



Old Testament Survey

Part Six: Hosea through Malachi

The Minor Prophets

Compiled by Paul R. Blake

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Part Six: Hosea through Malachi, the Minor Prophets

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- Old Testament Outlines by Ethan Longhenry, disciple_of_iesus@hotmail.com
- Introductions to the Minor Prophets by Al Maxey
- Introductions to the Minor Prophets (NIV)
- Introductions to the Minor Prophets (Angelfire)
- Eerdmans Pulpit Commentary
- Keil & Delitzsch Commentary on the Old Testament
- Gill's Exposition of the Bible
- Albert Barnes Notes on the Bible
- Matthew Henry's Commentary
- Homer Hailey, A Commentary on the Minor Prophets
- George Robinson, Commentary on the Minor Prophets
- Wikipedia

(Questions were written by the compiler specifically for this class.)

Lesson One: Introduction to the Minor Prophets

The section of the Old Testament from Isaiah through Malachi is often spoken of as “the Prophets.” Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and Daniel are known as the Major Prophets, simply because their books are longer than most of the others. The twelve shorter prophets are known as the Minor Prophets.

I. THE PERIOD OF PROPHETS

In the Old Testament, the prophetic period began in the time of Samuel (about 1100 B.C.), when the priesthood had failed. The prophets continued their work through the end of Old Testament history (about 400 B.C.), including the return from captivity and the rebuilding of Jerusalem and the temple. However, the writing prophets did not come upon the scene until the time of the Divided Kingdom (about 930 B.C.). Thus, they fit into the events recorded in 1 and 2 Kings and 1 and 2 Chronicles, and also extend through Ezra and Nehemiah.

II. THE METHODS OF THE PROPHETS

It has often been pointed out that the prophets’ messages consisted of both forth-telling and foretelling. By forth-telling, we mean that these prophets told forth the Word of God. They were conscious that they were doing this. They used such expressions as, “Thus says the Lord,” or “The word of the Lord came to me” (Jer. 1:9; Ez. 2:7).

As foretellers, they peered into the future and told the people what the consequences would be if they obeyed or disobeyed. The prophets did not always understand the messages themselves (Dan. 7:28, 8:15-27, 10:7-15; Rev. 7:13-14, 17:6). They had particular difficulty when they made prophecies concerning the coming Messiah. When they prophesied of the sufferings of Christ and the glories that should follow (1 Peter 1:10-13), they had trouble understanding how the Messiah could come as the suffering Servant of Jehovah and at the same time reign as King over the earth.

The twelve shorter prophetic books are called “minor” only because of their length, not because they are less important. All of the books bear the names of the prophets who wrote them. In our English translations of the Bible, these books are arranged according to the order in which history says they were written. The first of these prophecies was delivered around 850 B.C., and the last after the Exile. Most of them tell us their dates by the historical material they contain. Here are the books in order with their respective themes:

- Hosea: Gomer’s sin, punishment, and restoration; a symbol of Israel’s sin, punishment, and restoration.
- Joel: locust plague, penitence, God’s promise.
- Amos: woe and comfort for Israel.
- Obadiah: Jehovah will humble the pride of Elam who rejoiced in his brother’s distress.
- Jonah: mission to Nineveh; Jehovah’s love contrasted to Jonah’s anger.
- Micah: Jehovah’s controversy with His people.
- Nahum: Jehovah’s vengeance and goodness revealed in Nineveh’s overthrow.
- Habakkuk: the righteous shall live by faith.
- Zephaniah: Jehovah hides His people in the day of wrath.
- Haggai: exhortation to rebuild Jehovah’s house.
- Zechariah: future glory of Zion and of its shepherd king.
- Malachi: Jehovah’s love unrequited.

(Adapted from material prepared by Roy Crane)

III. TRANSLATED NAMES OF THE MINOR PROPHETS

In some cases the names of the Minor Prophets have significance for their ministries. The translation or interpretation of Hebrew names is not always precise, but these are the approximate meanings of the names of the Minor Prophets.

- Hosea: Salvation, Deliverance
- Joel: Jehovah is God
- Amos: Burden Bearer
- Obadiah: Servant of Jehovah
- Jonah: Dove
- Micah: He Who Is Like Jehovah
- Nahum: Comforter
- Habakkuk: Embrace
- Zephaniah: Jehovah Hides
- Haggai: Festive
- Zechariah: Jehovah Remembers
- Malachi: My Messenger

VI. EXPANDED THEMES OF THE MINOR PROPHETS

- Hosea: God's Love for Israel. The story of Hosea and his faithless wife illustrates the loyal love of God and the spiritual adultery of Israel.
- Joel: The Day of the Lord. A recent locust plague illustrates the far more terrifying day of the Lord. God appeals to the people to repent in order to avert the coming disaster.
- Amos: Judgment of Israel. In eight pronouncements of judgment, Amos spirals around the surrounding countries before landing on Israel. He lists the sins of Israel and calls for repentance.
- Obadiah: Judgment of Edom. Condemns the nation of Edom (descended from Esau) for refusing to act as a brother toward Judah (descended from Jacob).
- Jonah: Revival in Nineveh. The repentant response of the people of Nineveh to Jonah's one-line prophetic message caused the God of mercy to spare the city.
- Micah: Judgment and Restoration of Judah. In spite of divine retribution against the corruption of Israel and Judah, God's covenant with them will be fulfilled in Messiah's future kingdom.
- Nahum: Judgment of Nineveh. About 140 years after Nineveh repented under the preaching of Jonah, Micah predicted the destruction of the city because of its idolatry and brutality.
- Habakkuk: Live by Faith. Troubled with God's plan to use the Babylonians as His rod of judgment on Judah, Habakkuk praises the Lord after gaining a better perspective on His power and purposes.
- Zephaniah: The Great Day of the Lord. The coming day of the Lord is a time of awesome judgment followed by great blessing. Judah stands condemned, but God will restore the fortunes of the remnant.
- Haggai: Build the Temple. After the Babylonian exile, Haggai urges the Jews to put God first and finish the Temple they had begun so that they can enjoy God's blessing.
- Zechariah: Prepare for the Messiah. Like Haggai, Zechariah exhorts the Jews to complete the construction of the Temple. He relates it to the coming of Messiah in a series of visions and messianic prophecies.

- Malachi: An Appeal to Backsliders. The spiritual climate of the people had grown cold, and Malachi rebukes them for their religious and social compromise. If they return to God with sincere hearts, they will be blessed.

V. THE PROPHETIC OFFICE

"Under the law there were at least five classes of speakers:

- Moses the lawgiver
- The wise men who gave counsel
- Priests who taught the law
- Prophets through whom God spoke His word
- Psalmists who were the singers or poets in Israel" (Homer Hailey).

"By way of general definition, a prophecy is an oral or written disclosure in words through a human mouthpiece transmitting the revelation of God and setting forth His will to man" (Gleason Archer, Jr.).

"God told Moses that his brother Aaron would be 'his prophet' (Ex. 7:1). God then explains the nature of this work in Exodus 4:14-16 -- the prophet is a 'mouthpiece.' The Lord further discusses a prophet and his work in Deut. 18:18-22, and tells us how we may determine who is a genuine prophet and who is a false prophet. Fore-telling the future was only a small part of prophecy; the major work of the prophet was to reveal God's will to His people -- what God expected of them in the present. As a spokesman for God he was more a forth-teller than a fore-teller" (Homer Hailey).

VI. BIBLICAL TITLES OF PROPHETS

- Prophet - (Hebrew: nabi - "one who has been called"). "The prophet was not to be regarded as a self-appointed professional whose purpose was to convince others of his own opinions, but rather he was one called by God to proclaim, as a herald from the court of heaven, the message transmitted from God to man."
- Seer - (Hebrew: hozeh or ro'eh). "As a seer (one who "sees") he would avoid evolving ideas or opinions of his own mind and would confine himself to that which God had actually shown him. This appears to have been the earliest term by which these men were called (1Sam. 9:9)."
- Man of God - (1Sam. 9:6; 1Kings 17:18). "This title implied that the prophet must be a man who belonged first and foremost to God, was wholly devoted to His cause, and enjoyed His personal fellowship. Therefore he could be trusted to transmit God's Word, because he spoke only as God enlightened him and guided him to speak." (Archer)
- Servant of Jehovah - (1Chron. 6:49; 1Kings 18:36).
- Messenger of Jehovah - (Isa. 42:19).
- Watchman - (Ez. 3:17; 33:7).

VII. RESPONSIBILITIES OF THE PROPHETS

"The prophet had the responsibility of encouraging God's people to trust only in Jehovah's mercy and delivering power, rather than in their own merits or strength, or in the might of human allies. The prophet was responsible to remind his people that safety and blessedness were conditioned upon their faithful adherence to the covenant, and that this adherence involved not only doctrinal conviction but a sincere submission of their will to obey God with their whole heart and to lead a godly life. Apart from such submission, no amount of sacrifice or ritualistic worship could satisfy the Lord. In other words, a saving faith involves a sanctified walk."

"The prophet was to encourage Israel in respect to the future. This assurance of the future, of the ultimate triumph of the true faith, was well calculated to encourage the sincere believers within Israel to keep faith with God and keep on trusting Him in the face of all contrary appearances and hostile circumstances. Hebrew prophecy was to seal the authoritativeness of God's message by the objective verification of fulfilled prophecy" (Archer).

"There are two classes of preachers --- the good preachers who have something to say, and the poor preachers who have to say something. But there is yet another and higher class. It consists of those who both have something to say and who have to say it. Such are the prophets." (Albert Knudson) (Adapted from material arranged by Al Maxey)

QUESTIONS ON THE INTRODUCTION TO THE MINOR PROPHETS

1. Name the "major prophets." How many "minor prophets" are in the Old Testament?
2. When and with whom did the "prophetic period begin"? When did it end?
3. List the two forms of prophetic messages.
4. Did the prophets always understand their messages? Which subject gave them the most difficulty?
5. Why are the Minor Prophets called "minor"?
6. How were all of the books of the Minor Prophets named?
7. List the five classes of prophetic speakers:

a.	d.
b.	e.
c.	
8. List the six Biblical titles of prophetic speakers and a brief definition of each:

a.	d.
b.	e.
c.	f.
9. List three important responsibilities of prophets:
10. What is the difference between a good prophet (preacher) and a bad prophet (preacher)?

Chronology of the Prophets Before the Fall of Samaria 722/1 B.C.

PROPHET	APPROXIMATE DATES	KINGS OF JUDAH	KINGS OF ISRAEL
Obadiah	845	Jehoram	Joram
Joel	835	Joash	Jehu
Jonah	782	Amaziah and Uzziah (coregency) Assyrian King: Shalmaneser IV	Jeroboam II
Hosea	760 to 720	Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz, Hezekiah	Jeroboam II, Zechariah, Shallum, Menahem, Pekahiah, Pekah, Hoshea
Amos	760	Uzziah	Jeroboam II
Isaiah	739 to 685	Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz, Hezekiah, Manasseh	Pekah, Hoshea
Micah	737 to 690	Jotham, Ahaz, Hezekiah	Pekah, Hoshea

Chronology of the Prophets After the Fall of Samaria 722/1 B.C.

PROPHET	APPROXIMATE DATES	KINGS OF JUDAH	FOREIGN KINGS
Nahum	650	Manasseh	Assyria: Ashurbanipal
Zephaniah	640	Josiah	
Jeremiah	627 to 580	Josiah, Jehoahaz, Jehoiakim, Jehoiachin, Zedekiah Exile Governor: Gedaliah	Babylon: Nabopolassar Nebuchadnezzar
Habakkuk	609	Jehoiakim	Babylon: Nabopolassar
Daniel	605 to 530	Jehoiakim, Jehoiachin, Zedekiah	Babylon: Nebuchadnezzar, Neriglissar, Labashi-marduk, Evil-Merodach, Nabonidas Medo-Persia: Cyrus, probably Cambyses
Ezekiel	593 to 570	Zedekiah	Babylon: Nebuchadnezzar
Haggai	520	Governor: Zerubbabel	Medo-Persia: Darius I
Zechariah	520*	Governor: Zerubbabel	Medo-Persia: Darius I
Malachi	433	Governor: Nehemiah	Medo-Persia Darius II

*Zechariah may have continued his ministry to 485 or so.

Lesson Two: Hosea -- Salvation and Deliverance!

INTRODUCTION

The name Hosea comes from the Hebrew language. It means salvation. Although not specifically stated, it is believed Hosea was a native of Samaria (he refers to the ruler of Samaria as "our king" (Hosea 7:5). His family seems to be of significant social standing for the name of his father to be mentioned (Hosea 1:1). As to his occupation, nothing is known for certain. It seems clear that he occupied "some position or place of distinction." Many scholars believe he may have been a priest.

Based upon his reference to the kings (Hosea 1:1), most scholars date his prophetic ministry during the years 753 - 715 BC. The book bearing his name is a combination of many sermons and actions delivered over a period of several decades.

I. HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

Religious - Hosea summed up the religious activities of Israel in one word: prostitution. As a harlot, she had prostituted herself before the false gods. The people lacked knowledge (Hosea 4:6; 5:4), and were ignorant of God's Law (Hosea 8:12). Idols had been set up and women were serving in the temples as cult prostitutes.

Moral - "Their conduct was the very opposite to that which God desired and demanded. The people were guilty of swearing, breaking faith, murder, stealing, committing adultery, deceit, lying, drunkenness, dishonesty in business, and other crimes equally abominable before Jehovah. The picture painted in the Book of Hosea is truly that of a nation in decay" (Homer Hailey).

Political - It was a period of political upheaval in Israel. Upon the death of Jereboam, several kings came to the throne but were quickly assassinated; some reigning only a few weeks. Tiglath-pileser (king of Assyria) came against Israel and exacted heavy tribute from them. Finally, in 722 BC, the northern kingdom fell to the Assyrians, with many of the people being carried off into captivity. "These were trying years of political conniving and intrigue, of anarchy and rebellion, of treachery and murder. God was completely left out of the picture and out of the people's thinking. The prophet's task was to turn the thinking of the people back to God, but they were too deeply steeped in their idolatry to heed his warning. They had passed the point of no return; they refused to hear" (Homer Hailey).

Their faithlessness was manifested in two major ways: 1) rebellion against all constituted authority, and 2) dependence upon human defenses and foreign alliances, rather than upon the power of Jehovah. The cause for this widespread immorality and faithlessness toward God was two-fold: 1) Corruption of the priests, with whom the false prophets were in league, and 2) corruption of worship.

II. ANALYSIS OF THE BOOK OF HOSEA

Hosea (הוֹשֵׁעַ) prophesied during a dark and melancholy era of Israel's history, the period of the Northern Kingdom's decline and fall in the 8th century BC. The apostasy of the people was rampant, having turned away from God in order to serve the calves of Jeroboam II, (Hosea 8:4-6) and Baal, a Canaanite god.

During Hosea's lifetime, the kings of the Northern Kingdom, their aristocratic supporters, and the priests had led the people away from the Law of God, as given in the Pentateuch. Forsaking the worship of God, they worshiped other gods, especially Baal, the Canaanite fertility god. Other sins followed, including homicide, perjury, theft, and sexual sin (Hosea 4:1-2). Hosea declares that unless they repent of these sins, God

will allow their nation to be destroyed, and the people will be taken into captivity by Assyria (Hosea 9:3), the greatest nation of the time.

The prophecy of Hosea centers on God's unending love towards a sinful Israel. In this text, God's agony is expressed over the betrayal of Israel (Hosea 3:1, 11:1, 14:4). Stephen Cook asserts that the prophetic efforts of this book can be summed up in this passage "I have been the Lord your God ever since the land of Egypt; you know no God but me, and besides me there is no savior" (Hosea 13:4). Hosea's job was to speak these words during a time when that had been essentially forgotten.

The book naturally breaks in three sections:

Chapters 1-2 - Account of Hosea's marriage with Gomer biographically which is a metaphor for the relationship with Yahweh and Israel.

Chapter 3 - Account of Hosea's marriage autobiographically.

Chapters 4-14:9 - Oracle judging Israel, Ephraim in particular, for not living up to the covenant. Following this, the prophecy is made that someday this will all be changed, that God will indeed have pity on Israel.

III. SUMMARY OF THE BOOK OF HOSEA

First, Hosea was directed by God to marry a promiscuous woman of ill-repute, and he did so. Marriage here is symbolic of the covenantal relationship between God and Israel. However, Israel has been unfaithful to God by following other gods and breaking the commandments which are the terms of the covenant, hence Israel is symbolized by a harlot who violates the obligations of marriage to her husband.

Second, Hosea and his wife, Gomer, have a son. God commands that the son be named Jezreel. This name refers to a valley in which much blood had been shed in Israel's history, especially by the kings of the Northern Kingdom. (1Kings 21; 2Kings 9:21-35). The naming of this son was to stand as a prophecy against the reigning house of the Northern Kingdom, that they would pay for that bloodshed. Jezreel's name means God Sows.

Third, the couple have a daughter. God commands that she be named Lo-ruhamah; Unloved, or Pity, or Pitied Upon to show Israel that, although God will still have pity on the Southern Kingdom, God will no longer have pity on the Northern Kingdom; its destruction is imminent. It is believed that there is doubt as to whether Lo-Ruhamah was the daughter of Hosea or one of Gomer's lovers.

Fourth, a son is born to Gomer. It is also questionable whether this child was Hosea's, for God commands that his name be Lo-ammi; Not My People, or more simply, Not Mine. The child bore this name of shame to show that the Northern Kingdom would also be shamed, since its people would no longer be known as God's People. Also God says that "I am not your I AM"; in other words, God changes His own name in connection with his current relationship with Israel.

Chapter two describes a divorce. This divorce seems to be the end of the covenant between God and the Northern Kingdom. However, it is probable that this was again a symbolic act, in which Hosea divorced Gomer for infidelity, and used the occasion to preach the message of God's rejection of the Northern Kingdom. He ends this prophecy with the declaration that God will one day renew the covenant, and will take Israel back in love.

In Chapter three, at God's command, Hosea seeks out Gomer once more. Either she has sold herself into slavery for debt, or she is with a lover who demands money in order to give her up, because Hosea has to buy her back. He takes her home, but refrains from sexual intimacy with her for many days, to symbolize the fact that Israel will be without a king for many years, but that God will take Israel back, even at a cost to Himself.

Chapters 4-14 spell out the allegory at length. Chapters 1-3 speak of Hosea's family, and the issues with Gomer. Chapters 4-10 contain a series of oracles, or prophetic sermons, showing exactly why God is rejecting the Northern Kingdom (what the grounds are for the divorce). Chapter 11 is God's lament over the necessity of giving up the Northern Kingdom, which is a large part of the people of Israel, whom God loves. God promises not to give them up entirely. Then, in Chapter 12, the prophet pleads for Israel's repentance. Chapter 13 foretells the destruction of the kingdom at the hands of Assyria, because there has been no repentance. In Chapter 14, the prophet urges Israel to seek forgiveness, and promises its restoration, while urging the utmost fidelity to God. Matthew 2:13-15 cites Hosea's prophecy in Hosea 11:1 that God would call His Son out of Egypt as foretelling the flight into Egypt and return to Israel of Joseph, Mary, and the infant Jesus Christ.

IV. HOSEA: THE ACCOUNT

A. Main Sections

1. Hosea's personal example (Hosea 1-3)
2. Prophecy (Hosea 4-14)

B. Hosea's Family (Hosea 1-3)

1. Introduction (Hosea 1:1)
2. God instructs Hosea to take wife of whoredom because of whoredom of Israel; takes Gomer as wife (Hosea 1:2-3)
3. Son born to him, told to name him Jezreel, punishment coming to house of Jehu; daughter Lo-ruhama, No Mercy, for God will have no mercy on Israel, but will on Judah; son Lo-ammi, Not My People, for Israel no longer His people (Hosea 1:4-9)
4. Israel will be restored, multiplied; will again be children of living God, will have one head (Hosea 1:10-11)
5. Speak to brothers, sisters to plead with mother because of her whoredom; otherwise, her nakedness to be exposed; no mercy upon her children, children of whoredom; she goes after lovers, believes they have given her resources; wall built against her, she will pursue lovers, will not find them; will return to first husband; she did not know that God gave her all of her resources that she gave to Baal; God will take them back, uncover her nakedness; festivals ended; vines and trees, believed to be gifts of lovers, laid waste; great punishment (Hos 2:1-13)
6. God will then allure her, restore her to Himself; Israel to again make God their God, Baal no longer remembered; covenant of peace, no more war; will be betrothed to God in righteousness and safety; they will know the LORD; God will have mercy on No Mercy, Not My People will be His people, He will be their God (Hosea 2:14-23)
7. God tells Hosea to love the adulteress again as God loves Israel; Hosea buys wife back, she is not to belong to any other for many days, as Israel will dwell without king or pillar or ephod for many days, and will then return to God and to David, will obtain His goodness (Hos. 3)

C. God's Argument (Hosea 4-5)

1. God's controversy with the people: no love, no knowledge of God, all sort of sin; land mourns (Hosea 4:1-3)
2. Contention with priest; he and prophet will stumble; people destroyed for lack of knowledge; priests thus rejected; the more the people grow, the more they sin; all to be punished for their ways; no satisfaction; people inquire of wood; led astray into whoredom; burn offerings on

- hills; daughters/brides not punished for adultery, for men engaged in prostitution; people without understanding come to ruin (Hosea 4:4-14)
3. May Judah not follow after Israel's sin; Israel as stubborn; Ephraim joined to idols; they will be ashamed (Hosea 4:15-19)
 4. Judgment for priests, king, Israel, all will be disciplined; Ephraim played whore, Israel defiled; refuse to repent; will stumble; Judah will stumble; dealt faithlessly with God, God has withdrawn from them (Hosea 5:1-7)
 5. Alarm to be sounded; desolation and punishment for Ephraim; God's wrath upon Judah; Ephraim oppressed because of defilement; God source of distress for Israel and Judah (Hosea 5:8-12)
 6. They see their difficulty, turn to Assyria; he cannot cure them; God will carry them off; He will return to His place until they seek Him (Hosea 5:13-15)

