salvation of God.</p> <p>116:17-18 I will offer to You the sacrifice of thanksgiving, And will call upon the name of the LORD. I will pay my vows to the LORD.</p>

2. Jonah's obedience (3:3-4)

Nineveh is the capital of the Assyrian empire built by Nimrod (Genesis 10:11). Jonah preaches God's message of judgement and impending disaster. Our Lord says, "Jonah became a sign to the Ninevites" (Luke 11:30). Jonah's *message* is not the sign; it is his *person* that becomes the sign. Jonah presents himself to the Ninevites as one who has miraculously escaped from death, urging them to anticipate the danger which threatens them.⁹ When they hear of God's dealings with Jonah in response to his disobedience, the Ninevites are more likely to take God's message seriously.

"Yet forty days, and Nineveh shall be overthrown" (3:4)—in just under six weeks, the city will experience the righteous judgement of the living God.

3. Jonah's success (3:5-10)

This message of doom and gloom has a remarkable effect: there is a widespread spiritual awakening throughout the city. The people believe God and turn to him in true repentance. When the news reaches the king of Nineveh, he also repents and calls on every citizen to repent likewise: "Cry mightily to God; yes, let every one turn from his evil way and from the violence that is in his hands" (3:8). The reference to violence is pertinent since the Assyrians were noted for their extreme brutality. The cruelty they inflicted on their enemies went even beyond the savagery of the day.

The Lord sees that the repentance of the Ninevites is real. The people not only cover themselves with sackcloth and cry out mightily to the Lord, they also turn "from their evil way" (3:10).

In consequence of that repentance, it would seem that the judgement of God against Nineveh was suspended for a further 200 years. Around 650 B.C. the prophet Nahum foretold the city's destruction (Nahum 1:1-10). It was eventually destroyed in 612 B.C.

4. Jonah's prayer (4:1-3)

Jonah knows the character of God. The key to the whole book is found in this section:

⁹ Frederic L. Godet, *Commentary on Luke* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 1981), 327.

Ah, LORD, was not this what I said when I was still in my country? Therefore I fled previously to Tarshish; for I know that You *are* a gracious and merciful God, slow to anger and abundant in lovingkindness, One who relents from doing harm (4:2).

In spite of the confidence in God that Jonah expresses in his psalm, he shows himself here to be antagonistic toward the mercy of the Lord. As a prophet, he should have been the epitome of godliness and spirituality, but Jonah does everything in his power to disobey the Lord. Even when he reluctantly and begrudgingly discharges the duties of his office, he still resents the subsequent conversion of the Gentiles. He would rather die than witness this spectacle of amazing grace (4:3).

5. Jonah's rebuke (4:4-11)

Jonah cannot bring himself to feel compassion toward Israel's enemies. He still holds to the hope that the Assyrians will be destroyed. Jonah's experience in the belly of the great fish does not seem to have permanently softened his heart toward the purposes of God. He resents the Lord's gracious and merciful attitude. So God teaches Jonah another vital lesson through the growth and withering of a plant!

The message of God's outstanding unmerited mercy and his compassion on the very young is the concluding word, for the Lord says to Jonah,

And should I not pity Nineveh, that great city, in which are more than one hundred and twenty thousand persons who cannot discern between their right hand and their left—and much livestock? (4:11).

JONAH / CHRIST AND HIS CHURCH

TYPES

Jonah: a type of Christ

The Lord Jesus Christ provides the true meaning and significance of Jonah's experiences. Jonah was a sign, says Jesus, to the Ninevites of his generation:

And while the crowds were thickly gathered together, He began to say, "This is an evil generation. It seeks a sign, and no sign will be given to it except the sign of Jonah the prophet. For as Jonah became a sign to the Ninevites, so also the Son of Man will be to this generation" (Luke 11:29–30).

Jonah appears to the Ninevites as one brought back from the grave. In the same way, though on a far superior level, Jesus will be a sign to his generation. Indeed, the death and resurrection of the Son of God will be the fulfilment of the type of Jonah. Unlike Jonah, the Saviour will be swallowed and disgorged, not by a fish but by death itself (Acts 2:23–24).

The storm of God's righteous anger was raging. As soon as Jonah was cast into the sea, "The sea ceased from its raging" (1:15). Cast into the deep, the Saviour quenched forever the wrath of God toward his people:

Save me, O God!
 For the waters have come up to *my* neck.
 I sink in deep mire,
 Where there is no standing;
 I have come into deep waters,
 Where the floods overflow me (Psalm 69:1–2).

All your waves and billows have gone over me (Psalm 42:7).

Now from the sixth hour until the ninth hour there was darkness over all the land. And about the ninth hour Jesus cried out with a loud voice, saying, "Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani?" that is, "My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?" (Matthew 27:45–46).

From God's dealings with Jonah, it is evident yet again that the death and resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ were in the plan and purpose of God hundreds of years before these events took place. For although Jonah was disobedient to the command of God and consequently brought punishment upon himself, nevertheless, the means which the Lord used to correct Jonah resulted in profound symbolism. Jonah's experience in the belly of the great fish is a prophetic picture, a

foreshadowing and acted prophecy of what was to happen to the incarnate Son of God.¹⁰ Jonah's incarceration and release are a type of the death, burial and resurrection of Christ.

For as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of the great fish, so will the Son of Man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth (Matthew 12:40).¹¹

Speaking of his imminent death, the Lord Jesus told visiting Greeks,

"Most assuredly, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the ground and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it produces much grain.... And I, if I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all peoples to Myself." This He said, signifying by what death He would die (John 12:24,32–33).

The Saviour's death and resurrection are crucial to the ingathering of the Gentiles. This is the important and significant link which the history of Jonah provides in the unfolding of the divine plan of salvation in the Old Testament. Through the death of Christ, the promise to Abraham is fulfilled that "all the families of the earth shall be blessed" (Genesis 12:3). Jonah's release from the tomb-like belly of the fish, his preaching to the Gentile Ninevites and their subsequent repentance constitutes a wonderful type of our Lord's rising from the dead followed by the powerful preaching of the resurrection by the apostles, with the result that many Gentiles discovered, "the gospel of Christ... is the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes, for the Jew first and also for the Greek" (Romans 1:16).

Our Lord is one who is "greater than Jonah" (Matthew 12:41), but there are comparisons to be drawn. In Jonah's willingness to be cast into the raging sea, there is a picture of the one who willingly sacrificed

¹⁰ Keddie, *Preacher on the Run*, 70.

¹¹ The duration "three days and three nights" (1:17) is to be understood in terms of the Jewish reckoning that day and night are one unit and any part of that unit is thought of as the whole. This is important when reading of our Lord's death and resurrection, since he died on Friday afternoon and rose again on Sunday morning (Luke 23:50–24:8; cf. Matthew 12:40—see William Hendriksen, *The Gospel of Matthew* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1973), 534).

his life for the safety and salvation of others. Jesus said, "I lay down My life that I may take it again. No one takes it from Me, but I lay it down of Myself" (John 10:17–18). There is also a marked contrast: Jonah reluctantly preached to save a city; Jesus willingly died to save the world (1 John 2:2; 4:14).

Jonah: a type of the church

Jonah the Israelite was cast into the sea because of his disobedience to God. In the same way, the Israelites in their disobedience will suffer the judgement of God and be cast out from their own land. Assyria may devour Israel, but the Lord will preserve alive a remnant, even as he preserved Jonah in the belly of the great fish. As God dealt with Jonah when he was without hope, so the Word is revealed to the Israelites that if, even in their last extremity, they will turn to the Lord, he will have mercy on them and abundantly pardon (Isaiah 55:7). As Jonah was delivered so that he could fulfil his mission to Nineveh, so the remnant of Israel will return to fulfil the Lord's commission to make him known to the whole Gentile world.

The mission of Jonah was a fact of symbolical and typical importance, which was intended not only to enlighten Israel as to the position of the Gentile world in relation to the kingdom of God, but also to typify the future adoption of such of the heathen, as should observe the word of God, into the fellowship of the salvation prepared in Israel for all nations.¹²

When the promised Messiah came to Israel they refused to receive his message. The contrast is therefore brought out between the Gentiles in Jonah's day and the Jews in the day of our Lord: "The men of Nineveh will rise up in the judgment with this generation and condemn it, because they repented at the preaching of Jonah; and indeed a greater than Jonah is here" (Matthew 12:41).

¹² Carl F. Keil, *The Twelve Minor Prophets* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1949), 383.

JONAH / **CONCLUSION**

The book of Jonah holds a strategic and vital place in the purposes of God. It is an essential component in God's salvation history. God was determined to reveal all the major truths and doctrines concerning his Son before his incarnation as Jesus Christ. The experiences of Jonah when he was swallowed by the great fish speak of the Saviour's death, burial and resurrection from the dead.

This little book also prefigures the conversion blessings which will come to the whole world through an Israelite Servant of God, the Lord Jesus Christ.

Finally, the book of Jonah teaches God's people their continuing responsibility to make the gospel known to all. The church of Jesus Christ will ultimately be composed of "a great multitude...of all nations, tribes, peoples, and tongues" (Revelation 7:9). The conversion of the Ninevites illustrates the abiding truth that "Whoever calls on the name of the LORD shall be saved" (Joel 2:32; Acts 2:21; Romans 10:13). "How then shall they call on Him in whom they have not believed? And how shall they believe in Him of whom they have not heard? ...So then faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God" (Romans 10:14,17). Our Lord has commissioned his church: "Go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature" (Mark 16:15).

Through Jonah, this lesson is forcefully taught: God is the God of Israel, God is the God of Nineveh, God is the God of the *whole* world. As Paul reasons, "Or *is He* the God of the Jews only? *Is He* not also the God of the Gentiles? Yes, of the Gentiles also" (Romans 3:29).

God's message of salvation is intended for the whole world: Jonah needed to hear and understand this fact; Israel needed to hear and understand it; Christians today need to hear and understand it.

JONAH / APPLICATION AND REFLECTION

1. Providence

Note the four “prepared” things in this book: “Now the LORD had prepared a great fish to swallow Jonah” (1:17); “And the LORD God prepared a plant and made it come up over Jonah” (4:6); “God prepared a worm” (4:7); and “God prepared a vehement east wind” (4:8). There is an undoubted recognition of the sovereignty of God over nature, the natural elements and all circumstances. Christians are used to the thought of the Lord stilling the storm (Mark 4:39), but are often reluctant to acknowledge that he raises the storm in the first place (Psalm 107:25).

The great fish “vomited Jonah onto dry land” (2:10). When God works a miracle, he does not do it by halves. Jonah was not required to swim to shore, nor to clamber up muddy banks. Like Moses and the children of Israel crossing the sea when escaping from Egypt, or Joshua and the Israelites entering into Canaan via the River Jordan, he found himself on dry land (see Exodus 14:22; Joshua 3:17).

2. Recommissioning

Jonah’s experience is a warning to the servants of God against disobedience. It is also a wonderful display of divine grace in restoring one who has sinned. What a blessing not to be cast off because of faithlessness and disobedience! The apostle Peter was publicly restored after his terrible denial of the Lord (John 21:15–17). The Lord is prepared to use unworthy instruments as his messengers.

3. Prayer in time of trouble

“Is anyone among you suffering? Let him pray” (James 5:13; cf. Philippians 4:6–7; 1 Peter 5:7).

Out of the depths I have cried to You, O LORD;
LORD, hear my voice!
Let Your ears be attentive
To the voice of my supplications (Psalm 130:1–2).

I waited patiently for the LORD;
And He inclined to me,
And heard my cry.

He also brought me up out of a horrible pit,
 Out of the miry clay,
 And set my feet upon a rock,
 And established my steps (Psalm 40:1-2).

There is virtue in memorizing the Scriptures; Jonah knew the Psalms. He would have been comforted and strengthened by the conviction of David, who prayed,

Where can I go from Your Spirit?
 Or where can I flee from Your presence?
 If I ascend into heaven, You *are* there;
 If I make my bed in hell, behold, You *are* there.
If I take the wings of the morning,
 And dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea,
 Even there Your hand shall lead me,
 And Your right hand shall hold me (Psalm 139:7-10).

4. World mission

There is a right concern for our own people. The apostle Paul, in spite of being commissioned as “an apostle to the Gentiles” (Romans 11:13), shows a deep concern and compassion toward his own people (Romans 9:1-5). But a regard for our own nation or race must not cloud us to our responsibilities toward the rest of the world. The book of Jonah challenges the Israelites over their failure to have a world vision. Their history ought to have served as an impetus to evangelize all nations. The Lord’s promise to Abraham was that “in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed” (Genesis 12:3). The nation of Israel was the Lord’s servant with the commission to bring the knowledge of the Lord to the world.

The Lord’s concern for the non-Israelite world is vividly portrayed in this book in the contrast between Jonah and God. Jonah cares for a plant; God cares for people. Jonah is interested in himself; God is interested in others. Jonah did nothing for the plant. God created and provides for human beings. God has every right to be compassionate to them; it is in his nature (4:2; Exodus 33:19; 34:6). “But the LORD said, ‘You have had pity on the plant for which you have not labored, nor made it grow, which came up in a night and perished in a night. And should I not pity Nineveh...?’” (4:10-11). “I will have mercy on whomever I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on

whomever I will have compassion" (Romans 9:15). Jonah in his hatred invokes the mercy of God as a reason for refusing to preach to Gentiles. Paul in his compassion cites the mercy of God as a reason for continuing to preach to Gentiles (2 Corinthians 4:1-6).

Even in New Testament days, Jewish Christians hesitated to preach the gospel to the Gentiles. The risen Christ promised his disciples: "But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth" (Acts 1:8). The final words of the Lord Jesus Christ, before leaving earth for heaven, were clearly and powerfully expressed:

All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, *even to the end of the age* (Matthew 28:18-20).

It would seem that those disciples were not too keen to obey the world-wide commission. The persecution of the early Christian church may have been necessary in order to get the Christians moving and "scattered throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria" (Acts 8:1). The results were certainly beneficial in terms of the spread of the gospel (Acts 8:4). A little later, the apostle Peter had to be encouraged by a dream and a vision to go to the home of the Gentile Cornelius (Acts 10:9-23).

Later, Peter writes to the Christian Jews who were pilgrims of the dispersion: "But you *are* a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, His own special people, *that you may proclaim* the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light" (1 Peter 2:9, emphasis added). The salvation of God is not to be confined to one nation.



MICAH

MEANING

**"Who is like
Jehovah?"**

AUTHOR

Micah

KEY THOUGHT

**The pardoning
God**

THEME

***God hates sin and delights
to pardon***

THEME VERSE

***Who is a God like You,
Pardoning iniquity...?
He does not retain His anger forever,
Because He delights in mercy.***

MICAH 7:18

MICAH / SUMMARY

PART 1 / JUDGEMENT THREATENED AGAINST ISRAEL AND JUDAH

1:1-2:13

- | | | |
|----|--|---------|
| a. | The prophet and his hearers | 1:1 |
| b. | The Lord is a witness to the sins of Israel and Judah | 1:2-7 |
| c. | Grief over the sins of Israel and Judah | 1:8-16 |
| d. | The sins of people in power: covetousness, violence and oppression | 2:1-5 |
| e. | Their contempt for the messengers of God | 2:6-11 |
| f. | The promise of a remnant restored after judgement | 2:12-13 |

PART 2 / JUDGEMENT PRONOUNCED; FUTURE EVENTS ANNOUNCED

3:1-5:15

- | | | |
|----|--|---------|
| a. | The wickedness of the leaders in church and state | 3:1-11 |
| b. | The utter destruction of Jerusalem | 3:12 |
| c. | The restoration of Jerusalem and the glorious kingdom of God | 4:1-7 |
| d. | Judah will be delivered from Babylon and all her enemies | 4:8-5:1 |
| e. | The ruler out of Bethlehem | 5:2-5 |
| f. | Restored Israel once more victorious | 5:6-15 |

PART 3 / PUNISHMENT AND MERCY

6:1-7:20

- | | | |
|----|--|---------|
| a. | The Lord pleads with his people | 6:1-5 |
| b. | What the Lord requires of his people | 6:6-8 |
| c. | Israel's failure will be punished | 6:9-16 |
| d. | Sorrow over the sins of Israel | 7:1-6 |
| e. | Confession of sin and confidence in the Lord | 7:7-13 |
| f. | God will pardon the penitent | 7:14-20 |

MICAH

Micah was a man from the country districts of the plain of Judah. He had a passionate concern for the oppressed and afflicted agricultural workers of his day. He challenged the nation about the corruption that was so evident on every hand: Judah was constantly violating her covenant with the Lord, though she continued the rituals of religion (6:6–7). Property was taken by violence (2:2); debts were collected by force (2:8); prophets and priests were corrupt (3:11); justice was perverted by the nation's leaders (3:1–3,9); witchcraft and paganism were rife throughout the land (5:12–14); false weights and deceit were frequently used in trade (6:10–12); and family relationships had broken down, with devastating consequences (7:5–6).

Micah, with a heart full of concern for the people, warned of the judgement of God on the nation and her leaders. Spiritual corruption and social injustice were signs indicative of a people who had turned from the living God, their God, the God of the ancient covenants.

Though the sins of the people were many, yet the living God is outstanding in mercy and pardon. God would punish, but God would also pardon. Micah proclaimed the grace of God as a great motive to repentance (7:18–20).

MICAH / AUTHOR

The name *Micah* is an abbreviated form of *Micaiah* and means, “Who is like Jehovah?” (cf. 7:18)—that is, “one dedicated to Jehovah the incomparable God.”¹ The name of the prophet was suited to his character. God was everything to him. He had a high view of the holiness, righteousness and compassion of God. To judge by his writings, he was a man of powerful personality, of calm, sane judgement, tenderhearted yet faithful, and for all this he gave God the credit and the glory (3:8).²

Micah was a native of Moresheth Gath (1:1,14) a village about twenty-four miles south-west of the city of Jerusalem. The village was located

¹ Carl F. Keil, *The Twelve Minor Prophets* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1949), 419.

² Robert Lee, *The Outlined Bible: An Outline and Analysis of Every Book in the Bible* (London: Pickering and Inglis, 1930), analysis no. 33.

on the edge of rolling hills as they met the coastal plains of Judah. By giving his place of birth, this prophet is distinguished from another prophet called Micah, or Micaiah, the son of Imlah, who ministered over a century earlier, in the days of Ahab of Israel (1 Kings 22:8–28).

Micah would not have been able to engage in this exacting and demanding ministry unless he had been conscious of his divine appointment to office:

But truly I am full of power by the Spirit of the LORD,
And of justice and might,
To declare to Jacob his transgression
And to Israel his sin (3:8).

MICAH / HISTORICAL SETTING

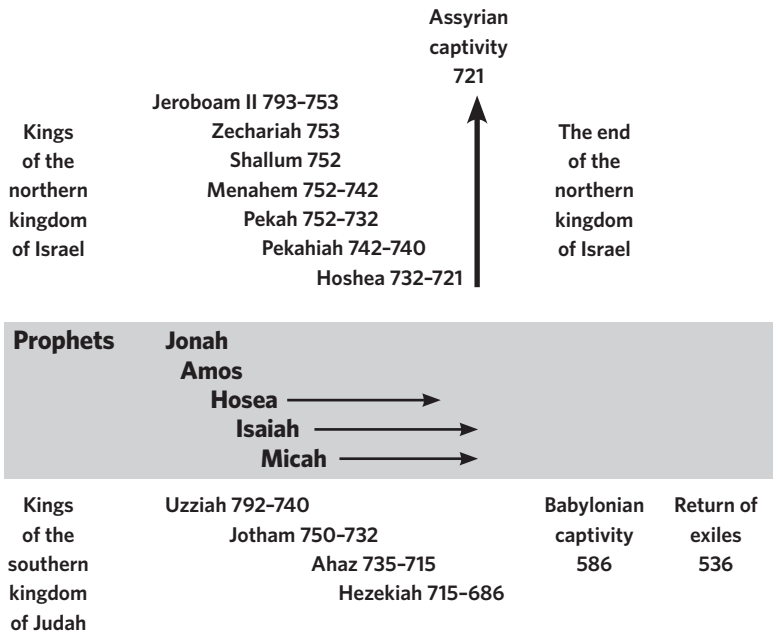
The prophet Micah exercised his ministry during the reigns of three kings of Judah: Jotham (750–732 B.C.), Ahaz (735–715 B.C.) and Hezekiah (715–686 B.C.). Consequently, Micah functioned for at least seventeen years—commencing before 732 B.C. and continuing until after 715 B.C. He lived after the prophets Jonah and Amos and was a contemporary of Hosea and Isaiah, who had begun their ministries a few years earlier (see Figure 12).³

The historical and political background of the book of Micah is the same as that of the earlier sections of the prophecy of Isaiah, although Micah has not the same familiarity with the political life of the capital. This may be readily explained in that Micah came from the countryside whereas Isaiah was from the city.

Micah began his prophetic ministry about ten years before the Assyrian invasion and subsequent captivity of the northern kingdom of Israel. While the main thrust of his ministry concerned the southern kingdom of Judah, he also included severe warnings against the northern kingdom (1:1—“Samaria” was the capital city of the northern kingdom). Throughout his ministry, the growing Assyrian empire posed a real threat to Judah. In common with all the prophets, Micah shows that national security is not achieved by political means but by spiritual repentance and dependence on God.

³ See Micah 1:1; cf. 2 Kings 14:25–27; Amos 1:1; Hosea 1:1; Isaiah 1:1.

Figure 12. Micah in relation to the kings and prophets of the divided kingdom*



*Years are in B.C.

MICAH / OUTLINE

The book of Micah does not follow a precise structure, though it falls roughly into three sections, each beginning with the word “Hear” (1:2; 3:1; 6:1).

PART 1 / JUDGEMENT THREATENED AGAINST ISRAEL AND JUDAH (1:1-2:13)

God’s anger is expressed toward Israel (Samaria) and Judah (Jerusalem) on account of the evil behaviour of their leaders and people. Micah predicts the fate of the northern kingdom of Israel (1:6-7). Judah too will not escape the judgement of God, for his anger is kindled because of their evil practices: covetousness, violence, oppression,

viciousness and breaking-up of families (2:1–2,8–9). The punishment will come and the people will be brought low (2:3–5).

The section ends with wonderful words of comfort and encouragement:

I will surely assemble all of you, O Jacob,
 I will surely gather the remnant of Israel;
 I will put them together like sheep of the fold,
 Like a flock in the midst of their pasture;
 They shall make a loud noise because of so many people (2:12).

PART 2 / JUDGEMENT PRONOUNCED; FUTURE EVENTS ANNOUNCED (3:1–5:15)

The sinfulness of the people is again identified and enumerated. The leadership of church and state is exploiting and abusing ordinary people. Censure upon the nation culminates in the prediction of the destruction of the city of Jerusalem and her temple (3:12). Well over 100 years later, elders in Jerusalem quoted this verse from Micah in defence of the ministry of the prophet Jeremiah (Jeremiah 26:16–19), with the result that the latter's life was spared. This reference in Jeremiah also locates the prophecy of Micah 3:12 in "the days of Hezekiah king of Judah" and reveals the good effect which resulted from the preaching of Micah:

Did Hezekiah king of Judah and all Judah ever put him [Micah] to death? Did he [Hezekiah] not fear the LORD and seek the LORD's favor? And the LORD relented concerning the doom which He had pronounced against them (Jeremiah 26:19).

The destruction of Jerusalem was averted under the preaching of Micah. Many repented and a great reformation took place in Judah (2 Chronicles 29:31–31:21). "Micah's efforts probably played a large part in the revival of true religion."⁴

⁴ Michael Bentley, *Balancing the Books: Micah and Nahum Simply Explained* (Darlington: Evangelical Press, 1994), 50.

Micah's prophecy was fulfilled 130 years later, in 586 B.C., when the Babylonians invaded Judah and totally destroyed the temple and Jerusalem (2 Chronicles 36:15–21).

The awe-inspiring prophecy concerning the *destruction* of Jerusalem (3:12) is more than matched by the wonderful prophecy concerning her ultimate *restoration* (4:1–8). The words of 4:1–3 are virtually identical to Isaiah 2:2–4. Isaiah may have “borrowed” from Micah; Micah may have “borrowed” from Isaiah; both prophets may have drawn on an earlier prophecy; or the Holy Spirit may have given the same message to both independently. The prophets of the eighth century B.C. held on to glorious promises of a future salvation.

The birth of a new king and his kingdom is announced (5:2–15). The Messianic King will be unique: he will be truly human, for he will come forth out of Bethlehem, and he will be truly divine, for his goings forth have been from of old, from days of eternity.⁵

PART 3 / PUNISHMENT AND MERCY (6:1–7:20)

The Lord's complaint against Judah is that he has done so much for them, but they have responded with ingratitude and rebellion. A representative speaks on behalf of the people, enquiring how to approach God (6:6–7). The answer is given that humble obedience is what is required (6:8).

The prophet responds to the threatened punishment from God: in the name of the believing remnant he confesses deep sin and widespread corruption (7:1–6). He painfully acknowledges the necessity of a severe visitation from God; all confidence is placed upon God's grace and mercy:

Therefore I will look to the LORD;
I will wait for the God of my salvation;
My God will hear me (7:7).

The Lord will hear and the Lord will restore the prosperity of his people. Judah's enemies are warned not to gloat at her misfortune. The nation will rise again and the former glory will be restored. The nations will

⁵ Compare also Micah 5:5 with Isaiah 9:6.

witness the raising up of God's people and be dumbfounded and humbled.

The grand climax of the whole book is reached as the pardoning grace of God is expressed in words of profound beauty and power: "Who is a God like you, pardoning iniquity..." (7:18).

MICAH / CHRIST AND HIS CHURCH

PROPHECIES

1. Messiah's birthplace

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 *are* from of old,
 From everlasting (5:2).

This prophecy was ascribed to the promised Messiah; even the godless Jewish leadership in the days of the incarnation were able to identify the birthplace of the Messiah. When Herod the Great asked the chief priests and scribes where the Christ was to be born they referred to Micah 5:2 and identified Bethlehem (Matthew 2:4–6).

God moves in mysterious ways (cf. Isaiah 55:8). The chosen parents (mother and step-father) of Christ lived in Nazareth, but in the providence of God they travelled to Bethlehem for the official census, with the result that Jesus was born there in fulfilment of the prophecy (Luke 2:1–7). The fact that his earthly parents originated from Nazareth, and that Jesus was brought up in Nazareth, led to initial uncertainties that he was the Christ. When Philip announced to Nathanael that they had found Messiah and that he was "Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph" (John 1:45), Nathanael responded with the question: "Can anything good come out of Nazareth?" The question was not motivated by prejudice but by prophecy. There were no Messianic prophecies associated with Nazareth. Philip wisely answered, "Come and see" (John 1:46).

2. Messiah's glorious kingdom

Now it shall come to pass in the latter days
That the mountain of the LORD's house
 Shall be established on the top of the mountains,
 And shall be exalted above the hills;
 And peoples shall flow to it.
 Many nations shall come and say,
 "Come, and let us go up to the mountain of the LORD,
 To the house of the God of Jacob;
 He will teach us His ways,
 And we shall walk in His paths."
 For out of Zion the law shall go forth,
 And the word of the LORD from Jerusalem.
 He shall judge between many peoples,
 And rebuke strong nations afar off;
 They shall beat their swords into plowshares,
 And their spears into pruning hooks;
 Nation shall not lift up sword against nation,
 Neither shall they learn war anymore (4:1–3).

Although Micah addressed his messages of "judgement and hope toward Israel and Judah of his day, he used words that transcended the immediate historical crisis and, by doing so, took his readers into the more distant future."⁶ The prophet pictures a time when the peoples of the world will flock to worship God. There will be universal peace without the least threat of war.

Micah, like Isaiah, prophesies the captivity in Babylon, but he goes beyond Isaiah in predicting the return (4:10) and rebuilding of the temple (4:2). The fulfilment of Micah 4:1–3 will pass through a number of stages: *first*, the return of the exiles and the rebuilding of the temple; *second*, the first advent of Messiah, with his suffering, death and resurrection leading to his entry into the heavenly sanctuary (Hebrews 9:11–12, 24); and, *third*, the second advent of Messiah, when he appears in glory and establishes the "new heavens and a new earth

⁶ Raymond B. Dillard and Tremper Longman III, *An Introduction to the Old Testament* (Leicester: Apollos, 1995), 402.

in which righteousness dwells” (2 Peter 3:13; cf. Revelation 21:1–4,10,22–27).

A great spiritual awakening is predicted among the nations (the Gentiles). They will turn to the God of Israel and seek to share in the blessings of believing Israelites. The Israelites were the chosen people of God under the Old Covenant,

to whom *pertain* the adoption, the glory, the covenants, the giving of the law, the service *of God*, and the promises; of whom *are* the fathers and from whom, according to the flesh, Christ *came*, who is over all, *the* eternally blessed God (Romans 9:4–5).

Gentile believers are indebted to them (Romans 15:27). The great promise to Abraham contained blessing for “all the families of the earth” (Genesis 12:3). The completed church of Jesus Christ will be composed of saved Israelites and saved Gentiles:

a great multitude which no one could number, of all nations, tribes, peoples, and tongues, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed with white robes, with palm branches in their hands, and crying out with a loud voice, saying, “Salvation *belongs* to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb!” (Revelation 7:9–10).

MICAH / **CONCLUSION**

This small book presents a summary of Micah’s ministry in the land of Judah. It sets out the basis of God’s complaint against his people, announces the certain punishment that is coming on account of their sins and reveals a glorious salvation yet to come. The centre and soul of this great salvation will be the person of the God/Messiah. By means of the book of Micah, another great step forward is taken in the preparation for the coming of Christ, the Son of the living God. His birth-place is specified; his natures are identified. In time, God will reveal how his Messiah King will be the very means by which he “will cast all our sins into the depths of the sea” (7:19) and demonstrate beyond all controversy that the incomparable Jehovah is so outstanding in pardoning sin:

In this the love of God was manifested toward us, that God has sent His only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through Him. In this is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son *to be* the propitiation for our sins (1 John 4:9–10).

MICAH / APPLICATION AND REFLECTION

1. The definition of true religion

Through the prophet Micah, the Lord corrects an unhealthy emphasis on external religion:

With what shall I come before the LORD,
 And bow myself before the High God?
 Shall I come before Him with burnt offerings,
 With calves a year old?
 Will the LORD be pleased with thousands of rams,
 Ten thousand rivers of oil?
 Shall I give my firstborn for my transgression,
 The fruit of my body for the sin of my soul?

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? (6:6–8).

Whenever the prophets draw a contrast between external observations and internal heart religion they are not intending to denigrate the place of external observations but rather to emphasize the importance of heart religion (see 1 Samuel 15:22–23). Although sacrifices were instituted by God through the law, they were never to be understood as actually removing sin: “For it is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins” (Hebrews 10:4). The design of God in those offerings was twofold: to lead the people by those rituals to repentance and faith, and to cause the people to look beyond those sacrifices to the only true sacrifice by which all sins are taken away.⁷

2. False teachers, false prophets

Severe criticism is levelled at the prophets who make the people of God go astray (3:5). Though guilty of taking bribes, of adjusting their teaching

⁷ John Calvin, *Commentaries on the Twelve Minor Prophets*, vol. 3: *Jonah, Micah and Nahum* (1559; Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1986), 342.

according to financial rewards and of declaring peace where there is no peace, yet they have a *form* of religion: "They lean on the LORD" (3:11). The false prophets, and the rest of the establishment of Judah, fail to appreciate how far their behaviour has diverged from what the Lord requires. "They profess to know God, but in works they deny Him, being abominable, disobedient, and disqualified for every good work" (Titus 1:16). They continue to profess faith in God, and claim the blessings of the covenant as theirs by right.⁸

How is it possible to distinguish Micah as a true teacher rather than a false teacher? It is not satisfactory to quote 3:8 and declare that Micah knew he was "full of power by the Spirit of the LORD, and of justice and might, to declare to Jacob his transgression and to Israel his sin." Anyone could have said that. While it was true in Micah's case, it could just as easily have been claimed by false teachers. In God's instructions recorded by Moses, guidance is provided. If the prophet speaks in the name of other gods, he is to be put to death. If the prophet predicts an event which does not come to pass you are to disregard him (Deuteronomy 18:20-22). *The test, then, of teachers or prophets is not whether they claim spiritual enlightenment, but whether they are speaking in accordance with the revealed Word of God.* In this way Isaiah laid a solid foundation for distinguishing the true from the false: "To the law and to the testimony! If they do not speak according to this word, *it is because there is no light in them*" (Isaiah 8:20).

Even the Lord Jesus Christ established his credentials on the Word of God (John 5:39,45-47; Luke 24:25-27,44). The four Gospels are full of references to the Old Testament to verify the declaration that Jesus of Nazareth is the Christ, the Son of God. The apostle John urged his readers, "Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits, whether they are of God; because many false prophets have gone out into the world" (1 John 4:1). He went on to base the test upon revealed truth, especially in relation to the person and work of the Saviour.

In a similar manner, Jude warned of "certain men" who "have crept in unnoticed, who long ago were marked out for this condemnation, ungodly men, who turn the grace of our God into lewdness and deny the only Lord God and our Lord Jesus Christ" (Jude 4; cf. 2 Peter 2:1-3). The remedy urged by Jude by which to expose and refute false teachers is to contend earnestly for the faith which was once for all delivered to the saints" (Jude 3; cf. Titus

⁸ John L. Mackay, *God's Just Demands: A Commentary on Jonah, Micah and Nahum* (Fearn: Christian Focus, 1993), 105.

1:9). Revealed truth in Scripture is the yardstick by which to test the teacher. All teachers are to remember the sober warning of James: "My brethren, let not many of you become teachers, knowing that we shall receive a stricter judgment" (James 3:1). It is one thing to believe error; it is far worse to teach it.

3. A divisive gospel

When the Lord Jesus Christ sent out his twelve apostles to preach and heal in the towns and villages of Judah and Galilee he loosely quoted the prophet Micah (7:6):

Do not think that I came to bring peace on earth. I did not come to bring peace but a sword. For I have come to "set a man against his father, a daughter against her mother, and a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law"; and "a man's enemies *will* be those of his *own* household." He who loves father or mother more than Me is not worthy of Me. And he who loves son or daughter more than Me is not worthy of Me (Matthew 10:34–37).

There will always be contrasting responses to the gospel: some hearers will accept Christ; others will reject him. The gospel of peace does not always bring peace. Often, at least initially, the gospel brings division in a family when one member is converted and the other members react in horror and derision. Although Jesus is the "Prince of Peace" (Isaiah 9:6), responses to him vary from great love and devotion to hatred and antagonism. The greatest war zone for a new convert is frequently his own home.

4. Removal of sins

Who is a God like You,
Pardoning iniquity
And passing over the transgression of the remnant of His heritage?

He does not retain His anger forever,
Because He delights *in* mercy.
He will again have compassion on us,
And will subdue our iniquities.

You will cast all our sins
Into the depths of the sea (7:18-19).

The disposal of the sins of “the remnant of his heritage,” the elect, the chosen people of God, is graphically portrayed. As Corrie Ten Boom said, “When we confess our sins, God casts them into the deepest ocean.... then places a sign out there that says NO FISHING ALLOWED.”⁹ The free forgiveness of sins is a greater blessing than any human being could ever have imagined!

⁹ Corrie Ten Boom, *Tramp for the Lord* (Fort Washington: CLC Publications, 1974), 55.



