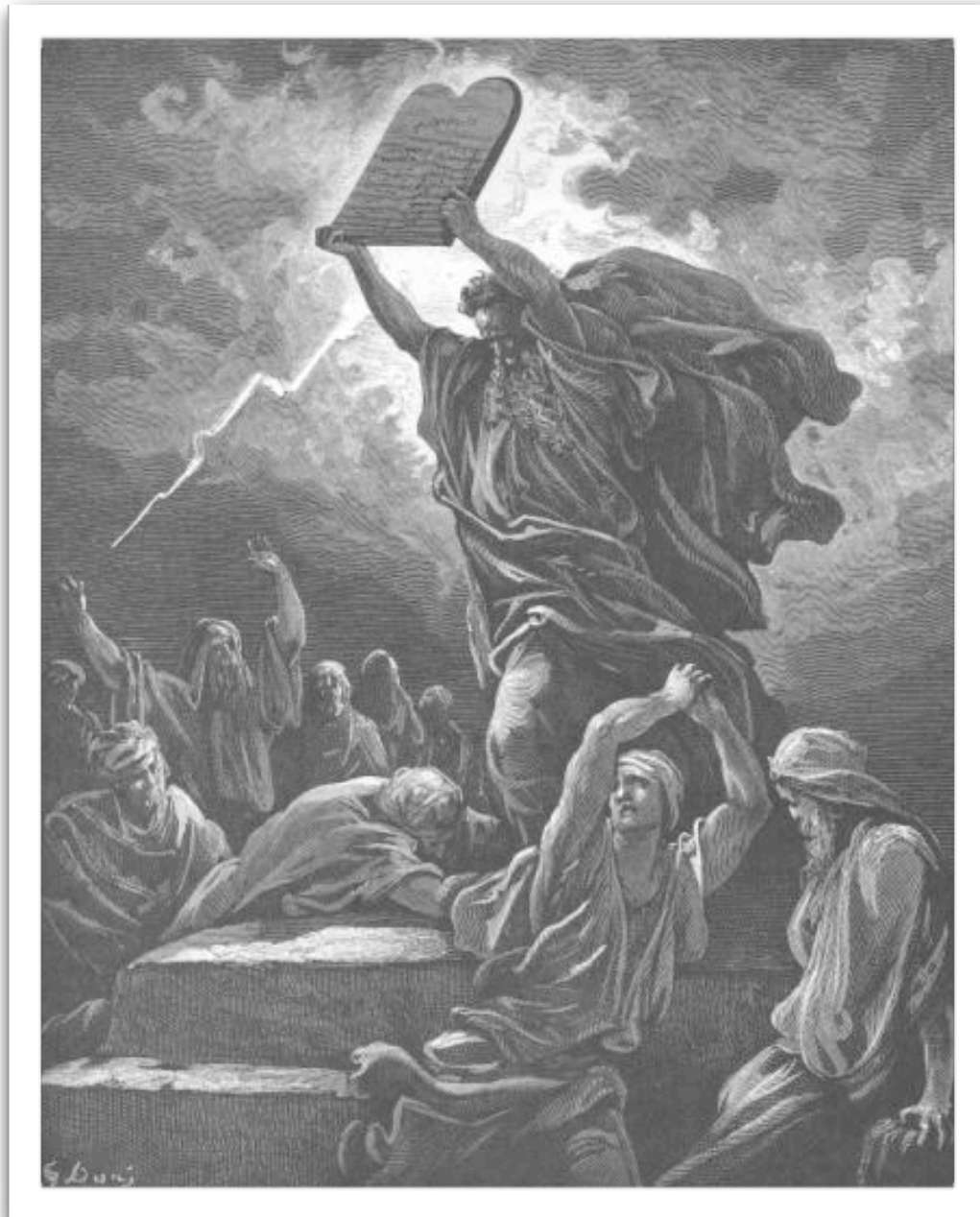


OLD TESTAMENT OVERVIEW



UNDERSTANDING AND APPRECIATING GENESIS TO MALACHI

By

John M. Buttrey II

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Introduction

The Old Testament contains a wealth of valuable information for us as Christians today. Such a statement may surprise some who have long heard, or believed, that today we only need the New Testament. While it is true we that are now living under the New Covenant, the Old Testament still has much to offer us. It has rightly been said, the New Testament is in the Old Testament concealed, and the Old Testament is in the New Testament revealed. The Old Testament helps us make sense of what we read in the Gospels, Acts, and the Epistles.

In terms of the value of the Old Testament Scriptures for us today, consider these words from the inspired pen of Paul:

For whatever was written in earlier times was written for our instruction, so that through perseverance and the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope.

Romans 15:4

When Paul mentions the things written in earlier times, he is referencing the Old Testament Scriptures. He tells us those things were written for our instruction. In this manner, the same apostle uses the Old Testament example of Israel as a means of instruction for the brethren at Corinth.

1 For I do not want you to be unaware, brethren, that our fathers were all under the cloud and all passed through the sea;

2 and all were baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea;

3 and all ate the same spiritual food;

4 and all drank the same spiritual drink, for they were drinking from a spiritual rock which followed them; and the rock was Christ.

5 Nevertheless, with most of them God was not well-pleased; for they were laid low in the wilderness.

6 Now these things happened as examples for us, so that we would not crave evil things as they also craved.

7 Do not be idolaters, as some of them were; as it is written, “The people sat down to eat and drink, and stood up to play.”

8 Nor let us act immorally, as some of them did, and twenty-three thousand fell in one day.

9 Nor let us try the Lord, as some of them did, and were destroyed by the serpents.

10 Nor grumble, as some of them did, and were destroyed by the destroyer.

11 Now these things happened to them as an example, and they were written for our instruction, upon whom the ends of the ages have come.

1 Corinthians 10:1–11

To the Galatians, Paul, while emphasizing that we are freed from the demands of the Old Covenant, pointed out a great value to the Law of Moses.

Therefore the Law has become our tutor to lead us to Christ, so that we may be justified by faith.

Galatians 3:24

To Timothy, Paul again makes mention of the Old Testament Scriptures and their value, even to us today.

15 and that from childhood you have known the sacred writings which are able to give you the wisdom that leads to salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus.

16 All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness;

17 so that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work.

2 Timothy 3:15–17

The sacred writings to which Paul makes reference, are the Old Testament Scriptures. Notice that these can provide the wisdom that leads to salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. As he told the Galatians, the Law was a tutor to bring us to Christ. The Old Testament, from Genesis to Malachi, points the way to Jesus Christ.

The Old Testament is full of relevant examples for our learning. There are important prophecies concerning Christ and the church (2 Pet. 1:19-21). The Psalms provide comfort and encouragement. The book of Proverbs provides us with timeless wisdom. Needless to say, with all its history, examples, poetry, prophecy, encouragement, and instruction, the Old Testament Scriptures are a valuable resource for the church today.

This is an overview study of the Old Testament. As such, please know that this will not be a detailed study of every person, prophecy, and event covered between Genesis and Malachi. Our goal will be to identify key events, people, instruction, and prophecies. It is hoped that our efforts will increase our appreciation for, and knowledge of, the thirty-nine books that comprise the greater half of our Bible.

John Buttrey II

The Pentateuch

The first five books of the Old Testament are often called, “The Pentateuch.” This is a Greek term that means “Five books.” In Hebrew, these same five books are known as the Torah. Torah is a Hebrew word which means “instruction” or “law” (cf. Ex. 12:49). In the Bible, the Torah is known as the “Law of Moses” or the “Book of Moses” (cf. Ezra 7:6; Neh. 8:1; 2 Chron. 25:4; Luke 24:44). Sometimes they may be referenced as simply “the Law” (Rom. 8:3). The common description “the books of Moses” speaks of the inspired authorship of Moses. One resource notes of these five books:

The books of Exodus (32:16), Leviticus (1:1), Numbers (1:1), and Deuteronomy (31:26) all make an explicit claim to inspiration. Genesis alone has no such direct claim. However, Genesis too was considered to be part of the “book of Moses” (cf. Neh. 3:1; 2 Chron. 35:12) and by virtue of that association has the same divine authority. Whatever holds for one book holds for all of them. In other words, a claim by or for one book in this canonical section is thereby a claim for all of them, since they were all unified under a title such as *the* book of Moses or *the* law of Moses.¹

In this lesson we will discuss each of these five books individually. We will cover their contents, key events, and key people.

Genesis

Genesis, as its title would suggest, is the book of beginnings. In Genesis we have recorded for us a number of significant beginnings.

- The beginning of the world
- The beginning of days
- The beginning of all life
- The beginning of man
- The beginning of marriage
- The beginning of sin
- The beginning of sacrifice
- The beginning of prophecy
- The beginning of murder
- The beginning of death
- The beginning of covenants

¹ Geisler, N. L., & Nix, W. E. (1996). *A general introduction to the Bible* (Rev. and expanded.) (71). Chicago: Moody Press.

Truly, Genesis is an appropriate title for a book covering so many beginnings. In fact, Genesis begins in the beginning.

In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.

Genesis 1:1

This verse may well be called the most important verse in all of the Bible. If this verse is not true, than nothing that follows it is true. This verse establishes the important truth that God is the Creator of all. Think of the importance of this grand truth. It upholds everything we know, and everything we are, as beings created in the image of God. This world did not happen by itself. There was no big bang. There was no cosmic accident. Because God exists and created everything there is meaning and purpose to our existence. Everything we as believers hold so dear rests upon the truth of this one verse. One resource offered the following important insights from the first verse of our Bible.

This opening verse of the Bible, seven words in the Hebrew, establishes seven key truths upon which the rest of the Bible is based. First, God exists. The essential first step in pleasing God is recognizing His existence (Heb. 11:6). Second, God existed before there was a universe and will exist after the universe perishes (Heb. 1:10-12). Third, God is the main character in the Bible. He is the subject of the first verb in the Bible (in fact, He is the subject of more verbs than any other character) and performs a wider variety of activities than any other being in the Bible. Fourth, as Creator God has done what no human being could ever do; in its active form the Hebrew verb *bara'*, meaning "to create," never has a human subject. Thus *bara'* signifies a work that is uniquely God's. Fifth, God is mysterious; though the Hebrew word for God is plural, the verb form of which "God" is the subject is singular. This is perhaps a subtle allusion to God's Trinitarian nature: He is three divine persons in one divine essence. Sixth, God is the Creator of heaven and earth. He doesn't just modify pre-existing matter but calls matter into being out of nothing (Ps. 33:6, 9; Heb. 11:3). Seventh, God is not dependent on the universe, but the universe is totally dependent on God (Heb. 1:3).²

That God is the Creator of everything places Him far above any man-made gods. Through the years, the gods that man created were all gods of the creation. There were gods fashioned after cattle or oxen. There were gods of the rains. The sun god. The moon god. A fly god. A frog god. But the God of Genesis 1:1 that we know created all of these things. He is therefore greater than any of these so-called "gods." The apostle Paul pointed this out.

² Holman Christian Study Bible, Comment on Genesis 1:1.

20 For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes, His eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly seen, being understood through what has been made, so that they are without excuse.

21 For even though they knew God, they did not honor Him as God or give thanks, but they became futile in their speculations, and their foolish heart was darkened.

22 Professing to be wise, they became fools,

23 and exchanged the glory of the incorruptible God for an image in the form of corruptible man and of birds and four-footed animals and crawling creatures.

Romans 1:20-23

As the Creator of everything, God is far above man and beast. Yet man, denying the existence of God, has chosen to worship beasts. Interesting, since God gave him dominion over the beasts. Today, man continues to deny the existence of God. This is another reason why Genesis 1:1 becomes the most important verse in the Bible. It is a verse which we must vigorously defend.

Listen to what is at stake should Genesis 1:1 be discounted by mankind. Here are the words of Cornell University professor William Provine. He is a Darwinist. He does not accept the Bible's account of creation. He certainly would not accept Genesis 1:1 as being truthful. Describing the conflict between science (evolutionary science) and the Bible, he says this:

Modern science directly implies that the world is organized strictly in accordance with mechanical principles. There are no purposive principles whatsoever in nature. There are no gods and no designing forces that are rationally detectable...

Second, modern science directly implies that there are no inherent moral or ethical laws, no absolute guiding principles for human society.

Third, human beings are marvelously complex machines. The individual human becomes an ethical person by means of two primary mechanisms: heredity and environmental influences. That is all there is.

Fourth, we must conclude that when we die, we die and that is the end of us...

Finally, free will as it is traditionally conceived—the freedom to make uncoerced and unpredictable choices among alternative possible courses of action—simply does not exist.... There is no way that evolutionary process as currently conceived can produce a being that is truly free to make choices.³

While I do not agree with this man's thinking, or his scientific conclusions regarding our origin, I appreciate his honesty. He tells us exactly what is at stake. Let me summarize what he said.

³ William Provine, as quoted by Philip Johnson, *Darwin on Trial*, 126-127.

1. There is No God.
2. There is No eternity or Life after Death.
3. There are No Moral Absolutes (Essentially No Right or Wrong).
4. There is No Meaning to Life.
5. There is no Free Will.

We are seeing this type of thinking exhibited more and more in our society. Let's consider each of the points made by the professor.

Point 1: *"There is No God."* Contrary to this statement of evolutionary belief, Genesis 1:1 begins, "In the beginning God." Right away you see the conflict between evolution and the Bible. With the truth of Genesis 1:1 we can know that there is indeed a God. What a comforting thought! There is Someone greater. There is One who cares. There is One who loves. The fact that God exists defeats everyone of these dangerous points of thinking that are destroying our society.

Point 2: *"There is No Eternity or Life after Death."* As William Provine put it, "...we die and that is the end of us." What a hopeless and pathetic way to view life and death. Remember, for the evolutionary school of belief, mankind is just an advanced form of monkey. Monkeys have no soul. There is no monkey heaven. There is no place where animals go when they die. They truly return to dust.

This type of thinking has led to human life being increasingly devalued. Why shouldn't it be? If we are nothing more than an advanced form of monkey, and that only by random selection, what real value is there in us?

