

**PREFACE  
TO  
NOTES ON THE BOOKS OF THE BIBLE**

*The value of a Canonical Curriculum*

These studies are distillations of expository series on the Bible given to congregations, conferences, and churches of which I have been the minister. One of my tasks as a pastor was annually each summer to review the previous year's topics of my sermons, Bible studies and doctrinal series to ascertain: How much repetition have I inflicted on the people? How much of the Bible have I engaged in my sermons and studies? How much have I left out? Which important doctrines, and what important teaching, have I not emphasized?

Each minister -- indeed, each serious lay Christian -- should set before himself or herself a life-time canonical curriculum: namely, *that at some point in life I determine to study each book of the Bible so as to grasp its structure, message and impact upon the people to whom it was written, upon my life and upon my involvement in the life of my community.*

In congregations of which I was the minister I have on more than one occasion employed such a curriculum over the space of the autumn, winter, and spring seasons, often reserving series on the Psalms for Sunday summer series sermons. One year we went through each book of the Old Testament. The next season we went through each book of the New Testament. Bible study series were often convened on a mid-week evening. But now-a-days, it will be necessary to schedule many such opportunities for groups small and large, which meet variously during the week.

The cure for absorption with pet themes, narrow-mindedness and tunnel vision as to grasping the message of the Bible is canon-wide study and appreciation of the plenary scope of the teaching of the scriptures. Systematic book by book study sets the message of the Bible in its historical contexts and makes the application to today all the more incisive -- the concepts are not merely lifted out of context, bare-bones. Consistent, canon-wide study is the best cure for narrow, mind-shackling, brain-washing obsession.

But what should be one's attitude to the scriptures in light of the never-ending modern tension between the scholarly and devotional uses of the Bible? It is quite remarkable how derisively dismissive secularists are in academic circles whenever the word "bible" is heard. This attitude is simply proof of sustained ignorance of one of the most potent intellectual and cultural influences in the history of mankind. No one can think of himself or herself as an intellectual who does know the contents of the Bible. To be an educated person the study of the scriptures purely as classical literature which has profoundly affected the development of western civilization is mandatory.

## **NOTES ON GENESIS**

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The title 'Genesis' is a Greek word which means 'origin' or 'engendering.' Genesis tells us about the beginning of the world and human life under God. This is a vital point of faith because no human knowledge, scientific or otherwise, can tell us about the ultimate origin of things: 'through faith we understand that the worlds were framed by the word of God, so that things which are seen were not made of things which do appear,' (Heb 11:3).

This book discloses the fact of Creation and, as well, God's sovereign grace in choosing certain men, like Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, to fulfill His redemptive purpose. Here are told, in limited and compressed form, the origin of the world, life, man, human institutions, sin and redemption. The story of Creation centers upon the creation and fall of humanity which, in turn, centers upon the line of Judah as the divinely chosen channel for the coming Redeemer (Gen 49:10).

### **Authorship of Genesis and of the Pentateuch**

Among the Jews there is a strong and consistent tradition of the Mosaic authorship of the Pentateuch, given the addition of some materials which could not have been written by Moses (for example, the story of his death) or by editors.

During the past one hundred years scholars advocating the Documentary Hypothesis have claimed that the books derive from periods considerably later than Moses, and that the books represent compilations of distinct literary and, at times, religious traditions. These, in general terms, are identified as: The Jehovistic narrative (J), said to derive from the ninth century B C. and to be characterized by the predominant use of the name Jehovah (Yahweh) for God. The Elohist narrative (E), claimed to originate from the eighth century and later, to favour the tradition of the Northern Tribes of Israel, and the name Elohim for God. The Deuteronomistic document (D) is alleged to correspond roughly to Deuteronomy and to derive in part from the religious reform of Josiah. The alleged Priestly Code (P) is said to be concerned with Jewish sacrificial ceremonies, including the Tabernacle. This theory has undergone considerable modification and addition in recent years and has drawn strong criticism as well as support from scholars. Vast quantities of new materials, textual, archaeological and historical, have been uncovered and have yet to be fully digested in scholarly study. New developments in OT literary criticism are emerging very rapidly in our time, in what was thought formerly to be a static study. That 'documents' ever existed is now denied by some, who advocate parallel and interlocking traditions instead.

In my view the Pentateuch is not an accretion of loosely joined divergent literary traditions, but a congruous body of materials authentic to their times which present a consistent theological perspective.

My advice: take the biblical texts as we have them and study them with care. Give even a modicum of credence to authorial intent. Leave the weightier academic questions about manuscripts, variant readings, source criticism, form criticism, in abeyance. This is no different from my taking Plato's *Republic*, or Aristotle's *Metaphysics*, or Marcus Aurelius' *Meditations* at face value and then striving diligently to grasp what the author has written in the text I have in hand (or, for that matter, what the editors of the text have compiled). Bear in mind that in the case of the canonical scriptures, we have manuscript copies which extend the range of likely early textual authenticity far beyond anything available in classical studies. Give credence to the text, and diligently search out its sense in the form in which we have it.

I hope that these notes will spur the reader to life-long, systematic study of the Bible.

Historical evidence confirms that the literary capacity of the times, including Moses' education in Egypt, was at an advanced level. Other studies, such as those of the Synoptic Gospels, show us how materials can be edited and compiled into authentic volumes. Moses' role could well have been that of editor and compiler, as well as author, of large sections of the materials, some of which may have included records transmitted from former generations. It has become apparent, even to some critical scholars, that a philosophy of fragmentation is unsatisfactory from the standpoint of historical evidence, religious tradition, and the theological thrust of Israel's knowledge and service of God. The Pentateuch presents the unfolding divine revelation to man, through Israel, and not simply the natural evolution of disparate Palestinian tribal religious traditions.

### **General Outline of Genesis**

(See final note on the structure of Genesis.)

Genesis is a long book of fifty chapters; nevertheless, it is relatively simple in its structure, so that its contents are easy to remember. Four major events comprise the primeval historical section, while stories of four great patriarchs dominate the later historical period, as follows,

#### **Part I -- Four Great Events for Faith (Gen 1-11).**

Creation (1:1; 1:26; 2:7)

The Fall and Promise of Redemption (ch.3)

The Flood (ch. 4-10)

The Tower of Babel (ch. 11)

#### **Part II -- Four Great Men of Faith (Gen 12-50)**

The Story of Abraham (ch. 12-25:18)

The Story of Isaac (ch.21 - 35)

The Story of Jacob (25:19 - ch. 50)

The Story of Joseph (30:22 - ch. 50)

### **Part I**

#### **Four Great Events for Faith**

(Genesis 1-11)

#### **1. Creation**

##### **a. The Concept**

The creation or origin of the universe is inaccessible to human knowledge unless one is prepared to settle for the belief that the material world is eternal in substantially its present form. The uniqueness of Genesis is its claim to answer the question about ultimate origins and, as well, to declare the relation of the world to God as its Sustainer.

Three options on the nature of the world have been prominent in Western thought.

First, Materialism or Naturalism, in which is asserted the dogma that everything can be accounted for in natural ways and that the ultimate origin of things is unimportant. Second, Idealism, in which is claimed that Mind exists as well as Matter, that at its highest Mind is impersonal or supra-personal, and that Mind expresses itself as coherence, rationality, order, and such like in the world, but only as contained within the universe. Third, the Christian doctrine of the *creatio ex nihilo* (creation out of nothing), in which it is asserted, on the basis of the biblical teaching, that God created the world by his power but not from previously existing material.

The concept of creation in Genesis is unique. There are similarities between the Genesis narrative and other creation myths of the ancient near eastern world, but the similarities do not impinge on the core issues. The uniqueness of the Genesis teaching must be recognized in any fair-minded exposition of its narrative. This is done, for example, by one of the most militant atheists of our time, Anthony Flew, in a published dialogue on the concept of creation (*New Essays in Philosophical Theology*. SCM, 1961, pp. 171, 173). When approaching the doctrine of the *creatio ex nihilo*, he says,

But before moving on to that I think there are two points -- on which I'm sure we agree -- to be got out of the way. First: I'd like to emphasize how different the Genesis story is from any of those of its opposite numbers in other traditions which I myself have ever come across.... We have now three elements which are essential to any interpretation of Genesis, which is to be an interpretation and not a travesty. First: the insistence on absolute dependence; second: the rejection of any really fundamental dualism; and third: the suggestion of certain conduct and attitudes as appropriate. Surely there is a fourth (which many would treat as the prime point) -- the assertion that the world had a beginning?

#### b. The Narrative

The creation narrative structure devolves upon two points: the use of *bara'* (the verb to create) and the force of '*God said.*' In Scripture *bara'* has as its subject God, the object is always the product and never the material out of which things are made, and the divine action is extraordinary. It denotes creation out of nothing.

The implications of this narrative are: God alone, not matter, is eternal; God stands over and above his world, i.e., He is transcendent (Is 40:12-31; 41:4); God acts in his world because the world is not independent of God (He is immanent); and, God achieves His purpose by the word of his power (Ps 33:7; Is 45:12).

God's creating activity is at times ictic, i.e., sudden. In other ways God's creating activity is continuing. Let us not make the mistake of thinking that God creates, but that impersonal natural laws control the world. If God is anywhere he is everywhere. His control of the world order and creative activity is continuous.

The dignity and simplicity of the creation narrative contrast with the nonbiblical creation stories and with modern scientific language. The account is not a detailed

explanation, but an account of how the things which are visible to one looking at earth, sky, sea and the orders of living things, came into being.

It is a mistake to think of the narrative as a scientific description. The purpose of the Genesis narrative is ethical and religious. It reveals spiritual truths which are otherwise unascertainable.

Care should therefore be exercised in equating any scientific theory which is now in fashion with the Genesis account, though attempts at understanding both ought to continue. The stance of the writer in Genesis is simple and direct. Who brought this into being, or caused that to be so? The answer he gives is, God.

If we accept the Bible as divine revelation, then the narrative is historical and not mythological in the sense of other creation myths. It conveys more than simply allegorical spiritual truth, which some have claimed. Some who accept it as historical have tried to correlate the narrative with geological history, but this has not succeeded.

Difficulties arise when we impose contemporary notions on the narrative. For example, it is improper to impose the seventeenth century (now outmoded) concept of 'species' developed by John Ray and Linneaus, upon the biblical phrase 'after its kind' (1:11-12, 21, 24-25). For some, 'species' alleges identity of parent and offspring without modification, whereas the Hebrew term allows 'in all its varieties' or 'after its kinds.' The phrase points to the number and variety of the different species under each heading. Similarly, 'wherein is the seed thereof' (1:11) says that, by divine appointment, the earth produces its many different kinds, and that they contain within themselves the means of reproduction.

Another problem is that of chronology. The term 'day' has several different uses in the Bible. I do not think that a gap between Genesis 1:1 and 1:2, nor a figurative use of 'days' for geological ages are convincing interpretations, and the latter is too closely allied to some contemporary scientific theories. 'Day' might mean creation revealed in six days, or it may be a way of indicating the purpose and interrelations of God's activity, not a chronological sequence.

The Bible records in every day language only a few events selected from millions of years of history, to set forward crucial spiritual truths. Genesis is concerned with questions such as the relation of God to nature as its Creator and Sustainer, of God to humanity, of humanity to nature, of husband to wife, and of tempter to mankind -- but all of these as historical events. The message of the creation narrative is that the world is more than matter and energy, and that God is more than impersonal power pervading things. God made all the universe by his power for a purpose which he discloses in the Bible.

### c. The Key Feature of Creation

Genesis teaches not only the fact that God created the world, but also that he made it to be a certain kind of world. That is, he made it so that persons could be in free fellowship with himself.

This means that we as sinners are not only saved by grace, but also that prior to salvation the original relation of God to the world is that of grace. God is not related to the world like a craftsman to inert matter, or a clockmaker who winds up a clock and leaves it alone. God is in continuous creative relation to the world. Grace is the mode of this relationship, in virtue of which the world is real, God is independent, and we are created for freedom. I quote from what I wrote in *The Grace of God* (Eerdmans, 1966, p. 72),

The Christian doctrine of creation declares that God is neither too proud to create the world nor too remote to care for it. God created the world; He is immanent in it and transcendent over it. He exercises providential care of the world and of all creatures in it. This care includes wise and holy government of the world for moral ends (Gen 1:1; Ps 39:11; Is 40:21-: 27; 44:24; Rom 1:20; Heb 11:3). All this says that ultimate reality is of the nature of persons and personal relations. Taking its analogy from personal experience, the doctrine of the *creatio ex nihilo* understands the world according to the divine, purposive intention. In Calvin's words, God did not create the world *ambiguo fine*. He knew what He was doing. The corollary of this is grace as the way He treats the world for the achievement of His beneficent purpose (Eph 1:9-10; 3:11; 4:13-16).

At every moment of its existence God is providentially related to the world through grace. This is the basis of his subsequent loving and redemptive concern for us.

#### d. The Creation of Mankind (ch.1-2)

The creation narrative declares that human beings were created by God, and that they are linked both with the animal creation and to God: with animal creation by orgasmal features, and to God by spiritual nature. We are like other creatures physically; our uniqueness lies in our spiritual nature.

This should not disturb us. After all, the Scriptures declare mankind's continuity with the dust (Gen 2:7; 3:19; Job 34.15; Ps 103.14; Eccl 12:7). Neither our human continuity with the dust nor with other creatures poses a hindrance in scripture to the view of human uniqueness spiritually. The critical issue is whether one sees God as involved creatively in his world from the beginning or whether one sees the world without God.

Essential features of the Genesis story are: There is a Creator, and the world which he created is not evil but good. Human beings are spiritual beings as well as earthly creatures like other creatures, and are capable both of knowing God and of defying him.

What is the origin of humanity? Three options may be mentioned. First, which Christians reject, that human beings evolved wholly naturalistically from other forms of life and that there is no God involved in the world process at all. Second,

that humans were created by God gradually, like other creatures, and are physically continuous with them, but that God breathed into man a unique spiritual life at a point in time so that man is akin to God spiritually. Third, that God created human kind, body and spirit, at one time, and physically like other creatures. The second and third options are held by many Christians to be the intent of Genesis.

The crucial point is that humans were created in the image and likeness of God (Gen 1:26-27; 2:7). Each human being is a unity of body, soul and spirit. By means of bodily life (soul) human beings are related to the world around. By means of their spiritual life (spirit) they are related to God. But the uniqueness of humanity stands not only in this three-fold description, but in the quality of life to which they point.

This turns us to the meaning of humanity created *in the image of God*.

I suggest a four-fold meaning. *First*, each person is a self-conscious spiritual reality; a self. A person is not simply a unity of conscious experiences, but the subject of that unity. God, who is personal, has created us to be personal. *Second*, each person is an intelligent self. He and she have minds capable of rational and creative activity. *Third*, each person is a valuing self. We are each affected by moral standards such as good and evil. We know the difference between right and wrong. We are ethical beings. *Fourth* each person is a purposing self. We have the power to act freely in morally responsible ways.

To be made in the image of God means to be a spiritual being, which means to be a person, who can act in intelligent and moral ways.

In the Bible, humans as individuals exist and can be nurtured to maturity only in community with other persons. This includes redeemed men and women, in the fellowship of the Church. Interdependent life is expressed in Scripture in terms of the trinitarian life of God, which life Christians are called upon to share (John 17: 21-23).

## **2. The Fall and Promise of Redemption (ch.3)**

In Genesis chapter three is recorded the story of the fall of the first human pair, by their disobeying God's command. The effect of this has been disaster for the human race, involving all the consequences of sin physically, psychologically, and morally. It is plain that the biblical account presents humanity as having fallen from a created, sinless state, not having arisen from primeval superstition to modern spiritual heights.

On the other hand, it has been popular to take the story of the Fall as a useful myth which shows how in our own moral experience each of us falls below known moral ideals.



Involved are two crucial issues: the historicity of the Fall, and the universality of sin in the human race.

Christians reject the idea that good and evil are two eternal principles, or that evil is a form of good, or that there are celestial beings between God and the world, the actual agents who brought an imperfect world into existence so that God himself can be absolved of responsibility for the existence of an imperfect world and of evil.

The possibility of the Fall is tied directly to the doctrine of Creation. When God created the world it was free of evil. It is a standing truth for Christians that evil originated within creation through creaturely rebellion permitted by God. This means that we must allow God to take the responsibility for creating the kind of world in which evil as a positive act of rebellion could arise, knowing that he had in himself the full resources (the Cross) to deal with sin.

A prime purpose of God in Creation is to create free moral beings. Thus, given the Christian doctrine of the *creatio ex nihilo* we cannot lift the fall out of the time-series. Otherwise we end in either dualism or unmoral monism. Whether we like it or not, given the biblical premises of Creation by God, whatever else it may be, the Fall *must* have been an event in time.

When did the initial rebellion take place? Scripture intimates a pre-mundane angelic fall (Mt. 25:41; Jn. 8:44; 2 Peter 2:4; 1 Jn. 3:8; Jude 6; Rev. 12:7-17). The fall of an angelic being who rebelled against God and became Satan coheres with biblical teaching that persons and personal relationships constitute ultimate reality.

Parallel with this, is the fall of man, who was tempted by the evil one. The essence of the sin is independence of God and disobedience of his express command (3:4-6). The temptations of Genesis 3:4-6 parallel those of our Lord in the wilderness (Mt. 4:1-11) and the comment of John (1 Jn. 2:16).

The results of the Fall include separation from God and the universal sinfulness of Adam's posterity. This is the force of Paul's discussion in Rom. 5:12-21. Through Adam sin, condemnation and death came to the whole race. Through Christ there came righteousness, justification and life everlasting.

Since apostolic days, students of Scripture have seen a promise of redemption in Gen. 3:15. The seed of the woman (the Messiah) would bruise the head of the serpent. At the outset of human history and need, the loving divine redemptive purpose is disclosed

### **3. The Flood (ch. 4-10)**

In the disaster of the Flood are observed the severity and the goodness of God. Because the wickedness of man was very great God brought just destruction upon him, but God also saved Noah, a just man, to make a new beginning for mankind (6:1-7). The Scriptures indicate an extension of time (120 years) before the Deluge (Gen 6:3; 1 Pet. 3:20), among which Noah built the Ark and preached righteousness.

Eight people were preserved in the Ark (Gen. 6:18; 7:7, 13; 2 Pet. 2:5), including Noah, his three sons Shem, Ham, and Japheth, and their four wives. Also, two of each type of creature (not specifically 'species') were carried on board plus additional creatures for food and sacrifice.

When Noah entered the Ark, God closed the door behind him and brought the waters, some as rain, other as rising floods. The flood lasted for 371 days according to the narrative. Toward the end, Noah let loose a raven, which apparently stayed nearby. Then he let go a dove, which returned; then he released the dove a second time which returned with an olive branch; then the dove the third and final time. It did not return. After 29 days Noah came out of the Ark.

Genesis declares that everything, including man and animal creatures, was destroyed (6:7, 13, 17; 7:21, 22). The text can sustain the interpretation of a universal flood, and some conservative Christians take it this way. Other equally conservative Christians take the Flood to have been vast but encompassing not the whole world but the existing human environment of the ancient world. This is predicated upon terms which suggest locality: "upon the earth" can mean land; "under heaven" can mean the visible sky within the horizon; and "upon the ground" could derive its meaning from the other two terms. Nevertheless, such a flood would be of cataclysmic proportions to fulfill the severity of the divine judgment.

God delivered Noah and made a covenant with him, signified by the rainbow, that regular seasons would prevail, that no further destruction by deluge would occur and that the race should multiply.

Some important lessons emerge from this account. Wickedness in Noah's day invaded every sphere of life, including abuse of marriage (6:2), violence (6:5), evil thinking (6:5), and heedlessness (Mt. 24:37-39; 2 Pet. 3:3-6). God is aware of human sin and judges it (6:5, 7, 12-13). Those men who believed Noah's message entered the Ark for safety. Christ is our refuge from the final divine judgment.

Noah is one of the great men of faith (Heb. 11:7). In his stand for righteousness we see the loneliness of spiritual dynamic. He drew spiritual courage from walking with God (6:9), and he responded faithfully to God's Word to him (6:22). Through the obedience of faith Noah found grace (6:8), deliverance (6:18; 7:1), remembrance before God (8:1), a new life (8:16), and a covenant of peace (8:20-22; 9:1, 9).

#### **4. The Tower of Babel (ch. 11)**

The narrative continues, to indicate that from Noah and his three sons derive the nations of the world.

Noah and his descendents worshipped the true God, but very quickly men turned to idolatrous worship. The confusion of tongues is presented as a divine judgment to fragment the growing idolatrous association of men and their pride.

Babel was a foremost city in ancient Babylonia. The Tower (which term does not occur in Scripture) was a great architectural and religious landmark, common to important cities of the time. They were temple-towers, or ziggurats. They consisted of rectangular stages built one on top of the other, and presented an imposing sight. Access was provided by lofty external staircases, and internal passages. On the highest stage was the heathen temple covered with silver and other precious metal, and set in an environment of black, blue, and red colouring which decorated the stages.

One record on a cuneiform tablet gives sufficient detail to enable us to picture such a building, though this is of a later building. It had an enormous outer court, surrounding the base rectangular stage which measured 295 x 295 feet x 108 feet high. On this base stage were five proportionately diminishing stages in area, but each being 20 - 60 feet high. At the top was the temple, as on a high pinnacle, and richly adorned.

The Tower age signifies an idolatrous 'age of man' which God disrupted by the confusion of tongues (11:7).

### **Part II -- Four Great Men of Faith**

Genesis 12-50

#### **1. The Story of Abraham (Gen 11:26 - 25:10)**

Abraham, the descendent of Shem and son of Terah, became the great progenitor of the Hebrew people through Isaac, and of the Arab peoples through Ishmael. As a man of great faith he was known as the 'Friend of God' (2 Chron 20:7). His importance to the life of Israel is apparent from frequent allusions to him in the NT. More especially, he epitomizes the central feature of the Christian Gospel, the response of faith by which alone men are justified before God (Rom 4; Gal 3:6-18).

##### **a. Outline of Abraham's Life**

(i) Ur of the Chaldees (Gen 11:27-30). Abraham was born at Ur His father was Terah, his brothers Nahor and Haran, his wife Sarai, and his nephew Lot.

Ur was a fine residential and industrial city with an advanced culture. Sir Leonard Woolley (*Ur of the Chaldees*, Pelican) uncovered the remains of a home approximately 40 x 52 feet in size with a yard extra. It was of burnt brick, two stories in height. There was a paved lobby leading from the front door, with a drain and washbowl. The center of the house was open to the sky with the central court paved and unroofed. Wooden poles supported the roof of the gallery. Downstairs there were servants' rooms, the staircase, a guest room, a lavatory, a kitchen with cookers, and the family chapel. Upstairs there were about five fine rooms with charcoal fires for heat, simple wood and woven furniture, draperies, and clay and copper vessels.

A school, utilizing a converted home, was also uncovered containing living quarters, lavatory, kitchen, and a classroom. Many tablets were found showing the different grades of work. The master wrote on one side while the pupil wrote on the other. Lessons were dictated, and some mistakes were written out fifty times. There were reading lessons of hymns and there were arithmetical problems in addition, multiplication and division. Square and cube roots were known and used. Practical geometry was used in finding the number of rods in an irregular field. Grammar was studied, for conjugations of verbs were found.

Social conditions were advanced. Agriculture prospered by extensive, complicated systems of irrigation utilizing canals and pumps. Foreign trade was common and such items as checks and letters of credit were commonly employed. Ships carried bills of lading, and their cargoes included copper ore, gold, ivory, hard woods, and alabaster, from as far away as the Gulf of Persia, the Caspian Sea, the Mediterranean, and India. Trade was by both land and water. One letter was found saying, "I sent five letters and received no reply. How can one do business?"

Gold, silver, and barley were used for money and weighed out accurately (note Gen 23:16). Manufactured articles included pottery, weaving of at least 12 types of cloth, woodwork and metalwork. Proper books were kept of business transactions and monthly profit and loss statements were kept including a record of the food consumed by the workers and the upkeep costs of equipment. Women had almost equal rights with the men (note Gen 21:10). They owned money and property, could sue in court, and were generally recognized as individuals. Where they helped their husbands in business they were entitled by law to one third of the profit. All business was conducted by contract, letter, law, and a definite business code, with witness seals in regular legal procedure.

(ii) Haran (Gen 11:31, 32; 12:1-5). Terah and his family (except Nahor) departed from Ur for Canaan. They set up temporary residence at Haran in northern Palestine, where Terah died.

(iii) Canaan (Gen 12.4-9). God called Abram to travel southward from Haran

toward Canaan at age 75, taking along Sarai his wife, Lot his nephew, and servants. At Shechem the Lord appeared to Abram and entered into covenant with him, which covenant looked toward the land of Israel, a new nation begotten from Abram and God's redemptive purpose through a Redeemer born in that nation.

(iv) Egypt (Gen 12:12-20). Famine drove Abram south to Egypt where a problem arose with the King of Egypt over Sarai's beauty and Abram's duplicity.

(v) Canaan (Gen 13-25:11). At Bethel (13:1-17), as at the first, Abram renewed his faith in God's covenant. Abram and Lot separated. God reaffirmed the covenant.

Abram pitched his tents on the plains of Mamre, at Hebron (13:18 - ch.19), where he built an altar. Abram delivered Lot from captivity, following the battle of the kings; (14:1-16). Abram paid tithes to Melchizedek, who blessed him (14:17-24; note Heb 7). God reaffirmed the covenant (ch. 15). The problem of Hagar and Ishmael, who was born in Abram's 86th year (ch. 16). God reaffirmed the covenant in Abram's 99th year (ch.17), and changed his name to Abraham ("father of multitudes"). The rite of circumcision was established. Sarah's name was changed to Sarah ('princess'). The three men visited Abraham (ch. 18) to promise a son to Sarah. Isaac was born. Abraham interceded on behalf of Sodom and Gomorrah, and Lot. The judgment of Sodom and Gomorrah and the deliverance of Lot (ch. 19).

(vi) The "south country" (Gen 20-21). Abraham journeyed to the Negeb, where the problems of Sarah's beauty and his own duplicity arose again (ch.20). He worshiped at Beersheba and lived in Philistia for a time (ch.21).

(vii) The land of Moriah (Gen 22), which is the hill where Jerusalem was later built. Here Abraham's faith was put to the test by God's command to sacrifice Isaac.

God intervened by providing a substitute ram, and reaffirmed the covenant of promise with Abraham.

(viii) Beersheba and Machpelah (Gen 23-25:10). The death of Sarah at age 127 and her burial in the cave of Machpelah at Hebron are recorded (ch.23). Abraham sent his servant to the house of Nahor to find a bride for Isaac. Rebekah was won, traveled to Canaan and was married to Isaac (ch.24). Isaac became Abraham's, sole heir. Abraham's death at age 175 and burial in the cave of Machpelah are recorded (ch. 25: 1-10).

## b. Spiritual Highlights of Abraham's Life.

(i) God's covenant with Abraham

The covenant which God made with Abraham (12:1-4) and reaffirmed several times (13:14-17); 15:1-7; 17:1-8) attests to the sovereign grace of God who chose Abraham and his posterity as the vehicles of the divine redeeming action.

Its terms were: I will make of you a great nation; I will bless you; I will make your name great; you will be a blessing; I will bless him who blesses you; and curse him that curses you; by you all families of the earth shall bless themselves (or be blessed).

It was an everlasting covenant, depending upon the very nature of God (17:1). The condition was Abraham's obedient faith ("Go out", "So Abram went"), which alone is the means of justification, not only then (15:6) but also now through faith in Christ (Rom 4:1-4; 13-15).

From Abraham came Isaac, Jacob, the Israelitish nation, and finally Jesus Christ. By this means God prepared the way for the incarnation of His Son at Bethlehem, and through Him the redemption of the world. The key features of the covenant are grace and faith. Faith is the only appropriate human response to divine grace.

(ii) The ministry of intercession

Genesis ch. 18 records Abraham's intercession on behalf of the divinely condemned Sodom and Gomorrah, and on behalf of Lot. The wickedness of the cities was very great (13:12-13). Lot's situation is typical of the Christian's situation in a sinful world (2 Peter 2:6-8). Reasons for preferring to live there include the security of urban centers (note 12:10-12) and the success a city offered, for Lot was evidently one of the city elders who sat "in the gate of Sodom" (19:1). The divine judgment was due to the crisis proportions of wickedness (18:20) righteously noted by God (18:21). Abraham's prayer mediation on behalf of the city (18:23-33) has often been seen as a type of Christ's mediation on behalf of the world, though Christ's relates to a world where there are no exceptions to the universal divine indictment.

(iii) Abraham's spiritual lapses.

Fearful that God had delayed irrevocably to provide him the promised heir, Abraham took Hagar as wife, of whom was born Ishmael. As a servant-woman, she and her son in NT theology represent the bondage of the law, in contrast to Sarah and Isaac who represent promise and grace (Gen 17:17-22; 21:14; Gal 4:21-31).

On two occasions, during visits to the South Country, Sarah's beauty became a problem, which Abraham tried to circumvent by duplicity. In each case God intervened to deliver Abraham and Sarah (12:10-20; ch.20) and in each case Abraham was called back to an altar of worship (Bethel, and Beersheba) and to divine re-

affirmation of the covenant.

## **2. The Story of Isaac (Gen 21-35)**

As the son of promise to Abraham and Sarah when they were past child-bearing age (18:9-15; 21:1-5), Isaac occupies a strategic role in the book of Genesis. Isaac's birth was the first step toward implementing the divine covenant with Abraham.

Isaac's marriage to Rebekah, whom Eliezar secured from Nahor's house for Isaac, was a love match. She bore twin sons, Esau and Jacob, but the covenant line proceeded through the younger, Jacob. Esau was a cunning hunter, Jacob a plain man of the tents. Isaac favoured Esau, as the eldest, but Rebekah loved Jacob who received the birthright from Esau for a mess of pottage (25:29-34).

Due to famine in Canaan, Isaac lived for a time in Gerar (26:1-21). There God reaffirmed the covenant with him (26:2-5), but Isaac also experienced difficulty over Rebekah, as Abraham had over Sarah, because of his duplicity. His prosperity offended the Philistines, who sent him away (26:15-33). Esau took Hittite women to wife, which was a bitter experience for Isaac and Rebekah (26:34-35).

When Isaac was ready to pronounce the fatherly blessing upon his sons, and to pass on the blessing of the covenant, by duplicity Rebekah secured the birthright for Jacob (27:1-40). Though he did receive a blessing from Isaac, Esau held murderous feelings for Jacob who, assisted by his mother, fled to Laban's house (27:42-46). This plan was double edged: not only to escape Esau's anger, but also to find for Jacob a wife among his own people. Isaac concurred with the plan (28:1-5), which antagonized Esau further, so that he married an Ishmaelite woman (28:6-9).

Isaac died at the age of 180 (35:27-29) and was buried by his sons Esau and Jacob, who were reconciled following Jacob's return to Canaan.

Three great features about Isaac's life stand out in Scripture: his birth, the test of Abraham in his willingness to sacrifice Isaac, and the procurement of a bride for Isaac.

### **a. The birth of Isaac**

At an advanced age, when they were as good as dead for procreating children, God fulfilled his promise to Abraham and Sarah so that Isaac, the child of promise, was born. This was a great test of faith for Abraham (Heb 11.11-12), and was seen as the intervention of God for the fulfillment of his redemptive purpose.

b. The test concerning Isaac (Gen 22).

As difficult as had been the more than twenty year waiting period for Isaac's birth, now that he had grown to young manhood, clearly past the possibility of another heir being born, God made of Abraham the staggering demand that he sacrifice Isaac on mount Moriah.

It was a test of obedience and of faith for, while it appeared to jeopardize the promise, Abraham obeyed God (Heb 11:17-19). Parallels between this event and Calvary have been drawn by Christians of all ages. To begin with, Moriah is the site of the later Jerusalem. More than this, the provision by God of a substitute victim, points for Christians to the later divine provision of the incarnate redeemer as the sacrifice for human sin.

c. A bride for Isaac (ch. 24).

Many parallels have been drawn between Abraham's commissioning of Eliezar, his trusted servant, to procure a bride for Isaac, and the ministry of the Holy Spirit who is procuring a bride (the Church) out of the world for Christ. By divine providence, Eliezar was led to Rebekah, yet she herself had to choose to come to Isaac (24:58). Her decision involved as its consequence a long pilgrimage. Then a joyful meeting with Isaac.

The role of Eliezar is instructive. He had a solemn commission, responsibility, and divine guidance to accomplish it (24:4, 7-9). He was trusted by his master (24:10) and prayerful in his attitude to the task (24:12-14). He exhibited sanctified tactfulness and courtesy (24:15-21), and marvelled at how easily God had led him (24:21, 26-27). He discharged his responsibility with candor, and without delay (24:33, 56). It became apparent to them all that "the thing comes from the Lord" (24:50).

### **3. The Story of Jacob (Gen 25.19 - ch. 50:1-4)**

Jacob's childhood and growth to manhood are, closely tied to Isaac and Esau (Gen 25:19-28:9) at Beersheba. During this period he secured the birthright from Esau (25:19-34) and gained Isaac's blessing by deception (27:1-46).

To escape the anger of Esau, it was agreed that he should go to Laban, in Padanaram (28:1-31:16). On the way there occurred the encounter with God at Bethel, the renewal of the covenant to Jacob, and the erection of a memorial stone (28:10-22). This was a climactic spiritual event for Jacob.

Jacob spent twenty years in the house of Laban (29:1-31:16), during which time he amassed cattle, goods, wives and children, despite the scheming of Laban and Laban's sons. Jacob loved Rachel and worked a total of 14 years to gain her as his wife. Jacob's success as a business man and herdsman aroused the anxiety of



Laban and the envy of Laban's sons. Despite their conniving, Jacob prospered. Finally, with the help of Rachel and Leah, Jacob secretly left during Laban's absence and made a two-day headstart toward Canaan with his cattle and goods.

Laban gave pursuit and overtook Jacob in Gilead (31:17-55). Warned by God to do no harm, Laban took a conciliatory stance. Charge and countercharge were exchanged: Laban charged that Jacob had left surreptitiously, stealing Laban's family images. Jacob charged that Laban had pursued too hotly, had failed to appreciate 20 years faithful service, and that had not God intervened Laban would have sent Jacob away empty handed. They covenanted together for peace (31:43-55), set up a mark dividing territory between them, and parted.

At Mahanaim an angelic host met Jacob, preparatory to the meeting with Esau (32:1-2). Jacob sent a conciliatory message to Esau and prepared a defensive strategy for meeting him (32:3-23). Jacob wrestled with a man at daybreak, who changed his name to Israel (32:24-32). Then Esau returned to Seir, while Jacob proceeded to Shechem.

In Canaan again, Jacob established himself at Succoth through purchase of land, and built an altar. There followed the unhappy incident over Dinah (ch.34). God directed him to return to Bethel where the covenant was first made with Jacob (35:1-15). Idols were put away and God confirmed the covenant. Rachel died while giving birth to Benjamin (35:16-21). The twelve sons of Jacob are listed (35:22-26).

The final chapter of Jacob's life concerns Joseph and the sojourn in Egypt. Following the disclosure of Joseph as the ruler of Egypt under Pharaoh during the famine, Jacob and his sons resided in Egypt (ch.46-49). On the way Jacob revisited Beersheba, sacrificed to God, and was assured that he should proceed (46:1-4). He was met by Joseph in Goshen (46:28-34) and presented to Pharaoh (47:1-26). Jacob's remaining years are recorded, his blessing to his sons, and his burial in Machpelah (47:27-50:14).

#### a. Jacob and the birthright

Jacob had a high sense of the spiritual value of the birthright. His purchase of it from Esau is confirmed by documents which record a similar transaction. The bestowal of Isaac's blessing could not be revoked (27:33). Jacob inherited the covenant and blessing of Abraham, including tithe land of Canaan (Rom 9:10-13; 11:26-27, 29).

#### b. Jacob's vision

The vision at Bethel disclosed the covenant to Jacob and, as well, the glory and majesty of God (28:10-17). God declared that the promised blessing, which we know to be the redemption of the world, would come to the world through Jacob's

posterity, which was the line of Judah, culminating in Jesus Christ (49:10; Deut 33:7; Mt 1:2).

c. Jacob's sons

The twelve tribes of Israel derive from the twelve sons of Jacob, and are thus the foundation of Israelitish life. The name Israel was given to Jacob by his supernatural opponent (Gen 32:28) at Peniel and means one who strives with God and prevails. The name was confirmed at Bethel (35:10).

#### **4. The Story of Joseph (Gen 30:22 - ch.50)**

The story of Joseph is one of the best known and best loved in the Bible. His home life with his brethren is described in ch 37-38. Jacob's partiality toward Joseph (he and Benjamin were Rebekah's sons) evoked the hostility of his brethren. This the gift of the multi-coloured, robe and Joseph's dreams only intensified. They finally connived to get rid of him by selling him into bondage in Egypt. Reuben was not party to the sale.

Joseph became a servant in an Egyptian household, as did many other young Semites in those times. Potiphar's wife turned against him when he refused her advances, and she had him imprisoned. During his imprisonment Joseph came to the attention of Pharaoh as an interpreter of dreams, including the butler's and the baker's. Upon interpreting Pharaoh's dream concerning the impending famine, Joseph was elevated to second ruler under Pharaoh (ch 39-40).

There followed the touching episode when Jacob's sons came to Egypt for food. Joseph recognized them and dealt kindly with them. Throughout a succeeding visit Joseph kept his identity hidden, but insisted that Benjamin accompany them. Finally Joseph revealed himself to them, was reconciled, and brought them and Jacob to Egypt, away from famine and under his own protection.

This was the occasion of the settlement of the Israelites in Egypt (ch.42-47). Joseph's peaceful dealing with his brethren continued after the death of Jacob, and Joseph's death is recorded (50:15-26).

#### **Analogies Preachers have drawn between Joseph and Christ**

Throughout the course of Church history, many interesting parallels have been observed between Joseph and Christ. I note the following, which have often been used in sermons:

Each was his father's well-beloved son (Gen 37:3; John 3:16; 17:24)

Joseph was sent by his father to minister to his brethren (Gen 37:14). Our Lord was sent by the Father to his own (John 1:11; 17:3, 18, 21, 25).

Joseph was hated by his brethren (Gen 37:4). Our Lord was hated without a cause (John 8:40-44; 15:18-23).

Joseph testified to his brethren the things that God had revealed to him (Gen 37:5). Our Lord was the faithful witness to the word of God (John 8:23-24; 12:44-48). Each was hated the more for his words (Gen 37:8; John 10:37-39).

Joseph was sold by his brethren into bondage for 20 pieces of silver (Gen 37:28). Our Lord was sold by one of his own disciples for 30 pieces of silver (Matt 26:14-16).

Joseph was tempted by Potiphar's wife (Gen 39:7). Our Lord was tempted in the wilderness by Satan (Matt 4:1-11).

Though innocent, Joseph was cast into prison under threat of death (Gen 39:20). Our Lord, though innocent, was condemned to death (John 19:4, 12, 16).

God raised up Joseph from prison, the place of death, and vindicated him before Pharaoh (Gen 41:39-40). Our Lord was raised in triumph from the dead and vindicated by God (Rom 1:4).

All people came to Joseph for sustenance and he gave freely (Gen 45). Christ is the bread of life to all men (John 6:33).

In the end, Joseph was reconciled to his brethren and received them (Gen 45). At the end of the age Israel will be reconciled to her rejected Messiah (Rom 11).

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**Note on:**

**APPROACHES TO THE STRUCTURE OF GENESIS**

I cite several approaches to analysis of Genesis. It is a long book and has proved daunting to lay readers. Questions raised by modern literary criticism add to difficulties on how to outline the flow of thought in the book.

**I. -- Marcus Dods, *The Expositor's Bible* (late 19<sup>th</sup> century).**

Dods' classic work was set in the context of great preachers and great preaching in Britain (e.g., R. W. Dale, C. H. Spurgeon, Alexander Maclaren, and many others) and when many new archaeological and text discoveries were being made in Bible lands. However, he does not present an outline of the logic of lessons of the book, only annotation of major chapter themes, as follows:

*Chapter*

I

The Creation

|        |  |
|--------|--|
| II     | The Fall                               |
| III    | Cain and Abel .                        |
| IV     | Cain's Line, and Enoch                 |
| V      | The Flood                              |
| VI     | Noah's Fall                            |
| VII    | The Call of Abraham                    |
| VIII   | Abram in Egypt                         |
| IX     | Lot's Separation from Abram            |
| X      | Abram's Rescue of Lot                  |
| XI     | Covenant with Abram                    |
| XII    | Birth of Ishmael                       |
| XIII   | The Covenant Sealed                    |
| XIV    | Abraham's Intercession for Sodom       |
| XV     | Destruction of the Cities of the Plain |
| XVI    | Sacrifice of Isaac                     |
| XVII   | Ishmael and Isaac                      |
| XVIII  | Purchase of Machpelah                  |
| XIX    | Isaac's Marriage                       |
| XX     | Esau and Jacob                         |
| XXI    | Jacob's Fraud                          |
| XXII   | Jacob's Flight and Dream               |
| XXIII  | Jacob and Peniel                       |
| XXIV   | Jacob's Return                         |
| XXV    | Joseph's Dreams                        |
| XXVII  | Pharaoh's Dreams                       |
| XXVIII | Joseph's Administration                |
| XXIX   | Visits of Joseph's Brethren            |
| XXX    | The Reconciliation                     |
| XXXI   | The Blessings of the Tribes            |

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## II. -- W. Graham Scroggie, (*Know Your Bible*, 1940).

Scroggie, of Edinburgh's Charlotte Baptist Chapel, was a superb pulpit Bible expositor. His outline of Genesis is historical and thematic:

### I. PRIMITIVE HISTORY (1:1 – 9:9)

#### 1. From the Creation to the Fall, (1 – 3).

- (i.) The Creation, and God's Week of Work, 1:1-2:3.
- (ii.) The Garden, and the Probation of Man, 2:4-25.
- (iii.) The Serpent, and the Fall of Eve and Adam, 3.

#### 2. From the Fall to the Flood, (4:1 – 8:14).

- (i.) Cain and Abel, and their Offerings, 4:1-16.
- (ii.) The Genealogies of Cain and Seth, 4:17-5:32.

(iii.) The Great Apostasy and Divine Judgment, 6:1-8:14.

**3. From the Flood to Babel (8:15 – 9:9)**

- (i.) The New Covenant of God with Man, 8:15-9.
- (ii.) The Posterity of Noah's Three Sons, 10.
- (iii.) The Confederacy and Confusion at Babel, 11:1-9.

**II. PATRIARCHAL HISTORY (11:10 - ch. 50)**

**1. The Story of Abraham (11:10 – 25:18).**

- (i.) THE AWAKENING OF FAITH.  
From the Call in Chaldea to the Settlement in Canaan, 11:10 - ch. 13.
- (ii.) THE DISCIPLINING OF FAITH.  
From the Settlement in Canaan to the Birth of Isaac, ch. 14 - 21:21.
- (iii.) THE PERFECTING OF FAITH.  
From the Birth of Isaac to the Death of Abraham, 21:22 - 25:18.

**2. The Story of Isaac (ch. 21 - 36).**

- (i.) THE SUBMISSIVE SON.  
From his Birth to his Marriage with Rebekah, ch. 21 - 24.
- (ii.) THE FAITHFUL HUSBAND. From his  
Marriage to his Settlement at Beersheba, ch. 25 - 26.
- (iii.) THE INDULGENT FATHER. From his  
Settlement at Beersheba to his Death, ch. 27 - 36.

**3. The Story of Jacob (25:19 - 50:13).**

- (i.) THE SUPPLANTER.  
From his Birth to his Departure from Home, 25:19 - 28: 9.
- (ii.) THE SERVANT.  
From his Departure from Home to his Covenant in Gilead, ch.28:10 -  
ch.31.
- (iii.) THE SAINT.  
From his Covenant in Gilead to his Descent into Egypt, ch.32 - 45.
- (iv.) THE SEER.  
From his Descent into Egypt to his Burial at Mamre, ch. 46 - 50:13.

#### 4. The Story of Joseph (30:22 – ch. 50.).

(i.) THE PERIOD OF HIS TRAINING. THE SON.

From his Birth at Haran to his Arrival in Egypt, 30:22 - ch. 38

(ii.) THE PERIOD OF HIS TESTING. THE SUFFERER.

From his Arrival in Egypt to his Promotion to Power, ch. 39 - 41:36.

(iii.) THE PERIOD OF THE TRIUMPH. THE SOVEREIGN.

From his Promotion to Power to the End of his Life, 41:37 - 50:26

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#### III. – Roland K. Harrison (*Introduction to the Old Testament*, 1969, p. 548).

Following P. J. Wiseman, Harrison accepts the colophonic structure of the first part of Genesis. A colophon is an inscription usually marking the end of a book or literary segment which gives a description or identification of what is being recorded; that is, a beginning or ending, but not its subsequent development. Thus, *These are the generations of ...* identifies a history, a narrative, not begetting. In Genesis such eleven segments represent family histories. It appears that such literary units furnished economy of space and size to fit on a cuneiform tablet. Harrison argues that these are genuine literary sources for the first thirty-six chapters of Genesis. The list is:

|            |                       |                                   |
|------------|-----------------------|-----------------------------------|
| Tablet 1:  | Gen. 1:1 - 2:4.       | The origins of the cosmos         |
| Tablet 2:  | Gen. 2:5 - 5:1-2.     | The origins of mankind            |
| Tablet 3:  | Gen. 5:3 - 6:9a.      | The histories of Noah             |
| Tablet 4:  | Gen. 6:9b - 10:1.     | The histories of the sons of Noah |
| Tablet 5:  | Gen. 10:2 - 11:10a.   | The histories of Shem             |
| Tablet 6:  | Gen. 11:10b - 11:27a. | The histories of Terah            |
| Tablet 7:  | Gen. 11:27b - 25:12.  | The histories of Ishmael          |
| Tablet 8:  | Gen. 25:13 - 25:19a.  | The histories of Isaac            |
| Tablet 9:  | Gen. 25:19b - 36:1.   | The histories of Esau             |
| Tablet 10: | Gen. 36:2 - 36:9.     | The histories of Esau             |
| Tablet 11: | Gen. 36:10 - 37:2.    | The histories of Jacob            |

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#### IV. – MEREDITH G. KLINE, (“Genesis,” *New Bible Commentary, Revised*, 1970).

Kline adopts this structure for the entire book, though he employs the term “genealogical sections,” which may suggest to the reader “begetting” not primarily beginning or ending segments of historical narrative. His outline

follows:

- 1:1 - 2:3**      **Prologue**  
1:1-13          Creation's kingdoms  
1:14-31        Creature-kings  
2:1-3          Creator-King
- 2:4 - 4:26**    **The generations of heaven and earth**  
2:5-25        Man's original beatitude  
3:1-24        Entrance of sin  
4:1-26        Man in exile
- 5:1 - 6:8**      **The generations of Adam**  
5:3-32        Covenant genealogy: Adam to Noah  
6:1-8         Cult of man
- 6:9 - 9:29**    **The generations of Noah**  
6:9 - 8:19    Diluvian covenant  
8:20 - 9:17   Post-diluvian covenant  
9:18-27      Covenant in prophecy
- 10:1 - 11:9**   **The generations of the sons of Noah**  
10:1-32      Diaspora of the nations  
11:1-9        Dispersion from Babel
- 11:10-26**      **The generations of Shem**
- 11:27 - 25:11** **The generations of Terah**  
11:27 - 15:21 Abraham's kingdom inheritance  
16:1 - 22:19   Abraham's dynastic heir  
22:20 - 25:11 Royal succession
- 25:12-18**      **The generations of Ishmael**
- 25:19 - 35:29** **The generations of Isaac**  
25:19 - 28:9   Isaac's inheritance and heir  
28:10 - 35:29 Jacob's Syrian sojourn and return
- 36:1 - 37:1**    **The generations of Esau**
- 37:2 - 50:26** **The generations of Jacob**  
37:2 - 45:28   Jacob's kingdom-heirs  
46:1 - 47:27   Israel's descent into Egypt  
47:28 - 50:26 Israel's hope of restoration

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## NOTES ON EXODUS

Samuel J. Mikolaski

The name *Exodus* derives from the Greek title of the book in the Septuagint translation of the Hebrew Bible, and means *a going out*. It concerns the history of Israel following the time of Joseph until their exodus 430 years later (Ex 12:40).

Exodus records three great elements of Israel's religious history:

1. The deliverance from the bondage of Egypt and institution of the Passover.
2. The giving of the Law at Sinai.
3. The institution of formal worship and sacrifice including construction of the Tabernacle by divine appointment.

Each of these, in its own way, is directly tied in the New Testament to the Christian doctrine of redemption.

The following is an outline of Exodus, including some of the key features of each division:

### OUTLINE OF EXODUS

#### **I. The Bondage of the Hebrews in Egypt (ch. 1-12)**

- The circumstances of the Israelitish enslavement, ch. 1.
- The biography of Moses, ch. 2-4.
- The persecution of the Israelites, ch. 4-6.
- Moses and Aaron before Pharaoh, ch. 6-7.
- The ten plagues in Egypt ch. 8-12.

#### **II. The Deliverance from Egypt and the Journey to Mt. Sinai (ch. 13-19)**

- The Passover instituted and the Israelites delivered through the death plague, ch. 12-13.
- The destruction of the pursuing Egyptians and Moses' song of praise, ch. 14-15.
- The gift of manna, ch. 16.
- Events of the journey to Sinai, ch. 17-19.

#### **III. The Giving of the Law at Sinai (ch. 20-24).**

- The ten commandments (Decalogue), 20:1-20.
- Code of the covenant, 20:21 - ch. 23.
- The covenant ratified, and Moses re-visits Sinai, ch. 24.

#### **IV. The Tabernacle, its Ministry and Offerings (ch. 25-40)**

- Specifications of the Tabernacle and its priesthood, ch. 25-31.
- The idolatry of the golden calf, and the divine judgment, ch. 32.

God meets Moses at Horeb, ch. 33.  
Second reading of the covenant, ch. 34.  
Gifts for the construction of the Tabernacle, ch. 35.  
Construction of the Ark and the Tabernacle, ch. 36-38.  
The priestly garments, ch. 39.  
The guiding cloud by day and fire by night, ch. 40.

## **MAJOR THEMES**

### **1. The Bondage in Egypt**

During the time following Joseph's death the Hebrews multiplied. Unfriendly Pharaohs came to power who saw the Semitic minority as a ready source of cheap labor. The Israelites were pressed into slave labor for large public work projects of the Pharaohs. Gradually the work requirements were intensified until they become unbearable. Finally, to curb the birth rate, and also to restrict the growth of young men who would be potential rebels, the Egyptians ordered the killing of Hebrew male babies. To palliate the crime, it was made to appear as a ritual act because the children were thrown into the Nile, which was sacred to the Egyptians.