NAHUM

MEANING
"comfort"

AUTHOR
Nahum

KEY THOUGHT
Awful doom

THEME

***The destruction of
God's enemies***

THEME VERSE

***The LORD will take vengeance on His adversaries,
And He reserves wrath for His enemies.***

NAHUM 1:2

NAHUM / SUMMARY

PART 1 / THE MIGHT AND MAJESTY OF THE LORD

1:1-15

- | | | |
|----|--|--------|
| a. | The prophet introduces himself | 1:1 |
| b. | A psalm of praise to almighty God | 1:2-8 |
| c. | Assyria is condemned for her sins | 1:9-14 |
| d. | Destruction for Assyria; deliverance for Judah | 1:15 |

PART 2 / THE DESTRUCTION OF NINEVEH

2:1-13

- | | | |
|----|-----------------------------------|--------|
| a. | A call to battle | 2:1 |
| b. | Assyria destroyed; Judah restored | 2:2 |
| c. | The siege of Nineveh | 2:3-13 |

PART 3 / THE VICTOR AND THE VANQUISHED

3:1-19

- | | | |
|----|--|---------|
| a. | The evil of Nineveh | 3:1-4 |
| b. | The Lord's punishment | 3:5-7 |
| c. | There is no security from the judgement of God | 3:8-15 |
| d. | Assyria's leaders are weak | 3:15-18 |
| e. | Assyria's enemies will rejoice over her downfall | 3:19 |

NAHUM

Emphasis on the love of God may lead to an unbalanced view of the awesome nature and majesty of almighty God. Worship, even among converted, Bible-believing people, has deteriorated in many churches and fellowships. Concentration on the kindness and compassion of God, to the detriment of thought and attention focused on the might and majesty of God, has brought a low view of worship and a loss of the awesomeness of God's being. In some Christian circles, there is an almost exclusive emphasis on the person and work of God the Son and the presence and power of God the Holy Spirit, with a resulting neglect of God the Father. How many hymns and spiritual songs sung in our assemblies, and how many prayers prayed in our meetings, directly address God the Father? A sense of the holiness, glory, majesty and might of almighty God needs to be recaptured in public and in private worship, if we are to "worship in spirit and truth" (John 4:24).

The book of Nahum brings such a corrective. The message of this prophet is bold and striking. The opening chapter declares who and what God is. No believer can read these words without bowing in recognition of the Lord's awesome majesty. While the destruction of Israel's great enemy gives consolation to God's people in Judah, it also demonstrates that, even for the people of God, "It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God" (Hebrews 10:31). "Our God is a consuming fire" (Hebrews 12:29), therefore we should worship and serve him "acceptably with reverence and godly fear" (Hebrews 12:28).

NAHUM / AUTHOR

The name *Nahum* means "comfort" or "consolation." It is a shortened form of *Nehemiah*, which means "comfort of Yahweh" or "comfort of Jehovah."¹ The prophet is identified as a native of Elkosh (1:1), but the location of this town or village is not known. Various answers have been proposed through the years. One suggestion is that it was on the

¹ Bruce Wilkinson and Kenneth Boa, *Talk Thru the Old Testament* (Nashville: Nelson, 1983), 267.

Tigris River north of Nineveh, and that Nahum may have been a descendant of an exiled northern Israelite family; another that it was in northern Galilee at a site now called El-Kauzeh; a third that it was in Capernaum (*Caper-Nahum* meaning “place of Nahum the prophet”); and a fourth that it was in Judah, between Jerusalem and Gaza.² As the Lord has not seen fit to give clear indications in the Scriptures for us to locate Elkosh with any degree of certainty, the only possible conclusion must be that such information is irrelevant to the messenger and his message.

The book of Nahum is unique in that it is described as a “book” (1:1). This suggests that the prophecies recorded here may not have been preached. The other writing prophets simply made a record of their public proclamations (cf. Jeremiah 36:2,28). From Nahum we may have “something which was originally written as a pamphlet for circulation and discussion among the people.”³

NAHUM / HISTORICAL SETTING

Nahum prophesied after the destruction of No Amon (3:8), the strong fortress of the Egyptians on the River Nile, better known by its Greek name, Thebes, and before the fall of Assyria when Nineveh was demolished. This places Nahum’s ministry somewhere between 663 and 612 B.C. (see Figure 13). To be more exact is not possible.

The book of Nahum stands as a sequel to the prophecy of Jonah. Both address Nineveh, the capital of Assyria, but whereas Jonah preached a call to repentance, over 100 years later Nahum announces the destruction of the nation for its terrible apostasy.

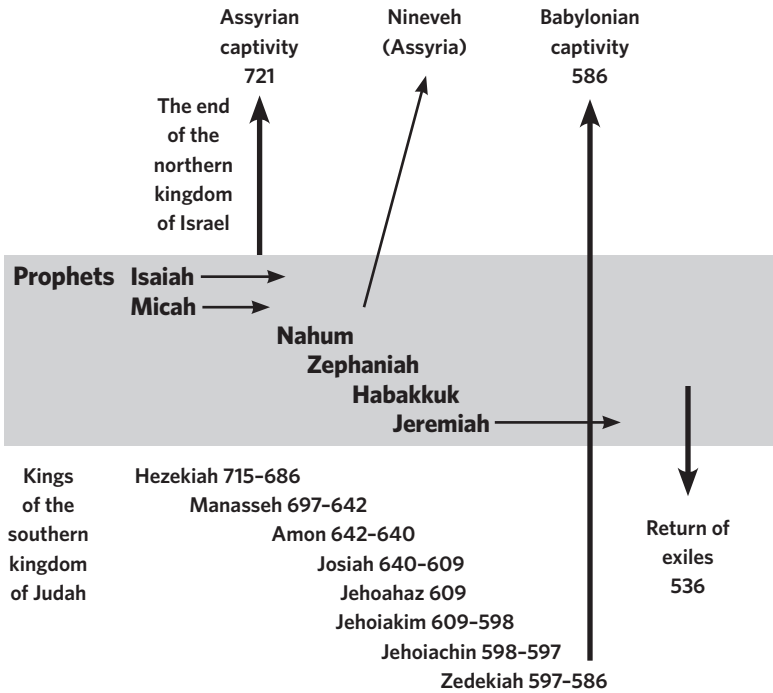
The city of Nineveh was built around 2000 B.C. by Nimrod (Genesis 10:11). It is first implied to be the capital of Assyria in the days of Hezekiah (2 Kings 19:36). A library in the city established by King Ashurbanipal provided a great source of knowledge of Assyrian and Babylonian affairs.⁴

² Raymond B. Dillard and Tremper Longman III, *An Introduction to the Old Testament* (Leicester: Apollos, 1995), 404.

³ Michael Bentley, *Balancing the Books: Micah and Nahum Simply Explained* (Darlington: Evangelical Press, 1994), 94.

⁴ A.R. Buckland and A.L. Williams, ed., *Universal Bible Dictionary* (London: The Religious Tract Society, 1914), 339.

Figure 13. Nahum in relation to the kings and prophets of the southern kingdom*



*Years are in B.C.

Somewhere during the period 793–753 B.C., the prophet Jonah reluctantly obeyed the commission of the Lord and journeyed to Nineveh. There he (eventually) preached the message given to him by God, with the result that the majority of those Gentile people repented and turned to God. This was the outcome that Jonah had feared because he knew God to be “a gracious and merciful God, slow to anger and abundant in lovingkindness, One who relents from doing harm” (Jonah 4:2). Jonah did not want the Assyrians to be given any opportunity to repent. They were a dreadful people and the enemies of Israel. In his opinion, they deserved to die under the judgement of God. With the repentance of the people, however, the threatened overthrow of Nineveh within forty days (Jonah 3:4) was rescinded.

It would appear that within a short time after that spiritual awakening with numerous conversions, the people of Nineveh once more reverted to their gross idolatry and vile immorality. They were a vicious people, noted for their extreme barbarity and cruelty. Their empire grew, threatening the surrounding nations.

In 724 B.C., the Assyrians invaded the northern kingdom of Israel and, following a three-year siege under the leadership of King Shalmaneser V (2 Kings 18:9–10), Samaria (the capital of Israel) was taken by his brother Sargon II and the majority of the people were forcibly removed into exile. The Assyrians brought in immigrants from five surrounding nations to repopulate the region of northern Israel (2 Kings 17:24). The Samaritan nation had been born.

Eight years after conquering the northern kingdom of Israel, the Assyrians, led by their new king, Sennacherib (705–681 B.C.), came up against Judah (2 Kings 18:13). Sennacherib's extreme arrogance toward the Lord God illustrated how far the nation of Assyria had fallen away from God in the short time since Jonah. Under attack from the Assyrians, King Hezekiah prayed to God (2 Kings 19:15–19) and the prophet Isaiah sent a reply back from God (2 Kings 19:20–34). Overnight, the Lord killed 185,000 soldiers. Sennacherib returned to Nineveh and within a short while he was murdered by two of his sons.

The Assyrians continued to plunder other nations. In 663 B.C., they attacked and destroyed the Egyptian fortress city of Thebes, that is, No Amon (3:8), which was built on both sides of the River Nile and considered to be impregnable. Both Jeremiah and Ezekiel had prophesied its destruction (Jeremiah 46:25; Ezekiel 30:14).

Nineveh became the strongest fortress city in the world. The thirty-metre high wall surrounding the city was wide enough for three chariots to travel side by side. Huge towers were strategically built along its ramparts. A moat, fifty metres wide and twenty metres deep surrounded the whole city.⁵

More than a century after the prophet Jonah, another prophet came addressing Nineveh (Assyria). Nahum's prophecy that the apparently impenetrable city of Nineveh would be invaded and destroyed must have been greeted with open incredulity. Assyria in Nahum's day was still like "the lion" who "tore in pieces enough for his cubs, killed for

⁵ Wilkinson and Boa, *Talk Thru the Old Testament*, 268.

his lionesses, filled his caves with prey, and his dens with flesh” (2:12). This prophet foretold the utter destruction of Nineveh and the Assyrians because of their great turning from the Lord. They had experienced God’s pardoning mercy in years past, but had so quickly deserted him. They were an apostate nation.

Nineveh, then under the rule of Ashur-uballit II, was eventually destroyed in 612 B.C., under the combined forces of the Medes and Babylonians (Nabopolassar 625–605 B.C.).

NAHUM / **OUTLINE**

Israel had been destroyed by the Assyrians. Judah had been repeatedly threatened by them. Nahum communicates a message of judgement on the enemy. Though Assyria had been blessed by God in the days of Jonah (c. 780 B.C.) and used by God in the punishment of Israel (2 Kings 17:6—721 B.C.), nevertheless her sins will not be overlooked. The Ninevites are an apostate people. They have known God; they have been blessed by God; they have now rejected God, and they will be punished by God.

PART 1 / **THE MIGHT AND MAJESTY OF THE LORD (1:1-15)**

The book opens with an introductory psalm in which God is praised for his majestic power, the punishment of the Lord’s enemies is announced and God’s goodness is declared to all who trust in him. Under the image of a fierce storm, Nahum presents the overwhelming majesty of almighty God (1:2–8). The grandeur, holiness, patience, power and justice of God are displayed as he comes into conflict with the cruel and defiant Assyrian empire:

Who can stand before His indignation?
 And who can endure the fierceness of His anger?
 His fury is poured out like fire,
 And the rocks are thrown down by Him (1:6).

Yet even here, in the declaration of the most severe threatenings, there is a distinct note of grace:

The LORD is good,
 A stronghold in the day of trouble;
 And He knows those who trust in Him (1:7).

Condemned to extinction (1:8–9), the Assyrians will be overtaken at a time when they consider themselves beyond the reach of anyone. Destruction will come while they are “tangled like thorns” (1:10).

When thorns are entangled, we dare not, with the ends of our fingers, to touch their extreme parts; for wherever we put our hands, thorns meet and prick us. Hence the Prophet says, they who are as entangled thorns; that is, “However thorny ye may be, however full of poison, full of fury, full of wickedness, full of frauds, full of cruelty, ye may be, still the Lord can with one fire consume you, and consume you without any difficulty.”⁶

The “wicked counsellor” from among them (1:11) seems to be a direct reference to the Rabshakeh, the leader of the Assyrian army, whose defiant and blasphemous words were so offensive to Hezekiah and the people of Jerusalem, and even more offensive to the King of kings in heaven (2 Kings 18:28–37). For this effrontery, the name of the Assyrians will be blotted out (1:14).

While great wrath is expressed toward Assyria, there is a note of future deliverance for Judah—the remaining Israelites in the southern region (1:15). The first chapter closes with a warning to the people of Judah to keep the terms of their covenant with the Lord: “O Judah, keep your appointed feasts, perform your vows” (1:15). Coming after what God has said to the Assyrians in such stark and graphic terms, this warning is all the more sober and impressive. The people of Judah must turn from their wicked ways or they are in danger of a similar end to that of the Ninevites.

PART 2 / THE DESTRUCTION OF NINEVEH (2:1–13)

Assyria will be conquered; Judah will be restored (2:1–2). Preparation

⁶ John Calvin, *Commentaries on the Twelve Minor Prophets*, vol. 3: *Jonah, Micah and Nahum* (1559; Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1986), 436–437.

is underway for the destruction of Nineveh. The empire that has been built on violence and cruelty will perish in the same manner. Nineveh's downfall and destruction are expressed in the most vivid terms. The Lord comes as a mighty, invincible warrior against Assyria. Nahum gives a dramatic description of the siege of Nineveh. "The prophet sees, and makes his hearers see, all the horrid sights of the tragic scene."⁷

PART 3 / **THE VICTOR AND THE VANQUISHED (3:1-19)**

The Assyrians more than deserve the punishment that will be inflicted on them (3:1–4). They will not escape God's justice. There is nothing they can do to avert the vengeance of the Lord. Just as Assyria invaded and conquered the seemingly impregnable fortress at No Amon, so she herself will be invaded and conquered. All that God can do with a people who have so openly and blasphemously insulted him over so many years is to destroy them (cf. Ephesians 2:13–15).

The prophecy ends with a rhetorical question (3:19). Only one other book in the Old Testament ends like this—the book of Jonah! Drawing attention to this powerful contrast is clearly intended.

NAHUM / **CHRIST AND HIS CHURCH**

This prophecy of Nahum, which focuses on the judgement of Assyria, was a message of comfort and a word of hope to the Judeans of the seventh century before Christ. Assyria had conquered and destroyed their Israelite brethren in the northern kingdom and was continually threatening them. The people of Judah lived under this constant threat of harassment, persecution and invasion. To hear that God was to severely punish their persistent enemies would have been a source of encouragement.

In this book we find no types or theophanies, and no prophecies that are directly related to the Lord Jesus Christ and his church. Consequently many Christians see little or no value or relevance in the book of Nahum for today. This is, however, far from being the case.

⁷ Robert Lee, *The Outlined Bible: An Outline and Analysis of Every Book in the Bible* (London: Pickering and Inglis, 1930), analysis no. 34.

The key to the book of Nahum is found in the opening psalm (1:2–15). Here the Lord is revealed as the great warrior who delivers his people and punishes his enemies:

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*.

The LORD has His way
 In the whirlwind and in the storm,
 And the clouds *are* the dust of His feet (1:2–3).

The LORD is good,
 A stronghold in the day of trouble;
 And He knows those who trust in Him.
 But with an overflowing flood
 He will make an utter end of its place,
 And darkness will pursue His enemies (1:7–8).

Behold, on the mountains
 The feet of him who brings good tidings,
 Who proclaims peace!
 O Judah, keep your appointed feasts,
 Perform your vows.
 For the wicked one shall no more pass through you;
 He is utterly cut off (1:15).

It is here that there is the strongest connection with the coming Christ, for a similar note is struck in prophecy about the Messianic King:

Gird Your sword upon *Your* thigh, O Mighty One,
 With Your glory and Your majesty.
 And in Your majesty ride prosperously because of truth,
 humility, *and* righteousness;
 And Your right hand shall teach You awesome things.

Your arrows are sharp in the heart of the King's enemies;
The peoples fall under You (Psalm 45:3–5).

He will bring justice to the poor of the people;
He will save the children of the needy,
And will break in pieces the oppressor...
For He will deliver the needy when he cries,
The poor also, and *him* who has no helper.
He will spare the poor and needy,
And will save the souls of the needy.
He will redeem their life from oppression and violence;
And precious shall be their blood in His sight (Psalm 72:4,12–14).

The warrior God of the Old Testament anticipates the warrior Christ of the New Testament. There is, however, a striking difference. In the Old Testament, God conducted his warfare against the *physical* enemies of Israel (the Assyrians, Canaanites, Philistines, etc.). In the New Testament, the warfare will be conducted in the *spiritual* domain, against Satan and his forces:

And you, being dead in your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, He has made alive together with Him, having forgiven you all trespasses, having wiped out the handwriting of requirements that was against us, which was contrary to us. And He has taken it out of the way, having nailed it to the cross. *Having disarmed principalities and powers*, He made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them in it (Colossians 2:13–15, emphasis added).

For He must reign till He has put all enemies under His feet (1 Corinthians 15:25).

The warrior Christ will battle on behalf of his people, subduing all their enemies, until the finale, on the great and terrible day of the Lord:

Now I saw heaven opened, and behold, a white horse. And He who sat on him was called Faithful and True, and in righteousness

He judges and makes war. His eyes *were* like a flame of fire, and on His head *were* many crowns. He had a name written that no one knew except Himself. He *was* clothed with a robe dipped in blood, and His name is called The Word of God. And the armies in heaven, clothed in fine linen, white and clean, followed Him on white horses. Now out of His mouth goes a sharp sword, that with it He should strike the nations. And He Himself will rule them with a rod of iron. He Himself treads the winepress of the fierceness and wrath of Almighty God. And He has on *His* robe and on His thigh a name written:

KING OF KINGS

LORD OF LORDS (Revelation 19:11–16).

Consequently, although Nineveh no longer exists, the abiding significance of the book of Nahum is found in the warring Christ of the New Testament.⁸

NAHUM / **CONCLUSION**

Nahum stands with Obadiah and Habakkuk in proclaiming God's judgement on the enemies of Judah. Nahum addresses Assyria, Obadiah addresses Edom and Habakkuk addresses Babylon. Although the people of Judah were often sinful, idolatrous and immoral, the Lord always restored them after punishment. But there was to be no restoration for Assyria. Nahum clearly reveals the principles by which the Lord judges the nations, while at the same time showing mercy to Judah. "Blessed is the nation whose God is the LORD, the people He has chosen as His own inheritance" (Psalm 33:12).

It is not only the grace of God, but also the righteous anger of God, which reveals the glory of God. God's righteous anger toward sin in all its forms and expressions is only an inevitable consequence of his holy love. God cannot truly love that which is pure, holy, good and true without hating those things that are opposed to purity, holiness, goodness and truth.

⁸ Dillard and Longman, *An Introduction to the Old Testament*, 408.

For the LORD is righteous,
He loves righteousness;
His countenance beholds the upright (Psalm 11:7).

God is a just judge,
And God is angry *with the wicked* every day (Psalm 7:11).

There can be no genuine and true love of that which is holy and good, without there also being a corresponding hatred of that which is unholy and evil. “Who can stand before His indignation? And who can endure the fierceness of His anger?” (1:6).

In grace, the Lord God has provided an answer to his wrath for those who believe in the Saviour: “He who believes in the Son has everlasting life; and he who does not believe the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God abides on him” (John 3:36).

NAHUM / APPLICATION AND REFLECTION

1. Worship

The opening verses of the book of Nahum declare the glory, magnificence and power of almighty God. The introduction, “God is jealous, and the LORD avenges” (1:2), links back to the law at Sinai and the Ten Commandments, which begin with three commandments as to how the Lord is to be worshipped and served (Exodus 20:1-7). After declaring that he alone is to be worshipped and served, and that no image or visual symbol is ever to be used to represent him, the Lord gives his reasons:

For I, the Lord your God, *am* a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children to the third and fourth *generations* of those who hate Me, but showing mercy to thousands, to those who love Me and keep My commandments (Exodus 20:5-6).

Right from the outset, the Bible presents a revelation of the true God which is intended to inspire worship and praise. The Lord God is the sovereign Creator.

To consider the vastness of the universe and to realize that it has come from the sovereign God and is kept in being by His power is to be moved to awe and wonder. This is the reaction which characterizes biblical religion, and which stands in marked contrast with the glib familiarity and flippancy so common in today’s religious scene.⁹

Add to the knowledge of his creative power and genius, his controlling wisdom, his all-seeing, all-hearing, all-knowing awareness, his righteousness, his holiness, his mercy and his grace, and the mind is nearly overwhelmed by awe and wonder! No wonder the psalmist cries out,

Oh come, let us sing to the LORD!
 Let us shout joyfully to the Rock of our salvation.
 Let us come before His presence with thanksgiving;
 Let us shout joyfully to Him with psalms.

⁹ Herbert M. Carson, *Hallelujah!: Christian Worship* (Welwyn: Evangelical Press, 1980), 34.

For the LORD is the great God,
 And the great King above all gods.
 In His hand are the deep places of the earth;
 The heights of the hills are His also.
 The sea is His, for He made it;
 And His hands formed the dry *land*.

Oh come, let us worship and bow down;
 Let us kneel before the LORD our Maker.
 For He is our God,
 And we are the people of His pasture,
 And the sheep of His hand (Psalm 95:1-7).

2. Prophecy fulfilled

The wicked Assyrians fell under the righteous judgement of almighty God in 612 B.C. Nineveh, once the strongest city on earth, was destroyed. The prophecies of Nahum came to a literal fulfilment. The king of Assyria was celebrating his successes and had given a vast quantity of wine to his soldiers, who proceeded to get extremely drunk (1:10).¹⁰ The Tigris River overflowed its banks and the flood destroyed part of the city wall (1:8; 2:6). Army deserters informed the Babylonians of the situation in the capital. The combined forces of the Medes and Babylonians grasped the opportunity and entered through the breach in the wall, plundering the city and setting fire to it (1:6,10). Considerable amounts of gold and silver not destroyed by the flames were carried away (2:9). The city of Nineveh was destroyed and “hidden” (3:11; cf. Ephesians 2:13-15) for 2,050 years; the site was not discovered until 1842.¹¹

There may have been as long as fifty years between the prophecy of Nahum and its fulfilment, which illustrates the longsuffering of God. There is a very strong parallel in the New Testament in relation to the end of this present world:

The Lord is not slack concerning *His* promise, as some count slackness, but is longsuffering toward us, not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance.

¹⁰ Buckland and Williams, ed., *The Universal Bible Dictionary*, 339.

¹¹ Wilkinson and Boa, *Talk Thru the Old Testament*, 268.

But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night, in which the heavens will pass away with a great noise, and the elements will melt with fervent heat; both the earth and the works that are in it will be burned up. Therefore, since all these things will be dissolved, what manner of *persons* ought you to be in holy conduct and godliness, looking for and hastening the coming of the day of God (2 Peter 3:9-12).

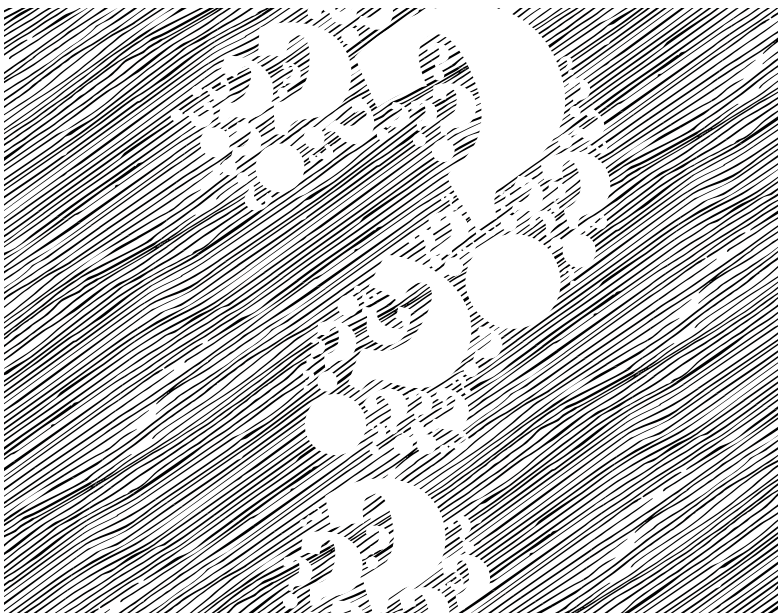
3. Warnings ignored

Interspersed within this book of judgement against Assyria is a message of reassurance and warning for Judah. There is a distinct note of comfort for the people of God (1:7), a promise of delivery from oppression (12-13) and of the restoration of the nation (2:2). But the people of Judah have to face their responsibilities and walk in obedience to the Lord (1:15) or they too will know the indignation and anger of God (1:6).

Judah failed to learn the lesson and continued to break their covenant with the Lord. One-hundred-and-sixteen years (721-605 B.C.) after the fall of the northern kingdom of Israel, Nebuchadnezzar and the Babylonians came against their nation (2 Kings 24:1; 605 B.C.). After repeated threats, rebellions and invasions, Judah was finally destroyed in 586 B.C., and the majority of the remaining inhabitants of the southern kingdom were taken captive. The Babylonian exile began (2 Kings 25:11,21).

Devastating as the judgement of God was against Assyria, and then against Judah, there is a far greater devastation coming on the whole world. The first death is bad; the second death is far worse (Revelation 2:11; 20:6, 21:8). This could be called "a living death," because it is another way of describing the everlasting hell which is the abode of unrepentant sinners, all those who are not the children of God.

The warning of this great day of God's judgement (Romans 2:5; Matthew 12:36; 2 Peter 2:9; 3:7) has profound implications for the child of God. Peter draws attention to this implication when he asks, "What manner of persons ought you to be in holy conduct and godliness?" (2 Peter 3:11). Knowing that God's prophecy of the day of judgement will be fulfilled should have a significant impact on our lives and produce every endeavour toward holiness (cf. Titus 2:11-14).



HABAKKUK

MEANING

"to embrace"

AUTHOR

Habakkuk

KEY THOUGHT

Living by faith

THEME

The mysteries of providence

THEME VERSE

***Behold the proud,
His soul is not upright in him;
But the just shall live by his faith.***

HABAKKUK 2:4

HABAKKUK / SUMMARY

PART 1 / **HABAKKUK'S FIRST CONVERSATION WITH THE LORD**

1:1-11

- a. Introduction 1:1
- b. The prophet's first question:
Why does the holy God permit evil? 1:2-4
- c. The Lord's reply: God always punishes
evil. He is about to chastise Judah. 1:5-11

PART 1 / **HABAKKUK'S SECOND CONVERSATION WITH THE LORD**

1:12-2:20

- a. The prophet's second question: Why does
the holy God use a wicked nation? 1:12-2:1
- b. The Lord's reply: God's people must be
confident that God knows what he is doing. 2:2-20

PART 3 / **A PSALM OF WORSHIP**

3:1-19

- a. The prophet's prayer 3:1-2
- b. The divine warrior 3:3-15
- c. Humbly rejoicing in God in extreme
circumstances 3:16-19

HABAKKUK

Why does God tolerate sinners? Why does he permit the wicked to triumph in their evil designs? Is he not the Almighty? Does he not have the authority, the right and the power to resolve bad situations?

God's people suffer and God appears unmoved. They are persecuted under evil regimes; they are molested, abused and ill-treated—and God seems distant. Does God care?

The invasion of the northern kingdom of Israel and the subsequent deportation of the majority of its citizens to Assyria (721 B.C.) had not softened the hearts of their brothers in the southern kingdom of Judah. Though the people of Judah had known, in the following 130 years, some “times of refreshing...from the presence of the Lord” (Acts 3:19), they had fallen back yet again into serious sin. Once more leaders in church and state, in religion and politics, were corrupt. The faithful remnant was exploited and abused. When the spiritually awakened and enlightened cried out to God in their distress, he appeared not to hear, not to heed.

Habakkuk, like so many before him and so many since, was utterly confused by the behaviour he witnessed around him and by the wickedness so prevalent throughout Judah. He had no doubt that the Lord of heaven and earth was almighty, just and holy, but why did he not intervene? “Here was a man greatly troubled by what was happening. He was anxious to reconcile what he saw with what he believed.”¹

HABAKKUK / AUTHOR

Habakkuk was a prophet (1:1; 3:1) and also evidently a member of the Levitical orchestra in the temple (3:19;² cf. 1 Chronicles 25:1); hence he must have been a resident in Jerusalem. He does not provide any biographical material, and he is not mentioned elsewhere in the Old Testament; consequently nothing more is known about him.

¹ D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones, *From Fear to Faith: Studies in the Book of Habakkuk—and the Problem of History* (London: Inter-Varsity Fellowship, 1953), 10.

² In 3:1, *Shigionoth* may indicate some musical notation.

True to his name (Habakkuk means “to embrace” or “to cling”),³ the prophet clings to the Lord and pours out his difficulties in prayer.

HABAKKUK / HISTORICAL SETTING

Unlike many of the prophets, Habakkuk does not locate his ministry in the reign of a king, or kings, of Judah, although the words of 1:5–6 would lead to the conclusion that he ministered in the years leading up to the invasions of Judah by Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon (which took place in 605 B.C., 597 B.C. and 586 B.C.). Judging from the terrible spiritual and moral conditions in Judah (1:2–4), the beneficial effects of Josiah’s reign (640–609 B.C.) and reformation (2 Chronicles 34:1–35:27) are no longer to be seen. This would place Habakkuk’s ministry in the first four years of the reign of Jehoiakim (609–598 B.C.)—that is, between the death of Josiah and the first invasion by Babylon, somewhere, therefore, between 609 and 605 B.C. (Figure 14).

Jehoiakim was a godless king totally unlike his father Josiah. He committed great acts of wickedness and led the people down the slippery slope to ruin (2 Kings 23:34–24:5). The account of the last years of Judah before the final Babylonian exile makes disturbing reading:

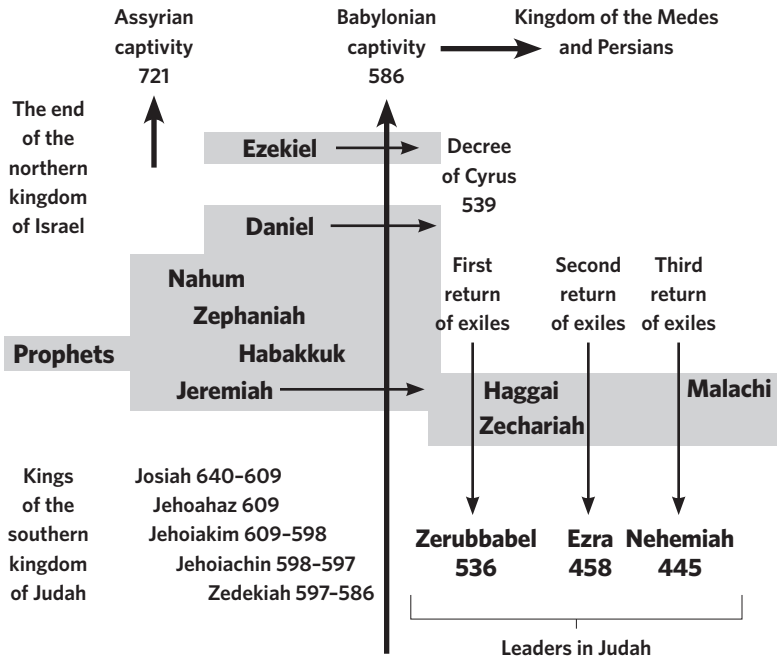
Moreover all the leaders of the priests and the people transgressed more and more, *according* to all the abominations of the nations, and defiled the house of the LORD which He had consecrated in Jerusalem.

And the LORD God of their fathers sent *warnings* to them by His messengers, rising up early and sending *them*, because He had compassion on His people and on His dwelling place. But they mocked the messengers of God, despised His words, and scoffed at His prophets, until the wrath of the LORD arose against His people, till *there* was no remedy (2 Chronicles 36:14–16).

Habakkuk was one of those messengers sent by God. He was probably a contemporary of the prophets Nahum, Jeremiah and Zephaniah.

³ The same Hebrew word occurs in 2 Kings 4:16, Ecclesiastes 3:5 and Song of Solomon 2:6.

Figure 14. Habakkuk in relation to Judah and its prophets and kings: before, during and after the exile*



*Years are in B.C.

HABAKKUK / **OUTLINE**

The whole book bears a poetic style “approaching nearer to the Psalms in structure than any other of the prophetic writings.”⁴

PART 1 / **HABAKKUK’S FIRST CONVERSATION WITH THE LORD (1:1-11)**

Habakkuk sees the people of Israel in a thoroughly backslidden state. They have once more turned to idolatry and to the gross immorality

⁴ Robert Lee, *The Outlined Bible: An Outline and Analysis of Every Book in the Bible* (London: Pickering and Inglis, 1930), analysis no. 35.

with which it is so strongly associated. The authorities in the land are powerless and corrupt. These appalling conditions are weighing heavily on the prophet's mind and heart. He has prayed frequently about the situation and called upon God, but there is no answer, no response from heaven: "O LORD, how long shall I cry, and You will not hear?" (1:2). He is bewildered by the mystery of unpunished evil in the nations and cries out: "Why do You show me iniquity, and cause me to see trouble?" (1:3). He cannot understand why the Lord allows such moral and spiritual wickedness.

Confident of the Lord's power, Habakkuk pours out his complaint. Judah is beset by oppression and violence on every side, the law is powerless and the righteous are constantly being victimized. The nation has once more fallen headlong into corruption and idolatry.

The Lord replies to the prophet's question, indicating that his silence does not mean that he is ignorant or indifferent to the situation. He is about to take action. He will raise up the Chaldeans (Babylonians) as an instrument of punishment (1:6), although they will not realize that the Lord is behind their successes; indeed, they will credit their victories to their god (1:11). The Chaldeans will sweep through the nations in overwhelming victory, subduing all peoples before them.

PART 2 / **HABAKKUK'S SECOND CONVERSATION WITH THE LORD (1:12-2:20)**

The Lord's reply to Habakkuk's first question solves one difficulty but raises another: How can a holy God tolerate evil? Indeed, how can he use an evil nation to destroy people who are less wicked?

Are You not from everlasting,
 O LORD my God, my Holy One?
 We shall not die.
 O LORD, You have appointed them for judgment;
 O Rock, You have marked them for correction.
You are of purer eyes than to behold evil,
And cannot look on wickedness.
 Why do You look on those who deal treacherously,
 And hold Your tongue when the wicked devours
 A person more righteous than he? (1:12-13).

The prophet climbs the watchtower to survey the land and wait to see what the Lord will do (2:1). The Lord instructs him to make a permanent record of the prophecy (2:2) so that it will be a testimony when it comes to pass. He encourages Habakkuk to be patient. The time for judgement is set. Those who love God must live with constant trust and confidence in the Lord: “The just shall live by his faith” (2:4).

The Lord reveals that he is well aware of the wickedness of the Babylonians. The evils of this new world power are identified and swift judgement is pronounced against their dishonesty (2:6), covetousness (2:9), the use of violence in building a town (2:12), moral corruption (2:15) and idolatry (2:18–19). The Lord promises that one day a new world order will ensue, and life will be significantly different:

For the earth will be filled
With the knowledge of the glory of the LORD,
As the waters cover the sea (2:14).

Whereas idols carved out of stone and overlaid with gold and silver are lifeless and powerless, the Creator God is sovereign and will be seen to be supreme (cf. Jeremiah 10:1–16⁵): “But the LORD is in His holy temple. Let all the earth keep silence before Him” (2:20).

The moral character of God is such that no wickedness will go unpunished. The underlying message is that everyone will eventually stand before the Judge of all the earth.

PART 3 / **A PSALM OF WORSHIP (3:1-19)**

Habakkuk does not attempt to excuse or defend the people of Judah. He humbles himself before God and praises him for his holiness, justice and righteousness. He describes the appearance of God as a great warrior, overpowering and controlling all the forces of nature and the power of the nations.

The Lord is in control; the Lord knows what he is doing. Judgement will fall on the wicked and impenitent. He works to his own timetable and according to his own counsel and purpose. The prophet prays a psalm of praise declaring the glory and majesty of the Lord, appreciated

⁵ The prophet Jeremiah was ministering in Judah at about the same period.

in the past and anticipated in the future. Whether this truth is demonstrated by past history or revealed by future prophecy, the Lord is in control. Habakkuk pleads with the Lord to, in his anger, remember mercy (3:2). He recalls the Lord's majesty at Sinai and in leading Israel into the promised land of Canaan. As he draws to mind the past demonstration of the might and majesty of God in delivering his people, the prophet trembles and hopes he will be safe when the destruction occurs. He utters his devotion to the living God and his glad reliance upon the Lord's purposes and providence:

Though the fig tree may not blossom,
Nor fruit be on the vines;
Though the labor of the olive may fail,
And the fields yield no food;
Though the flock may be cut off from the fold,
And there be no herd in the stalls—
Yet I will rejoice in the LORD,
I will joy in the God of my salvation (3:17–18).