This thinking is so contrary to the Bible. Scripture tells us we are created in the image of God (Gen. 1:27). In Psalm 139 David talks of how we are fearfully and wonderfully made by the hand of God (Ps. 139:14). That we are created in His image gives us value.

When Genesis 1:1 tells us "In the beginning God..." it is not describing God's beginning. God is eternal. In this first verse of the Bible we get our first glimpse at the possibility of eternity. Because God is eternal and created us in His image we begin to learn of hope (John 3:16; Rom. 6:23). Our hope came to fruition in the resurrection of God's Son from the dead. Though our physical bodies will die and return to dust, we have the hope of being raised from the dead in an eternal body (Titus 1:2). And in that spiritual body we will spend eternity in heaven (1 Cor. 15:50-58).

Point 3: *"There are No Moral Absolutes."* In other words, there is no right or wrong. What a convenient belief. If there is no Genesis 1:1; if there is no "In the beginning God created the

heavens and the earth”; than what standard of right or wrong is there, but that which man himself creates? Man does not determine what is right or wrong. God tells us what is right or wrong.

Point 4: “*There is No Meaning to Life.*” King Solomon set out to find meaning and purpose to life. The conclusion he reached is written in the book of Ecclesiastes.

13 The conclusion, when all has been heard, is: fear God and keep His commandments, because this applies to every person.

14 For God will bring every act to judgment, everything which is hidden, whether it is good or evil.

Ecclesiastes 12:13-14

This too is an important verse. It is a grand truth, but it would not be true without Genesis 1:1. Because God created everything and everyone, because He has set forth the moral standard by which all are to live, He is the only One qualified to judge mankind.

Point 5: “*There is no Free Will.*” From an evolutionary point of view, free will cannot really exist. It is natural extinct and environment that determines one’s actions. Again, what a hopeless and pathetic way to view human life.

All of these points considered and their impact on man’s thinking and values, and its destructive viewpoint toward Christianity and the Bible, listen to what one atheist wrote back in 1978.

Christianity is—must be!—totally committed to the special creation as described in Genesis, and Christianity must fight with its full might, fair or foul, against the theory of evolution... It becomes clear now that the whole justification for Jesus’ life and death is predicated on the existence of Adam and the forbidden fruit he and Eve ate. Without original sin, who needs to be redeemed? Without Adam’s fall into a life of constant sin terminated by death, what purpose is there to Christianity? None.... What this all means is that Christianity cannot lose the Genesis account of creation... The battle must be waged, for Christianity is fighting its very life.⁴

The evolutionists know what’s at stake, do we? This is another reason why I believe Genesis 1:1 is the single most important verse in the Bible. This one verse contains all we need to know to having meaning, purpose, love, hope, and peace in life. If these words are not true, there is no meaning, purpose, love (as it should be love), hope, or peace.

⁴ Richard Bozarth, quoted by Hank Hanegraaff, *The Face*, 19.

We must with all our ability defend the Genesis account of creation as being six literal days, with God resting on the seventh. To even allow for the possibility of theistic evolution calls into question Genesis 1:1. If the days become symbolic then why not God? If God needs millions of years to accomplish what Genesis says He did in a twenty-four hour day, then God's power is reduced.

The Beginning of Sin

A very significant beginning covered in Genesis is the beginning of sin. In theological terms this is described as "the fall of man." The events surrounding the fall are covered in the third chapter of Genesis. The rest of Scripture, from Genesis three to Acts chapter two reveal God plan to rescue man from sin. When Adam and Eve sinned, they were cast from their beautiful garden home and from access to the tree of life. In Christ, man regains what he lost in the garden. He regains access to Christ as our tree of life.

The Beginning of Prophecy

Another significant beginning found in Genesis is the beginning of prophecy. The prophecy is given as God is explaining to Adam, Eve, and the serpent, the consequences of their sinful actions. To the serpent, or devil, God says the following:

And I will put enmity Between you and the woman, And between your seed and her seed; He shall bruise you on the head, And you shall bruise him on the heel."

Genesis 3:15

This prophecy contains a number of significant firsts. It is the first prophecy of the virgin birth. This is seen in the words "her seed." These two words come from the Hebrew word *zera*. This word as it appears here is a singular noun with a feminine singular suffix. What a powerful prophetic picture given this early in man's history. As Paul said, God had a plan to rescue us before the foundation of the world (Eph. 1:4).

Another first in this prophecy deals directly with God's plan to save mankind through His Son. The words spoken to the serpent, "He shall bruise you on the head" are a prophecy of Christ's resurrection from the dead. This makes this the first prophecy of His resurrection. This significant event would bruise the devil's head or authority with respect to death. The Hebrew writer stated it well.

Therefore, since the children share in flesh and blood, He Himself likewise also partook of the same, that through death He might render powerless him who had the power of death, that is, the devil,

Hebrews 2:14

Still another first contained in this text is the first prophecy of the cross. This is seen in the words, “you shall bruise Him on the heel.” This is a prophetic reference to the physical suffering Jesus would bear on the cross.

As you can see, the beginnings covered in the first book of the Bible make it a valuable book of history. As a book of history it should be understood that the language of Genesis is literal, and not symbolic as is often found in the books of prophecy. Being a literal record, Genesis describes six *literal* days in its account of creation (Gen. 1-2). Genesis records a *literal* flood with a literal ark (Gen. 6-9). Sodom and Gomorrah were *literally* destroyed (Gen. 19). The people and events covered in the book of Genesis were all historically real.

The history covered in Genesis can basically be divided into two sections. Section one covers four great events. Section two covers four great men. These are illustrated in the following chart:

FOUR GREAT EVENTS: GENESIS 1-11	FOUR GREAT MEN: GENESIS 12-50
Creation (Chapters 1-2)	Abraham (Chapters 12-25:11)
Fall of Man (Chapter 3)	Isaac (Chapters 25:19-27:46)
Flood (Chapters 6-9)	Jacob (Chapters 28-36)
Nations (Chapter 11)	Joseph (Chapters 37-50)

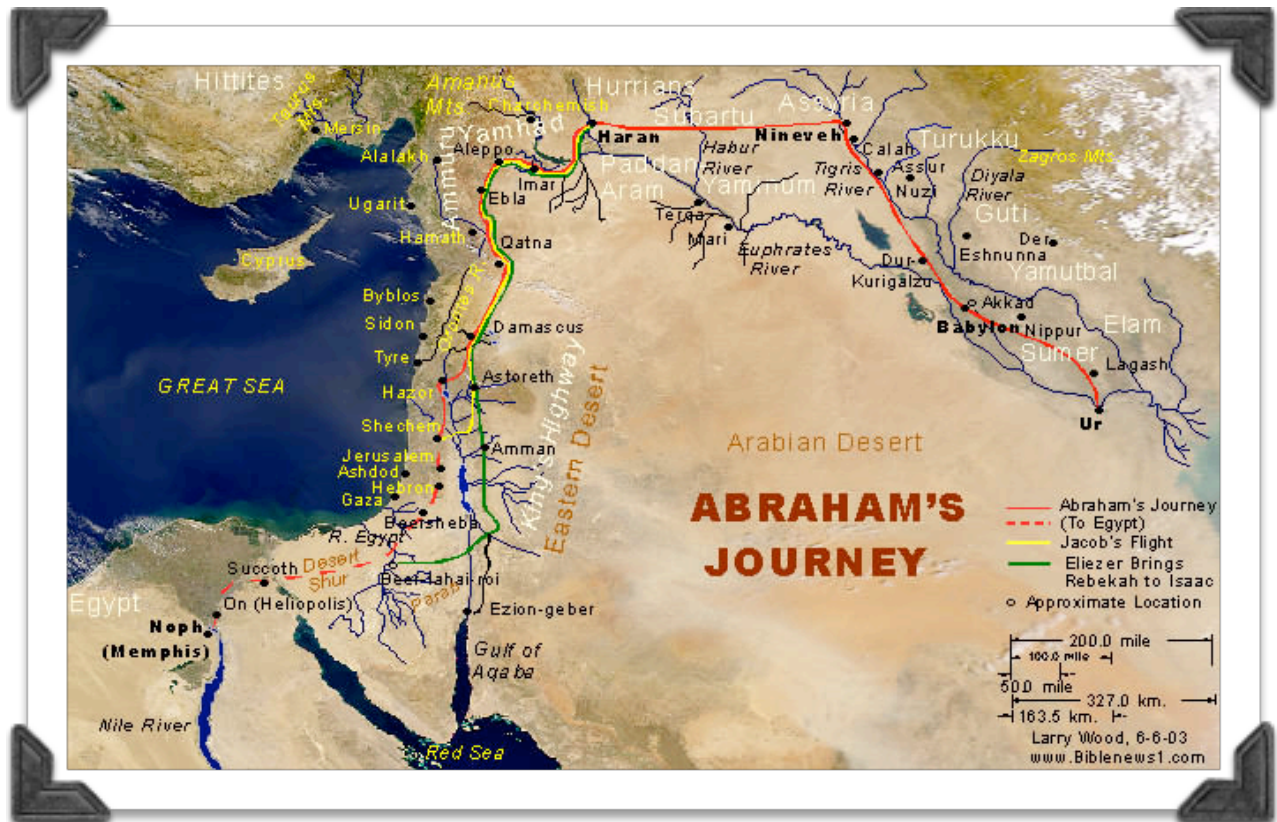
The first section of Genesis leads up to Abraham. The second section begins with the promises to Abraham and continues through their development to his descendants. Here are the promises as they are first stated to Abraham, who at the time was known as Abram.

1 Now the Lord said to Abram, “Go forth from your country, And from your relatives And from your father’s house, To the land which I will show you;
 2 And I will make you a great nation, And I will bless you, And make your name great; And so you shall be a blessing;
 3 And I will bless those who bless you, And the one who curses you I will curse. And in you all the families of the earth will be blessed.”

Genesis 12:1–3

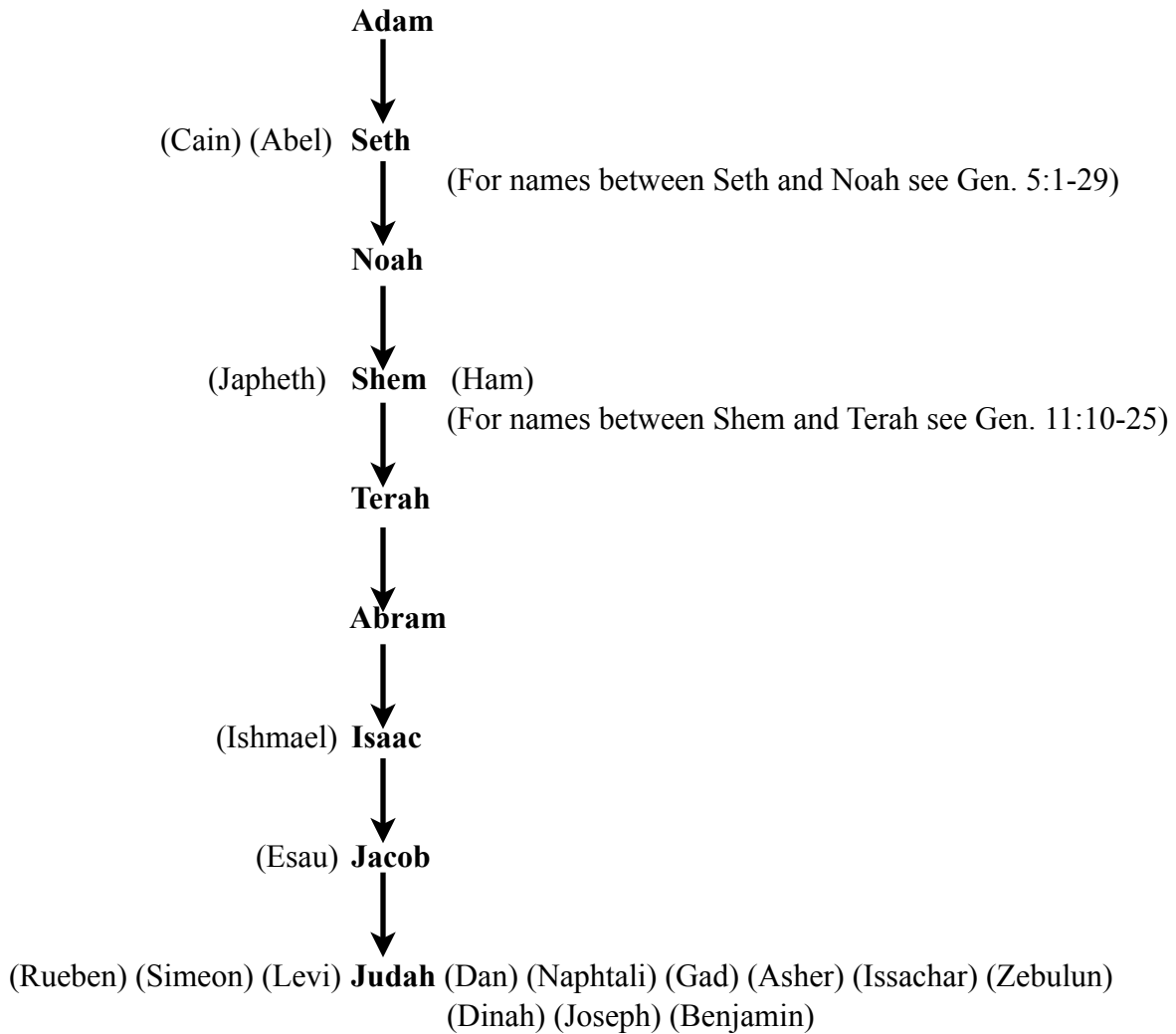
The Lord appeared to Abram and said, “To your descendants I will give this land.” So he built an altar there to the Lord who had appeared to him.