D. Ephraim's Sin (Hosea 6-8)

1. Message of repentance, returning to God; He will heal and bind after tearing and striking; raised up after three days; press on toward God (Hosea 6:1-3)
2. Love of Ephraim and Judah like morning cloud or dew; thus He has hewn them by prophets, slain them by word of mouth; God desires love, not sacrifice; knowledge than offerings (Hosea 6:4-6)
3. They transgress covenant like Adam; evildoers, murderers, priests like thieves; Israel defiled (Hosea 6:7-10)
4. Harvest for Judah when fortunes restored (Hosea 6:11)
5. God would heal Israel, yet sin of Samaria revealed; thieves and bandits; God remembers their evil; king made glad by their evil; all as adulterers; princes drunk, hot as ovens, kings as fallen, none call on God (Hosea 7:1-7)
6. Ephraim mixed with others, cake not turned; devoured by strangers; old without knowing it; pride testifies against him; does not return to God (Hosea 7:8-10)
7. Ephraim as dove, without sense; calling Egypt and Assyria; God will catch him in net, will discipline them; woe because of their straying, destruction decreed; God would redeem, but they speak lies; no true repentance; rebellion, invoking Baal; God trained them, yet they rebel against Him; they will fall by sword (Hosea 7:11-16)
8. Blow trumpet; vulture over them because of transgression; they cry to God as if they know Him, but has spurned the good; made kings, not through God; made idols for own destruction; calf not God, will be destroyed; sow wind, reap whirlwind; no crop; Israel swallowed up; went to Assyria; Ephraim hired lovers; they hire allies, but God will gather them (Hosea 8:1-10)
9. Ephraim multiplied altars of sinning; God's laws as strange things; LORD does not accept their sacrifices; punished for sins; Israel forgotten Maker, Judah also will suffer for her fortified cities (Hosea 8:11-14)

E. Punishment for Israel (Hosea 9-10)

1. Israel not to rejoice; has played whore; prostitute's wages on threshing floors; will not remain in land; no libations, sacrifices-- such will defile; will not be able to do anything on festival days, for they are going to destruction; days of punishment have come; prophets as fools because of their sin; prophet as watchman, yet snare in his ways, hatred in

house God; Israel as sinful as Gibeah in days of Judges (Hosea 9:1-9; Judges 19-21)

2. God saw Israel from beginning; defiled in matter of Baal-peor; glory removed from Ephraim, no children born to them; woe when God departs; God will give them miscarriages, dry breasts; evil in Gilgal; because of wickedness, driven from God's house; God will love them no more; Ephraim stricken, no growth; God will put children to death; God rejects them, for they have not heeded Him (Hosea 9:10-17)
3. Israel as luxuriant vine: more fruit, more altars; false heart; will bear guilt; God will strike altars and pillars; have no king, fear not God; make empty oaths; judgment will spring up; Samaria trembles before a calf; people mourn, as do priests; calf as carried to Assyria, tribute to king of Assyria; Ephraim put to shame; king will perish; high places to be destroyed; will want mountains and hills to cover them (Hosea 10:1-8)
4. Israel sinned from days of Gibeah; war against unjust will overtake them; God will discipline them when He pleases, nations gathered against them; Ephraim as trained calf, neck spared, but now will be put to yoke; Israel to sow righteousness to reap love, ought to seek the LORD; they have instead plowed iniquity, reaped injustice; have trusted in own way; thus they will be brought low and destroyed-- Assyria will attack Ephraim as he did the rest of Israel, great violence, king will die (Hosea 10:9-15)

F. God and Israel (Hosea 11-13)

1. God loved Israel as child, called him from Egypt; the more called, the further they left; sacrificing to idols; God taught Ephraim, took him up, yet he did not know God healed him; God led them with love, fed them (Hosea 11:1-4)
2. Will not return to Egypt, will go to Assyria, for they have refused to repent; sword against city, will devour them; people bent on turning from God, call out to Him, but He will not raise him up (Hosea 11:5-7)
3. God recoils at idea of giving up Israel, treating her as cities of Plain in time of Sodom; God's compassion grows; God will not again destroy Ephraim; God as God and not a man; will not come in wrath; they will seek the LORD, will roar; ingathering of Dispersion (Hosea 11:8-11)
4. Ephraim as surrounding God with lies, but Judah faithful; Ephraim feeds on wind, multiply violence; make covenants with other nations (Hosea 11:12 - 12:1)
5. God's indictment against Judah and Jacob: Jacob as taking heel of brother, contending with God; Jacob as speaking with God at Bethel; return to God, wait for Him (Hosea 12:2-6)
6. Merchant with false balance, loves oppression; Ephraim as earned own wealth; God will make them dwell in tents again; He spoke to prophets; iniquity will come to nothing; Jacob fled to Aram, worked for wife; by prophet God brought Israel from Egypt; now Ephraim gives provocation, God will repay him for his deeds (Hosea 12:7-14)
7. Trembling when Ephraim spoke; incurred guilt by Baal, died; sin multiplied; graven idols; people to vanish; God the only God, no other savior; God knew them in wilderness; now that they are filled, they forgot Him; God as lion to them, will fall upon them as bear robbed of cubs; Israel to be ripped open; God as destroying Israel; asks where

their rulers are: God gave king in anger, will take him away in wrath (Hosea 13:1-11)

8. Sin of Ephraim bound up; pangs of birth come for him, but he does not present self to opening of womb; God will not ransom them from death; sting and plague of death; compassion hidden from God's eyes; east wind will come despite Ephraim's wealth; will be parched, dried up; Samaria will bear guilt, fall by sword, little ones dashed in pieces, pregnant women ripped open (Hosea 13:12-16)

G. A Plea for Repentance (Hosea 14)

1. Plea for Israel to return to God; they have stumbled because of sin; ask God to remove iniquity, they will pay vows; Assyria cannot save them; will not consider the works of their hands to be gods; mercy in God (Hosea 14:1-3)
2. God will heal them, love them; He will provide stability, strength for Israel; Israel to return and grow and prosper; great fame (Hos. 14:4-7)
3. God has nothing to do with idols; God looks after Ephraim, provides their fruit (Hosea 14:8)
4. Conclusion: those who are wise, understand these things; ways of LORD right, upright walk in them, transgressors stumble in them (Hosea 14:9)

V. HOSEA: IMPORTANT TEXTS

- A. Hosea 1:10 - Rom. 9:25-26
- B. Hosea 2:23 - Rom. 9:25-26, 1 Peter 2:10
- C. Hosea 4:1-14
- D. Hosea 6:1-3 (foreshadowing the resurrection)
- E. Hosea 6:6 - Matt. 9:13, 12:7; 1Sam. 15:22
- F. Hosea 10:8 - Luke 23:30, Rev. 6:16
- G. Hosea 11:1 - Matt. 2:13-15
- H. Hosea 13:14 - 1Cor. 15:55

CONCLUSION

It was a difficult time. Things only appeared to be well in Israel. Hosea preached a message of judgment and condemnation using his own life to represent God's turmoil with Israel. Everything he says comes to pass. Nevertheless, hope was present; repentant people will be restored, and those who were not His people can become His people through Jesus and His Kingdom.

QUESTIONS FOR THE BOOK OF HOSEA

1. What does the name Hosea mean?
2. Where is Hosea believed to have come from?
3. When and where did he prophesy?
4. What was his profession before he became a prophet?

5. What word sums up the religious activity of Israel in Hosea's day?
6. In what two ways did Israel manifest its faithlessness?
7. What pagan god did the Israelites worship in Hosea's day?
8. Name Hosea's wife. What kind of woman was she?
9. Name Gomer's children and the meanings of their names:
 - a.
 - b.
 - c.
10. What did Hosea do to get his wife back after he divorced her for adultery?
11. According to Hosea 4, what did the prophet say destroyed the people?
12. According to Hosea 6, after how many days would they rise up?
13. What does God want more than sacrifices and burnt offerings?
14. Out of what country did God call His "son"?
15. According to Hosea 13, what will God do with death?

Lesson Three: Joel -- Jehovah is God!

INTRODUCTION

Joel, a prophet of Judah, probably spoke during the reign of King Joash (2Chron. 22-24). In his youth he may have known Elijah, and he certainly was a contemporary of Elisha. The plagues of insects, which were the token of the divine chastening, give occasion for the unveiling of the coming "day of the Lord" (Isa. 2:12), in its two aspects of judgment on the Gentiles and blessing for Israel.

I. AUTHOR

The name Joel (Hebrew: Yo'el) means "Yahweh is God." He was the son of a man named Pethuel (or Bethuel in the Septuagint) which means "the open-heartedness or sincerity of God." Whether Joel received his name at birth, or was given this name later as a result of his ministry, is unknown.

Joel lived and prophesied in the southern kingdom of Judah. He very likely was a resident of the city of Jerusalem. He makes frequent reference to Judah & Jerusalem (2:32; 3:1, 17-18, 20), to their citizens (3:6, 8, 19), to Zion (2:1, 15, 32; 3:17, 21) and its children (2:23). He also shows great familiarity with the Temple and its ministry (1:9, 13-14, 16; 2:14, 17; 3:18). He was also intimately acquainted with the geography and history of the land (1:2; 3:2-8, 12, 14, 18).

Some scholars have suggested his familiarity with the Temple service may indicate he was a priest, or the son of a priest. Others speculate "his castigation of the priests suggests he was not a member of their caste." Little is known about this man, except for what can be gleaned from the book itself. The prophet Joel cannot be identified with any of the 12 other figures in the OT who have the same name. He is not mentioned outside the books of Joel and Acts (Acts 2:16). The non-Biblical legends about him are unconvincing. His father, Pethuel (1:1), is also unknown. Judging from his concern with Judah and Jerusalem (2:32; 3:1, 6, 8, 16-20), it seems likely that Joel lived in that area.

"Joel was a man of vitality and spiritual maturity. A keen discernor of the times, he delivered God's message to the people of Judah in a vivid and impassioned style, with a precision and originality of thought that served as a veritable quarry out of which many subsequent prophetic building stones were to be hewn" (Expositor's Bible Commentary).

II. DATE OF WRITING

There is great disagreement among scholars as to the dating of this book. Theories range from the 9th century to the 4th century BC. Some have even sought to date it as late as the Maccabean Period (during the Inter-Testamental Period). The problem -- no date is given in the heading of the book, nor is there any explicit reference within the body of the work itself. The major theories are:

- Post-exilic - The captivities of God's people have ended. The exiles have returned to their homeland. The Temple has been rebuilt. This view calls for a date in the mid-4th century BC.
- Pre-exilic - Three general positions have been advanced by those who assign a pre-exilic date to Joel. They are:
- Early Pre-exilic - A 9th century date. It is felt the situations depicted within the book point best to the time of the boy-king Joash (835-796 BC), who began his rule through the regency of the high priest Jehoiada.

- Middle Pre-exilic - An early 8th century date. An extensive defense of this view is given in *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, Vol. 7, p. 231-233.
- Late Pre-exilic - A 7th century date. This view seeks to find a link with the prophet Jeremiah, and to harmonize the literary forms and religious outlooks of the two prophets.

The most likely and logical of these theories is the Early Pre-exilic, which would date the prophecy of Joel from about 835 BC on. The book contains no references to datable historical events. Many interpreters date it somewhere between the late seventh and early fifth centuries B.C. In any case, its message is not significantly affected by its dating.

III. HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

The land has been devastated by a locust plague. Drought, famine and fires follow in the wake of the locust plague. This is far more than just a natural disaster -- it is also a national disaster. Almost every aspect of community life has been affected. The economy of the land has been all but ruined. The whole nation has ground to a halt. Even the religious life of the community is threatened through the shortage of offerings.

Joel addresses a link between this natural/national disaster and a time of coming judgment from the Lord God, the Day of the Lord. Not only was this locust plague an actual judgment from God, but it warned of an even greater impending judgment against the people of God when the enemy would not be armies of locust, but armies of men. This concept of further judgment also is part of Joel's revelation of God's intention for the last days, the ultimate coming of God in judgment at the end of time.

IV. JOEL IN THE NEW TESTAMENT

"While this is one of the briefest books in the OT, it is at the same time one of the most profound. Both in its grasp of the relationship between historical events and the supra-historical expectation of the day of the Lord, and also in its impact on early Christian theology, its influence has hardly been proportionate to its size" (*New Layman's Bible Commentary*).

- In Acts 2:16 the apostle Peter states that the things the people were witnessing on the day of Pentecost had been spoken of by the prophet Joel (Joel 2:28-29).
- In Romans 10:11-13 Paul refers to Joel 2:26 and 2:32.
- In Mark 4:29 Jesus makes use of Joel 3:13.
- There seems to be some dependence on Joel 2:32 in Acts 2:39.

There are several references to Joel in the Book of Revelation:

- Rev. 6:12 (Joel 2:10, 31; 3:15)
- Rev. 6:17 (Joel 2:11)
- Rev. 9:7-9 (Joel 1:6; 2:4-5)
- Rev. 14:15, 18 (Joel 3:13)

V. JOEL: SUMMARY

The book falls into two distinct sections:

- Joel speaks: 1:2 - 2:17
- Jehovah speaks: 2:18 - 3:21

Joel refers to the natural/national disaster of the locust and tells the people this is to be a warning to them so that they might repent. This disaster heralded the Day of the Lord which could only be averted by genuine repentance. If they repented, this day of judgment would come upon their enemies rather than upon themselves.

"The book is an appeal from Jehovah to the people to seek Him through repentance. Out of this repentance there would come material blessings followed by an outpouring of spiritual blessings" (Homer Hailey). Joel has often been called the Prophet of Pentecost because of his reference to spiritual blessings.

Other major messages of the book of Joel are:

- God is sovereignly, providentially guiding the affairs of earth's history toward His final goal --- 1:15; 2:1-4, 18, 20, 25-27, 28-32; 3:1-21.
- He is a God of grace and mercy - 2:13, 18.
- A God of loving-kindness and compassion - 2:13.
- A God of justice - 3:1-8, 12-13.
- Mere externalism in worship to God is insufficient - 2:12-13.

When sin becomes the dominant condition of God's people, they must be judged. God may use natural disasters, or political means, to accomplish the chastisement of His people. For those who repent there will be the blessings of a restored fellowship.

"Integral to all Joel's prophecy is his teaching about the Day of the Lord. By the skillful use of this term, which gives cohesion to his entire message, Joel demonstrated that God is sovereignly operative in all that comes to pass, directing all things to their appointed end" (Expositor's Bible Commentary).

God had abundantly blessed Judah, but the people had taken God and His blessings for granted. Their faith had degenerated into an empty formalism and their lives into moral decadence. "Under divine inspiration Joel told the people that the locust plague was a warning of a greater judgment that was imminent unless they repented and returned to full fellowship with God. If they did, God would abundantly pardon them, restore the health of the land, and give them again the elements needed to offer the sacrifices. The ceremonial system was designed to express a heart relationship with God. By their sin they had forfeited any right to religious ceremony" (Expositor's Bible Commentary).

VI. JOEL: THE ACCOUNT

A. Main Sections

1. Pestilence (Joel 1)
2. The Upcoming Day of the LORD (Joel 2)
3. Judgment on the Nations (Joel 3)

B. Pestilence (Joel 1)

1. Introduction; message to the people; terrible event to take place; different types of locusts have consumed everything (Joel 1:1-4)
2. Exhortation for people to lament; powerful nation has come against them; lamentation, for all has been destroyed and lost; lamentation for loss of harvests, trees; no gladness among men (Joel 1:5-12)
3. Call to wear sackcloth and lament; charge to consecrate a fast; day of the LORD near; food and gladness cut off; no seed or food in granaries; herds and flocks suffer; prophet calls to the LORD because of great destruction, desolation (Joel 1:13-20)

C. The Day of the LORD (Joel 2)

1. Blow trumpet; people tremble; day of LORD near; day of darkness; great people upon the mountain such as never been seen before or will again; land before them like Eden, behind them made like wilderness; appear like horses, leap on mountains, like powerful army (Joel 2:1-5)
2. People are in anguish before them; charge like warriors; do not swerve in their paths; not stopped; leap into houses; earth quakes before them;

sun, moon darkened; LORD utters voice before army; camp is great; day of the LORD awesome-- who can endure it (Joel 2:6-11)?

3. God gives people opportunity to repent; rend hearts, not garments; LORD gracious, merciful, slow to anger, relents over disaster; God may relent and leave blessing; blow trumpet, consecrate fast, mourn and lament; priests to make supplication for God to not make His heritage a reproach (Joel 2:12-17)
4. LORD has pity on His people; LORD to provide grain, wine, oil; will not make them reproach among nations; will remove northerner from them, drive former into parched lands, seas; land to not fear but rejoice, same for beasts and field; children of Zion to be glad, given early and latter rains; abundance of food and drink; restoration of what locusts devoured; they will eat plenty, praise God; people not to be put to shame; will know that LORD is God, there is no other (Joel 2:18-27)
5. Afterward God will pour Spirit out on all flesh; children will prophesy, old men to dream dreams, young men see visions; God will show wonders in heavens and on earth; sun to darkness, moon to blood; everyone who calls on name of LORD to be saved; those who escape in Zion, Jerusalem (Joel 2:28-32)

D. Nation Judgments (Joel 3)

1. When fortunes of Judah and Jerusalem restored, gathering of nations to valley of Jehoshaphat for judgment; judgment because people scattered in Dispersion, divided His land, cast lots for His people (Joel 3:1-3)
2. Tyre, Sidon, Philistia send some payment, but because they sold people of Judah and Jerusalem to Greeks, God will return payment on their own heads; children to be sold into hand of Judah (Joel 3:4-8)
3. Declaration for nations to prepare for war; farming instruments into weapons; let all be gathered to valley of Jehoshaphat; sickle for harvest, winepress, vats overflow because their evil is great; multitudes have come, sun and moon darkened; LORD roars from Zion, heavens and earth quake, LORD a stronghold & refuge for people (Joel 3:9-16)
4. They will know that LORD is God, dwells in Zion; Jerusalem holy, strangers not in it; mountains will drip wine, hills milk, streams with water in Zion; Egypt, Edom to become desolations for the violence done to Judah; Judah to be inhabited forever; blood avenged; LORD dwells in Zion (Joel 3:17-21)

VII. JOEL: IMPORTANT TEXTS

- A. Joel 2:4-5 - Rev. 9:3-10
- B. Joel 2:28-32 - Acts 2:16-21; Rom. 10:13
- C. Joel 3:13 - Rev. 14:14-20

CONCLUSION

Joel warns of pestilence for Judah that would bring unprecedented devastation. It is later used as an illustration in Revelation. But on the whole, it is a message of hope. If people repent, calamity will be averted, God will enter into judgment with nations oppressing Judah, and they can look forward to great day of the LORD-- Pentecost. For this reason Joel is called the Jews' prophet of hope.

QUESTIONS ON THE BOOK OF JOEL

1. What is the meaning of Joel's name?
2. Where did he live, and where did he prophesy?
3. What plague devastated the land in Joel's book? What lesson should they have gotten from it?
4. List three persons who quoted Joel in the New Testament and give references.
5. There are two primary speakers in the book of Joel. Name them.
6. There are five other important messages in Joel; list three of them.
7. What two things tend to happen when God's people take Him for granted?
8. What is meant by "That I will pour out My Spirit on all flesh"?
9. What is meant by "great and awesome day of the LORD"?
10. What is meant by "whoever calls on the name of the LORD shall be saved"?

Lesson Four: Amos -- Burden Bearer

INTRODUCTION

Amos, an older contemporary of Hosea and Isaiah, was active around 750 BC during the reign of Jeroboam II, making the Book of Amos one of the first biblical prophetic books written. Amos lived in the kingdom of Judah but preached in the northern kingdom of Israel. His major themes of justice, God's omnipotence, and divine judgment became recognized as the standard of authentic prophecy.

I. AUTHOR

The meaning of the name Amos (which is from the Hebrew verb *amas*: "to lift a burden, to carry") is "burden-bearer." He was a native of the southern kingdom of Judah, from the town of Tekoa, about six miles south of Bethlehem, twelve miles south of Jerusalem, and eighteen miles west of the Dead Sea. Tekoa was the center for a large sheep farming district.

Amos describes himself as one who had three different occupations:

- Shepherd (Amos 1:1) - This is the Hebrew word *noqed*, which was a word used to describe a man who tended a particular small, rugged, speckled variety of sheep (called *naqod*) which required less food and could live well in the desert, and which produced a wool of superior quality and of great value.
- Herdsman (Amos 7:14) - This is the Hebrew word *boqer*, which refers to one who raises or tends cattle.
- Cultivator of Sycamore Figs (Amos 7:14) - This was the wild fig (*siq-mim* in Hebrew) which exuded a ball of sap when nipped at the right season, and which hardened into a sort of edible fruit which the lower classes were able to afford. This tree was found at a lower altitude than Tekoa, so Amos undoubtedly had to do some traveling (perhaps down to the Dead Sea region) to tend these trees. The process involved climbing the tree, nicking the end of the fruit with a knife, and wiping the fruit with an oiled cloth to allow it to ripen. It was labor intensive and a job given to menials who would do it while tending flocks and herds.

"These occupations made it necessary for Amos to do a large amount of traveling to the wool and cattle markets of Israel and Judah. In this way, he learned firsthand the military, social, and economic conditions and practices of rich and poor alike" (John T. Willis).

Amos was not a "professional" prophet, but a common man utilized by the Lord to deliver His Word to His people. "I am not a prophet, nor am I the son of a prophet ... but the Lord took me from following the flock and the Lord said to me, 'Go prophesy to My people Israel.' And now hear the Word of the Lord!" (Amos 7:14-16). He had no special training; he was not a graduate of the School of the Prophets (variously referred to as "bands" - 1Sam. 10:5, 10; "companies" - 1Sam. 19:20; "sons of the prophets" - 1Kings 20:35); nor was he descended from or related to any prophets.

He was not even a citizen of Israel (the northern kingdom), but rather of Judah (the southern kingdom). Nevertheless, God sent him to Israel to proclaim the Word to the people of the northern kingdom. He was not a man of wealth, yet was sent to warn the wealthy; not a man of luxury, or one who was lazy, yet sent to those who were both. All of this was designed to separate the MAN from the MESSAGE. There was to be nothing about this man which would attract a personal following. It was the message God desired the people to focus upon, not the messenger.

Amos did most, if not all, of his prophetic work (the totality of which probably did not last over a year or so - Amos 1:1) in the city of Bethel (Amos 7:10), where he was denounced by Amaziah the priest and forbidden to preach further in Israel.

"Someone has described Amos as 'the first Great Reformer.' He was not of the school of the prophets, who by this time were disposed to cry what the people wanted. There was not in Amos the sympathy, warm love, and feeling of the statesman or citizen, but a cold sense of justice and right. He was the stern prophet of justice and righteousness. Hosea's spirit was summed up in the word loving-kindness; Amos' is summed up in the one word 'justice'" (Homer Hailey).

"The dark days in which he lived called for a man of sturdy moral fiber and fearlessness. Such was Amos. His character, molded in the harsh terrain of the wilderness of Tekoa, enabled him to stand before the priest and the people, proclaiming the word God had given him" (Expositor's Bible Commentary). "At the call of God he left his home in Judea as a mere layman to proclaim a hostile message in the proud capital of the Northern Kingdom of Israel. Without any status as a recognized prophet, he braved the prejudice of the Ephraimite public to carry out faithfully his commission from God. A man of rugged convictions and iron will, he could not be deflected from his purpose even by the highest functionary of the Samaritan hierarchy" (Gleason Archer).