HABAKKUK / CHRIST AND HIS CHURCH

THEOPHANIES

Opinions differ as to whether Habakkuk is describing a theophany which he himself witnessed, or whether he is reminding believers of God's appearance in the past when he says:

God came from Teman,
The Holy One from Mount Paran. *Selah*

His glory covered the heavens,
And the earth was full of His praise.
His brightness was like the light;
He had rays *flashing* from His hand,
And there His power was hidden.
Before Him went pestilence,
And fever followed at His feet (3:3–5).

This description of God may have been taken from the earlier manifestations of the Lord: in delivering his people from Egypt, appearing on Mount Sinai at the giving of the law, carrying them through the wilderness and settling them in the promised land.⁶ On the other hand, comparing these words with the similar words of Moses in Deuteronomy 33:2, Keil notes a difference in tense in Habakkuk (not obvious in our translation) in which “The LORD came” becomes in Habakkuk, “He will come, or comes,” to indicate at the very outset that he is about to describe not a *past*, but a *future* revelation of the glory of the Lord. This Habakkuk sees in the form of a theophany, which is fulfilled before his mental eye.⁷

PROPHECIES

Habakkuk echoes the strong note struck by the prophet Nahum just a few years earlier, revealing God as the great warrior.⁸ Instead of using the designation “LORD” (Jehovah, the name of God in covenant relationship with Israel), he uses the more general term “God” (*Elohim*) which is used to designate God as the Lord and governor of the whole world. He comes as the Holy One (1:12), who cannot tolerate sin and who will judge the world and destroy sinners (3:12–14). As Moses declared, following the destruction of the Egyptians, “The LORD is a man of war; the LORD is His name” (Exodus 15:3).

Throughout the history of Israel the Lord exerted his mighty power in numerous miracles, overruling nature and nations (3:8–12). By these means, he displayed his glory and saved his people. Habakkuk declares: “You went forth for the salvation of Your people, for salvation with Your Anointed.” (3:13). This is not so much a prophecy as a declaration about the past that is continually relevant. Nevertheless, what God has been doing in the past he will continue to do in the future. He has *always* been working in the world for the salvation of his people. He is always working to this end. He always will work for this purpose until the task is completed and “the Son of Man” comes “in the clouds

⁶ George Hutcheson, *Exposition of the Minor Prophets: Obadiah, Jonah, Micah, Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah* (Lafayette: Sovereign Grace Publishers, 1962), 266.

⁷ Carl F. Keil, *The Twelve Minor Prophets* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1949), 2:97.

⁸ See the chapter on the book of Nahum.

with great power and glory” and gathers “together His elect from the four winds, from the farthest part of earth to the farthest part of heaven” (Mark 13:26–27).

Who are God’s people for whom he goes forth? In regard to creation, all people of the world are God’s people. Under the Old Covenant, Israel was God’s chosen people (Deuteronomy 7:7–8),

to whom *pertain* the adoption, the glory, the covenants, the giving of the law, the service *of God*, and the promises; of whom *are* the fathers and from whom, according to the flesh, Christ *came*, who is over all, *the* eternally blessed God (Romans 9:4–5).

There never was a time, however, when all citizens of the nation of Israel were spiritual children of God: “For they *are* not all Israel who *are* of Israel” (Romans 9:6). Nevertheless, the Lord always maintained a remnant, a spiritually quickened minority who loved him and were devoted to his worship and service. This expression, “the salvation of your people,” must refer, then, not to the nation of Israel as a whole, but to that “remnant according to the election of grace” (Romans 11:5).

This salvation of his people, God accomplished (and continues to accomplish) by going forth with his Anointed (Hebrew, *Messiah*). While the words of Habakkuk may signify men like Moses, Joshua and David, nevertheless the underlying truth has reference to the Son of God. “God went forth with his Anointed, that is, with Jesus Christ, to save his people...and by this faith, by faith in this Messiah, the just shall live.”⁹

HABAKKUK / **CONCLUSION**

Why does the Lord allow his people to be persecuted? Why does the Father allow his children to suffer? Why does the Lord stand by while false religions sweep through one nation after another, debarring Christian preachers from freely proclaiming the glorious gospel? Why does the Lord permit impostors to deceive the people with a false Christianity?

⁹ Edward Marbury, *Obadiah and Habakkuk* (1649–1650; Minneapolis: Klock and Klock, 1979), 674.

The prophet Habakkuk faced the same kind of moral dilemmas we do. He could not harmonize his knowledge of the goodness and righteousness of God with the evil so prevalent in the world. While he was struggling in prayer, God gave the prophet “a wonderful insight into biblical philosophy and history, and how these things are to be reconciled with His own holiness and greatness, and how everything will eventually be perfectly worked out.”¹⁰ Habakkuk may not have understood God’s ways, but he was confident in God’s wisdom. God is consistent with himself even as he permits evil. The wicked may appear to prosper, but it is only for a little while. The judgement of God will fall upon them. Asaph faced the same dilemma as he witnessed the prosperity of the wicked:

When I thought *how* to understand this,
It was too painful for me—
Until I went into the sanctuary of God;
Then I understood their end (Psalm 73:16–17).

Habakkuk began by questioning the Lord. He closed by praising the Lord. He praised God for his person, his power and his purposes. The Lord requires faith from his people. He does not give detailed explanations of his activity or his inactivity. The answer is consistently the same: *God is good and God knows what he is doing.*

Nowhere was the activity of God more baffling to human thought than in the death of the Lord Jesus Christ: scorned and abused by the Jewish leadership, crucified by Gentiles as a common criminal and deserted by his friends. The evidence would seem to suggest that God’s purposes were frustrated. On the contrary, the purpose of God was not thwarted but accomplished! Isaiah had prophesied, “Yet it pleased the LORD to bruise Him; He has put *Him* to grief.” (Isaiah 53:10). While it is true that Jesus was taken by lawless hands...crucified, and put to death,” he was nevertheless “delivered by the determined purpose and foreknowledge of God” (Acts 2:23). What appears to human eyes and reason to be evidence of failure is in reality the greatest success. What appears to be weakness turns out to be remarkable power (1 Corinthians 1:23–25).

¹⁰ Lloyd-Jones, *From Fear to Faith*, 13.

“For My thoughts *are* not your thoughts,
 Nor *are* your ways My ways,” says the LORD.
 “For as the heavens are higher than the earth,
 So are My ways higher than your ways,
 And My thoughts than your thoughts” (Isaiah 55:8–9).

God’s ways are often baffling to his children, but he is under no obligation to explain himself to us. The Lord requires our devotion and our trust.

God moves in a mysterious way,
 His wonders to perform;
 He plants his footsteps in the sea,
 And rides upon the storm.

Blind unbelief is sure to err,
 And scan his work in vain;
 God is his own interpreter,
 And he will make it plain.¹¹

Whatever and whenever the children of God may suffer, they can be confident knowing God is fighting for them: “If God is for us, *who can be against us?*” (Romans 8:31). “And shall God not avenge His own elect who cry out day and night to Him, though He bears long with them? I tell you that He will avenge them speedily” (Luke 18:7–8).

Like Habakkuk, all God’s saints are to trust the Lord implicitly:

Though the fig tree may not blossom,
 Nor fruit be on the vines;
 Though the labor of the olive may fail,
 And the fields yield no food;
 Though the flock may be cut off from the fold,
 And there be no herd in the stalls—
 Yet I will rejoice in the LORD,
 I will joy in the God of my salvation (3:17–18).

¹¹ From a hymn composed by William Cowper (1731–1800).

HABAKKUK / APPLICATION AND REFLECTION

1. Unbelief despite warnings

The judgement of God upon Judah, which was expressed in the invasion of the land by the Babylonians, is an illustration of an even more serious judgement from God coming upon the whole unbelieving world. Paul warns Jews in Antioch by quoting Habakkuk:

Behold, you despisers,
Marvel and perish!
For I work a work in your days,
A work which you will by no means believe,
Though one were to declare it to you (Acts 13:41; cf. Habakkuk 1:5).

The quotation is applicable to all nations in all generations. Even though people are warned time and time again about the coming judgement of God, they stubbornly refuse to take notice. Many thousands have heard the gospel clearly and faithfully proclaimed, and yet they refuse to repent and believe on the Lord Jesus Christ for salvation.

2. Living by faith

Scholars are divided as to the translation and therefore the interpretation of the words of Habakkuk: "The just shall live by his faith" (2:4). Some give the sense: "The one who is righteous shall live by his faith." Others give the sense: "The one who is righteous by faith shall live." The first meaning appears to suit the context of Habakkuk (and that of Hebrews 10:38), whereas the second is the evident meaning of the apostle Paul (Romans 1:17; Galatians 3:11).

Through the prophet Habakkuk, the Lord declares the reason for his delay in delivering his people and punishing the wicked (2:2-4). Harsh difficulties in life make the distinction plain between "the proud" (unrepentant sinners) and "the just" (repentant sinners who are trusting in the grace of God). The just (righteous) "shall live by his faith" (2:4). That person has confidence that the Lord's timing is the best timing. God knows what he is doing; God knows when he will do it. Let the believer rest in God's wisdom, power and grace. "The Lord is not slack concerning His promise, as some count slackness, but is longsuffering toward us, not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance" (2 Peter 3:9).

Speaking of the great salvation “ready to be revealed in the last time,” the apostle Peter says,

In this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while, if need be, you have been grieved by various trials, that the genuineness of your faith, *being* much more precious than gold that perishes, though it is tested by fire, may be found to praise, honor, and glory at the revelation of Jesus Christ (1 Peter 1:6-7).

The second meaning of the words, “The just shall live by his faith” (2:4), is found in the New Testament and is understood in the sense of “The one who is righteous by faith shall live.” In other words, it is a declaration of the foundation of a right relationship with God. God is righteous; God demands righteousness; we live in the presence of God only by righteousness. This righteousness is provided by the Lord Jesus Christ (Jeremiah 23:6; 1 Corinthians 1:30; 2 Corinthians 5:21). It is the righteousness of God which is clearly revealed in the New Testament gospel and is ours only by faith (Romans 1:17). “But now the righteousness of God apart from the law is revealed, being witnessed by the Law and the Prophets, even the righteousness of God, through faith in Jesus Christ, to all and on all who believe” (Romans 3:21-22).

No one is made righteous by obedience to the law of God because no one is able to keep the law of God in its entirety (Galatians 3:11). If any are righteous before God, it is because they have received God’s righteousness as a free gift through faith. This has *always* been the case, for Abraham “believed in the LORD, and He accounted it to him for righteousness” (Genesis 15:6; cf. Romans 4:2-5). While, as Calvin acknowledges, “Habakkuk does not, it is true, explicitly deal with this question, and hence he makes no mention of free righteousness,”¹² the New Testament nevertheless amplifies and clarifies the meaning intended by the Holy Spirit.

The question is not what the Old Testament writers intended in such and such sayings, but what the Spirit which was in them did signify. The Prophets might often not know the full extent of their own prophecy, but certainly the Spirit, by which they spake, always did.... And who

¹² John Calvin, *The Epistles of Paul the Apostle to the Romans and to the Thessalonians* (Edinburgh: Saint Andrew Press, 1958), 54.

dare say but that He may point out more fully under the New Testament what He intended in the Old, than ever could have entered into the heart of man? (1 Corinthians 2:9-10). Surely the only wise God must be allowed to know the full sense of His own words.¹³

There is, however, no real tension between the two interpretations, “The one who is righteous by faith shall live” and “The one who is righteous shall live by his faith.” As is often the case, the New Testament amplifies and clarifies the Old. We must first be “righteous” before God, and that is only possible “by faith,” and *then* we “shall live by faith” (2 Corinthians 5:7).

It is evident that the phrase, “The just shall live by his faith,” is applied with differing emphases according to the context. In Romans 1:17, the emphasis falls on “righteousness”; in Galatians 3:11, it falls on “faith”; while in Habakkuk 2:4, it falls upon “live.”

In Hebrews 10:38, the emphasis is that of Habakkuk—to continue to live firm in the faith. The passage that follows immediately afterward in Hebrews 11 illustrates how God’s people were saved *by faith alone* before the coming of the Messiah, even as God’s people are saved *by faith alone* since the coming of the Messiah. Strictly speaking, of course, all who are saved are saved by grace through faith and even this faith is a gift from God (Ephesians 2:8).

We stand firm and secure only when we rest on God by faith:

Before a man can attain to a comfortable way of bearing trouble and waiting on God in hard times, he must first make sure of his personal reconciliation and righteousness before God, which will be only when by faith he lays hold on Christ’s righteousness offered in the gospel. He must first be “just,” and that “by faith,” and then he “shall live by faith” in trouble.¹⁴

3. Trust in difficult days

There are strong points of comparison between the book of Habakkuk and that of Job. Evil prospers and the righteous suffer. Habakkuk received the same basic message as Job,

¹³ Bell, cited by Robert Haldane, *An Exposition of Romans* (McLean: MacDonald Publishing Co., 1958), 54.

¹⁴ Hutcheson, *Exposition of the Minor Prophets*, 246–247.

In spite of all appearances to the contrary, and no matter how difficult conditions might become, he must continue to believe, continue to trust the promises of God and have confidence that the Lord of all the earth would do right.¹⁵

Years before Isaiah had expressed a similar thought:

Who among you fears the LORD?
 Who obeys the voice of His Servant?
 Who walks in darkness
 And has no light?
 Let him trust in the name of the LORD
 And rely upon his God (Isaiah 50:10).

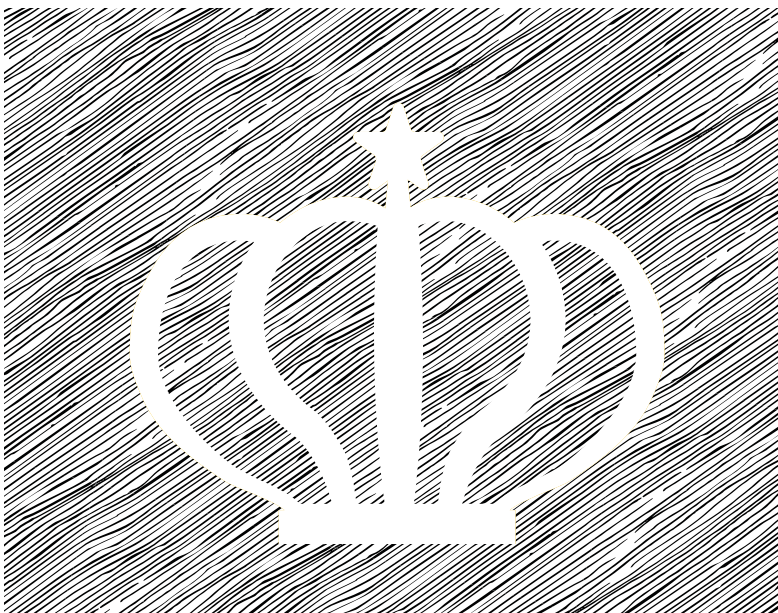
The most staggering illustration of a man clinging to God in the darkest hour is that of the Lord Jesus Christ. In the Garden of Gethsemane, he prayed: "O My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from Me; nevertheless, not as I will, but as You will" (Matthew 26:39). Christ "humbled Himself and became obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross" (Philippians 2:8). And on that cross, at the height of his suffering, he cried out, "My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?" (Matthew 27:46).

Habakkuk concludes with some of the most moving words of faith and confidence. This is the hope of all believers: that when the day of trouble comes, when the harvest fails, when livestock die and the outlook in life is desperate, they will be able to say, "Yet I will rejoice in the LORD, I will joy in the God of my salvation" (3:18).

Another suffering servant of God, the apostle Paul (cf. 2 Corinthians 11:23-28), declared the same confidence in the Lord:

Not that I speak in regard to need, for I have learned in whatever state I am, to be content: I know how to be abased, and I know how to abound. Everywhere and in all things I have learned both to be full and to be hungry, both to abound and to suffer need. I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me (Philippians 4:11-13).

¹⁵ Raymond B. Dillard and Tremper Longman III, *An Introduction to the Old Testament* (Leicester: Apollos, 1995), 413.



ZEPHANIAH

MEANING
**"hidden by
Jehovah"**

AUTHOR
Zephaniah

KEY THOUGHT
God's jealousy

THEME

***The searching judgements
of God***

THEME VERSE

***All the earth shall be devoured
With the fire of My jealousy.***

ZEPHANIAH 3:8

ZEPHANIAH / SUMMARY

PART 1 / **THE DAY OF THE LORD IS AT HAND** 1:1-2:3

- | | | |
|----|-----------------------------|--------|
| a. | Introduction | 1:1 |
| b. | Judgement coming upon Judah | 1:2-18 |
| c. | A call to repentance | 2:1-3 |

PART 2 / **PROPHECIES AGAINST THE SURROUNDING NATIONS** 2:4-15

- | | | |
|----|---|---------|
| a. | Judgement against Philistia (to the west) | 2:4-7 |
| b. | Against Moab and Ammon (to the east) | 2:8-11 |
| c. | Against Ethiopia (to the south) | 2:12 |
| d. | Against Assyria—in particular, Nineveh (to the north) | 2:13-15 |

PART 3 / **JUDGEMENT AGAINST THE CITY OF JERUSALEM** 3:1-8

PART 4 / **UNIVERSAL JUDGEMENT: A RIGHTEOUS REMNANT PRESERVED** 3:9-13

PART 5 / **THE RESTORATION AND GLORY OF ISRAEL** 3:14-20

ZEPHANIAH

At Sinai the Ten Commandments began:

I *am* the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage.

You shall have no other gods before Me.

You shall not make for yourself a carved image—any likeness of *anything* that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth; you shall not bow down to them nor serve them. For I, the LORD your God, *am* a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children to the third and fourth *generations* of those who hate Me, but showing mercy to thousands, to those who love Me and keep My commandments (Exodus 20:2–6).

The motivation behind these early commandments is given: “For I, the LORD your God, *am* a jealous God.” Fundamental to all God’s dealings with his people is his jealousy—but not the kind of jealousy so often demonstrated by human beings. Human jealousy often stems from insecurity, fear or resentment, and is expressed by suspicion of unfaithfulness. God needs no one to affirm his being or his worth. He is the only true God; he made all things; he is Lord of heaven and earth; he has the right to the entire devotion of all his subjects:

I *am* the LORD, and *there is* no other;

I form the light and create darkness,

I make peace and create calamity;

I, the LORD, do all these *things*...

Woe to him who strives with his Maker! (Isaiah 45:6–7,9)

And *there is* no other God besides Me,

A just God and a Savior;

There is none besides Me.

Look to Me, and be saved,

All you ends of the earth!

For I *am* God, and *there is* no other (Isaiah 45:21–22).

I have made, and I will bear;
 Even I will carry, and will deliver *you*.
 To whom will you liken Me, and make *Me* equal
 And compare Me, that we should be alike? (Isaiah 46:4–5).

Zephaniah is the book of God’s jealousy, God’s demand for exclusive loyalty. It is a jealousy that is expressed in righteous judgement. Yet in the midst of judgement, God expresses amazing love toward his chosen people and will go to great lengths to secure an exclusive place in their hearts.

ZEPHANIAH / **AUTHOR**

As Zephaniah is the only prophet to trace his ancestry back through so many generations there must be some significance in this. The conclusion seems therefore justified that Hizkiah (1:1, *av*) is to be identified with Hezekiah, the godly king of Judah (715–686 B.C.).¹ Zephaniah is therefore the only Old Testament prophet of royal blood, a direct descendant of King Hezekiah, who was his great-great-grandfather. As such, he would have easy access to the royal court and therefore firsthand knowledge of the corruption of Judah’s leaders in church and state.

Zephaniah means “hidden or protected by Jehovah,” and the prophet may have had his own name in mind when he wrote,

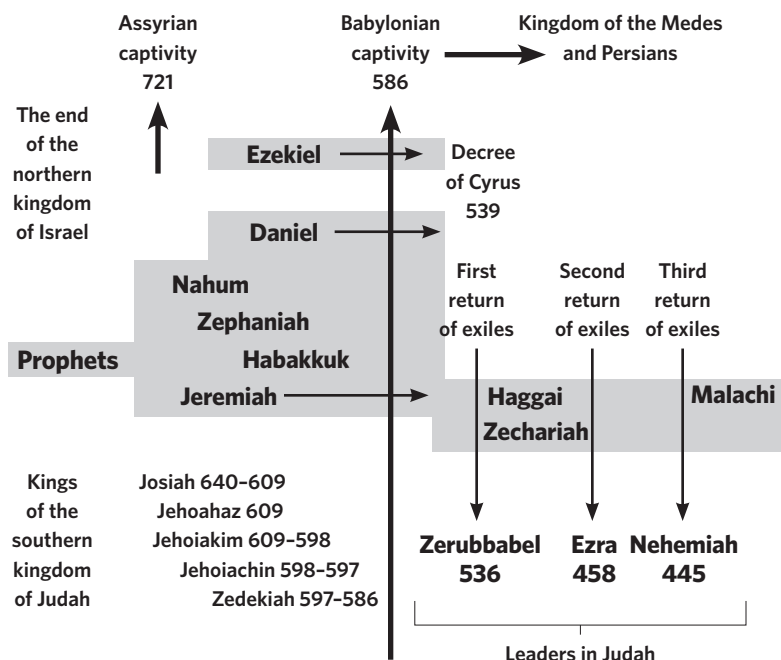
Seek the LORD, all you meek of the earth,
 Who have upheld His justice.
 Seek righteousness, seek humility.
 It may be that you will be hidden
 In the day of the LORD’s anger (2:3).

ZEPHANIAH / **HISTORICAL SETTING**

According to the opening words (1:1), Zephaniah exercised his ministry during the reign of godly King Josiah (640–609 B.C.) (Figure 15). As the destruction of Nineveh (foretold in 2:13) occurred in 612 B.C.,

¹ As in the RAV and NIV.

Figure 15. Zephaniah in relation to Judah and its prophets and kings: before, during and after the exile*



*Years are in B.C.

Zephaniah must have prophesied somewhere between 640 and 612 B.C. The imminent judgement of God which the prophet described occurred when Judah was invaded by the Babylonians (605 B.C.).

The northern kingdom of Israel (the ten tribes) had been invaded a century earlier and her inhabitants taken captive into the land of Assyria (721 B.C.). The small southern kingdom of Judah (the remaining two tribes of Israel, Judah and Benjamin) remained with her capital at Jerusalem—but her days were numbered. Continuing rebellion against the Lord, with blatant idolatry and immorality, was to lead to her overthrow and subsequent captivity in the land of Babylon.

Born during the reign of evil Manasseh, Zephaniah would be all too aware of the corruption into which Judah had so easily and so often slipped. By the time his ministry commenced, a new king was on the

throne of Judah. It is generally thought that Zephaniah exercised his ministry in the early years of Josiah's reign before that godly king instigated a religious reformation of Judah (2 Kings 23:2,8, 627 B.C.). This would place Zephaniah as a contemporary of Nahum and Jeremiah. It is most likely that the two prophets, Zephaniah and Jeremiah, influenced Josiah in the religious reformation of the nation.

Josiah became king of Judah at the age of eight; at sixteen, he turned to God, and at twenty he began his first reformation of religion (628 B.C.). He destroyed numerous idols, grinding them to dust, burned the bones of false priests on their altars and then demolished the altars themselves (2 Chronicles 34:3–7). The discovery of the Book of the Law in the temple (2 Kings 22:8) had a profound effect upon the king and a second reformation was undertaken.

The reign of a godly king (Josiah) and the ministries of worthy prophets such as Zephaniah, Jeremiah and Habakkuk during those latter years of the nation of Judah indicate the great mercy of God in giving the people many warnings of their serious plight, and numerous opportunities to return to him. Zephaniah, Jeremiah and Habakkuk have been called “the eleventh-hour prophets to Judah.”² However, the repentance of the people during the reign of Josiah was short-lived; within a short period of time, the nation was once more plunged into idolatry and immorality.

ZEPHANIAH / **OUTLINE**

As with the books of Isaiah and Ezekiel, there is a similar threefold pattern to the book of Zephaniah. Beginning with prophecies related to the immediate historical context of Judah, there follow prophecies of judgement against foreign nations, concluding with prophecies of future restoration and blessing for Israel.

The book makes solemn reading. It is filled with vivid expressions of God's righteous anger:

Neither their silver nor their gold
Shall be able to deliver them

² Bruce Wilkinson and Kenneth Boa, *Talk Thru the Old Testament* (Nashville: Nelson, 1983), 279.

In the day of the LORD's wrath;
But the whole land shall be devoured
By the fire of His jealousy (1:18).

My determination is to gather the nations
To My assembly of kingdoms,
To pour on them My indignation,
All My fierce anger;
All the earth shall be devoured
With the fire of My jealousy (3:8).

Stern condemnations and severe threats pile up on one another until the very last section, where the tone changes drastically to end in one of the most beautiful love songs found in the Old Testament.

PART 1 / **THE DAY OF THE LORD IS AT HAND (1:1-2:3)**

The Israelites have once more failed in their covenant obligations. They have not remained true to the living God. His patience and long-suffering are exhausted. He expresses his great anger at the idolatry of Judah (1:2-7).

The expression, "the day of the LORD," occurs seven times in this first section.³ Zephaniah is probably aware of the earlier use of this theme by the prophet Amos (cf. Amos 5:18-20; 8:3-13).⁴

The first section ends with a call to repentance (2:1-3). God's mercy is wonderfully demonstrated as he reveals his severe judgement and then calls upon the people to turn to him and so escape his wrath.

PART 2 / **PROPHECIES AGAINST THE SURROUNDING NATIONS (2:4-15)**

Although Zephaniah is a prophet to Judah, there is nevertheless a message for the heathen or pagan nations around. They are convicted by God of their sins and are without excuse. Non-Israelite nations

³ 1:7,8,14 (twice),18; 2:2,3.

⁴ Raymond B. Dillard and Tremper Longman III, *An Introduction to the Old Testament* (Leicester: Apollos, 1995), 419.

must also answer to God. His fellow prophets, Jeremiah and Nahum, proclaimed the same message:

But the LORD is the true God;
He is the living God and the everlasting King.
At His wrath the earth will tremble,
And the nations will not be able to endure His indignation
(Jeremiah 10:10).

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* (Nahum 1:2–3).

The future of the nations is in the hands of the Lord, to dispose of as he sees fit. Zephaniah addresses Gaza and the land of the Philistines (2:4–7); he pronounces judgement upon Moab and Ammon because of their hostility toward Israel (2:8–11); Ethiopia also comes under judgement (2:12); and the destruction of Nineveh is foretold in graphic detail (2:13–15). The prophecy was fulfilled when Nineveh was utterly destroyed approximately twenty years later, in 612 B.C., by the combined forces of the Medes and Babylonians.⁵

PART 3 / JUDGEMENT AGAINST THE CITY OF JERUSALEM (3:1–8)

The Lord is particularly distressed about the spiritual and moral state of the capital city. The people of Jerusalem continue in their spiritual blindness and wickedness despite repeated warnings from the Lord through his prophets. Those who should have been leaders in righteousness are leaders in iniquity—princes, judges, prophets and priests (3:3–4).

Though the people of Judah have witnessed the fall of the northern kingdom of Israel they have not learned the lessons of history.

⁵ See the chapter on Nahum for fuller details about Nineveh, the capital city of Assyria.

PART 4 / **UNIVERSAL JUDGEMENT: A RIGHTEOUS REMNANT PRESERVED (3:9-13)**

The prophet Zephaniah foretells a universal judgement at which only a small number of people will be saved. There will be a “remnant of Israel” who “shall do no unrighteousness and speak no lies, nor shall a deceitful tongue be found in their mouth” (3:13).

PART 5 / **THE RESTORATION AND GLORY OF ISRAEL (3:14-20)**

As the Lord is “in the midst” for judgement (3:5), so he is also “in the midst” for restoration (3:15,17). “When the cup of wrath is drained, love is poured forth.”⁶ Zephaniah rejoices in the prospect of the coming kingdom of God. He presents a remarkable picture of the Lord as one who, with great tenderness and love, will delight in his people:

The LORD your God in your midst,
The Mighty One, will save;
He will rejoice over you with gladness,
He will quiet you with His love,
He will rejoice over you with singing (3:17).

God’s people will be restored and they shall be famous throughout the earth (3:20).

ZEPHANIAH / **CHRIST AND HIS CHURCH**

PROPHECIES AND TYPES

1. The Day of the Lord

In just three chapters, there are twenty references to “the day” of the Lord. Zephaniah’s prophecy concerning the day of the Lord, when he will visit the land with judgement (e.g. 1:14–16), found partial fulfilment in the invasions of Judah by Nebuchadnezzar and the Babylonian army, with the subsequent exile (605 B.C., 597 B.C. and 586 B.C.), but the full and complete fulfilment is yet in the future.

⁶ Franz Delitzsch, *Messianic Prophecies* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1880), 77.

The New Testament writers refer to the day of the Lord in two ways. On the one hand, the expression “the day of the LORD” is related to the first coming of Messiah, the Lord Jesus Christ (Acts 2:20, quoting Joel 2:31; cf. Malachi 4:5).

On the other hand, the apostle Peter uses it when he writes about the second coming of the Lord Jesus Christ,

But the day of the LORD will come as a thief in the night, in which the heavens will pass away with a great noise, and the elements will melt with fervent heat; both the earth and the works that are in it will be burned up. Therefore, since all these things will be dissolved, what manner of *persons* ought you to be in holy conduct and godliness, looking for and hastening the coming of the day of God, because of which the heavens will be dissolved, being on fire, and the elements will melt with fervent heat? Nevertheless we, according to His promise, look for new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells (2 Peter 3:10–13).

Paul also refers to the day of the Lord as the return of Christ. Addressing the Thessalonians, he writes, “For you yourselves know perfectly that the day of the Lord so comes as a thief in the night” (1 Thessalonians 5:2; cf. Matthew 24:43–44; 1 Corinthians 5:5; 2 Corinthians 1:14).

For Zephaniah, the day of the Lord is a complex interweaving of momentous events (3:8–13). It is not possible to determine dogmatically which predictions relate, firstly, to the invasion by Babylon and the subsequent exile; secondly, to the return of the captives under the leadership of Zerubbabel and Ezra; thirdly, to the coming of the Messiah in his mission as the Saviour; or, fourthly, to the return of the Messiah in glory and judgement. The same complexity is evident 500 years later in the teaching of the Lord Jesus. Speaking of momentous events in the future, he interweaves the invasion of Jerusalem by the Romans, international confrontations, worldwide gospel preaching and his return “with power and great glory” (Matthew 24:1–25:46).

While so many of the prophecies relating to the day of the Lord have now been fulfilled, there still remains the *climactic* day of the Lord. Building up to that day is the fearful warning of the Lord Jesus when he asks, “When the Son of Man comes, will He really find faith on the earth?” (Luke 18:8). The apostle Peter asks, “What manner of persons

ought you to be in holy conduct and godliness, looking for and hastening the coming of the day of God?" (2 Peter 3:11–12). The writer to the Hebrews urges Christians to wait "eagerly" for him (Hebrews 9:28). Paul sums up the importance of living faithful and obedient lives when he writes,

For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men, teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly in the present age, looking for the blessed hope and glorious appearing of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ (Titus 2:11–13).

2. The right clothing

Be silent in the presence of the LORD God;
For the day of the LORD is at hand,
For the LORD has prepared a sacrifice;
He has invited His guests.

And it shall be,
In the day of the LORD's sacrifice,
That I will punish the princes and the king's children,
And all such as are clothed with foreign apparel (1:7–8).

The sacrifice here is the nation of Judah; the invited guests are the Babylonians who come as priests to cut and slay the Israelites, and the birds and beasts will feed on their carcasses (cf. Ezekiel 39:17–20).

The same kind of language is used in Revelation to describe the final judgement of God:

Then I saw an angel standing in the sun; and he cried with a loud voice, saying to all the birds that fly in the midst of heaven, "Come and gather together for the supper of the great God, that you may eat the flesh of kings, the flesh of captains, the flesh of mighty men, the flesh of horses and of those who sit on them, and the flesh of all people, free and slave, both small and great" (Revelation 19:17–18).

This appears in the very same chapter as the marriage of the Lamb (Revelation 19:6–9).

The Lord Jesus may have had the words of Zephaniah 1:7–8 in mind when he spoke the parable of the marriage feast (Matthew 22:1–14). The king had *prepared* the celebration and *invited* his guests. One man was removed from the festivities because he did not have the appropriate “wedding garment” (Matthew 22:11); in other words, he was “clothed with foreign apparel” (1:8).

In Isaiah, the appropriate clothing is referred to as “the garments of salvation” and “the robe of righteousness” that every true child of God wears:

I will greatly rejoice in the LORD,
My soul shall be joyful in my God;
For He has clothed me with the garments of salvation,
He has covered me with the robe of righteousness,
As a bridegroom decks *himself* with ornaments,
And as a bride adorns *herself* with her jewels (Isaiah 61:10).

It is “the best robe” in which the Father dresses his prodigal son (Luke 15:22). The “foreign apparel” of Zephaniah 1:8 is a symbol of “all our righteousnesses,” which “are like filthy rags” (Isaiah 64:6) in the sight of a holy God and totally unsuited for his glorious presence. The Redeemer has commanded that the filthy garments be taken away from every child of God and has said, “See, I have removed your iniquity from you, and I will clothe you with rich robes” (Zechariah 3:4; cf. Revelation 19:7–9).

3. The end of shame

In that day you shall not be shamed for any of your deeds
In which you transgress against Me;
For then I will take away from your midst
Those who rejoice in your pride,
And you shall no longer be haughty
In My holy mountain (3:11).

What is said here cannot refer to those who were brought back from

Babylon because there were hypocrites and unconverted among the returning exiles. The prophetic announcement, as Keil explains, “refers to the time of perfection, which commenced with the coming of Christ, and will be completely realized at His return to judgment.”⁷

The Lord Jesus Christ “was manifested to take away our sins, and in Him there is no sin” (1 John 3:5). Here is complete salvation. The whole character and work of the incarnate Son of God has removed sin. The cross destroys both the guilt and the power of sin, for “Righteousness is imputed and implanted in one act.”⁸ The indwelling Holy Spirit brings his beautiful influence to bear on the child of God, convicting “of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment” (John 16:8) and, at the same time, producing fruit that is honouring to God (Galatians 5:22–23).

Zephaniah declares the character of the preserved ones:

The remnant of Israel shall do no unrighteousness
And speak no lies,
Nor shall a deceitful tongue be found in their mouth (3:13).

The New Covenant reveals a wonderful parallel:

And now, little children, abide in Him, that when He appears, we may have confidence and not be ashamed before Him at His coming. If you know that He is righteous, you know that everyone who practices righteousness is born of Him (1 John 2:28–29).

4. The Lord's remnant

I will leave in your midst
A meek and humble people,
And they shall trust in the name of the LORD.
The remnant of Israel shall do no unrighteousness
And speak no lies,
Nor shall a deceitful tongue be found in their mouth (3:12–13).

⁷ Carl F. Keil, *The Twelve Minor Prophets* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1949), 1:158.

⁸ George G. Findlay, *Fellowship in the Life Eternal: An Exposition of the Epistles of St John* (Minneapolis: James and Klock, 1977), 259.

While the nation falls under the severe judgement of God, a small number, “the remnant of Israel,” are kept faithful by God’s powerful grace. In every generation, the Lord keeps for himself a “remnant according to the election of grace” (Romans 11:5). Even in the dark days of Elijah in the northern kingdom, when he thought himself alone, the Lord showed him that he was much mistaken, for the Lord had kept 7,000 faithful souls in Israel (1 Kings 19:18). The preservation of the elect of God is a precious truth bringing great comfort to the people of God (1 Peter 1:5).