Genesis 12:7



The promises given to Abram were physical and spiritual in nature. Physically, the promises related to becoming a great nation and the obtaining the land of Canaan. The promise that all the nations of the earth would be blessed through his seed was spiritual in nature. The fulfillment of this promise is found in Christ (cf. Gal. 3:16, 29). The book of Genesis records these same promises being mentioned to Isaac (Gen. 26:3-4, 24) and Jacob (Gen. 35:9-12). From Genesis all the way to the book of Acts, Scripture shows the development and fulfillment of these promises.

As a book of beginnings, Genesis gives us the beginnings of the genealogy of Jesus. The record begins with the first man and takes us all the way to Judah the son of Jacob. In terms of key figures, the genealogy recorded in Genesis would be as follows:



As the book of Genesis closes, it sets the stage for the book of Exodus. Chapters 37-50 record how Jacob's family came to be in the land of Egypt. This is where they are found as the second book in our Bible begins.

Exodus

The opening verse of the book of Exodus connects it right where Genesis concluded. Exodus opens with a listing of the names of the family of Jacob who came to Egypt during the famine (Gen. 41:50-42:5). We are told they were seventy in number. However, the seventy quickly grew in number. Moses tells us the sons of Israel were fruitful, increased greatly, and became exceedingly mighty and the land was full of them (Ex. 1:7).

To set the stage for the Exodus from Egypt, the book records a new king (Pharaoh) had come to power who did not know Joseph (1:8). This is believed by some to represent a change in dynasties in Egypt. In other words, a new Pharaoh came to power who had no knowledge of all Joseph had done for Egypt. All he knows is that the land is full of Hebrews. This creates a great concern for Egypt's king and results in great burdens for the people of Israel (Ex. 1:9-22).

The name of the second book in our Bible comes from a Greek word which means "a going out" or "way out." It comes from the Greek title of the book as found in the Septuagint. The Hebrew title of the book comes from the first few words of the book and means "these are the names."

The time of the exodus fits a promise made to Abraham. God told the man of faith, his descendants would come out in the fourth generation (Gen. 15:16). The four generations are as follows: Levi, Kohath, Amram, and Moses (Ex. 6:14-20).

The book of Exodus covers much more than just the exodus of Israel out of Egypt. That event is only found in chapters 13-15. Exodus deals with events leading up to, and after the actual exodus. Consider some of these key (and familiar) events covered in the book of Exodus:

- The Birth of Moses (2:1-3)
- Moses at the Burning Bush (3:1-4:17)
- The Ten Plagues (7:14-12:32)
- Institution of Passover (12:1-22)
- Exodus Out of Egypt (12:33)
- Parting of the Sea (14:9-14:29)
- Bitter Water made Sweet (15:22-25)
- Manna from Heaven (16:1-7)
- Water from the Rock (17:1-7)
- Amalek Defeated (17:8-16)
- Arrival at Mount Sinai (19:1)
- Ten Commandments given (20:1-17)
- Instructions for the Tabernacle (25:1-31:18)
- The Golden Calf (32:1-32:35)
- Tablets of Stone Replaced (34:1-5)
- Completion of the Tabernacle (38:1-40:38)

As with the book of Genesis, Exodus is a valuable historical resource. Much can be learned from the many challenges experienced by Israel.

Without a doubt, the events most recognized in Exodus would be the ten plagues. A study of these ten plagues shows an attack on all of Egypt's gods. God was letting the Egyptians know that there was only one true God (cf. Ex. 9:16). Easton's Bible Dictionary summarizes the plagues as follows:

- The river Nile was turned into blood, and the fish died, and the river stank, so that the Egyptians loathed to drink of the river (Exodus 7:14-25).
- The plague of frogs (Exodus 8:1-15).
- The plague of lice (Heb. kinnim, properly gnats or mosquitoes; Compare Psalms 78:45; 105:31), "out of the dust of the land" (Exodus 8:16-19).
- The plague of flies (Heb. arob, rendered by the LXX. dog-fly), (Exodus 8:21-32).
- The murrain (Ex.9:1-7), or epidemic pestilence which carried off vast numbers of cattle in the field. Warning was given of its coming.
- The sixth plague, of "boils and blains," like the third, was sent without warning (Ex.9:8-17). It is called (Deuteronomy 28:27) "the botch of Egypt," A.V.; but in RSV, "the boil of Egypt." "The magicians could not stand before Moses" because of it.
- The plague of hail, with fire and thunder (Exodus 9:18-35). Warning was given of its coming. (Compare Psalms 18:13; 105:32-33).
- The plague of locusts, which covered the whole face of the earth, so that the land was darkened with them (Exodus 10:1-15). The Hebrew name of this insect, *Arbeh*, points to the "multitudinous" character of this visitation. Warning was given before this plague came.
- After a short interval the plague of darkness succeeded that of the locusts; and it came without any special warning (Exodus 10:21-29). The darkness covered "all the land of Egypt" to such an extent that "they saw not one another." It did not, however, extend to the land of Goshen.
- The last and most fearful of these plagues was the death of the first-born of man and of beast (Exodus 11:4-5; 12:29, 30). The exact time of the visitation was announced, "about midnight", which would add to the horror of the infliction. Its extent also is specified, from the first-born of the king to the first-born of the humblest slave, and all the first-born of beasts. But from this plague the Hebrews were completely exempted. The Lord "put a difference" between them and the Egyptians.⁵

In chapter twelve of Exodus we find the institution of the Passover Feast. Many insights can be found in the types of the Passover. For example, consider these interesting types and their relation to the Lord's Supper:

⁵ Easton's Bible Dictionary.

Types in the Passover and Lord's Supper

The Passover Feast

The Old Covenant Feast
The Passover Lamb
The Flesh and Unleavened Bread
The Bitter Herbs
The Blood of the Lamb
The Sheaf of First Fruits
Until the Cross
Deliverance and Redemption

The Lord's Supper

The New Covenant Feast
The Lamb of God
The Bread Symbolic of His Flesh
The Sufferings of Christ
The Blood of Christ
The Resurrected Christ
After the Cross
Deliverance and Redemption

The faithfulness and power of God are seen throughout the book of Exodus as He provides deliverance for the people, just as He had promised (cf. Ex. 3:21-22 and Ex. 12:35-36).

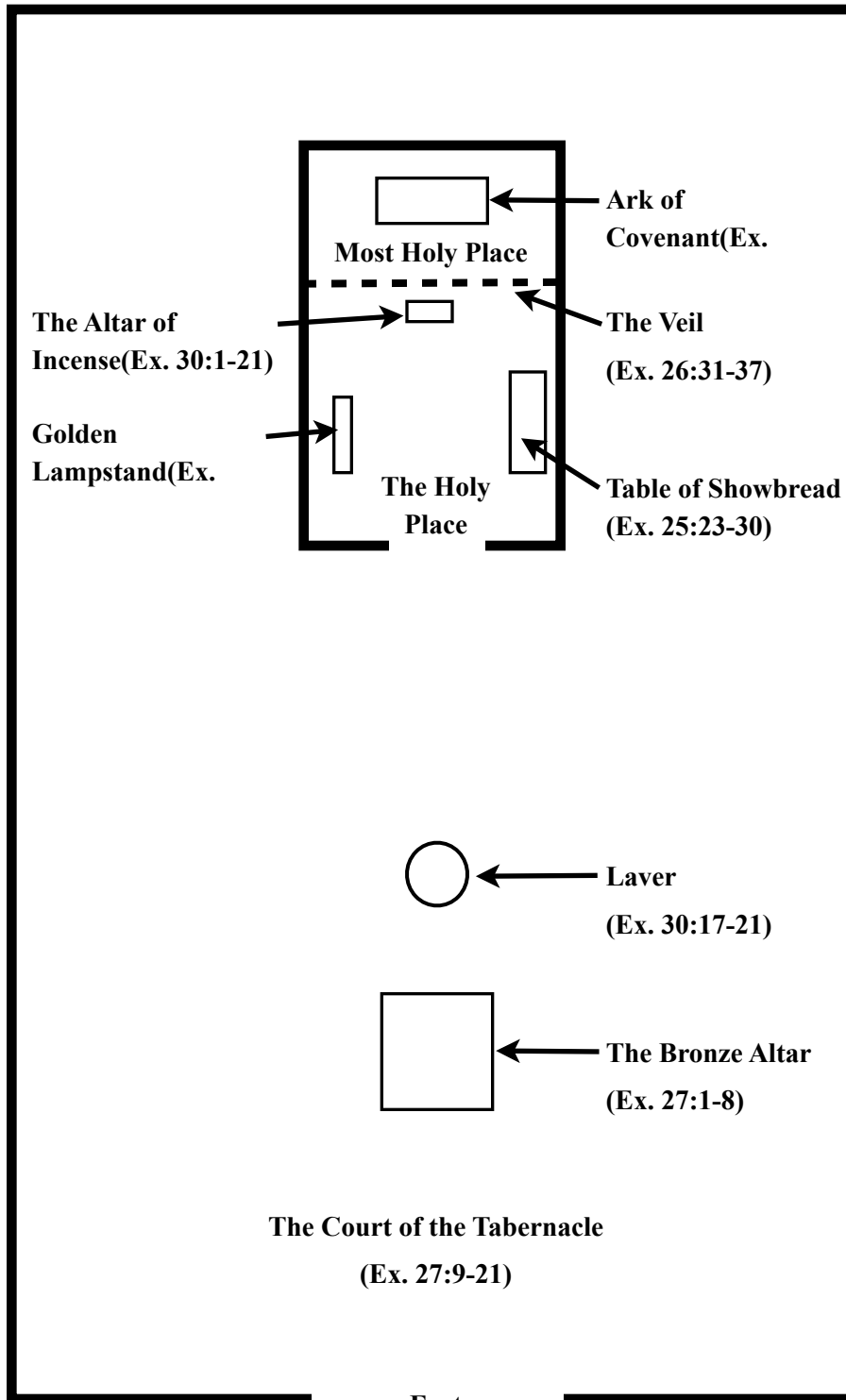
The Tabernacle

In Exodus 25-31 the description of the tabernacle they were to build is given by God to Moses. The tabernacle became Israel's center of worship. It was here sacrifices would be made to God. It is here the people would learn the cost of sin and joy of forgiveness.

Five names in Scripture describe the Tabernacle. It was called "a sanctuary" (Ex. 25:8), denoting that it was set apart for a holy God. "Tabernacle" (Ex. 25:9) reveals that it was the dwelling place of God among His people. "Tent" (Ex. 26:36) designated it as a temporary dwelling place of God. It was called "the tabernacle of the congregation" (Ex. 29:42) because it was where God met with His people. The final expression, "the tabernacle of testimony" (Ex. 38:21), described the law given to Moses, which was kept in the ark of the covenant located in the holy of holies. What an appropriate appellation for the Tabernacle, which stood as a testimony to Israel and the world of God's truth and glory.⁶

⁶ Levy, D. M. (1993). *The tabernacle : Shadows of the Messiah : Its sacrifices, services, and priesthood*. Bellmawr, NJ: Friends of Israel Gospel Ministry.

West



(Ex. 27:13ff; Lev. 16:14)

The Tabernacle

As you can see in the diagram on page 20, the process of cleansing in the tabernacle went in an east to west direction (cf. Ps. 103:12). A deeper study of the tabernacle and its various furnishings reveals a number of interesting types. The apostle Paul makes reference to Christ being displayed publicly as a propitiation for our sin (Rom. 3:25). This is an allusion to the mercy seat which sat on top of the ark. It spoke of the events which took place in the most holy place on the Day of Atonement (Lev. 16).

The lampstand would be a type of Christ as the Light of the World (Jn. 8:12). Within the ark of the covenant were the Law, the manna, and Aaron's rod that budded. This is the way (manna), the truth (Law), and the life (Aaron rod's: *Christ resurrection*) as in John 14:6. The table of showbread would speak of Christ as the Bread of life (John 6:48). The Hebrew writer draws parallels from the tabernacle to Christ (Heb. 8-9).

In the bronze altar we get a picture of the price for sin. This was ultimately accomplished through Jesus Christ. In the laver we see the need for cleansing if one is to approach God. This is fulfilled in baptism. The whole concept of God tabernacling among the people is fulfilled in Jesus. As John put it, the Word became flesh and dwelt (to fix one's tabernacle or tent) among us (John 1:14).

17 Now in the first month of the second year, on the first day of the month, the tabernacle was erected.

18 Moses erected the tabernacle and laid its sockets, and set up its boards, and inserted its bars and erected its pillars.

19 He spread the tent over the tabernacle and put the covering of the tent on top of it, just as the Lord had commanded Moses.

20 Then he took the testimony and put it into the ark, and attached the poles to the ark, and put the mercy seat on top of the ark.

21 He brought the ark into the tabernacle, and set up a veil for the screen, and screened off the ark of the testimony, just as the Lord had commanded Moses.

22 Then he put the table in the tent of meeting on the north side of the tabernacle, outside the veil.

23 He set the arrangement of bread in order on it before the Lord, just as the Lord had commanded Moses.

24 Then he placed the lampstand in the tent of meeting, opposite the table, on the south side of the tabernacle.

25 He lighted the lamps before the Lord, just as the Lord had commanded Moses.

26 Then he placed the gold altar in the tent of meeting in front of the veil;

27 and he burned fragrant incense on it, just as the Lord had commanded Moses.

28 Then he set up the veil for the doorway of the tabernacle.

29 He set the altar of burnt offering before the doorway of the tabernacle of the tent of meeting, and offered on it the burnt offering and the meal offering, just as the Lord had commanded Moses.

30 He placed the laver between the tent of meeting and the altar and put water in it for washing.

Exodus 40:17–30

The Ten Commandments

Aside from the exodus out of Egypt, what most students of Scripture remember about Exodus is the giving of the Ten Commandments from Mount Sinai (Ex. 20:117). Though these commandments are given in the book of Exodus, they are found throughout the Bible, as the chart below illustrates.