The deliverance of the Israelites was an act of God's mercy and power (3:7-12). It marks the formation of the Hebrews into a nation, with a national consciousness and sense of spiritual destiny.

### **2. The Leadership of Moses**

Moses may well be designated the greatest man of the OT. He was born of the priestly tribe of Levi, during the Egyptian persecution. The story of how his mother hid him among the reeds of the Nile River is well known to every Christian. When discovered by an Egyptian princess (2:1-10), he was reared in a rich Egyptian household. Modern knowledge of ancient Egypt shows that Moses must have had a diversified education, and that foreigners could reach positions of eminence in government.

When he saw an Egyptian beating a Hebrew slave, Moses slew the Egyptian (2:11), but it came to the attention of Pharaoh so Moses fled east across the border to Midian. There he became associated with Jethro, married one of his daughters, and lived for about forty years. But God was preparing him, who was already trained in Egyptian knowledge, in the backside of the desert, in spiritual ways (Acts 7:29; Heb.11:23-28).

The call of Moses at the burning bush represented a turning point in the history of Israel and in the revelation of the nature of God (ch.3). Under Moses' leadership the Israelites were delivered from bondage, they received the law of God, they were welded into a nation and fighting force, and their patterns of worship and

sacrifice were established. Moses was a gigantic figure on the horizon of early Western history. Through him the redemptive covenant was confirmed and in his ministry the redeemer was symbolized (Deut 18:15, 18).

### **3. The Plagues of Egypt**

God had said to Moses that only through a manifestation of divine power would Pharaoh let the Hebrews go (3:19, 20). The plagues were intended to demonstrate the power of Israel's God as the true and living God, in contrast to the impotence of the Egyptian deities. Of the ten plagues, nine bear upon phenomena of the Nile valley to which many of the idolatrous concepts of the Egyptians were attached.

The *first* plague (7:14-25). The river turned "to blood" means that at high level, the river carried quantities of red earth from its upper sources. This would kill off vast quantities of microcosms and fish, to create the conditions of decomposition and stench which are described. The earliest and chief Egyptian god was their River Deity. Thus a direct blow was struck at the center of their religion.

The *second* plague (8:1-15). The frogs, which at times swarmed in August, would naturally flee the conditions of the river due to the first plague. The frog was sacred to the Egyptians and was consecrated to the sun.

The *third* plague (8:16-19) was probably mosquitoes ('lice'), which could readily become a plague during the flooding of the Nile.

The *fourth* plague (8:20-32). The conditions of decomposition would encourage the multiplication of flies, which were also carriers of diseases. These were particularly offensive to the Egyptians who made a fetish of ritual cleansings.

The *fifth* plague (9:1-7). The murrain that affected exposed cattle was probably anthrax, which may have been carried by frogs into the fields. The Egyptians worshipped a Bull God.

The *sixth* plague (9:8-12). The boils with blains were probably infection carried by the flies which breed in carrion.

The *seventh* plague (9:13-35). Heavy thunderstorms with devastating hail ruined the barley and flax. The fact that in Goshen the Israelites' crops were spared, is consistent with frequent weather patterns in Egypt.

The *eighth* plague (10:1-20). The heavy rains in the Upper Nile region created suitable conditions for the breeding of clouds of locusts. These were blown north by the 'sea-wind' (literally), i.e. a north-west wind, up the Nile valley.

The *ninth* plague (10:21-29). The thick darkness was probably a heavy dust storm, which would blot out the sun and be literally 'felt.'

The *tenth* plague (11:1-12:29). Finally, after his manifestations of absolute control over nature, and after specific warning, the death of the firstborn was announced as a judgment against Egypt. This was the consequence of persistent refusal to obey God.

In sum, the plagues represented not only God's judgment of the Egyptians and Pharaoh, but also of their gods, showing their impotence (12:12).

#### **4. The Passover and the Exodus**

The Passover, instituted by Moses at God's command, commemorates the deliverance and flight from Egypt. It was later also remembered in the Feast of Unleavened Bread, as a symbol of hasty departure.

The Passover indicated God's sparing of the first-born who were covered by the blood of the sacrificial victim. There is widespread precedent for identifying Christ our Passover Lamb with the Passover sacrifice, no bone of which was to be broken (1 Cor 5:7; John 19:36).

The Passover event of Exodus is therefore one of the important links in the chain of ideas which makes of the Bible a coherent account of divine redemption. The redemption prefigured in the OT was accomplished through Christ's Cross, which was the final, effective sacrifice for sin.

#### **5. The Law**

At Mt. Sinai the Israelites were brought into a special covenant relationship with God, who was made known to them through the special name Yahweh or Jehovah. He had demonstrated his power to rescue them; under Moses' leadership they now covenanted to be his obedient people.

The pledge of obedience involved acceptance of the 'ten words' or commandments of Yahweh, which became for Israel the heart of the Law. They were to worship the true God alone, without the use of images; they were to regard him, his name and day as holy; and in all their dealings with one another they were to act as children of the covenant. As His people, their lives were to be characterized by truth, mercy and righteousness, which are the character of God (6:1-8).

More than one code of Israelitish moral and ceremonial laws make up their tradition, but these are consistent with each other and are interlocking. They include the Book of the Covenant (Ex 21-23), the Deuteronomic code which was recovered by Josiah but was older (2 Ki 22), and the laws dealing with ritual and moral holiness (Lev. 17-26).

The ten commandments ("ten words," or decalogue) were originally spoken by

God to Moses and written by God on tablets of stone, twice (Ex 19:16-20:17; 31:18; 32:15-16, 19; 34:1-9).

The Decalogue epitomizes the covenant relation of God to his people, and the concrete moral and ethical precepts which were God's holy demand of his people. They are also directly related to God's redeeming purpose, not as the way of salvation, but as the expression of the loving, holy God who will within the terms of his righteousness redeem mankind (34:6-7).

Above all, it is to be remembered that while men are not redeemed to the side of the Law, they are as well not redeemed by the Law or its observances. These are Paul's vital theses in his epistles to Romans and Galatians. Through the judgment death of the Cross God deals with sin, which is the gift of grace. The righteousness on which the justified and forgiven sinner stands is not his own but God's, entered by faith in Christ. It is the righteousness of the holy God which the Law reflects (note Rom 3:2-5:21; Gal 3:10-14).

## **6. The Tabernacle**

In a Bible Dictionary, find an artist's impression of the Tabernacle. Note the following:

1. The enclosure  
Rectangle of curtains on poles, probably head-high, around the perimeter.
2. The Gate  
At one end of the enclosure, one opening.
3. The Brazen Altar  
Once through the gate the first object encountered was the brazen altar.
4. The Laver  
Behind the altar stood the laver for cleansing after sacrifice.
5. The Tabernacle  
The Tabernacle itself was a rectangular tent, immediately behind the laver.
6. The Holy Place  
Upon entering the Tabernacle the priest stood in the Holy Place, in which were:
  - a) The Candlestick
  - b) The Table of Shewbread
  - c) The Altar of Incense
9. The Holy of Holies  
Behind the Holy Place was the Holy of Holies, as follows:

- a) The Veil (curtain) separated the Holy of Holies and was entered by the High Priest only once a year, but not without blood.
- b) The Ark of Covenant – a wooden casket, about the size of a cedar chest.
- c) In the Ark: Tablets of the Law, Aaron’s Rod that budded, a pot of Manna.
- d) Covering the open Ark was a gold sheet, the mercy seat, out of the ends of which two cherubim were formed hovering over the mercy seat.

The Tabernacle was a portable sanctuary where God dwelt among his people during the time of their wilderness journey. It was used also after their entry into Canaan.

Its use for communion with God, expiatory and propitiatory sacrifices for sin, and the climactic Day of Atonement sacrifice portrays the doctrine of salvation through substitutionary sacrifice. These concepts are interpreted in the New Testament book of *Hebrews*.

## **7. The Name of God**

A foremost matter in Exodus is the revelation of God through his name. In Scripture God is not known as the conclusion of an intricate argument, but as the living God who takes the initiative to speak to men and to reveal his own name to them. The names of God in the Bible are of great importance to our knowing that God is living, personal, and self-revealed.

The name of *Yahweh* or *Jehovah* is the culmination in Exodus of a long period of history during which God was revealing himself. The importance of this is seen in Ex. 6:3 together with 3:14-15 which need to be studied together. 'I am that I am' means that God is the eternal one, the same yesterday, today and forever. It means that God is, and will be, to his people all they need.

The name *El* designates God as creator and preserver (Gen 17:1). The name *Adonai* means that God is Lord of all things (Gen 18:27). The name *El Shaddai* means that God is the mighty one who does his own will (Gen 17:1 ff; Ex 6:3). But the name of *Yahweh* or *Jehovah* is the name of God in relation to the covenant, which includes the covenant of redemption. It is the name which corresponds to our Lord's use of "I am" in the Gospels, which identifies him with God as the eternal Son.

## **8. The Wilderness Journey**

A journey which can be made easily in 12 days, and which need not have taken the throng of the Israelites more than a year, took them 40 years. This was in part a judgment for their faithlessness and disobedience (Nu. 14:26-39; Heb. 3:7-11).

## **SERMONIC ANALOGY**

From earliest Christian times, the bondage in Egypt, deliverance by God, wilderness wandering, and final settlement in the Promised Land, have been used by preachers and teachers as an analogy of the Christian life: deliverance from the Kingdom of Satan, at times disobedient and wandering discipleship, then final “rest” (the book of *Hebrews* in the New Testament) of the people of God in heaven.

## NOTES ON LEVITICUS

Samuel J. Mikolaski

This, the third book of the Pentateuch, has been variously titled. In the ancient Hebrew traditions the name suggests “priests book” or “law of the offerings.” The Latin Vulgate title Leviticus means Book of the Levites or Priests.

Leviticus gives us the background of contemporary Jewish religious life and dietary habits. For Christians, it gives the sacrificial background to the whole concept of atonement and redemption which culminates in the Cross of Christ, as God’s way of dealing with sin.

The continuing value of Leviticus is its presentation of Christ as the sacrifice for sin, which the Day of Atonement pictures. It also is the book of consecration and dedication through the meaning of the burnt offering which signifies consecration to God.

Nowhere in Leviticus is its author named. In my judgment the materials derive from the Mosaic period and may well have been gathered together at that time or soon thereafter into a priestly code. It interprets the spiritual and sacrificial life of Israel at the time of Wilderness wandering, which is recorded in Exodus and Numbers.

## OUTLINE OF LEVITICUS

### **I. Sacrifices That Remove Defilement, ch. 1-15**

The Burnt Offering, 1:1-17

The Meal Offering, 2:1-16

The Peace Offering, 3:1-17

The Guilt Offering, 4:1 - 5:13

The Sin Offering, 5:14-19

Laws governing the offerings, 6:1 - 7:38

### **II. Consecration of Priests and their Ministry, ch. 8-10.**

### **III. The Clean and the Unclean, ch. 11-15.**

### **IV. The Day of Atonement (Yom Kippur), ch. 16.**

### **V. Means of Restoring Fellowship with God, ch. 17-27**

The meaning of sacrificial blood, ch. 17.

Moral and social codes, ch. 18-20

Standards of priestly life, ch. 21-22

The feasts and sabbaths of Jehovah, ch. 23-25

Covenant promises, warnings, and instructions, ch. 26-27.

## MAJOR THEMES



## **1. Cleanness and Uncleanness**

The regulations governing diet, hygiene and medical practices form a unity with those governing sacrifice. They each concern pollution, the one external, the other internal. Together they show how much the divine revelation accentuated keeping sin and impurity at a distance. Thus the regulations governing diet and hygiene are part and parcel of the emphasis upon consecration for God's people (20:26).

Unique among the Hebrews in ancient times was the distinction between clean and unclean animals (ch. 11). The distinctions made, unlike religiously prescribed matters among their idolatrous neighbours, had nothing to do with magic or witchcraft. Rather, they had to do with principles of diet and sanitation which are consistent and effective. Above all, the principles of cleanness and uncleanness had to do with ethical obedience to God, through the code of Sinai, and were not based on purely external criteria of religious purity.

The distinctions between clean and unclean animals concerned the difference between good and possibly harmful foods. The "clean" animals were vegetarian. The unclean readily lent themselves to being carriers of infections and parasites. These included swine, crustaceans, and predatory birds (in contrast to domestic fowls). Rules also governed the handling of containers used for food and water.

Medically, the rules enforced a high level of hygiene, which was combined with a high moral code of social relations. These included purification rituals, sexual purity, and diagnostic and therapeutic techniques in regard to disease. The priests served as watch-dogs of the public health. Specific procedures, which were brought to a high state of observational and therapeutic skill, were employed as in the case of the disease leprosy (ch. 13).

## **2. Social Relations**

The marriage laws of the Hebrews were strict, which was a sharp contrast to the consanguinity practised by the Egyptians, including the Royal House, and the sexual abuses of the tribes of Canaan who surrounded the Israelites.

Of importance is the fact that marriage relations were seen in the context of moral behaviour, not simply of mores, and abuse of sex and marriage was declared to be abhorrent to God. Throughout the regulations runs the thread of the sanctity of marriage, including the sanctity of the person of the woman.

That humanity is God's creation and that the married state of male and female is sanctioned by God, are the key features of social life and relations in Leviticus. Together with this are high regard for the family, the concept of the household, and the rearing of children in the fear and worship of God.

### 3. The Sacrificial System

As noted in the outline, there were five main offerings: the Burnt, the Meal, the Peace, the Guilt, and the Sin. These are closely tied to the observance of the Feasts, including the Sabbath, Passover, Pentecost, Trumpets, Atonement, Tabernacles, and the Sabbatic and jubilee years (note ch. 23).

Various creatures were acceptable for sacrifice, ranging in value from a bullock, to a sheep or ram, to a fowl. Meal or cereal offerings were also made. The wide range of sacrificial animals ensured that the poor as well as the rich could share in sacrifice. The only stipulation about sacrifices was that they must be without blemish, i.e., be the best one had, not what one would in any case discard because it was defective (1:3).

The procedure when sacrificing followed a definite pattern. When a person brought a sacrifice, he brought it to the door of the Tabernacle, laid his hands upon it signifying that it represented himself, and slaughtered it. The priest sprinkled the blood on the four sides of the altar, burned parts or the whole of the animal on the altar, and then portions of the sacrifice were eaten by the priests and worshipper or by the priests separately.

a. The Burnt Offering (1:1-17; 6:8-13) was the most common sacrifice throughout Israelitish history. Its basic character was that of a gift to God, and pointed to the consecration of the individual to the Lord (Ps. 51:19).

b. The Meal or Cereal Offering (2:1-16; 6:14-23) represented at times a gift or tribute (1 Ki. 4:21), at other times it represented sacrifice generally including propitiation (1 Sam. 2:29; 3:10-14). It also accompanied other sacrifices and consisted usually of flour, baked cakes, or raw grain, together with oil and incense. Being a token, the offering conveyed also the idea of substitution.

c. The Peace Offering (3:1-17; 7:11-34) was used variously as an expiatory, propitiatory and reconciling rite. By it, joyous forgiveness was entered into on the ground that peace had been established through the offering as the expiation of sin. It was the basic Hebrew sacrifice of Reconciliation.

d. The Guilt or Trespass Offering (4:1-5:15; 6:24-30) designated sacrifices for offences of guilt, chiefly with regard to ceremonial offences and cleansings. These included the sin-offering of the leper (ch. 14) and of women after child-birth (ch. 12; note Lu. 2:24).

e. The Sin Offering (5:14-6:7; 7:1-10) was parallel to the foregoing, but designated sacrifices for sin, including deception, misappropriation and immorality (6:1-7; 19:20-22). These are instances of what were surely a wide range of applications of atoning sacrifice for sin. Sometimes the Guilt and Sin Offerings appear to be synonymous in meaning (5:6). One might generalize and say that the

Guilt (Trespass) Offerings had more to do with sins against one's neighbor (social trespasses) and therefore required recompense (6:5) whereas the Sin Offerings had reference more to sins against God.

#### **4. The Purpose of Sacrifice**

In Leviticus, as in all the Scriptures, the purpose of sacrifice was to atone (Kipper) for sin (1:4). The Hebrew term in this passage can mean to cover or, also, to cleanse or wipe away.

The best translation of the term is "to redeem or ransom by a substitute," which best accords with the other crucial text on sacrifice, "the life of the flesh is in the blood, and I have given it for you upon the altar to make atonement for your souls" (17:11). The atonement is not the life released by sacrifice, but the life laid down substitutionarily for sin, of which the blood speaks.

The act of the worshipper laying his hand upon the victim's head indicated that the sacrifice was his substitute and that it was a vicarious atonement for sin,

The term atonement also involves a propitiatory element (Ex. 32:30). Not that we appease God by sacrifice, but that He himself provides the sacrificial means by which sin is expiated and the divine wrath is assuaged.

Thus some sacrifices were for self-dedication, and others for atonement, but throughout the system the gracious provision of God to deal with sin and bring penitent sinners back to Himself was involved.

To accept the biblical teaching on sacrifice involves the crucial fact that the substitutionary, expiatory and propitiatory elements preserve the personal dimension in relations between God and man. Sin is personal affront to God. God deals with it personally, i.e., ultimately in Jesus Christ His Son. In other words, in Christ God is both judge and victim. Punisher and punished are one. "He was wounded for our transgressions" needs to be understood in the light of "God was in Christ reconciling the world unto Himself" (Is. 53:5; 2 Cor. 5:19).

#### **5. The Day of Atonement (Yom Kippur), ch. 16.**

On the tenth day of the seventh month (Sept.-Oct.) the Israelites observed Yom Kippur -- the great Day of Atonement. As the day of national confession and atonement, it was for them the most awe-inspiring day of the year, involving also a national fast.

This annual day reminded the people that all their sacrifices were inadequate, for the worshippers could not approach the Holiest place. On this occasion, as the representative of the people, the High Priest carried atoning blood into the Holy of Holies to sprinkle it on the Mercy Seat, which covered the Ark of the Covenant.

Simplicity and contrition marked the day, including a simple white robe worn by the High Priest in place of his gorgeous vestments.

The sacrifice was a male goat. Subsequently the High Priest took a second goat (the Scapegoat), confessed over its head the sins of the people, and drove it into the wilderness, which was a symbol of the sins of the people being carried away.

The Epistle to the Hebrews in the NT parallels the book of Leviticus in the OT. In Hebrews the day of atonement ritual is interpreted as a type of the atoning work of Christ on the Cross (Hebrews 9,10 -- see my studies of Hebrews on this website).

Christ Himself is our High Priest. He enters, not an earthly tabernacle, but the very presence of God in heaven. He carries not the blood of an animal, but his own blood which alone could atone for sin. Unlike the animal sacrifices, His blood makes atonement once for all, through a never-to-be-repeated sacrifice (Hebrews 9:22-28; 10:5-14).

Thus the relation between Leviticus and Hebrews --the former is the shadow of the final realities revealed in Christ -- is one of the foundation stones of biblical theology and biblical unity which links the Old Testament and the New Testament into a conceptual whole. Upon the principle of vicarious sacrifice, foreshadowed in the OT and fulfilled in Christ in the NT, rests the whole edifice of the redeeming work of God.

### **DEVOTIONAL NOTE**

#### **The theme of Leviticus is:**

How may sinful humans approach God who is holy?

#### **The answer is:**

Communion is re-established by way of prescribed sacrifice and obedience.

#### **Emphases include:**

1. The quality of the sacrifice (nothing defective, or less than one's best, may be offered, even if it is a humble offering).
2. A sense of consecration must pervade the ritual and the spirits of the worshippers.
3. The priests who minister on behalf of the people must themselves be consecrated, and must keep themselves free from defilement.

4. Laws of purity as to which foods may consumed, and in hygiene with regard to cleanliness and contagious disease, were to be observed.

5. One's entire life, including public demeanor and private social relations, were subject to the law of holiness. This included keeping one's pledged word (vows) and commitment to the covenant between God and his people.

## NOTES ON NUMBERS

Samuel J. Mikolaski

Numbers and Deuteronomy present the history of Israel from Sinai to the plains of Moab. Joshua completed the story of the conquest of the land and the settlement of the Israelites. Exodus and Leviticus give the Law; Numbers and Deuteronomy record the practical application of the Law in the nation's life. Numbers derives its name from the numbering and organization of the people into a nation. It covers a period of 38 years -- from the second until the 40th year of the Exodus (note 1:1; 7:1; 9:1,15; 10:11; 38:38; Ex. 40:2; Deut. 1:3).

The material is historical and much of it should be regarded as deriving from the Mosaic period (note 23:2) though in composition the book is more fragmentary than other pentateuchal books. There is evidently post-Mosaic material in the book (note 21:14). It is likely that there was a process of development of the laws and of editing the materials, but this could well have been completed by the time of Samuel.

### Outline of Numbers

#### **I. Preparation for the March from Sinai, 1:1-10:10**

The census and arrangement of the Camp, 1:1-4:49.

The law of jealousy, the Nazarite vow and other laws, 5:1-6:27.

The Consecration of the Tabernacle, ch. 7.

The Candlestick, the Levites and their ministry, ch. 8.

The second Passover, the Cloud, the Trumpets, ch. 9-10:10.

#### **II. Journey from Sinai to the Plains of Moab, 10:11-21:35**

The departure from Sinai, 10:11-36.

Unrest; the quails; the 70 elders appointed, 11:1-35.

Miriam and Aaron oppose Moses, ch. 12.

The twelve spies, ch. 13-14.

Various commandments, ch. 15.

The insurrection of Korah, Dathan and Abiram, ch. 16-17.

Regulations governing the priests and Levites, ch. 18.

The Rite of purification, ch. 19. The death of Miriam.

Water from the rock, 20:1-13.

Edom refuses passage to Israel, 20:14-29.

The struggle at Hormah. The brazen serpent. The plains of Moab. The battle in Bashan, ch. 21.

#### **III. Events in the Plains of Moab, ch. 22-36**

The story of Balaam, ch. 21-24.

The defection to Baal'peor, ch. 25.

The second census, ch. 26.

Inheritance rights of daughters; the successor to Moses, ch. 27.

Rules governing offerings; vows of women, ch. 28-30.

The battle with Midian, ch. 31.

Allotment of the land east of Jordan, ch. 32.

List of Israel's encampments, 33:1-49.

Allotment of the land west of Jordan; the cities of the Levites and of Refuge; the marriage of heiresses, 33:50-36.13.

## **Important Events and Themes of Numbers**

### **1. The Encampment, ch. 2**

The arrangement of the Camp, formerly held to be consistent only with a later period, is now known to have been a common plan of deployment of forces at the time of the Exodus, including a method employed by Rameses II of Egypt.

### **2. The Nazarite Vow, 6:1-21**

The Nazarite was held to be a sacred person who at times had divinely bestowed charismatic gifts (e.g. Samson).

Later the group was distinguished by a vow, which included the outward signs of abstinence from strong drink and allowing the hair to grow uncut as a symbol of self-dedication to God. Third, he was to abstain from touching a dead body. These three vows represented his being in full control of faculties, full dedication of life to God and ceremonial purity.

### **3. Kadesh Barnea and the Spies, ch. 13-14**

After leaving Sinai the Israelites travelled north to Kadesh where they camped while a group of scouts was sent to reconnoiter the promised land. Kadesh was probably about 60 miles south-west of the Dead Sea.

When they learned from the spies (Nu. 13:17 ff) that the inhabitants were strong and warlike, the Israelites revolted and would have killed Moses and Aaron but for divine intervention. God decreed that they should wander in the wilderness until that generation died out, except for Caleb and Joshua, the two scouts who had urged the nation to possess the land (Nu. 14:20 ff).

### **4. Quail, 11:31 ff, and Ex. 16:13**

The provision of quail suggests confirmation of the southerly route of the Israelites toward Sinai. The birds were often caught in the spring and during the evening on their migratory routes north and west toward Europe along the fringes of the Gulfs of Suez and Aquaba.

### **5. Water, 20:7-11**

While the regions of the Israelites' travels were wilderness, water could be found. Shallow wells drew on subsurface water (Nu. 21:16 ff). Moses' striking the rock indicates knowledge of the water bearing propensities of limestone in the region. Pilgrims could sustain life in those regions, as in the case of Elijah (1 Kings 19:4).

## **6. The Rebellion of Korah, ch. 16**

Civil unrest and rebellion were common features of Israelitish wanderings in the Sinai peninsula, following their life in the lush green fields of Goshen. The rebellion of Korah and the princes was on three grounds: that Moses and Aaron had assumed undue prerogatives (Nu. 16:3,13), that Moses had failed to lead them into the Promised Land (Nu. 16:14), and that Moses and Aaron had taken control of the priesthood (Nu. 16:7-11).

The severe judgment of being consumed by the earth and burned by fire was reserved for Korah and his key-conspirators (16:32 f). The withdrawal of the Israelites (16:26,27) from Korah and his company suggests an impending natural calamity of divine judgment. Some of the mud flats in the area could bear weight only under certain conditions of the dry season. At other times they were treacherous and could not bear weight.

## **7. Balaam, ch. 22-24**

This strange character was not a prophet, but a seer or diviner. He seems to have been a typical diviner of Mesopotamia who could be hired for a specific purpose. His being made subject to the will of God was exceptional. From what sources does this narrative derive? Quite probably not from Israelitish sources, but perhaps from Moabite sources and later inserted into the record to complete the story. The story illustrates the power of Jehovah over not only the forces of nature but also over those who claim powers other than His own.

## **8. The Brazen Serpent, 21:9**

The serpent of brass is one of the best known symbols of the OT to be related to the Cross as the way of salvation (John 3:14-15).

## **9. The Cities of Refuge, ch. 35**

The cities of refuge (3 on each side of Jordan) were havens for the inadvertent slayer (manslaughter). The concept was employed in the Middle Ages when Churches became sanctuaries for refugees, and some have used them similarly today. The city of refuge has also been seen to typify Christ, the sinner's refuge.

## **10. Conquest of the east bank of Jordan, ch. 31**



Under the leadership of Moses and Joshua the Israelites subdued the tribes in transjordan, including the Ammonites and Moabites in the south, the Midianites in the eastern desert, and king Og in Bashan in the north, as shown on the accompanying map.

### **Concluding Observations**

Numbers demonstrates the unfailing covenant love of God for his people, despite their faithlessness and rebellion.

God is not only Lord over nature (as in Egypt), and of the desert, but also He has power to constrain a heathen fortune-teller to do His will.

Throughout the book the consecration and separation of His people are underlying themes.

The Christological character of the book is seen in the mediation of the priests; the necessity of sacrifice for sin; and in the symbol of the brazen serpent which demanded faith in God the forgiver and healer of sinful men. Christ fulfills this symbol in John 3:14.

## **NOTES ON DEUTERONOMY**

Samuel J. Mikolaski

The fifth book of the Law is best understood in relation to the history and religious life of Israel at the end of the Mosaic era. It comprises chiefly the final addresses of Moses to the Israelites in the plains of Moab east of Jordan, and their entry into the land.

Deuteronomy has been the object of considerable scholarly scrutiny because its historical placing is crucial to the Higher Critical understanding of the Pentateuch. From the end of the last century critics placed its origin at the time of Josiah's reform (622 B.C.), however other scholars have chosen earlier dates in the 7th or 8th centuries B.C.

Important facts lead most conservative scholars to retain a late Mosaic period dating. The book is not written like a reform document of a later period. Jerusalem is not mentioned (it was a Jebusite fortress in Moses' day), whereas Jerusalem was the national center in Josiah's day. Although the later period is one of national doom, in Deuteronomy the mood is optimistic, looking toward entering the land. The concept of the remnant, which belongs to later history, is non-existent in Deuteronomy. The book is written from a position outside the land, looking toward entering it.

For these and other reasons it is, best to regard Deuteronomy as substantially Mosaic-era in origin. Certain isolated passages may be of later origin, including the account of Moses' death (ch.31 - 34), though these also probably derive from the same period. Unbroken OT tradition assigns the book to Moses. Our Lord speaks of it as Mosaic (Matt. 19:8). The narrator of the last chapters says that Moses wrote the book and delivered it to the priests with the command that it be read to the people (31:9-13).

The most probable understanding of the data is that Moses wrote the legislation (ch. 12 - 26) which is in the form of "Everyman's Law," i.e., a popular presentation of the law emphasizing its spiritual and moral issues. Deuteronomy is a book for the people in which the principles and terms of the covenant of God are enunciated.

### **Outline of Deuteronomy**

#### **I. Preliminary Discourses by Moses, ch. 1-11 .**

Moses rehearses God's guidance and the events from Horeb (Mt. Sinai) to the Plains of Moab, ch. 1 - 3.

Moses exhorts the Israelites to obey God's Law, ch. 4-11.

#### **II. Moses Presents and Expounds the Legislation, ch. 12-26.**

Recital of the Decalogue, ch. 5.

Exposition of the Decalogue, ch. 6-11.

The basis of approach to God, 6:1-9.

The dangers of forgetting God, 6:10-7:11

The blessings of obedience, 7:12-26.

Reviewing the goodness of God, ch. 8.

Review of Israel's rebellions, ch. 9-10:11.

Exhortation and warning, 10:12-ch. 11.

Ceremonial Laws, ch.12-16:17.

The Central Sanctuary, ch. 12.

The Dangers of Idolatry, ch. 13.

Rules governing food, ch. 14.

Rules regarding slaves and the poor, ch. 15.

Three annual feasts, 16:1-17.

Judicial Regulations, 16:18-ch. 20.

The Authority and function of the:

Judge, 16:18-17:7.

Priest, 17:8-13.

King, 17:14-20.

The place of the Priests and Levites, 18:1-8.

Spiritualism, true and false Prophets, 18:9-22.

Criminal Laws, ch. 19.

Rules of war, ch. 20.

Private and Social Regulations, ch. 21-24.

Social and moral regulations, ch. 21-22.

Citizenship, ch. 23.

Divorce, Injustice, Gleaning, ch. 24.

Equitable dealing, ch. 25.

Thanksgiving and Tithing, ch. 26.

### **III. The Covenant with God, ch. 27-30.**

Review of the Law, ch. 27.

Blessings and Cursings, ch. 28.

Moses exhorts the Israelites to obedience, ch. 29-30.

### **IV. The Close of the Mosaic Era, ch. 31-34.**

Moses to Joshua, the People, the Priests, the Levites, ch. 31

Moses installs Joshua as leader, ch. 32

The Song of Moses, ch. 33.

The Death of Moses, ch. 34.

Deuteronomy is one of four OT books most quoted by our Lord and the Apostles in the NT. All but six NT books refer in some way directly to Deuteronomy. Our Lord's three responses to the Tempter were derived from Deuteronomy as God's Word: the Temptation of the Bread (Matt. 4:4; Deut. 8:3), the Pinnacle of the Temple (Matt. 4:7; Deut. 6:16), and idolatry (Matt. 4:10; Deut. 6:13).

Parts of Deuteronomy, or the entire book, are likely the text recovered during the time of Josiah which stimulated spiritual renewal (2 Kings 22:8, 11; 23:2, 21). It was written for the whole people. It presented Moses, the spiritual leader of his people, in direct confrontation with them over vital issues which affected their relationships with God, each other and their future as a nation -- in the land. Its chief motif is Revelation and Response: God speaking and the people answering.

### **Key Themes in Deuteronomy**

#### **1. Belief in God**

Deuteronomy 6:4-5 is one of the most important kerugmatic utterances of the OT. The two names employed (Yahweh -- Elohim) denote God as the covenant-keeping living God who is full of power to do His will. The singular and plural forms of the names are also instructive, for they seem to imply the unity and the plurality of the nature of God (Hear O Israel, Yahweh our Elohim (plural) is Yahweh a unity, note Is. 48:16).

Other ways in which God is spoken of are:

One, 4:35, 39; 32:39.

Righteous, 4:24; 9:4-5; 10:18.

Merciful, 4:31.

Love, 4:37; 10:15.

Power, 4:37-38.

Covenant-keeping, 4:31; 7:8-9; 5:2 (note Heb. 6:13-20).

Lord, 6:4; 10:17; Ex. 20:2.

#### **2. The Worship of God**

Central to the worship of the one true God was the injunction to have only one sanctuary (ch. 12). This was in contrast to the various pagan deities and sanctuaries around the Israelites. The force of this is not that there should be only one place of worship (at Mt. Ebal at that time), but that the places of their worship should be dedicated to the worship of the one true God.

Other elements to be noted are:

Apostasy is warned against, 12:29-13:18; 17:2-13.

Cultic prostitution is condemned, 23:17-18.  
Idolatry is condemned, 4:15-19, 26-29; 7:25.  
The tithe is stated, 14:22-29.  
The glory of God is to be praised, 4:32-40.  
Confidence in God and His comfort are encouraged, 4:26-31.  
The love of God and trust in Him are urged, 6:4-5; 8: 3; 10, 12;  
note Matt. 4: 4; 22:37.

### **3. The Law of God (ch. 12-26).**

In Deuteronomy three types of legislation are discernible:

1. *Judgments*. These were rules or laws laid down by authority which also had the force of ancient customs, note Ex. 21. These were laws laid down for public order and the public good. They are like the Code of Hammurabi, for example, but in Moses' case they were divinely sanctioned for the nation's good.

2. *Statutes*. These were permanent rules of behaviour or conduct. Unlike Judgments which were enforced by appeal to a judge, the Statutes had their force in an appeal to the conscience or the inner moral nature of a man, note 1 Kings 6:12 where Solomon is urged to 'walk' in the statutes of God and to 'execute' His judgments. They are moral precepts which constitute a divine rule for human life. Some in Deuteronomy are now obsolete, while others continue to be directly relevant to our lives, (i.e., rules of feasts and offerings, in contrast to rules of justice, kindness and clemency).

3. *Commandments*. These were commands which were not of permanent value or obligation, but could be fulfilled at one time, e.g., destruction of pagan shrines (12:2), or establishment of cities of refuge (19:1-13).

The legislation of Deuteronomy is filled with injunctions to act in a way that is consistent with the character of God who is not only righteous but also merciful. We must distinguish between mores and morality. Paul does this in speaking of the judgment of God against sin in Romans. The moral law of God is the condition of human freedom. It is the complement of grace. Care should be exercised to differentiate between the Law of God (which is good) and law-works (self-justification) which Paul condemns (Gal. 3:13; Rom. 3:19-31).

In Deuteronomy 5 the ten commandments are rehearsed by Moses.

### **4. Obedience**

Obedience is not based on conjecture, but upon God's revelation of His will. God made a covenant with His people and called for their obedience, note 4:13-14; 5:1-2; 6:1-2,17; 8:1-2; 11:26-32; 27:9-26; 28:1-14,15-68, note v.58; 29:1-15.

Note that obedience is also important in the NT: Consider the cases of Ananias and Sapphira, Acts 5; Elymas the sorcerer, Acts 13:11; Communion abuses, 1 Cor. 11:30; exclusion of offenders, 1 Cor. 5:11-13; the unequal yoke, 2 Cor. 6:14-18; and sundry evils, 1 Cor. 9:10, 5:11.

## **5. The Home**

The family unit is basic to the good of human beings as persons and for the national life, in Deuteronomy, note 21:15-21; 25:5-10. There is a stress on the spiritual leadership of the father to acknowledge the ways of God, to be subject to God, and to lead his family into the knowledge of God, but not to be an autocrat.

On spiritual leadership and the covenant note:

The public exhibition of the law, 27:1-8.  
The seven-year reminder, 31:10-13.  
The family creed and dedication, 26:1-11.  
Teaching the faith daily, 6:7-9, 20-25.

## **6. Civil and Spiritual Authority**

Israel was to be a spiritual nation in which civil and spiritual authority blended under the direct leadership of the Lord. God exercised his will through leaders he had chosen, so that there was a delegated system of spiritual and civil authority. These included:

The leadership of Moses, Ex. 3:10, 12; Deut. 4: 5.  
The leadership of Joshua, Deut. 31:7-8, 23; Ex. 17:9.  
Civil Organization, 1: 9-18; Ex. 18: 13-26.  
Judges, 16:18-20; 17:1-7.  
Priests, 17:8-13; 18:1-8.  
Kings, 17:14-20.  
Prophets, 18:15-22.

On the matter of the Prophet, note should be taken of 18:18 which is seen to be a Christological reference, note Acts 3:22; 7:37.

Civil and spiritual authority were tied to self-discipline. Public order and personal development went hand in hand. Government by law, justice for all, personal responsibility for each other and to God are the keynotes of authority in Deuteronomy.

## **7. Marriage and Morality**

Women's rights and respect for captives are taken into account, 21:10-14. This means they were to be regarded as persons, not as chattels.

The bridegroom was excused from war for a year, in order to allow his marriage to mature, 24:5.

Standards were set against fornication and adultery. These standards did not advocate sex prudishness, but behavior based on love and respect for personhood within the bonds of legitimate matrimony, not the caprice of passion, 22:13-30. Divorce was allowed, but not approved, 24:1-4, note Mk. 10:1-12; Mt. 5:31-32; 19:1-12; Lu. 16:18. No law instituted divorce. It was tolerated only as an expedient.

The standards of Deuteronomy took full account of the emotional needs of men and women, including the position of the widow, but promiscuity and exploitation were rejected and condemned as beneath the will of God and the dignity of humanity.

## **8. Conservation of Resources**

While stringent penalties at times characterize this book, there is also a growing awareness of the importance of conserving life and resources. The general well-being of humanity and the husbanding of the environment were in view.

The mother bird was to be spared, 22:6-7. Kindness should be exercised to living creatures, 22:1-4; 25:4, including the working ox, 5:14 (note 1 Tim. 5:18; 1 Cor. 10: 9). Scorched earth policy was condemned, 20: 19-20.

## **9. Social Relations**

There was to be no compromise with heathen religions and customs, 7:1-26.

Human dignity in the limitation of punishment emerged as an important point, following full trial according to due process of law, 25:1-3. Day labor was to be paid honestly, 24:14-15. After six years slaves must go free, 15:12-18. Roofs of houses must be made safe for reasons of public safety, 22:8. The means of livelihood were to be preserved to a man, even when he was in straitened circumstances (i.e., the upper millstone), 24:6. Weights and measures were to be of one kind only and accurate, 25:13-16. Rules governing usury were laid down, 23:19-20.

The widow, orphan and sojourner were to be cared for with justice, 24:17-18. Release of the poor from grinding obligation was to be practiced in order to give those in financial trouble a chance to recover from poverty, 15:1-11. The cities of refuge were established for cases of inadvertent homicide, which pointed to the sanctity of life and mitigation of revenge, 4: 41-43; 19:1-13.

## **10. Personal Character**

Personal character was to be based on the covenant keeping and merciful character of God.

Public hygiene and quarantine regulations were enforced for the good of all, 24:8-9; 23:9-14. Dietary regulations guarded health of the populace, 14:1-21. Vows were to be kept, 23:21-23.

The dangers of prosperity were stated, including warnings against forgetting God and self-deification, 8:1-10:11. The solution to this was continual self-evaluation, an abiding love for God, and remembering God's gracious dealings with them in the past, 9:1-11:21: The key to spirituality in Deuteronomy is to love God and to love and respect mankind, 11:13, 18.

### **Concluding Note**

As in other parts of the Scriptures, monotheism is the heart of the revelation and worship of God, which enjoins upon humanity single-minded devotion to the living, personal God who is self-revealed. God entered into covenant with His people and called upon them to obey with loving obedience. God demonstrated his concern for His people with mighty acts of His power; which vindicated Him before the paltry idols of the heathen. He promised to be with them at all times. Thus the progress of history for the child of God is bound up with the purpose and providential dealings of God.



## NOTES ON JOSHUA

Samuel J. Mikolaski

### The Structure of the Hebrew Bible

#### 1. Torah (The Law)

The first five books are the traditional five books of Moses: Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy.

#### 2. Nebhi'im (The Prophets)

The second division of the Hebrew Canon is comprised of the Prophets (the Nebhi'im), which were divided into two groups: the Former and the Latter Prophets.

The Former Prophets include Joshua, Judges, Samuel, and Kings. They tell the history of Israel from the time of their entry into the land of Palestine to the exile of the 10 northern tribes of Israel, then to the break-up of the Southern Kingdom at the time of the Babylonian Captivity. The authors and editors of these historical books are not known.

The Latter Prophets include the major literary prophets (Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel), plus the book of the twelve minor prophets (Hosea to Malachi).

#### 3. Kethubhim (The Writings)

These include: Psalms, Proverbs, Job; Song of Songs, Ruth, Lamentations, Ecclesiastes, Esther; Daniel, Ezra-Nehemiah, Chronicles.

## JOSHUA

The Book of Joshua tells the story of how the Israelites crossed the Jordan at Jericho, how they stormed and took that ancient fortress, and how they then engaged in two other campaigns, one in the south and the other in the north, to capture a large part, but not all, of the territory. Also included are details of the partition agreements reached at Shiloh, and sundry matters connected with their new life in the land.

This theme is epitomized by Moses in his final address to the Israelites: God, he said, *brought us out from thence* (Egypt), *that he might bring us in* (to the promised land), Deut. 6:23. The Red Sea was an *exit from* Egypt; crossing Jordan was the *entrance into* the land of promise. Thus, ever after, Christians have drawn an analogy between the travels of Israel from bondage to liberty, to the pilgrimage of Christians from the bondage of Satan to freedom in Christ. It is deliverance *from*, and deliverance *to*.

There is considerable uncertainty among scholars about the age of the book of Joshua. Estimates range from those of the critical school who tie it to the Deuteronomic tradition alleged to exist at the time of Josiah, to those who date it closer to the time of the prophet Samuel. Several historical strands of data seem to have been joined by the editor of the book (note Josh. 10: 13) in faithfully recording this period of Israel's history. An early date, probably at the beginning of the monarchy is possible, for the narrative is consistent with pre-monarchy traditions in the land. The fact that in 13: 6 the Sidonians are mentioned but not Tyre which only later became a famous city may be further evidence for an early as against a later date.

The book is a balanced composition, in two halves, with a conclusion about Joshua's death. Josh. 1 - 12 records the Israelites' occupation of the land, while Josh. 13 - 24 tells of their settlement,

The spiritual and religious life of the nation is in the forefront of the historical narratives. The events of the invasion are closely tied to the religious faithfulness of the people, their separation from the pagan practices of neighboring tribes, the covenant at Shechem, and Joshua's spiritual legacy.

## **Outline of Joshua**

### **I. The Invasion of the Promised Land, ch. 1-12.**

Joshua assumes command, ch. 1.

*First Campaign*, ch. 2-8.

The Spies at Jericho and Rahab, ch. 2.

The Crossing of the Jordan River, ch. 3-4.

Reinstitution of the Rite of Circumcision, 5:1-12.

The Victory over Jericho, 5:13-ch. 6.

The Campaign against Ai, ch. 7-8:29.

Reaffirmation of the Law and Covenant at Shechem, 8:30-35.

*Second Campaign* (South), ch. 9-10.

The Duplicity of the Hivites, ch. 9.

Defeat of the Southern Confederacy, ch. 10.

*Third Campaign* (North), ch. 11-12.

The Victory in the North, 11:1-15.

Summary of the Campaigns, 11:16-ch. 12.

### **II. Settlement in the Promised Land, ch. 13-24.**

The Task yet to be Finished, 13:1-7.

Division of the Land among the Tribes, 13: 8-19: 51.

The Cities of Refuge, ch. 20.

The Cities of the Levites, ch. 21.

The Settlement of the Tribes East of Jordan, ch. 22.

The Testament of Joshua and his Death, ch. 23-24.

## **1. The Campaigns of Conquest**

The Campaigns of Conquest may be divided into two broad sections as follows:

### **Part I.**

Eastern Palestine, including three campaigns, under both Moses and Joshua. The area east of Jordan belonged largely to the Amorites. King Sihon ruled in the south from the brook Arnon to the river Jabbok. In the north King Og ruled in Bashan.

*1st battle:* with Sihon at Jahaz (at the Brook Arnon), Nu. 21:21-31. The Israelitish influence now extended to the Jabbok river.

*2nd battle:* with Og at Edrei, Nu. 21:32-35. Israel now dominated the lands east of Jordan. However, in the desert areas the nomadic Midianites were still a menace militarily and religiously.

*3rd battle:* with the Midianites in the desert, Nu. 25-31. The story of Balaam comes in here. The Midianites and Moabites succeeded in beguiling Israel into idolatry. There occurred a plague of judgment.

### **Part II**

Western Palestine, including three campaigns, under Joshua.

#### **Central Campaign:**

First, Israel crossed the Jordan and camped at Gilgal (Josh. 4:19). There occurred the conquest of Jericho (ch. 6), the defeat at Ai and the discovery of the treachery of Achan (ch. 7-8).

Second, after conquering Ai, the armies of Israel proceeded north. There was a formal convocation of the people and proclamation of possession of the land. The people heard the reading of the law between the two mountains, Ebal and Gerazim (note Psalm 136; Josh. 8:32-35). They returned to the area of Ai and prepared for further conquest.

**Southern Campaign, Joshua 10.**

The native tribes sensed their danger.

In the SW five tribes united under Adoni-Zedek, king of Jerusalem. Joshua made a quick, forced march to Beth-Horon and forced the issue. The victory gave Joshua control of the south of Canaan. Joshua gave over leadership of the southern campaign to Caleb and Othniel

**Northern Campaign**, Josh. 11, Joshua made a forced march up the Jordan valley to catch the northern confederacy under Jabin, King of Hazor, not fully prepared. There was the great victory at Merom and the capture of many cities and much booty.

This closed formal military operations and the land rested from war. It is important to distinguish between occupation and subjugation (coupled with genocide) in the campaigns of the Israelites. At times war occurred because Israel was not granted peaceful passage. Most of the Canaanite tribes remained in the land, though these became a snare to Israel later.

There were certain supplementary conquests, including the Danite campaign (Josh. 19:47-48) and the victory of Caleb and Othniel at Debir, Josh. 15.

## **2. Historical value**

Recent archaeological and historical studies have shown the value of the territorial and tribal lists of Joshua. These yield important information on the pre-monarchy social and political system.

The Israelites, as a people delivered from bondage, saw themselves as tenants of the land upon terms of tenure laid down in the Covenant. They acted as the rulers but also as the defenders of the tribes within their borders. This political and social order has parallels in the Heroic Age of Greek society and places Joshua at the latter period of the second millennium B. C.

The outline of the Conquest is a synopsis. It shows that ultimately the Israelites occupied the land in accordance with God's purpose. But they failed to possess it completely, as in the case of the Jebusite fortress (Jerusalem) which was only much later captured by David,

## **3. The Fall of Jericho**

(ch. 3-8)

The capture of Jericho by Joshua is one of the most dramatic stories in the Bible. The Israelites marching around the city is also an intriguing account of ancient psychological warfare,

Archaeological digging at the site of ancient Jericho (which is north of the later NT Jericho) still furnishes the oldest and most consistent history of human habitation in Palestine.

Human habitation on the site goes back to at least 8000 B. C. A town was there during the seventh millennium B. C. Later, fashionable houses were built. Pottery found dates from the 4th and 5th millennium B. C. It was a walled and towered town in 3200 B.C., which is contemporary with Egypt's Pyramid era and the Sumerian culture of Mesopotamia. Remains unearthed from the period 1900-1600 B.C., which is contemporary with the Abrahamic family, show a high level of culture including comfortable homes which were well furnished with beautifully designed furniture and pottery.

The archaeologist J. B. E. Garstang suggested that divinely sent earth tremors were instrumental in the breaching of the walls, and this is possible in the light of geological conditions of the area.

The story of Rahab, the harlot, forms a thread of redemptive significance throughout Scripture. Her house was situated on the town wall. The two spies lodged with her to allay suspicion, and she hid them under drying stalks of flax on the roof. The victories of the Israelites convinced her that God was with them, so she negotiated terms with the spies on behalf of herself and her family. The spies escaped from a window of her home over the wall. Later she and her family were spared to become proselytes (6:17-25). Rahab is used as an example of faith in the Hebrews (11:31). James cites her as one who was justified by her works (Jas. 2:25). In all likelihood she is included in the genealogy of our Lord (Matt. 1:5) as the mother of Boaz, who was the great-grandfather of David the forefather of our Lord.

Rahab the sinful woman, and an alien to the commonwealth of Israel, is thus through grace spared to become part of the messianic line of Scripture. The scarlet cord in her window has often been interpreted as the mark of redemption and faith. Her life is a symbol of God's grace extended to the Gentiles to include them in the covenant of redemption.

#### **4. Military Skills and the Covenant**

The events of Joshua are based squarely upon the Deuteronomic covenant between God and his people.

The narrative is consistent with the topography of the area, and Joshua's military strategy is realistically recounted.

The land was a gift from God to Abraham and his posterity (Gen. 17:8) depending upon their faithful obedience (Deut.7:6-11). They were required to reject the native deities and other polytheistic systems of the heathen (Deut.7:1-5; 4:23; Nu.25:1-2). That they failed in some respects is apparent (Josh. 17:13; 18:3).

The lesson of Joshua is that Israel did not secure the land by military skill alone;

though even today the brilliance of Joshua's tactics is widely acknowledged in modern Israel. To this day, Israeli military strategists carefully study the military campaigns of Joshua to gain insights from his strategy. Israel's success ultimately depended upon obedience to God (Deut.1:17-21; 4:1-6) and it was the power of this ideal which initially motivated the conquest (Josh.1:1-9). The glory and the power belonged to God alone (3:10; 4:23-24; 6:6).

Privilege and responsibility are the important themes of the book in relation to the covenant (22:5). Israel's entire life was meant by God to attest to other nations the unity, holiness, righteousness and love of God. This concept of a spiritually based and morally motivated kingdom pervades the OT story of Israel's history, despite her failures. It is also a significant aspect of the nature of the people of God in the New Testament with the added emphasis of the new working of the Holy Spirit to make Christ real in human experience.

### **5. Key Spiritual Lesson: Venture on Faith**

An important clue to the theological significance of this historical account is in the comment of Moses in Deut. 6:23, *He brought us out from thence (Egypt), that He might bring us in, to give us the land which he swore unto our fathers.*

Moses was God's choice to bring Israel out of Egypt; Joshua to bring them into the land. Moses had the vision of faith; Joshua took the venture of faith. These truths came out also in Joshua's consecration to leadership (Nu. 27: 12-23).

Paul declares that the OT events are for our admonition (1 Cor.10:11); that is, we are to read them not just for the story of the past but with understanding for application to our own lives and times.