ZEPHANIAH / **CONCLUSION**

Judgement and mercy, wrath and grace are the dominant themes of this book. Judgement is related primarily to the day of the Lord, whereas grace is linked to a remnant and restoration. “Wrath and mercy, severity and kindness cannot be separated in the character of God.”⁹ “Therefore consider the goodness and severity of God: on those who fell, severity; but toward you, goodness, if you continue in His goodness. Otherwise you also will be cut off” (Romans 11:22).

The book of Zephaniah closes with six beautiful “I wills” of what the Lord will do for his people:

*“I will gather those who sorrow over the appointed assembly,
Who are among you,
To whom its reproach is a burden.
Behold, at that time
I will deal with all who afflict you;
I will save the lame,
And gather those who were driven out;
I will appoint them for praise and fame
In every land where they were put to shame.
At that time I will bring you back,
Even at the time I gather you;
For I will give you fame and praise
Among all the peoples of the earth,*

⁹ Wilkinson and Kenneth Boa, *Talk Thru the Old Testament*, 279.

When I return your captives before your eyes,”
Says the LORD (3:18–20, emphasis added).

The ten tribes of the northern kingdom of Israel have long since been taken into captivity in Assyria. Soon, the two tribes of the southern kingdom will suffer the same fate at the hands of the Babylonians. In the midst of declaring the judgement of God upon a wilful and rebellious nation, the Lord gives encouragement to the faithful that restoration will come about. The Lord will return them to their own land.

Beyond this, however, there is the glorious fine thread of the promise to Abraham (Genesis 12:3). Through the prophet Zephaniah, there is the anticipation of a time to come when the nations will worship the Lord. Whereas there is judgement pronounced on the whole earth, there is also predicted the conversion of the heathen nations to the living God:

For then I will restore to the peoples a pure language,
That they all may call on the name of the LORD,
To serve Him with one accord (3:9).

Through Israel, and especially through Israel's greatest Son, the nations will be gathered in. The promise of a new Israel composed of Jew and Gentile alike (Galatians 3:8–9, 14, 26–29) is already in the process of fulfilment.

ZEPHANIAH / APPLICATION AND REFLECTION

1. The singing of the Lord

The Lord told Job that when he “laid the foundations of the earth...the morning stars sang together, and all the sons of God shouted for joy” (Job 38:4,7), but there is no mention of the Lord himself singing.

When the church of Jesus Christ, which is the true Israel of God composed of believing Jews and believing Gentiles, is complete and glorified, God will sing:

The LORD your God in your midst,
The Mighty One, will save;
He will rejoice over you with gladness,
He will quiet you with His love,
He will rejoice over you with singing (3:17).

“He will rejoice over you with gladness,” points to the inward delight in the heart of God, whereas “He will rejoice over you with singing,” expresses the outward manifestation: “as the bridegroom rejoices over the bride, so shall your God rejoice over you” (Isaiah 62:5).

God deeply loves his people; which is the same as saying that the Lord Jesus Christ “nourishes and cherishes” his church (Ephesians 5:29).

2. The presence of the Lord

Jerusalem’s princes, judges, prophets and priests have failed (3:3–4); consequently the Lord is “in her midst” (3:5) to rectify a bad situation. When “the LORD...is in her midst,” he takes the place of these leaders and fulfils each office in turn. The Lord comes, firstly, as *Judge* convicting of sin and bringing his justice to light (3:5–7; cf. John 16:8–11); secondly, as *Prophet* teaching the people to call upon his name with pure lips (3:9; cf. Joel 2:32; Acts 2:21; Romans 10:13–17), humbling his people in his presence (3:12); thirdly, as *King* reigning in sovereign power and glory “in your midst” (3:15); and, fourthly, as *Priest*, gathering his people, removing all obstacles and bringing them into the closest possible relationship with himself (3:17–20).¹⁰

¹⁰ A.M. Hodgkin, *Christ in All the Scriptures* (London: Pickering and Inglis, 1907), 215.

The day will come when God will create “a new heaven and a new earth” and a loud voice will declare:

Behold, the tabernacle of God *is* with men, and He will dwell with them, and they shall be His people. God Himself will be with them *and be* their God. And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes; there shall be no more death, nor sorrow, nor crying. There shall be no more pain, for the former things have passed away (Revelation 21:3–4).

3. Right jealousy

As there is a jealousy in God that is holy and pure, so there is to be in believers a comparable jealousy. There are two kinds of jealousy:

one that springs from our self-love which is evil and perverse, and another that we endure on behalf of God.... There are many who are jealous on their own account and not on God's, but the only right and godly jealousy is that which looks to God's interest to see that He is not defrauded of the honour that is His due.¹¹

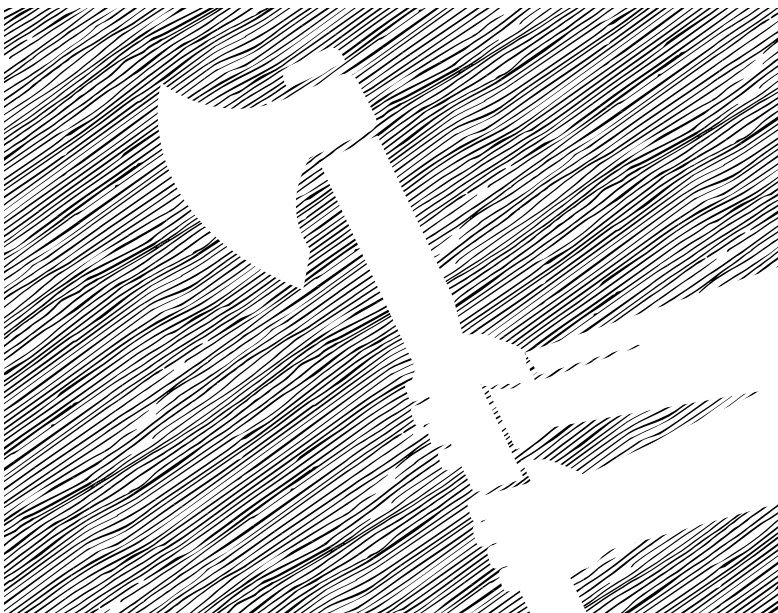
When God's jealousy is understood as his demand for exclusive loyalty, his people share that jealousy in being passionately concerned for his honour and glory. The apostle Paul displays this spirit when he writes to the Christians at Corinth:

For I am jealous for you with godly jealousy. For I have betrothed you to one husband, that I may present *you* as a chaste virgin to Christ. But I fear, lest somehow, as the serpent deceived Eve by his craftiness, so your minds may be corrupted from the simplicity that is in Christ (2 Corinthians 11:2–3).

He is passionately concerned that they retain their exclusive loyalty to Christ.

The people of God should be excited by strong feelings of concern for the name, honour and glory of the only true God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ—and our Father, by his grace!

¹¹ John Calvin, *The Second Epistle of Paul the Apostle to the Corinthians* (Edinburgh: St Andrew Press, 1964), 139–140.



HAGGAI

MEANING

"my feast"

AUTHOR

Haggai

KEY THOUGHT

Working for God

THEME

God first in life and service

THEME VERSE

***Is it time for you yourselves to dwell in your paneled houses,
and this temple to lie in ruins?***

HAGGAI 1:4

HAGGAI / SUMMARY

PART 1 / **FIRST MESSAGE (1ST DAY, 6TH MONTH): REBUKE**

1:1-11

- | | | |
|----|---|--------|
| a. | Introduction | 1:1 |
| b. | The people have fine houses but the temple is in ruins | 1:2-4 |
| c. | The Lord explains the reason for the famine and drought | 1:5-11 |

PART 2 / **SECOND MESSAGE (24TH DAY, 6TH MONTH): REASSURANCE**

1:12-15

"I am with you," says the Lord	1:13
--------------------------------	------

PART 3 / **THIRD MESSAGE (21ST DAY, 7TH MONTH): COMFORT AND HOPE**

2:1-9

- | | | |
|----|--|-------|
| a. | Older people remember Solomon's temple | 2:1-3 |
| b. | Strengthened by God's presence | 2:4-5 |
| c. | The glory of the new temple | 2:6-9 |

PART 4 / **FOURTH MESSAGE (24TH DAY, 9TH MONTH): CLEANSING AND BLESSING**

2:10-19

- | | | |
|----|-------------------------------------|---------|
| a. | Impurity provokes God's displeasure | 2:10-14 |
| b. | Obedience results in God's blessing | 2:15-19 |

PART 5 / **FIFTH MESSAGE (24TH DAY, 9TH MONTH): SECURITY**

2:20-23

- | | | |
|----|---|---------|
| a. | Security for Israel | 2:20-22 |
| b. | Zerubbabel chosen by God for special blessing | 2:23 |

HAGGAI

The exile in Babylon was over. The Israelites had been encouraged to return to their homeland. But the early enthusiasm for rebuilding the temple in Jerusalem had waned. Setbacks and discouragements had hindered the work. After sixteen years, the people had lost interest. The Lord called Haggai to the prophetic office to stimulate and challenge them to once more take up the task of rebuilding the temple.

Haggai, together with Zechariah and Malachi, faced a different situation from that which confronted the prophets who ministered before the Babylonian exile:

Those earlier prophets confronted a people who tended to depend upon physical ceremonies and buildings.... In contrast, the post-exilic prophets ministered to a discouraged and apathetic people who were tempted to believe that nothing they did made any difference from a religious standpoint. The destruction of Jerusalem had humbled a once-proud people and they were influenced by the Persian view of all religions as equal in value.¹

HAGGAI / AUTHOR

Haggai was probably born in Babylon during the seventy-year exile.² The name *Haggai* means “my feast” and may have been given to him by his parents in anticipation of the return from exile. Alternatively, he may have been born at the time of one of the Jewish festivals. It is likely that Haggai journeyed to Judah with the first returning Jews under the leadership of Zerubbabel (1:1; 536 B.C.). He was a colleague of the prophet Zechariah (Ezra 5:1; 6:14), beginning his ministry two months earlier than the latter (1:1; cf. Zechariah 1:1). The recorded prophecies of Haggai were delivered within the space of just three months and twenty-four days, whereas those of Zechariah span three years.

¹ Thomas Nelson, *Nelson's Complete Book of Bible Maps and Charts* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1996), 276.

² On the fragile basis of 2:3 some suppose Haggai to have been born in Judah and to have seen the temple as a child before being taken into exile. The prophet would then have been in his mid-to-late seventies when he delivered these messages from God.

HAGGAI / **HISTORICAL SETTING**

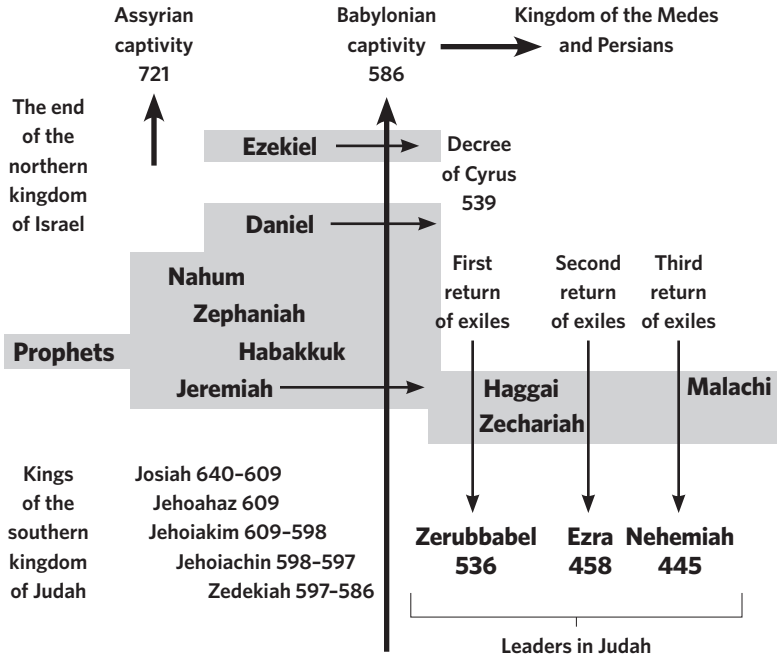
The third and final invasion of Judah occurred in 586 B.C. The city of Jerusalem, with its temple and houses, was left in ruins by the invading forces of Nebuchadnezzar. The people of the southern kingdom of Judah were taken into exile in the land of Babylon. The Lord raised up prophets from among the exiles: Daniel served as a statesman in the royal court; Ezekiel ministered to the people. During the long years of captivity, the godly yearned to return to Jerusalem (Psalm 137).

When Babylon eventually fell to the Medes and Persians, Cyrus issued his decree encouraging the Jews to return to Judah to rebuild the Lord's temple at Jerusalem (539 B.C.; 2 Chronicles 36:22–23; Ezra 1:2–4). The Babylonian exile was over; 50,000 Jews returned (Ezra 2:64–65; Nehemiah 7:66–67).

Many more thousands of Jews chose to remain in Babylon. The prophet Jeremiah had counselled the exiles, “Build houses and dwell *in them*; plant gardens and eat their fruit. Take wives and beget sons and daughters” (Jeremiah 29:5–6), and it seems that many had settled down and prospered. After so many years, Babylon had become “home”; indeed, for the generations born there, it was the only home they had known. When the opportunity came to return to Judah, the Jews had to consider the lives they had built for themselves—the prosperity they enjoyed in business and commerce, the friendships they had forged, the family networks which had developed and the poor state of the land of Judah, to which they were being encouraged to journey. It may be that most of those who made the long trek to Jerusalem were motivated by a concern for the honour and glory of God, or it may just have been the excitement of a new opportunity and a new beginning.

At first, those who returned to Jerusalem were enthusiastic (Psalm 126), giving themselves to rebuilding of the altar and laying the foundation for the temple (Ezra 3:1–13). Within a short time, however, the neighbouring Samaritans proved a hindrance and hired “counsellors against them to frustrate their purpose” (Ezra 4:5). The opposition proved effective, and the reconstruction of the temple was hindered for a number of years. During this period, the Jews became dispirited and lost interest in the project. By the time the Samaritan opposition

Figure 16. Haggai in relation to Judah and its prophets and kings: before, during and after the exile*



*Years are in B.C.

had waned, the people had become absorbed in their own concerns, preoccupied with building and equipping their own homes. The temple still lay in ruins (1:4).

Disasters and afflictions struck the land: the harvests failed and there was a serious drought (1:6,9–11). The prophet Haggai was sent by God to interpret the calamities and to communicate the Lord's displeasure. Haggai and his colleague Zechariah were raised up by the Lord to challenge and encourage the people to return to the building project (Ezra 5:1–2) (see Figure 16). Haggai is often called the prophet of the temple and his prophetic ministry began in the second year of King Darius (1:1; 520 B.C.), king of Persia, sixteen years after the return from captivity. In just over three weeks, the building work recommenced and the Lord sent new messages of encouragement and hope.

HAGGAI / **OUTLINE**

The style of this prophet is “plain, simple, curt, business-like.”³ Through Haggai, the Lord is challenging—he demands a hearing, he engages his hearers (1:4; 2:3,12–13). He uses repetition for emphasis: in just two chapters, Haggai uses the expression, “says the Lord,” nineteen times, “the LORD of hosts,” fourteen times and “consider” five times.

The book is composed of five distinct messages from God delivered on separate occasions.

**PART 1 / FIRST MESSAGE (1ST DAY, 6TH MONTH):
REBUKE (1:1-11)**

Disheartened and dispirited, the people are not inclined to work on the rebuilding of the temple. They try to avoid their obligations and excuse themselves by claiming that it is just not the right time to build (1:2).

Their homes are fine, solid structures while the temple remains in ruins (1:4). Attention is drawn to the various calamities that have struck the land, such as the failed harvests and the prolonged drought. Haggai explains why these afflictions have come from the Lord: it is because they have neglected the rebuilding of the temple.

The people are encouraged to work for the Lord (1:8).

**PART 2 / SECOND MESSAGE (24TH DAY, 6TH MONTH):
REASSURANCE (1:12-15)**

Just over three weeks after Haggai’s first prophetic word, the people commence the reconstruction work on the temple, because they fear “the presence of the LORD” (1:12). But it is not in judgement or punishment that the presence of the Lord is to be experienced; Haggai delivers a second message in which there is the reassurance of the *encouraging* presence of the Lord (1:13). Zerubbabel the governor (the

³ Robert Lee, *The Outlined Bible: An Outline and Analysis of Every Book in the Bible* (London: Pickering and Inglis, 1930), analysis no. 37.

⁴ The sixth month of the Jewish calendar falls roughly around August–September.

civic leader) and Joshua the high priest (the religious leader) and “all the remnant of the people” are stirred up in spirit by the Lord and put themselves to the task (1:14).

Like the tabernacle before it, the temple

was not only the focus of the whole system of offerings and sacrifices, priests, and worship; it was also the symbol of Israel’s spiritual identity and a visible reminder of the person, power, and presence of God.⁵

**PART 3 / THIRD MESSAGE (21ST DAY, 7TH MONTH):
COMFORT AND HOPE (2:1-9)**

There are evidently some older Jews among the returning remnant who had been born in Judah and had actually seen the elaborate temple of Solomon (2:3) before it had been destroyed by Nebuchadnezzar, seventy years earlier. They are disheartened because they do not have the necessary resources to build a similarly fine temple. Had they not been led to expect the wealth of the nations to finance the rebuilding work (cf. Isaiah 60)? Yet, the building now being constructed seems more like a hut than a temple worthy of the Lord.

The leaders and the people are urged to work hard for the Lord:

“Yet now be strong, Zerubbabel,” says the LORD; “and be strong, Joshua, son of Jehozadak, the high priest; and be strong, all you people of the land,” says the LORD, “and work; for I *am* with you,” says the LORD of hosts (2:4).

The God of the covenant is with his people (2:5). The Lord reassures the people: the new temple may not be anything like the old one in terms of its size, structure and magnificence, but it will surpass it for glory. This simplicity is not, however, due to any lack of resources for, the Lord reminds them, “The silver is Mine, and the gold is Mine” (2:8). The Lord gives a wonderful promise that he will send “the

⁵ Bruce Wilkinson and Kenneth Boa, *Talk Thru the Old Testament* (Nashville: Nelson, 1983), 285.

Desire of All Nations” and he “will fill this temple with glory,” (2:7) with the result, “The glory of this latter temple shall be greater than the former” (2:9).

**PART 4 / FOURTH MESSAGE (24TH DAY, 9TH MONTH):
CLEANSING AND BLESSING (2:10-19)**

Two months after the last message, the prophet delivers another word from the Lord. By question and answer, Haggai explains, just as a clean thing becomes contaminated by contact with the unclean, so “the former attitude of the people toward the Lord and His house polluted their own labour and as a result the blessing of the Lord was withheld.”⁶

The situation is now changed. The impurity has been removed. Their obedience to the command of God and their return to work on the temple has resulted in the blessing of the Lord resting upon them. Their fields will be fruitful once more (2:18-19).

**PART 5 / FIFTH MESSAGE (24TH DAY, 9TH MONTH):
SECURITY (2:20-23)**

The last message recorded by Haggai is received on the same day as the previous one. Zerubbabel is assured of the Lord’s blessing; the strength of the heathen will be broken; God will show mercy to his people. Zerubbabel, a descendant of David, is God’s chosen instrument, chosen as a twin-link in the chain of ancestry for the promised Messiah. By the sign of the “signet” he is shown how much the Lord esteems, values and cares for him. The prophecies linked to David’s line are to continue through Zerubbabel.

⁶ Edward J. Young, *An Introduction to the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1949), 277.

HAGGAI / CHRIST AND HIS CHURCH

PROPHECIES AND TYPES

1. The temple filled with glory

For thus says the LORD of hosts: “Once more (it is a little while) I will shake heaven and earth, the sea and dry land; and I will shake all nations, and they shall come to the Desire of All Nations, and I will fill this temple with glory,” says the LORD of hosts. “The glory of this latter temple shall be greater than the former,” says the LORD of hosts. “And in this place I will give peace,” says the LORD of hosts (2:6–7,9).

The significance of the shaking of heaven and earth is explained by the writer to the Hebrews:

whose voice then shook the earth; but now He has promised, saying, “Yet once more I shake not only the earth, but also heaven.” Now this, “Yet once more,” indicates the removal of those things that are being shaken, as of things that are made, that the things which cannot be shaken may remain.

Therefore, since we are receiving a kingdom which cannot be shaken, let us have grace, by which we may serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear. For our God is a consuming fire (Hebrews 12:26–29).

The Puritan theologian John Owen (1616–1683) draws certain conclusions from these two passages in Haggai and Hebrews:

- That the events referred to by both authors are one and the same;
- That these things are spoken by the prophet expressly with respect to the first coming of Christ and the promotion of his gospel;
- That the apostle declares that believers are now actually receiving what was being promised, “a kingdom which cannot be shaken” (Hebrews 12:28)—in other words, a spiritual kingdom;

- That these words of Haggai “are applicable to the first coming of Christ; they had a literal accomplishment in an eminent degree, in the announcement of His birth by an angel from heaven and celebrated by a multitude of the heavenly hosts; the Holy Ghost descended on Him in the shape of a dove; and God gave express testimony unto Him from heaven, ‘This is My beloved Son’”;
- “This shaking of the earth and the heavens is descriptive of God’s dealings with His church, and the alterations He would make therein.”⁷

The promise that “they shall come to the Desire of All Nations, and I will fill this temple with glory,” is Messianic (cf. Malachi 3:1). “The Desire of All Nations” is none other than the Messiah himself. “It must be obvious to a careful reader of this promise that the blessings which the Lord is here promising are spiritual in nature.”⁸ Over 500 years after Haggai, the incarnate Son of God, Jesus the Christ, visited that temple in Jerusalem on several occasions during his earthly life. He brought a greater glory to this second temple than the glory of the first one, for he is “the brightness of [God’s] glory and the express image of His person” (Hebrews 1:3). He is the spiritual, eternal temple (John 2:19–21) made without hands (Mark 14:58), and all who believe in him come to him and, “as living stones, are being built up a spiritual house, a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ” (1 Peter 2:5). The temple of Solomon and the rebuilt temple of Zerubbabel are symbols of Christ and his church (1 Corinthians 3:16–17; 6:19–20).⁹

The temple in Jerusalem is the place where God says, “And in this place I will give peace” (2:9). Jesus Christ is *Shiloh*, “the Pacifier” or “Peacemaker” (Genesis 49:10), the “Prince of Peace” (Isaiah 9:6), “for He Himself is our peace” (Ephesians 2:14), “having made peace through the blood of His cross” (Colossians 1:20). In his death, the Saviour unites believing Gentiles (nations) with believing Jews, and

⁷ John Owen, *Hebrews: The Epistle of Warning* [abridged] (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 1953), 265.

⁸ Young, *An Introduction to the Old Testament*, 277.

⁹ See the section on Solomon’s temple in the chapter on 2 Chronicles in volume 1.

forms one glorious spiritual building. All this was achieved when the one who is the true Temple and who builds the true temple died on a tree outside the walls of the city of Jerusalem.

The stone *which* the builders rejected
 Has become the chief cornerstone.
 This was the LORD's doing;
 It is marvelous in our eyes.
 This is the day the LORD has made;
 We will rejoice and be glad in it (Psalm 118:22–24).¹⁰

2. The Messianic line

Zerubbabel was of the tribe of Judah, of the house of David. He never had a kingdom or wore a crown; nevertheless, the Lord chose him and made him “as a signet” (2:23). Thus “Zerubbabel becomes the centre of the messianic line and is like a signet...sealing both branches together.”¹¹ Two lines of descent from King David unite at Zerubbabel and from him flow two lines which lead to Mary and Joseph, mother and step-father of the Lord Jesus (Matthew 1:12–13; Luke 3:27).¹²

HAGGAI / CONCLUSION

Haggai was one of the few prophets who saw immediate and tangible results from his prophetic ministry. The people accepted his criticism and responded by putting their backs into the work of rebuilding the temple of the Lord. The temple was completed within four years (1:1; Ezra 6:15).

The church of Christ is continually needing to be challenged in the area of priorities. Pressures are not easily balanced in relation to business and employment, parents and children, house and home, church and spiritual life. Failure to make worship and service for the

¹⁰ Psalm 118 was probably sung at the first Feast of Tabernacles celebrated in Jerusalem after the Babylonian exile, when the altar was first erected on the holy place (Ezra 3:4).

¹¹ Wilkinson and Boa, *Talk Thru the Old Testament*, 285.

¹² Zerubbabel is found in both lists. For a comparison of the genealogies of Jesus given in Matthew and Luke see William Hendriksen, *Survey of the Bible: A Treasury of Bible Information* (Welwyn: Evangelical Press, 1976), 135–137.

Lord a priority will inevitably bring problems. The Lord often withholds blessing where his worship and service have been neglected. To claim the extra stresses of modern living as an excuse for failure in worship or service is to show a lack of love toward the Lord.

Do not be deceived, God is not mocked; for whatever a man sows, that he will also reap. For he who sows to his flesh will of the flesh reap corruption, but he who sows to the Spirit will of the Spirit reap everlasting life. And let us not grow weary while doing good, for in due season we shall reap if we do not lose heart (Galatians 6:7–9).

HAGGAI / APPLICATION AND REFLECTION

1. In his majesty's service

Robert Lee describes Haggai as "a model worker for God".¹³

- He spends no time talking about himself. He magnifies the Lord.
- He is the Lord's messenger. He is always saying, "Thus says the LORD."
- He not only rebukes, but encourages; he not only criticizes, but he commends.
- He stimulates the people by word and example.
- He not only preaches, but he is involved in practical work (Ezra 5:1-2).

Working for the Lord should be the Christian's major concern:

Therefore, my beloved brethren, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that your labor is not in vain in the Lord (1 Corinthians 15:58).

In the days of Haggai, when the people focused on their own concerns and neglected the Lord's work, their crops failed and they became increasingly poor (1:9-10). Conversely, when the people committed themselves to the Lord's work they were promised sustenance and support (2:19). In a similar manner, the Lord Jesus exhorts his followers not to be anxious about their food, drink or clothing, but rather to "seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you" (Matthew 6:33).

2. Building the temple

The building of the temple in Jerusalem in 520 B.C. has a modern and spiritual counterpart today: the building of the church of Jesus Christ. The Son of God said, "I will build My church, and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it" (Matthew 16:18).

The Lord Jesus uses his people to build his church:

And Jesus came and spoke to them, saying, "All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the

¹³ Lee, *The Outlined Bible*, analysis no. 37.

Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, *even to the end of the age.*" Amen (Matthew 28:18–20).

The task placed on all Christians is to be engaged in building the true and spiritual church by prayer (Ephesians 6:18–20), witness (1 Peter 3:15), life (Philippians 2:14–16; Matthew 5:16), labour (1 Corinthians 15:58) and financial support (Philippians 4:15–19).

Haggai's message is full of stirring words to us today. If, as a church, we thought more of the Lord's work of saving souls than of our own comfort, there would be no lack of means to carry it forward.¹⁴

¹⁴ A.M. Hodgkin, *Christ in All the Scriptures* (London: Pickering and Inglis, 1907), 217.



ZECHARIAH

MEANING

**"Jehovah
remembers"**

AUTHOR

Zechariah

KEY THOUGHT

**God loves his
people**

THEME

***Encouragement to the
disheartened***

THEME VERSE

***"Behold, I will save My people...
They shall be My people
And I will be their God,
In truth and righteousness."***

ZECHARIAH 8:7-8

ZECHARIAH / SUMMARY

PART 1 / A CALL TO RETURN TO GOD

1:1-6

- | | | |
|----|-------------------------|-------|
| a. | Introduction | 1:1 |
| b. | Invitation and response | 1:2-6 |

PART 2 / VISIONS IN THE NIGHT

1:7-6:8

- | | | |
|----|---|---------|
| a. | First vision: horses among the myrtle trees | 1:7-17 |
| b. | Second vision: four horns and four craftsmen | 1:18-21 |
| c. | Third vision: a man with a measuring line | 2:1-13 |
| d. | Fourth vision: Joshua the high priest standing before the Angel of the Lord | 3:1-10 |
| e. | Fifth vision: one lampstand and two olive trees | 4:1-14 |
| f. | Sixth vision: a flying scroll | 5:1-4 |
| g. | Seventh vision: a woman in a basket | 5:5-11 |
| h. | Eighth vision: four chariots | 6:1-8 |

PART 3 / THE COMMAND TO CROWN JOSHUA, THE HIGH PRIEST

6:9-15

PART 4 / A QUESTION OF OBSERVING ADDITIONAL FASTS

7:1-8:23

- | | | |
|----|--|---------|
| a. | The question stated | 7:1-3 |
| b. | First answer: the Lord hates hypocrisy | 7:4-7 |
| c. | Second answer: obey the laws of social justice | 7:8-14 |
| d. | Third answer: the restoration of Israel and blessing for the remnant | 8:1-17 |
| e. | Fourth answer: the nations will seek the God of Israel | 8:18-23 |

**PART 5 / THE FUTURE OF THE WORLD POWERS
AND OF THE KINGDOM OF GOD**

9:1-14:21

- | | | |
|----|--|----------|
| a. | The punishment of Israel's enemies | 9:1-8 |
| b. | The coming of the peaceful King | 9:9-10 |
| c. | The Lord will save his covenant people | 9:11-17 |
| d. | The Lord will gather his chosen flock | 10:1-12 |
| e. | Good and foolish shepherds and the suffering flock | 11:1-17 |
| f. | The coming deliverance of Judah | 12:1-9 |
| g. | Mourning for the pierced One | 12:10-14 |
| h. | Idolatry will be cut off | 13:1-6 |
| i. | The suffering Saviour Shepherd | 13:7-9 |
| j. | The day of the Lord | 14:1-15 |
| k. | The nations will worship the Lord | 14:16-21 |

ZECHARIAH

When the people of God become disheartened in their service for the Lord, there are a number of approaches that may be used to stir and stimulate their enthusiasm. The approach often taken by church leaders is that of rebuke, censure and challenge. By contrast, the Lord often reminds his people of how much he loves them, in order to warm their hearts and stir a new devotion within. A revival of the first love brings renewed endeavours in God's work. Zechariah is the Barnabas of the Old Testament—a true “son of encouragement” (cf. Acts 4:36–37).

Zechariah revived the zeal of God's people by prophesying of the glory that was to come. His prophecies relate to both the first and the second coming of the Messiah. The adversities and hardships for the people of God are made bearable by the knowledge that there is a wonderful future ahead (cf. 1 Thessalonians 4:13–18; 1 Peter 1:3–7; 4:12–13; 2 Corinthians 4:16–18; Revelation 21:1–4).

ZECHARIAH / **AUTHOR**

Zechariah designates himself as “the son of Berechiah, the son of Iddo the prophet” (1:1), whereas Ezra the historian calls him “the son of Iddo” (Ezra 5:1; 6:14)—Zechariah's father was Berechiah and his grandfather was Iddo. It was Jewish practice to call someone “the son of” any of his male ancestors, not just his immediate father, and especially after a well-known ancestor. As Iddo the priest and prophet was well known in the Jewish community, Zechariah was known as “the son of Iddo.” The combined names of the three men are prophetic of Zechariah's life: *Berechiah* means “Jehovah blesses”; *Iddo* means “the appointed time” and *Zechariah* means “Jehovah remembers.”¹

Zechariah was both a priest and a prophet (Nehemiah 12:12,16). He was probably born in Babylon and, like Haggai, he would have made the long journey to Judah with the returning exiles under the leadership of Zerubbabel (536 B.C.). He was a colleague of Haggai (Ezra 5:1; 6:14) and probably the younger of the two (2:4). The

¹ The name *Zechariah* is popular in the Old Testament, referring to over twenty-five different individuals.

Table 6. Dates relating to Zechariah and Haggai according to the day, month and year of the reign of King Darius of the Medes and Persians

Date			Content	Reference
<i>Day</i>	<i>Month</i>	<i>Year</i>		
1	6	2	The temple must be rebuilt	Haggai 1:1-2
24	6	2	Work on the temple recommences	Haggai 1:14-15
21	7	2	The promise of greater glory for this temple	Haggai 2:1,9
?	8	2	A call to return to God	Zechariah 1:1,3
24	9	2	Cleansing and blessing for Israel	Haggai 2:10,17,19
24	9	2	Zerubbabel a chosen instrument of God	Haggai 2:20,23
24	11	2	Visions in the night	Zechariah 1:7-6:8
4	9	4	A question about fasting	Zechariah 7:1-7
3	12	6	The temple completed	Ezra 6:15

recorded prophecies of Zechariah were delivered during a period of three years, whereas those of Haggai took just three months and twenty-four days.

ZECHARIAH / HISTORICAL SETTING

As Zechariah commenced his prophetic ministry just two months after Haggai began to prophesy (1:1; cf. Haggai 1:1) the historical setting is the same for both prophets.² (See Table 6.) The year was 520 B.C.; 50,000 Jews had been back in Jerusalem for sixteen years; the foundations for the temple had been completed in the first two years, but the work had been interrupted by Samaritan interference and no work had been done on the temple since.

The Lord sent a message through the prophet Haggai, the people responded and three weeks after receiving that first message the work of rebuilding the temple began again (Haggai 1:1,12-15). Now, five weeks later, Zechariah joins Haggai to add his contribution to motivating the people to do the work of the Lord in the rebuilding of the

² See the historical setting in the chapter on Haggai.

temple (1:1). Zechariah ranks as one of the greatest prophets. He was a great poet and “a fitting companion” of “plain, practical Haggai.”³

ZECHARIAH / **OUTLINE**

PART 1 / **A CALL TO RETURN TO GOD (1:1-6)**

Zechariah introduces himself and then declares his first message. In the eighth month of the second year of the reign of Darius (522–486 B.C.), the Lord sends a word urging the people to return to him. They must not follow the behaviour of their sinful ancestors who disregarded the warnings of the prophets and consequently suffered under the judgement of God. The Lord lovingly pleads with Israel: “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).

PART 2 / **VISIONS IN THE NIGHT (1:7-6:8)**

Three months later, on the twenty-fourth day of the eleventh month, a second message is communicated to Zechariah. He receives eight visions in one night. In the first, he sees the Angel of the Lord as a man on a red horse. The Angel is coordinating the work of God’s messengers and travelling throughout the world observing events on earth. All the earth is said to be “resting quietly” (1:11), though Jerusalem and Judah are still suffering the effects of God’s judgement. A time is coming, however, when the situation will be reversed and the nations will feel God’s anger while Jerusalem will know God’s blessing and the temple will be rebuilt.

The four horns of the second vision represent the four empires in Daniel’s vision: Babylon, Medo-Persia, Greece and Rome (Daniel 7:1–8).⁴

In the third vision, a man is measuring the walls of Jerusalem because its present size is not large enough to cope with the number of people whom the Lord will bring to salvation.

³ Robert Lee, *The Outlined Bible: An Outline and Analysis of Every Book in the Bible* (London: Pickering and Inglis, 1930), analysis no. 38.

⁴ Edward J. Young, *An Introduction to the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1949), 282.

The high priest Joshua (at that time serving in Jerusalem), is pictured in the fourth vision. He stands before the Angel of the Lord. Satan stands by to accuse Joshua, but his accusations against the high priest are without effect. Joshua is confirmed in his office, with promises attached. The Lord commands the removal of Joshua's "filthy garments," which symbolize his sin, and their replacement with "rich robes" (3:4).

The golden lampstand and the two olive trees of the fifth vision symbolize the church (the people of God) and the source of their true power—the spiritual power of God's grace.

In the sixth vision, the prophet sees a flying scroll representing the judgements of God.

The seventh vision pictures Israel's "wickedness" as a woman being restrained in a basket with a lid of lead dropped on to the top (5:7).

The night visions come to a close with a vision of four chariots, with red, black, white and dappled horses. These represent "four spirits of heaven" (6:5) which go throughout the earth delivering the Lord's judgement.

PART 3 / **THE COMMAND TO CROWN JOSHUA (6:9-15)**

Messengers arrive from Babylon with gold and silver from the Jewish exiles still in that land, as their contribution to the rebuilding of the temple. Zechariah is instructed to use the gifts to make an elaborate crown and then engage in the symbolic act of crowning the high priest, Joshua. No man could occupy the position of priest and king according to the law of God, and the Lord goes on to explain that this act is a Messianic promise—Messiah will be both king and priest:

He shall bear the glory,
And shall sit and rule on His throne;
So He shall be a priest on His throne (6:13).