The Ten Commandments in the Bible⁷

COMMAND	VERSES	O.T. VERSES	N.T. VERSES	JESUS SAID
No other gods before Me	Ex. 20:3; Dt. 5:7	Ex 20:23; 34:14; Dt 6:4, 13-14; 2 Kg 17:35	Acts 5:29	Mt 4:10; 6:33; 22:37-40
No idols	Ex. 20:4-6; Dt. 5:8-10	Ex 32:8; 34:17; Lev 19:4; 26:1; Dt 4:15-20; 7:25	Acts 17:29-31; 1 Co 8:4-6, 10-13	Mt 6:24; Lk 16:13
Do Not use Lord's name in vain	Ex. 20:7; Dt. 5:11	Ex 22:28; Lv 18:21; 19:21; 22:2; 24:16; Eze 39:7	James 5:12	Mt 5:33-37; 6:9; 23:16-22
Remember Sabbath	Ex 20:8-11; Dt 5:12-15	Gen 2:3; Ex 16:23-30; 31:13-16; 35:2-3; Lv 19:30	Col 2:16	Mk 2:23-28
Honor Parents	Ex. 20:12; Dt. 5:16	Ex 21:17; Lv. 19:3	Eph 6:1-3; Col 3:20	Mt 15:4-6; 19:19
Do Not Murder	Ex. 20:13; Dt. 5:17	Gen 9:6; Lv 24:17	Rom 13:9-10	Mt 45:21-24
Do Not Commit Adultery	Ex. 20:14; Dt. 5:18	Lv 18:20; 20:10; Num 5:12-31	Rom. 2:22; James 4:4	Mt 5:27-28
Do Not Steal	Ex. 20:15; Dt. 5:19	Lv 19:11-13; Eze 18:7	Rom 2:21; Eph 4:28	Mt 19:18
No False Witness	Ex. 20:16; Dt. 5:20	Ex 23:1, 7; Pr 6:19	Eph 4:25, 31	Mt 5:37; 19:18; Mk
Do Not Covet	Ex. 20:17; Dt. 5:21	Dt 7:25; Ps 62:10	Rom 7:7	Lk 12:15-34

⁷ Chart adapted from Holman Study Bible

Leviticus

The book of Leviticus does not read as smoothly as Genesis and Exodus. This is because Leviticus is more a book of law than a book of historical accounts. Its title comes from the Latin form of the Greek title of the book, and means “about the Levites” or “pertaining to the Levites.”⁸ The Levites were the tribe chosen by God to minister in the tabernacle and later the temple. Easton’s Bible Dictionary offers this in regards to the Levites:

When the Israelites left Egypt, the ancient manner of worship was still observed by them, the eldest son of each house inheriting the priest’s office. At Sinai the first change in this ancient practice was made. A hereditary priesthood in the family of Aaron was then instituted (Ex. 28:1). But it was not till that terrible scene in connection with the sin of the golden calf that the tribe of Levi stood apart and began to occupy a distinct position (Ex. 32). The religious primogeniture was then conferred on this tribe, which henceforth was devoted to the service of the sanctuary (Num. 3:11–13). They were selected for this purpose because of their zeal for the glory of God (Ex. 32:26), and because, as the tribe to which Moses and Aaron belonged, they would naturally stand by the lawgiver in his work.

The Levitical order consisted of all the descendants of Levi’s three sons, Gershon, Kohath, and Merari; whilst Aaron, Amram’s son (Amram, son of Kohath), and his issue constituted the priestly order. The age and qualification for Levitical service are specified in Num. 4:3, 23, 30, 39, 43, 47.

They were not included among the armies of Israel (Num. 1:47; 2:33; 26:62), but were reckoned by themselves. They were the special guardians of the tabernacle (Num. 1:51; 18:22–24). The Gershonites pitched their tents on the west of the tabernacle (3:23), the Kohathites on the south (3:29), the Merarites on the north (3:35), and the priests on the east (3:38). It was their duty to move the tent and carry the parts of the sacred structure from place to place. They were given to Aaron and his sons the priests to wait upon them and do work for them at the sanctuary services (Num. 8:19; 18:2–6).

As being wholly consecrated to the service of the Lord, they had no territorial possessions. Jehovah was their inheritance (Num. 18:20; 26:62; Deut. 10:9; 18:1, 2), and for their support it was ordained that they should receive from the other tribes the tithes of the produce of the land.⁹

Leviticus is full of instructions for the priests and Levites. It provided information on the various feast days the people were to observe. It outlines laws regarding health and morality (cf. Lev. 18-22). The Year of Jubilee is outlined for the people (Lev. 25). It outlines in great detail the sacrificial system for the children of Israel.

⁸ Charles R. Swindoll, *God’s Masterwork, Genesis through Second Chronicles*, 29.

⁹ Easton, M. (1996). *Easton’s Bible dictionary*. Oak Harbor, WA: Logos Research Systems, Inc.

While we are not under the Old Law, Leviticus instructs us in the seriousness of worshipping God in spirit and in truth (John 4:24). The example of Nadab and Abihu is powerful in conveying this important message (Lev. 10:1-4).

SACRIFICES IN LEVITICUS
Burnt Offerings (Lev. 1, 6:8-13)
Grain Offerings (Lev. 2; 6:14-23)
Peace Offerings (Lev. 3; 7:11-20)
Sin Offerings (Lev. 4; 6:24-30)
Guilt Offerings (Lev. 5:1-6:7)
Sacrifices for Aaron and His Sons (Lev. 8)
Sacrifices for Passover, Feast of Unleavened Bread, and First Fruits (Lev. 23:5-14)
Sacrifices for Feast of Weeks (Lev. 23:15-25)
Sacrifices on Day of Atonement (Chapter 16-17, 23:26-24)

Numbers

The book of Numbers covers the journey of the people of Israel to the promised land. It begins at Mount Sinai with a census, or numbering of the people. Another census is taken later in the book (Num. 26). From these numberings of the people the book derives its title.

The first ten chapters of the book are very similar to Leviticus. They are full of instruction for the priests and the people. In Numbers 10:11 Israel moves from Mount Sinai and begins their journey to Canaan.

It is not too long into their journey when Israel begins to complain (Num. 11:1-9). This pattern continues throughout the book. In chapter twelve, Aaron and Miriam complain about Moses being in charge. In chapter fourteen, after hearing the bad reports of the land from ten of the spies, the people complain again. This results in a severe punishment for the people.

27 “How long shall I bear with this evil congregation who are grumbling against Me? I have heard the complaints of the sons of Israel, which they are making against Me.

28 “Say to them, ‘As I live,’ says the Lord, ‘just as you have spoken in My hearing, so I will surely do to you;

29 your corpses will fall in this wilderness, even all your numbered men, according to your complete number from twenty years old and upward, who have grumbled against Me.

30 ‘Surely you shall not come into the land in which I swore to settle you, except Caleb the son of Jephunneh and Joshua the son of Nun.

31 ‘Your children, however, whom you said would become a prey—I will bring them in, and they will know the land which you have rejected.

32 ‘But as for you, your corpses will fall in this wilderness.

Numbers 14:27–32

In chapter sixteen, the complaining of the people is heard in the rebellion of Korah who rose up against Moses. In 16:41 there is even more complaining. It is very surprising that the book was not titled, “Complaining.” What valuable lessons are contained for us in the book of Numbers. In this regard, both the apostle Paul and the Hebrew writer used examples from Numbers for New Testament instruction (cf. 1 Cor. 10:1-14; Heb. 3:12-19).

In the twentieth chapter of Numbers a very significant event occurs in the life of Moses. Here it is as recorded for us by Moses himself.

1 Then the sons of Israel, the whole congregation, came to the wilderness of Zin in the first month; and the people stayed at Kadesh. Now Miriam died there and was buried there.

2 There was no water for the congregation, and they assembled themselves against Moses and Aaron.

3 The people thus contended with Moses and spoke, saying, “If only we had perished when our brothers perished before the Lord!

4 “Why then have you brought the Lord’s assembly into this wilderness, for us and our beasts to die here?

5 “Why have you made us come up from Egypt, to bring us in to this wretched place? It is not a place of grain or figs or vines or pomegranates, nor is there water to drink.”

6 Then Moses and Aaron came in from the presence of the assembly to the doorway of the tent of meeting and fell on their faces. Then the glory of the Lord appeared to them;

7 and the Lord spoke to Moses, saying,

8 “Take the rod; and you and your brother Aaron assemble the congregation and speak to the rock before their eyes, that it may yield its water. You shall thus bring forth water for them out of the rock and let the congregation and their beasts drink.”

9 So Moses took the rod from before the Lord, just as He had commanded him;

10 and Moses and Aaron gathered the assembly before the rock. And he said to them, “Listen now, you rebels; shall we bring forth water for you out of this rock?”

11 Then Moses lifted up his hand and struck the rock twice with his rod; and water came forth abundantly, and the congregation and their beasts drank.

12 But the Lord said to Moses and Aaron, “Because you have not believed Me, to treat Me as holy in the sight of the sons of Israel, therefore you shall not bring this assembly into the land which I have given them.”

13 Those were the waters of Meribah, because the sons of Israel contended with the Lord, and He proved Himself holy among them.

Numbers 20:1–13

Because Moses and Aaron did not honor God, but brought attention to themselves (“shall we bring forth water for you”), they would not lead the people into the promised land. This sets up the book of Deuteronomy.

Deuteronomy

The title “Deuteronomy” comes from a Greek word. *To Deuteronomium Touto*, which means “This Second Law.” The Hebrew title of the book means “The Words.” This comes from the opening words of the book, “These are the words which Moses spoke to all Israel...” (Deut. 1:1).

In the book of Deuteronomy, Moses reminds the people of their journey from Sinai to where they were currently positioned, at the verge of entering into the land of Canaan. The forty years of wandering are complete (Deut. 1:3). This is how the title “Second Law” is derived. Deuteronomy is a retelling of events relating to Israel and their relationship with God. For example, in the fifth chapter, the Ten Commandments are repeated.

In addition to the repeating of previous events, a good portion of the book deals with various laws pertaining to the people (12:1-26:14). The book also includes some important warnings for the people. In chapter seven we find this clear warning to the people:

1 “When the Lord your God brings you into the land where you are entering to possess it, and clears away many nations before you, the Hittites and the Girgashites and the Amorites and the Canaanites and the Perizzites and the Hivites and the Jebusites, seven nations greater and stronger than you,

2 and when the Lord your God delivers them before you and you defeat them, then you shall utterly destroy them. You shall make no covenant with them and show no favor to them.

Deuteronomy 7:1–2

We will later find that the people failed to heed this warning. As a result it led to great trouble (cf. Judges 1:21-36). Whenever we fail to obey God as He specifically asks, we will find trouble.

In chapter nine, Moses reminds the people how they had provoked God, and why exactly God was giving them the land.

4 “Do not say in your heart when the Lord your God has driven them out before you, ‘Because of my righteousness the Lord has brought me in to possess this land,’ but it is because of the wickedness of these nations that the Lord is dispossessing them before you.

5 “It is not for your righteousness or for the uprightness of your heart that you are going to possess their land, but it is because of the wickedness of these nations that the Lord your God is driving them out before you, in order to confirm the oath which the Lord swore to your fathers, to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.

6 “Know, then, it is not because of your righteousness that the Lord your God is giving you this good land to possess, for you are a stubborn people.

7 “Remember, do not forget how you provoked the Lord your God to wrath in the wilderness; from the day that you left the land of Egypt until you arrived at this place, you have been rebellious against the Lord.

8 “Even at Horeb you provoked the Lord to wrath, and the Lord was so angry with you that He would have destroyed you.

Deuteronomy 9:4–8

In chapters 28-30 Moses outlines for the people the blessings and the curses. Blessings if they would obey God, curses if they would not. Because of continued disobedience of the people, years later, in the future of the nation, we find the curses fulfilled (cf. Dan. 9:1-16). God bring the Babylonians against the city of Jerusalem. The people are carried away as prisoners to a foreign land. These events are covered in Second Kings, Second Chronicles, Ezra, Nehemiah, Esther, Jeremiah, Lamentations, Ezekiel, and Daniel.

After Babylon destroys the city of Jerusalem, Jeremiah in his lamenting of their punishment identifies curse after curse that had been brought upon the people because of their failure to obey the Lord. In the chart on page 28 some of the warnings are listed, along with Jeremiah’s lamenting of their fulfillment. We should always understand that God means what He says. (Isa. 55:11)

WARNED BY GOD	LAMENTED BY JEREMIAH
Deut. 28:25	Lam. 1:6
Deut. 28:26	Lam. 5:18 (Jer. 7:33; 19:7)
Deut. 28:30	Lam. 5:2, 11
Deut. 28:32	Lam. 1:5
Deut. 28:37	Lam. 2:15
Deut. 28:41	Lam. 1:18
Deut. 28:44	Lam. 1:5
Deut. 28:48	Lam. 5:10
Deut. 28:50	Lam. 2:21; 5:12
Deut. 28:53	Lam. 2:20
Deut. 28:56-57	Lam. 4:10
Deut. 28:65	Lam. 1:3; 5:5

Having reminded the people of God’s law and the blessings and curses, Moses encourages them to choose wisely and obey God.

15 “See, I have set before you today life and prosperity, and death and adversity;

16 in that I command you today to love the Lord your God, to walk in His ways and to keep His commandments and His statutes and His judgments, that you may live and multiply, and that the Lord your God may bless you in the land where you are entering to possess it.

17 “But if your heart turns away and you will not obey, but are drawn away and worship other gods and serve them,

18 I declare to you today that you shall surely perish. You will not prolong your days in the land where you are crossing the Jordan to enter and possess it.

19 “I call heaven and earth to witness against you today, that I have set before you life and death, the blessing and the curse. So choose life in order that you may live, you and your descendants, 20 by loving the Lord your God, by obeying His voice, and by holding fast to Him; for this is your life and the length of your days, that you may live in the land which the Lord swore to your fathers, to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, to give them.”

Deuteronomy 30:15–20

Moses encourages them to choose life. This same choice is one that God has offered man since his beginning in the garden (Gen. 2:16-17). It is a choice available to man today in Jesus Christ (John 3:16; Rom. 6:23).