II. DATE OF WRITING

Amos 1:1 gives us a fairly accurate picture of when this prophecy occurred. It was during the days of King Uzziah (792-740 BC), and King Jeroboam II of Israel (793-753 BC). His mission to Bethel was also more precisely dated as occurring "two years before the earthquake." This was a very severe earthquake in the reign of Uzziah which was remembered for centuries afterward - "You will flee just as you fled before the earthquake in the days of Uzziah king of Judah" (Zech. 14:5). As a result of this information, most scholars date his prophetic work somewhere in 760 to 755 BC.

III. HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

This was a time when the fortunes of the northern kingdom (Israel) had reached one of their highest points of prosperity and peace. Jeroboam was able to extend his borders almost to those of the old Davidic kingdom. There was also peace with the southern kingdom (Judah). "After a long period of conflict during which Judah was in many respects subservient to Israel, there was now a spirit of co-operation and mutual enterprise resulting in a flow of trade and commerce between the two kingdoms" (New Layman's Bible Commentary).

It was a time of great economic well-being and national strength. The increase in wealth also led to extensive building programs. The simple brick of earlier days gave way to buildings of hewn stone and ivory decorations. They had "winter houses" and "summer houses" (Amos 3:15). They had "houses of ivory" (Amos 3:15), and "houses of well-hewn stone" (Amos 5:11). They reclined on "beds of ivory" (Amos 6:4); sprawled on couches; ate and drank to their fill; anointed themselves with the finest oils; were surrounded by music (Amos 6:4-7). In short, they were "at ease in Zion" (Amos 6:1).

"Concurrently with the increased wealth there was an associated rise in those social evils which characterized the prosperity of Solomon's reign; the rich became very rich and the poor became even poorer" (New Layman's Bible Commentary). "As their economic well-being and national strength continued to foster their security, an internal decay was eating at their vitals" (Expositor's Bible Commentary).

There was a complete lack of social concern in the land. The rich would stop at nothing to increase their profits, including economic exploitation of the poor. Even the legal system was corrupted, and the poor had no recourse even in the courts. "The rich

enjoyed an indolent and indulgent existence, urged on by the rapacity of their wives who demanded more and more luxuries" (New Layman's Bible Commentary).

"Back of all moral, social, and political corruption there lies a basic cause: Religious decay and apostasy" (Homer Hailey). The people were religious, but they were far from being spiritual. Their religion consisted of external acts --- they were putting on a show for God, but He was not fooled. "They prided themselves in their expensive 'church buildings.' They boasted of the numerous sacrifices which they offered, and of the fact that they offered them exactly as the Law prescribed ('legalism'). They gloried in their perfect attendance record at the worship services. They were well pleased with their efforts to sing praises to the Lord. But, by way of contrast, Amos rejected the idea that quantity, numbers, and external show was really religion. Some have criticized Amos for being a preacher of a "social gospel." However, "God made it clear that the heart of religion was to love God with all the heart, and to love one's neighbor as himself. Without these two elements, any number of external acts are meaningless to God" (Willis).

"The prophets had degenerated into time-servers, blinded with the complacency of the nation. Religion certainly flourished in the nation but it was a religion that was completely divorced from reality. There was a great deal of activism and outward show with crowds thronging the shrines at the times of the great festivals. Ritual was elaborate, but there was no true life and no evidence that real spiritual values had any place, and Yahweh was patronized with a presumption bordering upon arrogance" (New Layman's Bible Commentary).

"Extravagant religious ceremonies and rites were manifested on every hand. Tithes were offered every three days; free-will offerings were abundant and the amounts advertised (Amos 4:4-5). Religious fervor was high, but true spiritual devotion to God was utterly lacking" (Homer Hailey). "It was a religion which was empty in content, though full of ritual. Amos insisted that God had no time for ritualistic religion without heart" (New Layman's Bible Commentary).

IV. SUMMARY OF AMOS

The book of Amos falls into three major divisions:

- Chapters 1-2 - A series of oracles against "outside" nations, ending with similar oracles against Judah and Israel.
- Chapters 3-6 - Condemning various sins which were prevalent in Israel.
- Chapters 7-9 - Some information concerning the call of Amos, and five visions which reflect some of the basic themes of his message.

The oracles against the nations:

- Damascus - 1:3-5
- Gaza - 1:6-8
- Tyre - 1:9-10
- Edom - 1:11-12
- Ammon - 1:13-15
- Moab - 2:1-3
- Judah - 2:4-5
- Israel - 2:6-16

"The significant thing about this series, which in general denounces atrocities of war, is that Amos announces that God is concerned with sin wherever it occurs. He is the international God of Justice, punishing sin wherever it occurs" (Jack P. Lewis).

The Five Visions of Amos portray the main themes which God wanted this man to emphasize. They are basically visions of doom.

- The Locusts (Amos 7:1-3) - Locusts in Palestine were uncontrollable and considered "an act of God." Amos saw in them the threat of God's punishment, and by pleading for the land was able to convince God to relent.
- The Great Fire devouring the land (Amos 7:4-6) - Some see this as a famine or drought. Again, the prophet pleads with the Lord, and He relents.
- The Plumb Line (Amos 7:7-9) - The doom of the house of Jeroboam is announced. Amos pleads no further.
- The Basket of Summer Fruit (Amos 8:1-3) - Prophets frequently convey their message by puns not intended to be humorous. From the similarity of summer (qayits) and end (qets) in Hebrew, the Lord teaches Amos that the end is at hand. "The end has come for My people Israel" (Amos 8:2).
- The Lord Standing Beside the Altar (Amos 9:1) - The command is given to smite the Sanctuary and to destroy the sinful people of the land. "The point of this last vision is that when God finally sends the Assyrians to overthrow Israel, that there will be no way for sinners to escape punishment, no matter how hard they try" (John T. Willis).

V. AMOS: THE ACCOUNT

A. Main Sections

1. Judgment oracles (Amos 1-6)
2. Visions (Amos 7-9)

B. God's Judgment of Peoples (Amos 1-2)

1. Amos, shepherd of Tekoa, seer (Amos 1:1)
2. LORD roars from Zion, pastures mourn (Amos 1:2)
3. Word against Damascus: punishment for treatment of Gilead (Amos 1:3-5)
4. Word against Philistia: punishment for exile of people (Amos 1:6-8)
5. Word against Tyre: punishment for giving up people to Edom (Amos 1:9-10)
6. Word against Edom: punishment for anger, violence against Israel (Amos 1:11-12)
7. Word against Ammon: punishment for attack against Israel (Amos 1:13-15)
8. Word against Moab: punishment for attack against Edom (Amos 2:1-3)
9. Word against Judah: punishment for idolatry, rejection of law of God (Amos 2:4-5)
10. Word against Israel: punishment for oppression of poor, sexual immorality, idolatry; God as having removed enemies, provided land, brought them up from Egypt, established some sons as prophets, Nazirites; Nazirites forced to drink wine, prophets told to not prophesy; God will turn their strength to weakness, Israel will be defeated (Amos 2:6-16)

C. The Word of the LORD Against Israel (Amos 3-4)

1. God as having only known Israel; examples regarding cause, effect, demonstration that God brings disaster to cities, but only after providing warnings through the prophets (Amos 3:1-8)
2. Proclamation to Philistia, Egypt to see the tumults within Israel; adversary will surround Israel, destroy city (Amos 3:9-11)

3. As shepherd rescues only pieces of lamb from mouth of lion, so only portion of people of Israel to be rescued; on day of judgment of Israel, altars to be defaced, houses of rich to be destroyed (Amos 3:12-15)
4. Condemnation of women of Israel: oppressive, demand drink from husbands; God has sworn that they will be taken away with fishhooks (Amos 4:1-3)
5. Sarcasm regarding idolatry: come and bring offerings, sacrifice to Bethel, multiply sin (Amos 4:4-5)
6. God gave Israel bounty, they did not return to Him; He beset them with inconsistent rain, no rain at proper time, blight and mildew, locusts, pestilences, death, destruction of cities, yet they did not return to Him (Amos 4:6-11)
7. Israel should prepare to meet their God; God as Creator, Yahweh His name (Amos 4:12-13)

D. God's Lament Over Israel (Amos 5-6)

1. Lamentation: Israel as fallen; only 10% left (Amos 5:1-3)
2. Exhortation to seek God and live; do not go to idolatrous temples; God as Creator, will destroy Israel if she does not repent; Israel as hating reproof, commits oppression; because of oppression, will build, but will not occupy, will plant, but will not enjoy; God knows their sins, oppressions, those who are prudent will keep silent in the evil time; seek good, not evil, live; hate evil, love good, establish justice; God may be gracious to Joseph's remnant (Amos 5:4-15)
3. Lamentations in the cities, rural areas, for God will pass through their midst (Amos 5:16-17)
4. Woe to those who desire day of the LORD; day of LORD darkness; images of inescapable violence (Amos 5:18-20)
5. God as hating their feasts, assemblies, sacrifices; God will not accept them; will not listen to their music; they ought to accomplish justice, righteousness; in wilderness, did not properly bring offerings; people to be sent in exile (Amos 5:21-27)
6. Woe to those at ease in Zion, Samaria: are they better than kingdoms destroyed by Assyria?; woe to those who lie in wealth, sing songs in idleness, make new instruments, get drunk; they will go into exile; God hates pride, strongholds of Jacob, will deliver up all in them; people in houses will die, survivors to be ashamed to mention name of LORD (Amos 6:1-10)
7. LORD commands destruction of houses; justice made poison; confident in own strength; God will raise nation against them, will oppress them (Amos 6:11-14)

E. Visions of Warning (Amos 7)

1. God shows Amos locusts to be sent out to eat grass of land; Amos wonders how Jacob will stand; God relents (Amos 7:1-3)
2. God shows judgment of fire devouring the deep and land; Amos wonders how Jacob will stand; God relents (Amos 7:4-6)
3. God shows Amos plumb line; God says that He is setting it up in Israel, will not pass by them again, will make them desolate (Amos 7:7-9)
4. Amaziah, priest in Bethel, tells Jeroboam that Amos has conspired against him based on his prophecy; Amaziah tells Amos to return to Judah and prophesy there, never again in Bethel (Amos 7:10-13)

5. Amos responds: he is no prophet, but shepherd; LORD sent him to prophesy; since Amaziah says that Amos should not prophesy, God will turn his wife into a prostitute, children will die; he will die in unclean land; Israel to be exiled (Amos 7:14-17)

F. Vision of Mourning (Amos 8)

1. God shows Amos basket of summer fruit, indicates that time of end has come upon Israel; songs of temple to become wailings for the dead (Amos 8:1-3)
2. Message to oppressors, seeking opportunities to profit on the backs of the poor: God will not forget their deeds, will turn feasts into mourning; days coming when there will be famine of hearing God's word; young will faint of thirst on that day; they will fall, never to rise again (Amos 8:4-14)

G. Vision of Destruction (Amos 9)

1. Amos sees God beside altar; He speaks destruction upon capitals, destruction for everyone there; His hand will reach them in Sheol or heaven, on the mountains or on the seafloor; they will go into captivity; eyes fixed on them for evil, not good; God as Creator, controller of universe (Amos 9:1-6)
2. Israel like the Cushites; God as bringing Israel from Egypt, Philistines and Arameans from other lands; God destroys sinful kingdoms, but not all of Jacob; Israel to be shaken, sinners die by sword (Amos 9:7-10)
3. David's fallen booth will be repaired, restored; land will overflow with bounty; Israel's fortunes restored; they will not be uprooted again (Amos 9:11-15)

VI. AMOS: IMPORTANT TEXTS

- A. Amos 3:3, 7-8
- B. Amos 8:4-6
- C. Amos 9:11-12 - Acts 15:15-18

QUESTIONS ON THE BOOK OF AMOS

1. What does Amos' name mean?
2. Where was Amos from?
3. What did he do for a living before he became a prophet?
4. What background did Amos have as a prophet before being called by God?
5. Amos was from the south, but where did God send him to prophesy?
6. What catastrophic event occurred at the time of Amos' prophecies?

7. What was the condition of the economy and military of Israel in Amos' day?

8. List three things that characterized the spiritual condition of Israel at that time.

9. List the eight nations about whom Amos prophesied:

- | | |
|----|----|
| a. | e. |
| b. | f. |
| c. | g. |
| d. | h. |

10. List the five visions of Amos:

- a.
- b.
- c.
- d.
- e.

11. Briefly explain what Amos is charging in 8:4-6.

12. Briefly explain Amos 9:11-12.

Lesson Five: Obadiah -- One Who Serves Jehovah

INTRODUCTION

Edom, proud over her own security, has gloated over Israel's devastation by foreign powers. However, Edom's participation in that disaster will bring on God's wrath. She herself will be destroyed, but Mount Zion and Israel will be delivered, and God's kingdom will triumph.

I. AUTHOR

The name Obadiah means "Servant of Yahweh" (literally "One who serves or worships Jehovah"). This prophecy has the distinction of being the shortest book in the Old Testament. There are twelve different individuals in the Old Testament with this name (a very common name), but no indication that any of these other individuals are to be identified with this particular prophet.

Nothing is known about his life, background or personality except what little can be inferred from this prophecy. It is assumed that he was a native of Judah. Others believe he may also have been among the circle of prophets attached to the Jerusalem Temple. The Jewish Talmud states Obadiah was not Jewish, but rather an Edomite proselyte God used to rebuke his own people.

II. DATE OF WRITING

In addition to being the shortest book in the OT, Obadiah also bears the distinction of being the most difficult of all the prophecies to date. His work is ascribed to periods ranging from 845 to 400 BC. There are two major theories:

- 585 BC - This is the view held by most liberal scholars. It places this prophecy about a year after the fall of Jerusalem to the Babylonians.
- 845 BC - This is the view held by a good majority of the evangelical scholars of the 19th and 20th centuries. It places the prophecy during the days of King Jehoram (848 - 841 BC) when Jerusalem was attacked by the Philistines and Arabians (with probable cooperation from the Edomites - 2Kings 8:20; 2Chron. 21:8-10, 16-17). The second view seems to be the most probable. (A Survey of Old Testament Introductions, by Gleason L. Archer, Jr., p. 299-303, and A Commentary on the Minor Prophets, by Homer Hailey, p. 28-29.)

III. OBADIAH: AUTHENTICITY

This is one of seven OT books which is not quoted in the pages of the NT. However, there are obvious relationships with several other OT books. There is a similarity between numerous phrases found in Joel 3 and Obadiah.

- "Because of violence" - Joel 3:19 and Obad. 10
- "Your deeds shall return on your own head" - Joel 3:4-7 and Obad. 15
- "The day of the Lord is near" - Joel 1:15; 2:1; 3:14 and Obad. 15
- "In Mt. Zion there shall be those that escape" - Joel 3:17 and Obad. 17

It appears that Jeremiah was familiar with the work of Obadiah. Compare Jeremiah 49:7-22 with Obadiah 1-9. There are strong similarities between what the prophet Jeremiah wrote and Obadiah 1-9.

IV. HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

This prophecy is against the people of Edom. The Edomites were descendants of Esau (Gen. 36:8-9), whereas the Israelites were descendants of Jacob, the twin brother of Esau. Thus, the peoples were very closely related. From the very beginning there was

enmity between these two brothers, an enmity which carried over to the nations which descended from them. Jacob and Esau "struggled together" within the womb of Rebekah (Gen. 25:22). In the next verse the Lord tells her, "Two nations are in your womb." There was conflict over the taking of the birthright by Jacob from Esau (Gen. 25:27-34). It was at this time that Esau gained the name Edom (meaning "red"), the color of the stew for which he sold his birthright (Gen. 25:30). Much of the land occupied by the Edomites was made up of dark red sandstone; this was also the color of Esau at his birth (Gen. 25:25). There was conflict when Jacob tricked Isaac into blessing him instead of Esau (Gen. 27). There was trouble years later as the two brothers met (Gen. 32-33).

Conflict between the two nations (Edom and Israel) began at the time of the Exodus from Egypt when Edom refused to let the people of Israel pass through their region on the way to the promised land (Num. 20:14-21). This enmity continued until the time of King David when he put them under subjection to Israel (2Sam. 8:14). During the reign of Jehoram, Edom revolted (2Kings 8:20-22; 2Chron. 21:8-10) and set up their own king. It was during this time, about 845 BC, that Obadiah gave his prophecy to the people of Edom.

The people of Edom were continually filled with hatred for Israel. Speaking of these people, Amos 1:11 says, "he pursued his brother with the sword, while he stifled his compassion; his anger also tore continually, and he maintained his fury forever." As a result, Malachi 1:3-4 says that the Lord would utterly destroy the Edomites. They had become the people "toward whom the Lord is indignant forever!"

During their later history the Nabatean Arabs took over the territory of Edom and drove them from their land. They fled to the area south of the Dead Sea, and in time came to be known as the Idumaeans. Around 120 BC they were conquered by John Hyrcanus of the Maccabees, who forced many of them to be circumcised and to accept the Law of Moses.

During the trial of Jesus Christ, there is yet another confrontation. Jesus (a descendant of Jacob) stood before King Herod (a descendant of Esau). "By 100 AD the people of Edom had become lost to history" (Homer Hailey). "If you travel today in the region of Edom, you will find nothing but the most stark wilderness and the most isolated emptiness; it is one of the most formidable, forsaken spots on earth" (Briscoe). They will "become as if they had never existed" (Obad. 16).

V. OBADIAH: SUMMARY

The city of Jerusalem had been attacked by the Philistines and Arabians. The city had been stormed and looted. Edom, who was in a state of revolt, sided with the invading forces and shared in the spoils (Obad. 11). They gloated over Israel's misfortune (Obad. 12-13), and killed or imprisoned those who fled destruction (Obad 14).

VI. OBADIAH: MESSAGE

This book is structured around two major themes:

- The destruction of Edom - also referred to as Esau and Teman
- The vindication of Judah - also referred to as Jacob, Jerusalem, & Mount Zion

The use of Jacob and Esau in particular, along with such phrases as "your brother," draws attention to the blood relationship between these two nations. "It is the violation of these ties that occasion both Obadiah's denunciation of Edom and the necessity for Judah's restoration" (Expositor's Bible Commentary).

Even though Obadiah is a short, one-chapter book, there are numerous lessons to be derived from it.

1) When one shares in "the spoils of wrong-doing," even though he may not be an instigator of the crime, by "standing aloof" he becomes "as one of them" (Obad. 11).

2) When someone (even a nation) becomes unjust, cruel and bitter toward someone else, especially when they're brethren, they will be punished, and the one wronged will be avenged.

3) As a people sow, so will a people reap. "Do not be deceived, God is not mocked; for whatever a man sows, this he will also reap." (Gal. 6:7). The Edomites sought to destroy the Israelites, and were themselves destroyed (Obad. 15).

4) Obadiah makes it clear that the idea of a nation being invulnerable is an illusion. Edom felt so secure that they believed no one could destroy them. They built entire cities which were hidden within cliffs, and which could only be reached by narrow passes -- the famous city of Petra, which was carved from a mountainside, was in Edom. Their security, however, was misplaced. God said He would destroy them, and history demonstrates how this occurred.

5) The people were proud and arrogant which led them to be self-deceived. "The arrogance of your heart has deceived you, you who live in the clefts of the rock, in the loftiness of your dwelling place, who say in your heart, 'Who will bring me down to earth?'" (Obad. 3). The answer is in the next verse: "'From there I will bring you down,' declares the Lord."

6) The Edomites had become wise in their own eyes. They had all the answers; had need of nothing; God had been left out of the picture. In the OT there is no mention of any Edomite religion or any Edomite gods. "The Edomites had no allegiance to a god. This has led many scholars to believe that this unusual people were so self-sufficient, arrogant, and self-satisfied that they wouldn't even call upon the name of any kind of god. They believed they had all the answers themselves!" (D. Stuart Briscoe).

7) The Kingdom of the Lord will always ultimately prevail (Obad. 21 - "And the kingdom will be the Lord's").

8) The ultimate sin of Edom was "a manifest display of lack of brotherliness" (Jack P. Lewis). Edom stood by and gloated over the misfortune of a brother nation. "He who rejoices at calamity will not go unpunished" (Prov. 17:5).

9) God provides a place of escape for those who would turn to Him (Obad. 17).

VII. OBADIAH: THE ACCOUNT

A. Main Sections

1. Against Edom (Obadiah 1:1-14)
2. The day of the LORD (Obadiah 1:15-21)

B. Against Edom (Obadiah 1:1-14)

1. Report sent from God, messenger to nations: fight against Edom; Edom to be made small, despised; greatly proud; LORD will humble Edom (Obadiah 1:1-4)
2. If thieves, grape gatherers came, would only take enough for themselves; Edom pillaged by nations around about; wisdom of Edom to be destroyed that day; mighty men to be dismayed (Obadiah 1:5-9)
3. Destruction because of violence done to Jacob; Edom did nothing when foreigners came against him; do not rejoice over their destruction, attempt to take over Judah; leave Judah alone (Obadiah 1:10-14)

C. The Day of the LORD (Obadiah 1:15-21)

1. Day of LORD near for all nations; recompense for deeds; drunk on holy mountain, nations will drink continually; in Zion will be those who

escape; Jacob and Joseph will consume Edom; no survivor for Esau (Obadiah 1:15-18)

2. Those of the Negev will possess Esau, those of the Shephelah the land of Philistia, Ephraim, Samaria; Benjamin to take Gilead; (returned) exiles of Israel will possess all the land; saviors will go to Jerusalem, rule Esau; kingdom will be the LORD's (Obadiah 1:19-21)

QUESTIONS ON THE BOOK OF OBADIAH

1. What is the literal meaning of the name of Obadiah?
2. What is unique about the book of Obadiah relative to the rest of the Old Testament?
3. Who was Edom and why did Obadiah prophesy against them?
4. What happened to create tension between Edom and Israel?
5. List the two major themes of Obadiah.
6. List three applications that can be learned from Obadiah
 - a.
 - b.
 - c.
7. How many will survive the destruction of Edom?

Lesson Six: Jonah -- The Dove

INTRODUCTION

Jonah tells the account of a Hebrew prophet named Jonah ben Amittai who is sent by God to prophesy the destruction of Nineveh but tries to escape the divine mission. The primary theme of the Book of Jonah is God's compassion. It can be divided into four sections, roughly divided by each chapter: 1) God's sovereignty, 2) God's deliverance, 3) God's mercy, and 4) God's righteousness. The book of Jonah is not written like the other books of the prophets. Jonah is almost entirely narrative with the exception of the psalm in chapter 2. The actual prophetic word against Nineveh is only given in passing through the narrative. As with any good narrative, Jonah has a setting, characters, a plot, and themes. It also relies heavily on the literary device of irony.

I. AUTHOR

The name Jonah (Hebrew: Sefer Yonah) means "dove." He was the son of Amittai, of the tribe of Zebulun (Joshua 19:13), and from the city of Gath-Hepher which is in the region of Galilee. It is believed by some of the Jewish Rabbis that Jonah is to be identified with the dead son of a widow from Zarephath who was raised to life by Elijah (1Kings 17), however there is no basis at all for such an assumption. In 2Kings 14:25 Jonah is mentioned as being a prophet of God during the reign of King Jeroboam II (793-753 BC). Jonah foretold of the wide extent of this king's conquests and the expansion of Israel's territory under his leadership.