PART 4 / **A QUESTION OF OBSERVING ADDITIONAL FASTS (7:1-8:23)**

Two years later, on the fourth day of the ninth month, Jews living in the land of Babylon raise a question about the observance of fasts. The dating of this message is important since it indicates that the

rebuilding of the temple had been underway for two years and was halfway to completion. The basic structure of the Lord's house would be in place by now, and this would have been seen as indicating the return of the Lord's favour toward Israel. The observance of extra fasts relating to the destruction of Jerusalem and the temple now seem inappropriate.

During the exile, the Israelites were accustomed to observe a fast in the fourth, fifth, seventh and tenth months (8:19). In the fourth month, on the ninth day, they fasted to remember the conquest of Jerusalem by Nebuchadnezzar in the eleventh year of Zedekiah (Jeremiah 39:2; 52:6–7). In the fifth month, on the tenth day, they fasted to remember the day Nebuchadnezzar and the Babylonians destroyed Jerusalem and the temple (Jeremiah 52:12–13). In the tenth month, on the tenth day, a fast was observed to remember the beginning of the siege of Jerusalem by Nebuchadnezzar in the ninth year of Zedekiah (2 Kings 25:1; Jeremiah 39:1). In the seventh month, according to Jewish tradition, they fasted on the third day on account of the murder of Gedaliah, the governor, and the Judeans who had been left in the land of Judah (2 Kings 25:25–26; Jeremiah 41:1–3). Now that the exile is over, the exiles are questioning whether they should continue to observe the annual fasts connected with the destruction of Jerusalem and its temple.⁵

The answer from the Lord strongly indicates that the Lord delights in *obedience* rather than in *fasting*. Outward observances are meaningless without the engagement of the heart and mind. The failure of past generations of Israelites is highlighted and the people are urged to avoid the same pitfalls.

If the people will respond and honour God in their behaviour, the Lord promises the restoration of Israel and his blessing on the believing remnant.

PART 5 / THE FUTURE OF THE WORLD POWERS AND OF THE KINGDOM OF GOD (9:1-14:21)

The final part of the book contains two long prophecies (9:1–11:17 and 12:2–14:21). Both sections begin with the expression: “The burden of

⁵ These were not fasts instituted by God.

the word of the LORD” (9:1; 12:1), which gives the “character of a threatening prophecy or proclamation of judgement.”⁶ The first “burden” is “against the land of Hadrach,” while the second is “against Israel,” and throughout the six chapters the contrast and conflict between the heathen world and Israel are expressed.

The emphasis falls, in the first part, on the destruction of the heathen world and strength given to Israel to subdue all her enemies. The ultimate triumph of Israel will be accomplished through the coming of a humble king (9:9). The Lord will punish worthless shepherds and personally gather his chosen flock (10:3). The distinguishing features of good and bad shepherds are delineated (11:1–17).

The contents of the second burden emphasize the refining of Israel: the conflict with the heathen nations will be used by the Lord to sift out those who are genuinely the Lord’s people. Interwoven is a promise of “the Spirit of grace and supplication” bringing a true repentance (12:10–14), and the suffering of the Shepherd will result in the scattering of his sheep, but the Lord will ensure that a purified and totally committed minority will emerge (13:7–9).

Zion will be delivered and will triumph over the heathen world. When the Lord has completed his refining work, he will be the King of the world and everything will be devoted to *his* service. Even common utensils will be sanctified for the service of God (14:21). The distinction between sacred and secular will be abolished forever.

ZECHARIAH / CHRIST AND HIS CHURCH

PROPHECIES

Zechariah contributes some of the most wonderful prophecies concerning the Lord Jesus Christ found anywhere in the Scriptures.

1. Messiah, *the* temple-builder

Behold, the Man whose name is the BRANCH!
From His place He shall branch out,
And He shall build the temple of the LORD;

⁶ Carl F. Keil, *The Twelve Minor Prophets* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1949), 1:383.

Yes, He shall build the temple of the LORD.
 He shall bear the glory,
 And shall sit and rule on His throne;
 So He shall be a priest on His throne,
 And the counsel of peace shall be between them both (6:12–13).

Since the promise is given to Zerubbabel that he himself will finish the rebuilding of the temple in Jerusalem (4:9), another temple must be intended here. God promises that the man spoken of as the **BRANCH**—that is the Messiah (cf. Isaiah 4:2; Jeremiah 23:5–6)—will build, not a temple *to* the Lord, but rather the temple *of* the Lord.

Furthermore, the Messiah *himself* will be the glory of the new temple, and he will rule in a dual capacity as king and priest. Such a double function, with the same person holding the two offices of king and priest, was impossible under the Old Covenant, since priests were to descend from Levi and kings from Judah. Consequently, the Lord had prepared a priestly order *above* that of Aaron and Levi—the order of Melchizedek, the king/priest (Genesis 14:18–20; Hebrews 7:1–10).⁷ Messiah comes in this order of priesthood (Psalm 110:4). Christ rules the new temple, the temple of God, as *both* king and priest. He is King over his body the church (Ephesians 1:22–23), ruling, controlling and guarding. He is Priest for his church, having presented the one supreme sacrifice for sin (Hebrews 10:10) and ever living to make intercession for them (Hebrews 7:24–25).

Zechariah prophesied that Messiah would personally build the temple of the Lord, the greater temple. That temple is currently under construction. It is the spiritual temple of which Christ is the foundation (1 Corinthians 3:11), the cornerstone (Ephesians 2:20), the centre and the heart (John 2:21). Believers are living stones who come to Christ to be “built up as a spiritual house” (1 Peter 2:5) and *with* him and *in* him to form the true temple (1 Corinthians 3:16; 6:19–20). The true temple, the spiritual temple, is Christ and his church.

Connected with the arrival of God’s servant the **BRANCH** (3:8) is the removal of guilt in one day (3:9)—a remarkable prediction of the work of Christ at Calvary!

⁷ See the chapter on Genesis in volume 1.

2. Messiah, the humble Prince

Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion!
 Shout, O daughter of Jerusalem!
 Behold, your King is coming to you;
 He is just and having salvation,
 Lowly and riding on a donkey,
 A colt, the foal of a donkey (9:9).

The Jews always understood this passage to apply to the promised Messiah, until Christians used it as an argument in favour of Jesus Christ.⁸ Messiah the King is described as just, possessing salvation, humble, outwardly poor (riding on a donkey), and as one whose kingdom is characterized by peace and is of universal extent (9:10). The Lord Jesus Christ deliberately enacted this prophecy by his triumphant entry into Jerusalem (Matthew 21:1–11).

3. Messiah, the pierced One

Shortly after the Lord Jesus Christ died on the cross, soldiers arrived with orders to break the legs of the three crucified men. The legs of the criminals on either side of the Lord were broken. Jesus was delivered from this further barbarity because the soldiers were convinced he was already dead. One soldier, however, made doubly sure by thrusting a spear into his side. Here was confirmation indeed, concerning the actual death of Christ. This strange sequence of events served to fulfil prophecy once more. The apostle John sees the fulfilment of two Old Testament predictions (John 19:36–37). One concerned the Passover lamb: “Nor shall you break one of its bones” (Exodus 12:46). The other referred to the piercing of Jehovah:

And I will pour on the house of David and on the inhabitants of Jerusalem the Spirit of grace and supplication; then *they will look on Me whom they pierced*. Yes, they will mourn for Him as one mourns for *his only son*, and grieve for Him as one grieves for a firstborn (12:10, emphasis added).

⁸ Thomas V. Moore, *A Commentary on Zechariah* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1958), 145–146.

As God is here the speaker, this passage has always been a stumbling-block to the Jews, for how could God be pierced? The only fact that explains it is that which they have not yet admitted, that they have crucified and slain that prince of peace who was God manifest in the flesh. As soon as they admit this fact they will see the consistency of the passage, and will mourn the guilt of their fathers in crucifying the incarnate Son, and their own guilt in so long rejecting him.⁹

Also predicted in this prophecy of Zechariah is a great spiritual awakening among the people of Israel (cf. Acts 2:41; 4:4; 6:7). In this mighty revival that will take place in the future, there will be considerable penitence and prayer.

4. Messiah, the Betrayed One

Did the chief priests and elders at the time of the crucifixion realize the parallels between Zechariah 11:12–13 and the thirty pieces of silver paid to Judas and the purchasing of the potter's field (Matthew 27:1–10)?

Then I said to them, "If it is agreeable to you, give *me* my wages; and if not, refrain." So they weighed out for my wages thirty *pieces* of silver.

And the LORD said to me, "Throw it to the potter"—that princely price they set on me. So I took the thirty *pieces* of silver and threw them into the house of the LORD for the potter (11:12–13).

Then he threw down the pieces of silver in the temple and departed, and went and hanged himself.

But the chief priests took the silver pieces and said, "It is not lawful to put them into the treasury, because they are the price of blood." And they consulted together and bought with them the potter's field, to bury strangers in (Matthew 27:5–7).

⁹ Moore, *A Commentary on Zechariah*, 198.

The parallels between the two passages are striking. Firstly, the work of the Lord Jesus, as with that of Zechariah, was not valued. Secondly, thirty pieces of silver was a trifling amount either for the shepherd's wages or the Saviour's betrayal (there is great irony in calling it "that princely price"). Thirdly, in both cases the silver was thrown down in the temple. Fourthly, in both cases the thirty pieces of silver eventually arrived in the hands of a potter.¹⁰

5. Messiah, the stricken Shepherd

At the opening of Zechariah 13, the Lord promised that a fountain would be opened by which the people of Israel might wash away their guilt and moral pollution (v.1). The connection between this fountain for cleansing, the piercing of Jehovah (12:10) and the striking of Jehovah's shepherd and companion (13:7) only becomes evident in the suffering and death of the Lord Jesus Christ.

The night before our Lord's death, he walked with his disciples to the Mount of Olives and the Garden of Gethsemane. On the way, the Lord predicted their weakness and failure, quoting Zechariah 13:7:

All of you will be made to stumble because of Me this night, for it is written:

"I will strike the Shepherd,
And the sheep of the flock will be scattered."

But after I have been raised, I will go before you to Galilee
(Matthew 26:31–32).

Thus the meaning of Zechariah 13:7–9 is made clear: First, Messiah will die for the sins of his people. Second, the nature of his death will cause all his disciples to stumble (probably referring to their becoming untrue to their Master¹¹). Third, the salvation of the remnant will be through hardship and trial.

¹⁰ For a number of possible explanations as to why Matthew quotes Zechariah 11:12–13 and yet credits the words to the prophet Jeremiah (Matthew 27:9–10), see William Hendriksen, *The Gospel of Matthew* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1973), 947–948.

¹¹ See Hendriksen, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 913.

It is God the Father who strikes the Shepherd.

There is in the whole compass of human knowledge, nothing more awfully sublime, than this seeming schism in the Godhead. It is as if sin was so dreadful an evil, that the assumption of its guilt by a sinless Mediator must for a time make a division even in the absolute unity of the Godhead itself. It is the most awful illustration of the repulsive and separating power of sin, that the history of the universe affords.¹²

6. Messiah, the robe of righteousness

In Zechariah's fourth vision (3:1–5), Joshua the high priest is seen standing before the Angel of the Lord. Powerful symbolism is used which demonstrates that he has been rescued from hell (“a brand plucked from the fire”—v.2); washed of all his sins (“Take away the filthy garments from him”—v.4) and clothed in the righteousness of Christ (“See, I have removed your iniquity from you, and I will clothe you with rich robes”—v.4).¹³ The foundation on which this wonderful transaction takes place is further indicated when the Lord says, “And I will remove the iniquity of that land in one day” (3:9; cf. Daniel 9:24).

ZECHARIAH / CONCLUSION

The task before the prophet Zechariah is to encourage the people in their God-given responsibilities of love and obedience. If they continue in sin, they will be punished as in former days. But if they will humble themselves before the Lord they will have a glorious future. The heathen nations will be subdued, Jerusalem will prosper and great future spiritual blessings will be brought about through the Messiah.

Blessed *be* the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly *places* in Christ, just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before Him in love, having predestined us to adoption as sons by Jesus Christ to

¹² Moore, *A Commentary on Zechariah*, 211–212.

¹³ Compare the section “The right clothing,” in the chapter on Zephaniah

Himself, according to the good pleasure of His will, to the praise of the glory of His grace, by which He made us accepted in the Beloved (Ephesians 1:3–6).

ZECHARIAH / APPLICATION AND REFLECTION

1. God's power to preserve his people

The Lord has a great love for his people: "I am zealous for Jerusalem and for Zion with great zeal" (1:14). "For thus says the LORD of hosts: 'He sent Me after glory, to the nations which plunder you; for he who touches you touches the apple of His eye'" (2:8). "I am zealous for Zion with great zeal; with great fervor I am zealous for her" (8:2).

In his zeal and love for his people, the Lord provides all that they need to fulfil his commands. This is demonstrated by the vision of the lampstand (4:2-3), which indicates both the responsibility of the church and the source of her power. Her mission is to be the light-bearer in a dark world (cf. Matthew 5:14-16). The lampstand is of solid gold, signifying purity, preciousness and indestructibility. The seven lamps and seven tubes indicate the varied ways the light is to shine. The two olive trees supply all the oil and represent the source of grace and strength to the church—the Holy Spirit of God. He constantly reassures his people: "My grace is sufficient for you, for My strength is made perfect in weakness" (2 Corinthians 12:9).

The vision conveys the message that the church will carry out her work in the world, not by human power but by the strength of God. As Hezekiah had said regarding his enemies, "With him is an arm of flesh; but with us is the LORD our God, to help us and to fight our battles" (2 Chronicles 32:8). The Angel of the Lord gives the interpretation of the vision of the lampstand:

This is the word of the LORD to Zerubbabel:
 "Not by might nor by power, but by My Spirit,"
 Says the LORD of hosts.
 "Who are you, O great mountain?
 Before Zerubbabel *you shall become a plain!*
 And he shall bring forth the capstone
 With shouts of 'Grace, grace to it!'" (4:6-7).

The power of God alone is sufficient to preserve the church. Each child of God is "kept by the power of God through faith for salvation ready to be revealed in the last time" (1 Peter 1:5). Once God has begun a good work in the life of an individual, there is absolute certainty that he will "complete it until the day of Jesus Christ" (Philippians 1:6). There is no power on earth or in hell that can thwart God's purposes in preserving every last one of his

people. Hence, we should not “fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. But rather fear Him who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell” (Matthew 10:28).

Fear Him, ye saints, and you will then
Have nothing else to fear;
Make you His service your delight,
Your wants shall be His care (Nahum Tate, Nicholas Brady).

2. A great spiritual awakening

Amplifying the prophecies of Micah 4:2 and Isaiah 2:3, Zechariah predicts a great turning to God among the Gentiles (the nations):

Thus says the LORD of hosts:

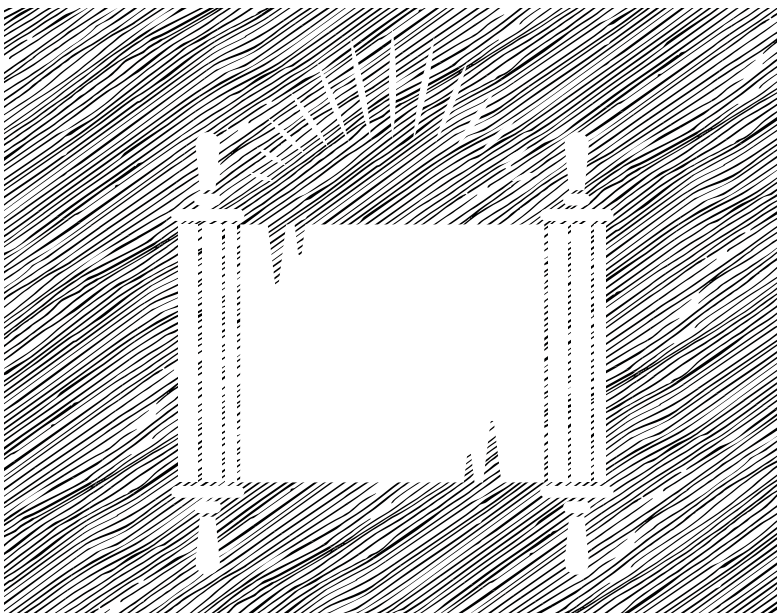
“Peoples shall yet come,
Inhabitants of many cities;
The inhabitants of one city shall go to another, saying,
‘Let us continue to go and pray before the LORD,
And seek the LORD of hosts.
I myself will go also.’
Yes, many peoples and strong nations
Shall come to seek the LORD of hosts in Jerusalem,
And to pray before the LORD.”

Thus says the LORD of hosts: “In those days ten men from every language of the nations shall grasp the sleeve of a Jewish man, saying, ‘Let us go with you, for we have heard *that God is with you*’” (8:20–23).

The nations are seized with a powerful desire to go to Jerusalem. They press toward it and want to be included in the community of Israel. The promise given to Abraham is being realized: through his Seed “all the families of the earth shall be blessed” (Genesis 12:3; cf. Galatians 3:26–29; Revelation 7:9).

Believing Jews joined by believing Gentiles form the true Israel through which Jehovah will make himself known as the God of the world’s history and of prophecy—the believing Israel of the New Testament era.¹⁴

¹⁴ Franz Delitzsch, *Messianic Prophecies* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1880), 99.



MALACHI

MEANING

"my messenger"

AUTHOR

Malachi

KEY THOUGHT

**The Lord will
come**

THEME

***Messages of love, rebuke
and hope***

THEME VERSE

***Behold, I send My messenger...
And the Lord, whom you seek,
Will suddenly come to His temple,
Even the Messenger of the covenant.***

MALACHI 3:1

MALACHI / SUMMARY

PART 1 / A MESSAGE OF LOVE	1:1-5
a. Introduction	1:1
b. The Lord's special love for Israel	1:2-5
PART 2 / A MESSAGE OF REBUKE	1:6-2:17
1. The sin of Israel's priests	1:6-2:9
a. They did not honour God	1:6-7
b. They offered blemished sacrifices	1:8-14
c. They failed to teach the law of God	2:1-9
2. The sin of Israel's people	2:10-17
a. They disobeyed God by marrying pagans	2:10-12
b. They dishonoured God by divorcing their wives	2:13-17
PART 3 / A MESSAGE OF HOPE	3:1-4:6
1. The coming Messenger	
a. The messenger of the Messenger	3:1
b. Messiah will purify his people	3:2-6
2. The call to return to God	3:7-18
a. Obedience is the key to blessing	3:7-15
b. The book of remembrance for those who fear God	3:16-18
3. The great day of God	4:1-6
a. Blessings from Messiah	4:1-3
b. The law of Moses and the coming Elijah	4:4-6

MALACHI

There is something peculiarly solemn about the closing book of the Old Testament. “The stern vigour of its reproofs, the yearning tenderness of its appeals and the sublime sweep of its predictions combine to give it an intrinsic interest of the profoundest character.”¹ This interest is greatly enhanced by its position—standing as it does in the closing days of the Old Covenant revelation, yet looking to the future and the dawning of the New Covenant. The anticipated change is going to be dramatic.

MALACHI / AUTHOR

The name *Malachi* means “my messenger,” or “my angel.” This has led some of the earlier commentators to conclude that God had communicated this prophecy through an angel. It is, however, evident, as Calvin asserts, that “The Lord at that time did not send angels to reveal his oracles, but adopted the ordinary ministry of men.”² As the apostle Peter declared, “For prophecy never came by the will of man, but holy men of God spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit” (2 Peter 1:21, emphasis added).

Some suppose Malachi may be another name for Ezra. The name Ezra Malachi or Ezra the Messenger would then be like John the Baptist, where the office or title had become, in time, a proper name. This is pure conjecture; the Bible gives no such information. “Malachi is happy to remain anonymous so that people think, not about him, but about what God has to say.”³

Malachi is God’s messenger fulfilling a priestly function. A priest is “the messenger of the LORD of hosts” (2:7); Messiah is “the Messenger of the covenant” (3:1); and the one coming immediately before Christ will be the “messenger” of the Messenger (3:1).

¹ Thomas V. Moore, *A Commentary on Haggai and Malachi* (1876; Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1960), 101.

² John Calvin, *Commentaries on the Twelve Minor Prophets*, vol. 5: *Zechariah and Malachi* (1559; Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1986), 459.

³ John Benton, *Malachi: Losing Touch with the Living God* (Welwyn: Evangelical Press, 1985), 11.

MALACHI / **HISTORICAL SETTING**

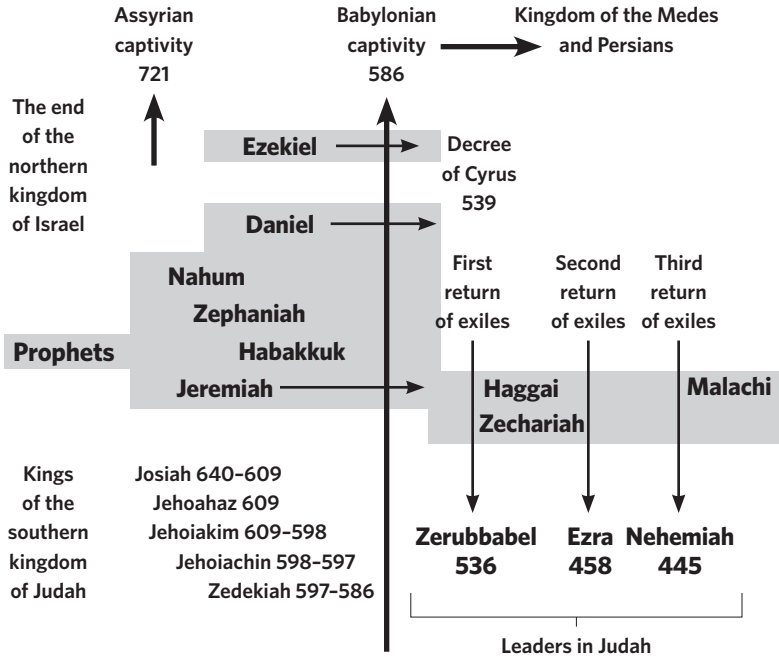
No personal information about Malachi is given in the Scriptures and he himself provides neither ancestry, home location, nor even the designation of “the prophet.” Unlike many of the writing prophets, he does not locate the time of his prophecies in the reign of a particular king (cf. Isaiah 1:1; Zechariah 1:1; see Table 7). There are nevertheless internal indications which enable an approximate date to be established:

- The temple had been rebuilt at Jerusalem and sacrifices were being offered (1:7–8, 13–14; 3:8).
- The word translated *governor* (1:8) is the Persian technical term *pehah*, probably indicating that a Persian governor was ruling in Jerusalem.
- The great similarity between the problems faced by Ezra and Nehemiah and those addressed by Malachi, such as: corrupt priests (1:6–2:9; Nehemiah 13:7–9), intermarriage with pagans (2:10–12; Ezra 9:1–2; Nehemiah 13:23–28) and the neglect of tithes and offerings (3:8–9; Nehemiah 13:10–11).

Nehemiah came to Jerusalem in 445 B.C., but it is unlikely that he was the governor mentioned in 1:8 since the Persian word is used. It is probable that Malachi’s prophecies were delivered during Nehemiah’s twelve-year absence in Susa with Artaxerxes of Babylon (Nehemiah 13:6). That would place Malachi’s prophecies between 433 and 421 B.C., about a century after Haggai and Zechariah began their ministries (520 B.C.). Malachi, therefore, probably stood in the same relation to Nehemiah as Haggai and Zechariah did to Zerubbabel, or Isaiah to Hezekiah, and Jeremiah to Josiah, in Israel’s earlier history (Figure 17).

Before the Babylonian captivity (586 B.C.) the besetting sins of the Jews were idolatry and superstition. Afterward, because of the influence of the Babylonian culture and mindset, a change began in the thinking of the Jews, which would ultimately lead to the rigid formalism of the Pharisees and the ridiculing scepticism of the Sadducees. The predominant outlook during the period of Malachi’s prophecy was the Pharisaic “spirit of proud and bigoted self-righteousness that claimed

Figure 17. Malachi in relation to Judah and its prophets and kings: before, during and after the exile*



*Years are in B.C.

the favour of God with insolent haughtiness, at the very moment that this favour was forfeited by unbelief and neglect of duty.”⁴

MALACHI / OUTLINE

The book of Malachi is written as a dialogue between God and his people. Of the fifty-five verses in this book, forty-seven are spoken by God—the highest proportion of all the prophets.⁵ Twelve times in the first three chapters, “you say” is contrasted with “says the LORD.” God

⁴ Moore, *A Commentary on Haggai and Malachi*, 104.

⁵ Bruce Wilkinson and Kenneth Boa, *Talk Thru the Old Testament* (Nashville: Nelson, 1983), 297.

Table 7. The chronological message of the writing prophets

B.C.	Prophet	Nation(s)	Theme	Key thought
c. 840 or c. 580	Obadiah	Edom	Warning to the enemies of the people of God	As you have done, it shall be done to you
c. 820	Joel	Judah	The value and importance of repentance	The day of the Lord
793-753*	Jonah	Nineveh	He is not the God of the Jews only	A gracious and merciful God
792-740*	Amos	Israel	National sin results in national punishment	Punishment
750-710*	Hosea	Israel	God's love for his wayward people	Return
740-700+	Isaiah	Judah	Salvation by the living God through judgement and grace	The Holy One of Israel
732-715†	Micah	Judah/ Israel	God hates sin and delights to pardon	The pardoning God
663-612*	Nahum	Nineveh	The destruction of God's enemies	Awful doom
640-612*	Zephaniah	Judah	The searching judgements of God	God's jealousy
627-586+	Jeremiah	Judah	Certainty of God's judgement; eternity of God's love	Early warnings
609-605*	Habakkuk	Judah	The mysteries of providence	Living by faith
605-522+	Daniel	Gentile nations	Jehovah is Lord of all	God's universal sovereignty
592-570†	Ezekiel	Judah in exile	The severity and goodness of God	The glory of the Lord
c. 520	Haggai	Judah after exile	God first in life and service	Working for God

* somewhere within this period

+ and onward

†at least this period

B.C.	Prophet	Nation(s)	Theme	Key thought
520-517	Zechariah	Judah after exile	Encouragement to the disheartened	God loves his people
538-458	Ezra	Judah after exile	The place and power of the Word of God	The Word of the Lord
445-433+	Nehemiah	Judah after exile	Building the kingdom of God	Prayer and hard work
432-420*	Malachi	Judah after exile	Message of love, rebuke and hope	The Lord will come

* somewhere within this period + and onward †at least this period

hears and remembers every word spoken by his people. Through Malachi, the Lord counters their wrong thinking and challenges their sinful behaviour.

Malachi...directed his message of judgment to a people plagued with corrupt priests, wicked practices, and a false sense of security in their privileged relationship with God. Using the question-and-answer method, Malachi probes deeply into their problems of hypocrisy, infidelity, mixed marriages, divorce, false worship and arrogance.⁶

PART 1 / A MESSAGE OF LOVE (1:1-5)

A clear pattern is evident throughout the book: the Lord makes a statement; the people question or deny it; and the Lord gives the answer.⁷ The first instance of this (1:2-5) illustrates the common pattern. The Lord says, "I have loved you," to which the people respond with the question: "In what way have You loved us?" (1:2). The Lord then replies by describing the destruction of their enemies the Edomites, the offspring of Esau. It is an illustration of his patient love that God is prepared to reason with them.

⁶ Wilkinson and Boa, *Talk Thru the Old Testament*, 295.

⁷ Beginning at 1:2; 1:6; 1:7; 1:11; 2:13; 2:17; 3:6; 3:13.

PART 2 / A MESSAGE OF REBUKE (1:6-2:17)

In spite of the numerous evidences of God's special love for his people, they have not responded by honouring and obeying him. The priests have neglected their responsibilities: the sacrifices they have brought to God are not fit even to set before an earthly governor (1:8), and they have failed to obey and to teach the law of God (2:5-9).

The behaviour of the Lord's people reflects badly on the Lord himself. He is being dishonoured by both priests and people; as in the days of Hosea it is "like people, like priest" (Hosea 4:9). Following the bad example of their religious leaders, they have intermarried with their pagan neighbours (2:11) and have "dealt treacherously" by divorcing their wives (2:14-16). They display a bad attitude toward each other (2:10). To all their faults and failings, they add the greatest dishonour to the Lord by blasphemously claiming, "Everyone who does evil is good in the sight of the LORD, and He delights in them" (2:17).

In spite of Israel's failure and neglect, the Lord will vindicate his great name (1:11).

PART 3 / A MESSAGE OF HOPE (3:1-4:6)

The Lord gives the Israelites a message of hope, though it contains a sober warning. He will send the Messenger of the covenant, but his coming will prove devastating: "But who can endure the day of His coming?" (3:2). The nation will be purified: witchcraft, adultery, dishonesty and oppression will be banished from the land (3:5).

If they will obey the terms of their covenant with God, then they will experience the singular blessing of the Lord.

The Lord accuses them of uttering more harsh words against him. They have claimed there is no value in obeying the Lord (3:14), and they have honoured the wicked and blasphemous among them. There is, however, a *righteous remnant* to be found in Israel who encourage one another in the Lord. The Lord records their names in "a book of remembrance" (3:16). When the day of the Lord comes, there will be a clear distinction drawn between the righteous and the unrighteous (4:1-4).

The people are again urged to keep the law of Moses and with patience to await the arrival of Elijah the prophet.

MALACHI / CHRIST AND HIS CHURCH

PROPHECIES

1. The Messenger of the covenant

Covenants stand at the heart of the book of Malachi. Three covenants are specifically mentioned: the covenant of Levi (2:8), the covenant of the fathers (2:10) and the covenant of marriage (2:14). The special love which God displays toward Israel is intrinsically related to his covenant relationship with them (1:2–5). Furthermore, through Malachi the promised Messiah is called “the Messenger of the covenant”:

“Behold, I send My messenger,
And he will prepare the way before Me.
And the Lord, whom you seek,
Will suddenly come to His temple,
Even the Messenger of the covenant,
In whom you delight.
Behold, He is coming,”
Says the Lord of hosts (3:1).

The Messenger of the covenant is an apt name for the one who is also the Word of God (John 1:1). The Son of God is the ultimate communication from God (Hebrews 1:1–2) since, “No one has seen God at any time. The only begotten Son, who is in the bosom of the Father, He has declared *Him*” (John 1:18; cf. John 14:9–10).

The “covenant” here does not mean any specific outward transaction between God and the Israelites, but that deeper inner relationship “which he has to the whole church, involving...the great purpose and plan of redemption.”⁸ The Lord Jesus Christ is also called “the Mediator of the new covenant” (Hebrews 12:24; cf. Matthew 26:28; Jeremiah 31:31–34).

Four-hundred years after Malachi prophesied, the Lord Jesus identified John the Baptist as the one who fulfilled the prophecy: “Behold, I send My messenger before Your face, who will prepare Your way

⁸ Moore, *A Commentary on Haggai and Malachi*, 149.

before You" (Matthew 11:10; Luke 7:27; cf. Mark 1:2–4). John declares his unique ministry as identifying and introducing Jesus of Nazareth as the Messiah, the Son of God, the King of Israel, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world (John 1:29,34,36).

2. The coming of Elijah

Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet
Before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the LORD (4:5).

Who is this Elijah? Is he the Tishbite (1 Kings 17:1), who is personally to reappear on earth? That is what the Jews and even some of early Christian fathers thought. The question is resolved, however, by the Lord Jesus Christ himself when, referring to John the Baptist, he said, "For all the prophets and the law prophesied until John. And if you are willing to receive it, he is Elijah who is to come" (Matthew 11:13–14). In a parallel passage, Luke records the words confirming John the Baptist's representative character. Speaking about John, the Lord Jesus said,

But what did you go out to see? A prophet? Yes, I say to you, and more than a prophet. This is he of whom it is written:

"Behold, I send My messenger before Your face,
Who will prepare Your way before You" (Luke 7:26–27).

Before the birth of John the Baptist, his father, the godly priest Zacharias, received a visit from the angel Gabriel, who applied the prophecy of Malachi (4:5–6) to the unborn child when he said,

And he will turn many of the children of Israel to the Lord their God. He will also go before Him in the spirit and power of Elijah, "to turn the hearts of the fathers to the children," and the disobedient to the wisdom of the just, to make ready a people prepared for the Lord (Luke 1:16–17).

John the Baptist is the Elijah promised by the Lord through his servant Malachi.

While the two prophecies of the messenger of the Messenger (3:1) and the sending of Elijah the prophet (4:5) appear unrelated in the book of Malachi, in their fulfilment they are intrinsically united. John the Baptist is the man of God who unites both predictions in his person and office.

MALACHI / **CONCLUSION**

The Jews (Israelites, predominantly from the tribes of Judah and Benjamin) were back in their homeland. The temple in Jerusalem had been rebuilt but they were still under the control of Babylon, still ruled by a pagan people. Their spiritual condition was very poor. Instead of seeking God's help and relying on his providence and the promises given in the Law and through the prophets, they were faithless, disobedient and resentful. Rather than acknowledging their sin and repenting before God, they blamed the Lord for all their troubles.

Malachi issues a three-pronged challenge: to the priests, the men of Israel and then the nation as a whole. Using a question and answer approach, the prophet sets out God's accusations against the priests and the people for their sins. Specific charges are presented: their sacrifices are inferior, their divorces are numerous, unjustified and unlawful, their marriages with pagans offend the Lord and their general attitude toward the true and living God is utterly disrespectful. Malachi records that their response is disbelief and doubt.

In spite of their sinfulness, God remains faithful. True believers are present in the nation. They are urged to converse regularly about the Lord and be assured that God remembers them. Malachi's greatest encouragement to the faithful—both here and in the generations to come—is given when speaking of the promised Messiah. Through Malachi the Lord promises: a forerunner to the Messiah (3:1, "My messenger"), Christ will come to his temple to purify the priesthood (3:2–3) and Christ will come as "the Sun of Righteousness" who rises "with healing in His wings" (4:2).

Malachi presents the last word of prophecy. Four-hundred years of silence will follow. The next prophet of God will be John the Baptist—proclaiming the arrival of the promised Messiah, Jesus the Christ!

ANTICIPATING A NEW BEGINNING

With the culmination of the book of Malachi, the Old Testament preparation for the coming of the Messiah is complete.

Theophanies, types and prophecies have laid the foundation. The promise of a great champion, who would do battle with the enemy of God (Genesis 3:15) and rectify the appalling damage which resulted through the sins of unbelief and disobedience, has been expounded.

Predictions have been made:

- The seed of Eve, the seed of Abraham, the seed of Judah, the seed of David—establishing the royal line.
- Son of God, God like God, possessing all the attributes of the eternal—revealing a unique personage.
- King, Priest, Prophet, Messiah, Mediator, Counsellor—forming a unique combination of offices.
- Peacemaker, kinsman-redeemer, sacrificial lamb, sin-bearer—indicating a remarkable responsibility and purpose.

The scene is set. The godly yearn; they watch; they wait and pray. The “just and devout” wait “for the consolation of Israel” (Luke 2:25).

The Old Testament Scriptures are complete.

The prophetic voice is silent for the next 400 years, until suddenly a man emerges in Judah crying out: “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand!” (Matthew 3:2). John the Baptist breaks forth as “the voice of one crying in the wilderness: ‘Prepare the way of the LORD’” (Isaiah 40:3). He is the messenger of the Messenger of the covenant (Malachi 3:1). God has raised him up to reveal his Son to Israel (John 1:34,31). The fullness of the time has come.

God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, that we might receive the adoption as sons (Galatians 4:4–5).

God, who at various times and in various ways spoke in time past to the fathers by the prophets, has in these last days spoken to us by His Son (Hebrews 1:1–2).