As the book of Deuteronomy comes to a close, so too does the life of Moses. Before he dies, the Lord has Moses commission Joshua to lead the people into the land of Canaan (Deut. 31:14, 23). The Lord then gives Moses a picture of what was going to happen to the people.

16 The Lord said to Moses, “Behold, you are about to lie down with your fathers; and this people will arise and play the harlot with the strange gods of the land, into the midst of which they are going, and will forsake Me and break My covenant which I have made with them.

17 “Then My anger will be kindled against them in that day, and I will forsake them and hide My face from them, and they will be consumed, and many evils and troubles will come upon them; so that they will say in that day, ‘Is it not because our God is not among us that these evils have come upon us?’

18 “But I will surely hide My face in that day because of all the evil which they will do, for they will turn to other gods.

Deuteronomy 31:16–18

Before he dies, the Lord allows Moses to see the land of Canaan (Deut. 32:45-52). The book closes with the death of Moses and a statement of honor regarding his service to the Lord.

10 Since that time no prophet has risen in Israel like Moses, whom the Lord knew face to face,
11 for all the signs and wonders which the Lord sent him to perform in the land of Egypt against Pharaoh, all his servants, and all his land,

12 and for all the mighty power and for all the great terror which Moses performed in the sight of all Israel.

Deuteronomy 34:10–12

The Books of History

The Old Testament books of history begin with Israel entering and conquering the land of promise. They conclude with the people returning to Jerusalem after a period of exile in Babylon. These books begin with Joshua and end with Esther.

Joshua

The book of Joshua continues where Deuteronomy ends. The name of the book comes from its central character. Joshua is also believed to be the author of the book. With the death of Moses, Joshua is now leading the children of Israel. He has previously been introduced to us in Exodus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy. He fought and defeated Amalek on the way to Mount Sinai (Ex. 17:8-16). He went with Moses up on Mount Sinai (Ex. 24:13; 32:17). He was one of the two faithful spies (Num. 14:6-10). He was commissioned by God to replace Moses (Num. 27:12-23; Deut. 31:14, 23; 34:9). As the book opens, the Lord speaks to Israel's new leader.

1 Now it came about after the death of Moses the servant of the Lord, that the Lord spoke to Joshua the son of Nun, Moses' servant, saying,

2 "Moses My servant is dead; now therefore arise, cross this Jordan, you and all this people, to the land which I am giving to them, to the sons of Israel.

3 "Every place on which the sole of your foot treads, I have given it to you, just as I spoke to Moses.

4 "From the wilderness and this Lebanon, even as far as the great river, the river Euphrates, all the land of the Hittites, and as far as the Great Sea toward the setting of the sun will be your territory.

5 "No man will be able to stand before you all the days of your life. Just as I have been with Moses, I will be with you; I will not fail you or forsake you.

6 "Be strong and courageous, for you shall give this people possession of the land which I swore to their fathers to give them.

7 "Only be strong and very courageous; be careful to do according to all the law which Moses My servant commanded you; do not turn from it to the right or to the left, so that you may have success wherever you go.

8 "This book of the law shall not depart from your mouth, but you shall meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do according to all that is written in it; for then you will make your way prosperous, and then you will have success.

9 "Have I not commanded you? Be strong and courageous! Do not tremble or be dismayed, for the Lord your God is with you wherever you go."

Joshua 1:1-9

With these words of encouragement as a starting point, Joshua's leadership over the people of Israel is detailed, chapter by chapter, battle by battle, throughout the book bearing his name. It is interesting to note that the name of Joshua is the Hebrew equivalent of the more familiar Greek name, Jesus.

Key events in the book of Joshua obviously include the conquering of the land of Canaan. However, individual events that are familiar to many would include: Rahab hiding the spies (Jos. 2:1-24). Crossing the Jordan as they had earlier crossed the Red Sea (Jos. 3:1-4:11). The walls of Jericho tumbling down (Jos. 6:1-27). The sin of Achan (Jos. 7:16-26). The dividing of the land (Jos. 13:1-22:34).

There are some key verses in the book of Joshua that should be remembered by every serious student of Scripture. These relate to the fulfillment of the promises made to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob concerning the possession of the land of Canaan.

14 "Now behold, today I am going the way of all the earth, and you know in all your hearts and in all your souls that not one word of all the good words which the Lord your God spoke concerning you has failed; all have been fulfilled for you, not one of them has failed.

15 "It shall come about that just as all the good words which the Lord your God spoke to you have come upon you, so the Lord will bring upon you all the threats, until He has destroyed you from off this good land which the Lord your God has given you.

16 "When you transgress the covenant of the Lord your God, which He commanded you, and go and serve other gods and bow down to them, then the anger of the Lord will burn against you, and you will perish quickly from off the good land which He has given you."

Joshua 23:14-16

Joshua is very clear in this address to the nation. God had fulfilled the promise He had made concerning the land. God had also earlier fulfilled the promise concerning the nation given to Abraham (cf. Gen. 15:5 and Deut. 1:10). Also contained in these words is a promise, that should they forsake the Lord, He would remove from them the land. This promise is also later fulfilled.

The most famous words from the book of Joshua come the man himself. These words have been placed on posters, cards, books, and mugs. They have inspired many people and are still powerful words for any child of God to follow:

"If it is disagreeable in your sight to serve the Lord, choose for yourselves today whom you will serve: whether the gods which your fathers served which were beyond the River, or the gods of the Amorites in whose land you are living; but as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord."

Joshua 24:15

Judges

The book of Judges is a sad book. It is a stark contrast to the successful battles fought by faith in the book of Joshua.

THE BOOK OF JOSHUA	THE BOOK OF JUDGES
Joy and Achievement	Sorrow and Failure
Strength	Weakness
Victory	Defeat
Unity and Order	Disunity and Anarchy
Freedom	Bondage
Obedience	Disobedience
Conquering	Maintaining
Zeal	Indifference
Consecration	Degradation

Contrasts Between Joshua and Judges¹⁰

The book of Judges opens with a tragic picture of compromise and a failure to fully follow the instruction of the Lord. The Lord's instructions to Moses way back in the book Deuteronomy were not hard to understand.

1 "When the Lord your God brings you into the land where you are entering to possess it, and clears away many nations before you, the Hittites and the Girgashites and the Amorites and the Canaanites and the Perizzites and the Hivites and the Jebusites, seven nations greater and stronger than you,

2 and when the Lord your God delivers them before you and you defeat them, **then you shall utterly destroy them.** You shall make no covenant with them and show no favor to them.

Deuteronomy 7:1-2

These instructions considered, the book of Judges records for us how the people failed to follow the word of the Lord. The tribe of Benjamin did not drive out the Jebusites (1:21). The

¹⁰ Chart taken from *God's Masterwork: Genesis through Second Chronicles*, Charles R. Swindoll, 63.

house of Joseph failed to utterly destroy the inhabitants in their territory (1:22-26). The tribe of Manasseh failed to destroy the inhabitants of their land (1:27-28). The same is said for Ephraim (1:29), Zebulun (1:30), Asher (1:31), and Naphtali (1:33). This failure in obedience sets the stage for the sad events of the book of Judges.

In chapter two of the book, the angel of the Lord speaks to the children of Israel regarding their disobedience and the consequences of their actions.

1 Now the angel of the Lord came up from Gilgal to Bochim. And he said, “I brought you up out of Egypt and led you into the land which I have sworn to your fathers; and I said, ‘I will never break My covenant with you,
2 and as for you, you shall make no covenant with the inhabitants of this land; you shall tear down their altars.’ But you have not obeyed Me; what is this you have done?
3 “Therefore I also said, ‘I will not drive them out before you; but they will become as thorns in your sides and their gods will be a snare to you.’”
4 When the angel of the Lord spoke these words to all the sons of Israel, the people lifted up their voices and wept.
5 So they named that place Bochim; and there they sacrificed to the Lord.

Judges 2:1–5

Adding to this already disappointing scene are even more consequences. Look what happened As a result of another act of disobedience by the people of Israel:

8 Then Joshua the son of Nun, the servant of the Lord, died at the age of one hundred and ten.
9 And they buried him in the territory of his inheritance in Timnath-heres, in the hill country of Ephraim, north of Mount Gaash.
10 All that generation also were gathered to their fathers; and there arose another generation after them who did not know the Lord, nor yet the work which He had done for Israel.

Judges 2:8–10

Here were the results of a failure to teach their children about all that God had done for the nation and about His word. The people were told repeatedly to teach these things to their sons and daughters (Ex. 12:23-27; Deut. 6:4-9; Joshua 4:1-6; 24:14-15). What important lessons the book of Judges holds for us today! The importance of teaching the word of the Lord to our children cannot be emphasized enough (cf. Eph. 6:4; 2 Tim. 1:5; :2:2; 3:14-16; Heb. 5:12ff).

All of the people’s disobedience leads to a common set of words found in Judges. “The sons of Israel did evil in the sight of the Lord” (2:11; 3:7, 12; 4:1; 6:1; 8:34; 10:6; 13:1). For each time of disobedience by the nation, God delivers the people into the hands of an enemy. When the

people repent, God raises up a judge, or deliverer for the people. This pattern is seen throughout the book of Judges.

The book of Judges records the actions of some familiar Bible names. These familiar names were Judges who helped free the people: Deborah (4:1-5:31), Gideon (6:11-8:35), Jephthah (11:1-30), Samson (13:24-16:31). The Hebrew writer mentions some of these names in his great chapter on faith (Heb. 11:32).

The author of Judges is not mentioned. Samuel is thought to be one of the most likely candidates for inspired authorship (cf. 1 Sam. 10:25).

Ruth

The book of Ruth contains a beautiful love story. The events of the book take place during the period of the judges (Ruth 1:1). The name of the book comes from a woman of Moab who chooses to follow the faith of her Hebrew mother-in-law, Naomi. The author of the book is unknown, though it is typically attributed to Samuel. It is one of only two books in the Bible bearing the name of women, Esther being the other. Ruth is also one of four women mentioned in Matthew's genealogy of Jesus (Matt. 1:5).

It is in the book of Ruth that we are first introduced to a key figure in the Bible. Ruth, though at one time a widow, marries a man named Boaz. In time they are blessed with a child. This child becomes the grandfather to this important figure in the scope of the Bible's history. Who is he? Take a look:

The neighbor women gave him a name, saying, "A son has been born to Naomi!" So they named him Obed. He is the father of Jesse, the father of **David**.

Ruth 4:17

First Samuel

The book of First Samuel begins during the period of the judges. Eli is the spiritual leader in Israel (1 Sam. 1:9; 4:18; 1 Kings 2:26-27). The first chapter introduces us to the man who would succeed Eli, and become the key figure in the first sixteen chapters of the book, Samuel. The third chapter describes Samuel's unique calling by the Lord while he was just a boy.

In the eighth chapter of the book, the people of Israel make a horrible request to Samuel. They ask for a king to rule over them (1 Sam. 8:4-5) This request upsets Samuel (1 Sam. 8:6). However, God tells Samuel, "They have not rejected you, they have rejected Me from being king

over them” (1 Sam. 8:7). The people are warned about the consequences of their foolish request (1 Sam. 8:10-18). Yet, despite the serious warning:

19 Nevertheless, the people refused to listen to the voice of Samuel, and they said, “No, but there shall be a king over us,
20 that we also may be like all the nations, that our king may judge us and go out before us and fight our battles.”

1 Samuel 8:19–20

With their refusal to heed the warning, a transition in Israel’s history takes place. They move from the period of judges to a period of kings.

The first king the book of Samuel records is Saul (1 Sam. 13:1). Saul was tall and handsome (1 Sam. 9:1). To the people he must have looked “kingly” (1 Sam. 10:22-24). As king, Saul had problems right from the start. When fear arose among the people about the Philistines coming to wage war, Saul acted foolishly.

8 Now he waited seven days, according to the appointed time set by Samuel, but Samuel did not come to Gilgal; and the people were scattering from him.

9 So Saul said, “Bring to me the burnt offering and the peace offerings.” And he offered the burnt offering.

10 As soon as he finished offering the burnt offering, behold, Samuel came; and Saul went out to meet him and to greet him.

11 But Samuel said, “What have you done?” And Saul said, “Because I saw that the people were scattering from me, and that you did not come within the appointed days, and that the Philistines were assembling at Michmash,

12 therefore I said, ‘Now the Philistines will come down against me at Gilgal, and I have not asked the favor of the Lord.’ So I forced myself and offered the burnt offering.”

13 Samuel said to Saul, “You have acted foolishly; you have not kept the commandment of the Lord your God, which He commanded you, for now the Lord would have established your kingdom over Israel forever.

14 “But now your kingdom shall not endure. The Lord has sought out for Himself a man after His own heart, and the Lord has appointed him as ruler over His people, because you have not kept what the Lord commanded you.”

1 Samuel 13:8–14

Saul had problems in giving foolish orders (1 Sam. 14:24-46). He had problems in being obedient to God (1 Sam. 15:1-25). As a result, Samuel informs Saul:

26 But Samuel said to Saul, “I will not return with you; for you have rejected the word of the Lord, and the Lord has rejected you from being king over Israel.”

27 As Samuel turned to go, Saul seized the edge of his robe, and it tore.

28 So Samuel said to him, “The Lord has torn the kingdom of Israel from you today and has given it to your neighbor, who is better than you.

1 Samuel 15:26–28

The “neighbor who is better than you” is a reference to David. While David is first referenced in the book of Ruth, he first appears in Scripture as living person in First Samuel. Chapter sixteen of the First Samuel records the anointing of David to be king. In chapter seventeen, his well-known victory over Goliath is recorded. The remainder of the book covers Saul’s hatred of David and his constant pursuit of the one who would be Israel’s next king. Much of this history concerns itself with David and his men. The book closes with the death of Saul and his sons.

Second Samuel

The book of Second Samuel continues where First Samuel ended. Originally, the two books were one. It is believed Samuel began as the author of First Samuel. His work is thought to have been completed by the prophets, Nathan and Gad (cf. 1 Chron. 29:29).