As a result of the above very popular prophecy, which was fulfilled in a relatively short time, "Jonah must have enjoyed great popular respect as a true prophet; this may explain his reluctance to accept a less popular commission, and cause him to lose substantial face" (New Layman's Bible Commentary).

Technically, the book of Jonah is anonymous; however, Jewish tradition holds that the author is Jonah himself. In more recent years it has come to be believed that "the book is about Jonah rather than by him." "It is chiefly a book about a prophet instead of being a collection of oracles of the prophet. Only eight words are needed to report Jonah's preaching -- Jonah 3:4" (Jack P. Lewis).

Jonah is the only "minor prophet" ever to be mentioned by Jesus Christ. He is also the only OT figure that Jesus Himself likens unto Himself (Matt. 12:39-41, 16:4; Luke 11:29-32). Although some contend this book is a fable and that Jonah never actually lived, the Biblical evidence is to the contrary. 2Kings 14:25 speaks of him as an actual historical figure. So does Jesus Christ. Josephus (an early Jewish historian) also regarded him as historical rather than fictional (Antiquities of the Jews, Book 9, Chapter 10, Sections 1-2). Also, when Paul wrote that Jesus "was buried, and that He was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures" (1Cor. 15:4), he may well have been referring, at least in part, to Jonah's experience.

The Apocrypha writers regarded Jonah as an actual historical figure. He is listed among "The Twelve Prophets" in Sirach 49:10. Tobit 14:4 refers to "God's word which was spoken by Jonah against Nineveh." In 3Maccabees 6:8 the deliverance of Jonah is one in a series of God's great acts of mercy of the past that forms a part of the prayer of Eleazar.

The Greeks have long expressed their deep veneration for the prophet Jonah. In the 6th century AD they dedicated a church to him (compare this action with what Peter sought to do in Luke 9:33).

II. DATE OF WRITING

From 2Kings 14:25 we know that Jonah lived during the time of Jeroboam II (793-753 BC). He was sent to Nineveh, the capital city of Assyria, to deliver a warning from God that unless they repented they would be destroyed. There are several historical clues which seem to point to a date for this prophecy somewhere in the late 750's BC, perhaps around 758 BC:

1) During the reign of Adad-nirari III (811-783 BC) there was a swing toward monotheism. However, at his death the nation entered a period of national weakness and even greater moral decay. "During this time, Assyria was engaged in a life and death struggle with the mountain tribes of Urartu, and its associates of Mannai and Madai in the north, who had been able to push their frontier to within less than a hundred miles of Nineveh" (Expositor's Bible Commentary, Vol. 7).

2) In 756 BC a plague struck the nation, followed by a second plague in 759 BC. In 763 BC there was an eclipse of the sun. These were "events of the type regarded by ancients as evidence of divine judgment, and could have prepared the people to receive Jonah's message" (The Ryrie Study Bible). "No doubt this depressed state of Assyria contributed much to the readiness of the people to hear Jonah as he began to preach to them" (Homer Hailey).

3) There is some historical evidence that during the reign of Ashurbanipal (747-722 BC) a religious awakening occurred. This may have been the result of Jonah's preaching. In 745 BC Tiglath-pileser III (745-727 BC) came to the throne and Assyria again became a major power. Under his leadership the Assyrians became "the rod of God's anger (Isaiah 10:5) against His rebellious people Israel. Israel finally fell to the Assyrians with the capture of Samaria in 722 BC (through the efforts of Tiglath-pileser's successors --- Shalmaneser V and Sargon II).

4) Through the preaching of Jonah, and the repentance of the people of Nineveh, the city was spared at this time. However, history tells us their repentance was fairly short-lived. Soon they had fallen back into their sinful way of life. The prophet Nahum was then sent to these same people. However, they failed to repent (as they had with Jonah), and thus were destroyed in 612 BC.

III. PURPOSE OF THE BOOK OF JONAH

Until the 18th and 19th centuries, Jonah was regarded almost exclusively as historical fact. However, in the 20th century many other theories have been put forth as to how this book should be interpreted. The following are the major theories of interpretation proposed:

1) ALLEGORICAL - "An allegory is a story consisting of a series of incidents which are analogous to a parallel series of happenings that they are intended to illustrate." Thus: Jonah = Israel; Jonah's flight = Israel's failure to fulfill its spiritual mission to the nations; The "great fish" = Babylon, which swallows up Israel in the captivity; Spitting out Jonah = the restoration of Israel to their homeland; etc. (Jer. 51:31 speaks of Babylon "swallowing" Israel "like a monster," and it "filled his stomach." Then, in vs. 44, God says He will "bring forth out of his mouth that which he hath swallowed up.") Some regard this as biblical proof of their theory that Jonah is merely an allegory.

2) PARABOLIC - "A parable is a short, pithy story with a didactic aim." The moral of this story: God's love for the nations. Jonah typifies "the narrow-minded, exclusivist Jew with no love for the nations beyond its borders."

3) MYTHICAL - This point of view assumes that the whole story is nothing but a myth or legend which arose around some incident in the history of Israel.

4) HISTORICAL - This view holds that the narrative describes events which actually took place. (This is the view this compiler takes!) Those who object to this view

do so primarily on the basis of the miraculous element in the account (the "great fish"). "Jesus placed His sanction on the story as historical fact; therefore, the historical interpretation is the only interpretation worthy of acceptance to all who believe that Jesus is the Christ" (Homer Hailey). The fact that this account should be regarded as historical, however, does not mean there are no parabolic or allegorical or spiritual lessons to be derived from it.

IV. MIRACLES OF THE BOOK OF JONAH

The fact that there are obvious miracles recorded in this book has caused foolish and unbelieving scholars, who doubt or deny the miraculous power of God, to label this work as fiction. The various miracles recorded in the book of Jonah are:

- God raising up a storm --- 1:4
- God calming the storm --- 1:15
- God's commissioning of a great fish to swallow Jonah --- 1:17
- Jonah surviving three days & three nights inside the fish --- 1:17
- God commanding the fish to vomit Jonah out on dry land --- 2:10
- A city the size of Nineveh experiencing such a wide-spread repentance --- 3:5-9
- The Lord raising up a plant, a worm, and a scorching east wind --- 4:6-8

Dag Gadol is the Hebrew phrase which literally means "great fish." The Jews had no special word for "whale" (the word used in the KJV). Since the word dag may refer to a fish of any species, including the whale, it matters not at all what kind of fish or whale it may have been. Speculation based on the mouth or stomach capacity for swallowing and containing a man is moot. The text states that God prepared the marine creature. That is enough to answer any question about its ability to swallow a man, that is, God made it capable of fulfilling His purpose to swallow and contain Jonah.

"The ability or inability to accept a miracle depends on whether or not one spells his God with a capital 'G'" -- Homer Hailey

V. MESSAGES OF JONAH

The message of the book is twofold:

- God's love and concern is for all people, and anyone who is willing to repent and turn to God can find salvation (Acts 26:19-20; 2Peter 3:9).
- God is a universal God. There is but ONE God, and He alone is to be the God of all people. Jonah preached to a monotheistic people, but the god they worshipped was Nebo. He warned them they must repent and turn to Jehovah, and worship and serve Him only.

Other lessons of the book of Jonah are:

1) "God's judgments, even when declared in prophecy, can be averted by genuine repentance." This is a "crucial theological truth relating human repentance to escaping from anticipated judgment" (New Layman's Bible Commentary). Jer. 18:7-8 - "At one moment I might speak concerning a nation or concerning a kingdom to uproot, to pull down, or to destroy it; if that nation against which I have spoken turns from its evil, I will relent concerning the calamity I planned to bring on it."

2) National sin demands national repentance. Just as this principle applied to Nineveh, the capital of Assyria, so it also applies to all nations today.

3) This book is a stern rebuke of a narrow exclusiveness that characterized the Israelites. Jonah, whose attitude was typical of his people, had no desire to see the Assyrians saved; they were the enemy. He fled rather than preach such a distasteful message to this distasteful people. And even after finally preaching it, he sat outside the city waiting to see if God would change His mind and still destroy them. When he

realized God was indeed going to show mercy to these people, he prayed to die rather than have to witness such a thing. (Jonah 4:1-3). When we hold to such attitudes: "We are the only ones God truly favors"; "We would rather die than see those people saved"; "We're not about to preach the gospel to that bunch"; then we have repeated the sin of Jonah. Further, we have failed to perceive the universal love of God. Jonah symbolizes a narrow, sectarian spirit, rather than the spirit of Christ.

4) One cannot run away from God (Psalm 139:7-12). "Jonah learned, and through his valuable experience millions have learned, that when God enjoins a disagreeable duty, it is far easier to go and do it than to run away from it" (J.W. McGarvey). "When one sets out to baffle God, there is bound to be a storm" (George L. Robinson).

5) "The infinite concern of God for life is shown in contrast to the concern of man for the material" (Homer Hailey). "The withering of the prophet's gourd, with the regrets it excited, strikes home in all ages, as it must have done in Jonah's day, the contrast between the infinite love of God and the selfish coldness of man. The growth of a night can be pitied when it touches ourselves; but unspeakably higher claims too often awaken no tenderness where we are not personally concerned" (Cunningham Geikie).

6) In Jonah, one sees "the forerunner of the universal gospel message" and messenger (Hailey). Also, we see the principle that "the most unpromising mission fields are often the most responsive" (The Ryrie Study Bible). "From the human standpoint Assyria was the last place an Israelite would choose for a missionary venture, so Jonah took a trip in the opposite direction" (Samuel J. Schultz).

7) "There is no remonstrance and no mention of Jonah's former call and flight (Jonah 3:1-2). The Lord passes this over in gracious silence" (Homer Hailey). The Lord is willing to forgive and forget.

VI. JONAH: THE ACCOUNT

A. Main Sections

1. Before Nineveh (Jonah 1-2)
2. At Nineveh (Jonah 3-4)

B. Jonah Flees From God (Jonah 1-2)

1. Word of LORD comes to Jonah to call against Nineveh, its evil; Jonah arises, flees from presence of LORD, goes on ship headed for Tarshish (Jonah 1:1-3)
2. LORD causes great storm upon the sea; mariners each cry to his god, removed all cargo; Jonah asleep; they wake him, petition him to call out to his god (Jonah 1:4-6)
3. Mariners decide to cast lots to see who has brought the evil upon them; lot falls on Jonah; they want to know more about Jonah; he identifies himself as a Hebrew, serving the God of heaven; mariners afraid, for they know he is fleeing LORD's presence (Jonah 1:7-11)
4. Mariners ask what should be done; Jonah says to throw him overboard; men first try to get to land; they cannot; they call out to the LORD, beg for mercy, cast Jonah overboard; sea quiets down; mariners sacrifice to LORD, make vows (Jonah 1:8-16)
5. LORD prepares giant fish to swallow Jonah; Jonah in belly of fish three days and nights (Jonah 1:17)
6. Jonah prays to God from belly of fish: calls to God in his distress, seas lash against him, God delivers his life; message of thanksgiving; Jonah will make sacrifices and pay vows (Jonah 2:1-9)
7. Fish vomits Jonah onto dry land (Jonah 2:10)

C. Jonah's Preaching (Jonah 3)

1. Word of LORD returns to Jonah, tells him to go to Nineveh; he does so (Jonah 3:1-2)
2. Nineveh large city, three day's journey in breadth; Jonah went a day's journey in, begins calling out that Nineveh will be overthrown; people believe God, fast, wear sackcloth (Jonah 3:3-5)
3. Word reaches king of Nineveh; he humbles himself, wears sackcloth; issues proclamation of fasting and lamentation, so that God may relent of disaster (Jonah 3:6-9)
4. God sees their repentance, relents of disaster (Jonah 3:10)

D. Jonah's Anger (Jonah 4)

1. Jonah very displeased; indicates that he fled toward Tarshish since God is gracious and merciful; would rather die than to see Nineveh spared (Jonah 4:1-3)
2. God asks if he does well to be angry; Jonah pitches a tent to east of city to see what will happen to it (Jonah 4:4-5)
3. God prepares a plant to provide shade to Jonah; Jonah glad for it; next day, worm attacks plant and it withers; God sends scorching wind that causes Jonah distress; Jonah asked that he might die (Jonah 4:6-8)
4. God asks if Jonah does well to be angry regarding the plant; he says yes, enough to die; God says that he pities the plant that he did not create and which lived for a day, and asks why He should not have a similar pity for Nineveh with 120,000 ignorant people and cattle (Jonah 4:9-11)

VII. JONAH: IMPORTANT TEXTS

- A. Jonah 1:17 - Matt. 12:39-40
- B. Jonah 4:11

QUESTIONS ON THE BOOK OF JONAH

1. Each chapter of Jonah highlights a characteristic of God; name all four:
2. What does Jonah's name mean? Where was he from?
3. Why did Jonah attempt to avoid his duty to Nineveh?
4. According to history, did Nineveh remain penitent?
5. List the seven miracles God performed in the book of Jonah.
6. How could a "great fish" swallow a man and keep him alive underwater for days?
7. List the two important messages of Jonah.

Lesson Seven: Micah -- He Who Is Like Jehovah

INTRODUCTION

Micah is the sixth book of the twelve minor prophets in the Bible. Micah of Moresheth (most likely the same city as Moresheth-Gath, mentioned in Micah) prophesied during the days of King Hezekiah of Judah. During the reigns of Uzziah, king of Judah, and Jeroboam II, king of Israel, the period of relative peace and prosperity began to wane. This was in part due to the rise of the nation of Assyria, who, after a period of quiescence, became a potent political force in the Near East. With the rise of Assyria came a rise in military pressure upon the kingdoms of Judah and Israel.

At the same time that trade and commerce was flourishing, rich landowners were bribing judges to look favorably upon illicit land acquisitions resulting in a rapid disappearance of small farmers. Those who were dispossessed drifted from the countryside to the cities, which led to overcrowding in the major population centers. Micah outspokenly refuted practices that cheated small farmers resulting in gains for rich landowners. It not only violated the laws of fairness and honesty, it violated God's instructions regarding inheritance.

Micah also speaks out against the lack of obedience to the law. Many aspects of the covenant had been abandoned in favor of Baal-worship and other pagan practices. While the book of Micah is relatively short, it presents a wide variety of content. This includes laments (1:8-16, 7:8-10), visions (1:3-4), and hymn-style prayers of petition and confidence (7:14-20).

I. AUTHOR

The name Micah is a shortened form of Micaiah which means "Who is like unto Jehovah?" The longer form of this name appears (in the Hebrew text) in Jeremiah 26:18. In Micah 7:18 a word play is made on his name. "Who is a God like Thee, who pardons iniquity and passes over the rebellious act of the remnant of His possession?"

Micah was from the town of Moresheth (Micah 1:1), which was near Gath (Micah 1:14), which was 25 miles SW of Jerusalem. This was a productive agricultural area on the border of Judah and Philistia. Through this area the armies and commercial caravans frequently passed, as it was the main road to the Maritime Plain and to Egypt. "Because of this, the young prophet had opportunities to learn of big events taking place in his time" (Hester, *The Heart of Hebrew History*).

Nothing is known of his family or home life. However, like Amos (whose hometown of Tekoa was just 17 miles away), Micah was a man of the country. "From his book one can surmise that Micah lived close to both the people and the soil and possessed a keen sympathy for both. Moresheth was sufficiently detached from Jerusalem to produce men of courage and independence of thought" (Homer Hailey). "His father's name is not given, and we conclude that his family was of humble origin" (Gleason Archer).

Micah was a contemporary of Isaiah and Amos and Hosea. Some have even speculated that he might have been a student of the prophet Isaiah; there are certainly several similarities in their two prophetic books (Isa. 2:2-4 and Micah 4:1-3 are almost identical). "Micah, however, was a rustic prophet with a rural ministry while city-bred Isaiah devoted his prophetic efforts to the population and court of Jerusalem" (Schultz, *The Old Testament Speaks*). "Hence he was not in as close touch with international politics as was his contemporary, Isaiah. His ministry was especially preoccupied with the sufferings of the common people and of the peasants in the agricultural areas who were exploited by rich and unscrupulous landed nobility" (Archer). "Micah was the

prophet of the poor and downtrodden who displays the courageous and fearless spirit of one who is indignant over the corruption and heartlessness of inhuman rulers and time-serving religionists" (Hailey).

II. DATE OF WRITING

Micah 1:1 places his prophecies over a lengthy period of time during the reigns of King Jotham (750-731 BC), King Ahaz (736-715 BC), and King Hezekiah (715-686 BC), all of whom were kings of the southern kingdom of Judah. "From Jeremiah 26:18-19 we learn that his earnest warnings during the reign of Hezekiah were taken seriously, and made an important contribution to the revival which took place under government sponsorship" (Archer).

Although the active ministry of Micah may well have covered a period of some 50 years, "it seems likely that the bulk of his recorded prophetic oracles were uttered in the period 725-710 BC" (Zondervan's Pictorial Encyclopedia). Other sources revise this figure to 735-710 BC to allow for work during the reign of King Jotham.

It is pretty obvious that this book is a collection of prophecies which were delivered over a period of several decades. "It is a series of messages called oracles given at different times, in different circumstances, in all probability spanning a considerable length of time. It is important to recognize this if we are going to make any sense out of what Micah is saying" (Stuart Briscoe).

III. HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

The Biblical texts for the history of this period are: 2Kings 15-20, 2Chron. 27-32, and Isa. 36-39. Micah speaks to both the northern and southern kingdoms (Israel and Judah), although he deals primarily with Judah. The northern kingdom of Israel was soon to fall to Assyria. This occurred in 722 BC, probably within a decade of his warning that destruction was coming (Micah 1:6). The southern kingdom of Judah would become an "Assyrian vassal state" for many years, and would be forced to pay a heavy tribute to Assyria. King Hezekiah finally abandoned this pro-Assyrian policy (2Kings 18:7, 19-20), and Sennacherib invaded Judah (701 BC), but the Lord overthrew them and drove them back. Hezekiah then introduced some broad religious reforms. It was during this time that Micah worked. He also predicted the fall of Judah to Babylon, and their subsequent restoration (Micah 4:10). This would not occur for quite some time, however (around 125 years later), so was not taken too seriously by the people.

A great deal of Micah's message may well fall within the time of King Ahaz. "The corrupt and idolatrous conditions reflected throughout the book may be related to the low ebb of morality and religious interest during the days of Ahaz" (Schultz, *The Old Testament Speaks*). "Socially and morally Judah presented a dark picture" at this time (Hailey). The wealthy coveted the land of the people around them (Micah 2:1-2). They robbed the poor (Micah 2:8f). Corrupt business ethics were practiced (Micah 6:11). There were numerous false prophets (Micah 2:11) who prophesied for reward (Micah 3:11). The priests also taught for a price (Micah 3:11). Rulers and judges could be bribed (Micah 7:3).

The people were religious, but it was an empty ceremonialism. "Religion had become a matter of form; ceremonial observances were thought to meet all religious requirements. There was widespread misapprehension that as long as the external acts of worship were scrupulously performed the people were entitled to the divine favor and protection" (Homer Hailey). "The people have replaced heartfelt worship with empty ritual, thinking that this is all God demands. They have divorced God's standards of justice from their daily dealings in order to cover their unscrupulous practices" (The Expanded Open Bible).

IV. PURPOSE OF THE BOOK OF MICAH

"Stemming from the poorer, working class, Micah was acutely aware of the injustices and avarice of the rich. While he was interested in the political affairs of his nation, it was only as they were connected with the religious and moral situation that Micah spoke to them" (Zondervan's Pictorial Encyclopedia). Micah wants the people to realize that true faith in God results in personal holiness and social justice. He "emphasizes the integral relationship between true spirituality and social ethics" (Expanded Open Bible). "Worship and morality cannot be divorced from each other. They are two sides of the same coin" (Jack P. Lewis).

"Keenly he realizes that no multitude of sacrifices can adequately be substituted for righteousness in practice" (Schultz, *The Old Testament Speaks*). "These people have been professing much and performing little. 'God has been observing the contradiction between creed and conduct,' says the prophet, 'and He will not tolerate it anymore'" (D. Stuart Briscoe).

What does the Lord require of you? Micah 6:8 answers the question: "To do justice, to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God." "How will the world know that I am walking humbly with my God? They will know by the way I treat people. Those who walk humbly with their God have a passionate concern for justice being done in society, and a deep concern to treat people lovingly and mercifully" (D. Stuart Briscoe).

Micah is the first prophet to specifically threaten Judah with the destruction of Jerusalem and its temple (Micah 3:12). He also threatens them with the failure of prophecy (Micah 3:6-7); there would be no word from God; no guidance. Micah is also the first to point to Bethlehem as the city from which the Messiah would come (Micah 5:2). The chief priests and scribes referred back to this prophecy when Herod asked where the Messiah would be born (Matt. 2:4-7). This passage also came up in a dispute among the multitude over from where the Messiah would originate (John 7:40-44). Also, Micah 2:12-13, 4:1-8, 5:4-5 "offer some of the best OT descriptions of the righteous reign of Christ over the whole world" (Expanded Open Bible). And, Jesus quoted Micah 7:6 when He spoke to the Twelve about discipleship (Matt. 10:36).

V. THE PUNS OF MICAH

"The latter part of the first chapter (1:10-16) reveals the prophet's skill as a communicator. He uses a play on words, showing that he is as clever a punster as he is a strikingly gifted poet." (Briscoe). It is "the longest series of sustained puns in the OT, in which Micah describes the advance of the Assyrian army through his section of country" (Jack P. Lewis).

For example: Gath (1:10) sounds like the Hebrew word for tell, so it's as if he were saying, "Tell it not in Tell City." Also, in 1:10 he writes, "In Beth-le-aphrah (house of dust) roll yourself in the dust." Zaanah (1:11) means "going out," so he is saying, "Those of you in 'Go Out City' will not go out," etc. "Imagine an American preacher saying, 'Living in Pittsburgh is the pits,' or 'Los Angeles is not a city of angels.' This got the people's attention" (Briscoe).