The New Covenant is about to be established. The Old Covenant at Sinai is to be superseded by “a better covenant” (Hebrews 8:6), “the everlasting covenant” (Hebrews 13:20). The blood of this covenant is not like the old, “the blood of bulls and goats” (Hebrews 10:4), but “the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot” (1 Peter 1:19). The sins of God’s people are to be removed forever. Righteousness is to be imputed and imparted. The Spirit of God is to indwell every believer. The law of God is to be written on the heart. Believing Jew and believing Gentile are to unite into the new Israel of God, the true Israel of God, the spiritual Israel of God. Together the children of God of all nations unite in singing, “Salvation *belongs* to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb!” (Revelation 7:10).

The history of the Old Testament should thrill us; so too should its prophecies and teachings. The Old Testament should thrill us because it has one glorious and united purpose, one unifying subject: Christ and his church. The Bible should thrill us because it speaks of him (John 5:39) and what he has done for his people—at great personal cost, to “bring us to God” (1 Peter 3:18).

Amen! Blessing and glory and wisdom,
 Thanksgiving and honor and power and might,
 Be to our God forever and ever.
 Amen (Revelation 7:12).

This is the glory of Christ revealed in the Old Testament Scriptures. The momentous event is awaited—the glory of Christ in his coming. The Word would soon become flesh and dwell among us, Immanuel, God with us (Matthew 1:23). *All for the glory of God!*

MALACHI / **APPLICATION AND REFLECTION****1. The distinguishing love of God**

I have loved you...
 Jacob I have loved;
 But Esau I have hated (1:2-3).

The apostle Paul quotes these words, along with others from the Old Testament, when explaining the electing love of God:

For *they* are not all Israel who *are* of Israel, nor *are they* all children because they are the seed of Abraham; but, "In Isaac your seed shall be called" [Genesis 21:12]. That is, those who *are* the children of the flesh, these *are* not the children of God; but the children of the promise are counted as the seed. For this *is* the word of promise: "At this time I will come and Sarah shall have a son" [cf. Genesis 18:10,14].

And not only *this*, but when Rebecca also had conceived by one man, even by our father Isaac (for *the children* not yet being born, nor having done any good or evil, that the purpose of God according to election might stand, not of works but of Him who calls), it was said to her, "The older shall serve the younger" [Genesis 25:23]. As it is written, "Jacob I have loved, but Esau I have hated" [Malachi 1:2-3] (Romans 9:6-13, references added).

Paul's logic is crystal clear: the whole human race is sinful by nature. The Lord would be entirely just to condemn every individual man, woman and child to everlasting punishment. We all deserve it: "There is none righteous, no, not one...for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God" (Romans 3:10,23). The Lord "chooses and rejects as seems good to Him any of the sinful race of Adam, all of whom are justly objects of His displeasure, without regarding natural qualities which distinguish them from one another"⁹ (cf. Ephesians 1:3-5). "For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; *it is the gift of God*" (Ephesians 2:8).

⁹ Robert Haldane, *An Exposition of Romans* (McLean: MacDonald Publishing Co., 1958), 465.

From the book of Malachi, the Christian church may learn important lessons:

- They should remember how much God loves his chosen people (1:2; 3:17; cf. John 3:16; Romans 5:8; 8:31–32; Ephesians 1:3–7).
- Repentance is essential in maintaining a right relationship with the Lord (1:9; cf. Isaiah 55:7; 2 Corinthians 7:10).
- True faith in God is demonstrated by obedience to his Word (2:7–9; cf. John 14:15; 1 Corinthians 7:10; James 2:18).
- The Lord's people should encourage one another (3:16) "and so much the more as [they] see the Day approaching" (Hebrews 10:25).

2. Stealing from God

Will a man rob God?
 Yet you have robbed Me!
 But you say,
 "In what way have we robbed You?"
 In tithes and offerings (3:8).

The people defrauded the Lord in tithes and offerings. The tithe, a tenth part of income devoted to the Lord's service, was based on Abraham's spontaneous gift to Melchizedek (Genesis 14:20), continued as part of Jacob's commitment (Genesis 28:22), established in Israel's law by Moses (Leviticus 27:30–32; Deuteronomy 14:22–26) and given for the support of the Levites (Numbers 18:21–32).

Israel's repentance will be demonstrated by bringing "all the tithes into the storehouse" (3:10) and the blessing of the Lord will fall on them.

King Solomon recorded a spiritual proverb which expresses the same sentiment:

Honor the LORD with your possessions,
 And with the firstfruits of all your increase;
 So your barns will be filled with plenty,
 And your vats will overflow with new wine (Proverbs 3:9–10).

The Old Testament contains "spiritual laws of economics" which are diametrically opposed to the world's thinking:

There is *one* who scatters, yet increases more;
 And there is one who withholds more than is right,
 But it *leads* to poverty.
 The generous soul will be made rich,
 And he who waters will also be watered himself (Proverbs 11:24–25).

In the New Testament the words “tithe” and “tithing” appear only eight times (Matthew 23:23; Luke 11:42; 18:12; Hebrews 7:5,6,8,9). All of these passages refer to the Old Testament practice, or the current Jewish interpretation. Under the New Covenant, there is no express command to tithe, but Christians are commended for being generous in sharing their material possessions with the poor (Acts 2:44–45; 4:32–37) and instructed that gifts in support of the Lord’s people and the Lord’s work are to be given freely, cheerfully, generously and secretly (2 Corinthians 9:6–8; Matthew 6:3–4). Rich Christians are “to be rich in good works, ready to give, willing to share” (1 Timothy 6:18).

The Saviour is the Christian’s ultimate example of giving (2 Corinthians 8:9). All that we are, and all that we possess, have been entrusted to us by the Lord. We are called to be faithful stewards (1 Corinthians 16:1–3; 2 Corinthians 8:1–9:15). Love for the Lord demonstrated in generosity to the Lord’s people and the Lord’s work still results in blessing from the Lord (Galatians 6:6–10). When Abraham spontaneously gave a tithe, he did so 430 years before the tithe was written into the Old Testament law at Sinai. The tithe remains a guideline, but for many Christians in the Western world it is a wholly inadequate amount.

3. The book of remembrance

The character of God and his relationship with his people is highlighted throughout the entire book of Malachi: God loves his people (1:2); God is Israel’s Father and Master (1:6); God is without deceit and speaks openly and plainly (2:2); God is Israel’s Father and Creator (2:10); God is the God of justice (2:17) and God does not change (3:6).¹⁰ Everything about God’s character and ways warrants the utmost respect, reverence, love and service. Those who delight *in* the Lord will also delight in speaking of him, especially to those who share such loving devotion:

¹⁰ Raymond B. Dillard and Tremper Longman III, *An Introduction to the Old Testament* (Leicester: Apollos, 1995), 441–442.

Then those who feared the LORD spoke to one another,
 And the LORD listened and heard *them*;
 So a book of remembrance was written before Him
 For those who fear the LORD
 And who meditate on His name.

“They shall be Mine,” says the LORD of hosts,
 “On the day that I make them My jewels.
 And I will spare them
 As a man spares his own son who serves him” (3:16–17).

The Lord keeps a record of those in whom he delights and who delight in him. The coming of the Messiah will divide people into two groups—one for blessing, one for judgement. It will be a day “burning like an oven” (4:1), or the day when “The Sun of Righteousness shall arise with healing in His wings” (4:2). While the first advent of Christ brought judgement to some and healing to others (Matthew 8:16–17; 11:5), the second advent of Christ will bring in the final judgement and total healing (Revelation 21:4).

The apostle John describes a vision of the final judgement and the opening of the record books:

Then I saw a great white throne and Him who sat on it, from whose face the earth and the heaven fled away. And there was found no place for them. And I saw the dead, small and great, standing before God, and books were opened. And another book was opened, which is *the Book of Life*. And the dead were judged according to their works, by the things which were written in the books. The sea gave up the dead who were in it, and Death and Hades delivered up the dead who were in them. And they were judged, each one according to his works. Then Death and Hades were cast into the lake of fire. This is the second death. And anyone not found written in the Book of Life was cast into the lake of fire (Revelation 20:11–15).

4. Preparing for the coming of Messiah

Malachi presents a vivid picture of the closing period of Old Testament history: reformation is needed in preparation for the coming of the Messiah. There is a parallel to be drawn between Israel’s state and condition at this time and that of the church in our own day. Malachi closes with a forward

look to the first coming of the Messiah. No one knew just when that day would come. The church of Jesus Christ today looks forward to the return, the second coming, of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. God's people are to be those who are "looking for the blessed hope and glorious appearing of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ" (Titus 2:13). We are to be those "who eagerly wait for Him" (Hebrews 9:28), which leads us to ask, "What manner of persons ought you to be in holy conduct and godliness?" (2 Peter 3:11).

Select bibliography

Alexander, Charles D. *Elijah: 'Crouching Coward' or Hero of the Faith?* Liverpool: Bible Exposition Fellowship, n.d.

———. *The Heavenly Mystery of the Song of Songs*. Liverpool: Bible Exposition Fellowship, 1965.

Arnot, William. *Studies in Proverbs: Laws from Heaven for Life on Earth*. 1884; Grand Rapids: Kregel, 1978.

Atkinson, David. *The Message of Ruth: The Wings of Refuge*. Leicester: Inter-Varsity Press, 1983.

Barnes, Albert. *Notes, Critical, Illustrative, and Practical, on the Book of Job*, 2 vol. Glasgow: Blackie & Son, 1847.

———. *Notes on the Old Testament: Critical, Explanatory, and Practical. The Book of the Prophet Daniel*, 2 vol. London: Blackie and Son, 1851.

———. *Notes, Critical, Illustrative, and Practical, on the Book of Psalms*, 3 vol. Glasgow: Blackie & Son, 1869.

- Beeley, Ray. *Amos: Introduction and Commentary*. London: Banner of Truth Trust, 1969.
- Bentley, Michael. *Balancing the Books: Micah and Nahum Simply Explained*. Darlington: Evangelical Press, 1994.
- Benton, John. *Losing Touch with the Living God*. Welwyn: Evangelical Press, 1985.
- Blaikie, William G. *David, King of Israel: The Divine Plan and Lessons of His Life*. 1861; Minneapolis: Klock and Kloc, 1981.
- Bonar, Andrew A. *Christ and His Church in the Book of Psalms*. 1861; Grand Rapids: Kregel, 1978.
- Borland, James A. *Christ in the Old Testament: A Comprehensive Study of Old Testament Appearances of Christ in Human Form*. Chicago: Moody, 1978.
- Bridges, Charles. *A Commentary on Ecclesiastes*. 1860; Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1961.
- . *A Commentary on Proverbs*. 1846; London: Banner of Truth Trust, 1968.
- Brown, Raymond. *Let's Read the Old Testament*. London: Victory Press, 1971.
- Buckland, A.R. and A.L. Williams, ed. *Universal Bible Dictionary*. London: The Religious Tract Society, 1914.
- Burrowes, George. *A Commentary on the Song of Solomon*. 1853; London: Banner of Truth Trust, 1958.
- Calvin, John. *Calvin's Commentaries*, vol. 5, *Ezekiel and Daniel*. 1554; Grand Rapids: Associated Publishers and Authors Inc., n.d.
- . *Commentary on the Book of the Prophet Isaiah: Volume 4*, trans. William Pringle. Edinburgh: T. Constable, 1853.
- . *Commentaries on the Twelve Minor Prophets*, vol. 1: *Hosea*. 1559; Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1986.
- . *Commentaries on the Twelve Minor Prophets*, vol. 2: *Joel, Amos, Obadiah*. 1559; Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1986.
- . *Commentaries on the Twelve Minor Prophets*, vol. 3: *Jonah, Micah and Nahum*. 1559; Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1986.
- . *Commentaries on the Twelve Minor Prophets*, vol. 5: *Zechariah and Malachi*. 1559; Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1986.
- . *The Epistles of Paul the Apostle to the Romans and to the Thessalonians*. Edinburgh: Saint Andrew Press, 1958.

- . *The Second Epistle of Paul the Apostle to the Corinthians*. Edinburgh: St Andrew Press, 1964.
- Carson, Herbert M. *Hallelujah!: Christian Worship*. Welwyn: Evangelical Press, 1980.
- Clowney, Edmund P. *The Unfolding Mystery: Discovering Christ in the Old Testament*. Leicester: Inter-Varsity Press, 1988.
- . "Preaching Christ from All the Scriptures," in Samuel T. Logan, Jr., ed. *The Preacher and Preaching: Reviving the Art in the Twentieth Century*. Phillipsburg: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1986.
- Delitzsch, Franz. *Messianic Prophecies*. Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1880.
- Dillard, Raymond B. and Tremper Longman III. *An Introduction to the Old Testament*. Leicester: Apollos IVP, 1995.
- Edersheim, Alfred. *Israel under Samuel, Saul, and David, to the Birth of Solomon*. London: The Religious Tract Society, [1877?].
- Ellsworth, Roger. *He is Altogether Lovely: Discovering Christ in the Song of Solomon*. Darlington: Evangelical Press, 1998.
- Fairbairn, Patrick. *An Exposition of Ezekiel*. 1851; Minneapolis: Klock and Klock, 1979.
- . *Prophecy: Viewed in Respect to Its Distinctive Nature, Its Special Function, and Proper Interpretation*. 1865; Grand Rapids: Baker, 1976.
- . *The Typology of Scripture: Viewed in Connection with the Whole Series of the Divine Dispensations*. 1900; Grand Rapids: Baker, 1975.
- John Gill, *An Exposition of the Song of Solomon*. 1854; Grand Rapids: Sovereign Grace, 1971.
- Goldsworthy, Graeme. *Gospel and Kingdom: A Christian Interpretation of the Old Testament*. Carlisle: Paternoster, 1981.
- Green, William Henry. *The Argument of the Book of Job Unfolded*. 1874; Minneapolis: James & Klock, 1977.
- Greenhill, William. *An Exposition of Ezekiel*. 1645; Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1994.
- Gulston, Charles. *David, Shepherd and King: The Life and Heritage of David*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1980.
- Harrison, R.K. *Introduction to the Old Testament*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1969.
- Hendriksen, William. *Survey of the Bible: A Treasury of Bible Information*. Welwyn: Evangelical Press, 1976.

- Hengstenberg, Ernest W. *Christology of the Old Testament and a Commentary on the Messianic Predictions*. 1847; Grand Rapids: Kregel, 1970.
- . *History of the Kingdom of God under the Old Testament*, 2 vol. Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1877.
- Hutcheson, George. *Exposition of the Minor Prophets: Obadiah, Jonah, Micah, Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah*. Lafayette: Sovereign Grace Publishers, 1962.
- Hodge, Charles. *Systematic Theology*, 3 vol. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1977.
- Hodgkin, A.M. *Christ in All the Scriptures*. London: Pickering and Inglis, 1907.
- Jensen, Irving L. *Jensen's Survey of the Old Testament: Search and Discover*. Chicago: Moody, 1978.
- Jukes, Andrew. *The Law of the Offerings*. 1854; Grand Rapids: Kregel Publications, 1976.
- Keddie, Gordon J. *Preacher on the Run: The Message of Jonah*. Welwyn: Evangelical Press, 1986.
- Keil, Carl F. *The Twelve Minor Prophets*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1949.
- Kidner, Derek. *The Message of Ecclesiastes: A Time to Mourn, and a Time to Dance*. Leicester: Inter-Varsity, 1976.
- Krummacher, F.W. *David—The King of Israel*. 1868; Grand Rapids: Baker, 1982.
- . *Elijah the Tishbite*. Grand Rapids: Baker, 1977.
- . *Elisha: A Prophet for Our Times*. Grand Rapids: Baker, 1976.
- . *The Last Days of Elisha*. Grand Rapids: Baker, 1981.
- Lee, Robert. *The Outlined Bible: An Outline and Analysis of Every Book in the Bible*. London: Pickering and Inglis, 1930.
- Leupold, H.C. *Exposition of Ecclesiastes*. Welwyn: Evangelical Press, 1952.
- . *Exposition of the Psalms*. Grand Rapids: Baker, 1969.
- . *Exposition of Isaiah*, 2 vol. Welwyn: Evangelical Press, 1977.
- Lloyd-Jones, D. Martyn. *From Fear to Faith: Studies in the Book of Habakkuk—and the Problem of History*. London: Inter-Varsity Fellowship, 1953.
- Mackay, John L. *God's Just Demands: A Commentary on Jonah, Micah and Nahum*. Fearn: Christian Focus, 1993.

- Marbury, Edward. *Obadiah and Habakkuk*. 1649–1650; Minneapolis: Klock and Klock, 1979.
- Martens, E.A. *Plot and Purpose in the Old Testament*. Leicester: Inter-Varsity Press, 1981.
- McComiskey, Thomas E. *The Covenants of Promise: A Theology of the Old Testament Covenants*. Nottingham: Inter-Varsity Press, 1985.
- Moore, Thomas V. *A Commentary on Haggai and Malachi*. 1876; Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1960.
- . *A Commentary on Zechariah*. Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1958.
- Morgan, G. Campbell. *Student Survey of the Bible*. Iowa Falls: World Bible Publishers, 1993.
- Nelson's *Complete Book of Bible Maps and Charts*. Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1996.
- Olyott, Stuart. *A Life Worth Living and a Lord Worth Loving: Ecclesiastes & Song of Solomon*. Welwyn: Evangelical Press, 1983.
- . *Jesus Is Both God and Man—What the Bible Teaches About the Person of Christ*. Darlington: Evangelical Press, 2000.
- . *The Three are One: What the Bible Teaches About the Trinity*. Welwyn: Evangelical Press, 1979.
- Pink, Arthur W. *Gleanings from Elisha: His Life and Miracles*. Chicago: Moody Press, 1972.
- . *The Life of David*. Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1981.
- . *The Life of Elijah*. Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1956.
- Spurgeon, Charles Haddon. *The Treasury of David*, 3 vol. McLean: MacDonald Publishing Company, 1990.
- Stier, Rudolf. *The Words of the Apostles*. 1869; Minneapolis: Klock and Klock, 1981.
- . *The Words of the Lord Jesus*. 1874; Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1985.
- Still, William. *Eleven Sermons on the Song of Solomon*. Aberdeen: Didasko Press, 1971.
- Thiele, Edwin R. *A Chronology of Hebrew Kings*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1977.
- Vos, Geerhardus. *Biblical Theology: Old and New Testaments*. 1948; Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1975.
- Wilkinson, Bruce and Kenneth Boa. *Talk Thru the Old Testament*. Nashville: Nelson, 1983.

Young, Edward J. *The Book of Isaiah*. 2 vol. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1969.

———. *A Commentary on Daniel*. London: Banner of Truth Trust, 1949.

———. *An Introduction to the Old Testament*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1949.

Appendix: A study guide

By Paul Hudson

JOB / **REVIEW**

Some key verses from Job:

1. Job 1:20-22

Then Job arose, tore his robe, and shaved his head; and he fell to the ground and worshiped. And he said:

“Naked I came from my mother’s womb,
And naked shall I return there.

The LORD gave, and the LORD has taken away;
Blessed be the name of the LORD.”

In all this Job did not sin nor charge God with wrong.

2. Job 19:25-27

For I know *that* my Redeemer lives,
 And He shall stand at last on the earth;
 And after my skin is destroyed, this *I know*,
 That in my flesh I shall see God,
 Whom I shall see for myself,
 And my eyes shall behold, and not another.
How my heart yearns within me!

3. Job 38:1-4

Then the LORD answered Job out of the whirlwind, and said:
 "Who is this who darkens counsel
 By words without knowledge?
 Now prepare yourself like a man;
 I will question you, and you shall answer Me.
 Where were you when I laid the foundations of the earth?
 Tell Me, if you have understanding."

4. Job 42:1-2,5-6

Then Job answered the LORD and said:
 "I know that You can do everything,
 And that no purpose of *Yours* can be withheld from You....
 I have heard of You by the hearing of the ear,
 But now my eye sees You.
 Therefore I abhor *myself*,
 And repent in dust and ashes."

JOB / REFLECT

- 1. God rules:** Dr. Crossley reflects on the sovereignty of God: "Nothing happens on earth until it is sanctioned in heaven." In his summary of Job's reaction when informed of the four disasters which destroyed his wealth and took the lives of his children, Dr. Crossley writes that Job's words in Job 1:21, "The LORD gave, and the LORD has taken away; Blessed be the name of the LORD,"

were not the resignation of a man who yields to an inevitable fate which cannot be undone; nor is it surrender to an almighty Ruler who has the right to do as he will with his own; nor is it even the submission of a God-fearing man who surrenders to the sovereign

purpose of the living God. There is far more to these words than mere resignation, surrender, or godly submission. Job declares the goodness and kindness of God.

Quoting William Henry Green, Dr. Crossley continues, “The bitterness of his loss is made the measure of the preciousness of the blessings God had given” him.¹

This is a profound and seldom heard response to suffering: the more that is taken away, the more Job marvels at the goodness of God in having given in the first place! Write about how this perspective on suffering could change the way you grieve, and how you could use it in counselling brothers and sisters who are suffering.

- 2. The great adversary:** Here Dr. Crossley reflects on the fact that Satan had to obtain permission from God to afflict Job, and on the limitations God placed on what Satan could do. Nevertheless, Satan’s was

a two-pronged attack: open hostility in the form of disasters and affliction, and subtle insinuation through the counsel of Job’s friends. In the one, he is the “adversary the devil...like a roaring lion” (1 Peter 5:8). In the other, “Satan himself transforms himself into an angel of light” (2 Corinthians 11:14).

How do you cope when you find yourself in the middle of the arena facing disaster, affliction, temptation and discouragement? Do you consciously “put on the whole armor of God” (Ephesians 6:11) daily? Do you remind yourself and others that the victory has already been won in Christ Jesus?

- 3. Discerning the will of God:** Dr. Crossley makes the point, “Now that we have the completed Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments, the Lord no longer reveals his will by those former means [oral traditions, theophanies, dreams and visions].” And yet these are among the means that practitioners of the prosperity gospel claim God is using to reveal his will. The people of God are indeed “in danger of being led astray by those who claim a superior knowledge through dreams and visions, worldly wisdom,

¹ William Henry Green, *The Argument of the Book of Job Unfolded* (1874; Minneapolis: James & Klock, 1977), 88–89.

experience or reason.” What distortions of the gospel are prominent in your region of the world? By what means do the practitioners claim to discern the will of God? How do you respond? On the other hand, among the many who in our day are being drawn to Christ, some report God beginning the work in their hearts by the means of dreams and visions. How are such means to be assessed?

4. The Lord’s purpose behind suffering: Dr. Crossley leads us to some of the explanation provided in the book of Job for “the problem of evil” and “the problem of suffering,” where people challenge saying, “If God is love and God is almighty, why does he not put an end to suffering?” He lists a number of examples of the usefulness of suffering, and concludes, “Like Job we are so often ignorant of God’s purposes and actions. Trusting in his revealed Word we know, ‘His work is perfect; for all His ways are justice, a God of truth and without injustice; righteous and upright is He’ (Deuteronomy 32:4).” Based on the book of Job—and any other Scriptural reference that you could add—write your own response to the question: Why does God not put an end to suffering?

5. All things work together for good: Dr. Crossley quotes the apostle Paul in Romans 8:28, “And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to *His* purpose.” This “all things” includes what seems good and pleasant, as well as what is painful. God is accomplishing his purposes in and through us for his glory, whatever it might feel to us at the time. “For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, is working for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory” (2 Corinthians 4:17). When do you have the greatest difficulty trusting this aspect of God’s sovereignty—when things are going well, from a human perspective, or when they are going poorly?

JOB / REJOICE

When Peace like a River

Horatio Gates Spafford (1873)

When peace, like a river, attendeth my way,
 When sorrows like sea billows roll;
 Whatever my lot, Thou hast taught me to say,
 It is well, it is well with my soul.

It is well (it is well),
 with my soul (with my soul),
 It is well, it is well with my soul.

Though Satan should buffet, though trials should come,
 Let this blest assurance control,
 That Christ hath regarded my helpless estate,
 And hath shed His own blood for my soul.

PSALMS / REVIEW

Some key verses from Psalms:

1. Psalm 103:1-5

Bless the LORD, O my soul;
 And all that is within me, *bless* His holy name!
 Bless the LORD, O my soul,
 And forget not all His benefits:
 Who forgives all your iniquities,
 Who heals all your diseases,
 Who redeems your life from destruction,
 Who crowns you with lovingkindness and tender mercies,
 Who satisfies your mouth with good *things*,
 So *that* your youth is renewed like the eagle's.

2. Psalm 16:8-11

I have set the LORD always before me;
 Because *He is* at my right hand I shall not be moved.
 Therefore my heart is glad, and my glory rejoices;
 My flesh also will rest in hope.
 For You will not leave my soul in Sheol,
 Nor will You allow Your Holy One to see corruption.
 You will show me the path of life;
 In Your presence *is* fullness of joy;
 At Your right hand *are* pleasures forevermore.

3. Psalm 63:1-3

O God, You *are* my God;
 Early will I seek You;
 My soul thirsts for You;

My flesh longs for You
 In a dry and thirsty land
 Where there is no water.
 So I have looked for You in the sanctuary,
 To see Your power and Your glory.
 Because Your lovingkindness *is* better than life,
 My lips shall praise You.

PSALMS / **REFLECT**

1. The experience of the church: Dr. Crossley writes,

There are psalms for every occasion in life and for every spiritual condition, and they form an ideal basis for personal devotional life. There is no experience of the believer that is not reflected here.... There is a distinctly spiritual purpose behind all of these songs. They are designed to raise the mind above the things of the world, to lift the heart toward God, to inspire confidence in God, to provide comfort in times of trial and affliction and to point forward to a better life ahead for the people of God.

Do you make a habit of reading in the Psalms daily, or the whole book of Psalms once in the year? Do you recognize the invitation to bring all things to God in prayer, which is facilitated and encouraged in the Psalms? Are there Psalms that have enabled you to express your heart to God in particular times of wonder, awe and thanksgiving, in times of sorrow and lament?

PSALM / **REJOICE**

Psalms 34:1-10

A Psalm of David when he pretended madness before Abimelech, who drove him away, and he departed.

I will bless the LORD at all times;
 His praise shall continually be in my mouth.
 My soul shall make its boast in the LORD;
 The humble shall hear of it and be glad.

Oh, magnify the LORD with me,
And let us exalt His name together.

I sought the LORD, and He heard me,
And delivered me from all my fears.
They looked to Him and were radiant,
And their faces were not ashamed.
This poor man cried out, and the LORD heard *him*,
And saved him out of all his troubles.
The angel of the LORD encamps all around those who fear Him,
And delivers them.

Oh, taste and see that the LORD is good;
Blessed is the man *who* trusts in Him!
Oh, fear the LORD, you His saints!
There is no want to those who fear Him.
The young lions lack and suffer hunger;
But those who seek the LORD shall not lack any good *thing*.

PROVERBS / REVIEW

Some key verses from Proverbs:

1. Proverbs 1:7-9

The fear of the LORD *is* the beginning of knowledge,
But fools despise wisdom and instruction.
My son, hear the instruction of your father,
And do not forsake the law of your mother;
For they *will* be a graceful ornament on your head,
And chains about your neck.

2. Proverbs 3:5-7

Trust in the LORD with all your heart,
And lean not on your own understanding;
In all your ways acknowledge Him,
And He shall direct your paths.
Do not be wise in your own eyes;
Fear the LORD and depart from evil.

3. Proverbs 16:9

A man's heart plans his way,
But the LORD directs his steps.

4. Proverbs 31:30

Charm is deceitful and beauty is passing,
But a woman *who* fears the LORD, she shall be praised.

PROVERBS / **REFLECT**

- 1. The discipline of children:** Though most of the book of Proverbs is "a collection of wise sayings, stated succinctly," Proverbs 1-9 has a specific focus, reflected in the repeated use of the phrase, "my son" (15 times in this division, 8 times through remainder of the book). Study Proverbs 1-9 and make a summary of the wisdom being poured out from father to son, particularly with respect to listening to "Lady Wisdom" and rejecting "Madam Folly."

Dr. Crossley suggests that "the best method of study is the topical method. This can be achieved either with the aid of a concordance, or by slow and careful reading of the text, forming categories in the process." Select two key themes from Dr. Crossley's list in the application and reflection section, write out the verses and reflect on the wisdom for life being conveyed in God's Word.

PROVERBS / **REJOICE****Where Shall Wisdom be Found?**

James M. Gray (1916)

There is wisdom that gold cannot buy,
Nor may silver be weighed for its price;
Nor will onyx and ruby, or crystal and pearl,
Precious jewels or coral suffice.

Where shall wisdom be found? (Who can tell?)
And the place of understanding, who can know?
Behold! the fear of the Lord, that is wisdom,
And to depart from evil is understanding.

In the fear of the Lord it is found,
 In departing from evil and sin;
 In receiving the Saviour, the Wisdom of God,
 Doth the way into wisdom begin.

ECCLESIASTES / REVIEW

Some key verses from Ecclesiastes:

1. Ecclesiastes 3:1

To everything *there* is a season,
 A time for every purpose under heaven.

2. Ecclesiastes 5:1

Walk prudently when you go to the house of God; and draw near to hear rather than to give the sacrifice of fools, for they do not know that they do evil.

3. Ecclesiastes 12:13-14

Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter:

Fear God and keep His commandments,
 For this is man's all.
 For God will bring every work into judgment,
 Including every secret thing,
 Whether good or evil.

ECCLESIASTES / REFLECT

1. The fear of God: Dr. Crossley writes,

Two essential aspects are contained in the fear of God: the Lord we love and the life we live.

The first involves *respect, worship and service given to God as the sovereign Lord of all life...*

The second element...involves *holy living*.

Reflect, first, on the place and character of worship in your life. How much of your worship centres in the "thoughts, feelings, aspirations, experiences and blessings of the worshipper," and how much on "the adoration, exultation, praise and honouring of God"?

Second, reflect on your manner of life. The message of the book of Ecclesiastes is that true wisdom leads to pure and holy living (12:13) in obedience to God's revealed will. Does your thinking, speaking and acting begin with the question, "In this situation, what would be pleasing in God's sight?"

- 2. The wisdom of the world:** As Dr. Crossley writes, "a wisdom devoid of the love of God and a commitment to his honour is not wisdom from above." Citing from James 3, 1 Corinthians 1 and Colossians 2, he reminds us that the contrast between worldly wisdom and godly wisdom is found throughout the Scriptures. Consider the heartbreaking decision of Rehoboam, son of Solomon, to reject the counsel of his father's advisors in favour of the counsel of "the young men who had grown up with him" (1 Kings 12:8), resulting in the division of the kingdom into Israel and Judah (1 Kings 12; 2 Chronicles 10). Describe a time in your life when you either accepted or rejected godly wisdom and counsel. What were the results? What did you learn?

- 3. Worldliness:** Solomon's life was full—and yet empty. Dr. Crossley writes,

The only thing he lacked in the latter years of his reign was a good and right relationship with God! The result was that everything in his life was spoiled.

Work, hobbies, sport, recreation, holidays and family may receive more attention, time and energy than is appropriate. Spiritual concerns must always take priority and regulate all else.

How do you maintain proper balance in *your* life, ensuring that devotion to God takes precedence and all other activities of life are regulated by that priority?

- 4. Death:** Dr. Crossley writes that Solomon "was not excited at the prospect of heaven because all that he had laboured for was here on earth. Therefore, he feared death because he was leaving everything behind." Solomon's conclusion, as he reflected on his life and his search for meaning was "Fear God and keep His commandments, for this is man's all" (Ecclesiastes 12:13). What counsel have you received from older Christians, or have you given to younger Christians, concerning what is of value in this life? Write about any encouragement you have received from the realization that "Jesus has restored meaning to wisdom, labour, love and life," reflected in Table 3, contrasting "Life under the sun" with "Life under the Son"?

ECCLESIASTES / REJOICE

Awake, My Soul, and with the Sun

Thomas Ken (1695)

Awake, my soul, and with the sun
Thy daily stage of duty run;
Shake off dull sloth, and early rise
To pay Thy morning sacrifice.

Lord, I my vows to Thee renew.
Disperse my sins as morning dew;
Guard my first springs of thought and will;
And with Thyself my spirit fill.

Direct, control, suggest, this day,
All I design or do or say,
That all my pow'rs, with all their might,
In Thy sole glory may unite.

Praise God, from whom all blessings flow;
Praise Him all creatures here below;
Praise Him above, ye heav'only host;
Praise Father, Son, and Holy Ghost.

SONG OF SOLOMON / REVIEW

Some key verses from Song of Solomon:

1. Song of Solomon 3:1-2

By night on my bed I sought the one I love;
I sought him, but I did not find him.
"I will rise now," I said,
"And go about the city;
In the streets and in the squares
I will seek the one I love."
I sought him, but I did not find him.

2. Song of Solomon 4:16

Awake, O north *wind*,
 And come, O south!
 Blow upon my garden,
That its spices may flow out.
 Let my beloved come to his garden
 And eat its pleasant fruits.

3. Song of Solomon 5:1

I have come to my garden, my sister, *my* spouse;
 I have gathered my myrrh with my spice;
 I have eaten my honeycomb with my honey;
 I have drunk my wine with my milk.

SONG OF SOLOMON / REFLECT

1. Marital love: Dr. Crossley writes,

Though the Lord's primary purpose in the Song of Solomon is no doubt to communicate truth concerning Christ and his church, there is also a powerful message within the inspired story about human marital love (confined within marriage by the Word of God). In a day when sexual love is debased, exploited and publicly paraded, there is need for Christian married couples to know that sexual relationships can be pure, holy and God-honouring.

How would you counsel people—single people or married Christian couples—concerning God's gift of marital intimacy? Is this a taboo subject in your culture? Should it be?

2. Christ alone! Solomon describes his bride as "a garden enclosed," "a spring shut up" and "a fountain sealed," referring to the exclusiveness of their relationship. Dr. Crossley writes that this reminds us, "The Lord Jesus Christ, the Saviour and Lord of his church, is to be loved *exclusively*," and that "adoration, love, devotion, delight, obedience and service flow from the believer's grateful heart." How do we guard and protect the exclusivity of our relationship with Christ Jesus, our Saviour, as we wait for his coming again?

SONG OF SOLOMON / **REJOICE**

Are you going to be there?

Carrie Elizabeth Ellis Breck (1855–1934)

In the souls bright home, beyond the sky,
In a land where the ransomed never die,
There will be a royal banquet by and by,
'Tis the great marriage supper of the Lamb.

Are you going to be there
Are you going to be there,
At the great marriage supper of the Lamb?
With your wedding garment on,
Will you meet the loved ones gone,
At the great marriage supper of the Lamb?

We shall praise Him by the crystal tide
When the Lamb that was slain is glorified—
And the ransomed church of God shall be the bride,
At the great marriage supper of the Lamb.

ISAIAH / **REVIEW**

Some key verses from Isaiah:

1. Isaiah 7:14

Therefore the LORD Himself will give you a sign: Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a Son, and shall call His name Immanuel.

2. Isaiah 6:1–4

In the year that King Uzziah died, I saw the LORD sitting on a throne, high and lifted up, and the train of His robe filled the temple. Above it stood seraphim; each one had six wings: with two he covered his face, with two he covered his feet, and with two he flew. And one cried to another and said:

“Holy, holy, holy is the LORD of hosts;
The whole earth is full of His glory!”

And the posts of the door were shaken by the voice of him who cried out,
and the house was filled with smoke.

3. Isaiah 9:6-7

For unto us a Child is born,
Unto us a Son is given;
And the government will be upon His shoulder.
And His name will be called
Wonderful, Counselor, Mighty God,
Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.
Of the increase of *His* government and peace
There will be no end,
Upon the throne of David and over His kingdom,
To order it and establish it with judgment and justice
From that time forward, even forever.
The zeal of the LORD of hosts will perform this.

4. Isaiah 53:6

All we like sheep have gone astray;
We have turned, every one, to his own way;
And the LORD has laid on Him the iniquity of us all.

ISAIAH / REFLECT

1. A form of religion: Dr. Crossley writes,

False religion is a blatant disregard of the true God, but those who engage in the outward expressions of true religion without any reality in their hearts or minds show a more insidious disrespect.... The true worship of God consists not only in the engagement of the heart and mind in worship and spiritual exercises, but also the practical outworking of service and life.

Write about the apostle John's tests of true knowledge of God in 1 John (use the eight instances of the phrase "By this we know" as your guide), and how that contrasts with the "form of religion" Jesus condemns in Mark 7:6-7.