In the second chapter of the book, David is made king over Judah. In Israel, Saul’s son Ishbosheth is made king over Israel. Civil war irrupts in the land. The civil war ends with David’s victory. He is then made king over all Israel (2 Sam. 5:1-16).

One of the key events in the book of Second Samuel is David’s plan to build a house for God. While the prophet Nathan initially tells David to go ahead with the plan, God has other ideas (2 Sam. 7:5-17). David was a man of war (1 Chron. 22:7-8). God’s house would be built by a man of peace. Interestingly, God tells Nathan to inform David that God would build a house for him. This text gives us some very important Bible prophecy.

12 “When your days are complete and you lie down with your fathers, I will raise up your descendant after you, who will come forth from you, and I will establish his kingdom.

13 “He shall build a house for My name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever.

14 “I will be a father to him and he will be a son to Me; when he commits iniquity, I will correct him with the rod of men and the strokes of the sons of men,

15 but My lovingkindness shall not depart from him, as I took it away from Saul, whom I removed from before you.

16 “Your house and your kingdom shall endure before Me forever; your throne shall be established forever.” ’ ’

2 Samuel 7:12–16

Reference to these words of prophecy is made many times in Scripture (Isa. 9:7; Eze. 34:23-24; 37:24; Hos. 3:5; Matt. 1:1; 12:23; 22:42-46; Acts 2:24-36). The words of the prophecy are often applied to Solomon, as he was the one who built the temple. However, ultimately these words are spoken of the Christ. They are later directly applied to Jesus. Jesus built the house of the Lord and reigns as King over God’s people (Matt. 16:13ff; Acts 2:36).

The inspired Hebrew writer makes it clear that the prophecy was *only* concerning Jesus. Quoting from 2 Sam. 7:14 the writer asks, “For to which of the angels did God ever say, “I will be Father to Him and He shall be a Son to Me” (Heb. 1:5). To no angel did God ever make such a statement, and certainly not to Solomon.

Overall, the book of Second Samuel covers David’s reign as king over Israel. It records his many victories (2 Sam. 5, 8-10; 19:8), and his various moments of weakness (cf. 2 Sam. 11; 24). Much of this same history is covered in First Chronicles.

First Kings

First Kings continues where Second Samuel ends. David is old and close to death. In the first chapter, prior to the passing of David, his son, Solomon is made king. After encouraging Solomon to walk in the ways of the Lord (2 Kings 2:1-4), David passes from this life (2 Kings 2:10ff).

Following the death of his father, the Lord appears to Solomon in a dream. The Lord says to Israel’s new king, “Ask what you wish Me to give you” (1 Kings 3:5).

6 Then Solomon said, “You have shown great lovingkindness to Your servant David my father, according as he walked before You in truth and righteousness and uprightness of heart toward You; and You have reserved for him this great lovingkindness, that You have given him a son to sit on his throne, as it is this day.

7 “Now, O Lord my God, You have made Your servant king in place of my father David, yet I am but a little child; I do not know how to go out or come in.

8 “Your servant is in the midst of Your people which You have chosen, a great people who are too many to be numbered or counted.

9 “So give Your servant an understanding heart to judge Your people to discern between good and evil. For who is able to judge this great people of Yours?”

10 It was pleasing in the sight of the Lord that Solomon had asked this thing.

11 God said to him, “Because you have asked this thing and have not asked for yourself long life, nor have asked riches for yourself, nor have you asked for the life of your enemies, but have asked for yourself discernment to understand justice,

12 behold, I have done according to your words. Behold, I have given you a wise and discerning heart, so that there has been no one like you before you, nor shall one like you arise after you.

13 “I have also given you what you have not asked, both riches and honor, so that there will not be any among the kings like you all your days.

14 “If you walk in My ways, keeping My statutes and commandments, as your father David walked, then I will prolong your days.”

1 Kings 3:6–14

The start of Solomon’s reign as king appears to show great promise. However, note the warning given by God to Solomon, “If you will walk in My ways...” Ultimately, Solomon failed to be loyal to God.

Chapters five through nine of First Kings cover the building of the temple and its dedication. In chapter nine, the Lord again speaks to Solomon, and again issues a word of warning.

1 Now it came about when Solomon had finished building the house of the Lord, and the king’s house, and all that Solomon desired to do,

2 that the Lord appeared to Solomon a second time, as He had appeared to him at Gibeon.

3 The Lord said to him, “I have heard your prayer and your supplication, which you have made before Me; I have consecrated this house which you have built by putting My name there forever, and My eyes and My heart will be there perpetually.

4 “As for you, if you will walk before Me as your father David walked, in integrity of heart and uprightness, doing according to all that I have commanded you and will keep My statutes and My ordinances,

5 then I will establish the throne of your kingdom over Israel forever, just as I promised to your father David, saying, ‘You shall not lack a man on the throne of Israel.’

6 “But if you or your sons indeed turn away from following Me, and do not keep My commandments and My statutes which I have set before you, and go and serve other gods and worship them,

7 then I will cut off Israel from the land which I have given them, and the house which I have consecrated for My name, I will cast out of My sight. So Israel will become a proverb and a byword among all peoples.

8 “And this house will become a heap of ruins; everyone who passes by will be astonished and hiss and say, ‘Why has the Lord done thus to this land and to this house?’

9 “And they will say, ‘Because they forsook the Lord their God, who brought their fathers out of the land of Egypt, and adopted other gods and worshiped them and served them, therefore the Lord has brought all this adversity on them.’”

1 Kings 9:1–9

Sadly Solomon failed to heed the warning of the Lord. Long before Israel had made the request to have a king rule over them, like the nations around them, God had given specific instructions as to what the king *should not do*, and what he should do. Notice what Israel's king was not to do.

16 “Moreover, he shall not multiply horses for himself, nor shall he cause the people to return to Egypt to multiply horses, since the Lord has said to you, ‘You shall never again return that way.’

17 “He shall not multiply wives for himself, or else his heart will turn away; nor shall he greatly increase silver and gold for himself.

Deuteronomy 17:16–17

In regards to what the king was to do, God said he was to keep a copy of the Law and read it all the days of his life (Deut. 17:18-20). It appears that Solomon failed to keep reading the Law.

26 Now Solomon gathered chariots and horsemen; and he had 1,400 chariots and 12,000 horsemen, and he stationed them in the chariot cities and with the king in Jerusalem.

27 The king made silver as common as stones in Jerusalem, and he made cedars as plentiful as sycamore trees that are in the lowland.

28 Also Solomon's import of horses was from Egypt and Kue, and the king's merchants procured them from Kue for a price.

29 A chariot was imported from Egypt for 600 shekels of silver, and a horse for 150; and by the same means they exported them to all the kings of the Hittites and to the kings of the Arameans.

1 Now King Solomon loved many foreign women along with the daughter of Pharaoh: Moabite, Ammonite, Edomite, Sidonian, and Hittite women,

2 from the nations concerning which the Lord had said to the sons of Israel, “You shall not associate with them, nor shall they associate with you, for they will surely turn your heart away after their gods.” Solomon held fast to these in love.

1 Kings 10:26–11:2

All of this was in direct violation of Law. At an early age, God had encouraged Solomon to walk in the ways of the Lord. Solomon turned away from God. The text explains why:

3 He had seven hundred wives, princesses, and three hundred concubines, and his wives turned his heart away.

4 For when Solomon was old, his wives turned his heart away after other gods; and his heart was not wholly devoted to the Lord his God, as the heart of David his father had been.

1 Kings 11:3–4

God became very angry with Solomon (1 Kings 11:9). He tells Israel’s sinful king that the kingdom was going to be taken away from him and given to his servant (1 Kings 11:11). However, for the sake of David, this would not occur in the lifetime of Solomon, but in the days of his son. First Kings records the fulfillment of these words (1 Kings 12).

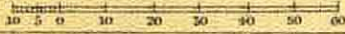
In the days of Solomon’s son, Rehoboam, the nation of Israel becomes divided. The northern kingdom would be known as Israel. The southern kingdom would be known as Judah. First Kings records some of the activities of the kings in the north and south. Most of the book’s history deals with the northern kingdom and their falling away from God. The chart below records the kings of each nation as recorded in First Kings.

KINGS IN JUDAH	PROPHET	KINGS IN ISRAEL	PROPHET
Rehoboam		Jeroboam	
Abijam (15:1-7)		Nadab (15:25-26)	
Asa (15:8ff)	Hanani	Baasha (15:27-28)	Jehu
Jehosaphat (15:24)		Elah (16:6)	
Jehoram (22:50)	Obadiah	Zimri (16:9-10)	
		Omri (16:16)	Elijah
		Ahab (16:28)	Elijah
		Ahaziah (22:51)	Elijah

One of the key figures in the book of First Kings was not a king at all. This key figure was the prophet Elijah (1 Kings 17-19). Elijah introduces us to the prophet who would take his place in Israel, Elisha (1 Kings 19:16). The record of these two prophets picks up in the beginning of Second Kings.

THE KINGDOMS
OF
JUDAH AND ISRAEL

Scale of English Miles



Second Kings

Second Kings continues where First Kings ends. In First Kings we saw the nation of Israel become divided, Israel to the north, Judah to the south. In Second Kings we see the nation dissolved. This dissolving or destruction of the nation is the fulfillment of a promise of God given many years earlier through the inspired words of Moses (Deut. 28:15ff). Joshua had also warned the people about the consequences of disobeying God.

15 “It shall come about that just as all the good words which the Lord your God spoke to you have come upon you, so the Lord will bring upon you all the threats, until He has destroyed you from off this good land which the Lord your God has given you.

16 “When you transgress the covenant of the Lord your God, which He commanded you, and go and serve other gods and bow down to them, then the anger of the Lord will burn against you, and you will perish quickly from off the good land which He has given you.”

Joshua 23:15–16

This book of history records the defeat of the northern kingdom by the Assyrians (2 Kings 17). It also records the defeat of the southern kingdom by the Babylonians (2 Kings 25). The northern kingdom of Israel was forever destroyed (cf. Jer. 3:8). The southern kingdom, Judah, would return after a period of exile to rebuild the city of Jerusalem and the temple. These rebuilding efforts are covered in the books of Ezra and Nehemiah.

In the second chapter of the book, the Lord takes Elijah up into heaven by a whirlwind. With Elijah gone, Elisha is now the prophet in Israel. Elisha’s role as a prophet is covered in the first nine chapters of the book. Chapter five records the familiar account of Naaman being healed of his leprosy. In chapter thirteen, the death of Elisha is recorded (2 Kings 13:14-20).

The first seventeen chapters describe events in both the northern and southern kingdoms, although more attention is given to events in Israel. From chapter eighteen to the end of the book, the focus is on Judah.

Chapters eighteen to twenty cover the the reign of Hezekiah in Judah. He was one of the southern kingdom’s faithful kings. The events of these chapters are paralleled in 2 Chronicles 29-32 and Isaiah 36-39. In chapter nineteen of Second Kings we get our first introduction to the prophet Isaiah.

The final chapter of the book describes Nebuchadnezzar’s attack on the city of Jerusalem. The city is burned with fire and destroyed. Historically, the conclusion of the book sets up the books of Ezra, Nehemiah, Esther, Daniel, and Ezekiel.

The chart below lists the kings of Israel and Judah mentioned in Second Kings along with the prophets who ministered during their particular reign.

JUDAH	PROPHET	ISRAEL	PROPHET
Ahaziah		Jehoram	Elijah, Elisha
Queen Athaliah		Jehu	Elisha
Joash	Joel	Jehoahaz	Elisha
Amaziah		Jehoash	Elisha
Azariah (Uzziah)	Isaiah, Micah	Jeroboam II	Elisha, Hosea, Jonah, Amos
Jotham	Isaiah, Micah	Zechariah	Hosea
Ahaz	Isaiah, Micah	Shallum	Hosea
Hezekiah	Isaiah, Micah	Menaham	Hosea
Manasseh	Isaiah, Nahum	Pekahiah	Hosea
Amon		Pekah	Hosea
Josiah	Jeremiah, Zephaniah	Hoshea	Hosea
Jehoahaz	Jeremiah		
Jehoiakim	Jeremiah, Habakkuk		
Jehoiachin	Jeremiah		
Zedekiah	Jeremiah		

First Chronicles

Chronologically, the book of First Chronicles does not follow Second Kings. The history covered in this book parallels Second Samuel. The first nine chapters of the book contain genealogical records going all the way back to Adam. In chapter ten, the record of the death of

king Saul is given. In chapter eleven, the book records David being made king. Chapter seventeen is a parallel to Second Samuel chapter seven. It contains the promise of God to David concerning his descendant. In Chapter twenty-two, David charges Solomon with the task of building the temple. Chapters twenty-three to twenty-six deal with divisions of tasks for worship in the temple. The book closes with the death of David.

Second Chronicles

The book of Second Chronicles parallels the history given in First and Second Kings. The first nine chapters focus on Solomon and the building of the temple. Chapters ten and eleven cover the dividing of the nation.

The main focus of the book from chapter nineteen to the end, is on Judah and its line of kings. In chapter thirty-six, the destruction of Jerusalem and its temple by the Babylonians is recorded. However, the book closes with a picture of hope. The once great and powerful Babylonians are conquered by the Medo-Persians. King Cyrus of Persia makes a decree to those of Judah who had been living in exile.

22 Now in the first year of Cyrus king of Persia—in order to fulfill the word of the Lord by the mouth of Jeremiah—the Lord stirred up the spirit of Cyrus king of Persia, so that he sent a proclamation throughout his kingdom, and also put it in writing, saying,

23 “Thus says Cyrus king of Persia, ‘The Lord, the God of heaven, has given me all the kingdoms of the earth, and He has appointed me to build Him a house in Jerusalem, which is in Judah. Whoever there is among you of all His people, may the Lord his God be with him, and let him go up!’”

2 Chronicles 36:22–23

These last two verses lead us directly into the book of Ezra. In fact, the first three verses of the book of Ezra are nearly word for word the same as the closing verses of Second Chronicles.