This is the way the Book of Hebrews is written: the lessons of the wilderness wandering and of the conquest are applied to Christian experience (Hebrews 3:8-19; 4:1-16).

The Israelites entry into the *rest* of the promised land (to be *at rest*; no more wandering), and their unbelief, are the analogy for the Christian venture of faith to enter fully into God's provision of spiritual rest and peace in Jesus Christ. The question of Hebrews is, therefore, why hold back? Don't go back to the old ways. Go on in faith!

God gave Israel rest in the promised land, which their disbelieving fathers had failed to procure (Ps. 95:11). The principle drawn out from the experience of the Israelites applies not only to the Psalmist's day, but also to the first Christians and, as well, to us. That is the message of Hebrews.

The final and perfect rest of the people of God is salvation in Christ. That rest Joshua could not give them; another day had to come (Heb. 4:8-9). It arrived with

the advent of Jesus Christ, through His life, death and resurrection.

Now that God has provided final rest to mankind (just as God provided rest in the land to Israel), why do we hold back? Let us in full faith receive God's salvation in Christ. Let us in full commitment of faith enter into his fellowship and service.

## NOTES ON JUDGES

Samuel J. Mikolaski

The book takes its name from the judges or saviors whom God raised up to rule his people and at times to deliver them militarily from oppression.

Chronologically the book records significant parts of the history of Israel from the death of Joshua to the judge-prophet Samuel and the rise of the monarchy.

The period of the judges thus extends into the events covered by the book of Samuel.

While there were probably others, fifteen judges or persons who exercised this office are listed: Othniel, Ehud, Shamgar, Deborah-Barak, Gideon, Abimelech, Tola, Jair, Jephthah, Ibzan, Elon, Abdon, Samson, Eli, Samuel.

All of these were to varying degrees judicial arbitrators, but some exercised other offices, chiefly three: Gideon was as well a *warrior*, Eli a *priest*, and Samuel a *prophet*. Judges is a sad book. Rebellion, apostasy and moral corruption prevail in certain periods; met by divine retribution and chastisement. Throughout the period God sends judges to call the people and their leaders to repent and change.

### Date and Literary Character

It is not possible to arrive at an exact chronology of the book, nor was this the intention of the record.

The beginning of the conquest under Joshua has been dated about 1240 B. C., on the strength of archaeological evidence. The accession of David to the throne occurred about 1010 B.C. The judges exercised leadership which was overlapping rather than consecutive.

Judges is written as a coherent account in heroic style but not in exact chronological sequence as a Western writer might wish to write today. Anyone familiar with classical Greek and other eastern European and near-Eastern literature will recognize that the book of Judges is composed of heroic epics. While each is historical, each is also a dramatic presentation, and they are joined together as one coherent book and period of history. Some of the stories were more popular than others so that greater detail was preserved, as in the case of the story of Samson.

The authenticity of the Judges materials as deriving from the pre-monarchy period of Israel's history seems firmly established. However, no one knows how these materials were compiled and edited, though one Talmudic tradition assigns the book to Samuel. It would appear that at least part of the book (note 1:21) derives from the pre-Davidic period.

### Israel and Israel's Times



During the late 13th and 12th centuries B.C. Egyptian power around the Mediterranean was revived, following a period of decline. The Hittites to the north had long enjoyed considerable power. Meanwhile the Philistines were dislodged from Crete and had consolidated their position along the coasts of Canaan. The failure of Israel to develop a strong sense of national unity made them ready victims of the alliances of the larger powers and of the growing strength of the Philistines.

At this time Israel was a loose union of twelve tribes, each of which was jealous of its autonomy. Their bond of unity, namely the Covenant of Sinai, was exceptional amongst nations of the ancient Mediterranean world. East of Jordan the symbol of the Covenant was the central shrine at Shiloh. Here each tribe was represented by delegates (Josh. 18:1; Judges 21:12; 1 Sam. 1:9; 3:21; 4:12; Jer.7:12). Apparently a tribal council of representative elders persisted from the times of Moses and Joshua. To this was added the role of the judges, at times with charismatic gifts, who administered regionally.

The regional character of the rule of judges answers well to the political and spiritual realities of the time. The freedom of the tribes in their relations to each other, the varying economic and military pressures from larger nations on their borders, and the conflicting regional pagan religious cults created the conditions that evoked the need for and the services of the judges.

The period became one of severe religious and economic decline for Israel, which is closely tied in the record to her military subjugation to neighboring tribes. Two main influences worked for Israel's inner moral and political disintegration: the attractions of the Canaanite Baal cults and the development of several tribal antagonisms within the nation (Judges 8:1; 20:12; Josh. 20:10-34). Rampant evils included sexual abuse (Judges 19:2,22), idolatry (17:5), theft (17:2-3), abduction (21:23), and disobedience to the covenant with Yahweh (2:11,14). They exceeded their fathers in iniquity (2:19).

The Book of Judges is thus not only an historical record, but also a theistic interpretation of life and of this period in Israel's history. The moral quality of life in relation to the demand and judgments of God is constantly in view, in contrast to the nature-fertility deities of the Baal cults.

### **Key Idea of Judges**

The key verse of Judges is the last one, "in those days there was no king in Israel: every man did that which was right in his own eyes" (21:25, note 17:6, 18:1, 19:1). Societal ethos was self-interest aiming at self-gratification.

In both OT and NT a cardinal principle is that morality must ultimately mean a righteousness unto the Lord, not just the mores of tribal and national cultures. In our times, when the concept of objective moral norms is widely rejected, this

Biblical truth deserves re-affirmation.

## **Outline of Judges**

### **I. The State of the Nation after Joshua's Death, ch. 1-2**

Settlement among and accommodation to neighboring pagan tribes, ch. 1.  
 The rebuke of the angel of the Lord, 2:1-5.  
 The death of Joshua recalled, 2:6-10.  
 Spiritual decline and the divine provision of Judges, 2:11-23.

### **II. Cycles of Oppression and Deliverance, ch. 3-16.**

Othniel vs. Mesopotamia, 3:8-11.  
 Ehud vs. Moab, 3:12-30.  
 Shamgar vs. The Philistines, 3:31.  
 Deborah and Barak vs. The Canaanites, ch. 4-5.  
 Gideon vs. the Midianites, ch. 6-8.  
 Abimelech the Usurper, ch. 9.  
 The judgeships of Tola and Jair, 10:1-5.  
 Jephthah, Ibzan, Elon and Abdon vs. the Ammonites and Philistines, 10:6 - 12:15.  
 Samson vs. the Philistines, ch. 13-16.

### **III. The Deterioration of Israelitish Life, ch. 17-21**

Micah, his gods and religion, ch. 17.  
 The Danite migration, ch. 18.  
 Moral outrage and Civil War against Benjamin, ch. 19-20.  
 Rehabilitation of the Benjamite tribe, ch. 21.

## **Three Judges**

### **1. Samson, ch. 13-16**

The story of Samson and the Philistines is well known to all readers of the Bible. From his birth he was consecrated as a Nazarite, which involved three prohibitions: no wine or strong drink was to be taken, no unclean or dead thing was to be touched, and there was to be no shaving or cutting of the hair of the body. These suggest the positive elements of total freedom of a man as a spiritual and rational being, purity, and consecration of the whole man to God.

Samson's tactics, like the one of releasing foxes with firebrands tied to their tails into the Philistine vineyards, parallel strategy that was current in eastern Mediterranean antiquity. The story of Delilah, the seductress, is also a recurrent ancient and highly instructive motif.

Samson despised the Philistines, at a time when others accommodated themselves to Philistine ways. But he had a macabre sense of humor, was headstrong and sensual, and wasted the strength God gave him. He is a classic example of misusing powers and of succumbing to seduction.

## **2. Deborah, ch. 4-5**

Deborah was a prophetess and judge in the non-military sense, who was widely consulted by various Israelite tribes in the regions of Bethel. It was she who commanded Barak to lead the Israelite forces against Sisera, which resulted in the latter's defeat.

Her story is preserved in two accounts. Chapter 4 is in prose; chapter 5 is in verse. The Song of Deborah is in 12th century B. C. verse and is one of the oldest passages in the Hebrew Bible. The victory is attributed to the Lord through a cloudburst which flooded the Kishon, swept away the cavalry of Sisera's armed forces, thus throwing his militia into confusion.

The powerful description of Sisera's mother (5:28 ff) is felt by some to be an indicator of the Song's feminine authorship.

## **3. Gideon, ch. 6-8**

The story reflects the recurrent difficulty of the Israelites in maintaining food supplies while they were under constant threat of marauding enemy troops and guerilla bands, especially at harvest time.

Gideon exercised a military judgeship. He created a confederacy of northern tribes along with his own central tribe of Manasseh for a highly successful night attack on the Midianites. The Ephraimites were at first offended because they were not invited to share in the battle, but later were mollified when they were tactfully congratulated for their capture of the Midianite princes Oreb and Zeeb. Following this Gideon declined to set up an hereditary monarchy, which indicated not only his humility but also his confidence in theocratic government as the ideal form of government for Israel.

Gideon's defeat of the Midianites was decisive. Peace came to Israel for a season. In Heb. 11:32 Gideon is numbered among the great men of faith. Rather than trusting in a large army, Gideon trusted in God. The victory of his small forces over overwhelming odds accentuated the divine character of the deliverance. Thereafter, the phrase *the day of Midian* (Is. 9:4) became proverbial for God's aid to His people.

## NOTES ON RUTH

Samuel J. Mikolaski

Two books in the Bible are named after women: Ruth, the Gentile, married an Israelite and was ultimately brought into the Israelite covenant. Esther, the Israelite, married Ahasuerus, the Gentile king.

The story of Ruth, the Moabitess, takes place during the period of the Judges. Like the Book of Judges the author is unknown, though there is a Jewish tradition that Samuel wrote both. It would appear that the book derives from a period later than the events recorded because of the historical explanation about ancient customs in 4:7-12.

The story is a jewel that brightens the dark period of the Judges in Israel's history. Moses and Joshua were gone; David the great king had not come. Political, religious and moral chaos seemed to dominate in the affairs of the twelve tribes. Nevertheless, God was not far off. He was working toward his ultimate messianic-redemptive goal. For this the settlement of Ruth in Bethlehem is historically significant in the structure and message of the biblical canon.

The book has been a great blessing to some in its portrayal of grace and redemption. To others, interpretation of the book is fraught with difficulty because of the circumstances of Ruth's (Levirate) marriage to Boaz. It is at the least a touching story of human loyalty, devotion and love.

### The Story

Elimelech and Naomi were a couple from Bethlehem who, with their two sons Mahlon and Chilion, sought to escape the famine at Bethlehem by moving to Moab. Ironically, *Bethlehem* means *house of bread*.

In the process of time the two sons married Moabite women, Orpah and Ruth. But death took all three men of the family leaving mother Naomi, plus daughters-in-law Orpah and Ruth, widows (1:1-5).

Naomi decided to return to Bethlehem because she heard that God had sent food to his people (1:6). As they set out on their journey, Naomi gave the two daughters-in-law opportunity to return to their homes. Orpah did so, but Ruth decided to adopt Bethlehem as her home and Israel as her people.

Ruth's declaration of intent is one of the most moving passages in Scripture (1:15-18).

Naomi and Ruth, apparently destitute, arrived in Bethlehem at the beginning of the barley harvest. Ruth went out to glean after the reapers in the field of Boaz, a relative of the late Elimelech (1:22; 2:1-3).

Because Ruth was related to him by marriage and because she had shown fidelity to Naomi, Boaz treated her with considerable kindness. His protection gave her a favored place among the gleaners, and she could eat with the reapers (2:8-14).

After the harvest, during the threshing, and acting on Naomi's instructions, Ruth appealed to Boaz' gallantry (ch.3) one night at the threshing floor. Her appeal for protection drew from him the promise that should a nearer kinsman not wish to redeem the property of Elimelech and her with it, then he, Boaz, would do so and marry her. He would become her *kinsman-redeemer*. As pledge of his word he sent her home at daybreak with a gift of six measures of barley.

The principles of Levirate marriage and the kinsman-redeemer are laid down in Lev. 25:25, 47-49; Deut. 25:5-10. These passages should be carefully compared with the events of Ruth 3-4. The law of the kinsman-redeemed aimed to preserve families from extinction. Boaz had not acted previously apparently for at least two reasons: first, he was considerably older than Ruth; and, second, another nearer kinsman had prior claim according to Israelite law. Ruth's gesture to seek Boaz' protection, prompted by Naomi, was intended to make clear both her fidelity and desire.

Naomi had the first claim to protection; the unnamed relative had the first obligation to redeem. How can Naomi indicate that she prefers Boaz to the nearer kinsman? She achieves two things by sending Ruth. Ruth makes the claim for herself, and she makes it of Boaz.

Ruth's act was hazardous, but it had a happy ending. To show that her days of mourning were past she had put on attractive attire (3:3-5). Boaz' reaction (3:10) means that he saw her act to claim his right of kinsman-redeemer as more noble and loving than her decision to accompany Naomi from Moab. Boaz' words (3:13) may indicate that the thought on his part to redeem Ruth had entered his mind, but had not appeared possible under Levirate law.

The sequel of these events is recorded in ch. 4. In the presence of ten elders of the city as witnesses, Boaz went through the legal formalities to establish his right as kinsman-redeemer. He appealed to the nearer kinsman to redeem a plot of land which had belonged to Elimelech (note the custom of Lev. 25:23) which in this case also included the obligation to marry Ruth (note 4:5). The nearer kinsman declined and renounced his right in favour of Boaz. To ratify this he took off his sandal in pledge of agreement.

Boaz then redeemed all that belonged to Elimelech, Chilion and Mahlon, including Ruth (4:9-10). He married Ruth who bore him a son Obed, who was the grandfather of David (Mt. 1:5). Thus the genealogy of our Lord includes Ruth, the Moabitess, who was brought into Israelite life through the kinsman-redeemer Boaz.

## Outline of Ruth

### **I. The Move to Moab and Naomi's Return, ch. 1.**

- The family of Elimelech, 1:1-5.
- Naomi's Return and Ruth's decision, 1:6-18.
- Arrival in Bethlehem, 1:19-22.

### **II. Gleaning In Boaz' Fields, ch. 2.**

- To the fields of Boaz, 2:1-7.
- Boaz' kindness to Ruth, 2:8-16.
- Naomi considers a plan, 2:17-23.

### **III. The Approach to Boaz, ch. 3.**

- Naomi's plan, 3:1-5.
- Ruth's encounter with Boaz, 3:6-13.
- Boaz' pledge, 3:14-18.

### **IV. Boaz the Kinsman-Redeemer, ch. 4.**

- Boaz assumes the role of kinsman-redeemer, 4:1-6.
- The custom of Israel explained, 4:7-12.
- The marriage and posterity of Boaz and Ruth, 4:13-22.

## The Purpose of the Book of Ruth

Difficulties have beset expositors in their attempts to state precisely the purpose of the book. A few of the suggestions that have been made are:

- (a) A delightful story which teaches fidelity and family devotion.
- (b) Racial tolerance and acceptance of foreigners into one's own culture.
- (c) Historical preservation of the Davidic family tree.
- (d) A document intended to counteract the strictness of the Ezra-Nehemiah era against mixed marriages.
- (e) An exhibition of the humanitarian character of the Levirate law.
- (f) A story which illustrates the overruling power of God in history.
- (g) A pleasant relief from the depressing historical account in the Judges.

Many Christians have seen in Ruth an Old Testament illustration of how through divine providence and grace someone who is alien to Israel is brought within the redemption covenant, notably into the line of our Lord (note Eph. 2:11-22).

Against the dark background of some of the years of the Book of Judges, the Book of Ruth is a gentle novella which moves the heart and stirs the mind of the reader away from dark thoughts of human failure to the over-riding providence and grace of God in "bringing in" the stranger; to include within the covenant and the salvific purposes of God one who was regarded as outside the covenant. Note the sentiments of Paul on the same theme in Ephesians 2:11-22.

### **Ruth's Declaration, 1:15-18**

*Entreat me not to leave you or to return from following you;  
for where you go I will go, and where you lodge I will lodge;  
your people shall be my people, and your God my God;  
where you die I will die, and there will I be buried.  
May the Lord do so to me and more also if even death parts me from you.  
(Revised Standard Version)*

Ruth's declaration to Naomi of her intent to leave Moab and go to Bethlehem has a dramatic and poetic character. It is among the most beautiful of lines in any language, in any literature.

The issue was not only her clinging to Naomi as her late husband's mother, but forsaking certain religious traditions and accepting new ones. For this reason Ruth is often seen as a symbol of conversion.

Orpah returned to her own people, with their customs and traditions drawn from other than the Sinai Covenant. She also returned (1:15) *to her gods*. Chemosh the Moabite god was conceived of as a cruel tyrant who at times required human sacrifice.

Ruth's decision entailed a new way of life, new citizenship and people, a new understanding of God, and a new hope at death. Her pledge to Naomi included also the prior pledge to accept the Lord as God and his people as her own people.

### **Key Idea**

Some have seen Ruth as a symbol of the Church which is being redeemed by her Boaz (our Lord) from the wilderness of the world (Judges period).

More to the point is the role of the kinsman-redeemer or *goel*. In the Old Testament, Yaweh is the Redeemer of his people. He saved them from Egypt and redeemed them from captivity (note Is. 54:5). In the NT the Lord Jesus Christ is the redeemer of the whole world, through his being our near kinsman (the Incarnation) and through the Cross (the Atonement).

The role of the kinsman-redeemer is an apt illustration of the fuller and final redemptive ministry achieved by Christ. While the Old Testament role was hedged about by laws, the NT role is the gift of grace and love, which the tender love between Boaz and Ruth beautifully exemplifies.

## **NOTES ON 1 SAMUEL**

Samuel J. Mikolaski

### **Introductory note on 1 and 2 Samuel**

In the Hebrew text the two books of Samuel were not separated. The book was divided into I and II Samuel in the Septuagint (the pre-Christian Greek translation of the Hebrew Bible), which was carried forward into the Vulgate and subsequent translations.

The period covered is the transition from theocracy to monarchy and includes crucial events and persons. In the books of Samuel and Kings we move beyond the unsettled era of the Judges toward a more systematic record of Israel's history under the monarchy. The transitions are: warrior-judges in Judges, followed by Eli the priest-judge, then by Samuel the prophet-judge.

Key figures stand out: Eli, Samuel, Saul and David. Something less than 100 years embraces the period of the two books. The stories of their lives overlap.

### **Date and Authorship**

Joshua's conquest of Canaan west of the Jordan began about 1240 B. C. Following Joshua is the period of the Judges, the last of whom is Samuel, a transition figure. Saul was king during the years 1045 (1050) - 1010 B.C., approximately. David ruled approximately 1010 - 970 B.C., to be succeeded by Solomon, approximately 970 - 930 B.C.

The compilers and authors of these two books are unknown though Samuel himself kept records (1 Sam. 10:25) and Nathan and Gad are mentioned (1 Chron. 29:29). The author or editors are in all probably from a period later than that of Samuel. The account is a splendid example of Hebrew historiography and is useful for historical and geographical detail. The narrative is vivid and objective with a unity of plan and style, suggesting that the author or editors lived near the events.

This crucial 100 year period is best studied in the lives and acts of the four principal characters Eli, Samuel, Saul and David. Under the leadership primarily of Samuel and David the scattered tribes became a powerful nation with a rich economy, culture and religious heritage.

### **Outline of 1 Samuel**

#### **I. Samuel as Judge and Prophet, I Sam. ch. 1-8**

Godly household: the birth, dedication, training, call of Samuel, ch. 1-2:11; ch. 3.

Disfunctional household: Eli, his sons; eclipse of the Shiloh priesthood,



2:12-36.

War with the Philistines; loss of the Ark, ch. 4.

Recovery of the Ark, ch. 5-7.

The Israelites call for a king, ch. 8.

## **II. Saul as King, I Sam. 9-15.**

Saul anointed king by Samuel, ch. 9-10.

Saul's victory over the Ammonites, ch. 11.

Samuel addresses Israel on Kingship and Covenant, ch. 12.

Saul's presumptive behaviour, disobedience and rejection from the kingship, ch. 13-15.

## **III. Saul's Increasing Emotional Instability and the Rise of David, I Sam. 16-31.**

Samuel anoints David to succeed Saul, ch. 16.

David's victory over Goliath, ch. 17.

Saul's jealous rage against David; Jonathan; ch. 18 - 19:17.

David's escape and life as a fugitive and warrior, 19:18 - ch. 30.

The death of Samuel, 25:1.

The death of Saul, ch. 31.

### **Eli**

The story of Eli is not a happy one. It appears that he judged Israel for about 40 years (1 Sam 4:18), a distinguished period of administration and religious service on behalf of his people. This fact is obscured by the sorry tale of his sons' malfeasance. Shiloh, the ancient religious sanctuary of Israel upon their entering Palestine, was the center of his activities. From the reference to his son Phinehas as a descendant of Ithmar (Aaron's son, note 1 Ki 2:27 and 1 Chron 24:3) we may conclude that Eli himself is a descendant of Aaron.

The "house of the Lord" (1 Sam 1:7) was probably the Tabernacle, later replaced by a temple. The term Shiloh appears also to have an indirect, haunting messianic reference (Gen 49:10).

In addition to an annual festival, Shiloh was the chief religious center of the tribes of Israel, a reminder of God's covenant with them and of their obligations to one another under the covenant as sons of Jacob.

Until Samuel's time Shiloh was the focal religious center of the nation, where the law was taught, people came to sacrifice, and where the priesthood, Tabernacle and ark were located. Samuel was dedicated by his devout parents, Elkanah and Hannah, and brought to Shiloh as a young boy for priestly service. Under Eli, Shiloh was a great religious center, but the seeds of decay and ultimate displacement were already sown (I Sam. 3-4).

Eli's sons did not heed their father's rebuke of their indecent ways. The thread of the story in these historical books is that the judgment announced by an unnamed prophet (1 Sam 2:27-36; 3:11-14, which the child Samuel reiterated) was inexorably fulfilled. Nevertheless, it appears that descendants of Eli continued as priests at Shiloh at least to the time of David.

### **Samuel**

What Moses was to early Israelite history, Samuel was to middle Israelite history. Each is a giant in his period and each crucially affects the character and subsequent history of the nation.

Four important points about Samuel's career stand out:

- (a) His career marks the end of the period of the Judges; and,
- (b) the end of the dominance of the Shiloh priesthood and sanctuary.
- (c) He appears to have inaugurated formal prophetic ministry and schools of prophets.
- (d) Samuel was instrumental in the inception and establishment of the monarchy, which signaled departure from the theocratic ideal.

Samuel laid the foundation religiously, judicially, socially and politically for the construction of the Israelite empire which at the time of David and Solomon became a powerful force in the ancient Near East. I think it can be fairly said that under Samuel the foundations were laid for a national culture. He trained teachers. It is likely that reading and writing became widespread under his influence and through his schools. It is not too much to claim that the foundation for the literary flowering within Israel under David and Solomon, and by the later major prophets in Israel, was laid by Samuel and his many students.

Samuel, like Moses, was a great religious reformer: (I Sam.7:3), the spiritual as well as political leader of men. On an annual circuit to three centers he judged the people (I Sam. 7:16, 17). This engendered confidence in just dealing and reminded the people about the Law of God given at Sinai and in the Covenant. Samuel gave the people the Word of the Lord, creating thereby a political system on moral and spiritual foundations (I Sam. 10:25; note Deut. 17:14-20).

He created the "schools of the prophets" (I Sam. 19:18-24) which radically reduced the spiritual hegemony which the Shiloh priesthood had enjoyed. Ever after, tension between religious establishment and the prophetic spirit is evident in the life of Israel. Historically, in our Judeo-Christian tradition the prophetic and spiritual traditions have generated criticism of establishments, both religious and political.

How the prophets arose and what was characteristic of their schools is largely unknown and is much debated by scholars. But it seems apparent that in Israelite life Samuel was largely instrumental in the formation of the movement, following upon God's call to him as a boy in the temple and subsequent revelations. The "sons of the prophets" were members of a school or guild. The prophet was one who was specially called by God to this spiritual vocation, i.e. he stood in a special relation to God which was vouchsafed in spiritual experiences and manifestations, often of an ecstatic kind. This manifestation of the Spirit of God appears to have been new and spontaneous. The "speaking" for God as the primary role of the prophet derives from this primary relation of the prophet to God.

Consistent with the foregoing was Samuel's rejection of the growing ritualization of Israelite religion. His famous words to Saul epitomize the point: *to obey is better than sacrifice* (I Sam. 15:22). Samuel did not jettison sacrifice; on the contrary, he too offered sacrifices. But he denied the efficacy of sacrifice which was merely ritual. This extended to the entire Aaronic priesthood, and as well to the national religion. The spiritual integrity and sincerity of the worshipper were emphasized.

It was Samuel's responsibility, following the demand of the Israelites and the divine commissioning, to anoint Saul then David as kings of Israel. It was also his sad task to announce to Saul his rejection from kingship (1 Sam. 15). Samuel laid down the terms of kingship (1 Sam. 10) as spiritual and moral, with prior joint responsibility of king and people to God. Samuel's death is recorded in I Sam. 25:1; 28:3.

### Saul

Saul's anointing to be king was within the terms of Israel's covenant with God, which placed upon him as well as upon the people duties of obedience to God and his laws, including the principles of justice, mercy, and holiness.

He was a man of commanding appearance and considerable military prowess. But he failed to distinguish between material and spiritual matters, especially between appearances and inner spiritual realities. He wrongly invaded priestly prerogatives and earned the stern censure of Samuel (1 Sam. 13:8-15). He disobeyed a divine command (1 Sam. 15:3, 22-23).

Saul's mental derangement and gradual deterioration have stimulated considerable interest. In contrast to many other ancient accounts of madness, the Biblical one about Saul is remarkably objective. The stresses of office and of the breach between himself and Samuel may well have adversely affected Saul, to say nothing of his own sense of guilt (1 Sam. 15:24).

Estimates of Saul's pathological condition vary. Some have thought that he was manic-depressive. More likely he was afflicted with paranoid schizophrenia. His intrusions into areas of higher religious responsibility, his feelings of insecurity and persecution, his violent tirades, and his relentless attempts to kill David may be evidence of such a condition. He was at times deeply depressed and reacted violently to stimuli intended to soothe him; as when David played music to quiet him (1 Sam. 16:14-23; 19:8-10). His violent anger against his own son Jonathan (20:30-31) and his emotional prostration before Samuel (28:20-25) are further indications of his mental and emotional deterioration.

It has been suggested that matriarchal traditions in Canaan may account for some of the tactics of Saul, David and others. In the matriarchate, as in ancient Egypt which at times dominated parts of Canaan, the line of inheritance was through the female rather than the male. Is this why David was anxious when Merab married Adriel instead of her becoming David's wife (1 Sam. 18:17-19), because Merab's husband would then inherit the throne? Would David inherit the throne of Geshur when he married Talmai the daughter of the King of Geshur (2 Sam. 3:3; Absalom fled there for refuge, 2 Sam. 13:37)? Perhaps Amnon's rape of Tamar had in view their marriage and Amnon's recovery of the throne. If David's wife Ahinoam (1 Sam. 25:43) was also the wife of Saul, it may be that by winning her from Saul David could also legally receive Saul's throne.

## NOTES ON 2 SAMUEL

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(See introductory note to 1 Samuel)

### Outline of 2 Samuel

#### **I. David as King of Judah, then of Israel, 2 Sam. ch. 1-10**

Saul's death and David's lament, ch. 1.

Two kings in Israel:

David, King of Judah at Hebron, 2:1-11.

Ish-bosheth, King over northern Israel in Gilead, 2:8-11.

The house of Saul vs. the house of David, ch. 2-4.

Joab, Abner, and David.

David anointed King over united Israel.

The capture of Jerusalem as David's capital, ch. 5.

Worship established at Jerusalem, ch. 6.

The incident of Uzziah and the Ark.

Covenant and messianic promise, ch. 7.

The supremacy of David, ch. 8.

David's magnanimity to Mephibosheth of Saul's house, ch. 9.

War with the Ammonites and Syrians, ch. 10.

#### **II. Events in David's Court and House, 2 Sam. ch. 11-21.**

David's adultery with Bathsheba and the consequences, ch. 11- 12.

The incident of Ammon and Tamar, and Absalom's flight, ch. 13.

Re-instatement of Absalom, ch. 14.

The revolt and death of Absalom, ch. 15-18.

David's lament over Absalom, and administrative changes, ch. 19.

Sheba incites revolt among the northern tribes, ch. 20.

Events concerning Saul's family, ch. 21.

#### **III. Concluding Songs and Events, 2 Sam. ch. 22-24**

Psalms of David, ch. 22-23:7

David's last words and tribute to valor, ch. 23:8-39

The census and the plague, ch. 24

### **Jonathan**

Jonathan, the eldest son of Saul, was a valiant warrior, eulogized by David (2 Sam 1:22). He had every reason to have been suspicious of David because the latter represented take-over of everything that Saul had as king of Israel, to which Jonathan was natural heir. Nevertheless, the steadfast friendship between Jonathan and David is one of the most moving stories in the Bible. He represents loyalty to truth, dedication to mediation and peace-making, and commitment to covenant of friendship.

## David

Five important achievements of the Davidic era may be noted. These are built upon the spiritual foundation which Samuel laid.

*First*, David captured Jerusalem and made it his capital. Jerusalem became the political and religious center of growing unity among the Israelite tribes and, as well, of a burgeoning economy and expanding empire.

*Second*, David founded a dynasty in which was centered the Messianic hope of Israel. David's enthronement in Israel was accompanied by a prophetic declaration that his line of kings would end in the King whose rule would never cease (2 Sam. 7). The ancient messianic promise, tied to Judah (Gen. 49:10), was fulfilled with the birth of Christ (Lu. 1:69; 2:11).

*Third*, during his reign poetry and music developed brilliantly. David is known as the "Sweet singer of Israel." Wind, stringed and percussion instruments were widely used in worship and public ceremonies. The development of psalmody was a notable achievement which has had a lasting influence upon subsequent western history. Major public works such as roads, pools, water systems, and public buildings were undertaken. Industry, trade and commerce flourished.

*Fourth*, there was rapid development of a civil service, judicial procedures to maintain justice, and public records began to be kept with care. Here was laid the foundation of the rich literary tradition of the Jewish people. Under David the scattered and often harassed tribes developed a strong sense of identity accompanied by diligent and creative efforts to enhance and develop their nationhood in important cultural ways.

*Fifth*, faith in God as the Lord of history was at the center of their growing national consciousness, politically and religiously. God was seen as sovereign in events, moving them to accomplish His purpose (1 Sam. 2:35). The divine attributes of justice, mercy and holiness figure prominently in shaping the inner life of the nation. Men were to be ruled justly (2 Sam. 23:3-4). The kindness of God was an ideal for human relationships (2 Sam. 9:3). The God who is holy was understood to overshadow their lives (1 Sam. 2:22). These elements answer to the deepest spirituality of the Samuel-David period, and contrast sharply with the prime weakness of Saul as a man and leader. The moral law as the reflection of God's own holy nature must be the key to personal and community life. This involves the evangelical and spiritual principle of obedience to God as superior to religious gestures such as ritual sacrifice.

Herein lies the importance of the story told at some length of David's adultery with Bathsheba and the elimination of her husband Uriah in battle. The issue in scripture is a moral one. The center is David's heart. Sacrifices will not do apart from penitence, confession, forgiveness, and restoration to God (Ps. 32, 51). The

message of Nathan the prophet had this cutting edge (2 Sam. 11:1-12:14).

Under Samuel we observe the decline of the Shiloh priesthood and the rise of the prophetic movement which carried with it emphases upon justice and holiness rather than attenuated religious ritual.

Under David we note the establishment of Jerusalem as the Israelite capital coupled with a powerful surge of justice in the land and unfolding of literature and the arts in the worship of God.

## **NOTES ON 1 KINGS**

Samuel J. Mikolaski

### **Introductory note to 1 and 2 Kings**

Like the books of Samuel, 1 and 2 Kings were a unity in the Hebrew Canon. They were divided in the Septuagint because of the length of the Greek translation.

The period covered is from the last days of David, through the divided kingdom to the fall of Samaria in 722 B.C., then on to the fall of Jerusalem and of the Southern Kingdom in 587 B.C. (the Babylonian Captivity). The book thus embraces about 400 years.

### **Date and Authorship**

The last date mentioned is the release of Jehoiachin from prison (2 Kings 25: 27-30) which can be readily fixed at 562 B.C. It may be assumed that Kings was completed in captivity about 550 B.C. However, major sources of the book were much older.

Three major sources are named: the Book of the Acts of Solomon (1 Kings 11:41), the Book of the Chronicles of the Kings of Israel (1 Kings 14:19), and the Book of Chronicles of the Kings of Judah (1 Kings 14:29). These were official records normally kept in the national archives. The Kings of Israel chronicles were probably completed a century before those of Judah. Other literary sources could well have included separate records about David, Elijah, Elisha, and Ahab. The compiler of the Kings record includes only those details that suit his didactic purpose, and he frequently refers his readers to the fuller historical documents (1 Kings 11:41). The sources for the book thus seem to derive from periods close to the events they record.

The author is unknown, though one unlikely Jewish tradition ascribes the book to Jeremiah. It would appear from the comments made in the book on the kings that the writer, like Jeremiah, was of a prophetic school and probably a younger contemporary of his.

### **Historical Method and Chronology**

1 and 2 Kings were not written to furnish detailed history. Sufficient history is written to give an account of the period together with lessons to be learned from the lives of men and women and events of which they were a part. Some important kings like Omri (1 Kings 16:23-28) are given little attention while the prophetic ministry and miraculous power of the prophets Elijah and Elisha occupy large parts of the books.

The Northern and Southern Kingdoms ran parallel in history and that is the historiographical method followed by the writer. He keeps their histories running



parallel. He begins with Jeroboam, the first king of Israel, then at the end of his reign he writes about the contemporary events in Judah. Thus a system of alternation is followed and time notations are constantly made which show that here we have accurate history.

Exceedingly difficult problems have arisen with regard to the chronology of these records. Only in recent years have the results of new research yielded a clearer understanding of the dating methods employed (E. R. Thiele, *The Mysterious Numbers of the Hebrew Kings* 1951, 1965).

Apparently during the course of the history of both kingdoms different kinds of reckoning were employed, i.e. accession and non-accession year methods of reckoning. It appears that at the division of the Kingdom, Israel employed the non-accession-year method of reckoning, while Judah employed the accession-year method of Mesopotamia. From the end of the 9th century B.C. to the Fall of Samaria in 722 B.C., Israel adopted the accession-year method. In contrast, Judah utilized the non-accession-year method for about half a century after 850 B.C. and then went back to the accession-year method.

### **Outline of 1 Kings**

#### **I. The Accession and Reign of Solomon, 1 Kings 1-11**

- The rejection of Adonijab and the anointing of Solomon as King, ch. 1
- Solomon eliminates his enemies, ch. 2
- Solomon's dream, prayer and wisdom, ch. 3
- Solomon's empire, ch. 4
- Construction of the Temple at Jerusalem, ch. 5-7
- Dedication of the Temple, ch. 8
- God's covenant with Solomon, 9:1-9
- Public works projects, a navy and rising taxes, 9:10-28
- The visit of the Queen of Sheba, 10:1-3
- Solomon's wealth, ostentation and fame, 10:14-29
- Solomon's apostasy and death, ch. 11

#### **II. The Divided Kingdom and Fall of Samaria, 1 Kings 12-2 Kings 17**

- Rehoboam's self-will and tax burden divide the nation, 12:1-18
- Jeroboam, king in Israel
- Rehoboam, king in Judah, 12:19-33
- The prophecies against Jeroboam, ch. 13 - 14:20
- Rehoboam in Judah, 14:21-31
- Abijam in Judah, 15:1-8
- Asa in Judah, 15:9-24
- Nadab in Israel, 15:25-32
- Baasha in Israel, 15:33-7
- Elah in Israel, 16:8-14
- Zimri in Israel, 16:15-20

Omri in Israel, 16:21-28  
 Ahab in Israel and the prophet Elijah, 16:29-22:40  
 Jehoshaphat in Judah, 15:24; 22:1-50  
 Ahaziah in Israel, 22:51 - 2 Kings 1.

The following are persons and events who figure prominently in the didactic aim of the author and editors of Kings:

### **Solomon c. 970-930 B.C., 1 Kings 1-11**

During David's declining years, Adonijah the younger brother of the dead Absalom prepared to lay claim to the throne, but the clever Bathsheba prevailed upon David to declare Solomon her son as king. Upon his accession to the throne Solomon quickly eliminated his opposition, notably Adonijah, Joab and Abiathar.

Solomon was Israel's first dynastic ruler, i.e. acceded to the throne as son of the king. He was famed for his wisdom for which he had prayed to the Lord (1 Kings 3:5 ff). Under his direction wisdom literature and psalmody flourished in Israel.

Also, extensive public works of roads, pools, public buildings, and palaces were built which, along with heavy commitments to a navy, army and cavalry created an exceedingly heavy tax burden on the nation.

Under Solomon tribal rule was replaced by administrative districts controlled by a civil service (1 Kings 4:7 ff). It would appear that he also recruited thousands of people for forced labor, some within the armed forces and some outside. In a pact with Hiram, King of Tyre, Solomon pledged the resources of twenty Galilean cities in exchange for skilled artisans, materials and backing. Solomon accomplished a great deal, but he did it at the high cost of alienating many of his people, especially the northern tribes.

He was an enterprising business man. Under his leadership the nation flourished commercially in the knowledge that the major caravan trading routes between Egypt and Asia passed through his empire. He and the King of Tyre dominated the sea lanes as well. Ezion-geber (Elath) in the gulf of Aqabah was a major port and manufacturing center. Foreign dignitaries frequently visited Israel to encourage economic and commercial ties; for example, the Queen of Sheba. He built up vast stables of horses and became one of the major entrepreneurs in horses and chariots to Hittites and Armaeans in the north (1 Kings 10:28,29).

In an almost unprecedented move in ancient times he took as wife a daughter of Egypt's Pharaoh, probably for commercial and political reasons, and built for her a special wing to the palace at Jerusalem. While marrying foreign wives was expedient politically, it proved to be disastrous spiritually. His wives brought their heathen gods and practices to Jerusalem which quickly intruded into Israel's religious life (1 Kings 11).

The Temple at Jerusalem was Solomon's greatest monument, but it was built at enormous cost of labor and tax money. The plan for worship was like that in the Tabernacle, including sacrificial approach, the Holy Place, and the Holy of Holies in which stood the Ark of the Covenant. The interior rooms were completely panelled to cover the stone walls and were beautifully covered with flowers, palm trees and cherubim, all overlaid with gold. Craftsmen from Tyre supervised the work and created significant parts of its design.

### **Division of the Kingdom, 1 Kings 12**

Following Solomon's death the kingdom divided, north and south. There had always been unrest among the northern tribes, even in David's time (1 Kings 12:16). With the accession of Rehoboam the issues came to a head because of his obstinacy. Three matters were crucial: heavy taxation, forced labor, and an autocratic central government which paid little attention to the needs and aspirations of the regions.

Under Jeroboam the son of Nebat, the ten Northern tribes seceded, with headquarters being established in Ephraim (1 Kings 12:25), eventually in the city of Samaria. Thus the *Northern Kingdom* in the text is called Israel, Ephraim or Samaria .

The two southern tribes, Judah and Benjamin became the *Southern Kingdom* with their capital at Jerusalem, and go by those names.

Despite the fact that the North renounced any claim to David's inheritance, God continued to send prophets to them (the prophets were sent to one or other of the two kingdoms or to both). Prophetic vision encompassed both (Hosea 1:11).

### **Ahab, Jezebel and Elijah (c. 874-853 B. C.), 1 Kings 16:29 - 22:40**

The lives of these three are closely interwoven in the narrative, which is one of the most fascinating in Scripture because of the insights into perverse human nature and the contest between the Lord and the Baal cult in the Northern Kingdom.

Ahab's father, Omri, had built the city of Samaria and established it as his capital. Ahab continued to fortify his major cities and to expand Samaria. He became a powerful ruler and defeated Ben-hadad, sparing his life. Later they joined forces to temporarily stay the advance of the Assyrian armies. Assyrian records show that at that time Ahab put 2,000 chariots and 10,000 men into the field.

As arranged by Omri, his father, he married Jezebel the daughter of the king of Tyre, which alliance was intended to discourage Syrian advances against Israel. Arrangements were made for her to worship Baal in Samaria in a temple specially

built for her (1 Kings 16:31-33).

Jezebel was a Baal fanatic. She had a forceful and domineering personality. By the time Ahab became king, her personal religious staff included 400 prophets of Baal, and 400 of the goddess Asherah (1 Kings 18:19). Her Tyrian concept of absolute monarchical power collided with the covenant ideal in Israel where king and people both stood under God morally. She stayed in power for ten years as queen-mother following Ahab's death.

Under Jezebel's influence, the prophets of the Lord were slain, Elijah was forced to flee, but 100 were hidden by Obadiah, Ahab's devout minister (1 Kings 18:3,4).

The altars of the Lord were torn down. Ahab's weakness is shown not only religiously, but also politically and judicially in the mock trial and execution of Naboth to expropriate his vineyard (1 Ki. 21:1-16), which brought Elijah out into the open again. He prophesied the death of Ahab and Jezebel, and the end of their dynasty (1 Kings 21:20-24).

### **Elijah, 1 Kings 17-19, 21; 2 Kings 1,2.**

Elijah appears on the scene suddenly, and he disappears at his translation just as dramatically. He is one of the most forceful prophetic figures in the Bible.

There are six episodes recorded in the Elijah cycle: the drought and his flight, the contest with Baal on Mt. Carmel, the flight from Jezebel's wrath to Horeb, Naboth's vineyard, the oracle concerning Ahaziah, and Elijah's translation. The entire cycle, except his translation, is concerned with either the clash with Baal or judicial corruption. The Naboth incident shows how deeply principles of justice were held in the prophetic consciousness.

Elijah stands in the prophetic tradition of Samuel. He and Elisha are forerunners of the great 8th century writing prophets who also were concerned about the Covenant, Messianic hope, and social justice. Elijah reappears in person at the Transfiguration of Jesus (Mk. 9:4) as the representative of the prophetic tradition.

Elijah was marked by uncommon courage, yet also by fear and depression as when he sulked in hiding (1 Kings 19). Significantly, he went to Horeb where the law and covenant were given to Moses originally. Here he found renewal of faith and courage.

Elijah's challenge to and victory over the prophets of Baal (1 Kings 18) is one of the outstanding stories of Scripture. Jezebel had claimed equality of Baal with Yaweh. Despite the failure of Baal, her fanaticism drove Jezebel against Elijah so that he fled.

## NOTES ON 2 KINGS

Samuel J. Mikolaski

(Note Introduction to 1 Kings)

### Outline of 2 Kings

(Completion of the Elijah story; Elisha begins ministry, ch. 1-2.)

#### **I. Divided Kingdom and Fall of Samaria (continued), 1 Kings 12 - 2 Kings 17.**

Jehoram in Israel; Elisha, 1:17; 3:1-8:15

Jehoram in Judah, 8:16-24

Ahaziah in Judah, 8:25-29, note 9:29

Jehu in Israel (anointed by Elisha), ch. 9-10

Athaliah and Joash in Judah, ch. 11-12

Jehoahaz in Israel and subjugation under Syria, 13:1-9

Jehoash in Israel and the death of Elisha, 13:10-25

Amaziah in Judah; Civil war, 14:1-22

Jeroboam II in Israel, 14:23-29

Azariah (Uzziah) in Judah, 15:1-7

Intrigue in Israel: Zachariah, Shallum, Menahem, and Pekahiah, 15:8-26

Pekah in Israel; the first captivity of Israel (Assyrian), 15:27-31

Jotham in Judah, 15:32-38

Ahaz in Judah, ch. 16

Hoshea in Israel, 17:1-2

Fall of the Northern Kingdom (Samaria) under Hoshea by Tiglath-pileser III in response to an appeal by Ahaz of Judah, 17:1-41 (722 B.C.)

#### **II. Continuing History and Fall of the Southern Kingdom, 2 Kings 18-25**

Hezekiah, Assyria, and Isaiah, ch. 18-20

Manasseh, 21:1-18

Amon, 21:19-26

Josiah and reform, 22:1 - 23:30

Jehoahaz; the first Captivity (Egyptian), 23:31-35

Jehoiakim, the second Captivity (Babylonian, Daniel), 23:36-24:7

Jehoiachin, 24:8-17

Zedekiah, 24:18-25:7

Destruction of Jerusalem; the third Captivity (Babylonian, Ezekiel), B.C.587, 25:8-21 Gedaliah, 25: 22-26

The life and death of Jehoiachin in captivity in Babylon, 25:22-30

### **Elisha**

The double portion of Elijah's spirit which his successor Elisha requested is reflected in the Elisha cycle which records more than twice the number of episodes and wonders of Elisha as those recorded for Elijah. His prophetic ministry to Israel lasted about fifty years, covering the reigns of Ahab, Ahaziah, Jehoram,

Jehu, Jehoahaz, and Jehoash.

Significant events include:

1. Elisha's being anointed to the prophetic ministry by Elijah (1 Kings 19:16; 2 Kings 2:1-18).
2. Healing of the waters and judgment of mockery (2 Kings 2:19-25).
3. The Shunammite woman (2 Kings 4:8-37).
4. The story of Naaman (2 Kings 5:1-27).

Like Elijah, Elisha has affinities with Samuel. He organized schools of the prophets. There is less tension over Baal worship during his period. Presumably the fanatical edge of the Baal cult was blunted with the death of Jezebel. Elisha is prominent as a seer to whom the common people and kings alike turned for advice.

The period of Elijah and Elisha is like that of Moses, Samuel and Pentecost. There are signs and wonders including ecstatic visions and pronouncements. But in the forefront is the spiritual ministry of the prophet in relation to the covenant of God with His people. Note the tribute of Joash that Elisha was the backbone of the nation (2 Kings 13:14).

### **Decline and Fall of Samaria**

The Kingdom of Israel, or the Northern Kingdom, which centered in Samaria fell to the Assyrian forces in 722 B.C. The extermination of the Omri-Ahab dynasty by Jehu (841 B.C.) was accompanied by the overthrow of the Baal cult in Israel.

While supported by the prophets, the break with Baal meant also friction with Northern nations dedicated to the cult.

Gradually the wealth of the nation concentrated into fewer and fewer hands. The poor were oppressed and justice was scarce which called forth the censure of the 8th century prophets such as Amos and Hosea.

The accession of Tiglath-Pileser III to the throne of Assyria marked the beginning of expansionist conquest for twenty-five years culminating, among other things, in the destruction of Samaria in 722 B.C. after a siege lasting three years. Part of the provincial population had already been deported following the conquest of Damascus (Syria) in 732 B.C. With the fall of Samaria a further deportation took place. Assyrian records show that 27,290 people were taken captive. So ended the Northern Kingdom as prophesied by Amos and others.

### **The Last Days of Judah**

The Kingdom of Judah and Jerusalem continued for a further period of 135 years after the fall of the Northern Kingdom.

Judah apparently was not threatened by the Assyrians, but seems to have been left as a small buffer state between Assyrian and Egyptian power, though formally under the former. There were usually parties in the royal court at Jerusalem urging alliances in one or other of these directions. Hezekiah's revolt was crushed by Sennacherib in 705 B.C., with disastrous consequences for the city's population and commerce.

Revival and reform took place under Josiah (621 B.C.) while Judah was nominally tributary to Assyria. When the Egyptians attempted a second time (609 B.C.) to advance against Assyrian power (this time under Pharaoh Necho) Josiah engaged them in battle at Megiddo and was killed.

The rise of Babylonian power, notably Nebuchadnezzar's victory at Carchemish in 605 B.C., changed the balance of power. Caught between the two great super powers, after several attacks and deportations, first by Egypt then by Babylon, Jerusalem was finally ravaged and her leading citizens deported in 587 B.C. This is the period of great prophets like Daniel, Jeremiah and Ezekiel. So ended the Kingdom of Judah and began the Great Babylonian Captivity (597-538 B.C.).

### **The Godly Minority**

Throughout the period there is the godly group who remain faithful to Yaweh (1 Kings 19:18). These were often spoken of by the prophets of the period.

In Elijah and Elisha we have the background to the major and minor prophets. The opposition to Ahab crystallized prophetic activity which ever after was ready to withstand royal apostasy and injustice. It is for no small reason that Elijah became a great religious figure in Jewish literature, and also in the New Testament.

### **TIME LINES OF THE KINGS OF ISRAEL (B.C.)**

(The dates are in many cases approximate.)

#### **The United Kingdom**

|         |                |
|---------|----------------|
| Saul    | 1050/45 - 1010 |
| David   | 1010 - 970     |
| Solomon | 970 – 930      |

The Kingdom divides under Rehoboam after the death of Solomon.

**Israel:**  
**The Northern Kingdom**  
**Capital at Samaria**

|              |         |
|--------------|---------|
| Jeroboam 1   | 930-910 |
| Nadab        | 910-908 |
| Baasha       | 908-885 |
| Elah         | 885-884 |
| Zimri        | 884-    |
| Tibni & Omri | 884-880 |
| Ahab         | 874-853 |
| Ahaziah      | 853-852 |
| Joram        | 852-841 |
| Jehu         | 841-814 |
| Jehoahaz     | 814-798 |
| Jehoash      | 798-782 |
| Jeroboam 2   | 782-753 |
| Zachariah    | 753-752 |
| Shallum      | 752     |
| Menahem      | 752-742 |
| Pekahiah     | 742-740 |
| Pekah        | 740-732 |
| Hoshea       | 732-722 |

Conquest by Assyria. Fall of Samaria.  
End of Kingdom of Israel, 722 B.C.

**Judah:  
The Southern Kingdom  
Capital at Jerusalem**

|                |         |
|----------------|---------|
| Rehoboam       | 830-913 |
| Abijam         | 913-910 |
| Asa            | 910-870 |
| Jehosaphat     | 870-848 |
| Jehoram        | 848-841 |
| Athaliah       | 841-835 |
| Joash          | 835-796 |
| Amaziah        | 796-767 |
| Uzziah/Azariah | 767-740 |
| Jotham         | 740-732 |
| Ahaz           | 732-716 |
| Hezekiah       | 716-686 |
| Manasseh       | 686-642 |
| Amon           | 642-640 |
| Josiah         | 640-609 |
| Jehoahaz       | 609     |
| Jehoiakim      | 609-597 |
| Jehoiachin     | 597     |



Zedekiah 597-587

Battle of Carchemish: Daniel and friends taken to Babylon, 605.