2. Worldly counsel: Through the prophet Isaiah, God warns against seeking counsel from worldly sources rather than from God. Although, as Dr. Crossley writes, "Living this side of Calvary and Pentecost, Christians

are in the privileged position of having a complete, written revelation from God," we are bombarded daily with advice as to how to live. How do you guard yourself against listening and responding to the cacophony of voices offering counsel and advice? How do you encourage those around you to turn, "To the law and to the testimony" (8:20) and to be like the Bereans who are commended because they "searched the Scriptures daily to *find out* whether these things were so" (Acts 17:11)?

- 3. Affliction:** In this meditation, Dr. Crossley writes about the faithful, who suffer alongside the wicked under the judgement of God, who may be tempted to despair. The Lord, through Isaiah, gives much encouragement and hope to persevere, to remain faithful. List and discuss three passages in the Scriptures (in Isaiah and elsewhere) where Christians can look for consolation and encouragement in times of affliction.

ISAIAH / REJOICE

O Sacred Head, Now Wounded

Bernard of Clairvaux (b. 1091)

Translated by James W. Alexander (1829)

O sacred Head, now wounded,
 With grief and shame weighed down;
 Now scornfully surrounded
 With thorns, Thine only crown;
 O sacred Head, what glory,
 What bliss 'til now was Thine!
 Yet, though despised and gory,
 I joy to call Thee mine.

What Thou, my Lord, hast suffered
 Was all for sinners' gain:
 Mine, mine was the transgression,
 But thine the deadly pain.

Lo, here I fall, my Savior!
 'Tis I deserve thy place;
 Look on me with thy favor,
 Vouchsafe to me thy grace.

JEREMIAH / REVIEW

Some key verses from Jeremiah:

1. Jeremiah 1:4-5

Then the word of the LORD came to me, saying:

“Before I formed you in the womb I knew you;

Before you were born I sanctified you;

I ordained you a prophet to the nations.”

2. Jeremiah 29:10-14

For thus says the LORD: After seventy years are completed at Babylon, I will visit you and perform My good word toward you, and cause you to return to this place. For I know the thoughts that I think toward you, says the LORD, thoughts of peace and not of evil, to give you a future and a hope. Then you will call upon Me and go and pray to Me, and I will listen to you. And you will seek Me and find Me, when you search for Me with all your heart. I will be found by you, says the LORD, and I will bring you back from your captivity; I will gather you from all the nations and from all the places where I have driven you, says the LORD, and I will bring you to the place from which I cause you to be carried away captive.

3. Jeremiah 31:31-34

Behold, the days are coming, says the LORD, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah—not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers in the day *that* I took them by the hand to lead them out of the land of Egypt, My covenant which they broke, though I was a husband to them, says the LORD. But this *is* the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the LORD: I will put My law in their minds, and write it on their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people. No more shall every man teach his neighbor, and every man his brother, saying, “Know the LORD,” for they all shall know Me, from the least of them to the greatest of them, says the LORD. For I will forgive their iniquity, and their sin I will remember no more.

JEREMIAH / REFLECT

1. **The amazing love of God:** Dr. Crossley writes, “Jeremiah is the prophet of the broken heart.” “Jeremiah comes across as a highly sensitive indi-

vidual with a very tender heart, who grieves at having to deliver" messages of God's judgement and destruction. On the other hand, "In spite of the unfaithfulness of the people, the Lord displays amazing love and compassion" through his servant. How should the tender heart of Jeremiah, and the mercy and compassion of God, be reflected in how pastors/elders/shepherds encourage, disciple and, when necessary, admonish the flock of God? Write about the contrast between the "shepherds" whom God condemns (23:1-2) and Peter's words to "fellow elders" in 1 Peter 5:1-4.

2. Declaring the judgement of God: Dr. Crossley writes,

Love for the lost demands a declaration of the judgement and justice of God. Without an awareness of the holiness and righteousness of God, without recognition of the judgement of God falling upon impenitent sinners, there will be no turning to the Saviour, no calling upon the Lord for salvation (Romans 10:13-14).

Many churches and denominations in the West have shied away from speaking about the holiness and righteousness of God. They prefer a message focused only on the love of God, fearing that holiness and righteousness will scare away potential church members. Is there a better balance in your church, in your region? How do we ensure that we preach the *whole* gospel, and not only what we think might "attract" people around us?

3. The condition of the human heart by nature: "In sharp contrast to the revelation of the *divine* heart is the shocking disclosure of the *human* heart," writes Dr. Crossley, citing Jeremiah 17:9, "The heart is deceitful above all *things*, and desperately wicked; Who can know it?" He points out that the "doctrine of total depravity does not teach that every human being is as wicked as he or she could be, but that sin has infected every *aspect* of every human personality—in thought, mind and will." He quotes from Ezekiel 36:26, where the promise of the New Covenant includes the promise of a new heart and a new spirit. Compare the prophecy of the New Covenant in Ezekiel 36 with that of Jeremiah 31:31-34. Are these two prophecies different or complementary? Describe the difference between the Old and New Covenants based on these prophecies.

4. Plea to backsliders: While Jeremiah was sent to preach a message of coming destruction, God also called his people to repent, to return to the covenant relationship with the Lord their God. Dr. Crossley points to the

wonderful promise the Lord gives, “And you will seek Me and find Me, when you search for Me with all your heart. I will be found by you, says the LORD” (Jeremiah 29:13-14) List two similar calls to repentance in the New Testament, and describe how you would use these passages to call a straying brother or sister to repentance.

- 5. Standing alone:** Jeremiah faced severe opposition to his message—from family, friends, neighbours, people and rulers. Dr. Crossley’s description of the situation in western culture is certainly true. How do we respond? What encouragement do you see in the book of Jeremiah—and elsewhere in Scripture—to remain faithful to “the faith which was once for all delivered to the saints” (Jude 3)?

JEREMIAH / REJOICE

The Holy Remnant

Daniel S. Warner (1893)

Are you of the holy remnant,
 Gathered to the King of Peace?
 Have you found a full atonement,
 And abundance of His grace?
 Yes, my soul has come to Zion,
 On the high and holy way,
 And I’ve seen the darkness flying,
 Driven by the light of day.

Have you heard a voice from heaven,
 Calling in a solemn tone,
 “Come, my people, from confusion,
 This is not your native home”?
 Yes, I heard, and to my vision,
 Zion’s glory brightly shone;
 Then I rose and fled the ruin,
 Taking not a Babel stone.

LAMENTATIONS / REVIEW

Some key verses from Lamentations:

1. Lamentations 1:1,3

How lonely sits the city
That *was* full of people!
How like a widow is she,
Who was great among the nations!
The princess among the provinces
Has become a slave!
Judah has gone into captivity,
Under affliction and hard servitude;
She dwells among the nations,
She finds no rest;
All her persecutors overtake her in dire straits.

2. Lamentations 3:31-32

For the LORD will not cast off forever.
Though He causes grief,
Yet He will show compassion
According to the multitude of His mercies.

3. Lamentations 5:19,21

You, O LORD, remain forever;
Your throne from generation to generation.
Turn us back to You, O LORD, and we will be restored;
Renew our days as of old.

LAMENTATIONS / REFLECT

1. Life without God: Dr. Crossley writes,

The condition of a people without God is described in terms of having “no rest” (1:3), “no pasture” (1:6) and “no comforter” (1:9). In Christ, these deficiencies are rectified.² “Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and *I will give you rest*” (Matthew 11:28, emphasis added).

² A.M. Hodgkin, *Christ in All the Scriptures* (London: Pickering and Inglis, 1907), 172–173.

Describe your life before and after salvation in Christ Jesus. How would you explain to an unbeliever the peace and rest that comes with a relationship with God in Christ Jesus, with the indwelling of Holy Spirit?

- 2. The faithfulness of God:** In spite of the circumstances, as Jeremiah perhaps “composed these lamentations as he sat on a hillside overlooking the ruins and desolation shortly before being taken to Egypt,” the book of Lamentations includes several words of comfort from God and several reminders that God is faithful. Dr. Crossley parallels Jeremiah 3:22–23 with Isaiah 50:10. When you (or someone you are counselling) feel the weight of the world on your shoulders, where do you turn in the Scriptures for reminders of the faithfulness of God?

LAMENTATIONS / REJOICE

When I Fear my Faith will Fail

Ada R. Habershon (1861–1918)

When I fear my faith will fail,
 Christ will hold me fast;
 When the tempter would prevail,
 He can hold me fast!

He will hold me fast,
 He will hold me fast;
 For my Savior loves me so,
 He will hold me fast.

I could never keep my hold,
 He must hold me fast;
 For my love is often cold,
 He must hold me fast.

EZEKIEL / REVIEW

Some key verses from Ezekiel:

1. Ezekiel 3:17

Son of man, I have made you a watchman for the house of Israel; therefore hear a word from My mouth, and give them warning from Me.

2. Ezekiel 11:23

And the glory of the LORD went up from the midst of the city and stood on the mountain, which *is* on the east side of the city.

3. Ezekiel 36:26-28

I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you; I will take the heart of stone out of your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. I will put My Spirit within you and cause you to walk in My statutes, and you will keep My judgments and do *them*. Then you shall dwell in the land that I gave to your fathers; you shall be My people, and I will be your God.

EZEKIEL / REFLECT

1. Individual responsibility: Dr. Crossley points to the heart of God calling sinners to return to him, but emphasizing the responsibility of the individual to repent of sin and call upon him, by faith in Christ Jesus, for forgiveness. Write about your own conversion experience. When, how and why did you come to faith in Christ Jesus as Lord and Saviour? How does this impact your life today?

2. A new heart: The new heart spoken of through the prophet Ezekiel (36:26-28) signifies:

What God is about to do will be revolutionary and radical: cleansing believers from all filthiness and from all idolatry, removing the old heart (cf. Jeremiah 17:9-10), implanting a new heart filled with love for God and giving a new spirit of obedience (36:25-27; 11:19-20).... When God gives a new heart and puts his Spirit within there is also a true conviction of sin (36:31; John 16:8-11; Acts 2:37-39).

How would you counsel a new believer (or someone who ought to be mature in the faith) who asks how they can be sure they are saved?

3. Born of the Spirit: Dr. Crossley links Ezekiel's vision of the valley of dry bones (37:1-14) with the coming of the "Spirit of God to work his regenerating and renewing power." He then points to Jesus' words to Nicodemus about being "born again." He writes, "the coming of the Holy Spirit in New Covenant blessing is associated with preaching to spiritually dead sinners (Acts 2:6,11,14; 4:31,33)." Note how the apostle Paul presents the gospel in Ephesians 2:1-10, and describe how you would tell a curious unbeliever about being "born again" by the Spirit.

4. Church leaders: As Dr. Crossley writes,

Ezekiel condemns false prophets for their self-interest (13:1-23) and leaders for their irresponsibility.... Leadership of the church of Jesus Christ is no less significant: the gospel must be preached to the lost and the people of God must be lovingly pastored.

What is to be done when pastors/elders are not faithfully carrying out their responsibilities? Is there a biblically-driven plan and process for your own church, or for churches with whom you are associated, that permits and guides the elders and/or a congregation to graciously, lovingly and deliberately, confront and, if necessary, remove a pastor/elder? If not, why not? If so, what does it look like?

EZEKIEL / REJOICE

Psalm 137:1-6

By the rivers of Babylon,
 There we sat down, yea, we wept
 When we remembered Zion.
 We hung our harps
 Upon the willows in the midst of it.
 For there those who carried us away captive asked of us a song,
 And those who plundered us *requested* mirth,
 Saying, "Sing us one of the songs of Zion!"

How shall we sing the LORD's song
 In a foreign land?
 If I forget you, O Jerusalem,

Let my right hand forget *its skill*!
 If I do not remember you,
 Let my tongue cling to the roof of my mouth—
 If I do not exalt Jerusalem
 Above my chief joy.

DANIEL / REVIEW

Some key verses from Daniel:

1. Daniel 4:34-35

And at the end of the time I, Nebuchadnezzar, lifted my eyes to heaven,
 and my understanding returned to me; and I blessed the Most High and
 praised and honored Him who lives forever:

For His dominion is an everlasting dominion,
 And His kingdom is from generation to generation.
 All the inhabitants of the earth are reputed as nothing;
 He does according to His will in the army of heaven
 And *among* the inhabitants of the earth.
 No one can restrain His hand
 Or say to Him, "What have You done?"

2. Daniel 7:9-10,13-14

I watched till thrones were put in place,
 And the Ancient of Days was seated;
 His garment was white as snow,
 And the hair of His head was like pure wool.
 His throne was a fiery flame,
 Its wheels a burning fire;
 A fiery stream issued
 And came forth from before Him.
 A thousand thousands ministered to Him;
 Ten thousand times ten thousand stood before Him.
 The court was seated,
 And the books were opened...
 I was watching in the night visions,
 And behold, *One* like the Son of Man,
 Coming with the clouds of heaven!
 He came to the Ancient of Days,

And they brought Him near before Him.
 Then to Him was given dominion and glory and a kingdom,
 That all peoples, nations, and languages should serve Him.
 His dominion is an everlasting dominion,
 Which shall not pass away,
 And His kingdom *the one*
 Which shall not be destroyed.

DANIEL / REFLECT

1. **The sovereign rule of God:** Dr. Crossley points out, “In the record which the Holy Spirit inspired Daniel to write, Gentile kings confess the sovereignty of God,” and he quotes kings Nebuchadnezzar (2:47; 4:37) and Darius (6:25–26). Many of the foundational documents of western democracies declare the sovereignty of God, but in practice they ignore God as much as did either the northern kingdom of Israel or the southern kingdom of Judah. What is the situation in your country? Do your political documents, structures and processes acknowledge the sovereignty of God? What difference would it make as a Christian in your country and culture, if more people acknowledged God as Lord over all?
2. **Prayer:** Daniel was a man of prayer. Taking Daniel’s prayer as an example to us, Dr. Crossley writes:

Although Daniel’s plea is based on God’s covenant mercy, he still pours out his heart in contrition, confessing a whole multitude of sins and iniquities. So when calamity, affliction and trials fall upon us and we go to God and pray that the evil may be removed, the first thing required of us is to confess our sins and acknowledge the justice of God in the judgements that have come upon us.³

Whether we are invited to do so publicly or not, when our nations face calamity, affliction and trials, we individually and together in our churches should pray to the Lord our God, confessing our sins and appealing to him for mercy and forgiveness, for the lifting of the evil, in such a way that his holiness and his glory are revealed. Write a prayer of confession and intercession for your country.

³ Barnes, *Notes on the Old Testament: Daniel*, 1:129.

- 3. The believer and the state:** Dr. Crossley writes about the wonderful example of Daniel who was promoted to the highest rank in the Babylonian kingdom, to whom the Lord gave favour with his tutor and his king and who “remained devoted to the Lord and obedient to the law and covenant of Sinai.” Daniel could not prevent every evil in government, but he influenced the course of the nation. Are there examples of godly men and women who have served in positions of great responsibility and influence in your country? What are some of the lasting legacies of their time in office?
- 4. The final resurrection:** As Dr. Crossley writes, we find “the clearest prophecy of the resurrection in the Old Testament Scriptures” in Daniel 12:2-3. Compare this prophecy to 1 Corinthians 15 and Revelation 20. Matthew writes, “many bodies of the saints who had fallen asleep were raised; and coming out of the graves after [Christ’s] resurrection, they went into the holy city and appeared to many” (Matthew 27:52-53). How does this foreshadowing of the general resurrection of the dead, feature in both your encouragement of the saints and your evangelism?

DANIEL / REJOICE

Rejoice, the Lord is King

Charles Wesley (1744)

Rejoice, the Lord is King:
 Your Lord and King adore!
 Rejoice, give thanks and sing,
 And triumph evermore.
 Lift up your heart,
 Lift up your voice!
 Rejoice, again I say, rejoice!

Rejoice in glorious hope!
 Our Lord and judge shall come
 And take His servants up
 To their eternal home:
 Lift up your heart,
 Lift up your voice!
 Rejoice, again I say, rejoice!

HOSEA / REVIEW

Some key verses from Hosea:

1. Hosea 1:2

When the LORD began to speak by Hosea, the LORD said to Hosea:

“Go, take yourself a wife of harlotry
And children of harlotry,
For the land has committed great harlotry
By departing from the LORD.”

2. Hosea 4:1-3

Hear the word of the LORD,
You children of Israel,
For the LORD *brings* a charge against the inhabitants of the land:
“There is no truth or mercy
Or knowledge of God in the land.
By swearing and lying,
Killing and stealing and committing adultery,
They break all restraint,
With bloodshed upon bloodshed.
Therefore the land will mourn;
And everyone who dwells there will waste away
With the beasts of the field
And the birds of the air;
Even the fish of the sea will be taken away.”

3. Hosea 14:4-7

“I will heal their backsliding,
I will love them freely,
For My anger has turned away from him.
I will be like the dew to Israel;
He shall grow like the lily,
And lengthen his roots like Lebanon.
His branches shall spread;
His beauty shall be like an olive tree,
And his fragrance like Lebanon.
Those who dwell under his shadow shall return;
They shall be revived *like* grain,

And grow like a vine.
 Their scent *shall be* like the wine of Lebanon."

HOSEA / REFLECT

1. **Chosen by grace:** Dr. Crossley points to Hosea's choice of Gomer, "graphically teach[ing] that God did not choose Israel on the basis of merit." He quotes from the apostle Paul in Titus 3:3-4 and Ephesians 2:4-5,8-10 as further testimony that "believers are not chosen on the basis of any merit or desert. We are more unworthy to be the bride of Christ than Gomer was to be the bride of Hosea!" Is it always true that a sinner needs to come to the end of self, to be thoroughly convicted by the work of Holy Spirit of their sin and inability to redeem themselves, before they can be saved by the grace of God? Describe your ongoing conviction of sinfulness before the gracious, merciful and holy God.
2. **Mercy, not sacrifice:** In this meditation, Dr. Crossley contrasts the lack of "compassion and tenderness toward others" which characterized the Pharisees, and God the Father's, and Christ the Son's mercy and grace, calling sinners to repentance (Matthew 9:12-13; cf. Hosea 6:6). Consider the New Testament texts dealing with discipline (Matthew 18:15-17; 1 Corinthians 5:1-13; 2 Corinthians 2:5-11; Galatians 6:1-3; 1 Timothy 5:19-20). What are the fundamental purposes of church discipline? Is it more about mercy, seeking repentance and reconciliation, or is it more about punishment, banishment and retribution?
3. **Leadership of God's people:** Dr. Crossley laments the lack of faithful leaders in our day, which parallels the situation of the kingdom of Israel to whom Hosea prophesied. He writes, "Leadership in the church of Christ is a most serious responsibility. Each leader, as a watcher of souls, 'must give account' to God (Hebrews 13:17)." How would you assess the situation in your own country or region? Are there many or few leaders who give themselves to "diligence in study that produces 'a worker who does not need to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth' (2 Timothy 2:15)"? Are there many or few who seek to tickle "itching ears" without concern for the heart condition of men and women and the salvation of the lost?
4. **Restoring the backslider:** Here, Dr. Crossley points to God's calls in Hosea, Jeremiah and in the "parable of the lost son" (Luke 15) as examples of "the Lord's pleading with backsliders, and healing and restoring

them.” It is a constantly recurring theme in Scripture. Does your church or denomination have a process for disciplining a backsliding brother or sister? If so, does that process include restoration of one who repents and seeks forgiveness? Develop a process for your church or denomination for the restoration of a repentant backslider.

HOSEA / **REJOICE**

Come, let us to the Lord our God

John Morrison (1749–1798)

Come, let us to the Lord our God
 With contrite hearts return;
 Our God is gracious, nor will leave
 The desolate to mourn.

His voice commands the tempest forth,
 And stills the stormy wave;
 And though his arm be strong to smite,
 ‘Tis also strong to save.

Long has the night of sorrow reigned;
 The dawn shall bring us light;
 God shall appear, and we shall rise
 With gladness in his sight.

JOEL / **REVIEW**

Some key verses from Joel:

1. Joel 1:14–15

Consecrate a fast,
 Call a sacred assembly;
 Gather the elders
And all the inhabitants of the land
Into the house of the LORD your God,
 And cry out to the LORD.
 Alas for the day!

For the day of the LORD is at hand;
It shall come as destruction from the Almighty.

2. Joel 2:12-13

"Now, therefore," says the LORD,
"Turn to Me with all your heart,
With fasting, with weeping, and with mourning."
So rend your heart, and not your garments;
Return to the LORD your God,
For He is gracious and merciful,
Slow to anger, and of great kindness;
And He relents from doing harm.

3. Joel 2:28-32

And it shall come to pass afterward
That I will pour out My Spirit on all flesh;
Your sons and your daughters shall prophesy,
Your old men shall dream dreams,
Your young men shall see visions.
And also on My menservants and on My maidservants
I will pour out My Spirit in those days.
And I will show wonders in the heavens and in the earth:
Blood and fire and pillars of smoke.
The sun shall be turned into darkness,
And the moon into blood,
Before the coming of the great and awesome day of the LORD.
And it shall come to pass
That whoever calls on the name of the LORD
Shall be saved.
For in Mount Zion and in Jerusalem there shall be deliverance,
As the LORD has said,
Among the remnant whom the LORD calls.

JOEL / REFLECT

1. The day of the Lord: In his outline of the book of Joel, Dr. Crossley writes:

There are three periods of history in mind throughout this book: the present, the near future and a time to come. Each period is associated

with the day of the Lord. In the plague of locusts and the devastating drought, the day of the Lord has come (1:15–20); a further day of the Lord is coming (2:1–11); whereas the great and terrible day of the Lord is the finale, the end of this present world (2:31). The day of the Lord is immediate, imminent and ultimate; it is now, it is close, it will be in the end; and for each of these periods described by Joel there is an associated call to repentance (1:13–14; 2:12–13; 2:32).

Here Dr. Crossley notes, “In the New Testament, the day of the Lord is still anticipated,” and quotes 2 Peter 3:10–12, where the apostle challenges us with these words, “What manner of persons ought you to be in holy conduct and godliness, looking for and hastening the coming of the day of God?” Do warnings about the coming of the “great and terrible day of the Lord” feature in the preaching and teaching in your church, in your denomination or in the region of the country in which you live? What call to repentance and faith would be appropriate for the people of your country, both believers and unbelievers?

- 2. A universal gospel:** Dr. Crossley notes that the apostle Paul, in Romans 10:12–13, applied Joel’s call to repentance more broadly: “Whoever calls on the name of the LORD shall be saved.” Further, he reminds us of Paul’s caution in Romans 9:6 that “the nation of Israel was never composed entirely of believing people.... The true, or spiritual, Israel is composed, therefore, of believing Jews together with believing Gentiles.” On the other hand, Jesus warns us, saying,

Many will say to Me in that day, “Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Your name, cast out demons in Your name, and done many wonders in Your name?” And then I will declare to them, “I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness!” (Matthew 7:22–23).

While accepting the caution that we cannot know with certainty what is happening in another person’s heart, can you make a guess at what percentage of people in your church are truly saved? How would you encourage someone to make a self-assessment (2 Corinthians 13:5)? To which books or passages in Scripture would you turn for help in assessing whether or not one is saved?

3. Repentance and its fruit: Dr. Crossley points to the call in Joel 2:12-13 for “true heart repentance,” that “the people must be genuine and sincere in heart and mind.” He discusses the distinction that the apostle Paul makes between godly sorrow and the sorrow of the world in 2 Corinthians 7:10, “The sorrow of the world is remorse or regret over a word or action because of the resulting consequences, ...[but] godly sorrow is the grief of heart that brings a sinner to God in confession and with a genuine commitment to forsake sin.” Do you find this distinction helpful in your own life and in counselling a brother or sister who has fallen into sin? Describe how you would counsel someone who habitually falls into the same pattern of sin.

JOEL / REJOICE

Praise, my soul, the King of heaven

Henry Francis Lyte (1834)

Praise, my soul, the King of heaven;
 To his feet your tribute bring.
 Ransomed, healed, restored, forgiven,
 Evermore his praises sing.
 Alleluia, alleluia!
 Praise the everlasting King!

Fatherlike he tends and spares us;
 Well our feeble frame he knows.
 In his hand he gently bears us,
 Rescues us from all our foes.
 Alleluia, alleluia!
 Widely yet his mercy flows!

AMOS / REVIEW

Some key verses from Amos:

1. Amos 1:2

And he said:

"The LORD roars from Zion,
And utters His voice from Jerusalem;
The pastures of the shepherds mourn,
And the top of Carmel withers."

2. Amos 2:6-8

Thus says the LORD:

For three transgressions of Israel, and for four,
I will not turn away its *punishment*,
Because they sell the righteous for silver,
And the poor for a pair of sandals.
They pant after the dust of the earth *which is* on the head of the poor,
And pervert the way of the humble.
A man and his father go in to the *same* girl,
To defile My holy name.
They lie down by every altar on clothes taken in pledge,
And drink the wine of the condemned *in* the house of their god.

3. Amos 5:14-15

Seek good and not evil,
That you may live;
So the LORD God of hosts will be with you,
As you have spoken.
Hate evil, love good;
Establish justice in the gate.
It may be that the LORD God of hosts
Will be gracious to the remnant of Joseph.

4. Amos 9:14-15

"I will bring back the captives of My people Israel;
They shall build the waste cities and inhabit *them*;
They shall plant vineyards and drink wine from them;
They shall also make gardens and eat fruit from them.
I will plant them in their land,
And no longer shall they be pulled up

From the land I have given them,"
Says the LORD your God.

AMOS / REFLECT

1. **Avoid idolatry and false worship:** Dr. Crossley writes,

Idolatry is an abiding problem (2:8; 5:26; 8:14; cf. 1 John 5:21). Although some may try to justify the use of images as "aids to worship," drawings, paintings, stained-glass windows and sculptures can easily assume the role of idols

How do we guard against aids to worship assuming the role of idols? Make a list of heart idols that might be drawing *your* attention and devotion away from true worship of God.

2. **Promote social justice:** The book of Amos relates God's condemnation of the abuse of power by the wealthy. The poor and needy were crushed by the powerful. Dr. Crossley, referring to William Hendriksen in *Survey of the Bible: A Treasury of Bible Information*⁴ writes, "Churches that neglect social responsibility and place a one-sided emphasis on individualistic salvation clearly indicate that they have not yet caught up with Amos—or with Christ!" What role does the church in your culture play in social justice issues? Are you focused solely on "the household of faith" in your care of the poor and needy, or do you recognize a broader responsibility to do good to all (Galatians 6:10)? Write an action plan for your church's engagement in social justice issues in your country.

3. **Shun materialism:** In the introduction to Amos, Dr. Crossley noted that Amos was sent to prophecy during the long and prosperous reigns of Jeroboam II of Israel and Uzziah of Judah, and in this reflection he notes, "It is all too easy to forget the Lord in times of prosperity and to become complacent, taking credit to oneself, instead of being grateful to the Lord for his provision (Deuteronomy 8:11-18)." Write about your personal experience and whether you have learned, as the apostle Paul wrote,

I have learned in whatever state I am, to be content: I know how to be abased, and I know how to abound. Everywhere and in all things

⁴ William Hendriksen, *Survey of the Bible: A Treasury of Bible Information* (Welwyn: Evangelical Press, 1976), 231.

I have learned both to be full and to be hungry, both to abound and to suffer need. I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me (Philippians 4:11-13).

4. Opposition to the Word: Dr. Crossley writes,

While God requires his people to “be subject to the governing authorities” (Romans 13:1), there is a limit to that submission. Submission to governing authorities is no longer appropriate when it involves a compromise of Christian principle or a violation of God’s Word.

Have you or your church encountered a situation where you had to disobey a command of the governing authorities (either religious or civil) in order to remain faithful to God’s Word? What was the issue? How did you—or how would you if such a situation has not yet arisen—disobey in such a manner as not to bring discredit to the name of God (1 Peter 3:12-18)?

AMOS / REJOICE

Come, ye sinners, poor and needy

Joseph Hart (1759)

Come, ye sinners, poor and needy,
 Weak and wounded, sick and sore;
 Jesus ready stands to save you,
 Full of pity, love, and power.
 He is able, He is able,
 He is willing, doubt no more!

Come, ye weary, heavy laden,
 Lost and ruined by the fall;
 If you tarry till you’re better,
 You will never come at all.
 Not the righteous, Not the righteous,
 Sinners Jesus came to call.

OBADIAH / REVIEW

Some key verses from Obadiah:

1. Obadiah 1:1-4

The vision of Obadiah.

Thus says the LORD GOD concerning Edom
 (We have heard a report from the Lord,
 And a messenger has been sent among the nations, *saying*,
 “Arise, and let us rise up against her for battle”):
 Behold, I will make you small among the nations;
 You shall be greatly despised.
 The pride of your heart has deceived you,
 You who dwell in the clefts of the rock,
 Whose habitation is high;
 You who say in your heart, ‘Who will bring me down to the ground?’
 Though you ascend as high as the eagle,
 And though you set your nest among the stars,
 From there I will bring you down,” says the LORD.

2. Obadiah 1:17-18

“But on Mount Zion there shall be deliverance,
 And there shall be holiness;
 The house of Jacob shall possess their possessions.
 The house of Jacob shall be a fire,
 And the house of Joseph a flame;
 But the house of Esau *shall be* stubble;
 They shall kindle them and devour them,
 And no survivor shall *remain* of the house of Esau,”
 For the LORD has spoken.

OBADIAH / REFLECT

- 1. Jehovah is Lord of the whole world:** Dr. Crossley writes, “The underlying message of the book of Obadiah is that the God of Israel is not the God of a single nation—he is the Lord of *all* nations,” and quotes Psalm 2:1-5. How do we ensure our evangelistic efforts are directed toward “every nation, tribe, tongue and people” (Revelation 14:6), who will all have to give an account at the judgement seat of Christ?

- 2. Jehovah keeps his covenant with Abraham:** As Dr. Crossley writes, "Under the Old Covenant, Edom's destiny, along with that of all other nations, depended on her behaviour and attitude toward Israel as Abraham's legitimate heir: 'I will bless those who bless you, and I will curse him who curses you' (Genesis 12:3)." In what way(s) does that principle continue today? The blessing to all nations has come in the form of Christ Jesus our Saviour, "the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David" (Revelation 5:5). Does Revelation 7 show us that the nation of Israel still features in God's plan for the redemption of a people for himself from ethnic Israel (cf. Romans 9–11)?
- 3. God administers just reprisals:** In quoting verses from Obadiah, as well as from Galatians and Matthew, Dr. Crossley reminds us that God promises to judge—with perfect judgement—all sin. Consider Christ's calls to forgive those who sin against us, and Paul's assurance that God will avenge sin committed against us (Romans 12: 14–21). How does that promise comfort and strengthen God's people in the midst of suffering, trials and persecution?
- 4. Salvation for Edomites:** Dr. Crossley remarks that the Edomites "were an independent, arrogant people, so independent they thought they could do without God." And yet, "The LORD is gracious and full of compassion, slow to anger and great in mercy" (Psalm 145:8). Dr. Crossley highlights that the great multitude which followed Jesus included Idumeans, the descendants of Esau (their Greek name, Mark 3:7–8). There is yet salvation for Esau's descendants in Christ Jesus. Find at least two other biblical references that give assurance to the nations that forgiveness is available in Jesus for "all nations, tribes, peoples, and tongues" (Revelation 7:9).

OBADIAH / REJOICE

We've a story to tell to the nations

H. Ernest Nichol (1896)

We've a story to tell to the nations,
 That shall turn their hearts to the right,
 A story of truth and mercy,
 A story of peace and light,
 A story of peace and light.

For the darkness shall turn to dawning,
 And the dawning to noonday bright,
 And Christ's great kingdom shall come on earth,
 The kingdom of love and light.

We've a song to be sung to the nations,
 That shall lift their hearts to the Lord,
 A song that shall conquer evil,
 And shatter the spear and sword,
 And shatter the spear and sword.

JONAH / REVIEW

Some key verses from Jonah:

1. Jonah 1:1-3

Now the word of the LORD came to Jonah the son of Amittai, saying, "Arise, go to Nineveh, that great city, and cry out against it; for their wickedness has come up before Me." But Jonah arose to flee to Tarshish from the presence of the LORD. He went down to Joppa, and found a ship going to Tarshish; so he paid the fare, and went down into it, to go with them to Tarshish from the presence of the LORD.

2. Jonah 2:1-2

Then Jonah prayed to the LORD his God from the fish's belly. And he said: "I cried out to the LORD because of my affliction,
 And He answered me.
 Out of the belly of Sheol I cried,
 And You heard my voice."

3. Jonah 4:11

And should I not pity Nineveh, that great city, in which are more than one hundred and twenty thousand persons who cannot discern between their right hand and their left—and much livestock?

JONAH / REFLECT

1. **Providence:** Dr. Crossley notes that through the use of the word *prepared*, we can see "an undoubted recognition of the sovereignty of God over nature, the natural elements and all circumstances" in the book of Jonah.

He says, “Christians are used to the thought of the Lord stilling the storm (Mark 4:39), but are often reluctant to acknowledge that he raises the storm in the first place (Psalm 107:25).” As you reflect on the sovereignty of God in directing all things in the book of Jonah, write about God’s sovereignty in your own trials—past, present and future.

- 2. Recommissioning:** Writing about God’s restoration of Jonah, Dr. Crossley writes, “What a blessing not to be cast off because of faithlessness and disobedience!” While church discipline is sometimes necessary due to unrepentant sin, the *object* of discipline should always be restoration. What is the plan and practice of church discipline, especially as regards restoration and even “recommissioning” of office bearers, in your church?
- 3. Prayer in time of trouble:** Dr. Crossley had noted that there are “many points of comparison between Job’s psalm and the psalms of David and his contemporaries” (2:1–9). Here he suggests that, “There is virtue in memorizing the Scriptures.” Have you memorized much of the Scriptures? Describe how your prayers are informed and shaped by the prayers of the saints (in Scripture and/or with you in your church), either as memorized or as paraphrased?
- 4. World mission:** Dr. Crossley writes, “There is a right concern for our own people,” while at the same time, “a regard for our own nation or race must not cloud us to our responsibilities toward the rest of the world.” Does your church, or the church in your nation generally, have an inward or an outward focus? Do you emphasize the need to evangelize the lost in your own nation or in other nations? Is there a balance implied in the statement of the Great Commission in Acts 1:8: “But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be witnesses to Me *in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth*” (emphasis added)?

JONAH / REJOICE

Psalm 130:1–6

A song of ascents

Out of the depths I have cried to You, O LORD;
 LORD, hear my voice!
 Let Your ears be attentive
 To the voice of my supplications.

If You, LORD, should mark iniquities,
 O LORD, who could stand?
 But *there is* forgiveness with You,
 That You may be feared.

I wait for the LORD, my soul waits,
 And in His word I do hope.
 My soul *waits* for the LORD
 More than those who watch for the morning—
 Yes, *more than* those who watch for the morning.

MICAH / REVIEW

Some key verses from Micah:

1. Micah 1:2-3

Hear, all you peoples!
 Listen, O earth, and all that is in it!
 Let the LORD God be a witness against you,
 The Lord from His holy temple.
 For behold, the LORD is coming out of His place;
 He will come down
 And tread on the high places of the earth.

2. Micah 5:2

"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 *are* from of old,
 From everlasting."

3. Micah 6:8

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?

4. Micah 7:18

Who is a God like You,

Pardoning iniquity
 And passing over the transgression of the remnant of His heritage?
 He does not retain His anger forever,
 Because He delights *in* mercy.