VI. MICAH: THE ACCOUNT

A. Main Sections

1. Judgments (Micah 1-3)
2. Future Restoration (Micah 4-5)
3. Judgment and Restoration (Micah 6-7)

B. Judgment on the People (Micah 1-3)

1. Address to all the creation; LORD a witness against them from His holy temple; He will come down, tread upon high places; world will tremble

before Him; all this because of the sins of Israel and Judah; their transgression in Samaria, Jerusalem; Samaria to be a heap of stones, returned to vineyards; destruction of idols; gathered them for fee of prostitution, will return to fee of prostitution (Micah 1:1-7)

2. Micah laments because of this; wound incurable, reached to Jerusalem; cities of southwest Judah not to weep but to roll in dust and lament for the upcoming disaster from God upon all of them; it will all be given to a conqueror; make lamentation, children will go into exile (Micah 1:8-16)
3. Woe to wicked: those who oppress others, take their property; God will bring disaster upon them; will be taunted that day, will be utterly ruined (Micah 2:1-5)
4. Micah told not to preach disaster, for it will not happen; Micah wants to know why this should be said; people not listening to God, work as enemy of God; women dispossessed, Children taken away-- they should go, for their place not for rest because of uncleanness of land; those who would preach of wine and strong drink would be accepted; God will gather Jacob as a shepherd his sheep, king leading army (Micah 2:6-13)
5. Call to rulers of Israel: they should know and do justice, but they oppress and do injustice; they will cry to God but He will not answer (Micah 3:1-4)
6. Call to false prophets: they speak good things when filled, evil when hungry; they will go without vision or divination; sun goes down on prophets; they will be disgraced, no answer from God; Micah filled with power to declare to Israel their sins (Micah 3:5-8)
7. Call to rulers: do not do justice, pervert the right way; build Jerusalem with sin and blood; easily bribed, priests and prophets in it for money; all lean on the LORD, believe no disaster will come; yet because of them, Zion to be plowed, Jerusalem a heap of ruins (Micah 3:9-12)

B. Hope for Restoration (Micah 4-5)

1. In latter days, mountain of house of LORD established as high mountain; people flow to it, seek to learn from God to do His will; law to go out from Zion; God will judge the peoples; war implements turned into agricultural ones; no more war; sit under vine and tree, none to make afraid; mouth of LORD has spoken; all peoples walk in name of its god, we walk in name of LORD God forever (Micah 4:1-5)
2. On that day, the lame, driven away, afflicted will be restored, made a nation; God reigns over them; former dominion to return to Jerusalem (Micah 4:6-8)
3. Now they cry out, act as if they have no king or counselor; great pain on them, as a woman in labor; will go out from city to Babylon; there God will rescue them (Micah 4:9-10)
4. Nations assembled, seek to destroy Zion; they do not know thoughts of God, that they will be threshed there; Zion will be made iron and bronze, beat peoples into pieces; their spoil as devoted to God (Micah 4:11-13)
5. Zion to gather troops; siege against them; ruler will come forth from Bethlehem, an ancient ruler; Judah given up until time of return, then all will be shepherded, majesty of God's name will be great; they will dwell securely, he will be their peace (Micah 5:1-5)

6. Assyrian to come into land, tread on palaces; shepherds raised against them to shepherd with sword; God will deliver people from the Assyrians when they enter Judah (Micah 5:6)
 7. Remnant of Jacob then in midst of people, as dew that does not wait for man; Jacob as lion in midst of sheep, will tear others in pieces, none to deliver; hand over adversaries, enemies to be cut off (Micah 5:7-9)
 8. In that day, horses, chariots, cities, strongholds, sorceries, fortune-tellers, idols, pillars, Asherim will be destroyed; God will execute vengeance on disobedient nations (Micah 5:10-15)
- C. Complete Indictment, Consequences (Micah 6-7)
1. Creation to hear God's indictment of Israel; He wants to know how He has wearied them; re-telling of exodus, wilderness events, consider God's saving acts (Micah 6:1-5)
 2. Should people come to God with offerings and sacrifices?; God indicates what He wants: do justice, love kindness, walk humbly with God (Micah 6:6-8)
 3. Voice of God to city; wisdom to fear God; God can no longer forget treasures of wickedness, false measure; God will not acquit those using false weights; rich are full of violence; all lie and deceive; God to strike them with terrible blows; eating without satisfaction, hunger, what they have given to others; sowing without reaping; statutes of Omri and works of Ahab kept so that God will make them a desolation; they will bear scorn (Micah 6:6-16)
 4. Woe to prophet, like the end of the harvest; godly have perished from earth; all are sinful; best of them is like briars, thorn hedge; day of punishment has come; they ought not trust anyone, even family and spouses; family relationships overthrown; Micah to look to the LORD, wait for God of salvation (Micah 7:1-7)
 5. Enemy not to rejoice over fall; will wise; LORD will be light in darkness; will bear anger of God for sin; He will plead case, execute judgment; prophet to see vindication; enemy will see, be shamed; enemy to be trampled like mire on streets (Micah 7:8-10)
 6. Day of building; boundaries to be extended; ingathering from nations; earth to be desolate because of deeds of inhabitants; plea for God to shepherd His people, let them return to land; God will show signs like against Egypt in Exodus; nations will see, be ashamed; nations become deaf, lick dirt like snakes; come trembling out of strongholds; they will fear God (Micah 7:11-17)
 7. Who is like God, forgiving sin, passing over transgression; God not angry forever, delights in steadfast love; God will have compassion on Israel, will cast their sins into sea; God will show faithfulness to Jacob and Abraham as He swore to fathers (Micah 7:18-20)

IV. MICAH: IMPORTANT TEXTS

- A. Micah 3:12 - Jer. 26:18
- B. Micah 4:1-5 - Isa. 2:2-4
- C. Micah 5:2 - Matt. 2:6; John 7:42
- D. Micah 6:8
- E. Micah 7:6 - Matt. 10:35-36; Luke 12:53

QUESTIONS ON THE BOOK OF MICAH

1. What is the meaning of the name Micah? It is the shortened form of what name?
2. What were the rich land owners and judges conspiring to do? How did this affect small farmers and the poor country folk?
3. Where did Micah come from? To whom was his message primarily sent? How long did Micah serve as a prophet?
4. Micah warned that Judah would become a subject nation to what invader? He also prophesied that they would fall to what empire?
5. What characterized Judah's worship practices in Micah's day?
6. Micah wanted the people to understand that true faith resulted in what?
7. Multiple sacrifices are no substitute for what?
8. Micah was the first prophet to specifically threaten the people of Judah with what if they do not repent?
9. Micah was the first prophet to specify what city as the birth location of the Messiah?
10. In spite of the dire nature of Micah's prophecies, what form of humor did he use in his writing? Give an example of this kind of humor used in the book of Micah.
11. Briefly, what is the meaning of the prophecies of Micah 4:1-5? What other Old Testament prophet used the same imagery in his prophecies? Give references.
12. According to Micah 6:8, what does God require of man? Have those requirements changed?

Lesson Eight: Nahum -- Comforter

INTRODUCTION

Nahum finishes the work Jonah started. Nineveh's repentance did not last. His carries a particular warning to the Ninevites of coming events, and he seems in favor of the destruction. One might even say that the book of Nahum is a celebration of the fall of Assyria. It is also a positive encouragement and message of comfort for Israel, Judah, and others who had experienced the endless cruelty (3:19) of the Assyrians. The prophet Jonah shows us where God manifests concern for the people of Nineveh, while Nahum's writing testifies to the righteousness and justice of God, and how God dealt with the Assyrians in punishment for their ongoing cruelty (Nahum 3:19). The Assyrians had been used as God's "rod of anger, and the staff in their hand as indignation" (Isa. 10:5). Now it was time to cast off the staff that developed a taste for malice.

I. AUTHOR

The name of the prophet Nahum means "comfort, consolation." It is a shortened form of Nehemiah which means "the comfort of Yahweh." This prophet is only mentioned once in the entire Bible (Nahum 1:1). His name "is in a sense symbolical of the message of the book, which was intended to comfort and console the oppressed and afflicted people of Judah" (Eiselen).

He is identified as "Nahum the Elkoshite." Some assume this refers to the name of his father (Elkoshai) and that he was actually born in Bethabor (which is beyond Jordan). The Chaldean Scriptures call him "Nahum of Beth-koshi." Most likely, though, this name refers to the place of his birth. Most scholars believe that Elkosh was a city in southern Judah (later called "Elcese") which was midway between Jerusalem and Gaza. "This would make Nahum a prophet of the southern kingdom and may explain his interest in the triumph of Judah - Nahum 1:15, 2:2" (The Open Bible, Expanded Version). Ultimately, one must admit that the actual location of Elkosh is unknown, although it seems very likely, based upon internal evidence from the book of Nahum itself, that this prophet was a resident of Judah.

II. DATE OF WRITING

Scholars are able to date the prophecy of Nahum fairly accurately based upon several considerations:

1) In Nahum 3:8-10 the prophet speaks of the fall of the city of Thebes (No-amon) which was in upper Egypt. It is viewed as an event which had already occurred. Thebes fell to the Assyrians in 661 BC. Thus, this prophecy must have been written after this time.

2) Ten years after its fall, Thebes had begun to rise from its ruins, to rebuild, and to regain its former glory. If Nahum had waited too long after the fall of Thebes to use its destruction as a warning to Nineveh, the force of this warning would have been lost. Nineveh might well assume that if Thebes can recover that quickly, then they can, too.

3) The fall of Nineveh is viewed as a future occurrence. The city fell in 612 BC when the Medes and the Babylonians finally destroyed it. Thus, the prophecy must have been written prior to this event.

4) Nahum speaks of Nineveh as being "strong and full of her old imperial arrogance" (Blaklock). This would place the prophecy in the time of Ashurbanipal (668-625 BC); it was under his successors that the nation declined and fell.

5) Nahum also mentions no king in his introduction. This has led some to the conclusion there was no king over God's people at that time worthy of mention. This

could well have been King Manasseh (686-642 BC). All of these factors, and others which could be discussed as well, seem to point to a time around 655 BC. This would be just a little over four decades from the fall of this mighty nation.

III. HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

The brutal imperialism of Assyria had been a curse to the lands of the Middle East for a couple of centuries. From the very beginning they had a policy of "westward conquest and world domination." They were noted as being one of the most aggressive, brutal, cruel and wicked nations on earth. "Assyria was a nation largely geared for aggressive war and its atrocities were proverbial. Nineveh saw men and nations as tools to be exploited to gratify the lust of conquest and commercialism. Assyria existed to render no service to mankind" (Willis).

The walls of Nineveh were almost 8 miles around. They were 100' high and wide enough that three chariots could ride on them side-by-side. Around the walls were towers that stretched an additional 100 feet above the top of the wall. In addition, there was a moat around the city 150' wide and 60' deep. Nineveh had enough provisions within the city to withstand a 20 year siege. Thus, Nahum's prophecy of the overthrow of this city seemed very unlikely indeed to the inhabitants. It was also a city filled with gardens and parks and even a zoo. The royal palace had an area of almost 100,000 square feet, and its walls were sculptured with scenes of the king's victories. There were 15 main gates with huge stone bulls standing guard at each.

Jonah prophesied to Nineveh about 758 BC. This resulted in a national repentance. However, this change of heart was short-lived. Nineveh repented of its repentance. They were soon back on a course of world conquest and wicked aggression. Following is a list of her kings and conquests from the time of her "change of heart" until her destruction:

- Tiglath-pileser III (745-727 BC) - He began a program of world conquest. He invaded the West and deported some of the inhabitants of northern Israel, removing them to an area north of Nineveh. He also extended his authority into Judah, exacting tribute from them (2Kings 15:29, 16:5-18; 1Chron. 5:6, 26; 2Chron. 28:16; 30:6).
- Shalmaneser V (727-722 BC) - He began the siege of Samaria, the capital city of the northern kingdom of Israel. He died before the city fell.
- Sargon II (722-705 BC) - He completed the siege of Samaria. The city fell in 722 BC, thus bringing an end to the northern kingdom of Israel (2Kings 17:3-6). He was murdered in 705 BC.
- Sennacherib (705-681 BC) - King Hezekiah (728-687 BC) abandoned his pro-Assyrian policy (2Kings 18:7, 19-20). As a result, Sennacherib invaded Judah (701 BC), conquered its fortified cities, and surrounded Jerusalem. He boasted that he had shut up Hezekiah in Jerusalem "as a bird in a cage!" However, the Angel of the Lord struck 185,000 of his soldiers dead in a single night, and the army withdrew (2Kings 18:13 - 19:36; 2Chron. 32:1-31; Isa. 36:1 - 37:38). He was murdered by two of his sons (Adrammelech and Sharezer), and a third son (Esarhaddon) became king (2Kings 19:37; Isa. 37:38).
- Esarhaddon (681-668 BC) - It was this king who captured King Manasseh (686-642 BC) and led him away for a brief period of captivity (2Chron. 33:10-13). He died while marching against Egypt in an effort to subdue them.
- Ashurbanipal (668-625 BC) - This king completed the campaign into Egypt which resulted in the fall of "No-amon" (Thebes) in 661 BC (Nahum 3:8-10). He extended Assyria's influence farther than any of his predecessors. Under his rule,

Nineveh became the mightiest city on earth. According to the records, he was an extremely cruel man.

- Assur-etil-ilani and Sinshumlishir (625-620 BC) - These two sons of Ashurbanipal had brief and ineffective reigns. The dynastic stability of Assyria was beginning to decline.
- Sin-shar-ishkun (620-612 BC) - This was the son of Assur-etil-ilani. He was also known as Esarhaddon II. During this time Nabopolassar (625-605 BC) established himself as the king of Babylon and began capturing Assyrian holdings. By 616 BC he had won complete independence from Assyria for Babylon. In 614 BC the Medes, under Cyaxares, captured the city of Ashur and inflicted a brutal massacre on the population. An alliance was then formed between the Medes and the Babylonians and the Scythians, and the siege of Nineveh began. The siege lasted 3 months, and it ended (according to the Babylonian Chronicle) when flood waters breached the walls allowing the soldiers to enter the city. This was according to the prophecy -- "With an overflowing flood He will make a complete end of its site" (Nahum 1:8).

The Tigris River had overflowed its banks and eaten away at the walls. "As walls of those ancient cities were generally formed of brick kneaded with straw and baked in the sun, a flood of waters could easily effect their dissolution" (Adam Clarke). When the enemy entered the city, King Sin-shar-ishkun gathered his wives and children and all his wealth into the palace and set it on fire. They all perished in the fire. A few of the Assyrians tried to hold out at Haran and reform the government, but they were defeated in 606 BC by King Nebuchadnezzar at the battle of Carchemish.

The destruction of Nineveh was so complete that about 200 years later, when Xenophon the Athenian and "the Ten Thousand," backing out of their entanglement in Persia, passed by the site they said there was no evidence a city had ever been there. Nahum 3:11, 17 predicted that they would be "hidden" and their place "not known." In more modern times, the site was not discovered until 1842. Today, the site is covered by fields, a water tower for a nearby village, a cemetery, and a local dump.

IV. THE MESSAGE OF NAHUM

The people of Nineveh had quickly reverted to their cruel and heathen practices. "They had not transmitted their knowledge of the true God to their children" (Ryrie Study Bible). They had repented of their repentance! Therefore, God, through Nahum, foretold the complete destruction of this kingdom. He had spared them once (during the time of Jonah); He would not do so again. Unlike Jonah, Nahum does not actually go to the city of Nineveh; rather, he declares his oracle from afar. There is no hope of any repentance taking place, thus no need to go to the city.

Although this book is concerned with the downfall of Assyria, it is nevertheless written for the benefit of Judah. God has demonstrated His patience and long-suffering; now He will demonstrate His wrath. The message of this book is that although God may be slow to wrath, He nevertheless always "settles His accounts in full." "Though God is slow to anger and abundant in loving-kindness (as His action toward Nineveh in the book of Jonah shows), His long-suffering is not to be interpreted as indifference or as lack of power - Nahum 1:1-6" (Willis).

This is also a message of consolation for the people of Judah who are being oppressed by Assyria. Regardless of how things may seem, God does not forget His people. The book of Revelation is a perfect example of this message. "When the forces opposing God are so firmly ensconced and the flickering lamp of God's people is at the point of extinction, however, it is easy for the remnant to forget. Nahum reminds us, as

do the ruins of ancient Nineveh, that God Himself is the ultimate Ruler. He will have the final word." (Expositor's Bible Commentary).

"Some have objected to the joyous attitude with which Nahum greets the prospect of the fall of Assyria's capital, and regard it as an exhibition of nationalistic fanaticism and vengeful malice. This, however, is a misunderstanding of the ground which the prophet occupies. Because he is a man of God, he speaks as one who is wholly preoccupied with the Lord's cause on earth. His earnest desire is to see Jehovah vindicate His holiness in the eyes of the heathen, as over against the inhumane and ruthless tyranny of that God-defying empire which had for such a long time trampled upon all the subject nations with heartless brutality" (Gleason Archer).

"His cry is not only the cry of jubilation at the fall of an oppressive foe, but is also the cry of faith in the sovereign rule of Jehovah and a vindication of confidence that He will avenge His elect when the time is ripe. The lesson of his beautifully worded yet dreadful prophecy is one to which the world could well give heed today. The prophet reveals the eternal principle of the omnipotent God that for a nation to survive it must be established upon and directed by principles of righteousness and truth. Wickedness will eventually turn a nation back to Sheol, the oblivion of the unseen, when it makes cruelty and wickedness the standard by which it lives" (Homer Hailey).

V. NAHUM: THE ACCOUNT

A. The Power of the LORD (Nahum 1)

1. LORD as jealous, avenging God; wrath against adversaries; great in power, just; works in whirlwinds, dries up rivers; mountains, trees wither; mountains & hills melt, earth heaves before Him (Nahum 1:1-6)
2. None can stand before Him in His anger; wrath poured out like fire; LORD as good, stronghold in difficult days, knows those who take refuge in Him; adversaries destroyed, enemies pursued; to plot against the LORD futile, for He makes a complete end (Nahum 1:7-11)
3. Even if enemies are in full strength, they will be cut down; God has afflicted Judah, will do so no longer; yokes and bonds to be broken; command given that gods and idols to be cut off, grave made for enemies; on mountains, feet of him who brings good news: feasts to be kept in Judah, enemy cut off (Nahum 1:12-15)

B. Destruction of Nineveh (Nahum 2)

1. Scatterer against them; people to be prepared for war; LORD restoring majesty of Israel after being plundered; soldiers, shields of red, chariots prepared; siege towers set up; river gates opened, palace disturbed; stripped, plundered, wealth removed (Nahum 2:1-9)
2. Desolation; people tremble, are anguished; Nineveh seen as lion who provided in past for cubs; LORD against them, will destroy them, devour young lions, prey cut off, voice not heard (Nahum 2:10-13)

C. Woe to Assyria (Nahum 3)

1. Woe to city full of lies, no end to prey; horsemen, chariots within city; dead in heaps; all of this because of their prostitution (Nahum 3:1-4)
2. LORD against them, will expose their nakedness, shame to kingdoms; God will treat them with contempt, make them a spectacle; all who see will shrink, seek comforters for Nineveh (Nahum 3:5-7)
3. Comparison to Thebes of Egypt; they had assistance from Cush, Put, Libya; yet she was destroyed, made captive, exiled; thus also to Nineveh-- will go into hiding, seek refuge; fortresses will be shaken and will fall, soldiers as women, gates wide open to enemies (Nah. 3:8-13)

4. Prepare for siege: water, strengthen forts; fire will destroy them; sword will cut off; they are to multiply, become as locusts and grasshoppers; they will flee, not be found; shepherds of Assyria asleep; no easing of pain; wound grievous; all who hear will rejoice, for evil of Assyria on everyone (Nahum 3:14-19)

IV. NAHUM: IMPORTANT TEXTS

A. Nahum 1:15 - Rom. 10:15

QUESTIONS ON THE BOOK OF NAHUM

1. Nahum finished the work that was begun by what prophet?
2. The Assyrians were known for what kind of treatment of their enemies?
3. What does the name Nahum mean? It is the diminutive form of what name? Where did he come from?
4. How high and wide were the walls of Nineveh? How far was it around the walls?
5. How well did they protect the city when God determined that it was to fall? How did the walls come down?
6. Nineveh returned to sin 13 years after its repentance. God brought the city down 133 years later. What can be learned about the nature of God's threat to punish them by this long period of time?
7. What New Testament writer quoted part of Nahum 1:15? Give reference.
8. What sits on the former location of the city of Nineveh? What lesson can be learned from this?
9. Did Nahum prophesy in Nineveh? What does this imply?
10. What are the eternal principles of God that ensure a nation's long term survival?

Lesson Nine: Habakkuk -- Embrace

INTRODUCTION

Habakkuk is unique among the prophets in that he openly questions the wisdom of God. He is trying to grow from a faith of perplexity and doubt to absolute trust in God. Habakkuk addresses his concerns over the fact that the punishment for Judah's sins is going to be executed by a sinful nation in Habakkuk's eyes. In the first chapter, the Prophet sees the injustice among his people and asks why God does not take action. "O Lord, how long will I cry, and you will not hear? I cry out to you "Violence!" and will you not save?" (1:2 WEB).

I. AUTHOR

The name Habakkuk is an unusual one of uncertain meaning. Some feel it comes from the Hebrew word Habaq which means "to embrace," thus, his name would signify an "ardent embrace." "At the end of his book this name becomes appropriate because Habakkuk chooses to cling firmly to (embrace) God regardless of what happens to his nation - 3:16-19" (EOB). Jerome preferred the idea of embracing so as to wrestle, "because he wrestled with God." Martin Luther seemed to favor this idea, saying, "It is certainly not unfitting, for in this little book we see a man, in deadly earnest, wrestling with the mighty problem of theodicy (divine justice) in a topsy-turvy world."

Others have suggested that his name was derived from an Assyrian flower, Hambaququ, but there is no way to verify this. According to a popular Jewish tradition he was the son of the Shunammite woman, since Elisha told her, "At this season next year you shall embrace (habaq) a son" (2Kings 4:16). A second tradition identifies him with the "watchman" of Isaiah 21:6.

Other than his name, little is known about this prophet. There is no biographical information on the prophet Habakkuk; in fact less is known about him than any other writer of the Bible. He apparently lived as one of God's called prophets (Habakkuk 1:1) and was not engaged in some secular profession as was Amos (Amos 7:14-15). Some have deduced that the final statement of the book, "For the choir director, on my stringed instruments" (3:19), may indicate that he was also a Levite and a member of the Temple cantors, or that he was in some other way connected with the Temple worship in Jerusalem. We may also assume with confidence that he was a prophet of the southern kingdom of Judah, and that he very likely lived in Jerusalem.

II. DATE OF WRITING

The only explicit time reference in this prophecy is 1:6, where the Lord says, "I am raising up the Chaldeans" (Babylonians). Actually, the Chaldeans were "a tribe of Semites from southern Babylonia, who, under the leadership of Nabopolassar, became rulers of the Neo-Babylonian empire" (Jack Lewis). This implies a time prior to their rise to power (which came after the critical battle of Carchemish in 605 BC). Before this time the Babylonians were not really a world force to be reckoned with. This is why the Lord tells Habakkuk, "Look among the nations! Observe! Be astonished! Wonder! Because I am doing something in your days you would not believe if you were told" (Habakkuk 1:5).