Fall of Jerusalem, 587. End of Kingdom of Judah.

Babylonian Captivity, 587.

## NOTES ON 1 CHRONICLES

Samuel J. Mikolaski

### Introductory note to 1 and 2 Chronicles

Like the preceding historical books, Chronicles was originally one book in the Hebrew Bible. The Hebrew title for the book was *Journals*, while the title in the Septuagint is *Matters Omitted* or *Omissions* (*paraleipomenon*), that is, they supplement Samuel and Kings.

### Major Characteristics and Purpose

Chronicles does not continue the history of Israel from the end of 2 Kings, but covers the same historical period as 2 Samuel and 1 and 2 Kings. The name Chronicles was given by Jerome (c.342-420 A.D.). In the recounting of the history of the kings of Judah there are many passages in 2 Chronicles parallel to passages in 1 and 2 Kings.

There is a difference between this and the preceding historical annals of Samuel and Kings. The writer (or compiler) does not cover all of the same events but selects those which are of a particular religious and spiritual interest. These concern mainly the Southern Kingdom and Jerusalem, and seem to be written from a priestly or Levitical point of view. As the writers' perspective is messianic, which is seen as an issue of the Davidic line, reference to the Northern Kingdom is omitted.

Chronicles furnishes a sweeping overview of history with a concentration upon the events chiefly in Judah which led to the Babylonian Captivity. It begins with Adam, encompasses the history of Israel to the Babylonian Captivity in 586-7 B.C., and focuses upon the covenantal relationship between God and his people. The message is: only as the true and living God is honored can Israel fulfill its God-given destiny.

In the Hebrew Bible, Chronicles is the last book. Thus its sweep, from Adam to the Babylonian Captivity, encompasses Israel's history under the providence of God.

### Authorship, Date and Relation to Ezra-Nehemiah

There is a close relation between Chronicles and Ezra-Nehemiah such that some have thought that they were at one time a unity.

Relevant facts are:

- a. The last verses of Chronicles are the same as the first verses of Ezra.
- b. Hebrew tradition has held that both were written by Ezra (or by a

contemporary).

c. The priestly point of view is common to both books and the literary styles are similar. Both retain strong feelings about the city of Jerusalem, the Temple, and the Judaic ritual.

However, no firm proof has been adduced for their common authorship. They may well derive from the same period and could have been compiled by Ezra or someone of that era. If so, then the passage which lists David's successors to six generations after Zerubbabel (1 Chron. 3:17-24) was added later.

Sources used by the author include the Pentateuch, a Jewish Midrash (commentary) on Kings (2 Chron. 26:22), and certain annals of the prophets (1 Chron. 29:29; 2 Chron. 9:29). Note also: 1 Chron. 9:1; 2 Chron. 12:15; 20:34; 24:27; 32:32; 33:19.

### **Outline of 1 Chronicles**

#### **I. Genealogies, 1 Chron. 1-9.**

Adam to Noah.

Noah to Abraham.

Abraham to Isaac.

The line of Ishmael.

Isaac to Jacob.

Twelve sons of Jacob; the 12 tribes.

#### **II. The Reign of David, I Chron. ch. 10-29.**

Saul's reign, unfaithfulness, defeat, death, ch. 10.

David captures Jerusalem as his capital; supporters and allies, ch. 11-12.

Return of the Ark, ch. 13-16.

The promise to the Davidic line, ch. 17.

Victories: Philistia, Moab, Zobah, Syria, Edom, Ammon, ch.18-20.

Census, ch. 21.

Preparations to build the Temple. ch. 22.

Worship: orders of priests, Levites and other officials; music, ch. 23-27.

David's instructions to Solomon, farewells and death, ch. 28-29.

### **Major theme of 1 Chronicles**

#### **Faithfulness vs False Worship**

The compiler's concentration is not upon the politics of the near eastern empires, nor upon Israel which had ceased as a nation earlier than Judah, nor even upon the political and cultural activity of Judah, but specifically upon the religious life of Judah. He has enough material in Judah without having to refer to Israel.

His narrative and interpretation exhibit the consequences of the vacillation from the true worship of the Lord which characterized the kings of Judah.

Some kings like Joash, Hezekiah and Jonah were faithful to God and called the people back to true worship. This faithfulness God attended with his blessing. Others were half-heartedly faithful or totally disregarded God's law. In these cases God sent warnings followed by judgment. Thus alternation between judgment and blessing, especially for turning the hearts of the people toward or from God, is the key feature of the historical interpretation (2 Chron.14:2-4, 11-12; 26:4-5; 28:1-5; 29:1-5; 33:1-10). It is striking that through the narrative priests, seers, prophets, as God's messengers, frequently confront Israel's rulers about their evils.

God honors those who keep his covenant.  
Events of the past are a warning, but also an encouragement.  
In the future God will be with them.

## NOTES ON 2 CHRONICLES

Samuel J. Mikolaski

(See introduction to 1 Chronicles)

The chronicler continues his review of Israel's history, focusing first on Solomon's splendor and reign, followed by the breakup of the kingdom into its Northern and Southern halves. The chronicler ignores the Northern Kingdom, concentrating his attention on the messianic line through David -- the line of Judah. Prophets, seers, priests often appear as messengers of God to warn kings about their unfaithfulness to the covenant. The record focuses on good kings, passing quickly over evil ones.

Revival, renewal, religious reform figure prominently, as during the reigns of Asa, Jehoshaphat, Hezekiah and Josiah. The content and force of these are unmatched in the other historical records and have served preachers well over the ages as sources of sermons on spiritual renewal.

### Outline of 2 Chronicles

#### **I. The Reign of Solomon, 2 Chron. ch. 1-9**

Solomon established as King, ch. 1

Construction of the Temple, ch. 2-5

Dedication of the Temple, ch. 6-7

Solomon's wealth, power and fame, ch 8

Visit of the Queen of Sheba and Solomon's death, ch. 9

#### **II. The Later History of Judah, 2 Chron. ch. 10-36**

Rehoboam, 10:1-12:16

Abijah, ch. 13

Asa and his reforms, ch. 14-16

Jehoshaphat and his reforms, ch. 17-20

Jehoram, ch.21

Ahaziah, 22:1-9

Athaliah usurps the throne, 22:10-12

Joash and his reforms, ch. 23-24

Amaziah, ch. 25

Uzziah, ch. 26

Jotham, ch. 27

Ahaz, ch. 28

Hezekiah: deliverance and reforms, ch. 29-32

Manasseh , 33:1-20

Amon, 33:21-25

Josiah and the Book of the Law, his reforms, ch. 34-35

Jehoahaz, ch. 36:1-4

Jehoiakim, 36:5-8

Jehoiachin, 36:9-10

Zedekiah, 36:11-13

The Babylonian attack, followed by exile, 36:14-21

The return from exile under Cyrus, 36:22-23.

### **Major Lessons from 2 Chronicles**

#### **1. Spiritual Renewal and True Worship**

Of great importance to the compiler is the destiny of the Davidic line despite its vicissitudes, the Temple and its orders of service, and the integrity of the service of priests and Levites who performed the service of God.

For example, the reforms of Joash (2 Chron. 24:4-5,7), Hezekiah (2 Chron. 29: 3-6,15-17,36) and Josiah (2 Chron. 34:3-5,10,31-33) involved: (a) cleansing the land of idolatrous practices, (b) purifying the Temple ritually and restoring it for proper worship, (c) gathering and sanctifying the scattered priesthood, (d) calling the people to repentance and true sacrifice, (e) reciting the covenant and law of the Lord publicly, (f) reminding themselves of the past dealings of God with their nation and pledging their own faithfulness to the Lord.

In Chronicles are annals of considerable importance in understanding spiritual regress, and also the nature and pattern of spiritual renewal. Those who are interested in spiritual renewal can find much here that is instructive.

#### **2. Grace and judgment**

The philosophical standpoint of the compiler as well as the historical data have much to tell us about the nature of God. This is why so little about David's household is mentioned. There is nothing here about the sins of David or of his household but much about the greatness and glory of God (1 Chron. 29:10-19). The power, glory and majesty of God are praised. His name is exalted. All of this is presented against a background of true self-abnegation in the wonder that God who is holy should deign to dwell among his people and bless them.

There is also an emphasis upon the transcendence of God, which is related to the truth and justice of his judgments: The eyes of the Lord range through the whole earth, to bring aid and comfort to those whose hearts are loyal to him, (2 Chron. 16:9, NEB). The judgments and mercies of God accord with his infinite knowledge and truth.

But in the midst of judgment God remembers mercy if his people will repent and turn to him (2 Chron. 6:24-31; 20:9). The prayer of Solomon is reminiscent of the blessings and cursings of Moses (Deut. 28).

No passage is more instructive or moving in this respect than the summation of

the compiler at the time of the Babylonian Exile (2 Chron. 36:14-21). In fulfillment of the prophets' words to judge the people for their idolatrous and sinful ways, and to give the land rest from their iniquities, God brought judgment upon them. Nevertheless, he did not forget them but stirred up the feelings of Cyrus (vv. 22-23) to restore them to their own city and Temple. The *because...therefore* theme of Chronicles reflects the strong spiritual and moral understanding of the writer. This is at the heart of the biblical prophetic message.

It is noteworthy that following these judgments and the Exile, Israel has never again been tempted to idolatry. This is a major historical and theological lesson to be drawn from these annals.

## **NOTES ON EZRA**

Samuel J. Mikolaski

### **Introductory note to Ezra, Nehemiah and Esther**

These books concern the Jewish people following the Babylonian Captivity. Most of them chose to remain in the Empire rather than return to the land. Only a minority returned to re-build Jerusalem.

The Babylonian Empire ended with the fall of Babylon in 539 B.C., which marked the ascendancy of the Persian Empire led by Cyrus. By means of ancient inscriptions, notably the Cyrus Cylinder, the policies of Cyrus as depicted in Ezra-Nehemiah are confirmed. Cyrus was tolerant of displaced minorities and of their religious practices. The edict of 538 B.C. allowed certain Jews and a prince of the Davidic dynasty to return to Jerusalem.

The Persian policy of tolerance appears to have continued. Ezra and Nehemiah, though Jews, held responsible positions in government service. Their work at Jerusalem began about 80 years after Cyrus' Edict.

### **The Sequence of Ezra-Nehemiah-Esther**

An intractable chronological problem has been the relation of the visits of Ezra and Nehemiah, respectively, to Jerusalem. The traditional date for Ezra's arrival in Jerusalem is 458 B.C. Questions are raised against this dating in favor of 428 B.C. or 397 B.C. 428 B.C. is suggested as the corrective to a scribal error which changed Artaxerxes date from the 37th to the 7th year. A major question is whether Ezra preceded or followed Nehemiah.

The 458 date accepts that Ezra 7:7 refers to Artaxerxes 1 (465-424 B.C.). The 397 date interprets 7:7 to refer to Artaxerxes 2 (404-358 B.C.). Recent studies appear to re-enforce credibility of the earlier date. The problem is complex and one cannot be dogmatic. I accept the traditional date of 458 B.C. It allows the text to stand without emendations for other reasons as well.

Also, the relationship between Ezra-Nehemiah and Chronicles is not known. In the light of the facts, I think it best to accept that Ezra and Nehemiah were chiefly responsible for the books named after them, that Ezra arrived in Jerusalem before Nehemiah and that they were contemporaries.

The story of Esther also fits into the Persian period. The decree of Cyrus allowing the Jews to return to Jerusalem was issued in 538 B.C. But most Jews remained in the Empire. It is with these people that the story of Esther is concerned.

Ahasuerus is a Hebrew version of the Persian name Khshayarsha, who is better known as Xerxes I. The Ezra-Nehemiah accounts tell of the return of the remnant



to the land, rebuilding of Jerusalem and the Temple, and restoration of true worship of Yahweh.

Esther tells how the Jews fared in the diaspora during a particularly crucial time when their existence was threatened. The providential concern of God for his people is to the forefront in these accounts.

### **The Book of Ezra**

The Book of Ezra is concerned with two distinct periods of history between which is a considerable gap of years. It is a deeply personal book. The first part is written in the first person; later parts in the third person.

Chapters 1-7 deal with the edict of Cyrus and the initial return of captives to Jerusalem after 538 B.C. under the leadership of Zerubbabel and Jeshua. In preparation for leaving they gather money from their fellow-exiles to help the reconstruction in Jerusalem. They first built the altar, then the Temple, though they encountered serious opposition (ch.4). The prophetic ministries of Haggai and Zechariah encouraged them to complete work on the Temple, following official leave by Darius to resume the work. It was dedicated in 515 B.C., with the Passover and Feast of Unleavened Bread being observed (Ezra 6:17-22).

The events of Ezra (ch.7-10) occurred considerably later. We have seen that his visit to Jerusalem might be dated from 458 B.C. or later, with the commission from Artaxerxes.

It is likely that Ezra held the senior position of the Persian government concerned with Jewish affairs. There accompanied him a large group of exiles, and they brought gifts of goods and money for the Temple and city. His task was to regularize the observance of Jewish religious and social laws. He also had authority to appoint leaders in the revived Jewish state.

### **Outline of Ezra**

#### **I. Cyrus' Decree and Restoration of the Jews, ch. 1-4 (538 B.C.)**

The decree of Cyrus, ch. 1.

List of returning exiles, ch. 2.

Re-establishment of sacrifice and worship, 3:1-6.

The Temple foundation laid under Jeshua and Zerubbabel, 3:7-13.

Opposition in the times of Cyrus, Xerxes, and Artaxerxes, ch. 4.

Ministry of Haggai and Zechariah, 5:1-2.

Tatnai's opposition and Darius' enquiry, 5:3-6:12.

Dedication of the Temple, 6:13-22.

#### **II. Ezra's Return to Jerusalem, ch. 7-10 (approx. 458 B. C.)**

Artaxerxes' decree and commissioning of Ezra, ch. 7.

List of returning exiles and preparation to return, ch. 8.  
 Ezra's vicarious confession and intercession, ch. 9.  
 Spiritual and social reforms, ch. 10.

## **Lessons from Ezra**

### **1. God in History**

A point of first importance in Ezra is the writer's awareness of God's overruling providence in history. Though Cyrus, Darius and Artaxerxes were pagan emperors, God inclined their hearts to favor and protect His people. This prophetic interpretation of God's dealings in history is an important element of OT teaching which infuses the NT as well (note Ezra 1:1-4; 6:1 ,8,12; 7:11-13).

### **2. The Valiant Minority**

Life in the empire was pleasant for most of the Jews of the dispersion. Why should they return to the hardships of the terrain and climate of Judah and rebuild a broken down Temple and city? This question was answered in the affirmative only by a minority. They are listed in Ezra-Nehemiah as spiritual heroes. Thereafter in the OT the concept of the faithful minority is prominent in Israelite life. Not everyone who makes a profession is willing to back up that profession with his or her life. The analogy today is between received Christian heritage and genuine personal faith and commitment to Christ.

### **3. Vision of the City of God**

More than nostalgia drew the returning captives to Jerusalem. Theirs was the vision of the covenant, city, temple and people of God. Such deep, spiritually based motivation is the crux of vision to achieve anything. Vision is more than merely being visionary. It involves a solid moral and spiritual commitment to ideals and, as in this case, a sense of implicit obedience to God's will as revealed to them and their forefathers.

### **4. Sturdiness to Confront Opposition**

Reconstruction of the city and Temple encountered vigorous opposition. While the work was forced to a standstill through political pressure, the vision remained undimmed through the ministry of the prophets Haggai and Zechariah. Rarely can a difficult and controversial task be completed without hindrance.

### **5. The Covenant Pledge and Worship**

The people met in public assembly, where the Law of God and the Covenant God made with them are recited. They are called to penitence, prayer and obedience.

Return from exile involved not only vision and dedication initially, but also laying the moral and spiritual foundation upon which national life could be rebuilt. This was the major task first of Zerubbabel, then of Ezra and Nehemiah.

## NOTES ON NEHEMIAH

Samuel J. Mikolaski

### See also introductory notes to Ezra and Esther

On the basis of the chronological sequence adopted in these notes, we are concerned with a series of major groupings of events:

First, the original return of captives to Jerusalem under the leadership of Zerubbabel about two years after the decree of Cyrus in 538 B.C. Enemies of Judah and Benjamin forced the Temple rebuilding to cease (Ezra 1-4).

Second, urged by Haggai and Zechariah, the work continued. Despite protests to Darius by their enemies, the emperor sustained the edict of Cyrus. In 515 B.C. the Temple was completed and dedicated (Ezra 6:17-22).

Third, later Ezra came to Jerusalem about 458 B.C., for what were probably two short tours of duty.

Fourth, there is the work of Nehemiah as Royal Commissioner during the reign of Artaxerxes I, about 445 B.C., with a subsequent visit about 433 B.C. The ministry of Malachi may be dated about 450 B.C.

In Ezra, Nehemiah and Chronicles we note strong love for Jerusalem as the ancestral home and religious center of the Jews, deep concern for true worship and authentic ritual in the Temple, powerful attachment to the covenant, and exhortation to observe the law of God.

Nehemiah was cupbearer to the Persian King Artaxerxes I (465-424 B.C.). News of cessation of the work of restoration and the sorry state of the city deeply depressed Nehemiah. The King gave him leave to go to Jerusalem where he became governor.

Opposition from the neighboring chieftains in Palestine and northwest Arabia (Sanballat, Tobiah and Geshem) was intense. But after herculean effort Nehemiah and the Jews completed restoration of the breached wall in fifty-two days, thus securing their first line of defence.

Nehemiah was an untiring worker and clever organizer. He adapted his method to the conditions of the terrain, circumstances of the breached wall, and skills of the people. We note clear divisions of labour, adaptation of workers' skills and strength to their jobs, honesty and economy of administration, cooperation, and careful protection of workers at assault points. Nehemiah gave effective, devout leadership.

Following the rebuilding of the wall, Nehemiah called the people to hear the Law of God read and to reaffirm the covenant. During his absence in Persia certain

abuses reappeared, with which he had to deal on his second visit.

## **Outline of Nehemiah**

### **I. Nehemiah Returns to Jerusalem, ch. 1-2**

In Persia Nehemiah hears about Jerusalem's troubles, and prays, ch. 1  
 Artaxerxes' favourable response to Nehemiah's request, 2:1-8  
 Nehemiah's arrival in Jerusalem; reconnaissance, 2:9-11  
 Nehemiah's money and encouragement to the people to build, 2:12-20

### **II. Progress of the Work Despite Opposition, ch. 3 - 7:4**

Organization of the work: builders and their tasks, ch. 3  
 Sanballat's opposition, but the work proceeds, ch. 4  
 Internal dissension; Nehemiah's reforms, ch. 5  
 The opposition of Sanballat, Tobiah and Geshem, ch. 6  
 The work on the walls completed, 7:1-4

### **III. Consolidation and Renewal, 7:4 - ch. 13**

Register of those who returned with Zerubbabel, 7:5-13  
 Reading and exposition of the Law, 8:1-12  
 The Feast of Tabernacles kept, 8:13-18  
 The people's repentance and confession, ch. 9  
 Renewal of the covenant, ch. 10  
 List of the dwellers in Jerusalem, ch. 11-12:26  
 Dedication of the rebuilt wall, 12:27 - 13:3  
 Correction of abuses and Nehemiah's second term of office, ch. 13:4-31

## **Lessons from Nehemiah**

### **1. Vision of the City and Temple**

Deeply embedded in Nehemiah's consciousness was his vision for rebuilding the city of his forefathers. This in no way blunted his awareness of the sins of his people as the cause of their plight. But his keen moral sense also looked to the mercy and grace of God to deal kindly with them (1:4-11).

### **2. Refusal to be Distracted**

Notice has been taken of Nehemiah's skills as a leader, his devotion to duty and his courage. His strength of character and native instinct is best shown in his refusal to be diverted from the task. Attempts at blackmail and attacks on his integrity failed to halt him in his work (6:1-14). Nor did intrigue. The key instance is in 6:3 where Nehemiah refuses to halt his work to attend a conference. Here he shows that he is a man of action, not just of talk.

### **3. Correcting Social Abuses**

Abuses that depleted the morals of the people were corrected (5:1-19). This especially concerned exorbitant interest rates which brought the lower classes into servitude. Thus social justice was an important factor in rebuilding the civic life of the nation.

#### **4. Renewal of Pledge to the Covenant**

Ezra played an important part in the public reading of the law (ch. 8) which constituted a call to repentance and rededication to the Lord. This revival, along with those recorded in Chronicles, are key patterns of spiritual renewal in the subsequent history of the church. Confession of sin and pledge of faith in the covenant go together (ch. 9).

There is included in this restoration and purification of the priesthood to the true worship and ministry of the Temple.

#### **5. Separation from Pagan Influences**

This involved at least three important matters:

First, Nehemiah disciplined the priesthood on his second visit to Jerusalem, because of an improper political alliance with Nehemiah's enemy Tobiah which involved political patronage (13:5).

Second, abuse of the sabbath and other religious ordinances (13:15).

Third, curbing the practice of marrying pagan wives, with a strong reminder of the failings of Solomon in this respect (13:26).

## **NOTES ON ESTHER**

Samuel J. Mikolaski

**See also introductory notes to Ezra and Nehemiah**

Historically, Esther is the complement of Ezra-Nehemiah in the canon of the Hebrew Bible. The latter are set chiefly in Jerusalem and recount the restoration of the Temple and city. The Book of Esther deals with certain events in the capital of the Persian empire, as these concern the many dispersed Jews within the Empire.

Cyrus, the great Persian emperor, had allowed the Jews who wished to do so, to return to Jerusalem after 538 B.C. Darius, Cyrus' successor but one, who was contemporary with Haggai and Zechariah, was succeeded by Ahasuerus who may be identified with Xerxes I (486-465 B.C.). Thus, the Book of Esther fits historically between chapters 6 and 7 of Ezra.

The story concerns Esther the young Jewess who became the queen of Ahasuerus. She was providentially in a position to intercede for her people when Haman, the grand vizier of the Empire, plotted to massacre the Jews because of his hatred of Mordecai, Esther's cousin. Mordecai had reared Esther from childhood. The book thus shows the providential care of God for his people who remained in the Empire.

### **Outline of Esther**

Deposition of Vashti, Ahasuerus' wife, because she refused to display herself at a banquet, ch. 1.

Esther the Jewess and cousin of Mordecai replaced Vashti, 2: 1-18.

Mordecai informs Esther of the plot to slay Ahasuerus, 2:10-23.

Haman's plot to massacre the Jews because Mordecai refuses to bow to him, ch. 3.

Mordecai pleads with Esther to intervene, ch. 4.

Esther's stratagem of the banquet for Ahasuerus and Haman, ch. 5.

The irony of Haman's having to honor Mordecai, ch. 6.

The second banquet: Haman unmasked and hanged, ch. 7.

The second royal edict allowing the Jews to defend themselves, ch. 8.

The Jews successfully defend themselves and institute the Feast of Purim, ch. 9.

The exaltation of Mordecai, ch. 10.

### **Historicity of the Story**

Several attacks have been made upon the historicity of the events of Esther. More recently the setting of the story is acknowledged to be consistent with the period.

Significant historical data tend to authenticate major elements of the story. The Greek historian Herodotus confirms the picture of Ahasuerus (Xerxes) when the Persians were turned back by the Greeks at Thermopylae in 479 B.C. This may

explain the curious gap in the book of Esther between the third and seventh years (1:3; 2:16) during which time Xerxes may have been engaged in the Greek wars. The chief queen of Persia was the cruel Amestres; hence Esther must be taken to have been a queen. Ahasuerus had a large harem. Heroditus records that Xerxes returned to Persia to console himself in the delights of his harem following his defeat by the Greeks.

Archaeological digging at Shushan confirms the grandeur of the palace of Ahasuerus and his protected isolation as recorded in Esther. An inscribed tablet found near Babylon mentions Marduka, a high official during the reign of Xerxes, which may refer to Mordecai. Also, extensive records have been found containing Jewish names of high government and provincial figures, which corroborate the freedom and position the Jews achieved in the Empire after the time of Cyrus.

The author of Esther is unknown, and the same is true of the date. If, as we think, Ahasuerus is Xerxes I, then the date is after his death in 465 B.C. perhaps about 430 B. C.

## **Lessons from Esther**

### **1. Anti-Semitism**

The primary point of the book is the terror of anti-Semitism and God's care of his people against massacre.

The fury of Haman who for paltry reasons determined to eliminate the Jews is consistent with human nature and other subsequent terrorist acts against them. The irrationalities and terrors of anti-semitism never seem far from the surface even among some professedly Christian people.

Family vengeance may have been a factor. Mordecai was a Benjamite Jew, a descendent of Kish the father of Saul. Haman was of Amalekite derivation, a descendant of King Agag (1 Sam. 15:8) whom Saul had defeated.

### **2. Divine Sovereignty**

Despite human intrigue and evil intent, God cared for his people. Haman was an irrationally superstitious man who by casting lots thought the day of his triumph was lucky (3:7). The irony of the King's sleeplessness, the reading of the Chronicle or Mordecai's loyalty to save the King's life, and the subsequent self-entrapment of Haman to honour Mordecai is a noteworthy lampooning of Haman's superstitious trust in luck as against the sovereignty of God in events. The Jews are not presented as worthy of God's favour, but as being the objects of his gracious concern.

### **3. Retribution**



The fact that Haman was hanged upon the gallows he had prepared for Mordecai is a lesson of how evil intended for others sometimes is turned back on its author. No attempt is made to hide contempt for the kind of man Ahasuerus was and the kind of life he led. He was a vain, sensual, capricious and despotic monarch. Despite his claims to absolute power over men and nations, the book presents history as ultimately under divine control. Xerxes was assassinated in 465 B.C.

#### **4. Vitality of the Diaspora**

The book reflects what subsequent historical data has confirmed, that the Jews of the diaspora had a vigorous family and economic life in the Persian Empire. They were able to retain many of their customs and much of their worship. Many of them held public office in national and local government. It is during this period while so many of them were away from Palestine and the Temple that the Synagogue evolved as the center of religious life, education, and social life for the Jews.

#### **5. God in Esther**

The fact that the name of God is not mentioned in Esther has caused considerable debate, including whether the book properly belongs in the Canon for that reason.

It may well be, however, that the historical fact of the survival of the Jews, having behind it the hidden working of God, is paralleled by the hidden but active God in Esther.

Attempts have been made (to my mind dubious) to find hidden evidence of the name of God in the text of Esther. The Tetragrammaton Y H V H, which are the consonants for Yahweh, are seen by some to occur four times in acrostic form at important junctures in the story (1:20; 5:4, 13; 7:7). In these instances it is claimed that twice the name is spelled backwards and twice forwards.

The claim has been illustrated in the following couplets using LORD, the English name for God:

**D**ue **R**espect **O**ur **L**adies, all  
Shall give their husbands, great and small (1:20)

**L**et **O**ur **R**oyal **D**inner bring  
Haman, feasting with a king (5:4)

**G**ra**D** fo**R** n**O** avai**L** my state,  
While this Jew sits at the gate (5:13)

**I**ll t**O** fea**R** decre**D** I find,

Toward me in the monarch's mind (7:7)

## **6. The Feast of Purim**

Another reason for the book is to give the historical circumstances for the Jews' observance of the Feast of Purim.

The importance of fasting in times of crisis is stressed (5:16; 9:31).

The term Purim derives from a Persian term meaning *lot*. We may accept the explanation of Esther 3:7 as the best solution to the meaning of the name

The feast is a joyful occasion when the Book of Esther is read and the congregation shouts against the name of Haman. That the feast is named after the superstitious casting of lots by Haman further mocks that superstition. Purim is a time of rejoicing and feasting over God's deliverance of the Jews.

## NOTES ON JOB

Samuel J. Mikolaski

### Introductory note on Job

While the traditional divisions of the Hebrew Bible, The Law, The Prophets and The Writings include Job in the latter of these, it is possible from a literary standpoint to posit the Psalms, Song of Solomon and Lamentations as Poetical literature, and Job, Proverbs and Ecclesiastes as Wisdom literature. This last is philosophical in nature.

In the ancient world the teaching of the wise was expressed in many literary forms including, for example, dialogue, as in the case of Plato. In the Bible there are intriguing forms, such as: riddle (Judges 14:14), fable (Judges 9:8-9, 15), maxim (Ecclesiastes 4:9-12), epigram (Proverbs 23:1-3), sonnet (Proverbs 4:10-19), dramatic monologue (Proverbs 1:20-33), and proverb (Proverbs 22:1).

Wise men reflected on the ironies and tragedy of life. Wisdom derives from contemplating the good, eschewing the bad, and puzzling over the inexplicable. In these respects Job is both poetry and philosophy, an instructive epic in its own right.

Job conveys *Everyman's Cry* -- how to make sense of life overwhelmed by apparently undeserved suffering, in relation to God who is good, and to his purposes and actions as lord of the universe.

### Job

This is a magnificent piece of literature. The Book of Job is one of the most original and grand epics in all of literature. It combines poetic, lyric, dramatic, and introspective qualities, but is not solely any one of these.

It explores the meaning of human suffering from the standpoint of a believer in God. The themes which it articulates have inspired other great masterpieces, including Dante's *Divina Commedia*, Milton's *Paradise Lost*, Goethe's *Faust*, and others.

Some see parallels between Job and other ancient annals of suffering, such as the Egyptian *Admonitions of Ipuwer*, the Ugaritic *Epic of Keret*, or the Greek myth of *Prometheus Bound*. But none of these is sufficiently congruent to be a parallel. Job stands alone, unique.

Apart from this book, we know virtually nothing about Job. It is not possible to decide from the text the exact location of Job's home, his times or the true age of the book. The patriarchal character of the story suggests an early date for the events. The magnificent poetic form may be a subsequent version of an earlier prose version. Job may have lived in parts of Edom or in northern Bashan. He was

evidently a man of wealth and social position, but he was not a king. Reference to Job occurs in Ez. 14:14. The present written form dates perhaps from as early as the Solomonic era but probably much later; however, the events are early.

The state of the text has caused much difficulty to scholars. Parts of it (such as Zophar's third speech) are probably missing. The Hebrew text is so difficult to understand and translate that the LXX omitted large portions of it. There are said to be over 100 Hebrew words which have survived only in Job; thus the meaning of some of them in relation to contemporary usage is not certain. It has been suggested that the Hebrew dialect of Job is unlike the Hebrew of the rest of the OT. A well-recommended translation of Job is that of James Moffatt.

### **The Story**

The book centers upon Job's being one of the Wise, or learned, men of his times. The literary tradition of these men is reflected in books such as Proverbs and Ecclesiastes.

The story concerns the mysteries of human suffering, which involve more than the eye can see or the mind fathom.

Permitted by God, Satan took away from Job first his wealth, then his children, and finally his health. Even his wife turned against him, urging him to curse God and die (2:9).

Three of Job's friends (Eliphaz, Bildad and Zophar), who were also of the elite Wise as Job had been, came to comfort him and to explore the causes of his calamity. Their discussion ends with a prolix intrusion by Elihu, a younger contemporary. They represent all that standard views of the time could say about suffering: it is inexorably due to personal sinfulness. But the problems of Job and of mankind go deeper than that, as the dialogue and God's intervention show.

### **Outline of Job**

#### 1. The Prologue, ch. 1-2.

Job's first test, ch. 1.

Job's second test, ch. 2.

#### 2. The Dramatic Dialogue, ch. 3-31.

The Lament of Job, ch. 3.

"Why was I born?"

"Why was I not still born?"

"Why do I continue to live?"

The First Round of Speeches, ch. 4-14.

Eliphaz, ch.4-5.  
 Job's reply, ch. 6-7.  
 Bildad, ch. 8.  
 Job's reply, ch. 9-10.  
 Zophar, ch. 11.  
 Job's reply, ch.12-14.

The Second Round of Speeches, ch. 15-21.

Eliphaz, ch. 15.  
 Job's reply, ch. 16-17.  
 Bildad, ch. 18.  
 Job's reply, ch. 19.  
 Zophar, ch. 20.  
 Job's reply, ch. 21.

The Third Round of Speeches, ch. 22-31.

Eliphaz, ch. 22.  
 Job's reply, ch. 23-24.  
 Bildad, ch. 25.  
 Job's reply, ch. 26.  
 Job to his friends, ch. 27-31.

The Intervention of Elihu, ch. 32-37.

Elihu's introductory speech, ch. 32.  
 Elihu to Job, ch. 33.  
 Elihu to the Three Friends, ch. 34.  
 Elihu to Job, ch. 35.  
 Elihu on the mighty acts of God, ch. 36-37.

Divine Intervention, ch. 38-42.

The mighty acts of God in nature, ch. 39-40.  
 Job's submission and contrition, ch. 40:1-5.  
 The majesty and power of God, 40:6 - 41:34.  
 Job's acknowledgment of God, ch. 42:1-6.

3. The Epilogue, ch. 42:7-17.

Job's friends rebuked, 42:7-9.  
 Job's restoration and prosperity, 42:10-17.

### **Progress of the Dialogue**

Eliphaz was probably Job's oldest and closest friend. He was a Temanite, a descendent of Esau. His speeches are moderate in tone and reflect tender concern for Job, though he holds that Job is guilty of something. Job pleads for pity.

Bildad was a descendent of Abraham and Keturah, who probably lived in the

regions of Arabia near Idumea. His speeches were more direct than those of Eliphaz and traditional in content. He accused Job of hypocrisy.

Zophar was a chieftan from the regions of Idumea. His judgments of Job were blunt and unrefined. He accused Job of lying.

Job replied that their comments were trite. Following a silence of seven days, Job cursed the day of his birth and his existence. There followed the dialogue by each with Job.

In the first round the justice of God who punishes wickedness in truth and prospers the just was rehearsed, but Job bitterly countermanded their premise.

In the second round the three reaffirmed that experience teaches that trouble follows evil-doing, and that some kind of hidden sin must be at the root of Job's calamities. But Job refused to move from his position. He accused his friends of being overbearing and of confusing issues with words.

In the third round the three attacked Job more directly, accusing him of specific sins of which they were certain he was guilty. As their attack intensified, Job became quieter, as a deeper yet not fully clear solution began to form involving his more complete trust in God.

Elihu, after a drawn-out introduction, indicted the three friends for their failure of argument, but even more severely attacked Job for his self-justification. Humans must not vainly trust their own judgments but must fear God.

God interjected in 38:1-42:6. He reviewed his power in nature. Job responded penitently while jettisoning dependence upon human reasoning, and found rest for his soul in his experience of God. In a new, fresh way Job recognized God's power in nature and human frailty, and God's wisdom in all his purposes and human ignorance.

At issue is how to reconcile the facts that God is great, just and good, and at the same time sends, or allows, trouble to beset his people as chastisement, purification, or warning?

Elihu's chief contribution was to move the argument away from calamity as direct retributive judgment to calamity as divine discipline.

## **Lessons from Job**

### **1. The Wisdom Literature**

The Wise represented the foremost learning of the time. These were men of the economic, social and intellectual elite who grappled not only with the problems of

life, but also with creating a theistic world-view. Job is a deeply theological and philosophical treatise.

Ecclesiastes represents the pessimism of the person who has lost faith and for whom all the grandeur of the world and the luxury of wealth have soured.

Proverbs, eulogizes the good life where wisdom and prudence are suitably rewarded with happiness, success and prosperity.

Job fits neither of these two categories. What about the man who fears God and serves him, and who nevertheless experiences calamity?

For this man the true, yet almost cliché-like propositions of the orthodox theologians seem grotesquely irrelevant because they cannot be stretched over the relevant facts and issues.

Job is therefore first an indictment of limited human knowledge and the consequent danger of the distortion of the truth about the relations between God and humanity.

## **2. The Tempter and Accuser**

Satan, the Hebrew name for the evil one, means "adversary." In Job he is seen opposing Job and, following divine permission, of taking from him his wealth, children and health.

In the Hebrew Bible, Satan consistently opposes God and works against the best interests of human beings. We do not know in what sense Satan was among the sons of God (heavenly hosts) but clearly he is the adversary (note 1 Chron. 21:1; Zech. 3:1).

In the New Testament he is called Satan, the Devil or Beelzebub. He tempted Christ (Mt.4; Heb. 4:15) and opposes God's children. Our Lord came to destroy him and his power over humanity (1 John 3:8; Heb. 2:14). Throughout Scripture he is represented as a personal being. Job's sufferings should not detach from Job faith in God's love, goodness and support in his extremity or in God's ultimate purposes. More was involved in Job's calamities than the evidently superficial conclusions of the Wise could show.

## **3. The Theological Problems**

The story of Job and the dialogue it records is a warning against too hasty and sweeping a conclusion being drawn by us about human suffering. In this respect an exact parallel in the New Testament is the story of the man born blind from birth and the disciples' hasty conclusions (John 9:1-3), which drew from our Lord strictures no less severe than those spoken by God in Job.

The problem of human calamity and of justifying the ways of God with men is many-sided. This variety is reflected in many parts of the story.

But Job seemed more concerned about his moral dilemma than about his severe pain of body and sorrow of soul. He was being treated as a moral outcast for, they said, he must be guilty of some heinous sin (public or private) for such evil to fall upon him. If, as the Wise taught, God prospered the prudent and judged the foolish and sinful, then that logic didn't fit the facts of his case. Their theology was not altogether wrong; it just didn't (and couldn't) take account of all the relevant data or issues entailed.

With our finite knowledge we cannot always, or often, reduce the problem of suffering into one homogeneous pattern. The scope of human knowledge is inadequate. There was more to it which both they and Job could not know (for example, Satan's allegations and accusations). And this does not in the least cancel out the reality that calamity might be due to sin, or that it may be didactic, or purging, or much more.

Their carefully worked out arguments led to one conclusion, that suffering is due to personal sinfulness. Elihu saw more in suffering than that. But none of them, Job included, knew the whole truth. They were wrong, but neither was Job right.

Basically, the book rejects the simple equation of goodness with prosperity and of suffering with personal sinfulness. This is a severe indictment of modern evangelical *prosperity as blessing ... because I'm worth it* ideology.

The heat of the controversy only deepened Job's despair and heightened his sense of disillusionment with his friends. But gradually a new awareness of God emerged until by the time God intervened, Job's outlook was transformed from rebellion to submission, from despair to faith, and from spiritual enervation to spiritual courage:

If there is a solution to the problem of Job, it is summarized, I believe, in 42:5-6:

*I had heard of thee by the hearing of the ear;  
But now my eye sees thee;*

*therefore, I despise myself,  
and repent in dust and ashes.*

What this means fully we cannot know, but it marks the difference between listening to brilliant argument about God and hearing the very voice of God to one's own soul. This is the difference between knowing only about God and knowing God himself. Once there, Job was convinced that the whole creation reflects the perfect wisdom, infinite majesty and righteous judgments of God. Job's penitence,



submission, and ultimate rest in the Lord is the key, I believe, to the issue raised in the book. The solution is God himself and an attitude to Him which carries with it an answer more complete than the apologetically framed one. Job's greatest sufferings were inward. Only by the direct, personal experience of God was his inner life put together after being torn into pieces.

In this is our Lord the supreme example? He absorbed suffering into himself, refused to allow it to corrupt him, but rather used it to feed the fire of his love for the Father and for the sinful men he came to redeem (Heb. 2:10).

#### **4. Our Great Vindicator (19:25)**

The wonderful climax of the vision of the Redeemer or Vindicator in Job is known to most Christians, including through the immortal musical rendition of it by Handel in *The Messiah*.

Here Christians have consistently seen Christ mirrored as our Intercessor and Vindicator (Heb. 7:25). Moffatt translates it *one to champion me*. One is reminded of the kinsman-redeemer in the book of Ruth. Job saw God as his Redeemer or Vindicator which, in the New Testament, parallels the justifying work of God as expounded by the apostle Paul in Romans ch. 3.

In this connection there are similarities, which cannot be pressed too far, between Job's sufferings and the vicarious sufferings of Is.53 which were fulfilled in Jesus Christ (compare Is.53:5 with Job 16:10).

### **Concluding Summary**

Important lessons may be drawn from the book of Job which profoundly affect our understanding of God and of human suffering.

The view of God held by Job's friends, as their argument epitomized the traditional theology of the time, was too small. Too small, that is, not only in respect of God, but also in respect of humanity's place as moral beings within the evil-infected creation.

The inner agony and physical sufferings of humans are often the point of questions raised in the Scriptures. David uttered his complaint in Psalm 55, and the writer of Psalm 73 gave classical expression to this moral and spiritual dilemma. Later, Jeremiah expressed the same agony of soul (Jer. 12:1). In his own way Voltaire in *Candide* satirized the too glib correlation of catastrophe with fate and divine justice in the simplistic 18th century theology of his time. Most of all, our Lord's cry of agony from the Cross, *My God, My God, Why?* accentuates the reality of the righteous one suffering. Our Lord did not suffer because He was a sinner, but vicariously. It is to that goal that the Biblical revelation gradually leads us, and Job is a vital link in this chain of revelation.

In our suffering we do not need the self-righteous strictures of a theology that superficially equates all suffering with divine punitive activity. Our Lord rebuked the disciples for that erroneous view in John 9. Where then is the comfort of God for us in our extremity, and where the comfort of our fellows? The arguments of the sages stripped Job of all possibility of divine succor, which left him spiritually in an intolerable position.

The book of Job shows, on the one side, the inadequacy of a traditional view of God and of suffering. But on another side, it points the way to the role of suffering in redemption.

The movement in Scripture historically, including Job, is three-fold.

*First*, while some suffering is due to personal sin, Job's friends must learn what Job was struggling with in his heart, namely, that not all sufferers are suffering because of specific sins.

*Second*, Job's experience showed that some sufferers are saints. Consider the hymn writer Fanny Crosby and others whom we know who suffer from painful malady and incurable disease, but whose lives are radiant with the presence of God.

*Third*, there follows in the course of revelation history the linking of this in Scripture with vicarious suffering which is redemptive. Thus the Suffering Servant of Isaiah 53:5 suffers for sin, but the sin is not his own. He suffers for others. We have arrived in the purpose of God to the grand conclusion: that this Sufferer is Savior, and that we are called upon to suffer redemptively *as He did* (Rom. 12:1; 1 Peter 2:24-25; 4:12-19). A key lesson, if not the key one, of Job is summarized in the last of these verses, by the apostle Peter: *Wherefore let them that suffer according to the will of God commit the keeping of their souls to him in well doing, as unto a faithful creator* We absorb evil and suffering redemptively, to stay their power to corrupt and destroy and, instead, spread God's goodness and love around us.

## NOTES ON THE PSALMS

Samuel J. Mikolaski

The Psalms have been a rich spiritual storehouse for God's people during Old Testament and New Testament times and throughout the history of the Church. Comfort, spiritual strength and instruction have been sought and found in them.

Their elegant lines prompted their use in many forms of Christian worship and also inspired the creation of hymns and liturgy. Their theological impact upon the life of the church has been profound, including the transformation of Luther's views while he was a young medieval Roman Catholic scholar.

For centuries the Psalms were the hymnary of the Christian Church. The metrical version of the Psalms of the Scottish Presbyterians (known as The Psalter) is part of this rich heritage. Among them is the beautiful metrical version of Psalm 23, especially when sung to the tune Crimond, which is still part of many modern hymn books.

### Compilation of the Psalms

Two-thirds of the Psalms have names attributing authorship. One is attributed to Moses (90). Seventy-three are attributed to David (chiefly in Books I and II). Two are ascribed to Solomon (72, 127), twelve to Asaph (50, 73-83), eleven to the sons of Korah (42-49, 84-85, 87), one to Heman the Ezrahite (88), and one to Ethan the Ezrahite (89). The remainder are anonymous.

The questions associated with the authorship of the Psalms are impossible to solve. It is reasonable to accept that the superscriptions (which mean *of* or *belonging to* suggest authorship). Other ascriptions such as *for the chief Musician* (note Psalm 4; which occurs 45 times), the *songs of ascent* (120-134) and the Praise (or Hallelujah) Psalms (111-113, 116-118, 135-136, 146-150) seem to suggest additional collections of Psalms.

We do not know how the present form of the Psalter developed. It is likely to have occurred gradually as various collections were joined together, probably chiefly during the three centuries after the time of David. We should not lose sight of the fact that a great deal of the process may have occurred while the Jews were dispersed in the Empire and then after the second Temple. The Psalms were a powerful force in Jewish life to preserve the knowledge and worship of God.

The literary tradition which gave birth to the Psalter appears to have been very old in Israel, and is tied also to the work of the prophets.

Early analogous forms of religious poetry are: *Song of the Well* (Nu. 21:17-18), the *Song of Deborah and Barak* (Judges 5), the *Oracles of Balaam* (Nu. 24), the *Song of Moses* (Ex. 15), the *Song of Hannah* (1 Sam. 2:1-10), and parts of the

prophetic writing (Hosea 6:1-3; Jer. 15:7-9; Is. 38:10-20). Post-exilic examples of psalm-like literature in books other than the Psalms are: Ezra 9:6-15, Neh. 9: 6-38. *The Magnificat* of Mary (Lu. 1:46-55), the *Praise of God* by Zechariah (Lu. 1:68-79) and the *Benediction of Simeon* (Lu. 2:29-35) are New Testament examples of psalmic poetry which derive from the Old Testament tradition.

### **David the Psalmist**

It appears that psalmody preceded the times of David. Similar religious poetry in the form of hymns have been found in Egypt and Babylonia as early as the 15th century B. C.

Recent data have opened the way in scholarly circles toward rehabilitating David as the "sweet singer" of Israel, following several decades when some tended to ascribe the Davidic parts of the Psalter to a later period. This was done chiefly on the premise that David was a man of war, not of poetry. But he was evidently a many-sided man, of deep feeling, and well-suited to be a poet. He was a singer (1 Sam. 16:15-23) of considerable reputation. His lament over the death of Jonathan and Saul is in poetic form (2 Sam. 1:19-27), as is the lament over Abner (2 Sam. 3:33-34).

The monarchy under David was not only an important period of military and political consolidation of the Israelite lands, but also of a burgeoning economy and great expansion of the arts, including music, literature, and liturgy. It was a period of national revival and awakening not unlike the Elizabethan age in England. The development of the lyric tradition in the Psalms is consistent with the developing national consciousness and the diversification of worship forms.

The ascriptions to the Psalms are not a guarantee to their authorship, but neither can we ignore this important data. In most cases these seem to be a satisfactory interpretation of authorship. But the development of the Psalter was slow, probably combining several groups or collections of Psalms.

### **The Five Books**

The 150 Psalms of the biblical collection are divided into five books (see the RV or the RSV), which are thought by some to consciously parallel the five books of the Law of Moses. However, it is not known that this parallel had any liturgical significance or use.

The Five Books are:

Book 1: 1-41.

Book II: 42-72.

Book III: 73-89.

Book IV: 90-106.

Book V: 107-150.

Each division ends with a beautiful benediction. Psalm 1 appropriately introduces the entire collection, and just as appropriately Psalm 150 concludes it with a song of praise to God.

### **Titles in the Psalms**

In Hebrew the title of the Psalms is *Songs of Praise*. Many attempts have been made to classify the terms in the headings and within the text of the Psalms. The use and meaning of many of these is not now fully known. Some refer to types of lyric or music. Others seem to refer to their style of direction for public use, or to their purpose. A few of these are:

*Alamoth* (Ps. 46) - perhaps designates that the psalm was sung by female voices.

*Sheminith* (Ps. 6,12, etc.) - perhaps an eight-stringed instrument or eight-part arrangement, or a male choir in contrast to *Alamoth*.

*Maschil* (Ps. 32, etc.) - a contemplative or instructive poem conveying theological truth.

*Michtham* (Ps. 16, 56-60) - golden, highly valued or carefully composed psalm.

*Mizmor* (Ps. 3, etc.) - a psalm

*Sir* (Ps. 30, etc.) - a song

*Shiggaeon* (Ps. 7) - a dirge

*Hazkir* (Ps. 28,70) - "to commemorate," e.g., a confession of sin by the worshipper or for him or her by the priest.

*Sir Hammalot* (Ps. 120-134) - a song of ascents, sung by pilgrims in procession behind the Ark, or on the road up to Jerusalem and the Temple.

*Gittith* (Ps. 8, 81, 84) - a Philistine musical instrument, or a mark signifying joyful music at grape-harvest.

*Neginoth* (Ps. 4) - on stringed instruments (cf. 1 Sam. 16:16). *Nehiloth* (Ps. 5) - on wind instruments, such as a flute.

*Chief Musician* (Ps. 8, etc.) - to the leader of choirs. *Jeduthun* may be the name of such a leader (Ps. 39).

*Selah* (Ps. 46:3, 7, 11) - occurs 71 times in 39 Psalms and probably means a pause (to contemplate), or lift up (i.e. raising the voice or music for emphasis). The true

meaning is unknown.

### **Hebrew Parallelism**

Hebrew poetry differs from much of our western poetry in that unlike the metre which we use commonly, Hebrew poetry has a certain rhythm of ideas.

This is expressed commonly in parallel form, where one line corresponds in thought to the preceding line. The parallelism may be synonymous or antithetical, or it may move conceptually along a line or up a scale, e.g. Ps. 1:1.

Many familiar examples can be cited:

Ps. 19:1

*The heavens declare the glory of God;  
And the firmament showeth His handiwork.*

Ps. 2:1

*Why do the heathen rage,  
And the people imagine a vain thing?*

Ps. 2:4

*He who sits in heaven shall laugh,  
The Lord shall have them in derision.*

### **Interpretation of the Psalms**

Various attempts have been made to classify the psalms. Classification significantly affects interpretation.

Classification based on the premise that the psalms were of chiefly liturgical use in public (Temple) worship sees them chiefly as hymns and prayers, whether of petition, lament, thanksgiving, or praise.

Subject-matter is another basis of classification, including worship, adoration of God, penitence, God's kingdom, meditation.

It would appear that many of the psalms have a specific historical situation in view, but these are not often known to us.

One useful classification is five-fold:

1. Hymns of praise to God and praise of his works in creation (e.g. Ps. 19).
2. National hymns used in times of crisis, such as war (e.g. Ps. 44).
3. Royal psalms, for use during royal worship in the Temple (e.g. Ps. 2, 20).
4. Individual hymns of lament or grief (e.g. Ps. 22).
5. Songs of thanksgiving, such as thanksgiving for deliverance, (e.g. Ps. 32).

## **The Teaching of the Psalms**

The Psalms are a rich treasury of prayer, confession, praise and instruction. They are for both private and public use.

In the Psalms the inner spiritual experiences of mankind stand out vividly, whether despair, joy, sorrow, penitence, hope, forgiveness, intercession. Most of all we see here the human soul seeking God and being met by him. Following deep consciousness of sin and confession of it, there comes sweet personal communion with God. This is the key-feature of the Psalms and the power of their continuing appeal to mankind.