Ezra

The book of Ezra begins exactly where Second Chronicles concludes. As mentioned in our study of Second Chronicles, the first three verses of Ezra are almost word for word the same as the closing verses of Second Chronicles.

Setting the scene for the book historically, Judah had been taken into Babylonian captivity. This was a punishment from God who had warned the people about their idolatry and other sins.

The captivity in Babylon was to be seventy years. This was the time as prophesied by Jeremiah (Jer. 25:11-12). After the seventy years were complete, King Cyrus of Persia (now the ruling power) allowed the Jews to return to rebuild Jerusalem (2 Chronicles 36:22-23; Ezra 1:1-3).

The first two chapters of the book of Ezra list the various persons and families who returned to Jerusalem to rebuild the temple. Ezra is not among the initial group of people to return. He comes on the scene much later. The key figure in the first part of the book is a man named Zerubbabel. The initial focus for those who returned was rebuilding the temple.

8 Now in the second year of their coming to the house of God at Jerusalem in the second month, Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel and Jeshua the son of Jozadak and the rest of their brothers the priests and the Levites, and all who came from the captivity to Jerusalem, began the work and appointed the Levites from twenty years and older to oversee the work of the house of the Lord.

9 Then Jeshua with his sons and brothers stood united with Kadmiel and his sons, the sons of Judah and the sons of Henadad with their sons and brothers the Levites, to oversee the workmen in the temple of God.

10 Now when the builders had laid the foundation of the temple of the Lord, the priests stood in their apparel with trumpets, and the Levites, the sons of Asaph, with cymbals, to praise the Lord according to the directions of King David of Israel.

11 They sang, praising and giving thanks to the Lord, saying, "For He is good, for His lovingkindness is upon Israel forever." And all the people shouted with a great shout when they praised the Lord because the foundation of the house of the Lord was laid.

12 Yet many of the priests and Levites and heads of fathers' households, the old men who had seen the first temple, wept with a loud voice when the foundation of this house was laid before their eyes, while many shouted aloud for joy,

13 so that the people could not distinguish the sound of the shout of joy from the sound of the weeping of the people, for the people shouted with a loud shout, and the sound was heard far away.

Ezra 3:8-13

In the Scriptures above we see two reactions to the foundation of the temple being laid. Those who were younger, and had not seen the previous temple which Solomon had constructed were full of joy. They were shouting and giving praise and thanks to God. For them, this was a momentous occasion. It was a time to celebrate. It was a new day. It marked the start of a new era.

Contrasting their shouts of joy were the sounds of loud weeping. The weeping came from those who were older and had seen the previous temple. They remembered all its former glory and beauty. When they saw the foundation for the new temple they knew it paled in comparison

to the old. So while the young ones shouted for joy, the older ones wept aloud. They could not celebrate, because all they could see was the past.

Ezra 3:13 is a sad verse. The shouts of joy were joined by the loud weeping and wailing, and it basically turned into a bunch of noise. The sound was heard far away, but you couldn't tell if it was joy or sorrow. The same type of thing occurs today in the church. Those who are older in years often talk about the good old days. They talk about times when there would be meetings that lasted a month or more. They talk of times when there were multiple baptisms, twenty, thirty or more people, a night. They speak of times when the church was experiencing rapid growth. And in thinking about those "good old days" they will often lament *these* days. They will bemoan the fact the things are not as they once were in the past.

In the same way, those who are younger in years, and who did not see those "good old days" are thrilled with what is happening today. For them, these days will be "the good old days" when they are older in years.

There is a danger in both of these perspectives. Some get so caught up in the past, that they fail to see the good that is being done by God today. As a result, it has a negative impact on their joy. At times, those who are younger in years, can be easily carried away by new trends. They sometimes fail to learn from the valuable experience of history. In some ways, they fail to truly appreciate the past: The sacrifices that were made; the teaching that was done; the battles for truth that were won.

For both young and old, there are some things that should be understood. To those who are older (this may upset you), but here it is: Not everything about the past (with respect to the church) was glorious. Yes, there were some great times. However, there was also lots of division and fighting among brethren. And to those who are younger, listen closely: There is still lots of work to do today. There are problems to solve; some of which have been carried over from the past. The restoration movement did not end at some distant point in the past. We should still be searching the Scriptures to make sure we are on a right course.

It is interesting, and a point of learning, that after the people returning from exile had laid the foundation, work on the temple stopped. In fact, it stopped for about fifteen years! They laid the foundation and stopped. Imagine that! For fifteen years that foundation sat untouched. For fifteen years the temple they had had begun, some with great joy, sat uncompleted without so much as a stone being lifted. It just sat. Stop and think. How many times have we done the same type of thing. We lay a foundation and stop. We have a great idea about something. With joy we lay the foundation. We get it started, and just as quickly we come to a stop.

You say, “I’m going to get more involved in the work of the church.” So you lay a foundation. However, it only lasts for a few weeks or a month, and you stop.

You say, “I’m going to study more.” So you lay a foundation. You buy some study books, and they sit on a shelf and are rarely opened. You stop.

You decide you’re going to learn a new skill. So you lay a foundation. You take a class, or buy some books, or attend a seminar, but the enthusiasm wanes, and it comes to a stop.

At home, our garages and closets are littered with half-completed projects. Foundations that were laid, but never completed.

Why did the work stop in Jerusalem? It is at this point, our study moves temporarily from the book of Ezra, to the book of Haggai. Haggai was a prophet of God at this time in Israel’s history. The book of Haggai is about God speaking to the people about this rebuilding project that had come to a halt. God identifies some of the problems with the attitudes of the people and gives them some encouragement to get back at it.

Problem Number One: Loss of Passion.

1 In the second year of Darius the king, on the first day of the sixth month, the word of the Lord came by the prophet Haggai to Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel, governor of Judah, and to Joshua the son of Jehozadak, the high priest, saying,

2 “Thus says the Lord of hosts, ‘This people says, “The time has not come, even the time for the house of the Lord to be rebuilt.” ’ ”

Haggai 1:1–2

“The time has not yet come...” There are a couple of ways we can take these words. The first I would like to set before you is this: They represent a loss of passion. And this loss of passion came as a result of fear, through the discouragement and threats of others (cf. Ezra 4:1-4).

Being passionate about something is critical to getting beyond just the foundation stage. When you are passionate about something, you are not content with just a foundation. You want (no matter what) to bring the project completion. When you are passionate about something you are not going to be stopped by someone trying to intimidate you.

Problem Number Two: Procrastination

“This people says, “The time has not yet come...”” As mentioned earlier, there are a couple of different ways to look at these words. Here’s the other: It is a picture of procrastination. In losing their passion, they procrastinated. The foundation was complete, but suddenly they began putting off the work. As we noted earlier, they put it off for fifteen years!

Problem Number Three: Worldly Pursuits

3 Then the word of the Lord came by Haggai the prophet, saying,

4 “Is it time for you yourselves to dwell in your paneled houses while this house lies desolate?”

Haggai 1:3–4

Here we see the problem of worldly pursuits. The worldly pursuits became their passion. This worldly passion took them away from the work of God. The temple of God set among ruins, just a flat foundation, while their houses were being decked-out with all the niceties of the time. Look what God says about their worldly pursuits:

5 Now therefore, thus says the Lord of hosts, “Consider your ways!

6 “You have sown much, but harvest little; you eat, but there is not enough to be satisfied; you drink, but there is not enough to become drunk; you put on clothing, but no one is warm enough; and he who earns, earns wages to put into a purse with holes.”

7 Thus says the Lord of hosts, “Consider your ways!

8 “Go up to the mountains, bring wood and rebuild the temple, that I may be pleased with it and be glorified,” says the Lord.

9 “You look for much, but behold, it comes to little; when you bring it home, I blow it away. Why?” declares the Lord of hosts, “Because of My house which lies desolate, while each of you runs to his own house.

10 “Therefore, because of you the sky has withheld its dew and the earth has withheld its produce.

11 “I called for a drought on the land, on the mountains, on the grain, on the new wine, on the oil, on what the ground produces, on men, on cattle, and on all the labor of your hands.”

Haggai 1:5–11

God essentially asks them, “Do you ever wonder why it seems that you work so hard, but have nothing to show for it? That would be Me trying to get your attention!” I like how God tells them, “Consider your ways!” (vs. 3)

3 'Who is left among you who saw this temple in its former glory? And how do you see it now? Does it not seem to you like nothing in comparison?

4 'But now take courage, Zerubbabel,' declares the Lord, 'take courage also, Joshua son of Jehozadak, the high priest, and all you people of the land take courage,' declares the Lord, 'and work; for I am with you,' declares the Lord of hosts.

5 'As for the promise which I made you when you came out of Egypt, My Spirit is abiding in your midst; do not fear!'

6 "For thus says the Lord of hosts, 'Once more in a little while, I am going to shake the heavens and the earth, the sea also and the dry land.

7 'I will shake all the nations; and they will come with the wealth of all nations, and I will fill this house with glory,' says the Lord of hosts.

8 'The silver is Mine and the gold is Mine,' declares the Lord of hosts.

9 'The latter glory of this house will be greater than the former,' says the Lord of hosts, 'and in this place I will give peace,' declares the Lord of hosts."

Haggai 2:3-9

God tells the people, "Take Courage!" (vs. 4), "Do Not Fear" (vs. 5), "I am with You!" (vs. 4), "I am still in Control!" (vs. 6-9). God is telling them, "You keep looking at that foundation and see no potential. You're putting your trust in yourselves, and not in Me."

In verse nine God says, "...the latter glory of this house will be greater than the former." However, understand that He is not speaking about the physical building they were constructing. That building never had the peace that is being described here. This rebuilt temple, just like the former, were really but one. They were a type of a much greater spiritual building. The peace He is describing is found in Christ. When He says in this place I will give peace He is talking about Jerusalem, and the word of God going forth ushering in the New Covenant.

With God's words of encouragement through the prophet Haggai, notice what happens, as recorded for us in the book of Ezra:

1 When the prophets, Haggai the prophet and Zechariah the son of Iddo, prophesied to the Jews who were in Judah and Jerusalem in the name of the God of Israel, who was over them,

2 then Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel and Jeshua the son of Jozadak arose and began to rebuild the house of God which is in Jerusalem; and the prophets of God were with them supporting them.

Ezra 5:1-2

In chapter seven we are finally introduced to the man Ezra, and his role in the rebuilding process.

1 Now after these things, in the reign of Artaxerxes king of Persia, there went up Ezra son of Seraiah, son of Azariah, son of Hilkiah,
2 son of Shallum, son of Zadok, son of Ahitub,
3 son of Amariah, son of Azariah, son of Meraioth,
4 son of Zerahiah, son of Uzzi, son of Bukki,
5 son of Abishua, son of Phinehas, son of Eleazar, son of Aaron the chief priest.
6 This Ezra went up from Babylon, and he was a scribe skilled in the law of Moses, which the Lord God of Israel had given; and the king granted him all he requested because the hand of the Lord his God was upon him.

Ezra 7:1-6

Ezra joins in the rebuilding effort and he is not alone. There are others who journeyed with him back to Jerusalem (cf. Ezra 8:1-14). Take a look at Ezra's goal in going to Jerusalem:

For Ezra had set his heart to study the law of the Lord and to practice it, and to teach His statutes and ordinances in Israel.

Ezra 7:10

What a passion Ezra had for his people, and more importantly for God. He equipped himself to make sure the Law of the Lord was taught and followed in Jerusalem. Ezra knew from their history the consequences of disobedience. Chapters eight through ten describe the important work of Ezra in Jerusalem. The close of the book of Ezra leads right into the book of Nehemiah.

Nehemiah

Nehemiah was a man of resolute determination, unwavering commitment, inspiring courage, and strong faith. Qualities such as these are sometimes rare today in our fast-paced "got-to-have-it-now" society. Many people today are looking for the short-cut. They like the quick and simple alternative. The motto of many has become "do just enough to get by." If reaching a particular goal seems too difficult or too long, many give up. If a particular obstacle in life is seemingly too great to conquer, some turn and walk the other way.

Nehemiah was the complete opposite. He had what it took to see a very difficult task through to the end. He had the ability to inspire others around him to greatness. He got out of others the very best they could give. He was a man of compassion and loyalty, an outstanding leader of people; and even more, he was a faithful servant of God. The Old Testament book bearing his

name is essentially a journal. It is a journal of his efforts to get the broken down walls of Jerusalem rebuilt.

In the first chapter of the book, we are introduced not only to the man, Nehemiah, but also to the situation existing in Jerusalem at this period in history. From the book of Ezra, we know that rebuilding work had begun in Jerusalem. Nehemiah however, is not in Jerusalem. He is far away in Susa. "...the capital of ancient Susiana, east of the Tigris, a province of Persia. From the time of Cyrus it was the favorite winter residence of the Persian kings."¹¹ It is here that Nehemiah was serving as the cupbearer to the king (Neh. 1:11). In regards to the position of cupbearer, one resource offered this description:

An officer of high rank at ancient oriental courts, whose duty it was to serve the wine at the king's table. On account of the constant fear of plots and intrigues, a person must be regarded as thoroughly trustworthy to hold this position. He must guard against poison in the king's cup, and was sometimes required to swallow some of the wine before serving it. His confidential relations with the king often endeared him to his sovereign and also gave him a position of great influence.¹²

His position of great influence would work to Nehemiah's advantage, but not nearly as much as his faith in God. As the book opens, Nehemiah inquires as to how things were progressing with the work in Jerusalem.

1 The words of Nehemiah the son of Hacaliah. Now it happened in the month Chislev, in the twentieth year, while I was in Susa the capitol,
2 that Hanani, one of my brothers, and some men from Judah came; and I asked them concerning the Jews who had escaped and had survived the captivity, and about Jerusalem.
3 They said to me, "The remnant there in the province who survived the captivity are in great distress and reproach, and the wall of Jerusalem is broken down and its gates are burned with fire."