Habakkuk 1:2-4 (speaks of internal conditions in Judah) points to a time after the reign of King Josiah (640-609 BC). However, during the reign of King Jehoiakim (609-597 BC), especially during the early years of his reign, the conditions fit. He was a godless king who led the nation to destruction (2Kings 23:34 - 24:5; Jer. 22:18). "It seems best, therefore, to assign the preaching of Habakkuk to a date shortly before 606

BC, but after the beginning of Babylon's westward move for world conquest" (Gleason Archer). "The probable date for this book is about 607 BC" (Expanded Open Bible).

III. HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

Upon the death of the good King Josiah at Megiddo (609 BC) (2Kings 23:29) his son, Jehoahaz, was made king. He was only 23 years old, and according to 2Kings 23:32 "he did evil in the sight of the Lord." He reigned for only three months, and then Pharaoh Neco of Egypt deposed him and put his brother, Jehoiakim (also called Eliakim), upon the throne (2Kings 23:33-37). He was 25 years old when he took the throne and he also did evil in the sight of God.

"Within a period of approximately 20 years the Chaldeans swept over Judah in successive waves, and ultimately destroyed the country and took its inhabitants away into captivity in 586 BC" (Zondervan's Pictorial Encyclopedia of the Bible). Internally, the people of God were caught up in religious decay and moral bewilderment.

"Looking about him Habakkuk sees a vivid demonstration of prevailing evils. He enumerates those who are proud and secure in their own ways (this list taken from: Schultz, The Old Testament Speaks):

- The unrighteous aggressors - 2:6-8
- Those who justify their evil ways - 2:9-11
- Those who shed blood for personal gain - 2:12-14
- Those who deceive their neighbors - 2:15-17
- Those who trust in idols - 2:18-19

The above series of five woes is in the form of a masal (a taunt song), and they are basically against: greed, aggression, self-assertion, exploitation, extortion, violence, immorality, inhumanity, and idolatry.

IV. THE PURPOSE OF HABAKKUK

"The book of Habakkuk differs from other books of prophecy in one special aspect. Instead of taking Jehovah's message directly to the people, he takes the complaint of the people to Jehovah, representing them in the complaint" (Homer Hailey). Habakkuk is a man of God; a man of faith; who is perplexed by what is happening around him. He doesn't understand why God is doing what He is doing. It seems inconsistent with what has been previously revealed.

Therefore, the prophet goes to God and asks some difficult questions, and he receives some answers which greatly puzzle him. Nevertheless, through it all, whether he understands or not, his faith in God never wavers. "His spirit is deeply troubled How could God permit so much suffering and death? How could God punish His own people, even though they had sinned, by a nation that was even more wicked?" (Hester, The Heart of Hebrew History). "How can a righteous God use the wicked Chaldeans to punish His people, which, in spite of their apostasy, are still more righteous than they?" (Zondervan's Pictorial Encyclopedia of the Bible).

"Violence and law-breaking abounded, and the wicked seemed at least superficially to triumph. According to all that Habakkuk knew about God's holiness and covenant (Deut. 26-33 on which Habakkuk seemed dependent), Yahweh should have arisen to correct the situation, particularly in response to believing prayer for change by such as Habakkuk. Such correction had not been forthcoming, and the prayers of the righteous and the struggle for justice in the land seemed in vain, with the result that God's program of redemptive history was threatened" (Expositor's Bible Commentary, Vol. 7).

"Why is evil and suffering rampant in our world? Goodness and justice seem to fail. How is it, God, that you are so against wrong but you go on tolerating wrong? God, is what you are doing fair? Is this honestly the moral, ethical thing to do?" (D. Stuart Briscoe). "Habakkuk is a freethinking prophet who is not afraid to wrestle with issues that test his faith" (Expanded Open Bible). Such spiritual struggles are not new. "Jeremiah, too, questions and expostulates with God as he struggles with the intractable problem of the prosperity of the wicked (Jer. 12:1-4, 13:17, 15:10-18, 20:7-18)" (New Layman's Bible Commentary).

The book of Job also discusses the question of why the individual righteous man or woman suffers. This is further discussed in Psalm 37, 49 and 73. "How can one justify the facts of life with the doctrine of an all-powerful but just God who is active in history? Events do not seem to bear out the doctrine that sin brings retribution. God seems inactive" (Jack Lewis). This was the problem with which Habakkuk wrestled.

Habakkuk, however, "was an honest seeker of the truth who went directly to God for the answer" (Hester, *The Heart of Hebrew History*). "While he is a man who has doubts and dares to express them, he does not make the mistake of ruling God out of the picture. Even though he is full of doubt he brings his distress and his doubts about God to God Himself." (D. Stuart Briscoe). "Where men attempt to think through the age-old problem of evil and seek to relate the grim facts of history to a God of justice and power who holds all in His control, they find themselves drawn to Habakkuk" (New Layman's Bible Commentary).

The final conclusion of Habakkuk is that we must allow God to be God, and allow Him to do things His way and in His own good time. Our job is to trust Him and to live by faith. "The righteous will live by his faith" (Hab. 2:4) is the key verse of this entire book. Although things do not always turn out as we would like, yet we will rejoice in the Lord anyway (Hab. 3:17-19).

"In spite of appearances to the contrary, God is still on the throne as the Lord of history and the Ruler of the nations. God may be slow to wrath, but all iniquity will be punished eventually. He is the worthiest object of faith, and the righteous man will trust in Him at all times" (Expanded Open Bible). "Apart from Isaiah (Isa. 7:9; 28:16), no other prophet stressed the significance of faith and prayerful trust in such a way as did Habakkuk. The central theme of Habakkuk's prophecy, viz. that the righteous shall live by his faith (2:4), is taken up in the NT, and applied in significant contexts: Rom. 1:17; Gal. 3:11; Heb. 10:38-39" (Zondervan's *Pictorial Encyclopedia of the Bible*).

"The prophet closes his poems with one of the greatest declarations of faith to be found in biblical literature. The prophet who has raised such searching questions in the early part of the book declares that come the worst of it, he will hold steadfastly to the Lord" (Jack P. Lewis). "Though He slay me, I will hope in Him. Nevertheless I will argue my ways before Him" (Job 13:15). "The growth of faith from perplexity and doubt to the height of absolute trust is one of the beautiful aspects of the book. Its lesson is for all time" (Homer Hailey).

V. HABAKKUK: THE ACCOUNT

A. Habakkuk's Complaints, the LORD's Answers (Habakkuk 1-2)

1. Habakkuk wants to know how long he must cry for help; sees great sin among the people, law as paralyzed, wicked surround righteous, justice perverted (Habakkuk 1:1-4)
2. LORD responds: look at nations; God doing a work that would not be believed if told; raising up Chaldeans, empire builders, fearsome; fast, fearsome horses; come for violence, look forward, deride rulers, laugh

at fortresses; sweep like wind, move on, own might is their god
(Habakkuk 1:5-11)

3. Habakkuk responds: God as everlasting, people as not dying; LORD ordains them as judgment, established them for reproof; God as having eyes too pure to see evil; why, then, does He remain silent while the wicked swallows up righteous?; man as fish of sea, crawling things without ruler; all brought up by hook and net, caught in dragnet; man sacrifices to dragnet, makes it his god; lives in luxury, killing nations; Habakkuk will stand and watch, see what God will say regarding his complaint (Habakkuk 1:12-17, 2:1)
 4. LORD responds: Write vision, make it plain; it awaits its proper time, hastens toward its end, trustworthy; wait for it, for it will come; soul of man puffed up within him; righteous live by faith; wine as traitor, arrogant man not at rest; great greed, never has enough like death; gathers all nations (Habakkuk 2:2-5)
 5. Taunt taken up: woe to indebted; debtors will rise, indebted as spoil; have plundered many nations, remnant of nations will plunder them; woe to those who obtains through evil; they have devised shame; they have thus forfeited their lives; stones cry out, wood responds; woe to those who build cities on blood and iniquity; nations weary themselves for nothing; earth to be filled with knowledge of God (Habakkuk 2:6-14)
 6. Woe to the one who makes his neighbors drunk to look at their nakedness; they will be filled with shame and not glory; cup of LORD will come to them, utter shame upon them; violence to Lebanon will overwhelm them, all the blood shed on account of them; what value is there in idols?; woe to those who serve empty idols; LORD in His temple, let earth be silent before Him (Habakkuk 2:15-20)
- B. Habakkuk's Prayer (Habakkuk 3)
1. Habakkuk as hearing report of LORD; fears LORD's work; make it known after many years; God as coming from Teman, great splendor, brightness; before Him went pestilence, plague; measured the earth; shook the nations; scattered mountains, hills made low; His ways as everlasting ways; affliction in Midian; Habakkuk wonders if God's anger against rivers & sea when He rode on chariot of salvation (Hab. 3:1-8)
 2. LORD takes out His bow and arrow; earth split with rivers; mountains see, writhe; waters seep on; sun and moon stand still; God as marching through earth in fury, threshes nations in anger; God goes out to save His people, His anointed; house of wicked crushed, they are exposed; oppressors pierced; sea trampled (Habakkuk 3:9-15)
 3. Habakkuk hears and trembles, waits for day of trouble; even if complete desolation, Habakkuk will rejoice in God; God as his strength (Habakkuk 3:16-19)

IV. HABAKKUK: IMPORTANT TEXTS

- A. Habakkuk 1:13
- B. Habakkuk 2:4 - Rom. 1:17

QUESTIONS ON THE BOOK OF HABAKKUK

1. What behavior of Habakkuk makes him unique among the other prophets? What verse exemplifies this?

2. What does the name Habakkuk mean? At what point in the book is it clear that he embraced (trusted) God's will?

3. Name the five kinds of proud evil doers Habakkuk lists in the second chapter:
 - a.
 - b.
 - c.
 - d.
 - e.

4. In what significant way does the book of Habakkuk differ from other prophetic books?

5. List three of the great questions about suffering Habakkuk asks God?
 - a.
 - b.
 - c.

6. Name another Bible character who asked the same questions. What was God's response to him?

7. Habakkuk 2:4 says that the just shall live by faith? How is that principle treated in the New Testament? How was it understood in Habakkuk's day?

8. How does one answer the apparent contradiction of the existence of individual suffering at the hands of the wicked in a world overseen by a God who has all power, is active in world events throughout history, and has promised retribution for sin?

Lesson Ten: Zephaniah -- Jehovah Hides

INTRODUCTION

Around the year 630, Zephaniah's voice breaks the silence of the seventy year lull during which they had not heard the word of God. Isaiah concluded his mission around 690, and after that the faithful of Judah went through more than fifty years of persecution in the reign of Manasseh. The book of Zephaniah contains both dark pictures of impending doom on Judah and also bright glimpses of a glorious distant future under the reign of Messiah. It is a beautifully written study in contrasts, with both severe warnings and glorious promises.

Zephaniah himself prophesied during the reign of Josiah, and thus was a contemporary of Jeremiah. It seems likely that his warnings may have contributed to the revival that took place under Josiah, and thus were written during the early years of his reign. Jeremiah then came on the scene during the later years of both Josiah and Zephaniah. In addition to prophesying of Judah's coming judgment because of her own wickedness, Zephaniah foretold imminent judgments on other nations that were more wicked, including: Philistia, Moab and Ammon, Ethiopia, and especially Assyria. Nevertheless his book closes with a wonderful prophecy concerning the future Messianic kingdom when all nations will serve the Lord, and restored Israel will finally be "a name and a praise among all people of the earth" (Zeph. 3:20).

I. AUTHOR

The name Zephaniah (Hebrew - Tsephan-yah) means "Yahweh hides" or "Yahweh has hidden." "Zephaniah was evidently born during the latter part of King Manasseh's reign (695 - 642 BC). His name may mean that he was 'hidden' from Manasseh's atrocities" (Expanded Open Bible). (2Kings 21:1-18; 2Chron. 33:1-20)

"Only Zephaniah among the prophetic books exhibits a lengthy genealogical note about the author" (Expositor's Bible Commentary). "His genealogy is much longer than the usual prophetic pedigree and traces four generations" (New Layman's Bible Commentary). Zeph. 1:1 identifies him as the great-great-grandson of a man named Hezekiah; many scholars feel this was the good King Hezekiah (715 - 686 BC), thus making this prophet of royal blood. His reference to Jerusalem as "this place" (Zeph. 1:4) seems to indicate that Jerusalem was his home. "His acquaintance with the conditions of the city (Zeph. 3:1) further confirms this point" (Homer Hailey).

The name Cushi, Zephaniah's father, means 'Ethiopian'. In a society where genealogy was considered extremely important because of God's covenant with Abraham and his descendants, the author may have felt compelled to establish his Hebrew lineage. In fact, this lineage is traced back to Hezekiah, who was king of Judah. The author of Zephaniah does not shrink from condemning the Cushites or Ethiopians. Chapter 2:12 contains a succinct but unequivocal message: "You also, O Ethiopians, Shall be killed by my sword." Zephaniah's family connection with King Hezekiah may have also strengthened his harsh indictment of the royal city in 3:1-7. Aside from these few facts and assumptions, nothing is known of this prophet.

II. DATE OF WRITING

Zephaniah 1:1 dates this prophecy in the days of King Josiah (640 - 609 BC). It may be inferred from the low moral and religious state of Judah at the time this was written that this prophecy came before the great religious reform of 621 BC (2Kings 22-23; 2Chron. 34-35). Also, Zephaniah 2:13 makes it clear that the fall of Nineveh (which occurred in 612 BC) was an event still in the future. "It would be safe to suggest 630 to

625 BC as the probable date of his work. If 626 BC is accepted, then the ministries of Jeremiah and Zephaniah began in the same year" (Homer Hailey).

III. HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

During the reigns of Manasseh (695 - 642 BC) and Amon (642 - 640 BC) the southern kingdom of Judah sank to astounding moral and spiritual depths. These two kings remained loyal vassals to Assyria, and sought to undo the good that King Hezekiah had accomplished. However, in the year 640 BC, at the age of 24, King Amon was assassinated by his servants (2Kings 21:23; 2Chron. 33:24), and his 8 year old son, Josiah, was made king (2Kings 21:24 - 22:2; 2Chron. 33:25 - 34:2). Josiah was the last good king to reign over Judah. When he died in 609 BC at the age of 39, Judah would have only 23 years left before her destruction and Babylonian Captivity (586 BC).

At the age of 16, Josiah began "to seek the God of his father David" (2Chron. 34:3). At the age of 20, he began to "purge Judah and Jerusalem" of all that was unholy and wicked (2Chron. 34:3). His reforms were the most extensive of any that were attempted by any king who ever reigned over Judah.

Several years later (621 BC), Hilkiah the priest discovered the lost book of the Law of Moses. When Josiah realized what this was and of its importance, he assembled all the people of his land from the greatest to the least, and read the Book of the Covenant to them (2Chron. 34:29-30). The temple was then cleansed and a Passover was celebrated, the likes of which had not been seen before or after (2Chron. 35). Josiah also gained independence from the Assyrians and began to retake some of the land which had been seized by them from the northern kingdom of Israel. The prophecies of Zephaniah had an influence on Josiah, and may have had a lot to do with the institution of reforms; and if Josiah and Zephaniah were related (both descended from King Hezekiah), he probably had a great deal of access to the young king.

Zephaniah predicts a coming Day of the Lord. Even though reforms were instituted, in short time after Josiah's death the people would revert to their old evil ways. Therefore, Zephaniah warns of impending doom from a nation even now on the horizon: Babylon. "Zephaniah's Day of the Lord plays an important role in the forming of the concept of the final judgment day" (Jack P. Lewis). "Zephaniah uses this expression more than any other prophet" (Expositor's Bible Commentary). Zephaniah 3:9-20 "speaks of another side of the day of the Lord: It will be a day of blessing after the judgment is complete. A righteous remnant will survive and all who call upon Him, Jew or Gentile, will be blessed" (Expanded Open Bible). Jesus alluded to Zephaniah on two occasions: Matt. 13:41 (Zeph. 1:3) and Matt. 24:29 (Zeph. 1:15). Both passages are associated with the second coming of Christ.

"Pharaoh Necho of Egypt determined to help Assyria fight off the Babylonians at Haran, and so marched north with his army (609 BC). Josiah attempted to stop him at Megiddo by throwing his forces in the path of Pharaoh Necho. He did succeed in preventing the Egyptian army from reaching Haran, but he was killed in the battle. For four years Egypt dominated Judah, but in 605 BC, Pharaoh Necho was defeated by Nebuchadnezzar (King of the Babylonians) at Carchemish. Here is enacted one of the ironies of history. Judah, led by Josiah, had attempted to aid the Babylonians by fighting against Egypt at Megiddo. The kingdom that gave its king in the struggle to aid Babylonia was now a vassal of the nation it had attempted to help. Later Judah was to be destroyed by Babylon" (Homer Hailey).

IV. THE DAY OF THE LORD

The major message of this book is The Day of the Lord, a day of judgment. It is viewed as a day of terror as imminent as one which will fall upon all creation as a

judgment for sin. It is a grim picture of destruction, but out of it will come a remnant. "It is a day of deliverance for the faithful" (Hailey), as well as destruction for the unfaithful. George Adam Smith, in *The Book of the Twelve Prophets* (Vol. 2, p. 48), has well summarized the spirit of this prophecy: "No hotter book lies in all the Old Testament. Neither dew nor grass nor tree nor any blossom lives in it, but it is everywhere fire, smoke and darkness, drifting chaff, ruins, nettles, salt pits, and owls and raven looking from the windows of desolate palaces."

V. ZEPHANIAH: THE ACCOUNT

A. Judgment on Judah (Zephaniah 1)

1. Introduction; God to sweep everything from face of earth; man and beast, birds and fish; man to be cut off (Zephaniah 1:1-3)
2. Hand of God against Judah, Jerusalem; those serving Baal, Milcom, other idols, those not serving God or inquiring of Him to be cut off (Zephaniah 1:4-6)
3. Call for silence before God; God has prepared sacrifice; on day of sacrifice, officials, those in foreign attire, those leaping over threshold, those practicing violence to be punished (Zephaniah 1:7-9)
4. Cries to be heard on that day throughout Jerusalem; traders, merchants cut off; those complacent to be punished, plundered, will not prosper (Zephaniah 1:10-13)
5. Day of the LORD near; day of wrath, devastation, darkness against cities (Zephaniah 1:14-16)
6. Distress to be brought on mankind; walking as blind because of sin; blood, flesh poured out; will not be able to be delivered by silver or gold; earth to be consumed in jealousy of the LORD; He will make full and sudden end (Zephaniah 1:17-18)

B. The Day of the LORD (Zephaniah 2-3)

1. Shameless nation to gather together before day of LORD against them; humble to seek LORD so as to be hidden on day of LORD's anger; Philistia to be devastated (Zephaniah 2:1-4)
2. Woe to Cherethites of the seacoast; word of LORD against Canaan, Philistia; God will make thorough destruction; seacoast to become pastureland; seacoast to become Judean possession when God restores their fortunes (Zephaniah 2:5-7)
3. God has heard the taunts of Moab and Ammon against Judah; as God lives, Moab and Ammon to be as Sodom, Gomorrah, a wasteland; Judeans who remain to plunder them because of their taunts; LORD against them, will famish gods of earth, all nations to bow to Him; Cushites also to suffer God's sword (Zephaniah 2:8-12)
4. Assyria also to be destroyed, Nineveh made a desolation; animals to live there; city now exultant, proud, but will be made desolate; all will hiss and shake fist who pass by (Zephaniah 2:13-15)
5. Woe to rebellious, defiled, oppressing city, who does not listen to God or trust in Him; officials as roaring lions, judges as wolves; prophets as fickle and treacherous, priests profane the holy and violate law; LORD is righteous, just; shows forth His justice, but unjust have no shame (Zephaniah 3:1-5)
6. Nations cut off, streets laid waste, their cities desolate; God expected Judah to see this and learn to accept correction, not meet same fate; yet they corrupted their deeds, thus wait for God when He rises up to

seize prey; God will gather nations and pour out His wrath on Judah; all earth to be consumed (Zephaniah 3:6-8)

7. Speech of peoples to be made pure speech that day; all to call upon LORD's name and serve Him together; offerings to be brought from beyond Cush; will not be put to shame that day despite rebellion; proud and arrogant to be removed that day, lowly and humble to remain; they will seek refuge in name of God, will be righteous; none will make them afraid (Zephaniah 3:9-13)
8. Zion to sing and rejoice, for LORD has taken away judgment against you, cleared enemies; LORD in their midst, will not again fear evil; Zion not to fear, let hands grow weak; God in their midst, will save, rejoice over them, quiet them with His love, exult with singing; He will gather those who mourn so as to not suffer reproach; God to deal with oppressors, will save lame, gather outcast, change shame into praise; God to bring them in, make them renowned and praised among people on earth, fortunes restored (Zephaniah 3:14-20)

IV. ZEPHANIAH: IMPORTANT TEXTS

- A. Zephaniah 3:13 - Rev. 14:5
- B. Zephaniah 3:14-20

QUESTIONS ON THE BOOK OF ZEPHANIAH

1. How many years had passed in Judah without the word of God being spoken when Zephaniah began to prophesy?
2. Zephaniah prophesied during the reign of what king and was a contemporary with what other prophet?
3. Zephaniah's name means what? List his genealogy.
4. Even though the prophet was related to a king, his father may have been from what other nation? Did this affect Zephaniah's address to that nation?
5. Describe some of the reforms of King Josiah.
6. What does "the Day of the Lord" mean in New Testament prophecy? What did it mean in Zephaniah's prophecy?
7. What are the meanings of the promises to Jerusalem given in Zephaniah 3:14-20?
8. Is the Day of Judgment a terrible thing for everyone? Why or why not?

Lesson Eleven: Haggai -- Festive

INTRODUCTION

The book of Haggai embraces three problems common to all peoples in all ages, and offers three inspired solutions to these problems. The first of them is disinterest (1:1-15). The people had returned from the exile with the declared purpose of reconstructing the temple in Jerusalem (Ezra 1:2-4) and had commenced the assigned work; but opposition arose and the work was detained. The people had cared more about building their own homes, perhaps to forget the time spent in a strange land (1:4). GOD spoke to them on two occasions to awaken them from their apathy. First they needed to recognize that their life was fruitless (1:5-6), because they had deserted the house of God to occupy themselves with their own houses (1:7-9). The efforts to construct their own kingdom could never produce permanent fruits. After having been made aware of their problems, the people should understand that GOD would accept the work that they were capable of doing; they would glorify him only by dedicating that which they had to him (1:8).

The second problem is discouragement (2:1-9). Some among the older people within the group of returned exiles had seen the temple of Solomon when they were children, so that no edifice, for the beauty that had been could compare with the glory of the earlier temple (2:3). The discouragement of the elders soon influenced the young, and only a month after the work began the edification of the temple ceased. But, again Haggai directed a message to the people to energetically confront their discouragement. The solution consists of two parts: one deals with the immediate problem, the other offers a solution for the long run. For the moment, it's sufficient that the people be strong...be strong...and work (2:4). The other key to overcome discouragement is to make known to the builders that they are building a temple so that GOD will fill it with his glory, so that it will surpass the old glory of the temple of Solomon (2:9).