### **1. The Nature, Works and Praise of God**

God, the Creator and Provider, is praised for his greatness, power, wisdom, and goodness. God is worshipped and acknowledged to be God. cf. Ps.8, 19, 100.

God in the Psalms is everywhere personal, glorious, and infinite. He cannot be likened to anything in the world. He is worthy of adoration and praise, Ps. 14, 50, 89, 92.

God is sovereign in the world, in the counsels of the nations and in the affairs of mankind, Ps. 2, 33.

God is worthy of our faith and trust. The soul who rests in the Lord will not be confounded, but will find strength, and courage, and will triumph with the Lord as his or her keeper, Ps. 46, 84, 91, 103.

### **2. The Man or Woman of God in Adversity**

Passages like Psalm 46 convey the soul's confidence in God in times of adversity. While this psalm likely reflects a national crisis, many passages refer to personal adversity and inner crisis.

Joy in the God who is gracious and who helps us in contrast to our fellows who are often a failing crutch, is an important theme (Ps. 146). Commitment of our way to the Lord when evil-doers cause us trouble will bring inner peace through the confidence that God overrules in human affairs (Ps. 37). *I sought the Lord, and He answered me, and delivered me from all my fears* (Ps.34: 4) epitomizes this faith. Passages like Psalm 90 (note also 103, 91) beautifully speak about God's glory and about God the helper and refuge of His people.

### **3. The Life in God**

The basis of the spiritual life in the Psalms, as in all of Scripture, is the life in

God. In the Psalms knowing about God and worshipping God are not simply ritual affirmation of the divine existence, but personal meeting of the soul with God.

Life in God means that one is in daily communion with Him through prayer and that one fosters a set of mind which turns to him. The whole of life is seen in relation to the providence of God. What we do each day has meaning and purpose because we are co-workers with the Lord.

The life in God is the best cure for worry (Ps. 55). In seasons of discouragement and depression we find strength in the Lord (Ps.42-43). When debilitating fear and anxiety overtake us, we find succor in Him (Ps. 27).

The most beautiful expression of the life of faith is the Heavenly Pastoral, Psalm 23.

#### **4. Wrestling with Doubts**

These arise from persecution and slander which cause feelings of suspense and anxiety (Ps.31). Doubts may arise at times of inner despair (Ps. 130), deadly peril (Ps. 116), weakness of body and loneliness (Ps.88), or disaster and defeat (Ps.60, 74, 79, 89). The *out of the depths* cry is common in the Psalms as the writer seeks consolation in renewal of the sense of God's presence in times of deep depression.

Important in this connection is wrestling with the problem of good and evil. Encouragement to faith despite the workers of evil because the Lord vindicates his own is a major theme (Ps.37). In Psalm 73 the psalmist struggles with the apparent success and prosperity of the wicked while the righteous suffer trouble. He achieves new understanding and renewal of faith in the house of God.

In the Psalms only despair is inconsistent with faith. Doubt often is a stepping-stone to new, enlarged vistas of spiritual understanding and communion with God.

#### **5. Judgment, Confession and Forgiveness**

Psalms 32 and 51 are two of the best known passages on this subject. While at times the judgments of God come upon men and women individually and nationally (Ps. 78, 95, 106) there is also the bitterness of spirit when the psalmist senses himself estranged from God due to sin.

The descriptions of inner feelings due to guilt, especially in Psalms 32 and 51 are penetrating and apt.

Following repentance, there is the joy of forgiveness and release, and restoration to personal fellowship with God.



This aspect of the message of the Psalms is especially important for modern humanity. Attempts have been made to explain away sin and to cure guilt feelings by words. Forgiveness is essential to human spiritual well-being, else we cannot be at peace with ourselves, our fellow human beings or God. God's love and forgiving grace are freely given to whoever sincerely seeks it. Spiritual realities can be dealt with only in spiritual ways.

## 6. The Messianic Psalms

The Psalms were dear to our Lord and are often cited in the New Testament. Our Lord's last words on the Cross came from Ps.31:5, and Ps.22:1 contains the phrase which he spoke on the Cross, *My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?*

Some of the many direct quotations from the Psalms in the New Testament are:

Ps. 2:7 (Acts 13:33, Heb. 1:5, Heb.5:5).

Ps. 8:2 (Mt.21:16).

Ps. 8:4-5 (Heb.2:6-7).

Ps. 22:7, 8, 18 (Mt .27:35, 39-48).

Ps.31:5 (Lk.23:46).

Ps. 32:1-2 (Rom.4:6-8).

Ps. 40:6 (Heb.10:5).

Ps. 45:6 (Heb.1:8-9).

Ps. 110:1 (Mt.22:44, Acts 2:34, Heb.1:13).

The Messianic hope centered upon the throne of David and the Kingdom of Messiah who was to come from the line of David. When our Lord taught them to do so, the first Christians began to read the Old Testament in a new way when their eyes were opened to see him as the Christ in its pages (Lu.24:25-27, 44-47).

Messiah, whom the disbelieving nations will be unable to dislodge, is to come as King in the New Age (Ps. 2). The Kingdom of Messiah is God's kingdom on earth in which Messiah will reign (Ps.47, 67, 96-100). He is the glorious King whose dominion will never cease (Ps.72, 110). He is the universal monarch.

But in the Psalms, as in Isaiah and Job, Messiah has another role which only the Cross and Resurrection fully disclosed to men's minds. Messiah is the Suffering Redeemer (Ps.22, 31, 49).

That Christ was to be Victor is a dominant theme of Old Testament prophecy, but that he would triumph through the passion of the Cross was not perceived until our Lord Himself unfolded this truth to his disciples.

## 7. God's Word as Our Treasure

God's Word is treasured for all of life in the Psalms. It is like a lamp to our feet and a light to our pathway in the dark (Ps. 119:105).

The prudent person not only hears but also gladly obeys the word of God. A principle for life is willingness to put one's life, ideas, motives and ambitions under God's word.

Psalms 119 especially is devoted to the praise of God's Word (Law). As the longest Psalm and chapter in the Bible, it is composed of as many eight-stanza segments as there are letters in the Hebrew alphabet. Thus an attempt was made to encompass all of the alphabetical elements of language in praise of God's Law.

## **8. The Imprecatory Psalms**

The imprecatory Psalms, which appear to be prayers for vengeance and for destruction to come upon enemies have been a stumbling-block to many. Note especially Ps.35:1-8; 55:15; 58:6; 59; 69; 109; 137.

It should be born in mind, first, that the Psalmist often recalls the goodness and severity of God to His own (Ps. 4, 5, 78, 81) and that the principles of divine righteousness and judgment apply equally to God's enemies. When we pray for justice in the world, are we ready to accept the judgments of God against evil? There are implications to judgment which are not immediately apparent to us when we pray, or which we prefer to leave unspoken.

It is very difficult to put oneself in the position of those who suffer and who look for vindication and vengeance. I have stood at Auschwitz in southern Poland and in the former Yugoslavia where thousands of men, women and children were brutally massacred during World War II and have sensed not only my own moral abhorrence of what was before me, but also the audible grinding of teeth of local men who showed me those sites, years after the events. I can never fully enter into their feelings, but I appreciate their demand for justice. It seems to me that in the imprecatory passages of some Psalms the feelings are more than personal hatred. I have not been thrown into circumstances where my soul would cry out for vengeance without personal hatred, but I know that such can be the spiritual experience of others in the face of horrors perpetuated by evil men and women.

A further point concerns the fact that these passages evidently are prayers, not action formulae or records of events. They reflect the deep inner feelings of the writer and perhaps of some in his audience. They may well serve as a spiritual catharsis where such feelings are spoken and thereby purged rather than acted upon. Spoken as prayers it is clear that the issue is left to God, which is far better than acts of passion by men or women. I do not wish to undercut the reality of judgment against evil and evil men and women in Scripture, but the Judge is God not ourselves. At times of our own deep passion we may turn to God in helpless prayer to express our feelings to him, but leave the issue in his hands. Sometimes,

for example, one might write a heated letter, then destroy it, and spiritually have won a victory while leaving the issue to God.

### **9. Confidence for the Future**

Faith in God generates cosmic hope in the spiritual experience of believers. That is, belief that ultimately the destiny of human beings and nations is in God's hands, that therefore our day to day experience can be lived in hope, and that our work and aspirations will not simply fall into the abyss of an expiring universe.

Note passages such as: Ps. 6, 16, 17, 30, 39, 49, 73, 88, 15.

God in the midst of His people is not only their defense but their crown. To him all people of the earth may come for spiritual sustenance, and before him all nations and men and women must stand for righteous judgment (Ps. 33, 77, 87, 89).

There are many other themes worthy of special study in the Psalms including reward and punishment, the basis and principles of the ethical life, the attributes of God, the spiritual nature of human beings, the work of the Spirit of God in creation and in sustaining the natural order, and the relation of God to Israel and the nations. But this brief list will serve as an introduction.

## **NOTES ON PROVERBS**

Samuel J. Mikolaski

Traditionally, the OT was divided into three parts, which division is reflected in Lu.24:44: the law of Moses, the Prophets, and the Psalms (or writings).

The writings are comprised of Job, Psalms and Proverbs, and also the five Scrolls, i.e., Song of Solomon, Ruth, Lamentations, Ecclesiastes and Esther.

The writings are books of poetry and wisdom, which were for centuries the worship and practical manuals of the Hebrew people.

Proverbs is a manual for living. It does not outline the terms of the Covenant of God with his people, but how that faith shapes the life of his people. It honors the life of wisdom, and deprecates the life of folly. The first six verses of chapter one state the nature and purpose of the book.

### **The Proverb**

One modern definition of a proverb is: a concise sentence, which is held to express some truth ascertained by experience or observation and familiar to all (Oxford Dictionary).

The Hebrew proverb is more like a parable, allegory, or comparison. A comparison is often drawn by means of simile or analogy, or a contrast is drawn, between the temporal and the eternal worlds, so as to communicate moral and spiritual truth.

### **The Book of Proverbs**

The Book of Proverbs is more than an anthology of common sayings. These are sayings to live by, written or spoken by men and women who sought the way of the Lord. They are insights of men who knew God and applied His revelation to the whole of life. In Proverbs the experiences of life are made object-lessons (note Jer. 18:18).

The proverbs parallel collections similar in thought and poetic form in the ancient world from at least as early as the 14th century B.C. But there is a great difference between the non-biblical and the biblical proverbs, especially as to basic philosophy of life. In the Bible the stress falls upon wisdom as the life obedient to God who is known and whose ways are followed.

No dating of the collections is possible, nor need we claim that the several attributions indicate complete authorship.

The book is not a collection of individual proverbs, but of groupings or collections of proverbs. The attributions relate to collections, which in part may

indicate authorship and in part the tasks of editing or collecting. Ascriptions occur at 1:1, 10:1, 22:17, 24:23, 25:1 and in the headings of Chapters 30 and 31. It is reasonable to think that some of the writing and compiling occurred during the Solomonic era, but that the book was not completed until post-exilic times.

### **Outline of the Book of Proverbs**

The importance of true wisdom, ch. 1-9.  
 The proverbs of Solomon, ch. 10-22: 16.  
 The words of the wise, 22:17-ch.24.  
 The collection by the men of Hezekiah, ch.25-29.  
 The proverbs of Agur, ch. 30.  
 The proverbs of Lemuel; the virtuous woman, ch. 31.

### **Practical Wisdom**

The author states his purpose: to give knowledge and discretion (1: 4). This is a guide for ethical living.

These teachings are based not just on folklore or common sayings, but upon the *fear of the Lord* being put first in life (1:7; 14:27; 23:17). Thus the good and wise man or woman depends upon the Lord for knowledge and courage to order his or her ways.

The proverbs do not claim to be encyclopedic, but to lay down basic principles to guide the prudent person in those cases where exceptions must be made. The basis of action is deeply religious with a powerful sense of dependence upon the all-wise God.

There is an important connection between the Proverbs and the biographies which abound in the canon of Scripture. The spiritual successes and failures of biblical characters aptly illustrate the many spiritual principles of the Proverbs.

### **Proverbs in the New Testament**

Our Lord and the Apostles frequently made use of the Proverbs, especially in the expanded parabolic form which our Lord frequently employs.

To be comprehended, the Proverbs must be carefully studied and patiently pondered. Some of our Lord's parables appeared to be obscure, but they throw a bright light upon the human spiritual condition. So also with the Proverbs of the Old Testament.

Allusions in the NT to the Proverbs are frequent. Some of the more important quotations and allusions are:

Prov. 3:1-4; Lu. 2:52  
 Prov. 12:7; Mt. 7:24-27  
 Prov. 25:6-7; Lu. 14:7-11  
 Prov. 14:11; Lu. 6:48  
 Prov. 27:1; James 4:13-14  
 Prov. 30:4; John 3:13  
 Prov. 3:7; Rom. 12:16  
 Prov. 3:11-12; Heb. 12:5-6  
 Prov. 3:34; James 4:6; 1 Peter 5:5  
 Prov. 4:26-27; Heb. 12:13  
 Prov. 10:12; James 5:20; 1 Peter 4:8  
 Prov. 15:21-22; Rom. 12:20  
 Prov. 26:11; 2 Peter 2:22  
 Prov. 24:21; 1 Peter 2:17  
 Prov. 16:7; 1 Peter 3:13  
 Prov. 11:31; 1 Peter 4:18

Paul's reference to Christ as the power and wisdom of God (I Cor. 1:24, 30) is taken by many to refer to wisdom personified in Proverbs 8 (note Col. 1:15-17, 28). Christ is pattern and wisdom to the Christian who lives the life of faith based not just upon pure reason or the practical commonplaces of human love, but upon the *mind of Christ* (I Cor. 2:16). In 1 Cor. 1-2 Paul does not depreciate reason, but certain kinds of reasoning. In Christ and his Cross are the true wisdom and power of God, he declares.

## **The Collections of Proverbs**

### **1. The Importance of True Wisdom, ch. 1-9**

The author of this striking introductory section is unknown, and many feel that these proverbs are later than other sections of the book.

The statement of purpose (1:1-6) is followed throughout the remainder of the section by an extended essay in praise of wisdom. These chapters may be regarded as the extension of a single proverb, namely, the surpassing worth of wisdom and the tragedy of folly. The section, especially ch. 8, is held by Christians to be fulfilled in Christ, who is the wisdom of God (note Prov. 8:22-31 with John 1:1-5, 17:5 and Col. 1:15-17).

The life of wisdom in contrast to the life of folly recurs throughout the section and is presented by means of startling contrasts. Scores of proverbs present the truth in many different ways.

The life of wisdom brings peace, happiness, wealth, honor, long life, guidance and a shield from evil; in short, the good life (3:13-18; 4:1-13; 6:20-23, 8:32-36).

Specific attention is given by the writer to certain evils and temptations. Noteworthy among these is moral impurity (2:16-19; 5:3-14; 6:23-35; ch. 7; 9:13-18). Other evils and follies which are warned against include: violence, 1:10-19; indiscretion, 2:11-13; evil motives, 2:22,3:30; failure to recognize the divine providential judgments, 3:25-26; dishonesty and duplicity, 3:27-29, 6:12-15; envying the wicked who may prosper temporarily, 3:31-35; a rash pledge or covenant, 6:1-5; laziness, 6:6-11; deviousness and insincerity, 6:12-15.

These injunctions rest upon a profound apprehension of the soul's dependence upon God, including his guidance and chastisements (3:5-12).

One writer has seen in these chapters thirteen lessons on wisdom (1:8-33; 2:1-22; 3:1-10; 3:11-20; 3:21-35; 4:1-9; 4:10-19; 4:20-27; 5:1-23; 6:1-19; 6:20: 35; 7:1-27; 8:1-36). In any case, chapter 9 concludes the section by presenting wisdom (9:1-12) and folly (9:13-18) as each presenting a feast and inviting guests to it.

## **2. The Proverbs of Solomon, ch. 10-22:16.**

From OT times to the present Solomon, as a wise man, has epitomized for biblical readers the wisdom of the proverbs; but, as well, at the close of his life the folly which the wisdom of his earlier years had proscribed.

This section is probably the earliest in the book. It reflects Solomon's fame at the peak of his career. His political, economic and military power threw him into contact with the empires of Egypt, Africa, and the far east, and allowed him opportunity for national cultural pursuits in architecture, music, and letters .

Early in his career, Solomon had humbly asked for wisdom, which God granted. Combined with a fervent love for the Lord, Solomon became famous for prudent government, wise administration and beautiful public works (I Kings, ch.3: 4:29-34), though one may raise serious questions about the tax burden and forced labor exactions he laid on the people. Not the least was his fame as a composer and sage (4:32). His pre-eminence drew the Queen of Sheba to visit him (10:1-13).

Over 350 proverbs are contained in this section, but as most of them are individual themes it is not possible to group or classify them.

It has been pointed out that an antithetical structure characterizes most of the proverbs in ch. 10-15, turning on the word "but," for example: *He that refuseth instruction despiseth his own soul: but he that heareth reproof getteth understanding* (15:32). The proverbs in ch. 16-22 largely are expressed in parallel or synonymous ideas, for example: *Wine is a mocker, strong drink is raging: and whosoever is deceived thereby is not wise* (20:1).

## **3. The Words of the Wise (22:17-ch. 24)**

It would appear that the “sayings of the wise,” or of the sages, should be regarded as a separate collection. This section appears to contain a sub-section at its end (22:23-34)

In ancient times sages contributed their wisdom to human affairs of state, education, family and personal life. In Israel, like priests and prophets, the wise stood under the Word of the Lord and must speak in terms of revealed truth (note the sages who disputed with Job, and God’s argument with them all at the end). These sayings may well have been drawn from very ancient traditions.

The proverbs of this section concern a number of different topics, including:

- concern for the poor, 22:22-23:
- avoiding violence and violent men, 22:24-29.
- respect for the king, 23:1-2.
- covetousness, 23:4.
- discipline of children, 23:13-14.
- strong drink and gluttons, 23:20-21, 29-32.
- honouring father and mother, 23:22.
- immorality, 23:26-28.
- association with good not evil men, 24:1-2, 19-25.

Here, too, the element of faith in God and obedience to Him is emphasized, 22:19-23, 24:21.

#### **4. The Collection by the Men of Hezekiah, ch. 25-29.**

The activity of Hezekiah in respect of collecting and editing Solomonic proverbs seems confirmed to some extent by his interests in Israel’s liturgical and literary past, 2 Chron. 29:25-30.

They express thoughts much like other parts of Proverbs, though these are often in a different literary form, for example, the antithetic form is less frequently employed. Some have suggested that restlessness about the monarchy at the time of Hezekiah is apparent in this section: cf. 25:5; 28:2, 15-16; 29:2, 4, 26-27.

#### **5. The Proverbs of Agur, ch. 30.**

No record remains as to who Agur the son of Jakeh was, but his words are seen as an oracle as well as proverbial.

Verses 1-4 may be defiant in tone with an answer from the standpoint of faith in verses 5-6. Here the immutable Word of God is the shield against the darts of un-faith. A prayer follows in verses 7-9, which reflects the true humility that ought to characterize the prudent man. There follow a series of proverbs on sundry themes, including morality.

#### **6. The Proverbs of Lemuel, 31:1-9**



The king's mother is given as the source of these parables, though the identity of these persons is unknown. The themes in these warnings parallel those of the earlier chapters: avoidance of sexual immorality, intoxication, and to be concerned about the poor.

### **7. The Virtuous Woman, 31:10-31**

This section seems to be an independent unit. It is a cleverly constructed and carefully written acrostic poem in which each letter of the Hebrew alphabet is used to express a thought about a virtuous and industrious wife and mother. For her, as for others upon whom wisdom, prudence and industry are enjoined, the key virtue is piety: "a woman that feareth the Lord, she shall be praised," (31:30).

This section suits the purpose of the book and as well the issues of life in the home. Where God is feared, his word heard, and his commandments obeyed, his ways may more readily be accepted by the children of the home. These are the youth of a society.

### **Conclusion**

The Book of Proverbs contains a rich store of wisdom which must be pondered at length until its truths take hold of one's inner life.

Some of the more famous passages are:

1:7-9  
 1:20-23  
 3:1-5  
 3:5-12  
 4:23-27  
 6:6-11  
 6:16-19  
 ch. 8  
 9:10-11  
 11:22  
 15:1-5  
 17:1, 15, 22  
 20:1, 27  
 22:1-2, 6, 16, 22-23  
 26:1  
 27:1-2  
 29:1-2  
 30:18-19  
 31:10-31

## **NOTES ON ECCLESIASTES**

Samuel J. Mikolaski

Few Bible readers read the Book of Ecclesiastes with pleasure. Its tone is sombre and it appears to exhibit total disenchantment with life. Some allege that major points in the book are out of harmony with other parts and with the broad teaching of Scripture because of their pessimism.

The aphoristic style of the writer adds to the difficulties of most readers, plus some obscure words and allusions which are difficult to interpret. Nevertheless the book has a powerful appeal to many though apparently more for the mood they feel it projects than understanding its message.

### **Authorship and Date**

Little agreement has been reached about the authorship and date of this book.

Some have held that the only possible person alluded to in 1:1 is Solomon, David's son; however, the passage implies but does not specifically say Solomon.

The language of Ecclesiastes is of a later period. Therefore some argue that the book, while not written by Solomon, is in the Solomonic tradition of wisdom literature and that it is a literary piece on a Solomonic aphorism, "Vanity of vanities, all is vanity," (1:2). Such a judgment, if made by Solomon, might derive from the later period of his life.

Some have dated the composition of the book in the period 444-328 B. C., which includes the times of Malachi. Most recent scholars date the book 280-200 B. C.

### **The Purpose of Ecclesiastes**

The famous king, Solomon, may be employed by the author as a paradigm on the human search for significance to life. The spiritual failure of Solomon toward the end of his career was well known. The style of the book suggests the use of Solomon, at times in the first person, and of the Counselor or Wise Man (who may be both spokesman and author) to articulate critical analysis of human existence, especially of the a-spiritual existentialist point of view.

The question remains, is there a positive spiritual deposit in the book, or is its emphasis essentially negative? This is the crux of the issue to many readers.

While the book does not lend itself to systematic analysis, a rough-hand outline may assist in showing that the book does have a positive spiritual end in view.

The writer speaks insistently from the standpoint of a secular person, one who has achieved the zenith of human wisdom, wealth and cultural pursuits. But even the highest that humans can achieve has no permanence or ultimate value. The writer

speaks from within the secular milieu and thus effectively to the secular milieu. The outline which follows shows that after each pessimistic review of human pursuits the writer briefly and almost unobtrusively turns the reader toward God as man's chief good and end.

### **Outline of Ecclesiastes**

Introduction and theme, 1:1-11  
(The inexorable wheel of futile existence.)

The Vanity and Meaninglessness of Life, 1:12-3:15.  
(Learn to recognize and to accept the providential dealings of God.)

The Oppressive and Irrational Elements of Existence, 3:16-ch. 6.  
(Listen to the inner voice of God and learn about inner spiritual resources.)

The Brevity and Uncertainty of Life, 7:1-9:10  
(Submit to the divine order and use life's powers wisely.)

The Folly of Inordinate Pride, 9:11-12:14  
(Learn to be humble and submit to God's laws for human life.)

### **Lessons from Ecclesiastes**

#### **1. Vanity Fair**

Questions about the unity of the book have at times concentrated upon alleged Epicurean passages which are held to be inconsistent with the remainder of the book and the Biblical revelation (note 2:24-26; 3:12-15, 19, 22). But the advocacy of pleasure and the earth-bound life are cited more to show their futility, rather than as the best ends in life.

John Bunyan's description of Vanity Fair in *Pilgrim's Progress* aptly parallels the mood of Ecclesiastes. The popular, utopian secularism of the natural man masks deep pessimism, even despair. The wisdom which finds the best life solely in pleasure, mirth, possessions, and earthly beauty is shown to be error, and its hopes for spiritual and intellectual satisfaction to be illusory. Apart from spiritual values and the knowledge of God, the highest things that humans can attain are deemed to lack ultimate significance. Note especially chapter 2.

#### **2. Existential Despair**

The mood of cosmic despair centers upon the secular humanity's stumbling over the terrible realities of evil in the world and death. These parallel the threat of non-being which characterizes the outlook of not a few moderns.

In the attempt to find a rationale for life in this universe, the non-theistic perspective cannot account for evil or interpret death. The Epicurean conclusion that death is nothing to us proves to be no comfort.

The reality of evil and death in the world is tied in the Scriptures to sin. The twin truths which form the basis for biblical hope and optimism are the righteous judgment of God against evil and evil-doers, and the promise of resurrection from the dead. (cf. 8:10-12).

The point of Ecclesiastes is that a universe in which evil and sin go finally unchecked and unjudged is mad. While we cannot fathom the meaning of all events that come our way, nor of the unsearchable ways of God, meaningful life depends upon confidence that God and the good must ultimately prevail. This is the cornerstone to the life of faith.

It is with this thought in view that the book ends (12:12-13). Existential despair follows from the secular viewpoint (2:12, 17). To accept each day as God's gift and to live humbly within each day as God's creature, cared for by him and morally responsible to him, is man's true outlook.

### **3. The Supra-natural**

The mystery of life centering in the inscrutable works of the Creator makes of humans more than consuming creatures (note 3:11). God has set eternity in the human heart so that we cannot be content with the purely material and mundane.

The world is God's. We are stewards not merely consumers or exploiters. The end of things is in God's hands, not humanity's (3:13-15; 8:6-8).

Our values must relate ultimately not merely to social and political mores or custom, but to the righteousness and goodness of God (3:17; 5:1-5; 12:13-14).

The created order is not an end in itself, but properly seen is a channel of God's self-revelation to humanity. As spiritual beings our true end is not hedonistic self-gratification but knowledge and service of the Most High God.

## NOTES ON THE SONG OF SOLOMON

Samuel J. Mikolaski

There has been considerable controversy from pre-Christian times to the present about the interpretation of this book, but its importance in Jewish religious life has never been in dispute.

The book was read publicly by the Jews five times each year at important festivals, including Passover. While there was some debate about its canonicity, its place in the Hebrew canon was not seriously threatened.

The Jewish Midrash concerning it declared, *Canticles is the most excellent of songs, dedicated to him who one day will cause the Holy Spirit to rest on us; it is that song in which God praises us and we him.*

### Authorship and Date

A widespread tradition attributes the book to Solomon. The Hebrew form of the title *Song of Songs* suggests this to be his finest composition. It is sometimes known as Canticles, i.e. songs or hymns.

The biblical texts on which Solomonic authorship is predicated (1:1, 5; 3:7, 9, 11; 8:11) may, however, mean for Solomon. One interesting theory is that it was written by a prophet during Solomon's lifetime and presented to him in an attempt to call him back to a purer life. Some Jews believed that he wrote the Song in his early youth, Proverbs in middle life, and Ecclesiastes in old age.

The well-marked sections, recurrent phrases and language common to that of Proverbs leads some to date it close to or within the Solomonic period. Others feel that the book is probably a collection of idyllic love poems, though they need not be dated as late as the Greek period (300 B.C.). The traditional view is that it reflects Solomon's wooing and winning of the Shulamite maiden.

### Structure and Style

The material of Canticles is intensely personal. It is not properly dramatic poetry, as some have claimed, but alternates between pensive soliloquy and dialogue. The identity of the characters mentioned is not clear, nor is it easy to outline the plot. The personal and pastoral detail is vivid. There is almost total lack of direct religious themes in the book. To western ears the lyrics are erotic but they are not obscene. All these factors add to the problem of interpreting the book.

### Interpretation

Direct opposites have been advocated in interpreting the Canticles, from complete allegory to literal interpretation of the book. The following are the major interpretive methods which have been adopted:

## 1. Allegorical

Most Jewish, early Christian and medieval writers are against too literal an interpretation. The absence of religious themes has been eased by seeing in its idyllic picture of human love the love of God for his people.

A parallel is drawn by some Christian writers: just as Jehovah loved Israel and deigned to call Himself a bridegroom to his people (Is. 62:5; Jer. 2:2, 3:1; Ez. 16: 8,32; note Hosea 2:1,2:19), so Christ loved the Church as his bride (Eph. 5:22). Not a few modern Christian theologically conservative writers have accepted this method of interpretation.

Great names are attached to this method of interpreting Canticles including Origen, Gregory of Nyssa, Jerome, Augustine, and Bernard of Clairvaux (who wrote 86 sermons on the 1st two chapters alone). Sometimes the analogy drawn is between Christ and the Church, sometimes between Christ and the believer. Roman Catholic writers have found the Incarnation in Canticles, with the Virgin Mary being interpreted as the bride.

The allegorical method bristles with exegetical difficulties, notably its reluctance to give attention to the erotic detail of the book, and to consider only the broad theme of love and devotion. While Old Testament topics as Jonah and the serpent in the wilderness are interpreted typically in the New Testament there is no mention of Canticles in this way, which makes of excessive allegorizing a somewhat hazardous undertaking.

## 2. Dramatic

Some writers, including Milton, see the book as a dramatic poem. Origen held it to be a nuptial poem about Solomon and Pharaoh's daughter, though the true meaning is to be found in allegory, he said. Modern variants of this make the *dramatis personae* to be Solomon and the Shulamite, or Solomon, the Shulamite and the Shepherd. In the latter the story is made to read that Solomon could not win the humble maid from her Shepherd lover. But there is no dramatic climax in the book. Also, it is difficult to see why the traditional triangle should aim to put Solomon in a bad light.

A further difficulty is the scarcity of evidence for dramatic literature among the Semitic people, especially the Hebrews.

## 3. Nuptial Cycle Songs

On this view, Canticles is a collection of originally separate nuptial songs. There is strong evidence that in northern Syria weddings climaxed by a week-long dramatic celebration. The bride and groom were queen and king for the week. A

throne was set up on the threshing floor. They were attended by servants, and given homage by the guests. On the strength of this tradition, which persisted into modern times, Canticles is seen as an early grouping of songs for the wedding week, especially as some of these songs appear parallel to those in Canticles. But no Judean counterpart of these customs has been discovered. None of the details fit, and nowhere is the Shulamite called queen in the Canticles.

#### **4. Abishag**

David's Shunammite maiden (1 Kings 1:3) is alleged by some to have refused Solomon's advances. But this has not been demonstrated (cf. 1 Kings 2:19-25) and it depends on the uncertain connection between Shunammite and Shulamite.

#### **5. Pagan Liturgy**

The view has been advanced that the songs are originally part of the Hebrew New Year celebration when at Spring-time the marriage of the Sun God to the Mother Goddess was celebrated in dramatic form. The songs are thus alleged to be surviving liturgies of an ancient Palestinian fertility cult. However, it is hard to see how such songs could have entered the canon without extensive revision, for which there is no literary evidence. This view is highly conjectural without concrete evidence to support it. On the other hand, the antipathy of the Hebrew prophets and seers to the fertility cults is widely acknowledged.

#### **6. Literal-Moral**

I feel that a literal-moral interpretation of Canticles is most in keeping with its true purpose. While the charms of human love are not commonly feted among religious people in the West, this practice was common, and is still common, in parts of the East.

Some Christian writers in the past have felt that literal interpretation would undercut the claims for the Canticles' rightful place in the Canon of Scripture, but it is not apparent to me why this should necessarily be the case. Perhaps unnatural and unbiblical prudishness might be more of a reason for holding such a view.

Suppose Canticles is regarded as a series of songs eulogizing the delights of true wedded love. Should the book for this reason be excluded from the Canon? I think not, unless we are to accept again, as some claimed in the Middle Ages, that marriage is a fall from man's true innocent state! In that case other parts of the Bible would also have to be excluded.

Furthermore, the book stresses not only the bliss of love, but also truth in love. That is, the morality of true love, or the integrity of true commitment in marriage and the chaste expression of love.

This may now be more readily seen by Biblical readers in new and accurate translations of the OT, such as the RSV.

A key recurrent phrase, found in 2:7 and 3:5, should be translated as in the RSV:

*I adjure you, O daughters of Jerusalem,  
by the gazelles or hinds of the field,  
that you stir not up or awaken love until it please.*

The inference in the additional passage (8:4) is that women were employing tricks or artifices to stimulate love, *that you stir not up nor awaken love until it please*. Here truth in love, not artificiality, may be the point. This is particularly *appropos* to times like our own, where artificial inducements in sexual matters lead to the corruption of love and ultimately to frustration.

The passage 8:6-7 has been for me the key-feature of Canticles:

*Set me as a seal upon your heart,  
as a seal upon your arm;  
for love is strong as death,  
jealousy is cruel as the grave,  
Its flashes are flashes of fire,  
a most vehement flame.  
Many waters cannot quench love,  
neither can floods drown it.  
If a man offered for love  
all the wealth of his house,  
it would be utterly scorned.*

A number of important points emerge from this passage. Love is an inward reality of the heart, but also attested to outwardly, like a mark on one's arm (or a ring). True love is jealous love. Not crassly jealous, but the jealousy which rejects the "eternal triangle." It is like the jealous love of God, which brooks no competitor. Love never fails. It endures in the face of catastrophe and even death. But it cannot be bought, i.e. by wealth, gifts, favor. True love is of the heart where spirit blends with spirit.

Canticles may thus be seen as a series of songs on love which in their own way parallel the central truths of Paul's great chapter on love, I Cor. 13.



## NOTES ON ISAIAH

Samuel J. Mikolaski

### Authorship

This book contains the prophecies of Isaiah, the son of Amoz, who lived in Jerusalem and proclaimed his message to Judah and Jerusalem between 742 and 687 B.C. He began his ministry in the year King Uzziah died. He continued his prophetic ministry during the reigns of Jotham, Ahaz and Hezekiah. According to tradition he died during the persecution of Manasseh by being sawn in pieces. This may be the significance of Heb. 11: 37.

There is a distinct break at the end of Chapter 39. The differences between chapters 1-39 and chapters 40-66 may be accounted for in one of two ways.

First, the traditional view holds that the whole book was written by Isaiah or by people associated with him during his lifetime. On this view chapters 40-66 were written late in Isaiah's life.

Second, because of the Babylonian setting of the writing others hold that chapters 40-66 were composed after the time of Isaiah. On this view chapters 40-55 were written just before Cyrus overthrew Babylon and released subject nations in 539-538 B. C. Chapters 56-66 look for the new heavens and earth by the remnant that returned to Jerusalem. On this view the successors of Isaiah, who formed a school of the prophet, spoke in his name after his death.

On both views prediction is seen to be a fundamental element of the prophetic message. It would appear undeniable that later editing of the materials took place. Some feel that once the predictive element is allowed, there is no reason to deny the unity of the book. However, it is important not to demand an overburden of prediction simply in order to establish authenticity. The importance and authenticity of the book in relation to its times and to the times of the generation which followed and who may have edited and contributed to the material in the prophet's name seem to be firmly established on either view.

A rule of thumb has been suggested by students of prophecy: A prophecy is earlier than what it predicts, but contemporary with, or later than, what it presupposes.

### Background

Before Isaiah's time, the Kingdom of Solomon had been divided into two parts: The Northern Kingdom based at Samaria (10 tribes) and The Southern Kingdom based at Jerusalem (2 tribes). The Southern Kingdom was called Judah or Jerusalem, whereas the Northern Kingdom was called Samaria or Israel (though Israel was also the name of the entire Jewish nation).

The Southern Kingdom faced attack from Israel (Northern Kingdom) and Syria

(about 740 B.C.). Assyria defeated Syria and ultimately overthrew Israel (722 B.C.). Assyria now threatened Judah which looked to Egypt for help.

Later, the Babylonians overthrew the Assyrian Empire and destroyed the Southern Kingdom during several invasions between 605-587 B.C. The Babylonian Captivity followed.

Cyrus the Mede conquered Babylon and established the Medo-Persian Empire (539 B.C.). He allowed a remnant of the Jews to return to Jerusalem. These events are connected with the times of Haggai and Zechariah (see notes on Ezra, Nehemiah and Esther), who urged the restoration and completion of the temple (520 B. C.).

The book of Isaiah is concerned with these catastrophic events, during which global politics and the international political game as we know it first arose.

### **Characteristics**

1. Isaiah attacks injustice as the most characteristic element of Judah's uncertain spiritual relationship with God. He urges the people to trust in God and to show this trust in public and private life. Frequent themes of the book include: righteousness and justice in personal and national life, instruction about the true nature of God, blessing upon the faithful and judgment upon the faithless and impenitent.

2. Isaiah stresses the involvement of God in the course of human history. God's plan is seen to extend from creation to redemption, and ultimately to the new creation. God alone is creator and lord of all the earth.

3. Three major themes are suggested by editorship of the book: The prophetic section (ch.1-35); the history section (ch.36-39); the messianic section (ch. 40-66).

3. The most moving theme of the book is the chapter on the Suffering Servant. The tie between Isaiah 53 and Mark 10:45 and the Passion of Christ on the Cross comprises for many Christians the most important link among many which establishes for them the unity of the Bible. God's message is still that he through Jesus Christ the Suffering Servant incarnate has redeemed the world and calls humanity to his light.

4. A prime thrust of the book is the eschatological hope of the ultimate Messianic kingdom. Especially is this so in chapters 40-66. God's ultimate glorious manifestation will be accompanied by a new creation. History is understood to be a meaningful procession of events moving toward a divinely planned goal. History is not meaningless, as some Eastern religions hold; nor is history moving inexorably to a materialistic utopia, as the Marxists claim. The goal is a spiritual

one including divine righteousness and truth. The Lord will judge the whole earth, purge it and transform it: *Arise, shine; for your Light has come* (60:1).

## **Outline of Isaiah**

### **I. Prophetic Burden against Judah, and Promise (1:1-12:6)**

Isaiah indicts the people of Jerusalem and Judah for their sin and rebellion against God. If they repent, God will forgive them. If they remain obdurate, God will severely judge them. A glorious future in the last days is prophesied for Judah. The terrors of invasion by enemy forces are stated, following the parable of the vineyard. Isaiah outlines his own prophetic call and commission.

To Ahaz Isaiah prophesies the coming of Immanuel, and describes the Messianic Age. He speaks of the imminent Assyrian invasion, and the return of the remnant.

#### Introductory Prophecy

- Superscription (1:1)
- The Nation Rebuked (1:2-20)
- Concerning Jerusalem (1:21-31)

#### Judah's Social Sins and Judgment

- The Kingdom of God (2:1-5)
- The Day of the Lord (2:6-22)
- The Coming Chaos (3:1-15)
- The Women of Jerusalem (3:16-4:1)
- The Glory of Purified Jerusalem (4:2-6)
- The Vineyard of the Lord (5:1-7)
- Woes to Evildoers (5:8-23)
- "His hand is stretched out still" (5:24-30)
- The Call of the Prophet (6:1-13)

#### The Book of Immanuel

- The Syro-Ephraimitic Coalition (7:1-9)
- The Sign of Immanuel (7:10-25)
- The Failure of the Coalition (8:1-22)
- The Messianic King (9:1-7)
- The Judgment of Ephraim (9:8-10:4)
- "Assyria, the rod of my anger" (10:5-19)
- "the remnant of Israel" (10:20-34)
- Messiah and the Messianic Age (11:1-16)
- Songs of Deliverance and Thanksgiving (12:1-6)

### **II. Prophetic Burden against Foreign Nations (13:1 - 23:18)**

There follow oracles against the heathen nations. Jerusalem and her leaders are

also included.

The Fall of Babylon and Her King (13:1-14:23)  
 Palestinian Defeat of the Assyrian Forces (14:24-27)  
 The Burden of Philistia (14:28-32)  
 Lament Over Moab (15:1-16:14)  
 Burden of Damascus and Samaria (17:1-14)  
 Message to Ethiopian Ambassadors (18:1-7)  
 The Judgment and Blessing of Egypt (19:1-25)  
 Sign against Egypt (20:1-6)  
 "Fallen, Fallen is Babylon" (21:1-10)  
 Burden of the Arabian Tribes (21:11-17)  
 Burden of Heedless Jerusalem (22:1-14)  
 Prime Minister Shebna Condemned (22:15-25)  
 Burden of Tyre (23:1-18)

### **III. The Burden of Universal Judgment and Hope (24:1-27:13)**

Universal judgment is pronounced against world wide sin. God's judgments are praised for their righteousness, and his saving mercy is extolled and hoped for.

World Righteous Judgment (24:1-23)  
 God Praised for Judgment and Salvation (25:1-12)  
 Song of Deliverance and Rejoicing (26:1-21)  
 "In that day" (27:1-13)

### **IV. The Burden of Judah's Alliance (28:1-31:9)**

Isaiah prophesies that Judah's alliance with Egypt is a covenant of death. Egypt itself will fall. Jerusalem will fall, but will be restored. Salvation is of the Lord.

Woe to the Scoffers of Samaria (28:1-29)  
 The Doom of Jerusalem (29:1-8)  
 Sham Faith and Future Deliverance (29:9-24)  
 The Folly of Reliance on Egypt (30:1-17)  
 "The Lord waits to be gracious to you" (30:18-33)  
 "The Egyptians are men, not God" (31:1-9)

### **V. The King of Righteousness (32:1-35:10)**

Isaiah prophesies that after her calamity Jerusalem will be restored. Salvation is of the Lord. The destruction of foreign nations is prophesied and the restoration of Zion is promised. The land will flourish and the captives will return with joy.

Righteousness in the Land (32:1-20)  
 "Your eyes will see the King" (33:1-21)  
 The Day of Vengeance (34:1-17)  
 The Highway of the Lord (35:1-10)

### **VI. Historical Interlude: Isaiah and Hezekiah (36:1-39:8)**

Sennacherib besieges Jerusalem and ridicules the Lord. Isaiah prophesies the destruction of the Assyrian army. Hezekiah recovers from serious illness. He foolishly displays his wealth to the Babylonian envoys. The Babylonian Captivity is foretold.

- Jerusalem besieged by Assyria (36:1-22)
- The Lord takes up the Challenge of Sennacherib (37:1-38)
- The Illness of Hezekiah and His Recovery (38:1-22)
- Babylonian Envoys in Jerusalem (39:1-8)

## **VII. The Salvation of the Lord (40:1-48:22)**

God announces his glory and the deliverance of his people. His power to save is unlimited; his love and grace are boundless. He delivers through his own Servant. Israel is his Servant-nation. Cyrus is God's instrument. Israel is punished in captivity and restored. Babylon will be judged.

- The Majesty and Comfort of God (40:1-31)
- God Challenges the Disbelieving (41:1-29)
- The Servant of the Lord (42:1-25)
- God will Redeem and Restore His People (43:1-28)
- Israel the Servant-nation as a Witness (44:1-28)
- The Role of Cyrus and the Salvation of the Heathen (45:1-25)
- God Supports Israel in Babylon (46:1-13)
- Lamentation over Babylon (47:1-15)
- Israel Punished and Restored: Babylon Judged (48:1-22)

## **VIII. The Lord's Suffering Servant-King Redeemer (49:1-55:13)**

The Servant of the Lord is commissioned to restore Israel and to enlighten the Gentiles. The obedience of the servant-nation is described. Israel is urged to trust in the Lord. The work of the Suffering-servant is presented, followed by the joy of God's people in the salvation of God. All who thirst are bidden to the banquet of the Lord.

- The Servant of the Lord Commissioned (49:1-26)
- The Obedient Servant (50:1-11)
- Israel Encouraged to Trust in the Lord (51:1-52:12)
- The Lord's Suffering Servant (52:13-53:12)
- The Song of Assurance to Israel (54:1-17)
- Invitation to the Feast of the Lord (55:1-13)

## **IX. Divine Program for Restoration and Peace (56:1-66:24)**

The reign of God in the world is described. God asks of men righteousness not formal religion. There is a call to repentance, and a commission to preach

good tidings to sinners. The ready response of God to penitent men is promised. Finally, the glory of the messianic age is described.

- Obedience Blessed; Wickedness Condemned (56:1-12)
- Folly of Idolatrous Worship (57:1-21)
- God Desires Not Fasting, but Kindness and Justice (58:1-14)
- Call To National Repentance (59:1-21)
- Prosperity and Peace of the Messianic Kingdom (60:1-22)
- Commission to Preach Good Tidings (61:1-11)
- The Glory of Restored Zion (62:1-12)
- Psalm of Intercession For Israel (63:1-64:12)
- The Ready Reply of God (65:1-16)
- The Glory of the New Age (65:17-25)
- Final Judgments of God and His Salvation (66:1-24)

## **Prophets and Prophecy**

### **Definition**

What is a prophet? Note the following definitions based on the usage of words in the Greek and Hebrew: The literal meaning of the Greek word (*prophetes* 'to speak forth') is a forth-teller, that is, one who utters the message which has been communicated to him through divine inspiration, whether of practical obligations and duties or future events. The emphasis of the prophet's work lay on the former. The Hebrew words are: (1) *nabi*, from a verb meaning 'to boil forth' as a fountain, hence one who speaks freely from a full heart impelled by an inspiration from God. (2) *ro'eh*, from a verb meaning to see, hence a seer (I Sam. 9:10), i.e. one who saw divine visions and declared what he had seen from God.

Thus:

- (1) A prophet is one who speaks for another, Ex. 7:1 - Aaron your brother shall be your prophet.
- (2). A prophet speaks a divine message, which is received not invented, Ex. 4:14-16, Jer. 15:19.
- (3). In speaking the mind of God, the task of the prophet is to be a preacher of righteousness; prediction of future events is incidental to this primary function.

The prophetic office was defined in part during the days of Moses (Deut. 18:18, 19) if not earlier. However, it was not until *after Moses and Joshua* that the prophets rose to a place of prominence in Israel. While Moses and Joshua led the nation they made clear the will of God to the people. When the nation lacked strong leadership God raised up special men endowed for their work of making known his will to the people.

After Samuel the prophetic office achieved importance in the national life of Israel. The priesthood had become a formalized, hereditary group, frequently more concerned with acquiring temporal possessions and power than in ministering spiritually or rebuking sin in the nation on which they depended for sustenance. The prophets were independent of public support and spoke freely. After the death of David and Solomon the nation split. Social evils and religious idolatry infiltrated both parts of the divided nation. It was during this period that the prophets were most active, and also during the restoration of Jerusalem when remnants returned from captivity.

Among other offices, Christ came to fulfill the role of prophet. This was predicted of him (Deut. 18:18-19). Christ came to reveal God to humanity (John 1:18, 21, 29-34; 5:32-47; 17:4,8). He was recognized by the people as The Prophet (John 6:14). The Apostles of our Lord applied this name and office to him (Acts 3:22; 7:37). Our Lord applied it to Himself (Luke 13:33; Mt. 13:57). In His incarnate prophetic ministry He warned men and women about the folly of sin and about impending divine judgment; he rebuked the Pharisees for their religious hypocrisy and their oppression of the poor; he performed many acts of mercy for those in need; he taught the people as no prophet had ever taught before; and he brought to fulfillment the promise of salvation through the Cross, which prophets before him had predicted in connection with the covenant relation of God to His people

### **Interpreting Old and New**

From earliest Christian times the Church has had the concept of Holy Scripture. The biblical books were known as Scripture, Holy Scripture, the Word of God, the Oracles of God. The authority of the Scriptures is deeply embedded in the thought and usage of the early Church fathers who always put themselves on a plane lower than the authority of the Apostolic writings and the received Hebrew scriptures.

During earliest times the Bible of the early Church was the Hebrew Bible, mostly used in its Septuagint (Greek) translation. Very quickly in the life of the early church a triad of writings was accepted as authoritative, namely, the Old Testament, the Gospels (which record the life of our Lord) and the remaining Apostolic Writings (Acts and the Epistles). This triad was the beginning of the concept of the Canon of the Old and New Testament as we now have it.

In what ways did these writings, which were written by so very many different people and over many centuries, appear as a unity to Christians? The answer, in a word, is *Christologically*. The entirety of the Scriptures -- Old Testament and New Testament -- alike were seen to centre on Christ and to be interpreted with reference to his person and mission.

Two basic approaches fed this Christological principle:

1. The OT was seen as *Preparation* for the fuller realities of the Gospel. This is the Schoolmaster concept of Gal. 3:23-24. God had been speaking through the various ages of the divine economy and, all the while, through the self-adaptation of God to the needs of his people, he had been preparing them for the coming of Christ.

2. The OT was seen as *Prefiguration* of the New Testament realities. The Old Testament foreshadowed the fullness in Christ which was to come, notably his glory, Cross and Kingdom. Thus the Ark, Sacrifice, the cities of Refuge, the Shepherd, the Vineyard, the Suffering Servant, and many other concepts prefigured the salvation of God in Christ.

With rare exceptions Christians have been unanimous in accepting the Old Testament as a Christian book which is to be interpreted messianically. The whole Bible is understood to speak of Christ and to point to him.

### **History, Revelation and Insight**

The power of the prophetic books is that they deal with real historical events and the proper interpretation of those events in the economy of God. Fundamental to the book of Isaiah is the working of God in history and the prophetic interpretation of those events. The Hebrew prophets are saying to us: *this is what is going on in the things that are happening.*

The prophet of the Lord saw things through the eye of faith; the prophetic message was comprised of insights of faith:

First, it was given to the prophet to see events in a certain way, as God acting in history.

Second, the prophet had to see them straight - as they truly were; that they meant this, not that.

Third, the prophet had to see them along the right perspective, i.e., from the standpoint of God's purposes. This is the key-feature of the ministry of the major and minor prophets.

In Isaiah, God is the great judge of the affairs of men, and the great redeemer of humanity through his mercy.

God judges nations and individuals (Is. ch. 1; 5:24; 64:6). He judges them according to his own standard (Is. 45:24; 5:16). He who judges is not the idolatrous figment of human imagination (Is. 40:12-26; 51:12-17; 54:4-8; 26:4). He is real, personal, righteous, and lovingly concerned about his people (Is. 44:9-20; 27-28).



Most of all, God's saving grace in the covenant of mercy is extended to humanity in its entirety. In Isaiah, suffering as chastisement is a human burden, but suffering as redemption is God's burden. Hence the meaning of Is. 53 (note also Is. 40:1-11; 44:21-28; 55:1-3, 6-9).

The message of Isaiah is the reality of God who is transcendent and personal. God the Most High loves his people. And as both righteous and loving he indicts Israel and all of mankind for their evils and faithlessness; nevertheless, the offer of grace remains to the truly penitent.

### **Christ in Isaiah**

That the Gospel is clearly declared in Isaiah is a much-loved theme of the Christian Church. The person and ministry of Messiah in Isaiah have been evident to Christians from apostolic days to the present.

There are 61 quotations from Isaiah in the New Testament, and a further 27 references to Isaiah materials in the New Testament.