MICAH / REFLECT

- 1. The definition of true religion:** Dr. Crossley looks to Micah 6:6–8 where “the Lord corrects an unhealthy emphasis on external religion.” There is “a contrast between external observations and internal heart religion,” he continues, “Although sacrifices were instituted by God through the law, they were never to be understood as actually removing sin.” Is there a danger in the hearts of Christians toward external observations of religion and away from internal heart religion? How is that to be seen in the church in your region? What can be done to avoid this danger?
- 2. False teachers, false prophets:** Through the prophet Micah, God spoke severe criticism at the prophets. Dr. Crossley asks, “How is it possible to distinguish Micah as a true teacher rather than a false teacher?” The answer, “*The test of teachers or prophets is not whether they claim spiritual enlightenment, but whether they are speaking in accordance with the revealed Word of God.*” The New Testament gives several warnings about false prophets and “false teachers, even antichrists who will come in our day (eg., Matthew 7:15; 24:11,24; 2 Peter 2:1). Are false prophets/teachers a great problem in your region? How can we keep the hearts of God’s people safe from false teachers who are eager to speak words that will tickle their “itching ears” (2 Timothy 4:3–4)?
- 3. A divisive gospel:** As Dr. Crossley writes,

There will always be contrasting responses to the gospel: some hearers will accept Christ; others will reject him.... responses to him vary from great love and devotion to hatred and antagonism. The greatest war zone for a new convert is frequently his own home.

Some of the most shocking crimes are committed against family members who dare to accept Christ Jesus as Saviour. What precautions must believers take in your region in order to ensure the sincerity of people professing faith in Jesus and/or to ensure the safety of people coming to faith in Christ out of other religions?

- 4. Removal of sins:** The prophet Micah was given an amazing message: God is willing to pardon iniquity and pass “over the transgression of the remnant of His heritage” (7:18). In the West, the bad news of God’s just wrath against sin is often left out of our evangelism and our preaching and teaching, gutting the good news of “the free forgiveness of sins.” What is the danger of this truncated “gospel”? How do you ensure that your presentation of the gospel is complete?

MICAH / REJOICE

Great God of wonders

Samuel Davies (1723-1761)

Great God of wonders, all Thy ways
Are righteous, matchless and divine;
But the blest triumphs of Thy grace
Most marvellous, unrivalled, shine;
Who is a pardoning God like Thee?
Or who has grace so rich and free?

In wonder lost, with trembling joy,
We hail the pardon of our God,
Pardon for crimes of deepest dye,
A pardon traced in Jesus’ blood.
To pardon thus is Thine alone;
Mercy and grace are both Thine own.

NAHUM / REVIEW

Some key verses from Nahum:

1. Nahum 1:2-3

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*.

The LORD has His way
 In the whirlwind and in the storm,
 And the clouds *are* the dust of His feet.

2. Nahum 1:15

Behold, on the mountains
 The feet of him who brings good tidings,
 Who proclaims peace!
 O Judah, keep your appointed feasts,
 Perform your vows.
 For the wicked one shall no more pass through you;
 He is utterly cut off.

3. Nahum 3:18-19

Your shepherds slumber, O king of Assyria;
 Your nobles rest *in the dust*.
 Your people are scattered on the mountains,
 And no one gathers them.
 Your injury *has* no healing,
 Your wound is severe.
 All who hear news of you
 Will clap *their* hands over you,
 For upon whom has not your wickedness passed continually?

NAHUM / REFLECT

1. **Worship:** Dr. Crossley begins his discussion of the book of Nahum with a lament about the condition of worship in many churches and fellowships in our day. Quoting Herbert Carson in *Hallelujah!: Christian Worship*, Dr. Crossley writes:

Right from the outset, the Bible presents a revelation of the true God which is intended to inspire worship and praise. The Lord God is the sovereign Creator.

To consider the vastness of the universe and to realize that it has come from the sovereign God and is kept in being by His power is to be moved to awe and wonder. This is the reaction which characterizes biblical religion, and which stands in

marked contrast with the glib familiarity and flippancy so common in today's religious scene.⁵

What is worship like in your church or in your nation? Have you preserved "a sense of the holiness, glory, majesty and might of almighty God"? Or is there "an almost exclusive emphasis on the person and work of God the Son and the presence and power of God the Holy Spirit, with a resulting neglect of God the Father"?

2. Prophecy fulfilled: Dr. Crossley writes, "There may have been as long as fifty years between the prophecy of Nahum and its fulfilment," but Nineveh was indeed, totally destroyed in 612 B.C. and "'hidden' for 2,050 years; the site was not discovered until 1842." Given that the unbelieving world is very quick to deny the reality of biblical prophecy, how can we keep the minds of believers focused on the prophecies of Christ's return? How can we use prophecy as an evangelistic tool when speaking to unbelievers?

3. Warnings ignored: The people of Nineveh ignored the warnings of God through his prophet Nahum. Also, the southern kingdom of Judah failed to learn the lesson and continued to break their covenant with the Lord and were attacked by Nebuchadnezzar and the Babylonians in 605 B.C. Given the many warnings about the coming judgement of God, how do you respond to Peter's question, "What manner of persons ought you to be in holy conduct and godliness?" (2 Peter 3:11)?

NAHUM / REJOICE

O worship the King, all glorious above

Robert Grant (1833)

O worship the King, all-glorious above,
 O gratefully sing, His power and His love:
 Our Shield and Defender, the Ancient of Days,
 Pavilioned in splendor and girded with praise.

⁵ Herbert M. Carson, *Hallelujah!: Christian Worship* (Welwyn: Evangelical Press, 1980), 34.

O tell of His might and sing of His grace,
 Whose robe is the light, whose canopy space.
 His chariots of wrath, the deep thunderclouds form,
 And dark is His path on the wings of the storm.

HABAKKUK / REVIEW

Some key verses from Habakkuk:

1. Habakkuk 1:2,5-6

O LORD, how long shall I cry,
 And You will not hear?
 Even cry out to You, "Violence!"
 And You will not save....
 "Look among the nations and watch—
 Be utterly astounded!
 For *I will* work a work in your days
 Which you would not believe, though it were told you.
 For indeed I am raising up the Chaldeans,
 A bitter and hasty nation
 Which marches through the breadth of the earth,
 To possess dwelling places *that are* not theirs.

2. Habakkuk 2:4

Behold the proud,
 His soul is not upright in him;
 But the just shall live by his faith.

3. Habakkuk 2:14

For the earth will be filled
 With the knowledge of the glory of the LORD,
 As the waters cover the sea.

4. Habakkuk 3:17-18

Though the fig tree may not blossom,
 Nor fruit be on the vines;
 Though the labor of the olive may fail,
 And the fields yield no food;
 Though the flock may be cut off from the fold,
 And there be no herd in the stalls—

Yet I will rejoice in the LORD,
I will joy in the God of my salvation.

HABAKKUK / REFLECT

- 1. Unbelief despite warnings:** Dr. Crossley writes that the judgement of God on Judah is an illustration of an even more serious judgement from God coming on the whole unbelieving world.

Even though people are warned time and time again about the coming judgement of God, they stubbornly refuse to take notice. Many thousands have heard the gospel clearly and faithfully proclaimed and yet they refuse to repent and believe on the Lord Jesus Christ for salvation.

How do you see the situation in your country? Do you see signs and warnings of God's coming judgement continuing (Matthew 24; Mark 13)? What does the Bible say about people seeing signs, yet not believing?

- 2. Living by faith:** Dr. Crossley discusses two possible translations of the phrase, "The just shall live by his faith" (2:4).

Some give the sense: "The one who is righteous shall live by his faith." Others give the sense: "The one who is righteous by faith shall live." The first meaning appears to suit the context of Habakkuk (and that of Hebrews 10:38), whereas the second is the evident meaning of the apostle Paul (Romans 1:17; Galatians 3:11).

He concludes, there is, however, no real tension between the two interpretations. "It is evident that the phrase, 'The just shall live by his faith,' is applied with differing emphases according to the context." Discuss how the emphasis shifts between "righteousness," "faith" and "live" in the use of Habakkuk 2:4 in Romans 1:17, Galatians 3:11 and Hebrews 10:38. Could it be that multiple nuances are intended by the Holy Spirit in the understanding and application of this verse?

- 3. Trust in difficult days:** As Dr. Crossley writes,

Habakkuk concludes with some of the most moving words of faith and confidence. This is the hope of all believers: that when the day

of trouble comes, when the harvest fails, when livestock die and the outlook in life is desperate, they will be able to say, “Yet I will rejoice in the LORD, I will joy in the God of my salvation” (3:18).

He writes of the strong points of comparison between Habakkuk and Job—evil seems to prosper and the righteous suffer. But he cites Raymond Dillard and Tremper Longman III,

In spite of all appearances to the contrary, and no matter how difficult conditions might become, he must continue to believe, continue to trust the promises of God and have confidence that the Lord of all the earth would do right.⁶

How do you maintain trust and confidence in God’s goodness and God’s perfect righteousness and holiness in the midst of great troubles? How could you use the book of Habakkuk in counselling, preaching and teaching others when great troubles and trials come?

HABAKKUK / REJOICE

God leads us

George A. Young (1855–1935)

In shady, green pastures, so rich and so sweet,
 God leads His dear children along;
 Where the water’s cool flow bathes the weary one’s feet,
 God leads His dear children along.

Some through the waters, some through the flood,
 Some through the fire, but all through the blood;
 Some through great sorrow, but God gives a song,
 In the night season and all the day long.

Sometimes on the mount where the sun shines so bright,
 God leads His dear children along;

⁶ Raymond B. Dillard and Tremper Longman III, *An Introduction to the Old Testament* (Leicester: Apollos, 1995), 413.

Sometimes in the valley, in darkest of night,
God leads His dear children along.

ZEPHANIAH / REVIEW

Some key verses from Zephaniah:

1. Zephaniah 1:14-15

The great day of the LORD *is* near;
It is near and hastens quickly.
The noise of the day of the LORD is bitter;
There the mighty men shall cry out.
That day *is* a day of wrath,
A day of trouble and distress,
A day of devastation and desolation,
A day of darkness and gloominess,
A day of clouds and thick darkness.

2. Zephaniah 2:3

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.

3. Zephaniah 3:14-15

Sing, O daughter of Zion!
Shout, O Israel!
Be glad and rejoice with all *your* heart,
O daughter of Jerusalem!
The LORD has taken away your judgments,
He has cast out your enemy.
The King of Israel, the LORD, *is* in your midst;
You shall see disaster no more.

ZEPHANIAH / REFLECT

1. **The singing of the Lord:** Dr. Crossley points to a beautiful picture of God rejoicing over his people (3:17). He writes, "'He will rejoice over you with gladness,' points to the inward delight in the heart of God, whereas 'He

will rejoice over you with singing,' expresses the outward manifestation." Write about the comfort, security and joy in your own heart arising from the knowledge that God loves you, that God delights in you, that God is so pleased in who you are in Christ Jesus, "He will rejoice over you with singing."

- 2. The presence of the Lord:** Here Dr. Crossley reflects on how Zephaniah reveals the many offices God fulfils—Judge, Prophet, King, Priest—because Jerusalem's princes, judges, prophets and priests have failed. He then quotes Revelation 21:3, showing that in the new heaven and new earth, "God Himself will be with them as their God." The book of Hebrews shows us how Jesus Christ fulfils the offices of king and prophet and our great High Priest, even offering himself as the sacrifice for our sins. How does the knowledge that God in Christ perfectly fulfils and performs all of these offices affect the believer's confidence today and his hope for eternity?
- 3. Right jealousy:** Dr. Crossley quotes John Calvin: "The only right and godly jealousy is that which looks to God's interest to see that He is not defrauded of the honour that is His due."⁷ He concludes:

The people of God should be excited by strong feelings of concern for the name, honour and glory of the only true God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ—and our Father, by his grace!

Thinking of this "right jealousy" for the "name, honour and glory" of God, what grieves your heart most inside and outside the church?

ZEPHANIAH / REJOICE

Psalm 9:1-2,10-11,19-20

To the Chief Musician. To the tune of "Death of the Son."

A Psalm of David.

I will praise You, O LORD, with my whole heart;
 I will tell of all Your marvelous works.
 I will be glad and rejoice in You;
 I will sing praise to Your name, O Most High....

⁷ John Calvin, *The Second Epistle of Paul the Apostle to the Corinthians* (Edinburgh: St Andrew Press, 1964), 139–140.

And those who know Your name will put their trust in You;
 For You, LORD, have not forsaken those who seek You.
 Sing praises to the LORD, who dwells in Zion!
 Declare His deeds among the people....

Arise, O LORD,
 Do not let man prevail;
 Let the nations be judged in Your sight.
 Put them in fear, O LORD,
That the nations may know themselves to be but men. Selah

HAGGAI / REVIEW

Some key verses from Haggai:

1. Haggai 1:2

"Thus speaks the LORD of hosts, saying: 'This people says, "The time has not come, the time that the LORD's house should be built."'"

2. Haggai 1:13-14

Then Haggai, the LORD's messenger, spoke the Lord's message to the people, saying, "I am with you, says the LORD." So the LORD stirred up the spirit of Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel, governor of Judah, and the spirit of Joshua the son of Jehozadak, the high priest, and the spirit of all the remnant of the people; and they came and worked on the house of the LORD of hosts, their God.

3. Haggai 2:6-7

For thus says the LORD of hosts: "Once more (it is a little while) I will shake heaven and earth, the sea and dry land; and I will shake all nations, and they shall come to the Desire of All Nations, and I will fill this temple with glory," says the LORD of hosts.

HAGGAI / REFLECT

1. In his majesty's service: Dr. Crossley quotes Robert Lee, who describes Haggai as "a model worker for God."⁸ Consider the five bullet points that Dr. Crossley uses to describe Haggai's ministry, and compare that list to

⁸ Lee, *The Outlined Bible*, analysis no. 37.

your own heart and your own ministry, to your family, to your church and to your community (both believers and unbelievers). How can we increase our devotion to the Lord and the work to which he has called us, that we may “be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that your labor is not in vain in the Lord” (1 Corinthians 15:58)?

- 2. Building the temple:** Dr. Crossley highlights an important contrast between the building of the physical temple urged by God through Haggai and Christ Jesus’ promise: I will build My church, and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it” (Matthew 16:18). Dr. Crossley urges that the task is laid on *all* Christians to be engaged in building the true and spiritual church by prayer, witness, life, labour and financial support. What is the emphasis in your heart, your church, your country? How does the desire and resources committed to building the spiritual church compare to that committed to building the physical church?

HAGGAI / **REJOICE**

I love Thy church, O Lord

Timothy Dwight (1752–1817)

I love your church, O Lord!
 Her saints before you stand,
 Dear as the apple of your eye
 And graven on your hand.

Beyond my highest joy
 I prize her heavenly ways,
 Her sweet communion, solemn vows,
 Her hymns of love and praise.

I love your church, O God,
 The people you have called,
 The church our blest Redeemer saved
 With his own precious blood.

ZECHARIAH / REVIEW

Some key verses from Zechariah:

1. Zechariah 1:3

Therefore say to them, "Thus says the LORD of hosts: 'Return to Me,' says the LORD of hosts, "and I will return to you," says the LORD of hosts.

2. Zechariah 3:3-5

Now Joshua was clothed with filthy garments, and was standing before the Angel.

Then He answered and spoke to those who stood before Him, saying, "Take away the filthy garments from him." And to him He said, "See, I have removed your iniquity from you, and I will clothe you with rich robes."

And I said, "Let them put a clean turban on his head."

So they put a clean turban on his head, and they put the clothes on him. And the Angel of the LORD stood by.

3. Zechariah 6:12-13

Then speak to him, saying, "Thus says the LORD of hosts, saying:

'Behold, the Man whose name is the BRANCH!

From His place He shall branch out,

And He shall build the temple of the LORD;

Yes, He shall build the temple of the LORD.

He shall bear the glory,

And shall sit and rule on His throne;

So He shall be a priest on His throne,

And the counsel of peace shall be between them both.'"

4. Zechariah 9:9

Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion!

Shout, O daughter of Jerusalem!

Behold, your King is coming to you;

He is just and having salvation,

Lowly and riding on a donkey,

A colt, the foal of a donkey.

 ZECHARIAH / **REFLECT**

- 1. God's power to preserve his people:** Dr. Crossley writes about the great love of God for his chosen people, a people he has called and in whom he has "begun a good work" (Philippians 1:6) and will preserve. But we are a people loved, preserved and equipped by God with "every good thing which is in you in Christ Jesus" (Philemon 1:6), in order to fulfil his commands and be the light-bearer in a dark world. Dr. Crossley writes that the vision of the lampstand (4:2-3) "indicates both the responsibility of the church and the source of her power" and "conveys the message that the church will carry out her work in the world, not by human power but by the strength of God." Consider Paul's encapsulation of the gospel in Ephesians 2:1-10 and write about God's purpose in saving us.
 - 2. A great spiritual awakening:** Dr. Crossley writes about how the prophecy in Zechariah 8:20-23 amplifies the prophecies of Micah and Isaiah of "a great turning to God among the Gentiles (the nations)." He concludes, "Believing Jews joined by believing Gentiles form the true Israel through which Jehovah will make himself known as the God of the world's history and of prophecy—the believing Israel of the New Testament era."⁹ What is the cultural and ethnic makeup of your church? Is it monolithic, or are people from other nationalities represented? How can we better reflect this picture of the gathering of the nations to God in Christ Jesus in our churches today?
-

 ZECHARIAH / **REJOICE**

Zechariah 4:6-10

So he answered and said to me:

"This is the word of the LORD to Zerubbabel:
 'Not by might nor by power, but by My Spirit,'
 Says the LORD of hosts.
 'Who are you, O great mountain?
 Before Zerubbabel you shall become a plain!

⁹ Franz Delitzsch, *Messianic Prophecies* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1880), 99.

And he shall bring forth the capstone
With shouts of "Grace, grace to it!"

Moreover the word of the LORD came to me, saying:

"The hands of Zerubbabel
Have laid the foundation of this temple;
His hands shall also finish it.
Then you will know
That the LORD of hosts has sent Me to you.
For who has despised the day of small things?
For these seven rejoice to see
The plumb line in the hand of Zerubbabel.
They are the eyes of the LORD,
Which scan to and fro throughout the whole earth."

MALACHI / REVIEW

Some key verses from Malachi:

1. Malachi 1:11

For from the rising of the sun, even to its going down,
My name *shall be* great among the Gentiles;
In every place incense *shall be* offered to My name,
And a pure offering;
For My name shall be great among the nations,"
Says the LORD of hosts.

2. Malachi 2:17

You have wearied the LORD with your words;
Yet you say,
"In what way have we wearied *Him*?"
In that you say,
"Everyone who does evil
Is good in the sight of the LORD,
And He delights in them,"
Or, "Where *is* the God of justice?"

3. Malachi 3:1

"Behold, I send My messenger,
 And he will prepare the way before Me.
 And the LORD, whom you seek,
 Will suddenly come to His temple,
 Even the Messenger of the covenant,
 In whom you delight.
 Behold, He is coming,"
 Says the LORD of hosts.

4. Malachi 3:16-17

Then those who feared the LORD spoke to one another,
 And the LORD listened and heard *them*;
 So a book of remembrance was written before Him
 For those who fear the LORD
 And who meditate on His name.
 "They shall be Mine," says the LORD of hosts,
 "On the day that I make them My jewels.
 And I will spare them
 As a man spares his own son who serves him."

5. Malachi 4:5-6

Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet
 Before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the LORD.
 And he will turn
 The hearts of the fathers to the children,
 And the hearts of the children to their fathers,
 Lest I come and strike the earth with a curse.

MALACHI / REFLECT

- 1. The distinguishing love of God:** In this meditation, Dr. Crossley writes about the electing love of God—"Yet Jacob I have loved; but Esau I have hated" (1:2-3), and cited by the apostle Paul among other examples of God's election in Romans 9:6-13. Dr. Crossley concludes with four important lessons for the Christian church. Do these lessons feature regularly in the preaching and teaching of your church? Why or why not?
- 2. Stealing from God:** Dr. Crossley writes about the unfaithfulness of God's people in withholding the tithe (3:8). He notes,

Under the New Covenant, there is no express command to tithe, but Christians are commended for being generous in sharing their material possessions with the poor (Acts 2:44-45; 4:32-37) and instructed that gifts in support of the Lord's people and the Lord's work are to be given freely, cheerfully, generously and secretly (2 Corinthians 9:6-8; Matthew 6:3-4). Rich Christians are "to be rich in good works, ready to give, willing to share" (1 Timothy 6:18).... The tithe remains a guideline, but for many Christians in the Western world it is a wholly inadequate amount.

What attitudes toward giving to God's work are present in your culture? Are the passages quoted in Proverbs (3:9-10; 11:24-25) twisted by "prosperity preachers" for people to give in order to line their own pockets? Or, are the principles taught there as well as in the Sermon on the Mount (Matthews 6:19-21) actually about honouring the Lord? Are these principles appreciated and honoured in your life by joyfully returning to the Lord the "firstfruits" of his blessings?

3. The book of remembrance: Dr. Crossley points to 3:16-17 which reveals "The Lord keeps a record ['a book of remembrance'] of those in whom he delights and who delight in him." That same book features in Revelation 20:11-15, when, on the day of judgement, "anyone not found written in the book of life was cast into the lake of fire." Some discourage preaching and teaching concerning judgement, for fear that seekers and weak or immature Christians will be turned off and leave the church. Does the day of judgement feature in the preaching and teaching of your church? Why is it important?

4. Preparing for the coming of Messiah: In this important meditation at the end of the volume, Dr. Crossley draws a parallel between Malachi's call for reformation in preparation for the first coming of the Messiah and the church of Jesus Christ today looking forward to the return, the second coming, of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. Is it time for you, for your church and for believers in your culture, to repent and return to the Lord, to prepare your hearts for Christ's "coming on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory" (Matthew 24:30; cf. Mark 13:26; Luke 21:27)?

MALACHI / **REJOICE**

Take my life and let it be*Frances Ridley Havergal (1874)*

Take my life and let it be
Consecrated, Lord, to Thee.
Take my moments and my days;
Let them flow in endless praise.

Take my hands and let them move
At the impulse of Thy love.
Take my feet and let them be
Swift and beautiful for Thee.

Take my voice and let me sing
Always, only, for my King.
Take my lips and let them be
Filled with messages from Thee.

Take my silver and my gold;
Not a mite would I withhold.
Take my intellect and use
Every power as Thou shalt choose.

Take my will and make it Thine;
It shall be no longer mine.
Take my heart it is Thine own;
It shall be Thy royal throne.

Take my love; my Lord, I pour
At Thy feet its treasure store.
Take myself, and I will be
Ever, only, all for Thee.

Application index

- a form of religion, 187-188
- a new heart, 259-260
- affliction, 189-191
- all things work together for good, 62
- amazing love of God, 219
- avoid idolatry and false worship, 344
- backsliding, plea to backsliders,
222-223, restoring the backslider
308-309
- born of the Spirit, 260-261
- building the temple, 467-468
- chosen by grace, 306
- Christ alone! 157-158
- church leaders, 261
- condition of the human heart by
nature, 222
- death, 135
- declaring the judgement of God,
220-221
- definition of true religion, 400
- discerning the will of God, 59-60
- discipline of children, 114
- distinguishing love of God, 500-501
- divisive gospel, 402
- experience of the church, 98-99
- faithfulness of God, 237
- false teachers, false prophets,
400-402
- fear of God, 133
- final resurrection, 287-288
- God administers just reprisals, 365
- God rules, 57

- God's power to preserve his people, 484-485
- great spiritual awakening, 485
- in his majesty's service, 467
- individual responsibility, 259
- Jehovah is Lord of the whole world, 365
- Jehovah keeps his covenant with Abraham, 365
- leadership of God's people, 307-308
- life without God, 237
- living by faith, 433-435
- marital love, 157
- mercy, not sacrifice, 306-307
- New Testament references to Proverbs, 115-116
- opposition to the Word, 345
- prayer in time of trouble, 386-387
- prayer, 285-287
- preparing for the coming of Messiah, 503-504
- presence of the Lord, 452-453
- promote social justice, 344
- prophecy fulfilled, 419-420
- providence, 386
- recommissioning, 386
- removal of sins, 402-403
- repentance and its fruit, 325
- right jealousy, 453
- salvation for Edomites, 366-367
- shun materialism, 345
- singing of the Lord, 452
- sovereign rule of God, 285
- standing alone, 223-224
- stealing from God, 501-502
- the believer and the state, 287
- the book of remembrance, 502-503
- the day of the Lord, 324
- the great adversary, 57-59
- the Lord's purpose behind suffering, 60-62
- trust in difficult days, 435-436
- unbelief despite warnings, 433
- universal gospel, 324
- warnings ignored, 420
- wisdom of the world, 134
- world mission, 387-388
- worldliness, 134-135
- worldly counsel, 188-189
- worship, 418

General index

Adam and Eve, 24, 26-27, 31, 33,
259, 340
allegories, 29, 143, 242, 253, 292,
371
apostles (disciples), 3-4, 6, 12,
16-22, 66, 96, 220, 302, 345,
383, 402
adultery, 12, 157, 292, 297
atonement, 153, 180, 209, 216

backsliding, 50, 123, 126, 129,
222-223, 291, 299, 308-309,
425, 474, 527-528, 537-538

Cain, 27, 362

Christ (Messiah),
advent, 152-155
ascension, 4, 6, 25, 94-95, 320
atonement, 153, 180, 209, 216
authority, 16
betrayal, 4, 92, 480-481
Bridegroom, 147, 148-152, 155,
156, 220, 448, 452
character, 174-175
Counsellor, 498
crucifixion, 4, 54, 221, 234, 304,
480
deliverer, 37, 152-153
deity, 88-89
eternal, 109-111
glory, 149, 175, 499
humanity, 87-89, 186, 257, 322,
398

humility, 186, 372, 479
 incarnation, 25, 27, 38, 150, 151,
 212-213, 361, 382-383, 385,
 396
 Judge, 82-86, 87, 174, 452, 558
 King, 5, 38, 76-77, 87-89, 95-97,
 139, 152, 180, 182-185, 209,
 212-213, 252, 257, 330, 361,
 395, 398, 412, 414-416, 452,
 474, 477, 478, 479, 496, 498,
 558
 Lamb of God, 5, 38, 93, 217, 496
 Mediator, 215, 482, 495, 498
 ministry, 175-176
 miracles, 2, 4, 19-20, 216-217
 parables, 177, 216-218, 275
 peacemaker, 464, 498
 person, 2, 4, 16, 26, 29, 38, 87,
 97, 110, 154, 158, 186, 280,
 398, 401, 407, 464, 478, 497
 pierced One, 479-480
 preaching, 177-178, 208, 221
 preparation and coming, 7,
 34-35, 37, 396, 503-504
 Priest, 5, 38, 95, 452, 475, 478,
 489, 498, 558
 promised Seed, 4, 24, 26, 38,
 154, 181, 485, 498, 500
 prophecies, 2, 234
 Prophet, 38, 208, 223, 452, 498,
 558
 Redeemer, 26, 35, 37, 152-154,
 301, 303, 448, 495
 resurrection, 3-4, 6, 16, 24, 25,
 31, 32, 55, 87, 94, 96, 217, 256,
 303-304, 320, 382-383, 397
 rejection, 54, 90
 righteousness, 55, 112, 213,
 414-415, 434-435, 449, 482,
 497, 499, 503
 sacrifice, 93, 186, 216, 221, 400,
 478
 second coming, 24-26, 282-283,
 446-447, 472, 499, 504
 selflessness, 304
 Servant, 94, 96, 155, 178-180,
 385, 436, 478

Shepherd (Chief, Good, Great),
 97, 108, 124, 251, 252, 477,
 481-482
 sonship, 2, 24, 37, 89, 109-111,
 173-174
 sorrows, 208-209
 substitute, 180
 sufferings, 5, 6, 16, 31, 38, 54-55,
 87, 90-92, 95, 178, 180, 186,
 208-209, 221, 234-235, 303,
 397, 436, 477, 481
 teaching, 6, 16-19, 21, 73, 84,
 208, 220, 446, 452
 temple-builder, 477-478
 virgin birth, 168, 173, 181
 warrior, 414-416
 wisdom, 111-112

Christ and his church, 23-26
 in Amos, 340-343
 in Daniel, 279-283
 in Ecclesiastes, 129-131
 in Ezekiel, 252-257
 in Habakkuk, 428-430
 in Haggai, 463-465
 in Hosea, 300-304
 in Isaiah, 173-186
 in Jeremiah, 207-218
 in Job, 53-55
 in Joel, 319-323
 in Jonah, 381-384
 in Lamentations, 233-235
 in Malachi, 495-497
 in Micah, 396-398
 in Nahum, 413-416
 in Obadiah, 360-363
 in Proverbs, 109-112
 in Psalms, 86-97
 in Song of Solomon, 148-155
 in Zechariah, 477-482
 in Zephaniah, 445-450

 Christophanies, *see theophanies*
 covenant,
 covenant with Abraham, 96, 213,
 365, 546
 covenant with David, 96

- New Covenant, 12, 34, 67, 99,
147-148, 183, 213-216, 217,
251, 255-256, 261, 282, 287,
291, 320-323, 449, 489, 499,
502, 527, 532, 565
- Old Covenant, 93, 95, 147, 183,
210, 214-217, 321, 362, 365,
398, 430, 478, 489, 499, 546
- creation, 12, 14, 24, 33, 36, 51, 57, 70,
71, 80, 111, 153, 156, 430
- day of the Lord, 170, 182, 303,
313-314, 316, 319, 323, 324, 359,
415, 420, 440, 443-447, 492,
494
- dreams, 12, 27, 30, 59, 143, 181, 246,
272, 273, 275, 277, 333, 388,
513-514
- election, *see also sovereignty*, 185,
341-342, 430, 450, 500, 564
- Fall, the, 27
- false prophets, 2, 203, 246, 249, 261,
400-402
- flood (time of Noah), 29, 342
- friendship, 114
- God,
 compassion, 219, 231, 232, 233,
 286, 299, 344, 350, 377, 381,
 387-388, 391, 407, 424
 Creator, 51, 61, 80, 156, 418, 427,
 502, 552
 faithfulness, 70, 71, 231-232, 236,
 237, 298
 Father, 2, 16, 26, 37, 59, 69, 73,
 89, 96, 110-111, 133, 149, 153,
 155, 172, 209, 256, 291, 322,
 407, 430, 448, 453, 502, 553,
 537
 heart, 23, 156, 207-208, 452
 jealousy, 84, 418, 439, 440, 453,
 492
 judgement, 220-221, 230, 234,
 245-251, 262, 297-299,
 317-319, 320, 334-339, 343,
 358-359, 365, 416, 420,
 427-428, 441, 444-445, 474
 justice, 82-86, 162, 221, 411
 longsuffering, 302, 419-420,
 433, 443
 plurality of his being/Trinity, 2,
 69, 110, 260
 protection, 280
 providence, 31-32, 99, 181, 274,
 396, 428
 righteousness, 73, 330
 sovereignty, 57, 80, 242, 259,
 262, 285, 386, 418
 wisdom, 134, 156, 331
 wrath, 13, 71, 220, 382, 417
- grace, 73, 99, 112, 115, 162, 183, 185,
186, 211, 215, 216, 219, 228, 297,
299, 305, 306, 318, 325, 330,
341, 342, 381, 386, 391, 395-396,
401, 411, 416-417, 418, 430, 433,
435, 447, 450, 453, 475, 477,
479, 483, 484, 492
- Hebrew poetry, 67-68, 106-107
- Holy Spirit,
 coming/sending, 32, 34, 321
 help to God's people, 12, 16-22,
 25, 34, 73
 inspiration of Scriptures, 9-22
 role to exalt Christ, 17, 22
- human nature, *see sinful nature*
- John the Baptist, 2, 150, 152, 176,
325, 360, 489, 495-497, 498
- lament, 77-78, 201
- leadership, 261, 307-308, 331-332,
394, 396, 472
- living by faith, 433-435
- marriage, 14, 24, 29, 83, 143-144,
149, 150-152, 156, 157, 292,
296-297, 300, 306, 448, 495,
522

materialism, 127, 294, 332, 345
mission, 387-388

new creation, 131, 172, 173

parables, 103, 108, 143, 145, 177,
199-200, 216-218, 242, 275, 291,
308, 448

Pentateuch, 68

Pentecost, 6, 19, 21, 32, 188, 256,
260, 319, 320, 321, 524

prayer, 6, 13, 22, 71, 72, 75, 76, 77,
85, 98-99, 112, 133, 167, 171, 209,
230, 233, 268, 276, 285-287,
376-381, 386-387, 407, 424, 431,
480, 516, 534, 548, 560

prophecy/prophecies, 2, 3, 4, 5, 23,
25, 26, 32-37, 43, 55, 56, 69,
86-97, 103, 109, 129, 151-155, 156,
164, 167-170, 172-178, 180-181,
186, 197-200, 203, 204, 206,
207, 209, 211, 218, 222, 223, 229,
232, 234, 242, 249, 250, 251,
252, 257, 260, 267, 268-269,
275, 281-283, 285-287, 291, 297,
301-304, 314, 316, 319-323, 324,
330, 332, 334-335, 337, 338,
340-343, 349, 350, 352-353,
357, 358, 360, 362, 364, 366,
373, 383, 392, 394-395,
396-398, 408, 410, 413, 414,
419-420, 427, 428, 429-430,
434, 442-450, 462, 463,
472-482, 485, 489, 490,
495-497, 498-499, 527, 535,
543, 553, 562

providence, 2, 30-32, 52, 99, 181,
274, 301, 386, 396, 428, 492,
497

redeem, redemption, 26, 37, 68, 112,
152-154, 214, 216, 299, 300, 301,
303, 366, 448, 495, 498, 537,
546

Sabbath, 44, 247, 307

Satan, Evil One, devil, 4, 31, 35, 45,

46, 48, 53, 57-59, 60, 93, 94, 175,
180-181, 276, 278, 282, 415, 475

Scriptures,

arrangement, 8

authority, 10, 13, 14, 21, 37

authorship, 11-13, 15, 66, 154,
162-165

division/types, 8, 12

fulfilment, 3, 302

help of the Holy Spirit, 10, 16-19,

inerrant, 11, 13

infallible, 10-13, 16

inspiration, 7, 9-22, 123-124, 154,
371-372

internal testimony, 17-19

interpretation, 341

opposition, 345

personality, 10, 12

private reading, 6

reliability, 22

revelation of God's will, 10

translation, 22, 103, 120, 126, 317,
429, 433

Septuagint, 120, 340

Shekinah glory, 27

sinful nature, human nature, 56, 105,
106, 222, 427, 500

social justice, 188, 344, 391

Spirit, coming of, 255-256, 260-261,
320-323

suffering, 5, 6, 16, 31, 38, 46-50,
53-55, 56, 60-62, 77, 84, 87,
90-92, 95, 178, 180, 186, 189-191,
205, 208, 221, 234-235, 303,
335, 376, 386-387, 397, 435-
436, 474, 477, 481, 513, 514, 546

theophanies, 26-27, 32, 34, 59, 109,
129, 280, 413, 428-429, 498, 513

Torah (law), 8, 43

tithes, 490, 501

types,

definition, 28-32

flood, 29

tabernacle, 29

- types of Christ,
 - advent, 148-150
 - ark of the covenant, 210
 - branch/twig, 256-257, 478
 - bridegroom, 150
 - David, 88-89
 - Elijah, 496-497
 - fountain, 481
 - Israel, 301
 - Jacob's ladder, 30
 - Jeremiah, 233-234
 - Job, 54-55
 - Jonah, 381-384
 - kinsman-redeemer, 498
 - manna, 30
 - Melchizedek, 29
 - mercy seat, 211
 - Passover, 30
 - river of life, 254-255
 - robe of righteousness, 482
 - sacrificial lamb, 30, 498
 - second coming, 150-152
 - Shepherd, 252
 - Shiloh, 152-155
 - temple, 30, 253-254, 464-465
 - water-giving rock, 30
 - wisdom, 111-112
- types of Christ and his church,
 - marriage, 29, 149-150, 153, 156, 300, 448
- types of the church,
 - faithful remnant, 218, 342-343
 - Jonah, 384
 - Zion, 212
- valley of dry bones (coming of the Spirit), 255-256, 260-261
- worldliness, 167, 134-135
- will of God, 13, 32, 59-60, 104, 132
- visions, 3, 12, 27, 30, 38, 59, 175, 242, 243, 246, 247, 248, 253, 254, 257, 260, 275-278, 280, 291, 292, 337-339, 388, 473-475, 482, 484, 503, 513-514, 532, 562