The final problem that Haggai confronts is that of dissatisfaction (2:10-23). Now that the people were working, they expected to rapidly make up for the years of inactivity. Then the prophet presents himself before the priests with a question (2:12,13) about clean and unclean things and their reciprocal influence. The answer of the priests is that uncleanness is contagious, while holiness isn't. The lesson is obvious: don't expect the work of three months to compensate for sixty years of negligence. The following Word of GOD for the people is a surprise: "But from this day will I bless you" (2:19). The people must understand that the blessing of GOD can't be bought, but that it was a free gift from a merciful GOD. GOD had chosen Zerubbabel as a sign (2:23), that is, as representative of the nature of the servant, which would have its ultimate expression in the greatest son of Zerubbabel, Jesus. Notice the name of Zerubbabel in the two genealogical lists that appear in the Gospels (Matt. 1; Luke 3), which indicates that the highest and most definitive blessing of GOD is embodied in one person, his Son Jesus Christ.

I. AUTHOR

The name Haggai means "festival, feast, festive." Some suggest it may be a shortened form of Haggiah which means "festival of Jehovah." This has led many to conjecture that he may have been born on one of the major festival or feast days of the Jews (Passover, for example). Although he is referred to as a "prophet" (Haggai 1:1; Ezra 5:1, 6:14), little else is known of this man. His father's name is never mentioned. It is assumed that he was born in Babylon during the time of the captivity.

It is very likely Haggai returned to Jerusalem with the first group of 50,000 persons led by Zerubbabel in 536 BC. It is also possible he did some writing of psalms during this time. The Septuagint (Greek version of the OT, which was made around 250 BC) credits him as being the author/co-author of several psalms (Psalms 138, 146-149).

History advocates: "In the Midrash and Talmud, legend makes Haggai, Zechariah and Malachi to be the founders of the 'Great Synagogue' (Aboth R. Nathan 1; Baba Bathra 15a), a body that is alleged to have played a great role in post-exilic times in preserving Scripture and handing on the traditional precepts and lore. It is further believed by the rabbis that after these three prophets died the Holy Spirit departed from Israel" (Jack P. Lewis).

"It is legitimate to suppose that Haggai was still a child when he returned to Judea with his parents in 536 BC" (Zondervan's Pictorial Encyclopedia). Haggai was a contemporary of Zechariah (557-479 BC). Haggai was the first prophet in Jerusalem after the return from Babylonian captivity. The prophecy of Haggai is second only to that of Obadiah in brevity among OT books.

II. DATE OF WRITING

The prophet dates his own work very precisely. Haggai 1:1 dates it in the "second year of Darius the king." This is Darius I, son of Hystaspes (522-486 BC). Thus, the prophecy is dated in the year 520 BC.

This book consists of four brief oracles, each of which is precisely dated within this year. They were delivered "between August and the last of December in the year 520 BC" (Hester, *The Heart of Hebrew History*). Thus, the four oracles of this prophecy all occur within a four month period. Haggai was the first to prophesy to the people who had returned, although Zechariah soon followed. Haggai's ministry was very brief, but Zechariah's lasted much longer.

III. HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

In the year 586 BC the southern kingdom of Judah fell to the Babylonians, and the city of Jerusalem was reduced to ruins along with the Temple. The people were led away into captivity (those who weren't killed), although a few were allowed to remain behind to live in the ruins. During the next several decades these few who remained in their homeland began to intermarry with the men and women of the foreign nations around them (including some of the Assyrians who had fled the destruction of their own nation). This merging of peoples led to the group known as the Samaritans, who, when the Jews returned to their land after the captivity, would become one of their major opponents.

During the period of the captivity, the prophets Daniel and Ezekiel, who were also taken captive, provided spiritual hope and guidance to the exiles. In the year 562 BC King Nebuchadnezzar died and Babylon then had a series of weak rulers. There was no one really strong enough to hold the empire together. In 549 BC Cyrus (who had become king of the Persians about ten years earlier) defeated the Median king and united the Medes and Persians.

In 539 BC (on October 13) Cyrus overthrew the city of Babylon and appointed a "phantom king" over the city. This king is known in the Bible as Darius the Mede, who is probably Gubaru (or Gabryas) of secular history (this is not the same Darius as the one mentioned in Haggai). Cyrus was a very benevolent ruler and had a policy of allowing enslaved peoples to return to their homelands and rebuild their temples and reinstitute their religious practices. In 538 BC Cyrus issued a decree which allowed the Jews to return to their homeland (2Chron. 36:22-23; Ezra 1:1-4). Over 150 years before this

event, Isaiah had prophesied that God would use Cyrus to bring about this restoration (Isa. 44:24 - 45:7).

This return of the Jews to their homeland took place in several stages. Not all the Jews in captivity wanted to return. Many had been born in Babylon and had, over the years, built up prosperous commercial enterprises. Also, "the prospect of a return to a desolate and impoverished land, and rebuilding the ruins of the past, had little practical appeal to those Jews who had managed to take advantage of the generous and rather naive Babylonians. Only those Jews who had caught a vision of service to God and man in the light of the promised covenant were seriously interested in the challenge" (Zondervan's Pictorial Encyclopedia). The various stages of this return were:

- 536 BC - About 50,000 return under Zerubbabel. Joshua, the priest, served as religious leader of the returned people. Haggai returned with this group - Ezra 2.
- 457 BC - A second group, led by Ezra, consisting of about 2058 persons, returns. Several reforms are instituted, including the problem of inter-marriage with the nations - Ezra 8-10.
- 445 BC - A third group, led by Nehemiah, returns. Nehemiah serves as the governor of Jerusalem. The walls are rebuilt - Neh. 2.

Upon the return of the first group (536 BC) work began on the Temple. The altar of sacrifice was restored and the foundation for the new Temple was laid. However, at this point the people ceased their work. The city and houses and wall were all in ruins, the land had been neglected for 50 years and food was scarce. The Jews who had remained in the land and intermarried with the nations offered to help rebuild, but their offer was declined; this led to hard feelings and opposition. As a result, the people became discouraged. They turned their full attention upon surviving. Then, once they had met the basic necessities of life, they began looking toward the luxuries, and in the process became apathetic toward the rebuilding of the Temple.

Cyrus was succeeded by his son Cambyses (529-522 BC). After this king came Darius I (522-486 BC). Two years into his reign (520 BC), and 16 years after work had ceased on the Temple, God raised up the prophet Haggai "to combat apathy and depression by giving inspired leadership" for the reconstruction of the Temple (Zondervan's Pictorial Encyclopedia).

IV. THE MESSAGE OF HAGGAI

Haggai "was a man of one paramount idea: build the Temple!" (Homer Hailey). His desire was to see the Temple reconstructed and their worship of God reinstated. The people had become discouraged and, as a result, forgetful of God. Their priorities were all wrong; they were thinking of themselves and not of God; building their own houses, but not His. Haggai was sent as a motivator and edifier: "Get your priorities right. Put God first, and He'll take care of your other needs" (Matt. 6:33).

The message of Haggai was extremely well-received and effective. "Within three weeks and a few days after his first address to the people they began work on the Temple again" (Hailey). One of the reasons for his success was his dependence on the Word of the Lord. Twenty-six times (in a book of only 38 verses) he appeals to God as the authority and source of his message. Such expressions as "saith Jehovah," "declares the Lord of hosts," and the like are very common. "This appeal to the Divine origin of what he said stirred the people, moved their hearts, and got results" (Hailey). "No prophet ever appeared at a more critical juncture in the history of a people, and it may be added, no prophet was more successful" (Marcus Dods).

The Temple was completed in 516 BC, twenty years after it was started and seventy years after it was destroyed in 586 BC (Ezra 6:15). This new Temple was desecrated in the time of Antiochus Epiphanes (168 BC), but later cleaned up. It was

added on to by Herod the Great. It was essentially this same Temple that Jesus and the apostles entered time and again during their ministries.

Haggai teaches us that faithfulness and material blessings are directly connected; that "when a good work is awaiting its accomplishment, the time to do it is now" (Farrar); that "discouragement, however profound, is not an adequate reason for neglecting duties, even when they seem to be encompassed with difficulty: 'Be strong and work' is a glorious motto for human life" (Farrar); that "the basis of all successful preaching is 'saith Jehovah.' It got results then, and such preaching will get results today!" (Homer Hailey).

V. HAGGAI: THE ACCOUNT

A. Exhortation to Return to Temple Building (Haggai 1)

1. (520 BC) Word of LORD comes to Haggai: people say that time has not yet come to finish Temple; God asks if it is time for the people to live in nice houses when Temple in ruins; God asks them to consider their ways: they sow much, harvest little; eat and drink but are not satisfied; clothe themselves but are not warm; one earns wage but does not keep it (Haggai 1:1-6)
2. God asks them again to consider their ways; go to hills, get wood, build Temple; they looked for much, found little, brought it home, it blew away; God did so because Temple lies in ruins, and yet they build their houses; thus the heavens withhold dew, no produce, drought in land (Haggai 1:7-11)
3. Zerubbabel, Joshua, people heed word from God, obey; they fear the LORD; Haggai speaks with LORD's message that He is with them; spirit of people stirred up, returned to work on the Temple (Haggai 1:12-15)

B. Glory of Temple, Blessing to People (Haggai 2)

1. Word of LORD to Haggai: speak to people: who saw First Temple, its glory?; people to be strong, work, for God is with them, according to covenant made when they came out from Egypt; Spirit in their midst, they ought not fear; God will soon shake creation and treasures of the nations will come to Temple; glory of Second Temple to surpass glory of First Temple; peace to be given there (Haggai 2:1-9)
2. Word of LORD to Haggai: ask priests about law: does man who carry holy meat in clothing make other food that touches clothing holy?; answer is no; if someone who is unclean from touching corpse touches them, are they unclean?; answer is yes; Haggai says that it is the same with these people/nation; the work of their hands offered is unclean (Haggai 2:10-14)
3. God asks them again to consider: before building Temple again, heap of 20 measures actually 10, wine vat of 50 measures actually 20; loss of produce from blight, mildew, hail, but they did not turn to God; consider again: since Temple foundation laid, is seed in barn?; vines, fig trees, pomegranates, olives yielded nothing; from this day forth, God will bless them (Haggai 2:15-19)
4. Word of LORD to Haggai for Zerubbabel: God about to shake heavens and earth; throne of kingdoms overthrown; their strength and armies overthrown; on that day, Zerubbabel will be taken, made like signet ring, for God has chosen him (Haggai 2:20-23)

IV. HAGGAI: IMPORTANT TEXTS

A. Haggai 2:3 - Heb. 12:26

B. Haggai 2:21 - Heb. 12:26

QUESTIONS ON THE BOOK OF HAGGAI

1. What are the three problems addressed in Haggai that are common to all people?
 - a.
 - b.
 - c.
2. What are the three Divinely generated solutions to those problems?
 - a.
 - b.
 - c.
3. What does the name Haggai mean? Where was he born?
4. What activity of the returned exiles indicated that they did not have their priorities in order? What did they need to do to correct this?
5. What Median king issued a benevolent decree allowing the captives to return to Jerusalem? Who prophesied that this would happen? Give references.
6. List the three groups of Jews that returned to their homeland:
 - a.
 - b.
 - c.
7. When did work begin on the temple? When was it complete? Why did it take so long?
8. What was Haggai's primary message to the returned exiles?
9. How soon after Haggai presented this message did the people follow his instructions?
10. What New Testament verse teaches us to get our own priorities in order?

Lesson Twelve: Zechariah -- Jehovah Remembers

INTRODUCTION

The book of Zechariah begins with an energetic message from the LORD asking the people to repent and return to their GOD. The book is replete with Zechariah's references to the Word of the LORD. The prophet doesn't transmit his own message, but faithfully communicates the message that GOD has given him. He calls the people to repent of their lethargy and complete the unfinished work.

Later, GOD gives assurances to the people of his love and care in a series of eight visions. The vision of the man and the horses reminds the people of the vigilant care of GOD. The vision of the four horns and four carpenters alludes to the judgment of GOD, first upon Judah and later upon their enemies. In the vision of the man with the measuring cord appears an apocalyptic reference to the beautiful and peaceful city of GOD. Joshua, the High Priest, represents cleansing from sin. The magnificent vision of the gold candlestick, supported by the two olive trees, is a message to Zerubbabel in the sense that GOD's purposes can only be fulfilled through His Spirit. The flying scroll emits a pronouncement against those who steal and swear falsely. The vision of the women bearing the ephah alludes to GOD's holiness and cleansing from sin. The vision of the four chariots describes GOD's sovereign control over the earth.

The visions are followed by a scene in which Joshua is crowned as king and priest. It has to do with a magnificent symbol of the coming of the Messiah.

In chapters 7 and 8, GOD makes use of a question about fasting to reinforce his mandate of justice and rectitude, which should be placed before religious formalities.

Chapters 9-14 have an eschatological (the study of end times) character. Zion is restored, and radiates the glory of the king who governs it. Two prophetic messages stand out. The first prophecy, or "oracle", is in chapters 9-11. GOD will deliver his people (chapter 9), the prosperity of the people of GOD (chap. 10) will be restored and the Shepherd of Israel will be initially rejected, which will bring great desolation (chap. 11). The second prophecy is in chapters 12-14. Once again GOD frees his people, while they are afflicted by Him whom they pierced (chapter 12). A fountain is then opened to cleanse sin and impurity (chapter 13). Finally, the LORD will reign over all the nations from a restored Zion (chapter 14).

I. AUTHOR

The name Zechariah (Hebrew: Zekar-yah) means "Yahweh has remembered." This was a very common Hebrew name. There are almost 30 different men with this name mentioned in the Bible, "presumably because the Lord had remembered the prayers of the parents for a baby boy" (Gleason L. Archer, Jr.).

Zech. 1:1 indicates he was the son of Berechiah and the grandson of Iddo. Iddo was one of the priests who returned to Jerusalem in the group led by Zerubbabel (Neh. 12:4, 16; Ezra 5:1; 6:14). Zechariah was also one of the ones who returned under Zerubbabel, and he was already a priest at the time of the return (Neh. 12:16). It is also very likely he was just a young man (Hebrew: na'ar) at this time (Zech. 2:4). He was likely born in Babylon, and perhaps had just become a priest at the time the exiles returned to Jerusalem. Zechariah "has been called the prophet with 'the soul of an artist and the eye of a seer'" (H.I. Hester, *The Heart of Hebrew History*).

Jewish tradition states that Haggai, Zechariah and Malachi were the founders of the Great Synagogue. The Greek Old Testament (The Septuagint) also credits Zechariah and Haggai as being the co-authors of several of the Psalms. In Matthew 23:35 and Luke 11:51 Jesus speaks of "Zechariah, the son of Berechiah" who was

"murdered between the temple and the altar." (Note - Another priest by the name of Zechariah, the son of Jehoiada, was also killed in the court of the temple (2Chron. 24:20-22).

II. DATE OF WRITING

According to Zech. 1:1 this prophet began to prophesy two months after his contemporary Haggai began his work (Haggai 1:1). This would place the beginning of Zechariah's work as a prophet around the month of November, 520 BC. From Zech. 7:1 we know that Zechariah prophesied for at least two more years. Chapters 9-14 are undated, however, and due to various stylistic differences, and due to internal evidence, "it is likely that this message was given after the dedication of the Temple. Presumably this represents Zechariah's message during a later period in his prophetic career" (Schultz, *The Old Testament Speaks*).

III. HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

For a discussion of the historical background see the study in this series on Haggai. Haggai "furnished the initial impetus for laying the foundation of the second Temple, whereas Zechariah helped materially toward the completion of the project by giving a larger spiritual dimension to the restored theocracy through his prophetic oracles. With his contemporary Haggai he was called to give that kind of spiritual leadership which would regenerate the theocracy, recall it to its true vocation, and guide it toward its destiny as the living witness of God in the world" (Zondervan's *Pictorial Encyclopedia of the Bible*).

Zechariah "began to prophecy at the time when zeal for the ideals of the theocracy had reached a very low ebb." "As was the case with Haggai, the primary concern of Zechariah was the establishing of spiritual priorities in the life of the returned community." Zechariah saw the "dangers involved in cultic formalism;" he realized that "submission, penitence, and cleansing from sin must precede the outpouring of Divine blessing;" and that "the prosperity of the theocracy depended upon a proper relationship between the covenant people and their God" (Zondervan's *Pictorial Encyclopedia Bible*).

IV. CONTENTS AND CHARACTER OF THE BOOK

"Zechariah is the longest and most obscure of all the twelve minor prophets" (Adam Clarke). "It is the most difficult of any of the OT books to interpret" (Homer Hailey). Zechariah "is the most Messianic, the most truly apocalyptic and eschatological, of all the writings of the OT" (Robinson). "Zechariah predicted more about the Messiah than any other prophet except Isaiah" (Ryrie Study Bible). "No prophet of the entire OT is more concerned with the Messianic hope or gives more specific predictions about the coming of the Messiah" (The Open Bible).

"Zechariah has exercised a greater influence upon the Messianic picture of the NT than any other minor prophet" (Jack P. Lewis). There are prophecies concerning His first coming (3:8, 9:9, 16, 11:11-13, 12:10, 13:1, 6-7), and there are prophecies concerning His second coming - chapter 14. "Christ is portrayed in His two advents as both Servant and King, Man and God" (The Expanded Open Bible). The following are a few of Zechariah's explicit anticipations of Christ:

- The Angel of the Lord - 3:1
- The Stone with seven eyes - 3:9
- The Righteous Branch - 3:8, 6:12-13
- The King and Priest - 6:13
- The humble King - 9:9-10

- The cornerstone, tent peg, and bow of battle - 10:4
- The Good Shepherd who is rejected and sold for 30 shekels of silver, the price of a slave - 11:4-13
- The Pierced One - 12:10
- The Cleansing Fountain - 13:1
- The Smitten Shepherd who is abandoned - 13:7
- The Coming Judge and Righteous King - chapter 14

Jack Lewis points out that "Zechariah exercised other influences on the NT. His demand that everyone speak truth to his neighbor is echoed by Paul (Zech. 8:16; Eph. 4:25). The reader of the book of Revelation may also find here the antecedent of certain pictures employed by that writer." For example:

- The four horsemen - Zech. 6:1-8; Rev. 6:1-8
- The two olive trees - Zech. 4:3; Rev. 11:4
- The lampstand and seven eyes - Zech. 4:2-10; Rev. 1:12
- In Zechariah Satan appears as the accuser to bring men's failings to the attention of God - Zech. 3:1; 2Chron. 21:1; Job 1:6, 2:1.

Homer Hailey notes "Zechariah differs in three points from the prophets who preceded him:

- He gives emphasis to visions as a means of divine communication. It is true that visions appear in the Book of Amos, but not in proportion to those in Zechariah.
- Angelic mediation occupies an important place in his message. Angels are especially conspicuous in the first six chapters of the book.
- Apocalyptic symbolism entering into the visions is another outstanding characteristic of this prophet's writings."

"The prophet sees and emphasizes the truth that ultimate triumph is dependent on Divine cooperation and on the submission of the people to God's Divine Will" (Homer Hailey). "It would be impossible to exaggerate the importance of such passages from this Minor Prophet in the preaching and the faith of early Christians" (The Open Bible).