The following are some of the Christological emphases from Isaiah in the New Testament:

#### A. Titles used of Christ and used by Christ.

1. Eternal God, Creator, Judge, Savior: Is. 9:6 - I Cor. 4:5
2. King: Is 6:1-5 - John 12:41
3. Shepherd: Is. 40:10, 11 - John 10:11, 14
4. Foundation (Church): Is. 28:16 - I Cor. 3:11, 2 Tim 2:19.
5. Glory: Is. 40:5
6. Man of Sorrows: Is. 53:3, 4 - Lu. 22:44; John 11:33; 12:27.
7. Child: Is. 11:6
8. Counsellor: Is. 9:6
9. Emmanuel: Is. 7:14; 8:8 - Mt. 1:23
10. Everlasting Father: Is. 9:6
11. Jehovah:
  - Is. 26:4, Is. 6:1-3 - John 12:41;
  - Is. 8:13-14 - I Pet. 2:8;
  - Is. 40:3 - Mt. 3:3;
  - Is. 40:11, 44:6 - Rev. 1:17;
  - Is. 48:12-16 - Rev.22:13.
12. Lawgiver: Is. 33:22
13. Mighty God: Is. 9:6
14. Mighty One of Jacob: Is. 60:16
15. Prince of Peace: Is. 9:6
16. Prophet, Priest, King: Is. 49; 50; 51; 52.
17. Servant: Is. 52:13

## 18. Wonderful: Is. 9:6

## B. Christ's Person and Career in Isaiah

1. First Advent: Is. 28:16; 32:1; 35:4; 42:6; 55:4.
2. His Forerunner: Is. 40:3; Mal . 3:1, Mt. 3:1-3; Lu. 1:17.
3. Birth. Is. 7:14 - Mt. 1:18, 22-23; Is. 60:3, 6.
4. Divinity: Is. 9:6; 25:9; 40:10
5. Spirit-endowed Humanity:
  - Humanity - Is. 11:1.
  - Perfection - Is. 53:2.
  - Spirit-endowed - Is. 11:2; 61:1; Mt. 3:16; Acts 10:38.
6. Character:
  - Is. 42:2 - Mt. 12:15, 16, 19.
  - Is. 40:11 - Heb. 4:15.
7. Ministry:
  - Mission - Is. 59:20;
  - Galilee - Is. 9:1-2; Mt. 4:12-16;
  - Miracles - Is. 35:5-6, 42:7 - Mt. 11:4-6.
8. Rejection by Own:
  - Is. 8:14 - Rom. 9:32; I Pet. 2:8.
  - Is. 63:3 - John 1:11; 7:3.
  - Is. 53:1.
9. Passion:
  - As a sacrifice - Is. 52:13-15; 53; Mark 10:45; I Pet. 2:21-25
  - Persecution: Is. 53:3; 52:14; John 19:5
  - Vicarious suffering - Is. 53:4-6, 12; Dan 9:26; Mt. 20:28
  - Silence - Is. 53:7; Mt. 26:63; Mt. 27:12-14
  - Death with Malefactors - Is. 53:9, 12
  - Buried with rich - Is. 53:9; Mt. 27:57-60
  - Poured out soul to death - Is. 53:12; Lu. 23:46; Mt. 27:50
10. Kingly Reign and Kingdom
  - Everlasting dominion: Is. 9:7; Dan 7:14; Lu.1:32-33
  - Second Advent - Is. 66:18; Is. 11:10
  - Justice, Righteousness of His Reign - Is. 42:1; 28:16-17

**The Suffering Savior, Is. 52-53**

That Messiah was to suffer and thereby redeem is the key-feature of the NT revelation and the way to unlock the truth of the OT ordinances.

That the Suffering Servant of Is. 52-53 is the Son of Man who came to seek and to save the Lord of Mark 10:45, is the key-feature to Christian understanding of the whole Bible.

Evidence of the importance of this connection to the NT writers includes:

Matthew: Is. 53:4, Mt. 8:17

John:

Is. 53:1, John 12:38; Is. 53:7, John 1:29, 36;  
note 1 Cor. 5:7; Rev.5:6, 12; 13:8

Peter: Is. 53:5, 1 Pet. 2:24. Is. 53:9, Mt. 27:57, 1 Pet. 2:22.

Philip: Is. 53:7, 8, Acts 8:32, 33.

Hebrews:

Is. 53:10, Heb. 7:25.

Is. 53:12, Heb. 9:28.

Paul:

Is. 52:15, Rom. 15:21.

Rom. 3:24-25, Is. 53:5.

This is why Isaiah is called the evangelical prophet. Note the words of our Lord: Is. 53:12, Lu. 22:37.

The following is an outline of the Suffering Servant passage in Isaiah:

1. The Redeemer Set Forth: Is. 52:13-15
2. The Redeemer Set Aside: Is. 53:1-3
3. The Passion of the Suffering Servant: Is. 53:4-6.
4. The Submission of the Servant, Is. 53:7-9
5. The Justification of the Servant, Is. 53:10-12

### **God and the Future**

Isaiah looks toward the final redemption of the world from its infection by evil and sin.

In some eastern religions, the world and its events are unreal, or unimportant. But through its doctrines of Creation and Redemption the Bible declares the importance of the created order in the purposes of God.

The OT heritage includes the doctrines of the unity of God, the unity of history, and the unity of the world.

The eternal God, who is Lord of creation, is the theme of Isaiah. He who is the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, is the God of Israel during Isaiah's day, and is also in their future, beckoning His people forward to the goal of His choosing. That God is the eternal one means that His children can trust Him for their future (cf. Is. 40:21, 25-31; 51:1-2; 54:4-8; 55:3, 6-9).

His Kingdom and His reign through King Messiah are the vision of hope which pervades the book, and they point to the final kingdom of our Lord, Jesus Christ (Is. 11:1-9; 60:1-3; 65:17-25; cf. Rom. 8:18-25; Rev. 21:1-4).

## **NOTES ON JEREMIAH**

Samuel J. Mikolaski

It has been said that circumstances do not change a man; they simply develop what is in him. What Isaiah was to an earlier generation, Jeremiah was to Judah during the catastrophic events which led up to the Babylonian Captivity. Jeremiah, often called "the weeping prophet," was a man of great moral courage and deep feeling whose stature has not always been recognized. William Ballantine, late 19<sup>th</sup> century American Congregationalist, wrote of him:

*Jeremiah is the most misunderstood of all the great men of (biblical) history. To be one of the healthiest of men and to be thought morbid, to be one of the bravest and to be thought fainthearted, to be a titan and to be thought a pigmy, has been his hard fortune.*

### **Authorship**

Jeremiah was called by God to prophetic ministry probably when he was in his early 20's during the 13th year of Josiah's reign (627 B. C.). He prophesied during the reigns of the last five kings of Judah, until the final fall of Jerusalem.

The Northern Kingdom centered at Samaria had fallen before the Assyrian forces in 722 B.C. Judah was now to fall before the Babylonian forces which had overtaken the Assyrian Empire. The historical occasion was the great struggle between the Babylonian and Egyptian Empires for control of the Near East, especially of the trade routes at the eastern end of the Mediterranean.

Jeremiah was preceded by Jonah., Amos, Hosea, Isaiah, Micah and Nahum. He was a contemporary of Zephaniah, Habakkuk and Obadiah. Ezekiel and Daniel were contemporaries in captivity in the east.

In the book it is stated that Baruch, Jeremiah's faithful friend, wrote down the prophecies which Jeremiah uttered (36:32). The appalling conditions under which Jeremiah often worked, the persecution he suffered, and the fact that an original roll of the prophecies was maliciously destroyed by Jehoiakim (ch.36) may account for the disjointed order of the book. The present order of the oracles is not chronological, and an exact chronological arrangement is difficult to construct.

### **Authenticity**

While the proper internal arrangement of the oracles is not fully known, events of the period have been documented in recent years from Babylonian tablets in the British Museum. It is now possible to sort out the chronology of the fall of Judah with greater accuracy.

### **Outline of Jeremiah**

The Prophet's Call, ch. 1.  
 Oracles concerning Judah's sin and coming judgment, ch. 2-6.  
 The Temple Gate oracles, ch. 7-10.  
 Oracle concerning the broken covenant, ch. 11-12.  
 Oracle of the linen girdle, the dearth and Jeremiah's prayer, ch. 13-15.  
 The bachelor prophet; trust in God, ch. 16-17.  
 Oracle of the potter's vessel, ch. 18-20.  
 Messages to Judah's kings, ch. 21-22.  
 Messiah, the Righteous Branch, ch. 23.  
 Oracle of the bad and good figs, ch. 24.  
 The Captivity foretold, ch. 25.  
 Opposition by princes and false prophets, ch. 26-28.  
 Jeremiah's letter to the Jews in captivity, ch. 29.  
 Restoration and the New Covenant, ch. 30-31.  
 Jeremiah buy's Hanameel's field, ch. 32.  
 Messianic prediction, ch. 33.  
 The Captivity of Zedekiah foretold, ch. 34.  
 Lesson of the Rechabites, ch. 35.  
 Jehoiakim destroys the roll, ch. 36.  
 Jeremiah in prison, ch. 37-38.  
 The Fall of Jerusalem, ch. 39.  
 Jeremiah and Gedaliah, ch. 40-42.  
 Jeremiah transported to Egypt, ch. 43-44.  
 Jeremiah to Baruch, ch. 45.  
 Oracles against foreign nations, ch. 46-51.  
 Historical appendix, ch. 52.

### **Historical Events and the Life of Jeremiah**

The events recorded in Jeremiah concern the five kings of Judah leading up to the fall of Jerusalem. One attempt to arrange the materials chronologically is as follows:

- a) Josiah: ch. 1-20 (omit 12:7-13:27).
- b) Jehoahaz: 22:10-12 (note 2 Kings 23:31-34).
- c) Jehoiakim: ch. 16, 22, 23, 25, 35, 36, 45, 33, 12:7-13:27.
- d) Jehoiakin: ch. 13:18, 20:24-30, 52:31-34.
- e) Zedekiah: ch. 21, 24, 27, 28, 29, 30-33, 37-39, 51:59-60.
- f) After the fall of Jerusalem: ch. 40-44.
- g) Against the nations: ch. 46-51.
- h) Appendix: ch. 52.

Notes on the five kings and their relationship to Jeremiah follow:

#### **1. Josiah**

Jeremiah was sympathetic to Josiah and to the brief revival which followed

discovery of the Book of the Law by Hilkiah (cf. 2 Chron. 34:4-7). Josiah was killed at Megiddo when he fought Pharaoh-Necho (608 B.C.). Jeremiah mourned his death (22:10, 15).

It appears that Jeremiah felt that the revival did not go deep enough (Jer. 7:1-20) and that only radical inner transformation of their hearts would satisfy God's demands.

Meanwhile the Babylonian forces had overtaken the Assyrian empire and swept westwards to a crucial encounter with Egypt. In 605 B.C. at Carchemish the Babylonians under Nebuchadrezzar (Nebuchadnezzar) routed the Egyptians. Thereafter the days of Judah were numbered. This was the burden of Jeremiah's message.

## **2. Jehoahaz (Shallum)**

He succeeded Josiah briefly in 608 B.C. but within three months was deposed by Pharaoh-Necho (22:10-12, note 2 Ki. 23:31-34) and died in exile in Egypt. He may have been the appointee and hope of the Davidic party at Jerusalem after Josiah's death.

## **3. Jehoiakim (Eliakim)**

Nebuchadnezzar quickly subdued Syria and Ashkelon. Jehoiakim the vassal of Pharaoh-Necho submitted to Babylon in 605-4 B.C. Note the fast proclaimed in Judah as the danger approached (Jer. 36:9). Jehoiakim was idolatrous, vain, selfish, and rebellious. He had little time for Jeremiah and men like him (26:9, 20-23) who condemned his tyrannies (22:13-19) and his alliance with Egypt. During this time Jeremiah was severely persecuted and imprisoned and his writings were destroyed at the instigation of false prophets. Jehoiakim died only a few weeks prior to rebellious Judah's fall before the Babylonian attack in 597 B.C.

First a vassal to Necho then to Nebuchadnezzar, Jehoiakim was a despotic, self-indulgent despot. He raised Necho's fine by heavy direct taxation, and indulged himself during precarious times by constructing costly buildings largely through forced labor. His impious act in cutting up the prophet's roll (36:23) shows his disdain for the word of the Lord.

## **4. Jehoiakin**

Jehoiakin reigned a few weeks after Jehoiakim only until the Babylonians could storm the city. They immediately deported him to Babylon (2 Kings 24:8).

## **5. Zedekiah**

The Babylonians enthroned Zedekiah as vassal king in Jerusalem, though

Jehoiakin was held to be king in exile.

The successor to Pharaoh-Necho in Egypt attempted to create disaffection among the nations at the edge of the Babylonian Empire, including Judah. Hence the constant preaching by Jeremiah about the dangers of alliance with Egypt. A strong pro-Egyptian party dominated Zedekiah's court which included the prophet Hananiah, but Jeremiah resisted this policy (note 2:18, 36; 25:17-19; ch. 28; 37:7).

Jeremiah insisted that God's will entailed submission to Babylon, and that eventually a remnant would return and be re-established in the land. He declared that prophets who spoke otherwise were not sent by God (Jer. 23:16, 26, 32).

Zedekiah was summoned to Babylon to demonstrate his loyalty, but upon his return the pro-Egyptian party persuaded him to enter into a rebellious alliance with Egypt. In 587 the besieging Babylonian armies withdrew briefly upon the appearance of Egyptian forces. At this time Jeremiah declared that resistance to Nebuchadnezzar was resistance to God's punishing agent (ch.27). Zedekiah vacillated (ch. 28:5, 10) between Jeremiah and the pro-Egyptian party but finally chose Egypt. Egypt proved powerless to help. The Babylonians brutally destroyed Jerusalem (2 Ki. 25). Jeremiah witnessed the fulfillment of his own prophecies with bitter heartache.

## **Lessons from Jeremiah**

### **1. Jeremiah's Character**

Jeremiah epitomizes a man who carries upon his heart the burden of a disobedient people who will soon encounter disaster. This book is superbly autobiographical - - more so than biblical stories of any other prophet -- and is deeply moving.

He saw himself as the bearer of the word of God which he was commissioned to proclaim, despite the easy words of uncommissioned prophets. His deep feelings and inner struggles against the divine fiat of inevitable judgment are recorded. Some have thought that he was a failure. The truth is that Jeremiah does not hide from us his inner struggles with God or the despair and grief of his soul at the suffering which was to befall his own people (note: 8:18-21; 9:1-2; 13:17; 15:10; 18:18, 21-23; 20:7-10, 14-18). He does not announce judgment as dry, judicial fiat, but with tear-filled eyes.

The compelling character of love for God, communion with Him and obedience to his word are powerful and attractive elements of Jeremiah's character.

### **2. History, Revelation and Insight**

Important to our understanding of the biblical revelation is to see how prophetic

insight worked. During all the political and military confusion of that 40-year period many conflicting views were advanced as to the meaning of the events for Judah.

We now know that Jeremiah was right and that the others were wrong. The substance of the biblical message is the prophetic insight of Jeremiah that the Babylonian forces were God's punishing agent against Judah for her sins, that all alliances to evade this would fail, that only submission would save them from total catastrophe, that the Captivity period would last 70 years, and that afterwards God would restore a remnant to Jerusalem. Jeremiah knew this because God gave him insight as to the true meaning of the events and understanding of the divine purposes. His prophecies tell what was going on in the things that were happening. That is the genius of prophetic insight.

### **3. God and His People**

Idolatry was the key indictment God brought against Judah through Jeremiah. Various pagan deities were mentioned. While Josiah purged the land of idolatrous practices, this was not of lasting duration. There were idols in the Temple (22:34). Even children were sacrificed to pagan gods (7:31; 19:5; 32:35).

Moral and political corruption (5:1-9) are additional matters strongly condemned by Jeremiah, which included the ruling, prophetic and priestly castes (5:30-31; 6:13; 14:14; 23:25-26).

God is Ruler of the world and he knows the secrets of human deeds and thoughts (23:23-24; 27:4-5). His love and forbearance are evident from his past dealings with them. He loves them still (ch. 2).

Jeremiah's own spirituality is an important message regarding the personal communion of the soul with God. True faith involves a person's relationship with God in trust, love and obedience (7:1-15; 31:31-34). In Jeremiah the importance of the individual and of his or her personal responsibility to God is an important step toward the knowledge of God as fully personal, and of our personal responsibility to God, in the New Testament.

Added to the foregoing was new understanding that true knowledge and worship of God could continue even in exile, even if the Temple and Jerusalem were destroyed and the people scattered. This is the point of Jeremiah's letter to the exiles in ch. 29. The ministry of the prophets Ezekiel and Daniel to the exiles corroborated this.

Thus the spiritual nature of God and the spiritual and personal character of true worship (in contrast to the corruption which had invalidated their Temple ritual) are strongly drawn out.



### **Formula: Judgment and Renewal**

In Jeremiah we have the moral as well as the political history of a nation. Here is the Lordship of God in history. Here are the beginnings of a philosophy of history (cf. Jer. 25:1-14; 2 Chron. 36:14-23).

It is possible to trace a six-fold formula of God's dealings with his people which may reflect a discernible pattern in the sociological, moral and political dissolution and regeneration of nations.

**a) Apostasy:**

Including idolatry, injustice and perversity (2:20-37; 5:1-9; 5:20-31).

**b) Crisis:**

Israel is indicted by God, caught as a thief in the act of theft (1:10-19; 2:9-19, 26; 5:29-31).

**c) Fiery Ordeal:**

Overthrow, pillaging, exile (25:1-14; 39:3).

**d) Catharsis:**

Purging. The land rests and is cleansed of exploiters. (3:2; 25:9; 2 Chron . 36:21).

**e) Charisma:**

God lovingly gives gifts of renewal; in wrath He remembers mercy (3:11-17; 31:1-14). Ezekiel and Daniel, prophets to the exiles, are such gifts.

**f) Resurrection:**

Restoration of the remnant to the land, re-creation of the nation and renewal of the covenant (2 Chron..36:22-23; Jer. 3:2; 23:25; 30:2, 14-16, 33-34).

## NOTES ON LAMENTATIONS

Samuel J. Mikolaski

The historical occasion of the book is the calamities which befell Jerusalem beginning with the death of Josiah at Megiddo in 608 B.C. and ending with the final destruction of Jerusalem in 587 B. C.

The book is a series of dirges or odes which mourn for the nation and recall the covenant between God and His people: the ancient promises of blessings and curses, which depended upon the obedience or disobedience of the people (Deut. 28, 32). The unhappy years of calamity and exile, interpreted by prophets like Jeremiah, Zephaniah, Habbakuk, Ezekiel and Daniel as divine judgment evoked introspection and sorrow.

The book is an example of songs of the period which memorialize the decline and fall of great empires or cities. These include taunt songs such as of Isaiah against Babylon (Is. 47), Ezekiel against Tyre (Ez. 28), passages in Amos against several surrounding nations, or later of the Book of Revelation against the harlot Babylon (Rev. 18).

### Authorship

The Hebrew text does not attribute authorship. A long tradition going back to the Septuagint's introductory lines attributes it to Jeremiah: *And it came to pass, after Israel was led into captivity, and Jerusalem laid waste, that Jeremiah sat weeping and lamented with this lamentation over Jerusalem....*

The author may have been a younger contemporary of Jeremiah's. This form of lament seems to be characteristic of the Babylonian rather than later periods, hence may be dated closer to Jeremiah's day than some have allowed. There is considerable resemblance between Jeremiah and Lamentations. To some, literary differences and variations within Lamentations suggest multiple authors.

### Structure

Various structures have been discerned in Lamentations, however opinion about these is far from unanimous. For example, chapters 1-2, 4, are seen as a funeral dirge, chapter 3 as a personal lament, and chapter 5 as a communal lament.

While the grief expressed is spontaneous and genuine the book is a group of poems reflecting conscious literary art written in a form which aids confession of sin.

Each of the chapters is a complete poem. Each of the first four is a complete acrostic. That is, each of the 22 verses begins with a letter of the Hebrew alphabet.

In the third poem, not only the first but all three lines of each strophe begin with

the appropriate letter of the alphabet, thus this chapter has 66 verses in our Bible.

The fifth poem has 22 lines corresponding to the Hebrew alphabet, but is not a true acrostic.

The acrostic form may have been a literary device to encourage complete confession (our way of saying this would be that Israel had sinned from A-to-Z).

The following is a structural outline:

**Lament 1:**

The Plight of Jerusalem, ch. 1.

**Lament 2:**

The Anger and Judgments of God, ch. 2.

**Lament 3:**

The Cry of Grief and Call for Repentance, ch. 3.

**Lament 4:**

The Consequences of Disobedience, and Shame of Defeat, ch. 4.

**Lament 5:**

The Confession and Plea for Mercy, ch. 5.

### **Characteristics and Message of Lamentations**

#### **1. Lamentations and the Psalms**

While Lamentations engages the mystery of God's harsher dealings with his people, it is not a book of pessimism, but of grief tinged by faith. Like the Psalms, it is a book of devotion, not of despair.

God judged Israel, but He takes no delight in the death of the wicked (3:33). There is a believing call to prayer and repentance (3:40, 41).

#### **2. Righteousness and Judgment**

The catastrophic events do not evoke simply blind grief over inexorable, impersonal historical process, but a deep sense of the tragedy of divine judgment.

The prophets foretold judgment because of Judah's sin. The destruction of Jerusalem vindicates the righteousness of God (1:18). Thus the grief is not over fortuitous happenings, but combines with it a powerful sense of guilt, especially as the punishment might have been avoided (1:5, 8, 9; 4:13-16, 22).

#### **3. Grief, Penitence and Hope**

The very fact that confession is central to the grief of Lamentations leads to the prayer of hope. It is not grief without hope, but grief with hope.

This may be seen in the powerful surge of emotion which turns to faith prior to its becoming broken despair. The penitent lament, but their cry turns to faith in God who forgives and restores (3:55-59; 4:22). It should be borne in mind that the message of the prophets allowed for discouragement, sorrow, even depression associated with true guilt, but not despair.

Like Psalms and Job, at the critical juncture of faith's trial Lamentations turns to prayer, not as an immediate escape from travail but for assurance of the ultimate righteousness and glory of God's providential dealings (5:19-22). Note especially 3:19-25, which has been a source of spiritual strength to many generations of Christians.

*But this I call to mind,  
And therefore I have hope:  
The steadfast love of the Lord never ceases,  
His mercies never come to an end;  
They are new every morning;  
great is thy faithfulness.  
“The Lord is my portion,” says my soul,  
“therefore I will hope in him.”*

## **BOOK OF EZEKIEL**

Samuel J. Mikolaski

The theme of this book is the naked terror of God's wrath, which concept is pressed with vigor. Yet supreme over all is the majestic sovereignty of God who through his grace will overrule and finally restore his people.

### **Authorship**

Ezekiel, a younger contemporary of Jeremiah, belonged to the aristocracy of the Jerusalem priesthood. He was carried away into captivity by the Babylonians in 597 B.C. along with Jehoiakin and the ruling classes of Jerusalem (2 Kings 24:15). In Babylon he lived in his own house, where leading exiled men of Israel came to him for advice (3:24; 8:1; 14:1; 20:1).

The prophecies are within the period from 592 B.C. (the fifth year of Jehoiakin's captivity) to 570 B.C. (29:17); that is, from five years before the final fall of Jerusalem (587 B.C.) to seventeen years after. From Babylon Ezekiel contemplated the impending events at Jerusalem, her destruction and its causes, the judgment of the surrounding nations, and the final fulfillment of God's purpose for His people.

### **Authenticity**

An important question regarding this prophecy is locale. Did Ezekiel write this book in Babylon, or were parts of it written in Palestine by him or others?

Only in this century have the unity and authenticity of the book been seriously questioned, but radical criticism has tended to cancel itself out.

One important issue is how Ezekiel could have known in detail the conditions in Jerusalem if he wrote only in Babylon. Detail in the book is taken by some to suggest either that he had a Jerusalem ministry or that large sections of the book are of Palestinian origin.

However, Babylonian captivity did not prevent frequent and free exchange of information, indeed of travel official and otherwise, between Jerusalem and Babylon.

Ezekiel's ministry was to those who like himself were in exile. He aimed to show them, both prior to and after the fall of Jerusalem, that God was just in judging them. The dramatic form of his presentation is consistent with the unusual literary and prophetic genre of the book. By detailing the horror of the events in Jerusalem he made a solemn impact upon the exiles, many of whom very quickly made for themselves a comfortable life in Babylon. Only a minority of the exiled Jews eventually returned to rebuild Jerusalem.

## **Purpose and Contents**

The book comprises the word of God to the exiles in Babylon during the years immediately before and after the fall of Jerusalem in 587 B.C. The plan of the book and its purpose cohere. Ezekiel prepared the exiles for the fall of Jerusalem (which many believed would never happen) and interpreted their role subsequently.

The book is in three parts. The first two parts apply to pre-fall times; part three concerns times after the fall of Jerusalem.

**Part I** (ch.1-24) begins with a complicated vision, which is followed by detailed indictment of the people's sins by many different means: speeches, symbolic acts, parables and analogies. The symbolic character of the book and the horror of the divine wrath remind one of the book of Revelation.

**Part II** (ch. 25-32) comprises prophecies against foreign nations surrounding Israel. Notable among these are Tyre and Egypt who will be judged for their pride. Babylon is omitted, perhaps because Ezekiel saw her as the instrument of God's wrath against his people.

**Part III** (ch. 33-48) is marked by the turning point of Jerusalem's destruction (33:21-33). Now that Ezekiel's prophetic ministry was vindicated the people came in large numbers to hear him. Thereafter Ezekiel's ministry was devoted to the future restoration of the nation.

## **Outline of Ezekiel**

### **I. Inevitable Judgment and National Disaster, ch. 1-24.**

The Call and Commission of Ezekiel, ch. 1-3.

Prophecies and visions of judgment, ch. 4-7.

Abandonment by God and imminent judgment, ch. 8-11.

Israel's unbelief, infidelity and judgment, ch. 12-24.

### **II. Prophecies Against Foreign Nations, ch. 25-32.**

Ammon, 25:1-7.

Moab, 25:8-11.

Edom, 25:12-14.

Philistia, 25:15-17.

Tyre, 26:1-28:19.

Sidon, 28:20-26.

Egypt, 29:1-32:32.

### **III. Prophecies of Hope After The Fall of Jerusalem, ch. 33-48.**

The New Covenant, ch. 33.

Turning point: Spiritual renewal, ch. 34.

The destruction of Edom, ch. 35.  
 Restoration of Israel to the land, ch. 36-37.  
 Gog and Magog, ch. 38-39.  
 The Ideal Temple and City of God, ch. 40-48.

### Style

Ezekiel is an enigma to most readers because of its style. In this it is paralleled by the Book of Revelation. Imagery and symbolism used in these two books have much in common, and they help in interpreting each other. One writer has listed the following:

1:1 (Rev. 19:11)  
 1:5 (Rev. 4:6)  
 1:22 (Rev. 4:6)  
 1:28 (Rev. 4:3)  
 2:9 (Rev. 5:1)  
 3:1, 3 (Rev. 10:10)  
 7:2 (Rev. 7:1)  
 9:4 (Rev. 7:3)  
 9:11 (Rev. 1:13)  
 10:2 (Rev. 8:5)  
 14:21 (Rev. 6:8)  
 26:13 (Rev. 18:22)  
 27:28-30 (Rev. 18:17-19)  
 37:10 (Rev. 11:11)  
 37:27 (Rev. 21:3)  
 38:2, 3 (Rev. 20:8)  
 40:2 (Rev. 21:10)  
 40:3 (Rev. 11:1)  
 43:2 (Rev. 1:15)  
 43:16 (Rev. 21:16)  
 47:1, 12 (Rev. 22:1, 2)  
 48:31 (Rev. 21:12)

Ezekiel's visions, ecstatic utterances, parables, symbolic acts and figures, vivid detail and imagination establish a new pattern of prophetic ministry, the apocalyptic movement.

He is, however, more than a link between prophecy and apocalypse (which leads on to the Book of Revelation). He is an important link between the priestly and prophetic ministries. It is as if during the fiery trials that beset Jerusalem God raised up a man who combined in himself the prophetic and priestly roles. False prophets and lecherous priests had been the bane of Israelite life for a long time. The rise of the prophetic ministry after Samuel was in part a reaction to the corrupt priestly caste. Perhaps we can say that in the man Ezekiel God is

vindicating both ministries purged through judgment.

Interpretation of Ezekiel is difficult, but not impossible for many of the key passages. An important step toward understanding is to grasp the significance of the vision associated with the call and commissioning of the prophet in ch. 1.

Like other prophets, Ezekiel's call came in a vision associated with his surroundings (note Elijah). In Ezekiel's case it was a violent storm cloud of sub-tropical type through which God revealed himself. The prophet did not see God, but a likeness of the glory of God in the storm cloud (1:26-28).

It was a whirling thundercloud surrounded by brilliant, flashing fire. This was the context for the revelation to Ezekiel of the greater and more brilliant glory of God. The living creatures, all of whom are subject to God and beneath His glory, formed a chariot for the divine throne (1:15, 16).

The wheels, two in one, whirled with lightning rapidity and had in their vast rims many eyes which looked simultaneously in every direction. Thus was symbolized the omnipresence and all-seeing eye of God. It was impossible to describe this heavenly chariot. But the prophet's attention was directed to a throne above the chariot, and he caught a glimpse of something he could never forget and could not describe. It was the throne of God, surrounded by glory and beauty. Thus for Ezekiel the transcendence and glory of God became the key themes of his ministry. They pervade his prophetic writings. The final vision of the New Temple and City of God in Part III of the book is analogous to the earlier visions, with the added theme of hope.

### **Themes of the Book of Ezekiel**

#### **1. Glory**

The most dominant theme of the book is the glory of God, seen in his transcendent splendour, judgment, merciful acts of restoration and of grace.

For Israel the glory of God meant also the immediate presence of God among his people which was closely associated with his holiness (note the pillar of cloud by day, the fire by night, and the glory that filled the Temple when it was dedicated). The glory of God departed from the Temple and city which were destined for destruction (10:18; 11:23). The glory of God will return to the restored and sanctified temple (43:2-5; 44:4), and it will fill the new heavenly home of the people of God (Rev. 21:22-23).

#### **2. Son of Man.**

Ezekiel is addressed 90 times as *son of man*. Thereby he is identified with the children of Israel to whom he was sent. Also the title emphasized his



creatureliness in contrast to the heavenly vision. And it refers to Ezekiel's being the divine instrument to speak God's word to the people because the title is not used by Ezekiel of himself but by God of him.

Thus when our Lord applied the title the *Son of Man* to himself, he identified himself with the humanity he came to redeem (Mark 10:45). By using it with reference to his second advent, he identified Himself with the *Son of Man* in Daniel's vision (Daniel 7:13).

### **3. God Transcendent and Omnipresent**

The prophecies of Ezekiel were the word of God to the broken and confused Jewish exiles in Babylon, who were called upon by Ezekiel to experience the presence of God in Babylon. This was contrary to received Jewish theological opinion of the times which claimed that God could be present only in the Temple and the city of Jerusalem.

That God is universally present was also the theme of Jeremiah's letter to the captives (Jer. 29). Ezekiel's message regarding the transcendence of God is that God's power and presence are not limited by the sins of Israel. Through biblical books such as these there emerged the doctrine of the omnipresence and providence of God.

Ezekiel's task was to persuade the exiles to see themselves, their city, and their history in the light of God's holiness, and to accept the righteousness divine judgment. Only then could they begin to understand the grace of God to them in exile and gradually see what their spiritual commitment in the future must be if they were to be truly God's people.

### **4. Individual Responsibility**

Ezekiel has long been seen as the prophet who first states clearly the doctrine of individual moral responsibility before God (18:4, 18-32). Ezekiel's message to Israel was that the corporate life of the community could not excuse the sins of individuals. The corporate sins of ancestors furnished no shield against individual moral responsibility.

In stating and developing this theme Ezekiel spoke not only from his own inner experience as an exile who sensed the sins of his people and the continuing presence of God. He enlarged on truths spoken by Jeremiah that a time would come when every individual would have access to God personally and directly (Jer. 31:34).

The new covenant is based upon this doctrine of individual response to God (ch. 36:26-29). His vision of the future kingdom is a redeemed nation of purged individuals. The covenant ideal is based upon grace and the individual person's

relation to God, not upon one's heredity, heritage, or environment (ch. 18:2-3; 36:10-11). Ezekiel's teaching is thus an important step forward toward the doctrine of grace, redemption, and individual responsibility in the New Testament.

## 5. Gog and Magog

The uprising of Gog and Magog (ch.38-39) following the renewed settlement of Israel in the land which Ezekiel prophesies has troubled and intrigued biblical students for a long time. In 38:2 we read, *Gog of the land of Magog, the chief prince (prince of Rosh), of Meshech and Tubal* .

These two chapters are very unusual in the Old Testament because they intimate a rebellion against God's people after the beginning of the New Age or Messianic Kingdom. The event is also evidently in the mind of the writer of Revelation 20:8.

Identification of Gog and Magog is perplexing and virtually impossible in the present state of our knowledge. A possible identification of Gog with Gyges, king of Lydia (670-652 B.C.), is the most reasonable one if identification with an historical person is required. Other, less likely, identifications are: the city of Carchemish, Gog as a personification of darkness and evil, Gog as a secondary linguistic form of Magog, Babylon, Alexander the Great, and other later figures.

Prophetic or apocalyptic interpretation of these chapters may not be ignored or easily dismissed. The events are seen to occur at the end of a long period of time: Israel's restoration would not be long in coming (36:8), but the uprising would occur only in the latter years (38:8) after the Israelites were comfortably and prosperously settled in their land (38:11-14). The clear intention is to say that whatever judgments had come upon Gentile nations in the past, a time would come when the majesty and power of the true God would triumph over the unbelieving forces of world powers.

Gog appears to be the name of a leader and Magog of his lands and people (38:2; 39:6). The Septuagint, properly I think, sees Magog as people rather than a country. This may be important in the light of the apocalyptic character of the passage. The connection of Gog and Magog with nations at the edges of the then known world may suggest that we have here not so much identifiable historical figures and lands as the movements of Gentile nations. Meshech and Tubal were probably east of Asia Minor (38:3). Identification of them and Rosh with Russia cannot be established. Gomer (38:6) is probably to be linked with Magog (Gen. 10:2). *North quarters* or *uttermost parts of the north* appears to suggest the farthest limits of the inhabited earth (38:6).

The passage points to warlike Gentile nations ranged against the people of God. Chapters 38-39 do not appear to be concerned with times earlier than chapters 40-48, which are a vision of the Messianic Kingdom. Thus the pattern of thought

between Ezekiel and Revelation is coherent. How far Ezekiel's vision carried him toward understanding the New Age and the New Creation which are the theological and eschatological themes of the New Testament is problematical, but it would be unwise and unnecessary to claim so much for him. On John's side in Revelation, there is no real problem over his use of the Ezekiel prophecy in relation to the new realities of the redeemed and reign of Christ.

Ezekiel 38-39 is used to augment the Johannine description of the Battle of Armageddon in Revelation 19, and finds fulfillment in the final rebellion of anti-God humanity on a global scale at the end of the millennium before the final reign of God (Revelation 20:7-9). In this crucial respect, namely that an immense rebellion of unbelieving humanity occurs after the onset of the Messianic Kingdom, the books of Ezekiel and Revelation are consistent with one another.

### **5. Grace and Destiny**

Finally, it is of considerable importance to understand that restoration of Israel in Ezekiel depends upon divine purpose and grace. While repentance of the people is important to the concept of individual responsibility, the destiny of Israel is bound up with God's honor.

Restoration depends upon grace which in turn leads to repentance (36:16-32) on the part of the faithful remnant. With the divine cleansing of the people, the implanting of a new mind and new spirit, the dry bones of the nation are brought to life (37:1-14). The Spirit of God is the agent of regeneration and quickening. There appears to be a strong resemblance between the doctrine of regeneration in Ezekiel and the doctrines of grace, regeneration and cleansing in the New Testament.

## **NOTES ON DANIEL**

Samuel J. Mikolaski

Daniel was an Israelite of royal descent who, along with many other leading citizens, was taken captive to Babylon by Nebuchadnezzar in Jehoiakim's third year (607-606 B.C.). Other deportations occurred in 597 and 587 B.C., the latter date being the destruction of Jerusalem. Daniel was thus contemporary with Jeremiah, Habakkuk, Ezekiel and Obadiah. While the momentous events surrounding the fall of Jerusalem were occurring Daniel and his friends were rising to power in Babylon.

Following a period of intensive training lasting 3-4 years, Daniel and his friends entered royal service and became famous for their wisdom (1:1-6). Daniel was given the Babylonian name Belteshazzar.

### **Authenticity and Structure**

As in the Septuagint, Daniel is found between Ezekiel and the minor prophets in our Bible. The Hebrews classed it among the Writings (between Esther and Ezra-Nehemiah) because it was seen not as the work of a prophet (proclaimer of God's word to His people) but as a revelatory or apocalyptic writing.

Basically the book is a series of visions about world history. Chapters 1-6 are written in the third person. Passages like 1:19 and 6:3, 28 may indicate authorship by a scribe other than Daniel. Chapters 7-12 are chiefly apocalyptic and are written in the first person. The text of Daniel in the Hebrew Bible is in two languages: ch. 2:4b-ch. 7 is written in Aramaic, the remainder of the book is in Hebrew.

Many questions have been raised about the unity and date of the book. Because the book clearly gives part of the history of the Greek period in considerable detail (ch. 12) many modern interpreters have assigned a second century B.C. date for the book. However, detailed studies by not a few conservative scholars, which cannot be ignored, defend a sixth century B. C. date. For those who lean to an early date, problems of the prophetic interpretation of the book are very great. Still others propose a mediating view: an early date for the first part of the book, and a later Maccabean date for the latter part of the book (thus suggesting more than one author).

At the time of our Lord certain elements of the book were seen to be still unfulfilled (Mt. 24:15). The book claims to be contemporary with the times of the conquest of the Babylonian Empire by the Persians in the 6th century B.C. The visions claim to be prophecies of the future of world history. Chapters 2 and 7 cover the period of the Gentile empires up to the end of the age. Chapters 8-11 specifically concern Jewish history between the close of the Old Testament and the advent of the Messiah and beyond.

## Outline of Daniel

Daniel in Captivity and his rise to power, ch. 1.  
 Nebuchadnezzar's dream of the image and its meaning, ch. 2.  
 The golden image and the fiery furnace, ch. 3.  
 Nebuchadnezzar's vision of the tree and its meaning, ch. 4.  
 The feast of Belshazzar, ch. 5.  
 Darius' reign and Daniel in the lion's den, ch. 6.  
 Daniel's vision of the four beasts, ch. 7.  
 Daniel's vision of the ram and the he-goat, ch. 8.  
 Daniel's prayer and the prophecy of the seventy sevens, ch. 9.  
 Daniel's vision of God by the Hiddekel, ch. 10.  
 The Wars of the kings of the North and the South, ch. 11.  
 Conclusion of the prophecy, ch. 12.

## Themes of Daniel

The Book of Daniel is a philosophy of history in the prophetic vein. It concerns the great kingdoms of the world, the coming of the Messiah, opposition to him and the final Kingdom of God. The major vehicles of apocalyptic in Daniel are dreams (as in ch. 2) and visions (as in ch. 7). At times earthly power is likened to a powerful colossus; at other times to powerful savage beasts.

While the apocalyptic character of the book is foremost, there are also many other important moral and theological truths presented. These include: Obedience to God (in this case through Jewish dietary laws in ch. 1) rather than easy compliance with ethnic mores. Maintenance of devotion to God (through prayer) despite restrictive laws prohibiting it (ch. 6). Important truths on the doctrine of angels and of the resurrection.

Prophetically, Daniel is important for an understanding of our Lord's discourse in Mt. 24-25, and the related passages in Mark 13 and Luke 21, the book of Revelation, and Paul's teaching on the mystery of iniquity and the man of sin in 2 Thess. 2.

The following are brief comments on some of the major prophetic sections:

### **1. Nebuchadnezzar's Dream of the Colossus (ch. 2).**

The interpretation of Nebuchadnezzar's dream was a mystery revealed by God (2:18) for which Daniel praises God (2:19-23).

The substance of the dream concerns the *latter days* (2:28), which may be taken to mean the Messianic age and subsequently. The various metals of the colossus represent world kingdoms, beginning with the head of gold which is Nebuchadnezzar himself (v.38).

Some who date the book in the 2nd century B.C. identify the kingdoms as Babylon, Media, Persia and Greece. However many scholars, including most conservative scholars, identify them as Babylon, Medo-Persia, Greece and Rome, and this identification accords with the teaching of 2:44 in which it is stated that the Kingdom of Messiah will arise during the times of these Kingdoms. Some continuing form of the fourth kingdom (Rome) would seem to be required if the prophecies of Daniel are to be fulfilled at the second coming of Christ, not the first coming alone. For this reason certain interpreters have seen the ten toes of the image as ten kingdoms of the final stage of the continuing Roman kingdom, though the toes are not explicitly numbered in the text of Daniel .

## **2. Nebuchadnezzar's Madness (ch. 4).**

While not a prophetic passage, ch. 4 is worthy of brief comment. Some have thought that the account of Nebuchadnezzar's madness is a legend, or an ancient attempt at describing the symptoms of paranoia in which the person loses any coherent and rational contact with his environment.

A former professor of mine has identified this illness as *boanthropy*, a rare kind of monomania, in which the person imagines himself to be a creature of the fields. He observed such a clinical case in England some years ago. The man ate grass and other vegetation, drank nothing but water which was served clean to him to prevent him from drinking from puddles, and though sparsely dressed he remained in good physical health.

## **3. The Feast of Belshazzar (ch. 5)**

A difficulty was seen earlier when inscriptions showed that Nabonidus was the king not Belshazzar his son, but recent records show that Belshazzar was in fact co-regent of Babylon with his father. While Nabonidus lived in Teima, Belshazzar exercised sole rule in Babylon.

Similarly, the identity of Darius the Mede has troubled scholars. It would appear that two persons, not one, were associated with the fall of Babylon in 539 B.C: Ugbaru (who apparently died shortly afterwards) and Gubaru, who seems identifiable as Darius the Mede.

## **4. Daniel's Vision of the Four Beasts (ch. 7)**

In this vision the wind stirs up four ferocious beasts from the depths of the sea, who evidently parallel the empires of ch. 2.

The first was like a lion with eagles wings (symbols of Babylon) which was humanized in its later form. The second beast had a two-sided aspect, and corresponds to Medo-Persia. The third, a leopard which is noted for speed,

corresponds to Greece. The fourth beast is a nondescript animal of great power and ferocity, which seems to correspond with Rome.

The parallel between the kingdoms of ch. 7 and those of ch. 2 appears to be evident. About Babylon there is no question. That the writer regarded Medo-Persia as one kingdom may be seen by comparing 5:28 with 9:1 and 10:1. That the Grecian Empire is intended as the third is likely from comparing 8:20-21 with 11:1-2.

The ten horns of the fourth beast correspond, it is said by some, with the ten toes of the Colossus (ch. 2). However, more important is the addition in ch. 7 of the 11th horn (7:8) which is understood to represent the anti-Christ who will persecute the people of God for *a time and times and half a time* (7:25). Ch. 7 sets forth the conflict between the Ancient of Days and the Little Horn which speaks blasphemies against God. The Little Horn derives from the fourth beast or kingdom.

### **5. Daniel's Vision of the Ram and the He-Goat (ch. 8).**

The Ram stands for Medo-Persia (8:20) and her rapid conquests. The he-goat stands for Greece (8:21) and the larger horn represents the first king, Alexander the Great who defeats the Persian forces. The breaking of the larger horn symbolizes Alexander's death (8:8, 22), after which there emerge four horns, or the division of the Greek Empire among Alexander's four generals.

A little horn emerges but this appears to be different from that of the fourth kingdom in ch. 7. Here in the third kingdom the little horn is likely Antiochus Epiphanes who persecuted the Jews (8:9-14) and in 169 B.C. entered the Holy Place and caused the sacrifices to cease.

### **6. The Prophecy of the Seventy Sevens (ch. 9).**

Following a period of prayer by Daniel the angel Gabriel gives to him a revelation of events leading to Messiah, his death and events which follow.

This is expressed as a determination of time during which the fulfillment would occur. The formula is seventy weeks, sevens or heptads, beginning with the decree to rebuild Jerusalem.

From any point of view ch. 9 is very difficult to interpret. That it was approximately this length of time from the Persian edicts to rebuild Jerusalem to the Crucifixion is undeniable but exact calculations are impossible. In any event, six great purposes of God for human redemption which are mentioned in 9:24 were accomplished at or through the death of Christ.

Some take the last week as a period of seven years which has been fulfilled with

the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 A.D. Others take the last week to signify a period of persecution of God's people at the end of the age immediately preceding the second advent of Christ, and that the time from our Lord's first to His second coming intervenes between the 69th and the 70th weeks.

### **7. The Wars of the Kings of the North and the South (ch. 11).**

Following the vision of ch. 10 Daniel was given a revelation of wars to come in ch. 11. These seem clearly enough to be the wars between the Ptolemies of Egypt and the Seleucids of Greece. The data derives from a vision or visions which Daniel had the skill to interpret. The vile person of 11:21 is Antiochus Epiphanes, though some see in these prophecies both a nearer and a more distant fulfillment.

### **Concluding Comments**

Much in Daniel has been fulfilled notably by Christ's advent and sacrificial death. Some things in Daniel may require both a nearer and a more distant fulfillment. Other matters seem clearly to demand (at least at the time of our Lord) a future fulfillment (cf. Matt. 24:15 with Dan. 9:27; 12:11).

There are profound differences of opinion about these prophecies. Some (chiefly the contemporary a-millennialists) treat all the numbers symbolically and they do not find the kings to represent concrete figures. For them the fulfillment is complete in Christ's first coming. It is Messiah's death that causes the sacrifices to cease in 9:24 they say and the *one who makes desolate* (9:27) is the destruction of Jerusalem by Titus in 70 A.D.

Others see sixty-nine sevens of years fulfilled at the death of Christ, but a gap between the 69th and 70th weeks. This last week will entail the persecution the saints suffer from the Anti-Christ during the period immediately before the Second Coming of Christ which, they argue, corresponds with Paul's doctrine of the Man of Sin and the teaching of the book of Revelation about the end times.

Our Lord identified Himself with the Son of Man of Daniel's vision (7:13; note Matt. 16:13; 26:64). His words in Matt. 25:46 reflect those in Dan. 12:2. The Book of Revelation contains many references to Daniel. It would appear from recent studies that new and fresh approaches need to be taken to these materials and topics.



## **NOTES ON HOSEA**

Samuel J. Mikolaski

The last part of the Old Testament canon is a group of twelve smaller or "minor" prophecies. This terminology simply distinguishes them from the longer or Major Prophets, Isaiah, Jeremiah and Ezekiel. The Minor Prophets are also called the Book of Twelve. The grouping precedes the Christian era. In some ancient manuscripts the Minor Prophets precede the Major Prophets but we have no knowledge as to why the books are arranged in their present form.

### **Background**

Amos and Hosea, who lived and prophesied in the 8th century B. C., are the earliest of the Hebrew writing prophets, though Amos is dated usually a little earlier than Hosea.

Hosea prophesied during the period (probably about 30 years duration) immediately prior to the fall of the Northern Kingdom (Samaria) in 721 B.C.

If, as may be the case, Hosea was a native of the Northern Kingdom then he is the only prophet in the canon from the North. He lived and prophesied in the North at about the time that Amos was active in Judah.

During the reign of Jeroboam II Israel enjoyed considerable prosperity though her national life was permeated by pagan and idolatrous practices. Jeroboam's death in 753 B.C. was followed by disorders including political intrigue and assassination. The next few years saw the decline and fall of the Northern Kingdom. Crucial to the period was the rise of the Assyrian power under Tiglath-Piliser III (745-727 B.C.). The Assyrian conquests cast a dark shadow over the eastern Mediterranean nations. It was a period of economic collapse and political vacillation as the political parties in Samaria fluttered between alliances with Assyria and Egypt, the two world-powers (Hosea 7:11). Parallel records are in 2 Kings 14:23-20:21 .

Apart from the references to Hosea's marital relations and family little is known about his life and activities. His knowledge of political and international affairs make it unlikely that he was an uneducated peasant. He shows awareness of life not only in Israel, but also Judah (8:14), Achor (2:15), Benjamin (5:8), trans-Jordan (6:8) and Lebanon (14:5-7).

### **Outline of Hosea**

Hosea's marriage as a paradigm of Israel's relations with God, ch. 1-3.

Israel's sins indicted and judgment promised, ch. 4-10.

God's love for Israel and his grief over her, ch. 11 .

The word of judgment and grace, ch. 12-13.

God's faithfulness to restore and heal His people, ch. 14.

## **The Message of Hosea**

Hosea knew the root of Israel's trouble and proclaimed it:

- Apostasy from God's covenant (8:1).
- Ignoring the laws of God (8:12).
- Corruption of the Levitical sacrifices (8:13).
- Introduction of pagan sacrifices (9:3-5).
- The knowledge and service of God debased (13:2).

What Jeremiah was to Judah more than a century later during the events which led to the Fall of Jerusalem, Hosea was to Israel. He felt deeply the sins of his people and the terrors of inevitable judgment.

In addition to pagan religious sacrifices, the festivals had become seasons of unrestrained sexual license (part of pagan fertility cults practices). Hosea condemns a long list of vices including falsehood, perjury, injustice, drunkenness and lust, robbery, murder, treason combined with the veneer of empty religious ritual (cf. 4:1-6).

The central theme of Hosea is the importance of personal knowledge of God and obedience to God (4:6; 6:6). The initiative of God to make Himself known to His people, and to love them despite their moral corruption and backsliding is Hosea's redemptive message. He is the prophet of grace. The metaphorical use of his tragic family relations to illustrate the unmerited favor of God to His people is the key feature of his message.

Some noteworthy passages are:

- 2:19, 20, 23
- 4:1, 6, 9
- 6:1, 6
- 7:11
- 10:12
- 11:3, 4, 8
- 12:5-6
- 13:4, 14
- 14:4

## **Lessons from Hosea**

### **1. Hosea's Family: A Living Paradigm**

The central theological and spiritual truth of the book concerns Hosea's marital relations which are made a parable of the relations between God and His people. The narrative is deeply personal; the interpretation is applied to Israel nationally; and the application is spiritual embracing the nation generally and every person

within it individually.

The truth expressed is that an unfaithful people are loved by God, sought by Him and reconciled, disciplined and restored, just as Hosea loved his erring wife who apparently was undeserving of his devotion.

The sources of this are chapters 1 and 3, with chapter 2 being a sermon on the theme of fidelity sandwiched in between. Chapter 1 is in the third person; chapter 3 in the first person. It seems best to take these chapters as a unit made up of autobiographical, biographical and didactic materials.

Upon Yahweh's command (1:2) Hosea married a woman named Gomer who was unworthy and unfaithful. She is called a *wife of whoredoms*. Children were born. Some commentators feel that Hosea was forced to conclude that the children were not his own (1:2), but others feel that they were or at least two were his own. In any case he accepted them as his own (1:4, 6, 9).

But, though he loved Gomer she forsook him. Chapter 3 states that she was loved by her paramour and that Hosea bought her back (either from slavery or the servitude of a prostitute) and re-established her as his wife (3:1-3). She may have been shamed and deserted, but in any case Hosea redeemed her. This also is given a parabolic significance.

There is throughout the book a strong sense of compassion and devotion. Unmerited and unquenchable love is the symbol of God's free grace to his sinful and backsliding people who appear in this case as Yahweh's erring wife.

## **2. Significant Names**

Names in Hosea have important spiritual significance. In addition many names especially geographical ones are employed symbolically in the poetry and poetic prose which characterizes a large part of the book. Thus Ephraim stands for the Northern Kingdom (7:1) and snow-capped Lebanon is a voice of strength and inspiration (14:5-7).

Each of the three children is given a name which symbolizes Israel's history. The first, Jezreel (1:4, 5) typified the dissolution of the northern monarchy as punishment of the house of Jehu for the bloodshed of Jezreel.

The second, Lo-ruhamah (1:6, 7) means mercy taken away from it, or un-pitied, means that God would withdraw his pity and judge them.

The third, Lo-ammi (1:9) means not-my-people and points to God's rejection of them.

Chapter three is important also for the unusual reference (3:4-5) to the future of

Israel. Despite her backsliding and rejection God will restore her in the latter days.

### **3. Holiness and Love**

Amos and Hosea have much to say about the covenant love of God (Amos 2:10; 3:2; Hosea 11:1). The original step was God's. He called them. Thus grace is at the center of God's dealings with His people.

In Hosea several words are used for love. The more important one is the word *hesed* which can be translated mercy; specifically *tender-hearted-mercy*. In Hosea it grows into God's covenant-love for His people. They have been unfaithful, which is pictured in Gomer's faithlessness. But like Hosea to Gomer, God is faithful in his love to Israel and redeems and reconciles her.

Gradually the meaning of grace emerges through the message of Hosea and from other prophetic writings until it springs full-blown from the pages of the New Testament in the face of Jesus Christ.

### **4. The Knowledge of God**

So far as the divine indictment is concerned the tragedy of Israel's sin is epitomized in 4:6 (note 4:1-6). They did not know God, either in an intellectual way, or morally as well. The knowledge of the Most High should have affected their entire life. The knowledge of God entails obedience that is not mere religious formality

### **5. Message of Hope**

While the book concentrates upon the tragedy of Israel's alienation from God through her sinning, and the inevitable judgment soon to follow, it is not unrelieved by hope. In 3:4-5 there is a glimpse of the restored nation in the latter days following the bleak days of national trouble.

## NOTES ON JOEL

Samuel J. Mikolaski

### The Man and his Message

Beyond his name and his father's name we do not know anything personal about the author of this book. The indications are that the scene is set in Judah, more particularly Jerusalem, and that the writer, if not of the priestly caste himself, was concerned about true worship as against formal worship. His knowledge of farming and locust infestation conditions is intimate.

Joel may be the earliest of the writing prophets, before 800 B. C., perhaps at the time of Jehoash and thus an older contemporary of Amos.

Others regard the book as the product of later editing, perhaps 6<sup>th</sup> century B. C., or even as late as 400 B. C. The evidence is not conclusive. Life in Joel is Jerusalem-centred (2:7-9) with no reference to the Northern Kingdom. Phrases like ministers for priests (1:9) and certain Aramaisms suggest to some a later date. There seems to be a quotation from Obadiah (2:32, from Obadiah 17), and probably other quotations from biblical sources as well. The Greeks are traders but not apparently an empire (3:6). Such considerations, and others, lead many scholars to date the book around 400 B.C. or a little earlier, that is, after the restoration of Jerusalem's wall (rebuilt by Nehemiah in 444 B.C., cf. 2:7-9) but before the Persian destruction of Sidon in 345 B.C. (note Joel 3:4).

### Outline of Joel

#### I. Prophetic-Historical, 1:1 - 2:27

- Desolation, through a locust plague, ch. 1
- The Day of the Lord, 2:1-11
- Call to true repentance, 2:12-17
- Reversal of judgment and restoration, 2:18-27

#### II. Eschatological-Apocalyptic, 2:28-3:21

- Universal bestowal and gifts of the Spirit, 2:28-32
- The judgment of the nations, 3:1-17
- The consummation: blessings on Jerusalem, 3:18-21

### Structure

Joel speaks in the first part of the book (1:1-2:17); whereas Jehovah is presented as speaking in the second part (2:18-3:21).

Early Hebrew forms of the book divided it into two parts between 2:27 and 2:28, which plan I have followed in the outline.

Later Hebrew forms of the book gave a four-chapter division as follows:

- 1 - 1:1-20
- 2 - 2:1-27
- 3 - 2:28-32
- 4 - 3:1-21

The first part of the book is evidently prophetic-historical, while the second part is eschatological-apocalyptic.

### **Purpose and Contents**

A devastating plague of locust is the occasion of the prophecy. Joel sees in this event a portent of the divine judgment (*The Day of the Lord*) which is yet to come. At that time God will judge men and nations. Joel calls the people back to true inward repentance, not the formal religious acts of external self-abasement. In the course of these prophecies there are given the apocalyptic messages which look to the universal gift of the Spirit and the glorification of God among his restored people.

Noteworthy passages of the book are:

- 1:13-14
- 2:25-27
- 2:28-32
- 3:10
- 3:18

### **Themes of Joel**

#### **1. Devastation as Judgment, 1:1-12**

There is no reason to suppose that a literal plague or succession of plagues is not in view. The effects of the plague are described in vivid detail. The priests should mourn like an aged virgin who has lost her fiance. The locust destroys the vines from which the wasted drunkard gets his solace. In addition, the desolation cuts off crops and cattle which might be used for sacrifice. In this way formal, hypocritical religion is cut off by God.

#### **2. True Repentance, 1:13-20**

In two forceful passages Joel calls the nation to true repentance. First, to the priests who claim to minister religion but are corrupt. Second, to the nation as a whole (2:12-14). In this memorable passage Joel calls upon them to rend their hearts, not their garments. Genuine worship is called for from young and old alike.

In the Bible *heart* means more than the emotions or affections; it stands also for the mind and the will. The stress on repentance and calling upon the name of the Lord does not indicate ethnic salvation, but the genuine response of faith to God and obedience to him. When the concept of divine mercy is joined to this we have the double biblical emphasis upon grace and obedient faith.

Restoration and healing of the land follows true repentance (2:18-27).

### **3. The Day of the Lord, 2:1-11; 3:1-17**

This phrase is a common name for the coming final divine judgment upon individual men and women and nations. The language in verse 10 seems to pass beyond the literal locust plague to a greater divine judgment.

The theme is picked up again in chapter 3 and applied to God's final victory over the nations. Verses 3-8 seem to apply to nations who persecuted the Jews. The time is in the future but is not specified. The international character of the assembled armies (3:2) points for many to the latter days and the final struggle between God and the world powers.

### **4. The Gift of the Spirit, 2:28-32**

This passage is a climax of prophetic utterance. Peter proclaimed its fulfillment on the day of Pentecost (Acts 2:16-21, 37-40).

Here then is an important link between the old economy and the new, a difference which centers upon the universal gift of the Holy Spirit.

Joel 2:28-29, 32 was fulfilled at Pentecost. Verses 30-31 were fulfilled at the crucifixion of Christ or await fulfillment when God finally overthrows his enemies.

In the Old Testament the Spirit of God came upon men and women on special occasions for special purposes (e.g. Samson, David). A strategic fact about salvation in Christ in the New Testament is the gift of the Spirit to all who believe in Christ (Acts 2:37-40). The mark of the Christian is indwelling by the Holy Spirit. Christians thus live in times of the fulfillment of Joel's prophecy.

### **5. The Consummation, 3:18-21**

The climax of God's victory is his enthronement among his people at Jerusalem (3:17). The final verses again refer to the judgment of Israel's enemies.

# **AMOS' MESSAGE FOR TODAY**

A study guide prepared by Dr. Samuel J. Mikolaski  
for the  
Division of Christian Studies  
of the  
The Baptist Union of Western Canada  
1973

[Dr. Mikolaski developed and implemented the concept of the Division of Christian Studies for Christian Discipleship Training among the churches of the Baptist Union of Western Canada.]

## **Outline**

### **I The Prophet, His Times and His Message**

- Lesson I      Oracles of Judgment, ch. 1-2
- Lesson II      Sermons on the Sin and Judgment of Israel, ch. 3-6
- Lesson III     Visions of Judgment on the Sin of Israel, ch. 7-9

### **II Amos' Message and Modern Society**

- Lesson IV      (a) Key Feature Model  
                    (b) The Nature of God  
                    (c) God, Humanity and the Moral Order  
                    (d) Revelation
- Lesson V      (e) Social Justice  
                    (f) Culture and Religion  
                    (g) Prophets, Prophetic Ministry and Culture
- Lesson VI      (h) The Covenant in Amos  
                    (i) Religion and Sacrifice in Amos  
                    (j) Response to God in Amos  
                    (k) Hope and the Remnant in Amos

## **Purpose of the Course**

To study the message of the prophet Amos and to discover the relevance of his message for modern man and modern society.

## **Method of Study**

In the first three lessons we will concentrate on grasping the structure and message of the book in a systematic and expository way.



The last three lessons are devoted to major themes, to show how our understanding of God, the world, humanity and moral responsibility have their roots in the Old Testament. The continuing relevance of biblical teaching to modern life is in view.

### **Textbook**

Page H. Kelley, *Amos: Prophet of Social Justice*.

### **Additional Reading**

Useful books of varying viewpoints include:

J. L. Mays, *Amos*.

J. D. W. Watts, *Studying The Book of Amos*.

R. S. Cripps, *A Critical And Exegetical Commentary On The Book Of Amos*.

J.A. Motyer, "Amos," *New Bible Commentary* (Revised 1970).

The old commentary on Amos by George Adam Smith in *The Expositor's Bible* is read by all serious students of the prophet.

### **Translations of Amos**

It is important to read Amos in a modern translation such as *The New English Bible*. Other translations such as *The Revised Standard Version* are helpful. Most commentaries will offer translation notes on the more difficult passages.

## **LESSON I**

### **ORACLES OF JUDGMENT**

(Amos 1-2)

#### **Aim of the Lesson**

(a) To study the structure of the Book of Amos with a view to obtaining a general understanding of its form, method and message.

(b) To study the Oracles of Judgment in ch.1-2. These were pronounced against the nations surrounding Judah and Israel, culminating in the Oracles of Judgment against Judah and Israel.

#### **Outline of the Book of Amos**

Examine the following outline of the book. Keep your Bible open and follow each section as you proceed through the outline. Try to gain an over-view of the book.

Read the Preface in the textbook (pp. 5-9), and Chapter I (pp. 13-27) for its introductory material.

Introduction, 1:1-2

Locale, 1:1

Theme, 1:2

## **I Oracles of Judgment, ch. 1-2**

In each case it is God who speaks, indicting a people for three, indeed four, transgressions. Judgment must come. The reason in each case is given. Mostly it is for crimes against humanity. In each case the leaders (who are primarily responsible) will be overthrown.

1. Damascus, Syria 1:3-5: for waging cruel warfare, and perpetrating atrocities.
2. Gaza, Philistia, 1:6-8: for war, and the slave trade even in peaceful times.
3. Tyre, Phoenicia, 1:9-10: for slave trade despite a covenant of friendship.
4. Edom, 1:11-12: for being warlike, unmerciful, and vengeful in spirit.
5. Ammon, 1:13 -15: for atrocities committed, and for war to gain territory.
6. Moab, 2:1-3: for unmerciful, vindictive, desecrating hatred.
7. Judah, 2:4-5(Southern Kingdom): for despising God's law, transgressing his statutes, and following the errors of their fathers.
8. Israel, 2:6-16 (Northern Kingdom): for injustice, greed, oppression, uncleanness, profanity, blasphemy, sacrilege. Their sin is compounded because they ignore the lessons of their past history.

## **II Sermons on the Sin and Judgment of Israel, ch. 3-6**

(Some see in this section five speeches, beginning at: 3:1; 4:1; 5:1; 5:18; 6:1. The entire section 2:6-6:14 concerns Israel, therefore some prefer to retain it as one literary or logical unit. )

1. *First Discourse*, ch. 3

Israel, especially privileged, is due for judgment (3:2).

The prophet vindicates the truth and his prophetic ministry (3:3-8).

The heathen are invited to witness Israel's judgment (3:9-10).

Only a broken remnant will survive (3:12); even Bethel will be destroyed (3:14).

2. *Second Discourse*, ch. 4

The low moral condition of womanhood in Samaria (4:1-3).

Their sins: oppressive, merciless, self-indulgent.

God satirizes their religious practices (4:4-5).

Rejection of warnings paves the way to judgment: bread (4:6); water (4:7-8); crops (4:9); suffering and death (4:10); overthrow (4:11); climax (4:12-13).

### 3. *Third Discourse*, ch. 5-6

Lamentation over the demise of the virgin Israel (5:2).

God explains his doings, "Thus saith the Lord...

The double woe, 5:18; 6:1. If they had sought the Lord the Day of the Lord would not have overtaken them, but now Assyria will usher it in.

## III Visions of Judgment on the Sin of Israel

1. The devouring locust, 7:1-3

2. The consuming Fire, 7:4-6

3. The searching plubline, 7:7-9

(Historical narrative regarding Amaziah and Amos, 7:10-17.)

4. The basket of summer fruit, 8:1-14.

5. Jehovah beside the altar, 9:1-10. Judgment is inevitable (9:1-6) and is righteous (9:7-10)

## Conclusion

A better day will dawn for Israel, 9:11-15

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## Amos and His Message

Amos was partly contemporary with Hosea, and may be regarded as among the earliest of the writing prophets of the canon of scripture. His messages were delivered during the reign of Uzziah in Judah (c.783-742 B. C.) and Jeroboam II in Israel (c. 786-746 B. C.). His prime activity was probably during the decade 760-750 B. C., though these dates cannot be established with certainty.

He was a herdsman from Tekoah, which was a tiny village in Judah a few miles south-west of Jerusalem, but he was far from being a country bumpkin. It is likely that he was a landowner and shepherd, perhaps of some means. His acquaintance with the surrounding nations probably indicates that he traveled not a little, perhaps to buy and sell goods and agricultural products.

Amos was called to prophesy against the surrounding nations. He does this first,

but also prophecies against Judah and Israel. His theme is the imminent judgment of God against personal sin, social evils, national atrocities and hypocritical religion. At the end of the book is a message of hope.

Amos wrote centuries before the rise of the great Greek philosophers and the development of the Greek and Roman Empires. His age saw the beginnings of the national and empire movements from which followed the modern international political game as we have come to know it.

What Amos says and implies about God, the world, man and the moral order of things epitomizes the great truths of the Old Testament, which are foundational to the development of western Christendom and civilization as we know it. Amos is as important for what he assumes and implies as for what he explicitly says. In this respect the prophecy is important to our times as we examine our own world view. At issue is the defence of humanity as a spiritual beings as much as the declaration of the revelation and judgments of God against human sin.

The prophecy is a call to turn from evil and seek the Lord, and judgment will be averted (5:6).

Find a map of Israel which displays boundaries in the Old Testament. Notice that Amos' messages are directed at the nations that surround Israel. His approach is a clever didactic tactic: he first indicts the nations around (his contemporaries would gladly agree); but then he zeroes in on Judah and Israel, which scandalized his contemporaries.

### **Oracles of Judgment**

Amos 1-2

Read Amos ch. 1-2 in the *Authorized (King James) Version* and in at least one modern translation (preferably *The New English Bible*, or the *Revised Standard Version*).

Read Ch. 2-3 in the textbook (pp.28-51).

Note the structure of the oracles: Amos indicts each of the surrounding nations (locate them on a map).

These charges would be well received in Judah and Israel (the Southern and Northern Kingdoms of Israel). But Amos' purpose is to zero-in on them also. His method is to indict the surrounding nations, but then to bring the message home to his presumptuous contemporaries.

What are the atrocities for which the nations are judged? What are the evils for which Judah and Israel are judged?

Is Amos saying that, bad though the barbarisms of the nations are, the sins of the Israelite civilization are worse?

## **ASSIGNMENT**

"Can the sins of civilization be worse than the sins of war?"

Write an essay of 3-4 pages on this question bearing in mind what Amos says about Damascus (1:3), Gaza (1:6), Tyre (1:9), Edom (1:11), the Ammonites (1:13), Moab (2:1), in comparison with Judah (2:4) and Israel (2:6).

## **LESSON II**

### **SERMONS ON THE SIN AND JUDGMENT OF ISRAEL**

(Amos 3-6)

#### **Aim of the Lesson**

To ascertain the teaching of the three discourses of these chapters, which are addressed to Israel (the Northern Kingdom).

Study Amos 3-6

Read the discourses carefully in a modern version. Parallel the reading of scripture with reading the textbook ch. 4-7, (pp. 52-99). Note the major themes outlined and commented upon in the textbook. Underline important ideas and make notes.

It is customary to see three discourses in these chapters: The first Discourse (ch. 3) is addressed to Israel (the Northern Kingdom). The second Discourse (ch. 4) is addressed to the women of Samaria (Samaria was the capital of the Northern Kingdom). The third Discourse (ch. 5-6) is a lament over Israel, as over the demise of a virgin daughter, in view of her national judgment.

Some have seen five, rather than three, discourses in these chapters, as indicated in the outline in Lesson 1.

#### **Important Major Themes.**

As you study these discourses note the dramatic metaphors and images which highlight the abuses for which Israel is judged. Draw up a list of the abuses under certain classifications, such as the following headings

##### **1. The Testimony of Conscience**

Amos assumes and declares the reality of a moral order and the moral nature and

responsibility of human beings. Is the fate of a society as civilization decided on a moral question? How has a system developed, and by what means is it maintained? Is justice actually observed? Is there freedom and dignity? Do avarice and luxury prevail? Do the well-to-do grind down the poor? Are the defenceless, the needy, children and others helped or oppressed?

## 2. Hinge-events of History

Amos sees the flow of historical events not as haphazard, but as expressing the purposes and judgments of God. He declares not only that individual men and women stand under judgment for their sins, but that civilizations, systems, and societies also stand under judgment (4:2). God is the Lord of history (3:9-10). Why not discern the signs? (3:3-6).

## 3. Religion on Trial

Their religion and religious tradition, though solidly based on the covenant of God, will not save them, because they have warped its meaning, blunted its spiritual and moral intent, and distorted its revelatory significance. Thus the prophet declares, "Seek not Bethel" (5:5), which was the religious shrine of the Northern Kingdom. "Seek good, not evil" (5:14-15) and "Seek me and ye shall live" (5:4-6) are the major positive emphases of the prophet.

The message of the prophet seemed to be insanity personified! ` Prosperity for the ruling classes - rich religious centers and festivals - a heritage glamorized - what else is needed for a happy life? But the foundation and the superstructure were rotten. It took divinely - inspired insight and courage to perceive the true nature of their social and religious life, and to declare God's judgment of it (note I Cor 1-2 - the foolishness of preaching the Cross which is, nevertheless, the wisdom of God).

## **ASSIGNMENT**

Write an essay of 4-5 pages on the abuses enumerated by Amos in these three discourses. Apply these to our own country and local social situation. Is God concerned about social righteousness? Is it possible for religion and religious structures to condone and approve social abuses? Is social justice a part of true spirituality?

## LESSON III

### **VISIONS OF JUDGMENT ON THE SIN OF ISRAEL**

(Amos 7-9)

#### **Aim of the Lesson**

(a) To study the significance of the five visions of these chapters as further disclosures of God's judgments, which point to His greatness and glory.

(b) To ascertain the fitness and significance of the hope passage (9:8b-15).

Read Amos ch. 7-9

Read these chapters with care. Follow the text with the comments in the textbook, ch. 8-13 (pp.100-132). Make notes of important points.

### **Five Symbolic Visions**

1. The Locust Plague (7:1-3). Intended is the destruction of the Spring crop, which affects the people directly. The unnamed enemy is Assyria.

2. The Searing Drought (7:4-6). The second calamity is also physical; but, again, the destruction is mercifully not total.

3. The Plumbline Test (7:7-17). The foregoing are natural calamities; this judgment works through historical events. The plumbline points to a given divine standard which tests man's structures for truth and righteousness. Included is the important passage on Amos' call and commissioning to prophetic ministry.

4. The Basket of Over-ripe Fruit (8:1-14). Israel is over-ripe for judgment. The satire is grim: they are ripe, not for taste, but for judgment. Their oppression, superficiality and dishonesty have gone far enough (8:5-6). The satire is sharpened: those who oppressed and defrauded others have defrauded themselves by adhering to false religion. The perfect con artist is he who can con himself. The real famine is not for food, but for want of hearing the true Word of God (8:11-12).

5. The Vision of God (9:1-8). God is seen standing, as if in the act of judgment, by the throne of His glory. Now they are no longer pursued by their conscience, but by their fate. Judgment is at hand.

### **Grace Mingled With Judgment**

9:8-15

"Yet I will not wipe out the family of Jacob root and branch;" and "a time is coming" (9:13) express hope for restoration through divine mercy.

Some have thought that this passage is a later addition and out of step with the sombre judgmental character of the book. What do you think? Most scholars see the message of hope in Amos as integral to the purpose of the prophet. A Jewish Rabbi once told me in a discussion of Amos that only a Gentile could conjure up the idea that hope is inimical to Amos' prophecy. To the Jew, hope is commanded

by God. After the purging judgment comes the day of restoration and joy.

### **ASSIGNMENT**

Note how the symbolic visions lead to the vision of God exalted and holy. Write a short essay (2-3 pages) on the majesty of God in relation to (a) judgment and (b) hope. Entitle it "Judgment and Grace". Relate your ideas to other visions of God as high and holy in the Bible.

### **LESSON IV**

## **GOD, HUMANITY AND THE WORLD**

### **Aim of the Lesson**

To ascertain the teaching of Amos on four major themes, as follows

- a) Key Feature model on the nature of the world in relation to God.
- b) The Nature of God
- c) God, Humanity and the Moral Order
- d) Revelation

### **Importance of the Lesson**

This lesson is of the utmost importance for two reasons:

- (a) The importance of grasping the Old Testament concept of the nature of the world and its relation to the Creator.
- (b) The importance of seeing how this relates to the development of our modern scientific world-view, and present views of God and the world.

The biblical model presents to us the truth of the way things are; of the way reality should be viewed; of that which is actually the case. What the prophet assumes and declares in Amos is highly relevant to modern man's understanding of human nature, problems and needs, and to a Christian world-view.

### **Approach to Lessons IV, V, and VI**

The following procedure is suggested in approaching Lessons IV, V and VI:

- a) Read the lesson material carefully first.
- b) Review the points of the lesson by searching out the meaning of specific scripture passages and ideas with the help of the textbook and other commentaries and reference books.



c) In doing this, remember to stand back from the material to ask yourself: "What is Amos' understanding of God, the world, human responsibility, morality?" Then try to relate these ideas to the way western civilization has developed, in contrast to the ideas of non-Christian cultures.

You will only find out where you are going; by grasping where we have come from, and how important the biblical model of God, man and the world is to the future of humanity and civilization as we know it.

### **Key Feature Model**

Amos is a remarkable book for what it assumes and teaches in the 8th century B. C. Bear in mind that the Greek philosophers had not yet arisen, nor did the Roman Empire exist.

Essential to Amos' teaching are the following conceptions:

- a) The unity of God: there is only one true and living God.
- b) The unity of the world: There is only one world. The world is related to God as creation to Creator. It is dependable, not capricious. God is the Lord of all of it. Only on such a foundation as this could modern science emerge in the late Middle Ages, as A. N. Whitehead has said.
- c) The unity of history: the movement of events is under the sovereignty of God. God is Lord of history and all men.
- d) The unity of Morality: There is one universal righteousness. God judges all human beings and nations justly and righteously, not by relative standards of social mores.
- e) The personal nature of ultimate reality: God is personal. We relate to him as free, moral beings.

Think carefully about these important points. Consider how they have affected the way we see reality, and the nature and purpose of life. Review the entire book in your mind. Do these points under gird its message?

### **The Nature of God**

There are three hymn passages which furnish on the nature of God. Study them carefully.

- a) 4:13
- b) 5:8-9

c) 9:5-6

Using these and other passages which you find, list as many characteristics of God as you can. Such data are vital to developing a biblical understanding of the nature of God.

### **God, Humanity and the Moral Order**

The fact that God is revealed to be personal, and that human beings created by God to be personal, is consistent with the moral relations between God and humanity in Amos.

Review the book of Amos. Note how the following are either assumed or emphasized strongly by the prophet.

goodness  
justice  
sin  
freedom  
responsibility  
judgment

In Amos, as in all the Bible, morality is not bound up with a particular culture. Righteousness is universal. It is the righteousness of God. Note that judgment comes upon the nations (including Israel) not in terms of Israel's mores, but in relation to the demands of righteousness and justice.

Right and wrong stand for more than cultural mores. They stand for objective characteristics which attach directly and inalienably to acts and their consequences. Amos assumes that each man is subject to a standard of unconditional value.

### **Revelation**

Amos strongly emphasizes that God has spoken in the past and that He now speaks, which should command hearing and obedience.

God's speaking includes at least the following:

- a) Direct declarations that God has spoken, or given his word (1:2; 3:8, 11-12; 7:14).
- b) Prophetic insight, divinely inspired, on the significance of events (3:1-8)
- c) The voice of conscience illumined by the Word of God. (3:1-8)

- d) God's past covenant with their fathers should speak to them now (4:11-12).
- e) Spiritual hunger should turn men and women to God (8:11-12).

List some of the ways in which you see God's revelation occurring. In what ways does God speak?

### **ASSIGNMENT**

Write a short essay (3-4 pages) on one of the following topics:

- a) "The Christian's View of the World." In the light of the teaching of Amos, and modern man's view of the world, how should the Christian view his or her life and the world?
- b) "Right and Wrong." Does Amos' teaching on justice and righteousness commit the Christian to morality that goes beyond relative standards for behaviour?
- c) "God in Amos." In the light of God's self-revelation in Amos, how does God speak to us today? What is the message of Amos about God's nature and purpose?

### **LESSON V**

#### **CULTURE AND RELIGION**

##### **Aim of the Lesson**

To continue study on major themes in Amos, as follows:

- a) Social Justice
- b) Culture and Religion
- c) Prophets, Prophetic Ministry and Culture
- d) The Covenant in Amos

In studying these themes, follow the procedure outlined in Lesson IV.

##### **Social Justice**

Note with care the relation between Justice, the Righteousness of God and Social Concern in Amos.

Many passages indict social injustice and the need for equity, for example: 5:7, 10, 15, 24 and 6:1. Find and note passages which speak of:

- a) Dangers and abuses of wealth
- b) Obligations to the poor

c) Exploitation

d) Evils of civilized societies (2:6-8; 3:9-10; 4:1; 6:1, 12; 8:4-7).

### **Culture and Religion**

Amos says that the practice of religion had degenerated so as to become sacral approval of social injustice. Elaborate religious feast days and rituals were devised, but these had little to do with true religion (4:4f; 5:5; 5:21-24). Their actual practices, which they thought were expressions of a "high" culture, were in fact uncivilized and irreligious. Their high culture was barbaric, because they denied justice, oppressed the poor, distorted the religious tradition of which they were heirs and disobeyed the express commands of God. Arnold Toynbee has said that the moral purpose of a civilization is determinative of its capacity to survive.

### **Prophets, Prophetic Ministry And Culture**

Prophets like Amos spoke for God (7:13-16). Their words were to be heard as the words of the Lord. Their message extolled the righteousness of God and His judgments against sin, but also His unsearchable mercy and grace.

The prophetic ministry was not wholly condemnatory; but proclaimed the mercy of God as well. To say that prophetic ministry today must herald the death of the institutional church is to distort both the New Testament doctrine of the church and the Old Testament doctrine of prophetic ministry. The true prophet proclaims the Word of God, which for us today includes the Gospel of God's love and grace in Christ as its centre.

Thus prophetic ministry today (if it is to parallel that of the Old Testament prophets) must deal with the issues of sin and righteousness not simply social mores; and (if it is to parallel that of the New Testament apostles) must call men and women as believers to the new life and new body which is subservient to the Lordship of Christ.

### **The Covenant in Amos**

Some have thought that reference to the covenant is omitted in Amos. However, explicit references do occur, as in: 2:4b,c (the law and the statutes imply it); 3:1,2 the term "known" or "cared" is covenant language; and in 5:17 the clause "I will pass through you" is a Passover (Covenant) analogy.

How else can Amos' message be understood except within the context of the Mosaic Covenant? Wherever the judgmental conclusion "therefore" occurs, it points to the revelational base upon which their knowledge and responsibility are built and which makes their indictment more serious than that of the surrounding nations who did not share in the Covenant (cf. Romans 2:17-24).

The plus-factor in God's judgmental dealings with Israel is the Covenant. Because they had more knowledge and light, more was expected from them, and their guilt was the greater when they sinned with impunity.

What does this say today of our spiritual, moral and social responsibilities? As heirs of God's covenant in Christ, what do we owe to a world in need?

## **ASSIGNMENT**

Write a short essay on the dangers of a link between a culture and religion. Recall the state of the church in Russia and the oppression of the poor prior to the Marxist takeover. Cuba as well. Entitle the essay "Culture and Religion." How can the Christian today be committed spiritually, be responsible socially, and free politically so that his or her faith is kept pure and altruistic?

## **LESSON VI**

### **FAITH, OBEDIENCE AND HOPE**

#### **Aim of the Lesson**

To conclude study on major themes in Amos, as follows:

- a) Religion and Sacrifice in Amos
- b) Response to God in Amos
- c) Hope and the Remnant in Amos

In continuing your study of major themes, follow the procedure outlined in Lesson IV, "Religion and Sacrifice in Amos."

Amos 4:4-5, which compares a satire on their sacrifices as formal religious observances, does not mean that there were no sacrifices during their wilderness wanderings, or that God did not prescribe sacrifices, but that sacrifices devoid of obedience are pointless.

The corrupt priestly cult is rejected, 5:21-23. Not sacrifice (as formal religious acts), but grace brought them out of the wilderness. The rejection of ritual acts apart from faith and obedience is frequent in the prophets (Is. 1:10ff; Jer. 7:22ff; Hosea 6:6; Micah 6:6ff; Psalm 40:6-8; 51:16f.)

As practised in Amos' day, sacrifices had become expressions of a culture and a tradition, rather than of faith. They were mere acts of self-gratification and attempts to buy-off God (the wrong or pagan meaning of propitiation), than acts of contrition, dedication, faith and obedience.

Amos condemns gratuitous religious acts, including festivals (5:21), sacrifices (5:22), praise or worship (5:23), meal-offerings (4:4-5).

### **Response to God in Amos**

Patronizing and presumptuous religious arrogance, rather than humility, obedience and faith, are most strongly censured by Amos. They loll on couches, but talk of redemption (3:12). They wrongly presume that the day of the Lord does not mean judgment (5:18-20; 6:3). They concoct elaborate rituals to satisfy the religious quest (5:21-24).

They miss the primacy of God's grace and initiative, substituting self-adulation for thankfulness: "It was I" who redeemed you, says the Lord; "But you" perverted the past and the truth of the covenant (2:9, 10, 12; 3:1-2).

Judgment should provoke re-thinking of their attitudes and repentance (4:6, 9, 10-11). The call of Amos is that they seek the Lord Himself (5:4-6) and the good not evil (5:14). The pursuit of justice and goodness is as much part of the call as the challenge to seek the Lord. They are related but they are not the same thing. Neither can they be disjoined. The response of faith and obedience includes acceptance of God's Lordship which includes submission to truth and righteousness.

### **Hope and the Remnant in Amos**

A distinct change in emphasis occurs in 9:8b-15. The message moves from the sombre note of judgment to hope and restoration (9:13).

Some have said that this part of Amos is a later addition. But it is an unwarranted assumption to think that no message of hope' is consistent with Amos' message of judgment. In the Old Testament hope is everywhere commanded. The message of hope is integral with the pronouncements of judgment. The day of God's Kingdom is anticipated. The child of God does not retreat to despair, but lives in hope that God's purposes in history, including our lives, will be fulfilled. To a despairing age, hope comes as a refreshing wind of change.

### **ASSIGNMENT**

Write an essay of 3-5 pages on one of the following topics:

- a) "Faith and Obedience in Amos." What are men and women urged by Amos to do in response to his prophetic ministry?
- b) "Pessimism or Hope?" Should the Christian live in hope? Why? Relate to this the judgment of evil, the vindication of the good, and the final Kingdom of God.



**NOTES ON AMOS**

Dr. Samuel J. Mikolaski

**The Man and his Message**

Amos was partly contemporary with Hosea. His messages were delivered during the reign of Uzziah in Judah (c. 767-740 B. C.) and Jeroboam II in Israel (782-753 B. C.). His prime activity was probably the period around 750 B. C.

He was called while a herdsman and possible landowner from a tiny village in Judah named Tekoah to prophesy against the surrounding nations, Judah and Israel. He is regarded as among the first of the writing prophets of the canon.

The theme is judgment from God against personal and national sin; judgment not only against the surrounding heathen nations but also against God's own people Judah and Israel. Only at the end of the book is there a message of hope, spoken of the remnant who survive the judgment. But the prophecy is a call to turn from evil and seek the Lord and judgment will be averted (5:6).

His didactic technique is exquisite. If one takes a map of Palestine of the times which includes the approximate boundaries of Judah, Israel and the surrounding nations, it is clear that Amos first indicts the surrounding nations. Then when he has caught the attention of his Jewish hearers who nod their heads in agreement, he zeroes in on them indicting them as bad, if not worse, than their pagan neighbors.

**Outline of Amos**

Introduction, 1:1-2

Locale, 1:1

Theme, 1:2

**I Oracles of Judgment, ch. 1-2**

In each case it is God who speaks, indicting a people for three, indeed four, transgressions. Judgment must come. In each case the reason is given. Mostly it is for crimes against humanity. In each case it is prophesied that the leaders (who primarily are responsible) will be overthrown.

1. Damascus, Syria, 1:3-5: Atrocities.

For waging cruel warfare, and perpetrating atrocities.

2. Gaza, Philistia, 1:6-8: Conquest and deportation.

For war and slave trade even in peaceful times.

3. Tyre, Phoenicia, 1:9-10: Conquest and deportation.

For slave trade despite a covenant of friendship.



4. Edom, 1:11-12: Genocide.

For being warlike, merciless and vengeful in spirit, pitiless.

5. Ammon, 1:13-15: Genocide.

For atrocities committed, and for war to gain territory.

6. Moab, 2:1-3: Vindictiveness.

For unmerciful, desecrating hatred.

7. Judah, 2:4-5: Rebellion, transgression.

For despising God's law, transgressing his statutes, and for following the errors of their fathers.

8. Israel, 2:6-16: Religious hypocrisy.

For injustice, greed, oppression, uncleanness, profanity, blasphemy, sacrilege. Their sin is compounded because they ignore the lessons of their past history.

## **II Sermons on the Sin and Judgment of Israel, ch. 3-6**

(Some see in this section five speeches, beginning at: 3:1, 4:1, 5:1, 5:18, 6:1.

The entire section 2:6 - 6:14 concerns Israel,  
therefore some prefer to retain it as one literary or logical unit.)

### *1. First Discourse, ch. 3*

Israel, especially privileged, is due for Judgment (3:1-2).

The prophet vindicates the truth and his prophetic ministry (3:3-8).

The heathen are invited to witness Israel's Judgment (3:9-11).

Only a broken remnant will survive (3:12); even Bethel will be destroyed (3:14).

### *2. Second Discourse, ch. 4*

The low moral condition of womanhood in Samaria (4:1-3). Their sins: oppressive, merciless, self-indulgent.

God satirizes their religious practices (4:4-5).

Rejection of warnings paves the way to judgment: bread (4:6), water (4:7-8), crops (4:9), suffering and death (4:10), overthrow (4:11), climax (4:12-13).

### *3. Third Discourse, ch. 5-6*

Lamentation over the demise of the virgin Israel (5:2).

God explains his doings, "Thus saith the Lord..."

The double woe, 5:18; 6:1:

If they had sought the Lord, the Day of the Lord would not have overtaken  
them,

But now Assyria will usher it in.

## **III Visions of Judgment on the Sin of Israel, ch. 7-9:10**

1 The devouring locust, 7:1-3

2 The consuming fire, 7:4-6

3. The searching plumb line, 7:7-9

[Interlude: Historical narrative re Amaziah and Amos, 7:10-17]

4. The basket of summer fruit, 8:1-14

5. Jehovah beside the altar, 9:1-10: Judgment is inevitable (9:1-6) and righteous (9:7-10).

**Conclusion:** A new day will dawn for Israel, 9:11-15

### **SOCIAL JUSTICE IN AMOS**

The following notes were prepared for the Seminar, "Economic Means, Religious Ends," December 1-3, 1983, Regina, Saskatchewan, sponsored by the Liberty Fund Inc., and administered by the Fraser Institute of Vancouver, B.C.

It is commonly assumed by some Christian theologians and socialistically inclined church leaders (Liberation Theology leaders in under-developed countries and socialists in the West) that Amos advocates the view that inequalities in wealth are synonymous with injustice and analogously that wealth disparity in modern times is due to concentrations of corporate and private wealth in capitalist countries which exploit poor countries. They therefore call for redistribution of wealth by political means. Examination of Amos does not lend credence to this interpretation of his message.

#### **Consider:**

1. Social evil in Amos is not essentially inequality. Inequality is the result; injustice is the cause.

2. If there were justice, freedom and opportunity there would not be (so many) poor.

3. Humanitarian concern for the poor and helpless is a virtue which is expected of a civilized, God-fearing society.

#### **Data Regarding Social Injustice**

1. Genocide, Atrocity, Barbarism, Deportation (The Nations)  
(See Section 1, Oracles of Judgment ch. 1-2)

2. Injustice, Oppression (Israel)

2:6 Judicial bribes: sell righteous for silver, note 8:6

2:6 Excessive penalty: servitude for the price of sandals

3:9 Arbitrary government: engenders seething strife

3:10 Extortion, Fraud: store up proceeds of violence and robbery

5:10 Perjury: abhor truth in the courts

5:12 Subversion of justice:

turn aside just cases in the courts, 2:7

turn justice to wormwood, poison, 6:12

hate just arbitration, 5:10

### 3. Repression, Exploitation, Abuse of Power (Israel)

2:7 Repression

trample heads of poor in dust, 4:1; 5:11

hounding, even to death, 8:4

even necessary garments are expropriated, 2:8

2:12 Curtailing freedom of speech:

honest criticism not allowed

you shall not prophesy, 5:10; 7:10-13

intimidation which silences, 5:13

5:7 Thwarting the social compact:

no responsibility for a just social compact, 5:12

robbery: violating social obligation, promise, 3:10

5:11 Extortion:

exorbitant exactions of wheat

### 4. Unjust Commercial Practices (Israel)

8:5 Fraudulent volume measure: small ephah

8:5 Fraudulent weight (money) measure: shekel great

8:5 Fraudulent balances

8:6 Adulterated wheat

### 5. Moral and Religious Corruption (Israel)

2:4 Moral recalcitrance, v.5

2:7 Prostitution

2:8 Ill-gotten goods used in worship

2:12 Corrupting Nazarites with drink

3:14 Breach of code: iniquities, sins, transgressions, 5:12

4:1 Dissolute women

5:5 Religion without justice, v.7; 5:21

5:11 Inhumanity: insensitivity while enjoying luxury, 3:15

### **The Concept of Justice in Amos**

1. Justice, Judgment: 5:7, 15, 24; 6:12 (*mishpat*)  
 That which is just and is one's due.  
 That which is right.  
     To "reprove" is to arbitrate justly; in truth, 5:10.  
     To judge justly.  
 In Amos this term is paired with righteousness.
2. Righteousness: 5:7, 24; 6:12 (*tsadaq*)  
 In Amos, this is not specifically holiness.  
 It has the forensic sense of innocent party (2:6); the opposite of guilty one.  
 It identifies what is due, equitable, right, i.e. the execution of social, judicial and political obligations as fulfillment of a covenant, an obligation, a promise or an ethical code
3. Right: 3:10 (*nakoach*)  
 That which is right: straightforward, upright
4. Good, Evil: 5:14, 15  
 Seek good (*tubh*)  
     Goodness, prosperity, well-being, wealth  
 Not evil (*ra'a*)  
     Evil, that which is noxious, calamitous; destructive, or breaks up

### **Commentary**

1. The key-feature model in Amos is that of persons and personal relationships, of which the essential elements are freedom and responsibility. The relationship between God and humanity and among human beings is fundamentally personal and moral. Included are nations and individuals.

2. The world Amos depicts entails:

the unity of God  
 the unity of the world  
 the unity of history  
 the unity of morality

3. Justice is the characteristic of those acts and conditions which are right and equitable in a forensic sense under God's law. Justice is to render to each person that which is his or her due.

4. Good and Right concern that which is morally right, and Evil and Wrong that which is morally wrong. In their primary sense they do not define that which is culturally expedient or inexpedient. Right and wrong stand for objective characteristics which attach directly and inalienably to acts and their consequences. Examples: Genocide is wrong. False balances are wrong. Extortion is wrong. The evils of the nations surrounding Israel are judged by Amos not by the mores of Israel, but by the moral dictum that genocide, cruelty and inhumanity are wrong. As a quality of human actions, good reflects the goodness of God whose steadfast love endures forever (1 Chronicles 16:34; 2 Chronicles 5:13). God's justice is tinged with mercy, which ought to be reflected in human relationships as well .

5. To overlay injustice, inhumanity and avarice with a religious veneer is particularly odious.

6. It is the duty of every person to care for the needy, but also to ensure a just society so that each person can freely and equitably pursue his livelihood: i.e, due obligations; just dealings (Note: Micah 6:8).

### **THE THEOLOGY AND PERMANENT VALUES OF AMOS**

1. Amos' call to the prophetic ministry is instructive. While pursuing his daily round of duties as a herdsman in an inconspicuous village, he was called, like Elisha, to the office of prophet. So far as we know, he was not formally in the line of the prophets nor had he received professional training as a prophet. God chooses spokespersons according to his own will, not always in accordance with human traditions or decision. When God speaks, who can but prophesy? (3:8). God by-passed the cults and then addressed the people directly through His chosen messenger.

2. The life and character of Amos are shown in the illustrations he uses. These are apt, penetrating, and often earthy. We do not know how much formal academic training Amos had, but his insights and ways of expressing them are incisive. His speech is simple, vivid, and vigorous, but he is not a simple person. A teacher would do well to emulate him. Figures he employs include: a bird in the nest, two men meeting in the desert, a shepherd snatching two legs and the piece of an ear

from the mouth of a lion, sycamore trees, grasshoppers, a basket of summer fruit, a wagon loaded with sheaves, cattle-driving, grain-winnowing, a plumb line, locusts, fire, and so on.

3. The eye of faith. Amos was a keen observer of human affairs and, apparently, informed about conditions in his own country, in Israel, and in the surrounding countries. He had an eye to see things in relation to God's purposes and to call them for what they were. The historical events were ordinary and real, but with prophetic insight he understood their historical and moral significance.

4. The Key Concept: "Let Justice roll down like waters, and righteousness like an everflowing stream" (5:24, RSV), with its complement: "For three transgressions and for four, I will not revoke the punishment" (1:3, etc., RSV). God is just. He demands justice. Where this fails the proper response is penitence in the light of God's past and present dealings. Where penitence fails, the only corollary is judgment. Justice is not relative to human mores, but is measured by the revealed will of God. The reality of the moral order, the justice of judgments, and the integrity of God as Judge are concepts fundamental to the entire book. The righteous man acknowledges this, but he may have to do so silently (5:13).

5. Here are shown the dangers of luxury, wealth, and spiritual indifference, leading to covetousness, ostentation, pride, injustice and indifference to suffering, dishonesty, impurity, disloyalty, and social equilibrium based on self-indulgence. The indictment points to the "deceitfulness of riches," of which our Lord later spoke (Mark 4:19). Interrelations between economics, social order, and religion are also clearly in view. The economy was divided between the very rich and the very poor and was infused by the social ethos of self-indulgence at someone else's expense. Superficial Mosaic worship was, in fact, a cover for the insidious Ba'al fertility cult.

6. Sin is a reality. It is against God. In Amos sin is shown in a number of ways: as rebellion against the Lordship of Yahweh; as unrighteousness; as failure to come up to the standards of God's justice; as distortion of right, i.e., seeing white as black and black as white; as insensitiveness to suffering due to the callousing of conscience and the feelings. Sin points to human freedom and responsibility. Israel has misused freedom. If they are willing, they could use their freedom now to repent (5:4-6); which they will earnestly seek to do after judgment (8:12).

7. Because Judah and Israel have sinned they will be judged, just as the other nations will be judged. The principle of justice is the same. Their favored position cannot mitigate righteous judgment. Rather, their covenant relationship with God aggravated their position by making their guilt worse. From the standpoint of the lessons of their past history, the uniqueness of the divine disclosures, the prophetic ministry of men like Amos, and the blessings they had enjoyed, their sin is the sin of impunity, which can issue only in judgment. Nations which enjoy enlightenment and privilege also bear the burden of responsibility.

8. The thrust of judgment clearly is upon that generation. The nations will be judged now, and Israel will be judged as well. Judgment is inevitable. Grace is past. The promise is to the broken remnant. As difficult as this may seem to us, the inevitability of judgment when the cup of wrath is full must be grasped and believed.

9. Amos is among the first of the prophets (like the message of the book of Jonah) to say that God is not only Lord of Israel but also of history. All nations are seen to be responsible to God and ultimately under his control. National sin goes neither unobserved nor unpunished. God never abdicates his authority.

10. True faith in God must make a change in the lives of those who profess to believe in God. The satirical thrust of the book against the religious practices of Israel is very sharp. Here the truth of the sentence that "religion is the opiate of the people" is expressed long before modern times. This is religion gone amuck. It is hardened into forms and practices that have little relation to righteous living, the holy God, and personal purity. Individual and corporate worship must reflect the character of the true and living God. Note the comedy of religious ritual (4:4-5) and the final folly of substitute ritual (5:4-6). Religion and morality cannot be divorced (5:14-17).

11. Perhaps the most serious charge brought against the people of God is their indifference to suffering, their hardness of mind and blindness of sight not to see the right, their distortion of wrong into right, their unconcern for the needy, and their self-centeredness and covetousness. To worship God must mean that one's heart is made tender to need and suffering. How can a man worship God and close his heart to his brother or to a human being in need? Note the messages of all the prophets and of books in the New Testament like James.

12. The theological argument matches the literary structure. It builds to a climax. It is cumulative, like a snow slide down a mountain. He begins with indictments of the nations surrounding Judah and Israel and includes them also. Then he passes to the personal indictments of the lives of God's people. The final vision is of Yahweh himself who, sorely tried, acts to judge his people.

13. The reality, importance and teleological character of history are declared. God is not removed from historical events. He is concerned about them. He involves himself in them. The progress of history reflects his will and purpose. This points back to the Christian doctrine of Creation, and prepares the way for the invasion of history by God personally in the person of Jesus Christ. The acts spoken of in this book are not in super-history, but in the history of the events of this world. God is the Lord of history and the Lord of all nature. He transcends them all, yet his purposes are involved in their processes and ends.

14. God will achieve His purposes. The devious movements of men and nations

who trifle with the righteousness of God cannot finally frustrate his purposes. God's judgment closes in slowly, but surely, around those who forget him. Neither by acts of people who resist God and ignore him, nor by concepts devised to exclude him, can men and women escape his judgments.

15. The entire thought of the book centers upon the fact and reality of the divine revelation. All of the discussion moves around this point. God has spoken. Often the words recur, "Thus saith the Lord. . ." Amos' boldness to speak is predicated on the premise that God has chosen to speak through him, and that he now delivers this divinely given message. The kind of appeal Amos makes links his prophetic ministry to the ministry of other prophets through whom God had spoken in the past. There is continuity to the revelation. The Lord who spoke in the past now speaks. He is the God of Abraham, of Isaac, and of Jacob. He now addresses his people on terms of the same mercy, grace, and judgment. Note 2:11-12; 3:7-8; 7:14-16; 8:11-12.

16. The doctrines of election and grace underlie the thought of the book (3:1). The people of Israel are chosen from among the peoples of the earth by God. This not only grants special privilege, it also places extra responsibility on them (3.2). Expressions in the book which refer to them as God's people point to the covenant of grace.

17. Note three doxologies in praise of God: 4:13; 5:8-9; 9:5-6.

18. The last word is one of hope based on God's unchanging justice and unending love (9:11-15). Divine judgment can be averted only by obedience. God will destroy the rebellious. Through the awful judgment he will restore his people to himself and to their land, and he will finally accomplish his benign purposes.



## NOTES ON OBADIAH

Samuel J. Mikolaski

This, the fourth book of the Minor Prophets (fifth in the Septuagint order), is the shortest in the OT. We know nothing about the author except that he was probably from Judah. It is unlikely that any identification between him and other men in the Old Testament who carry the same name is possible.

While the book is concerned with the judgment of Edom and immediate reasons for that judgment, it reflects the ancestral antipathy between Edom and Israel which figures prominently in the teaching of the Bible.

### Occasion and Date

Some have argued for a date before the fall of Jerusalem in 587 B.C. and attempt to identify the attack on Jerusalem as far back as the ninth century B. C. (Jehoram, 2 Chron. 21:16-17) or the eighth century (Ahaz, 2 Chron. 28:17).

However certain historical and textual considerations lead most scholars to assign a date after the fall of Jerusalem to Babylon in 587 B.C. and to identify the attack on Jerusalem mentioned in Obadiah with that event.

This later date does fit in other ways. If we assign a date after 587 B.C. it is consistent with other references to the attack on Jerusalem in which Edomites shared (cf. Ps. 137:7).