V. ZECHARIAH: THE ACCOUNT

A. Main Sections

1. Visions (Zechariah 1-8)
2. Burdens (Zechariah 9-14)

B. Call to Return to God, Visions (Zechariah 1-6)

1. 520 BC: Word of God to Zechariah: LORD angry with your fathers; LORD calls people to return to Him; do not be like fathers who did not listen to prophets; fathers and prophets did not live forever, God's words and statutes caught up to them; they repented when their destruction was evident (Zechariah 1:1-6)
2. Zechariah sees first vision: man on red horse, standing among myrtle trees, with red, sorrel and white horses behind him; Zechariah wants to know meaning, angel will reveal; horsemen as those God sends to patrol earth; indicate earth is at rest; angel wants to know how long it will be while God shows no mercy to Judah; LORD provides comforting, gracious answer, indicates His jealousy for Judah; God angry with nations at ease; God will return to Jerusalem, Temple to be rebuilt, prosperity to return; God will comfort and choose Zion (Zechariah 1:7-17)
3. Zechariah sees second vision: four horns; asks what they are; horns that scattered all Israel; Zechariah sees craftsmen, asks what they are

doing; they come to terrify, cast down horns of nations who fought against Judah (Zechariah 1:18-21)

4. Zechariah sees third vision: man with measuring line; Zechariah asks him where he is going; he goes to measure Jerusalem, its size; angel meets individual, tells him that Jerusalem will be inhabited as villages without walls because of number of people; LORD as wall of fire all around, His glory present; LORD declares for people to flee from the north, to return from the Dispersion to Jerusalem; glory to plundering nations will be restored; God to dwell again in Jerusalem; nations to join themselves with the LORD; God to dwell in the midst of the people, they will know that God has sent Zechariah to them; God will inherit Judah as His portion; all flesh to be silent because God has roused Himself from His dwelling (Zechariah 2:1-13)
5. Zechariah sees fourth vision: Joshua the high priest before angel of LORD, Satan next to him, accusing him; LORD rebukes Satan; God has again chosen Jerusalem; Joshua as in dirty clothes; angel says to have clothes removed; iniquity removed, he will be clothed with pure clothing; Joshua clothed with clean turban, garments; angel assures Joshua that if he is obedient to God, he will be given right of access; friends sitting before him as a sign that God will bring His servant the Branch; stone set before Joshua with seven eyes, inscription engraved; sin of land removed in one day; on that day, all invite neighbors to sit under vine, fig tree (Zechariah 3:1-10)
6. Zechariah sleeping, awakened by angel; Zechariah sees fifth vision: lampstand of gold, bowl on its top, seven lamps with lights, two olive trees; Zechariah wants to know what they are, does not know; word of LORD to Zerubbabel: not by power or might but by the Spirit of God; mountain to be plain before him, will bring forward top stone; as Zerubbabel began foundation of Temple, he will finish it; then they will know God sent Zechariah; those despising days of small things will rejoice, will see plumb line in hand of Zerubbabel; seven as eyes of the LORD on the earth; Zechariah asks twice about olive trees; they are the anointed ones who stand by the LORD of earth (Zechariah 4:1-13)
7. Zechariah sees sixth vision: a flying scroll, 20 by 10 cubits; curse going out over the whole land; all who steal cleaned out by what is on one side, those who swear falsely by what is on other side; God will send it out, it will enter houses of thieves and those who swear falsely, and will consume those houses (Zechariah 5:1-4)
8. Zechariah sees seventh vision: a basket going out; the iniquity in the land; woman in the basket, Wickedness; pushed back into basket, lid returned; Zechariah sees two women coming forward; wind in their wings, wings like storks, lifted up basket between earth and heaven; basket taken to land of Shinar (=Babylon), house to be built there for it (Zechariah 5:5-11)
9. Zechariah sees eighth vision: four chariots coming out from between two mountains; mountains of bronze; first chariot with red horses, second black, third white, fourth dappled; all strong; they go out to four winds of heaven after presenting themselves to God; black goes north, white after them; dappled toward south; horses impatient to patrol the earth, and they go; those who go to north country have set Spirit at rest there; word of LORD to Zechariah: take Heldai, Tobijah, and Jedaiah,

exiles returning from Babylon, go to house of Josiah; take silver and gold, make crown for Joshua the high priest; to say to him: man whose name is Branch; will branch out, build Temple; will bear royal honor, will sit and rule; priest on throne, counsel of peace between them both; crown will be in Temple to remind aforementioned persons; those far off will come and help build Temple; people will know that God sent Zechariah; it will come to pass if they obey (Zechariah 6:1-15)

C. The Word of the LORD Through Zechariah (Zechariah 7-8)

1. 518 BC: people of Bethel send Sharezer and Regem-melech to entreat God's favor, asks whether to weep and abstain in the fifth month; word of LORD to Zechariah: did you fast for God? Do you not eat and drink for yourselves? Did not God say that all these things were going to take place?; God tells people to accomplish justice and mercy, do not oppress people; people refused to pay attention, stopped ears, made hearts as hard as diamonds, did not hear message of former prophets; anger came from God, people were scattered among nations, land made desolate (Zechariah 7:1-14)
2. God jealous for Zion, jealous with great wrath; God has returned to dwell in Jerusalem; it will be called faithful city; old men and women will again sit in it; streets to be full of children playing; marvelous in His sight; God will save His people from east and west, make them dwell in Jerusalem; they will be His people, He will be their God (Zech. 8:1-8)
3. Let the hands of Temple builders be strong; beforehand, no security, money; now there will be sowing of peace, prosperity; Judah previously a curse, will be made a blessing; do not fear, have strong hands (Zechariah 8:9-13)
4. As God was provoked and brought disaster without relenting, He will now do good for Judah; do not fear; they are to speak truth and act justly, not think evil in their hearts and do not love false oaths, things God hates; all the fasts of Judah will be turned into seasons of feasting and joy; love truth and peace; people of many cities will come to seek, entreat God; men of nations will ask to go with a Jew since they have heard God is with him (Zechariah 8:14-23)

D. The First Burden (Zechariah 9-11)

1. Burden of word of LORD against Hadrach and Damascus; God has eye on nations, Israel; Tyre is very wealthy, yet God will strip her of her possessions and power; Philistine cities will see and be afraid, will lose their kings, be uninhabited; mixed people to live there, pride of Philistia to be cut off; blood taken from its mouth, abominations removed; after purging, made part of Israel; no oppressor to march over God's people (Zechariah 9:1-8)
2. People of Jerusalem to rejoice: their king is coming, humble, mounted on colt; cavalry, armaments to be removed from Israel and Judah; will speak peace to the nations; will rule over all the earth; because of blood of covenant, prisoners of the pit to be set free; prisoners of hope to return to their stronghold, will receive double from God; Judah bent as bow, Ephraim as arrow, to attack Greeks (Zechariah 9:9-13)
3. God will appear over them, will sound trumpet and march as whirlwinds of south; LORD to protect them; they will devour, tread down, and drink and roar; God will save them on that day; they will shine in land like

jewels in crown; God's goodness, beauty are great; grain make men flourish, new wine the young women (Zechariah 9:14-17)

4. Ask for rain from the LORD in spring season, He will provide; household gods speak nonsense and the diviners see lies; people wander like sheep, afflicted for lack of shepherd; God angry with shepherds, or leaders, will punish them; God cares for the flock of the house of Judah, from Him will come cornerstone and tent peg and battle bow and ruler; they will be as mighty men in battle; they will fight because God is with them, will put riders on horses to shame (Zechariah 10:1-5)
5. God will strengthen, save Israel and Judah; He will bring them back because of His compassion, they will be as if never rejected; God will answer them; Ephraim to be as mighty warrior, will be glad; children will see it and be glad; rejoice in LORD; God to whistle and gather them in for He has redeemed them; they will be as they were before; God dispersed them, will restore them, bring them home from Egypt, Assyria, return them to Gilead and Lebanon until there is no room; waters to be struck and dried up; pride of Assyria to be humbled; God will make them strong, they will walk in His name (Zechariah 10:6-12)
6. Lebanon to open doors so fire will devour cedars; cypress, oaks, shepherds to wail, lions to roar, for destruction has come upon Lebanon (Zechariah 11:1-3)
7. God tells Zechariah to become shepherd of flock doomed to slaughter; those who slaughter go unpunished, those who sell make money on them and bless the name of God; shepherds have no pity; God to no longer have pity on them, will cause them to fall into each others' hands; land to be crushed; Zechariah does so, taking two staves, Favor and Union; shepherds sheep; in one month, destroyed the three shepherds; became impatient with them, they hated him; Zechariah says he will no longer be their shepherd: what will die to die, those who remain devour one another; Favor broken, ending covenant of God with peoples; sheep traders saw, know it is word of LORD; asks them to give him his wages; they weigh out 30 pieces of silver; God says to throw it to the potter; it is the price at which they valued God; Union broken, ending brotherhood of Judah and Israel (Zechariah 11:4-14)
8. God tells Zechariah to take equipment of foolish shepherd; God raising shepherd in land who will not care for oppressed; woe to that shepherd, deserting the flock; may he be struck in the eye and his arm withered (Zechariah 11:15-17)

E. The Second Burden (Zechariah 12-14)

1. Burden of Word of LORD regarding Israel: LORD the Creator will make Jerusalem a cup of staggering to the peoples; siege of Jerusalem also against Judah; Jerusalem to be a heavy stone for peoples; those who lift it will injure themselves; nations of earth to gather against it; all horses, riders struck with panic, madness; for Judah God will keep eyes open, inhabitants of Jerusalem will have strength through God; Judah to be made like a fire on that day, devouring all surrounding peoples; Jerusalem to be inhabited again; LORD to give salvation to tents of Judah first so that glory of Jerusalem does not surpass Judah; LORD to protect inhabitants of Jerusalem; the feeble to be strong, the

- strong to be like God; God will seek to destroy all nations coming against Jerusalem (Zechariah 12:1-9)
2. God will pour out spirit of grace and mercy on house of David and Jerusalem; they will mourn and weep for sin when they look upon the God whom they have pierced; on that day, mourning for Jerusalem like mourning for Hadad-rimmon on plain of Megiddo; land, families individually mourn; fountain opened that day for house of David and for Jerusalem to cleanse them from sin (Zechariah 12:10-13:1)
 3. On that day, God will cut off name of idols from the land, to be remembered no more; prophets, spirit of uncleanness to be removed from land; those who prophesy will be denied as liars by their own parents; they will pierce him through; every prophet on that day will be ashamed of vision; he will not put on hairy cloak, but will claim to be a farmer; will deny wounds are from being a prophet; sword to be roused against shepherd; when shepherd struck, sheep will scatter; God to turn hand against little ones; two-thirds will be cut off, one-third to survive; that third to be put in fire and refined; they will be His people, tested in fire, who will call on His name and He will answer; He is their God, they are His people (Zechariah 13:2-9)
 4. Day coming when spoil taken will be divided in their midst; nations will gather for battle, the city will fall, houses plundered, women raped; half of city will go to exile, other half will not be cut off from city; LORD will go out and fight on that day, will stand on Mount of Olives; it will split in two; people to flee to the valley of the mountains, like they fled in the day of the earthquake in Uzziah's day; God will then come, His holy ones with Him; no light, cold, frost on that day-- a unique day, known to God, light in evening; living waters will flow from Jerusalem, half to the eastern sea, half to western sea, in summer and winter; LORD to be king over earth; LORD will be one, His name one; land to be turned into a plain save Jerusalem, which will still be on mountain; it will be inhabited and will dwell in security (Zechariah 14:1-11)
 5. Plague will come against nations fighting Jerusalem: flesh will rot; panic from LORD will fall on them, will fight each other; wealth of all nations to be collected; plague will also fall on all living creatures in their camp; all who survive from the nations will come up to worship God, keep Feast of Booths; no rain on those who do not go up; plague, no rain, for Egypt if they do not go up; it will be inscribed on bells of horses, "Holy to the LORD"; pots in Temple will be as bowls before altar; every pot in Jerusalem, Judah to be holy to the LORD so that all who sacrifice may come and partake; no more traders in Temple on that day (Zechariah 14:12-21)

VI. ZECHARIAH: IMPORTANT TEXTS

- A. Zechariah 1:7-16 - Rev. 6:1-8
- B. Zechariah 2:1 - Rev. 11:1
- C. Zechariah 3:2 - Jude 1:9
- D. Zechariah 4:2 - Rev. 1:12
- E. Zechariah 6:1-3 - Rev. 6:1-8
- F. Zechariah 8:16 - Eph. 4:25
- G. Zechariah 9:9 - Matt. 21:5; John 12:15
- H. Zechariah 11:13 - Matt. 27:9

- I. Zechariah 12:10 - John 19:37; Rev. 1:7
- J. Zechariah 13:7 - Matt. 26:31; Mark 14:27

QUESTIONS ON THE BOOK OF ZECHARIAH

1. What does Zechariah's name mean? What was his occupation? Where was he born?
2. When did Zechariah begin prophesying? How long did he prophesy? Zechariah was contemporary with what other prophet?
3. Apart from Isaiah, Zechariah spoke more about this matter than any other prophet?
4. According the reputable Bible scholars, how difficult is the book of Zechariah to understand?
5. List ten of Zechariah's expectations of the coming Christ:
 - a.
 - b.
 - c.
 - d.
 - e.
 - f.
 - g.
 - h.
 - i.
 - j.
6. List four prophetic images Zechariah uses that are repeated in Revelation:
 - a.
 - b.
 - c.
 - d.
7. What animal did Zechariah say Jesus would ride in His triumphant entry into Jerusalem?
8. To what New Testament character does Zechariah 11:13 apply?
9. To what New Testament character does Zechariah 12:10 apply?
10. To what New Testament characters does Zechariah 13:7 apply?

Lesson Thirteen: Malachi -- My Messenger

INTRODUCTION

Right at the beginning of his book, Malachi mentions the invariable love of GOD for his people, born from his eternal mercy. This serves as a background of the condemnations and exhortations that follow. First, the prophet directs himself to the arrogant, the open repudiation of the priests for the Law and their negative influence on the people. He signals them out as responsible for having made many stumble in sin. Thus he warns them that the LORD won't remain a mere spectator but, unless they repent, he will punish them severely.

Following that he refers to the betrayal of the priests and Jews who divorce their faithful spouses. This is followed by an earnest call to contain their passions and be faithful to the spouses that GOD gave them in their youth. Further on, the prophet rejects the irreligious practices of the people, their denial of divine justice, and their defrauding the LORD by holding back the tithes and offerings that are due Him.

Finally, he exhorts the people to observe the laws given to Israel through Moses and promises a future Messiah and his precursor, Elijah (John the Baptist). This prophecy closes the Old Testament and links it to the good news of the provision of GOD in the Son of Righteousness described in the New Testament.

I. AUTHOR

The word Malachi is generally translated "my messenger." "It may reasonably be regarded as an abbreviation of Malakhiyah which means 'messenger of Jehovah'" (George L. Robinson). "There has been considerable scholarly debate" over the centuries "as to whether or not 'Malachi' is a genuine proper name or a common noun" (Zondervan's Pictorial Encyclopedia). If it is the latter, this book is by an anonymous writer referred to as "My messenger" or the "Messenger of Jehovah." the LXX (Septuagint) regards the word as a noun rather than a proper name. Jewish tradition says he was a member of the "Great Synagogue," that he was of the tribe of Zebulun, and that he died young. Nothing further is known of this man of God.

II. DATE OF WRITING

It is impossible to date this work precisely, however by an examination of the material within the book itself one can determine the general time of this prophecy. The Persian term for governor ("pehah") is used in Malachi 1:8 (Neh. 5:14; Haggai 1:1, 14, 2:21), indicating this was written during the Persian domination of Israel (539-333 BC).

One can narrow it down more by examining the internal conditions existing in Palestine at this time. The Temple has been rebuilt and sacrifices are being offered in it. The priests are corrupt. The tithes and offerings are neglected. There is intermarriage with pagans and divorce is rampant. There is a spirit of skepticism. Financial abuses abound. Judah is under a governor, and Edom has been destroyed. It is agreed by most scholars that these are the same problems as those faced by Nehemiah. "It is therefore likely that the prophet and Nehemiah were active at about the same time and it would be well to study Nehemiah as a background for Malachi" (Jack P. Lewis). "A fair estimate as to date would be about 435 BC" (Gleason Archer).

III. HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

In 536 BC the Babylonian Captivity of the Jews officially ended when Cyrus allowed the people of Israel to return to their homeland. Under the leadership of

Zerubbabel some 50,000 Jews returned. Encouraged by the preaching of Haggai and Zechariah, the people rebuilt the Temple between 520-516 BC.

In 458 BC Ezra returned with a second group of exiles. The Persian King during this time was Artaxerxes I (465-425 BC). It was he who permitted Nehemiah to return in 445 BC to rebuild the walls of Jerusalem. Nehemiah's first term as Governor was 445-433 BC. He then returned to Persia for a time, after which he served a second term as Governor from 430-425 BC.

It was during this time that "Malachi took the helm of spiritual affairs in Jerusalem" (The Expositor's Bible Commentary). "For a full picture of the conditions in Judea during this period one should read Ezra 7-10 and the complete book of Nehemiah. The conditions of the people as revealed in Nehemiah and the bold and courageous attack of Malachi against the problems which the latter sets forth in his book point clearly to the contemporary dates of the two" (Homer Hailey).

IV. PURPOSE AND OCCASION FOR WRITING

About 100 years had passed since the people of Israel had returned to their homeland from the Babylonian captivity. The Temple had been rebuilt; the walls were rebuilt; the sacrificial system had been reinstated. Most of their goals, which had been set for them upon their return, had been achieved. They were safe from the nations around them. And they were bored!! Their initial enthusiasm, due to the challenges they faced, had worn off. Their worship had become mechanical, ritualistic, and unspiritual. They went through the motions, but their heart was not involved. Their relationships were falling apart, both with God and with one another. Yet, they can't seem to fathom why God is dissatisfied with them.

It is into this arena of deteriorating relationships, enthusiasm, and spirituality that Malachi is thrust, as the last "messenger of the Lord" before a 400 year period of prophetic silence! "His aim was to restore the Jews to a fresh relationship with God by indicating the precise causes of contemporary spiritual declension and setting out the steps by which the life of the community could be renewed. Like Haggai before him, his dominant concern was for the recognition of spiritual priorities on the part of the restored community" (Zondervan's Pictorial Encyclopedia). "Judah's sins against both God and man were overt and numerous" (Expositor's Bible Commentary). Some of the sins which occasioned Malachi's angry indictment were:

- Priestly laxity - Mal. 1:6 - 2:9 (Neh. 13:4-9). He "denounced the priestly hierarchy for its inability to furnish that kind of moral and religious leadership which would have enabled the returned community to avoid much of the current distress. The priests had been indifferent and even contemptuous in discharging their duties" (Zondervan's Pictorial Encyclopedia).
- Financial abuses and neglect of tithes - Mal. 3:5-10 (Neh. 13:10-13).
- Worship was in a state of decay - The refuse of the flocks and herds was being brought to the Temple for sacrifices unto God - Mal. 1:8.
- Intermarriage with pagans and divorce of their wives to marry pagan women - The people were not honoring their covenants. Their relationships, both with God and each other, were failing - Mal. 2:10-16 (Neh. 10:30; 13:23-28; Ezra 9-10).

"The people of Israel have become disillusioned and doubtful. They begin to question God's providence as their faith imperceptibly degenerates into cynicism. Internally, they wonder whether it is worth serving God after all. Externally, these attitudes surface in mechanical observances, empty ritual, cheating on tithes and offerings, and crass indifference to God's moral and ceremonial law. Their priests are corrupt and their practices wicked, but they are so spiritually insensitive that they wonder

why they are not being blessed by God. As their perception of God grows dim, the resulting materialism and externalism become settled characteristics that later grip the religious parties of the Pharisees and Sadducees" (The Expanded Open Bible).

V. THE CHARACTER OF THE BOOK

"The book of Malachi is written in a style unique in the prophets" (Jack P. Lewis). It is a new style of address known as the Didactic method of speaking (also known as the Disputation method). Later this use of "assertion - objection - rebuttal" became quite popular, and was the usual format for the rabbis and scribes. This method of making a point is found throughout the Gospels and Epistles of the NT canon.

"In this type of teaching an assertion or charge is made, a fancied objection is raised by the hearers, and a refutation to the objection is presented by the speaker. In the style of Malachi we have the beginning of a method of teaching that later became universal in the Jewish schools and in the synagogue" (Homer Hailey). Malachi 1:2 is a good example of the format which is typical of this author's style.

Malachi is written much like a running debate with those who call into question the Lord's goodness and justice. "The style of Malachi, then, is that of the spoken word. The book is very much like the letter of James in the NT, and resembles a collection of loosely connected oracles rather than a carefully organized literary work" (The New Layman's Bible Commentary).

Several important themes are seen in the book of Malachi. Among these are the following:

- The book of remembrance - Mal. 3:16, in which the deeds of the righteous are recorded. The development of this concept is seen in the later writings of God's people.
- The idea that true repentance is the first step toward a proper spiritual relationship with God is stressed.
- Malachi emphasizes the coming of a forerunner who is to herald the coming of the Lord. Jesus and others regarded this prophecy as foreshadowing the work of John the Baptist - Mark 9:11-13.

VI. MALACHI: THE ACCOUNT

A. The LORD, Israel, the Priests, and the People (Malachi 1-2)

1. Introduction (Malachi 1:1)
2. God loves Israel, but Israel doubts; God compares Esau and Jacob, how he loved Jacob but hated Esau; Edom may try to rebuild but God will tear it down; God angry with them forever; Israel will see it, will declare greatness of God (Malachi 1:2-5)
3. Son honors father, servant his master, but God is not honored; priests have not honored God because they have offered polluted food on the altar-- defective and inferior animals, not the best of the flock; God encourages them to take such creatures to the governor and see if he will accept them; God wants them to shut Temple doors and have no fire on altar, for He has no pleasure in them and will not accept offerings from them; God's name to be great among the nations and yet Israel dishonors it by polluting altar; Israel considers it as weariness, bringing inferior offerings, and God asks whether He is to accept them; curse to the cheat who makes a vow but substitutes an inferior animal; God as great King, Name to be feared by the nations (Malachi 1:6-14)

4. Command now comes to priests: if they will not listen and will not honor God's name, the curse will be sent upon them and their blessings; they are already cursed since priests have not laid it to heart; their offspring to be rebuked, dung on their faces and offerings, and they all will be taken away with them; priests will then know that God sent this command to them to keep covenant with Levi-- a covenant of fear, and Levi feared God; Levi as exemplary believer; priests should be exemplary believers, but they have turned from the way; many have stumbled because of their instruction; they corrupted the covenant with Levi, and God will make them despised and abased before the people, since they do not keep God's ways but show partiality in instruction (Malachi 2:1-9)
 5. Questions regarding singularity of Father, that one God has created them; people as faithless with one another, profaning covenant of fathers; Judah as profaning Temple by marrying daughter of foreign god; petition for God to cut off from Israel any who do this and bring offerings to God (Malachi 2:10-12)
 6. People as covering altar with tears because God does not regard or accept offerings; God does not do so because He is witness between the people and the wives of their youths to whom they have been faithless; God made them one, seeking godly offspring; people to guard themselves, not be faithless to wife of youth; God hates divorce; one who divorces covers garment with violence; they are not to be faithless (Malachi 2:13-16)
 7. People as wearing God with their words; they do this by declaring that those doing evil are good in the sight of God and by asking where the God of justice has gone (Malachi 2:17)
- B. The Messenger, Contributions, Elijah (Malachi 3-4)
1. God to send His messenger who will prepare the way; God will be in the Temple, messenger is coming; who can stand when He comes?; God as refiner's fire and like fullers' soap; He will refine and purify Levites and they will bring proper offerings; God will then be pleased with offerings as He was in olden times (Malachi 3:1-4)
 2. God will then draw near for judgment, will be a witness against sorcerers, adulterers, oppressors (Malachi 3:5)
 3. The LORD does not change, Jacob not consumed; people as constantly turning aside from God's statutes; return to God, He will return to them; people as robbing God through their tithes and contributions; people are to bring full tithes to the storehouses and put God to the test-- see if He will pour out blessings for their obedience; He will rebuke devourer so that their crops will not fail; all nations will call them blessed (Malachi 3:6-12)
 4. Words of people hard against God; they have said that it is vain to serve God, do not see profit in following Him; they call the arrogant blessed, say that evildoers prosper and put God to the test and escape (Malachi 3:13-15)
 5. Those fearing God speak together; God hears them, book of remembrance written before those who fear God and esteem His name; they will be God's when He makes up His treasured possession, and they will be spared; they will then see distinction between righteous and wicked, the servant & the disobedient (Malachi 3:16-18)

6. A day is coming when arrogant and evildoers will be consumed as by fire; yet for those who fear God, sun of righteousness will rise; they will go out as calves leaping; they will tread down the wicked; people to remember Law of Moses and its statutes (Malachi 4:1-4)
7. God will send Elijah the prophet before the day of the LORD; he will turn hearts of fathers to children, vice versa, lest God come and strike land with decree of destruction (Malachi 4:5-6)

VII. MALACHI: IMPORTANT TEXTS

- A. Malachi 1:2 - Rom. 9:13
- B. Malachi 2:16
- C. Malachi 3:1 - Matt. 11:10; Mark 1:2; Luke 7:27
- D. Malachi 3:17 - 1Peter 2:9
- E. Malachi 4:5-6 - Matt. 17:10; Mark 9:11; Luke 1:17

QUESTIONS ON THE BOOK OF MALACHI

1. Who did Malachi hold responsible for leading many in Judah to stumble into sin?
2. What did Malachi say was the second cause for their decline?
3. What was the third sinful matter addressed by this prophet?
4. What does the name Malachi mean? Approximately when was this book written?
5. In what condition was Jerusalem and the returned exiles in Malachi's day? How many years had passed since their return?
6. What behaviors indicated that they were weary with worship?
7. What is God's attitude toward divorce?
8. What was God's attitude toward the returned exiles (1:2)?
9. Explain 4:5... who is Elijah in this prophecy?
10. Compare and contrast the end of the Old Testament (Mal. 4:6) with the end of the New Testament (Rev. 22:21).