There are textual similarities between Obadiah and other prophetic writings which affect our view of the date. Note Obadiah 10 and Joel 3:19; 11 and Joel 3:3; 15 and Joel 1:15, 2:1 3:4,7,14; 18 and Joel 3:8. *As the Lord said* in Joel 2:32 seems to be a quotation from Obadiah 17. These references suggest that Joel is before Obadiah, but just how long before is uncertain.

Further parallels between Obadiah 1-9 and Jeremiah 49:7-22 are noted. Many scholars suggest that the text of Obadiah is more forceful than the text in Jeremiah and reflects an older form of the prophecy. Since Jeremiah precedes Obadiah in time they are both seen to be dependent upon older prophecy against Edom.

In the light of the evidence we are left with placing the date near the fall of Jerusalem in 587 B.C. because of the vigorous nature of the description; or after the exile, perhaps 450 B.C. at about the time of Malachi as the memory of events surrounding the fall of Jerusalem. Verse 7 seems to suggest that the Edomites had been ejected from their land which would tend to reinforce the later date (note Mal. 1:3).

Traditionally, since the occupation of the land of Palestine under Joshua, the Edomites (whose territories flanked Israel's south-east desert borders) were kept under subjection, but sometimes at heavy cost. The Edomites themselves were

also under pressure from desert tribes who constantly harassed them and after the Chaldean decline eventually forced them to vacate their strongholds.

When the Chaldeans under Nebuchadnezzar besieged and took Jerusalem in 587 B. C. the Edomites shared in the victor's spoils and added to the sorrow of Judah by rejoicing over her plight. This is the occasion of the prophecy. Their vindictive attitude toward the broken and demoralized Israelites elicits the prediction of judgment to come on themselves (Lam. 4:21; Ez. 25:12-14; ch. 35).

## **Lessons of Obadiah**

### **1. Israel and Edom in the Bible**

A number of ancient names identify Edom and the Edomites including Seir, Esau, and Sela. Her principal towns were Sela, Bozrah and Teman. In later times Petra became one of her virtually impregnable fortresses. Edom was the area east and south of the Dead Sea.

The Edomites are the descendants of Esau, Jacob's brother, and they are not infrequently contrasted with Jacob's descendants in the Scriptures on spiritual grounds.

The tension between Jacob and Esau is described as going back to the womb and persisting afterwards (Gen. 25-36). Esau is the ancestor of Edom. He was already settled in those parts when Jacob returned from Haran (Gen. 32:3; 36:1-9). The Edomites had a state established with kings as rulers before Israel became a nation under a king (Gen. 36:31; 1 Chron. 1:43).

Under Moses' and Joshua's leadership the Israelites sought to cross Edomite territory on their journey northward from the wilderness to Canaan, via the king's highway, a road which passed along the eastern edge of the great plateau (Nu. 20:14-21; 21:4; Judges 11:17-18). But the Edomites refused permission to Israel so that they had to make a detour westwards through forbidding territory. Nevertheless, the Israelites were not allowed to despise Edom for this disservice (Deut. 23:7-8).

Over the space of many generations after the breakup of the Israelite kingdom into two parts there were predatory incursions by Edomites against Jerusalem. This ancient animosity is in the forefront of Obadiah's thinking as he writes.

Some have thought that Haman (in the book of Esther) who is described as an Agagite was a descendent of Agog and the Amalekites, thus a descendent of Esau. However, this is uncertain. The Herods of the NT were Edomites and were contrasted in the New Testament with persons of truth and good will.

Esau and Edom in the scriptures are presented as the opposite of faithfulness to God and a prized spiritual heritage. Esau's original despising of the birthright and sale of it to Jacob for a mess of pottage is a symbol of the spiritually careless and indifferent person (Heb. 12:15-17). There are frequent prophecies against Edom in the Old Testament. In these accounts Edom seems to represent open hostility to God's purposes and to God's people. Paul employs the contrast between Jacob and Esau as an illustration of the electing grace of God (Rom. 9:13).

## **2. The Word of the Lord**

In several places (note 1, 8, 18) the divine origin and inspiration of the oracle is affirmed. The message is the Lord's.

The dramatic character of the language is striking. Vivid metaphors are employed, such as that though their rocky fastnesses were like an eagle's nest and as remote as the stars (4) this would not protect them from judgment.

## **3. The Judgment of God**

Edom's judgment was due to her inhumanity, but judgment will come upon all nations (15, 16). God's judgments are justly retributive.

## **4. The Coming Kingdom**

The final kingdom will be the Lord's, not of human making (cf. 21; Rev. 11:15; 12:10). Its moral and universal character is stated in Obadiah 17.

## **NOTES ON JONAH**

Samuel J. Mikolaski

Unlike the other smaller prophetic books, Jonah is more a biography with a telling prophetic message than a series of prophetic oracles. While Hosea is in part biographical, Jonah's experiences are less a paradigm than Hosea's. There are similarities between Jonah and the 9th century prophet Elijah, and also between the message of Jonah to Nineveh and the release of the Gospel to Gentiles in the book of Acts.

### **Occasion**

Jonah tried to escape the responsibility of prophesying against Nineveh, the capital of Assyria. He fled westward by ship which was overtaken by a storm. To save themselves the sailors threw Jonah overboard. He was swallowed by a giant fish which God had prepared. He was delivered from the fish by God who then again bade him go to Nineveh. This time Jonah obeyed and the whole city repented. But Jonah was displeased and sulked. God taught him a lesson by destroying the plant which gave him shade. This was to show him that his concern for the Ninevites (against whom judgment would have come) should have been as strong as for the plant that gave him shade.

### **Outline of Jonah**

Jonah disobeys God and flees, 1:1-3.

The storm; Jonah is cast overboard and is swallowed by the fish, 1:4-17.

Jonah's prayer inside the fish and his deliverance, ch. 2.

Jonah's prophecies in Nineveh; the city repents, ch. 3.

God rebukes Jonah for his prejudices, ch. 4.

### **Authorship**

A wide range of dates has been suggested for the book. The author is unknown. The earliest possible date is the 8th century B.C. at the time of Jeroboam II 782-753 B.C. (note 2 Kings 14:25). A later date is now generally favored, perhaps in the 6th century B. C. Conservative scholars generally favor a date between Jeroboam II and the fall of Nineveh in 612 B.C.

### **Theme**

The main point of Jonah is that God's concern for humanity and grace toward humanity goes far beyond the Jewish people. This universalist theme finds its fulfillment in the NT where the redeeming love of God in Christ is clearly stated to be for all of humanity.

### **Interpretations of Jonah**

As a literary piece Jonah is not unlike the Elijah story cycle, and there are similarities in the events as well: God protects the prophet, rebukes him, is concerned about Gentiles, performs miracles, etc. Thus the historical sequence of the two figures is consistent with the literary type used in each case.

A popular modern view is that the book of Jonah is a useful but imaginative story, perhaps mythological, but not historical. However the historical interpretation ought not to be dismissed too quickly.

The following are some modes of interpretation:

### **1. Allegorical**

No interpretation is free of difficulties including this method. The story, it is said, represents the failure of Israel as Jehovah's servant: Jonah is Israel, the fish is Babylon, the swallowing is the exile, the deliverance of Jonah is the restoration of Israel to the land. While allegory is employed as literary device in the Old Testament (note Eccl. 12) there is usually a key to such interpretation within the allegory itself, but this is not the case with Jonah. Thus the allegorical interpretation is not consistent. The analogies are highly arbitrary.

### **2. Parabolic**

More popular is the view that Jonah is teaching material of a highly moral character, not unlike the parable of the Sower or of the Good Samaritan. This eases the burden of facticity, however, it does not relieve the problem of a false or fanciful tale having a good moral impact in the Bible. A further difficulty is that evidently Jonah was an historical figure, as the Kings writings appear to show.

Are we then to view the Elijah cycles as an invention? As important as the moral teaching advocated by the parabolic approach is, it seems to need grounding in data which are more concrete than the parabolic view appears to allow. Credibility and morality are important to each other.

### **3. Satirical**

It has also been suggested that Jonah is a fabulously satirical tale told to intolerant Jews, especially of the post-exilic period. The story is really a cartoon like Charlie Brown it is argued, in which the imagination is visual rather than logical. It is said to be a Jew laughing at himself and at his own people, but the point of the satire is divinely inspired.

Comic elements would include: Tarshish as the *end of the world*. God made the sea yet Jonah makes a futile attempt to escape on it. The prayer in the fish's belly and Jonah's being vomited out. Everything goes wrong: God kills Jonah's plant

but spares the pagan Ninevites. The cattle in sackcloth, etc.

Exaggeration reinforces this, it is said. The inconsistency of Jonah and the repentance of all of the men and the animals are given as examples. Also there is the irony of Jonah's unfaithfulness though his name (Amittai) means faithfulness.

Undoubtedly satirical elements are present, especially God's dealings with Jonah when the prophet was despondent over God's sparing of the Ninevites. However, the historical reality of the situation cannot be ignored. In the Bible satire usually accompanies an historical record to highlight the absurdity of human folly and disobedience.

#### 4. Historical

Both Jews and Christians have traditionally regarded the book as historical narrative. The prior ministries of Elijah and Elisha to Sidon and Syria (I Kings 17: 9-24; 2 Kings 5) suggest to some that Jonah's mission to Nineveh is an extension of that same concept. If so, and Jonah is unhistorical, the episodes of the Elijah-Elisha cycle stories might be literary inventions as well. There appears to be no reason why the truth conveyed, namely that God extends mercy to Gentiles as well as Jews, could not have been presented through historical narrative. This would be not unlike the breaking out of the Gospel beyond the Jewish Christians through Peter's vision and his unwilling visit to the house of Cornelius (Acts ch. 10). The truth conveyed is concretely embedded in historical event.

Argument favoring this conclusion includes at least the following: There are no indications within the narrative itself that it should be interpreted unhistorically; that is, purely parabolically or allegorically. And we know that Jonah was an historical figure who is referred to elsewhere (2 Kings 14:25). This, at least, is how the narrative has been interpreted in both Jewish and Christian literature. For Christians it is also of great importance that Jesus himself regarded the repentance of Nineveh as real and his reference to Jonah's being inside the fish seems best taken at face value (Matt. 12:40-41). As important as stories are in the Jewish tradition it seems difficult to see the language (note 4:11) on terms other than an actual sparing of the people and the city.

However, several difficult problems confront historical interpretation.

*First*, there is the story of Jonah's being swallowed by the great fish, which may be a genuine miracle. *Whale* is an English translation not in the Hebrew text; the true rendering is *great fish* or *sea creature*. Various incidents like this have been alleged up to modern times and some of them may be true. The prayer of Jonah is an obstacle to some because it suggests a conscious state. The poetic form is likely the result of: later meditation on the event. It is ironic that in the ship Jonah refused to pray, but now in the sea creature he must pray.

The reference to sea-weed (2:5) has led some to postulate Jonah's drowning, his body being swallowed by the fish, regurgitation of the body, and Jonah's being quickened to life again. But this interpretation seems unnecessary.

The story suggests that by a combination of natural causes and divine intervention Jonah was preserved to carry out his unwilling mission to Nineveh.

The *second* problem concerns the size of Nineveh and the reported repentance of its inhabitants. No concrete reference to Jonah may be expected to occur in the pagan inscriptions for obvious reasons, however there are references to religious reforms in Nineveh around 800 B. C. which to some point toward monotheism. In any event, such a revival would probably be brief and the city would quickly revert to former religious practices.

Excavations have shown that Nineveh was eight miles in circumference and could have had a population of 175,000. The figures given in Jonah 4:11 are consistent with demographical studies of other sites in ancient times. The reference to *three days journey* (3:3) probably refers not to the main city itself, but the entire administrative district (like Metro Toronto, Greater Edmonton, greater New York, etc.) which was probably more than thirty miles across. Polytheistic communities of the past were at times willing to listen to the messages of new and strange gods (note Paul on Mars Hill in Acts 17) so that Jonah's preaching is not inconsistent with patterns of ancient life.

The *third* problem is the rapidly growing shade plant (4:6). Called a gourd, it was a tropical plant. *Castor-bean plant* is one allowable translation of the text. In New Orleans we had such a plant at the front of our house and can testify to its rapid growth and shade yielding properties. In the passage the destruction of the plant and the physical discomfort which Jonah suffered because of the sun and hot wind were a lesson to him about his distorted values. He cared more for the plant and his own comfort than for the welfare of the Ninevites. God is more merciful than we at times are and often more merciful than religious people.

### **Jesus and Jonah**

The Gospel references to Jonah by Jesus are Matt. 12:38-41 and Luke 11:29-32. Jesus drew a parallel between his own death, burial and resurrection and Jonah's experience.

Jesus said that he would be vindicated not by a supernatural sign to the credulous and unbelieving but by the sign of Jonah. In Luke this is also related in the succeeding passage to the visit of the Queen of Sheba to Solomon. The sign is not miracle, but the grace of God sought by those who had not known it: The Ninevites repented and the Queen of Sheba made great effort to come to see Solomon and to hear about the God of Israel. Aliens to the household of faith had

responded, but the Jews had hardened their hearts.

Analogously, God's outreach to the heathen in Jonah is parallel to the Gospel breakthrough in Acts. There Peter had to learn (Acts 10-11) that God cared for the Gentiles even though Peter despised them.

The universal grace of God to mankind is thus an important lesson of the book (note Acts 11:18; Gal. 2:1-20).



## **NOTES ON MICAH**

Samuel J. Mikolaski

Micah came from Moresheth, a small town in the south-west part of Judah in the borders of the Philistine country. He prophesied in the reigns of three Judean kings, Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah, within the period 740-680 B.C. He was a younger contemporary of Isaiah.

### **Message**

There are affinities between Micah's prophecies and the oracles of Amos which were spoken a century before. Amos was born within a score of miles of Micah's birthplace and seems to have influenced Micah (note Micah 2:6; Amos 2:12; 7:12-13). Major themes in Micah parallel the message of Amos, for example: social injustice, religious corruption, divine judgment and ultimate deliverance (though this last theme is more prominent in Micah).

Micah's prophecies were spoken in Jerusalem which leads many to believe that he must have known Isaiah and perhaps have been influenced by him (note Micah 2:1-5 and Isaiah 5: 8-25; Micah 5: 9-14 and Isaiah 2:6-9; Micah 5:2 and Isaiah 9:6-7).

A century after Micah, Jeremiah cites his message (Jer. 26:18) which shows the impact of his ministry on the memory of the people.

Like Jeremiah, Micah had been an unwilling prophet, but the sins of the nation and the certainty of their doom drew from him public denunciation, especially as they felt themselves to be immune to divine judgment.

Micah's ministry probably began about a decade or a little more before the fall of Samaria to the Assyrians in 722 B.C. He saw that the Northern Kingdom was in imminent danger of destruction despite its apparent security and prosperity.

He then directed his message to the Southern Kingdom and its capital, Jerusalem. Like Amos before him, Micah castigated the ruling classes for oppressing the poor and abusing justice. As in Isaiah the messianic hope is more prominent in Micah than in Amos.

### **Outline of Micah**

#### **Judgment pronounced upon both Israelite Kingdoms, ch. 1**

#### **Oracles of Judgment and Grace, ch. 2-3**

Upon the ruling classes, ch. 2:1 - ch. 3:4

Upon the religious leaders, ch. 3:5-12

#### **God's Grace and Israel's Future Glory, ch. 4-5.**

The Messianic Kingdom follows Israel's travail, ch. 4  
The Messiah and Israel's triumph, ch. 5

**God Confronts Israel With Her Past and Present, ch. 6.**

Her past testifies against Israel, 6:1-5  
True repentance and worship are needed, 6:6-16

**Divine Rebuke and Promise of Blessings to Come, ch. 7.**

True repentance, 7:1-6  
True trust even though judged, 7:7-10  
The Messianic Kingdom, 7:11-20.

**Major themes of Micah**

Micah's prophecies center upon national sin and religious corruption, the cessation of prophecy to them, crisis and judgment, and finally restoration which will include a new universal faith in God and obedience to His will .

**1. Social Injustice.**

While Isaiah's ministry was urban centered in its tone, Micah's prophecies center upon the oppressed poor of the countryside. The ruling classes were oppressive (2:1-3; 3:1-4, 10) and injustice was common. Destruction is imminent for the ruling classes: governing class, priests and prophets (3:9-12).

**2. Religious Corruption**

Worst of all, social injustice was obscured by corrupt and idolatrous religious practices and justified thereby (2:11; 3:11). This unwarranted sense of security would be rudely overwhelmed along with the overthrow of the city.

**3. Divine Righteousness**

It follows that the people and their leaders had wrong ideas about God. God did not automatically ignore their wrongdoing or wink at it simply because they claimed the heritage of the Mosaic covenant. God is righteous and must deal righteously with sin. The holiness of God, in other words, carries ethical implications for the lives and conduct of men and women (3:8-9; 6:3, 8; 7:9, 18-20).

**4. Messiah**

Micah is famous for the concrete prophecy that the Redeemer would come out of Bethlehem (5:2) and also for his description of the Messianic Age (4:1-5).

**5. Confession**

The beautiful passage at the end of the prophecy (7:18-20) is still recited by Jews at Yom Kippur, the celebration of the great Day of Atonement. For Christians this has found its true fulfillment in the redeeming work of Christ.

## NOTES ON NAHUM

Samuel J. Mikolaski

Though the name of this prophet means *comfort* his message is the *burden* (1: 1) of inevitable judgment on Nineveh, with the possibility of deliverance not indicated.

We know nothing about the man. The location of the town of Elkosh (1:1) is not certain. Some feel that it may have been in Judah and that this oracle was probably spoken in Jerusalem.

### Occasion

The prophecy appears to have been spoken before the fall of Nineveh in 612 B.C., which event it anticipates. At the other end, the destruction of Thebes by the Assyrian king Ashurbanipal, mentioned in 3:8 as No, establishes for us the earliest possible date boundary. Nahum prophesied between these dates, probably closer to the fall of Nineveh, perhaps after the Josiah's reform in Judah, 621 B. C.

The Assyrian forces were the scourge of the ancient east. Their barbarities were legendary. The main point of the book is that God is going to settle with Nineveh for the atrocities they have committed. No longer will Judah and other nations have to live in fear.

With the death of Ashurbanipal in 627 B.C. the Assyrian Empire began to break up. Babylon seceded a year later and gradually assembled forces to overtake the Assyrian strongholds one by one within a dozen years. Ashur, the Assyrian capital, fell in 614 B.C. Nineveh was destroyed in 612 B.C.

Chapter 1 is a psalm (thought by some to be in part an acrostic) which declares the vengeance of God against his enemies and their punishment. Chapter 2 pictures the siege and desolation of Nineveh. Chapter 3 outlines the evils of Nineveh, compares her doom with the dreadful sack of Thebes (No) by the Assyrians, and declares the judgment of God among the nations.

### Outline of Nahum

God Magnified in His Justice and Judgments, ch. 1.

The Attack on Nineveh and her Overthrow, ch. 2.

Nineveh's Wickedness and Judgment compared with the Sack of Thebes, ch. 3.

### Themes of Nahum

#### 1. Divine Justice in History

Nahum forcefully portrays the power and justice of God in history. God is not idle or unseeing. Contrary to pagan beliefs that gods favor their own people regardless of their national life and conduct, Nahum declares the righteous judgment of God. Nations as well as individuals are accountable to him (2:2-3; cf. Deut. 4:24).

## **2. Ruthless Militarism Rebuked**

God is against Nineveh for her deeds. Once she was like a den of lions preying on others; now she herself has become prey (2:11-13). Here is the divine rebuke of ruthless militarism.

## **3. Acknowledgment of Divine Justice**

Judah finds release (1:15) in the judgment of God upon Nineveh. No longer need she live in terror. The tidings are "good" because God has rebuked evil power. God's people must learn to accept peace that comes through the divine judgment.

## **NOTES ON HABAKKUK**

Samuel J. Mikolaski

The books of Nahum, Habakkuk and Jeremiah are all concerned with the same group of events: the rapid decline of the Assyrian Empire and the rise of the Chaldeans as a great power and conquerors of the ancient world.

In Nahum God is declared to be righteous and to judge men including his own people righteously. This, too, is vital in the book of Habakkuk except that as the judgment is imminent questions are raised about the rightness of God's using a Gentile power against his own people.

Habakkuk is the first prophetic writing in which challenging questions are put to God. These are in the form of a soliloquy, not unlike passages in Job.

### **Occasion**

Awareness of the rising Babylonian (Chaldean) threat is evident from 1:6.

The Assyrians and their capital Nineveh were finally overthrown in 612 B.C. Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon, extended his power to the borders of Egypt by defeating the Egyptian forces at Carchemish in 605 B.C. As he enveloped all the Israelite lands the fall of Jerusalem was imminent.

For nearly 20 years Judah became a pawn in the hands of the Babylonians who played a cat-and-mouse game with Egypt, until finally Jerusalem was destroyed in 587 B.C.

Habakkuk is concerned about the growing Babylonian threat. Thus the date of the prophecy may be placed at about 600 B. C.

The recent Qumran Cave manuscript discoveries (Dead Sea Scrolls) cast light on Habakkuk only obliquely because the expository method followed is concerned only with the Qumran brotherhood who prepared the manuscript.

### **Outline of Habakkuk**

Five Prophetic Utterances, ch. 1-2.

A Complaint to God because of lawlessness, 1:1-4.

God announces the rise of the Chaldeans, 1:5-11.

A question: how can the wicked judge the righteous? 1:12-17.

God's Reply, 2:1-5:

The wicked will be punished.

The righteous saved by faithfulness.

Five woes uttered against the Chaldeans, 2:6-20

Habakkuk's Psalm concerning God's majesty and judgments, ch. 3.

## **Themes of Habakkuk**

### **1. Human-divine Dialogue**

Like Job's question, Habakkuk's problem is a religious one, though unlike Job's, Habakkuk's is an attempt to comprehend history.

Justice must be at the centre of God's nature and of his dealings as well. How can God use the barbarous Chaldeans to judge His own covenant people? Every child of God must cope with personal tragedy and the social and political evils of the world. It is hard sometimes to see the meaning of one's own experiences in relation to the wider dealings of God and his promises in revelation.

### **2. Faithful Person**

An indirect answer is given to the above question. The impatient, proud man (2:4) will not get an answer, but only the humble and faithful man. The answer is in patience and faith, because ultimately God will make his purposes clear and vindicate himself.

### **3. The Person of Faith**

Paul uses this passage (probably because the Greek word for "faith" is employed in the Septuagint translation of Heb.2: 4) in his great argument for justification by faith alone (Rom. 1:16-17; 3:21-28; Gal. 3:11; Heb. 10:38).

What Habakkuk says is not the same thing that Paul says, but the ideas are not incompatible. Paul extends the Old Testament concept to the full Gospel meaning of salvation by faith. While Habakkuk means *spiritual and moral steadfastness* (faithfulness), Paul means that the man of faith who believes in Jesus Christ is saved. In the New Testament there developed more fully a recurring Old Testament theme.

### **4. The Justification of God**

Other pertinent themes occur in the book which are parallel to Nahum and other prophets.

The demand for ethical behavior within society, including national and religious leaders, is apparent. Political and economic security are delusions apart from true faith and just dealings because God will judge evil.

Evil and evil people may appear for a time to prosper and be immune to judgment, but they will ultimately fail and righteousness will prevail.

The people must trust in God even when divinely initiated catastrophe, like the Chaldean attack, comes. This is the only ground for individual and national life, and security.



## **NOTES ON ZEPHANIAH**

Samuel J. Mikolaski

An unusual feature of this book is the genealogical identification of the author, presumably as the great-great-grandson of Hezekiah, the famous King of Judah (c.716-686 B.C.). If this is the correct identification of Hezekiah, and there are strong reasons for thinking so, then Josiah, the king of Judah at the time of Zephaniah, is his cousin.

### **Zephaniah and his Contemporaries**

Following the death of Hezekiah and the destruction of Samaria, Judah fell upon evil times religiously and morally.

The long reign of Manasseh (686-642 B.C.) reversed the spiritual emphasis of his father Hezekiah. Perhaps to curry favour with the Assyrians to whom he was tributary Manasseh restored pagan idolatrous practices and many other moral and political vices. His son Amon continued this tradition.

There was also during this period apparently a long prophetic silence, which followed the ministries of Micah and Isaiah.

The prophetic silence seems to have been broken by Zephaniah, who began a new era of prophetic ministry including Jeremiah, Habakkuk, Obadiah, Ezekiel and probably Nahum.

Movement toward political, moral and spiritual reform was initiated by Josiah in the great awakening of 621 B.C. (2 Chron. 34-35). It is likely that Zephaniah's ministry is parallel to and instrumental in quickening Josiah's reform. We may thus place Zephaniah's times parallel to those of Josiah (c. 640-609 B.C.).

The relationship between Jeremiah and Zephaniah is not known. It is thought by many that their ministries were parallel, but that Jeremiah's was a little later. Perhaps this accounts for the direct appeal for reform in Zephaniah, but reservations about the depth and permanence of Josiah's reform in Jeremiah.

Little of Zephaniah is known because no passages have been popularized among Christians. However the heavy emphasis upon judgment has inspired hymnody on judgment including the medieval composition *Dies Irae*.

### **Outline of Zephaniah**

The Day of the Lord's Judgment, 1:1-3:8.

Judgment upon nations is announced, 1:1-3.

Judgment on Judah, 1:4-13.

Its imminence, 1:14-18.

Judah called to repentance, 2:1-3.

Judgment pronounced on surrounding nations, 2:4-15.  
Renewed threat against Jerusalem, 3:1-8.

Restoration and Renewal of the nation, 3:9-20.

### **Themes of Zephaniah**

#### **1. Inevitable Judgment**

Considerable discussion has occurred on the identity of the judging forces of whom Zephaniah speaks. Many scholars believe (though not universally) that significant evidence, including that of the Greek historian Heroditus, points to the Scythians who were powerful trans-Caucasian nomadic tribes of the ancient east. They apparently attacked Assyria from about 632 B.C., which relieved pressure upon Judah and the surrounding nations. This may have furnished the political relief to allow for Josiah's reform. Some records indicate that they threatened Egypt as well, which could have been the threat to Judah and the surrounding nations of which Zephaniah speaks.

The characteristic phrase for judgment is the *Day of the Lord is at hand* (1:7,14, 15,16; 2:3; 3:8) which has entered New Testament language in relation to the final judgment of God (Rom. 2:5; Rev. 6:17).

Reasons for the wrath of God were many and they are graphically epitomized by Zephaniah, including:

- (a) Astrological worship and idolatry (1:5).
- (b) Spiritual backsliding (1:6).
- (c) Careless opulence (1:8).
- (d) Violence and deceit (1:9).
- (e) Trust in riches (1:18).
- (f) Moral impurity and oppression (3:1).
- (g) Spiritual heedlessness and faithlessness (3:2).
- (h) Ravenous political leaders, false prophets, and vile priests (3:3).

#### **2. A New Day Promised**

A radical change of mood occurs after 3:9. Zephaniah predicts the restoration and purification of his people so that they will become a spiritual blessing to the whole world. This has happened in the coming of Jesus Christ through Israel, but the prophetic message has yet to be completely fulfilled with regard to the restoration of Israel. Its spiritual renewal is epitomized in 3:13.

#### **3. Contemporary Relevance**

Here again, as so often in the other prophets, the deceitful and wayward character of man's nature is portrayed. How readily men follow error rather than truth, and

how quickly they descend to oppressing their fellow man when the restraints of divine righteousness are thrown off! Spiritual and national well-being come only through God's grace in renewing men spiritually and then furnishing to them high and holy ideals in worship, morality and social responsibility.

## NOTES ON HAGGAI

Samuel J. Mikolaski

The prophecies of Haggai, Ezra, Nehemiah and Zechariah belong to the same period of Israel's history, which is the time after the Babylonian Captivity.

### Background Events

The Fall of Jerusalem occurred in 587 B.C. The victorious Babylonians deported the Jewish nobility and upper class to Babylon. Thereafter the Persian segment of the Babylonian Empire took over the empire.

In 539-8 Cyrus the great Persian emperor decreed that the Jews could return to Jerusalem, which they did under the leadership of Zerubbabel (Ezra ch. 1-4; note 1: 1; 2:1).

Political pressure forced the work of restoration to cease (Ezra 4:23-24). There appears to follow a gap of approximately 16 years during which time the work of restoration lay largely dormant, including the Temple which lay derelict. However the details of the events are not fully known to us.

It appears also that through the ministries of Haggai and Zechariah the people were inspired to resume the work of restoration (Ezra 5:1-2). They had already established themselves in comfortable homes while the house of the Lord was unbuilt with only the foundation laid in 536 B.C.

From the indications of date which are given (1:1, 15; 2:1, 10, 20), we can establish the time of prophesying with reasonable accuracy, namely end of August to mid-November, 520 B.C., which was during the reign of Darius I, the great Persian King. During the next four years the work progressed despite surrounding enemy protests to Darius, and was completed in 516 B.C. (Ezra 6:13-15).

Later there follow the events of the Book of Esther at the seat of Persian power after about 486 B. C. Later still there occur the events connected with Ezra and Nehemiah personally, and the ministry of Malachi, approx. 458-433 B.C.

Thus the post-exilic events are in two main groups: First, those connected with Zerubbabel, Haggai and Zechariah, approx. 539-516 B.C. Second: those connected with Ezra, Nehemiah and Malachi, approx. 458-430 B.C. It should be borne in mind that the early chapters of the book of Ezra thus record events of the first group which occurred before Ezra's own time.

### Outline of Haggai

#### **First prophecy:**

Rebuke because the Lord's house is desolate, 1:1-11.

#### **Narrative interlude:**

Zerubbabel and Joshua commence the repairs, 1:12-15.

**Second prophecy:**

Inspiring the faint-hearted, 2:1-9.

**Third prophecy:**

The foundation and divine blessing, 2:10-19.

**Fourth prophecy:**

Zerubbabel and Messiah's coming, 2:20-23.

### **Themes of Haggai**

The books of Haggai and Zechariah are identical in purpose, namely, to inspire the people of God to rebuild the temple, restore the true worship of God and adhere to the teaching of the Covenant with God.

#### **1. Our Estate and the Lord's House, ch. 1**

While they adorned comfortable houses, the house of God and the work of God lay derelict (1:4). They, and we, are exhorted to build His work, which obedience carries with it assurance of God's presence, provision and blessing (1:13). For them the Temple was the place of God's own presence. With God among them they would do His works. As one gives the remainder is multiplied in value (1:5-6). God gives his chosen servant to them and he is to be followed (1:14).

#### **2. Encouragement in the Work, 2:1-9**

God encourages the people through His chosen leader and promises to be with them (2:4). Part of the comfort for God's people in a time of stress is assurance of the ultimate divine judgment (2:7).

#### **3. The Law of Diminishing Returns, 2:10-19**

The law of purity is used to illustrate a point (2:12-13). The carrier of a consecrated sacrifice does not consecrate an object if he brushes it with his garment. But the clothing of a ritually unclean man pollutes all it touches. Thus the point is that the desolate temple ruins are defiled and they pollute the whole land and hinder the progress of everything done. But if they should rebuild the foundation and restore the House blessing will follow.

Their prosperity is tied to their obedience. He who robs God is also robbing himself. No riches are guaranteed to the Christian, but he who robs God of resources, whether material or spiritual, finally only impoverishes himself.

#### **4. The Messianic Type, 2:20-23.**

In addition to the promise of God to protect Zerubbabel is the intimation about the Messiah (2:23). Zerubbabel is spoken of as the Messiah, i.e. he prefigures Him. Thus the

verses 2:14-23 contain the vision of the new people of God, restored and cleansed, who will have the Lord's anointed as their king.

**Noteworthy Passages**

1:2-6, 12, 14

2:4, 6-9, 14, 17

## **NOTES ON ZECHARIAH**

Samuel J. Mikolaski

We know very little about Zechariah personally except that through his ancestor Iddo he derives from a priestly family who returned to Jerusalem from the Babylonian captivity under Zerubbabel.

He and his contemporary Haggai were likely very young men at that time. Haggai began his prophetic ministry a few months earlier than Zechariah, but the latter's ministry lasted about two years longer than Haggai's. They stirred the people up in 520 B.C. to rebuild the Temple following a gap of about 16 years in the work of restoration. The young man with the measuring line (2:4) may be Zechariah.

### **Outline of Zechariah**

The first eight chapters of Zechariah concern the period recorded in Ezra 5-6, which events are parallel to Haggai. The remainder of the book is undated. Chapters 7-8 parallel the visions of the first section in striking ways, and comprise prophetic lessons from Israel's past. Chapters 9-14 reinforce the Messianic theme by means of a series of oracles and predict the purification of Israel by judgment and the ultimate blessings of the kingdom. The book centers upon the coming Messiah.

#### **I. The Man Who Is the Branch, ch. 1-8**

Introduction: Lessons that call for repentance, 1:1-6

Eight Visions:

Four Horsemen: God will restore Jerusalem, 1:7-17

Four Horns and four smiths: the destroyers are destroyed, 1:18-21

The Measuring Line: the unmeasurable glory of new Jerusalem, ch. 2

The Purified High Priest: the man whose name is the Branch, ch. 3.

The seven-branched lampstand: Israel a light to the world, ch. 4

The flying scroll: God's indictment and judgment, ch. 5:1-4.

The woman in the barrel: Sin removed to Babylon, 5:5-11

The four chariots: The traversing judgments of God, ch. 6:1-8

Joshua as symbolic of Messiah: The Branch, 6:9-15

Historical interlude: the question of fasting, ch. 7-8.

#### **II. The Shepherd-Messiah, ch. 9-11**

Divine judgment of surrounding nations, 9:1-8

King Messiah the Redeemer, 9:9-11

Message of hope to the redeemed of the Lord, 9:12-17

The flock gathered in by Messiah, ch. 10

True and false shepherds, ch. 11

#### **III. The Glory of Messiah and His Kingdom, ch. 12-14.**

Jerusalem purified and restored, ch. 12

God among his people: purging and truth, ch. 13:1-5

The One wounded in the house of his brethren, 13:6-9  
The return and final triumph of Messiah, ch. 14

#### Noteworthy passages

1:3-6  
2:5, 10  
3:8  
4:6, 10  
6:12-13  
7:8-10  
8:16-17  
9:9-11  
12:10  
13:1, 6-7  
14:4-9, 16, 20-21

### **Prophecy and Apocalyptic**

The older pattern of prophesying is distinctly present in Zechariah. It consists chiefly of analysing the moral and spiritual condition of the people, indicting them for their evil, and predicting judgment which will be followed by redemption of the faithful remnant.

This is blended however with the apocalyptic method which characterizes so much of exilic and post-exilic prophesying in which prediction is communicated through highly symbolic images.

Woven into the apocalyptic imagery are concrete statements about Messiah's sufferings and glory (cf. 9:9-11; 12:10; 13:1, 6-7) which have traditionally been seen by Christians to be fulfilled in Christ.

### **Themes of Zechariah**

#### **1. The Glory of God**

A great disappointment to the nation was not only the inferior architectural beauty of the rebuilt temple at the time of Haggai and Zechariah (Haggai 2:3), but the absence of the shekinah glory of God (Haggai 2:7-9; cf. Ex. 40:34; Ez. 11:23).

Zechariah's references to glory appear to have a messianic center. When Messiah comes, he will embody the glory of God among his people (Haggai 2:7-9; Zech. 2:5, 8-10).

#### **2. God**



While the major emphasis of the book is redeemed and restored Israel with the Lord's anointed in the midst of his people, the foundation of the prophetic message is the holy nature of God. Not only does he judge the nations and Israel righteously, but His holiness will be the hallmark of the final kingdom, as the last few verses of Zechariah state.

The modes and vehicles of revelation are important, whether through prophetically interpreted events, visions and oracles or the moral constraint of the righteousness of God. The totality of this centers upon the anointed servant of the Lord, Messiah, who comes personally in the name of God.

### **3. Messiah: The Man whose Name is The Branch.**

Almost universally from apostolic days, and paralleling Jewish interpretation of the Old Testament, Christians have accepted the Christological interpretation of key passages about Christ's person and his passion.

The metaphor *The Branch* (Zech. 3:8; 6:12-13; cf. Is. 4:2; Jer. 23:5) is an ancient prophetic symbol in Hebrew prophecy which ties our Lord to David's line and imputes to him the Righteousness of God.

Theologically it suggests also a new shoot for a new line (the Second Adam and his offspring of Romans 5) of redeemed and righteous people and, as well, the fact that Jesus Christ sustains a root or generic relation to humanity (John 1:9; Heb. 2:14-18) in virtue of which whatever he does has relevance to us.

### **4. Messiah's Passion**

Several passages are also seen as direct predictions of our Lord's passion (9:9-11; 12:10; 13:1, 6-7). The one who is pierced in the house of his own brethren has through his own blood redeemed them through a new covenant. This language has, I believe, a distinct influence upon the language and concepts of the NT.

### **5. Messiah's Kingdom**

The Kingdom passages are more than rhetoric and symbolism. They look to the day when Messiah will come personally and establish his throne upon earth and his sway in human hearts (Zech. 14:4). The parallels with passages like Matt. 24-25 and other Synoptic passages are striking.

## NOTES ON MALACHI

Samuel J. Mikolaski

Like Ezra and Nehemiah the Book of Malachi is associated with the last recorded events of Israel's history at the end of the Old Testament period.

Because the Hebrew word for *Malachi* can be translated *my messenger* some accept the Septuagint translation which leaves the author anonymous, or possibly identified as Ezra the scribe. However, it is accepted by most that Malachi is the proper name of a prophet contemporary with the times of Ezra and Nehemiah.

### Background

The Persian Empire succeeded the Babylonian in 539 B.C. and lasted until the time of Alexander the Great (331-323 B.C.). Restoration of the Temple and city of Jerusalem began after the return of Jews from exile under Zerubbabel in 539 B.C. The work was resumed under the inspiration of Haggai and Zechariah in 520 B.C. and completed in 516 B.C.

Little is known about Jewish history in the succeeding years until about 450 B.C. Jerusalem was ruled by local Persian governors, presumably centered at Samaria. Work on the wall of Jerusalem was halted by Artaxerxes I (465-424 B.C.) for fear of revolt (Ezra 4). Relations between the Jews and the surrounding nations were tense.

The high expectations of the returning exiles under Zerubbabel had not been fulfilled. From the parallels between the complaints of Nehemiah and those of Malachi against the Jews of Jerusalem we may infer that the same historical period is in view. To begin with the Temple was standing (restored) and sacrifices were being offered (1:7; 3:10). Abuses included marriages with pagan women (2:10-12), polluted and blemished sacrifices (1:7), and withholding the tithe (3:8-10).

It seems best to date Malachi in the period 460-450 B. C. before Nehemiah's reforms which took place approximately 444 B. C.

Malachi reflects the deteriorating spiritual life of the returned exiles of Jerusalem, their forgetfulness of the terms of the covenant, and more generally the difficult political conditions in which they found themselves which were later to worsen in the Grecian period.

After Malachi, Ezra and Nehemiah there is the divine prophetic silence of four centuries, until the birth of John the Baptist and of our Lord.

### Outline of Malachi

#### **I. The Sins of Judah, ch. 1-2.**

God's steadfast love for His people, 1:1-5.  
 Polluted and blemished sacrifices indicted, 1:6-14.  
 Priestly abuses against the covenant, 2:1-10.  
 Divorce and mixed marriages condemned, 2:11-17.

## **II. The Day of the Lord, ch. 3-4.**

God's messianic messenger and judgments, 3:1-6.  
 Penitence and the tithe, 3:7-12.  
 The day of deliverance 3: 13-4:3.  
 Concluding injunction, 4:4-6.

### Noteworthy passages

1:6.  
 2:4-7, 10, 14-16, 17.  
 3:1-3, 6, 8-10, 13-14, 16-17.  
 4:2, 5-6.

## **Themes of Malachi**

### **1. God's dispute with his people**

In a notable series of passages rhetorical questions are posed which show the differences between God and his people (1:6, 7, 13; 2:14, 17; 3:8, 13, 14).

These concern genuine religious worship and sacrifice, morality and fidelity in marriage, faithfulness to the covenant, social justice, and true stewardship to God.

But the people were blind to the truth and to the justice of God's indictment.

### **2. The Day of the Lord, 3:1-6**

Again through prophetic vision we look toward the day when God will judge the nations. This prediction concerns the day of Messiah.

### **3. Messianic Deliverance, 3:13-4:3**

*In the end God* is the hope of the Christian. Integral to Christian faith is Christian hope. Though we suffer now, we live and work in hope knowing that our work for God will not fail. It is to some point within the providence and purposes of God. This inspired message of hope by the prophets is valid today. It looks toward fulfillment in the glorious day of King Messiah (note 1 Peter).

Prophetic silence reigned until broken by the appearance of Elijah (3:1; 4:5), whom we may take to be John the Baptist (cf. Matt. 11:10, 14; 17:10-13; Mk. 1:2; Lu. 1:76). John ministered in the spirit and power of the prophet Elijah (Lu 1:17).

## NOTES ON THE APOCRYPHA

Samuel J. Mikolaski

The books commonly known as the Apocrypha derive mostly from the last two centuries before the birth of Christ; that is, the second half of the period between the canonical Old Testament and the New Testament.

During those times many religious books were written and preserved by various parties and groups. When the Hebrew Bible was translated into Greek (*The Septuagint*, or LXX – named after the alleged 70 elders who translated it) a number of these books were included in the Septuagint because of the religious, social and political events they record.

Our *Authorized Version* (King James version of 1604) contains the books of the Hebrew Bible. The Apocryphal books are additions to the Septuagint translation of the Hebrew Bible, which entered Christian circles through the Vulgate (the Latin translation of the Bible prepared by Jerome at about 391 A. D., the official version approved by the Roman Catholic Church until the latter part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century).

What we call the Apocrypha may be defined as comprising the books which in the Vulgate are over and above the books in the Hebrew canon and which are derived from the Septuagint.

Attitudes of the early Christians to the Apocrypha varied: in some cases some Apocryphal books are included in lists. Augustine (4th-5th century) held that the Apocrypha had equal authority with the rest of the canon. Jerome had reservations. Publication of the apocryphal books in the Vulgate is the key to their further acceptance by some Christian groups.

Wycliffe rejected them as canonical (late 14th century). The Reformers, especially Martin Luther, set the pattern of later Protestant usage by rejecting their canonicity.

However, at the Council of Trent in 1546 the Roman Catholic Church, reacting to the Reformation, declared them canonical (excepting 1, 2 Esdras and the Prayer of Manasseh) and anathematized those who rejected their canonicity. More recently many Catholics have tended to avoid their use and discussion. In fact they are rarely used, except liturgically, by Roman Catholics.

The Westminster Confession of 1648 declared against them, but the Anglicans did allow their value even in public worship though not for the most part on the same level as Scripture. Eastern Orthodox churches generally regard at least some of the Apocrypha as canonical.

Modern protestant and evangelical non-use of the Apocrypha derives substantially from the decision of the British and Foreign Bible Societies after 1804, and

related Bible Societies following bitter debate, to cease funding publication of the Apocrypha along with the translation of the Hebrew canon.

Rejection of the Apocrypha by Christians from apostolic times as properly canonical derives chiefly from the fact that these books did not form part of the original Hebrew canon. The argument that among Greek speaking Jews in Alexandria, and among early Alexandrian Christians an enlarged canon which includes the Apocrypha was prevalent has not been persuasive. A corollary of that argument is that the extent of the canon is an open question because inspiration may extend to books other than those which have been regarded as canonical and thus later literature deemed to be inspired may need to be added to the canon.

In the New Testament there are no express references to the Apocrypha, which is all the more remarkable because the Greek Bible (The Septuagint) which the first Christians used included these books.

There appear to be some allusions to apocryphal materials in the New Testament or parallels between them. It is claimed by some that Ecclesiasticus must have been known to the author of James and that Hebrews refers to the story of the Maccabees (II Macc. 6:18-7:42). Note also Heb. 1:3 and Wisdom 7:26; and Heb. 4:12-13 and Wisdom 7:22-24. Doubtless Paul knew this material also, though it is disputed as to whether any part of the Apocrypha is discernible in his writings.

With the discovery of many new inscriptions and manuscripts, including those of the Qumran Cave in 1947 (Dead Sea Scrolls) the value of the Apocryphal books has increased. They provide indispensable information about the history of the inter-testamental period, including its politics, religious ferment and general community matters. Its contents are important to our understanding of various parties and sects mentioned in the Gospels of the NT.

Of the many modern editions of the Apocrypha one of the best is the Revised Standard Version edited by Bruce M. Metzger (Oxford University Press).

### **The Books of the Apocrypha**

#### *1. I Esdras*

This is a parallel account of some events recorded in parts of Chronicles, Ezra and Nehemiah chiefly concerning Zerubbabel who, it is alleged, won a debate and thereby the chance to remind Darius about resumption of the rebuilding at Jerusalem. With variations it reproduces much of 2 Chron. 35:1-36:23, Ezra, and Nehemiah 7:38-8:12 but appears to be a text, or to be dependent upon a text source, other than the Septuagint. It is probably Jewish folklore intended to give credence to the Josiah-Zerubbabel-Ezra reforms. I Esdras is called 3 Esdras in the Latin Vulgate Bible.

## 2. *II Esdras*

The mid-section of this book as we have it, which is an apocalypse of seven visions, was probably written by an unknown Jewish Christian toward the end of the first century and later edited by two Christians at different times. There are probably also other sources. It concerns the oppression of the Jews within the Roman Empire (designated *Babylon*), Messianic deliverance and contains complicated apocalyptic imagery including plant and animal symbolism. It struggles with how to justify the ways of God with regard to the suffering of his people.

## 3. *Tobit*

This was a popular romance. This book concerns a northern blind pious Jew, his wife and son Tobias, who are persecuted under the oppression of Esarhaddon. There are magical elements in it including the ritual burning of a fish's entrails to drive away demons, and the restoration of the father's sight by anointing with the fish's gall. Tobias is guided by an angel to recover Tobit's money in Media. Tobit then marries his long demon-possessed love Sarah once she is freed from demon possession.

## 4. *Judith*

This is a fictitious story of a beautiful young Jewish widow who seduced a Nebuchadnezzar's general when he invaded Judah and then beheaded him. She is praised in a heroine's psalm. The theme parallels that of Esther: a beautiful young woman piously answers the patriotic call to duty to defend and protect her people.

## 5. *Additions to Esther*

These are six additional passages which increase the size of the book of Esther by adding to the various events concerning Mordecai and Esther. They expand upon the drama of how Esther and Mordecai saved the Jewish people from massacre and are probably of Greek composition and an addition to the Hebrew text. The additions furnish a more direct religious note to Esther, especially with references to God who is not named in the canonical text.

## 6. *The Wisdom of Solomon*

This is probably the best book of the collection and is a Greek form of the traditional Old Testament wisdom literature. It is an exhortation, like the Book of Proverbs, to seek wisdom. Pursuit of wisdom has its rewards, but folly ends in judgment. Jews are encouraged to retain their faith and others are urged to believe in the true God. Dependence upon Greek (Platonic and Stoic) modes of thought on the nature of wisdom and the immortality of the soul is evident.

### 7. *Ecclesiasticus*

This is an account of the wisdom of Joshua ben-Sira (Jesus the son of Sirach) a Palestinian living in Jerusalem. The fifty-one chapters are probably the distillation of lectures given by Joshua ben-Sira in his school in Jerusalem. It is a form of wisdom literature on achieving the good life through fear of the Lord and obeying his laws. Piety and moderation are stressed. The second part of the book praises some of Israel's heroes.

### 8. *Baruch*

This is ascribed to Baruch (the scribe of Jeremiah) but it is obviously of later, composite authorship. The first part is prose, the second is in poetic form. It calls Jewish exiles in Babylon to confession and prayer, praises wisdom and the Mosaic law, offers comfort to the exiles, and hope of restoration to their land.

### 9. *The Letter of Jeremiah*

This is a sermon prepared as if it were an epistle from Jeremiah discrediting idols and rebuking the folly of worshipping impotent idols. It purports to have been written to the Jewish exiles in Babylon in about 597 B. C. (note Jer. 10:11, and ch. 29).

[10, 11, 12 -- *Additions to Daniel*]

10. The *Prayer of Azariah* and *The Song of the Three Holy Children* are literary pieces depicting the utterances of the three Hebrew young men in the fiery furnace, to be inserted between Dan. 3:23 and 3:24. The passage 28-68 is the *Benedicite* of Christian usage.

11. *Susanna* concerns a beautiful Jewish captive in Babylon who is falsely accused of adultery by two Babylonians and condemned. But Daniel uncovers the truth and vindicates her. The story's focus is that trust in God brought triumph of good over evil, notably through the wisdom and bravery of the young boy Daniel.

12. *Bel and the Dragon* is written to satirize idolatry. Daniel shows that in fact the pagan priests not their god nightly consume the day's sacrifices. There is added a legendary account of Daniel in the lion's den and of how he was fed by the prophet Habbakuk.

All three stories serve to justify faith in God and obedience to his laws because in times of testing God vindicates those who are faithful.

### 13. *The Prayer of Manasseh*

This piece is parallel to the prayer given in 2 Chron. 33:11-13, and may be of

Hebrew origin. It is liturgical in form and was used in acts of penitence and devotion to God.

#### 14. *I Maccabees*

Of several Maccabean books these two figure in the Apocrypha.

*I Maccabees* deals with the history of the period 175-134 B.C., that is, the rise of Alexander the Great, the division of his empire, and the accession of Antiochus IV (Epiphanes) who desecrated the Temple and sparked the Jewish struggle for independence. God raises up the family of the Judas Maccabeus as the champions and heroes of Judaism.

#### 15. *II Macabees*

This book covers approximately the same period as the first book, but by a different author (Jason of Cyrene) and is more abridged (180-161 B. C.). It is less credible historically and more theologically oriented in an attempt to show how God in His power responds in timely fashion to the importuning prayers of his people. As well there is considerable emphasis placed upon the righteous in heaven interceding for God's people on earth, and upon sacrifices and prayers being offered on earth for the dead.

### **Concluding Note**

The Apocrypha has had a wide influence. Many composers, including Handel, and others have drawn freely upon its stories and imagery. Rinckart's hymn *Now Thank We All Our God* is drawn in part from Ecclesiasticus 50:22.

The historical value of the Apocrypha for biblical study is considerable. It is said that II Esdras 6:42 and 6:47 were instrumental in encouraging Christopher Columbus to undertake his voyage of discovery which resulted in his finding the Western Hemisphere.

The apocryphal books are not part of the canon of Scripture, but they contain many theological and moral lessons of great value.