Nehemiah 1:1-3

This was not good news. Conditions in Jerusalem were not good. To understand the compassion of the man Nehemiah for his people, the city of Jerusalem, notice his reaction to this bad report:

¹¹ Jamieson, R., Fausset, A. R., Fausset, A. R., Brown, D., & Brown, D. (1997). A commentary, critical and explanatory, on the Old and New Testaments (Ne 1:1). Oak Harbor, WA: Logos Research Systems, Inc.

¹² I.S.B.E. Vol. II, 766.

When I heard these words, I sat down and wept and mourned for days; and I was fasting and praying before the God of heaven.

Nehemiah 1:4

Nehemiah prays to God and acknowledges the sins of the people that led to their captivity (Neh. 1:5-7). At the same time, he also demonstrates an awareness of a promise of God found way back in Deuteronomy. After God had warned the people of the consequences should they prove unfaithful to the covenant, there is also spoken a word of hope.

1 “So it shall be when all of these things have come upon you, the blessing and the curse which I have set before you, and you call them to mind in all nations where the Lord your God has banished you,

2 and you return to the Lord your God and obey Him with all your heart and soul according to all that I command you today, you and your sons,

3 then the Lord your God will restore you from captivity, and have compassion on you, and will gather you again from all the peoples where the Lord your God has scattered you.

Deuteronomy 30:1-3

Nehemiah prays with the hope of this promise of God (Neh. 1:8-11). After his prayer, Nehemiah begins formulating a plan to rebuild the walls of Jerusalem. When an opportune time comes, Nehemiah presents his plan to the king, who accepts his proposal (Neh. 2:1-8).

Having gone before the king, Nehemiah would next have to go before the people of Jerusalem to share his vision. When he finally arrives in Jerusalem, Nehemiah takes time to consider the damage and the amount of work that needed to be completed (Neh. 2:11-16). It is then this man of faith and determination inspires the people to get to work.

17 Then I said to them, “You see the bad situation we are in, that Jerusalem is desolate and its gates burned by fire. Come, let us rebuild the wall of Jerusalem so that we will no longer be a reproach.”

18 I told them how the hand of my God had been favorable to me and also about the king’s words which he had spoken to me. Then they said, “Let us arise and build.” So they put their hands to the good work.

Nehemiah 2:17-18

As soon as the people get to work on this important task, they begin to receive criticism from their enemies.

But when Sanballat the Horonite and Tobiah the Ammonite official, and Geshem the Arab heard it, they mocked us and despised us and said, “What is this thing you are doing? Are you rebelling against the king?”

Nehemiah 2:19

Nehemiah was quick to deal with the criticism (Neh. 2:20). This is something he would have to continually do, as more criticism would come.

1 Now it came about that when Sanballat heard that we were rebuilding the wall, he became furious and very angry and mocked the Jews.

2 He spoke in the presence of his brothers and the wealthy men of Samaria and said, “What are these feeble Jews doing? Are they going to restore it for themselves? Can they offer sacrifices? Can they finish in a day? Can they revive the stones from the dusty rubble even the burned ones?”

3 Now Tobiah the Ammonite was near him and he said, “Even what they are building—if a fox should jump on it, he would break their stone wall down!”

Nehemiah 4:1–3

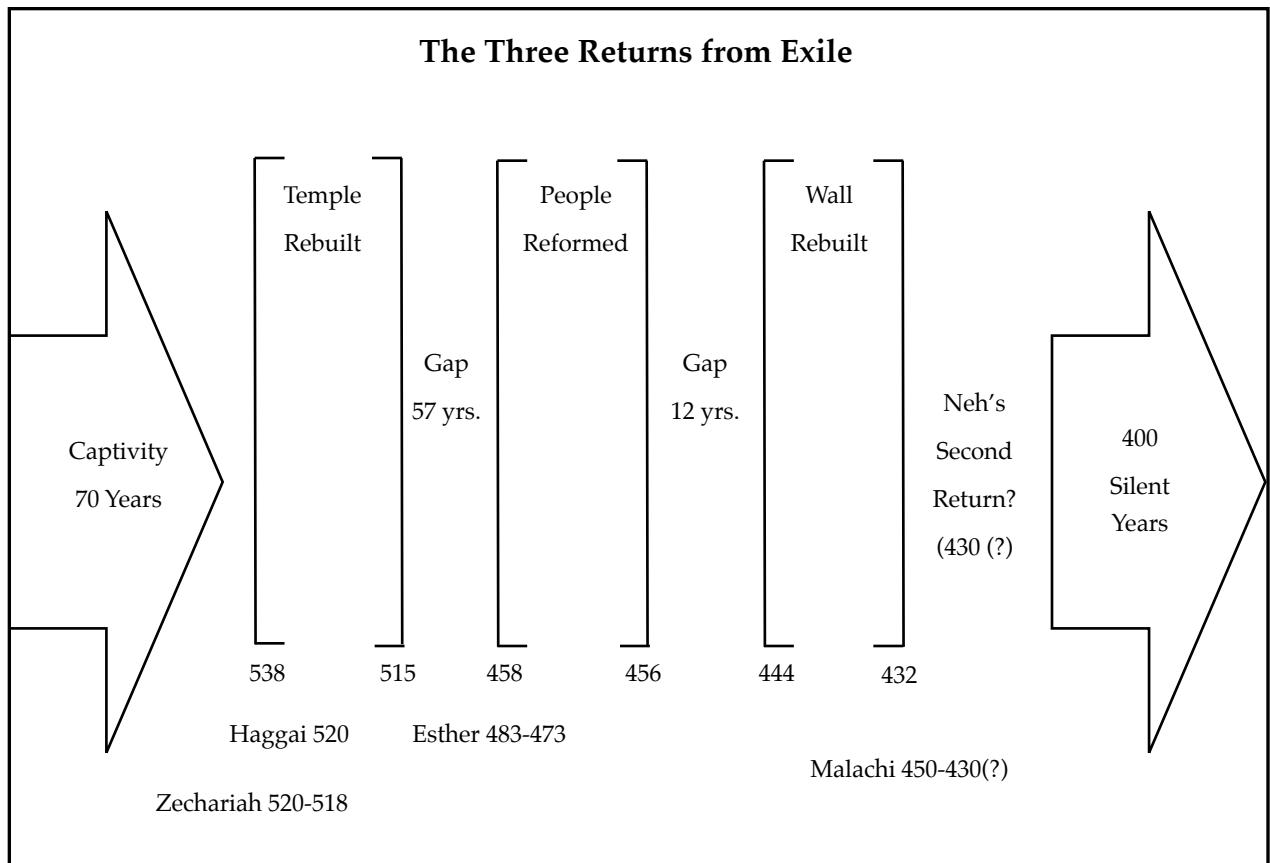


Chart taken from God's Masterwork, Vol. Two, 4

Along with dealing with constant criticism, he also had to keep the people inspired. They were given to moments of fear and discouragement. Listen to his prayer to God regarding their critics.

4 Hear, O our God, how we are despised! Return their reproach on their own heads and give them up for plunder in a land of captivity.

5 Do not forgive their iniquity and let not their sin be blotted out before You, for they have demoralized the builders.

6 So we built the wall and the whole wall was joined together to half its height, for the people had a mind to work.

Nehemiah 4:4–6

Nehemiah's determination is now reflected in the determination of the people who had a mind to work and complete this important task of rebuilding Jerusalem's walls.

15 When our enemies heard that it was known to us, and that God had frustrated their plan, then all of us returned to the wall, each one to his work.

16 From that day on, half of my servants carried on the work while half of them held the spears, the shields, the bows and the breastplates; and the captains were behind the whole house of Judah.

17 Those who were rebuilding the wall and those who carried burdens took their load with one hand doing the work and the other holding a weapon.

Nehemiah 4:15–17

Because of Nehemiah's determination, inspiring the people to work, they finish the job of rebuilding the walls in seemingly record time.

15 So the wall was completed on the twenty-fifth of the month Elul, in fifty-two days.

16 When all our enemies heard of it, and all the nations surrounding us saw it, they lost their confidence; for they recognized that this work had been accomplished with the help of our God.

Nehemiah 6:15–16

After completion of the walls, Nehemiah returned to the king of Persia, just as he had promised (Neh. 2:6; 13:6). However, due to evils that were taking place in Jerusalem, Nehemiah again returned to help get the people back to following God (Neh. 13:6ff).

The book of Nehemiah is an inspiring book for the rebuilding efforts in our life, be it rebuilding a relationship, a business, or a local church. The book of Nehemiah concludes with this wonderful prayer from the man for whom the book is named, "Remember me, O my God, for good."

Esther

The book of Esther, as previously mentioned in our study, is the second of only two books in the Bible bearing the names of women. The author of the book is unknown.

The chart on page 53 indicates the historical time frame for the events of Esther. They occur sometime between the work of Zerubbabel and Ezra. However, while these two men were hard at work in Jerusalem, the events of Esther took place far away in Susa (Esther 1:2; cf. Neh. 1:1). Chronologically, Esther would be better placed between the books of Ezra and Nehemiah.

Through the years there has been debate as to whether or not the book of Esther should be included in the canon of Scripture. The reasons for the debate are well summarized in the following:

Esther is the only book of the Bible in which the name of God is not mentioned. The New Testament does not quote from the Book of Esther, nor have copies of it been found among the Dead Sea Scrolls. The Law is never mentioned in the book nor are sacrifices or offerings referred to. This fits the view that the Jewish people residing in the Persian Empire were not following God's will. They were shunning their responsibility to return to Palestine and to become involved in temple worship.

Prayer is never mentioned in the book, though fasting is. In other postexilic books prayer is important to the main characters (both the books of Ezra and Neh. are good examples), but in the Book of Esther nothing is said about Mordecai or Esther praying. Both Esther and Mordecai seem to have lacked spiritual awareness except in their assurance that God would protect His people.¹³

Despite the lack of a specific mention of God, it is very clear that God was involved in the events described in the book of Esther. Even while they were in exile, God was looking after His people. The fact that sacrifices, offerings, and the Law are not mentioned is consistent with the fact that the people were in exile.

The book opens with the Persian king holding a banquet. This was a very lengthy celebration (Esther 1:4-5). During the course of the banquet the wine was flowing freely. On the seventh day, when the king was "merry with wine" (1:10), he commanded that Queen Vashti come and display her beauty to those gathered at the banquet. However, not wanting to parade herself before a court of drunken people, the queen refused. Of course, this did not set well with the king or his officials.

¹³ Walvoord, J. F., Zuck, R. B., & Dallas Theological Seminary. (1983-). Vol. 1: The Bible knowledge commentary : An exposition of the scriptures (698-699). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.

16 In the presence of the king and the princes, Memucan said, “Queen Vashti has wronged not only the king but also all the princes and all the peoples who are in all the provinces of King Ahasuerus.

17 “For the queen’s conduct will become known to all the women causing them to look with contempt on their husbands by saying, ‘King Ahasuerus commanded Queen Vashti to be brought in to his presence, but she did not come.’

18 “This day the ladies of Persia and Media who have heard of the queen’s conduct will speak in the same way to all the king’s princes, and there will be plenty of contempt and anger.

19 “If it pleases the king, let a royal edict be issued by him and let it be written in the laws of Persia and Media so that it cannot be repealed, that Vashti may no longer come into the presence of King Ahasuerus, and let the king give her royal position to another who is more worthy than she.

Esther 1:16–19

The search for a successor to Queen Vashti is where we are introduced to Esther and her guardian, Mordecai. One can almost imagine how the book might have been called Mordecai, for this man plays a prominent role in the events described.

5 Now there was at the citadel in Susa a Jew whose name was Mordecai, the son of Jair, the son of Shimei, the son of Kish, a Benjamite,

6 who had been taken into exile from Jerusalem with the captives who had been exiled with Jeconiah king of Judah, whom Nebuchadnezzar the king of Babylon had exiled.

7 He was bringing up Hadassah, that is Esther, his uncle’s daughter, for she had no father or mother. Now the young lady was beautiful of form and face, and when her father and her mother died, Mordecai took her as his own daughter.

8 So it came about when the command and decree of the king were heard and many young ladies were gathered to the citadel of Susa into the custody of Hegai, that Esther was taken to the king’s palace into the custody of Hegai, who was in charge of the women.

9 Now the young lady pleased him and found favor with him. So he quickly provided her with her cosmetics and food, gave her seven choice maids from the king’s palace and transferred her and her maids to the best place in the harem.

10 Esther did not make known her people or her kindred, for Mordecai had instructed her that she should not make them known.

Esther 2:5–10

As the events unfold, Esther finds favor in the eyes of all, especially the king (Esther 2:15-18). As a result, she is made Queen. All the while, upon the counsel of Mordecai, she has still not revealed to anyone that she was a Jew (Esther 2:20).

After the book records Esther becoming Queen, it turns its attention toward Mordecai and two significant events in his life. The first of which is how he saved the king's life.

21 In those days, while Mordecai was sitting at the king's gate, Bigthan and Teresh, two of the king's officials from those who guarded the door, became angry and sought to lay hands on King Ahasuerus.

22 But the plot became known to Mordecai and he told Queen Esther, and Esther informed the king in Mordecai's name.

23 Now when the plot was investigated and found to be so, they were both hanged on a gallows; and it was written in the Book of the Chronicles in the king's presence.

Esther 2:21–23

Saving the king's life is always a good thing. This will later come into play in the events recorded in Esther (Esther 6:1-3ff). The other event of interest relating to Mordecai is his refusal to bow before an evil and prideful man named, Haman (Esther 3:1-6). Such a refusal led to an evil plot devised by Haman to rid the land, not only of Mordecai, but all of Mordecai's people as well, the Jews.

9 "If it is pleasing to the king, let it be decreed that they be destroyed, and I will pay ten thousand talents of silver into the hands of those who carry on the king's business, to put into the king's treasuries."

10 Then the king took his signet ring from his hand and gave it to Haman, the son of Hammedatha the Agagite, the enemy of the Jews.

11 The king said to Haman, "The silver is yours, and the people also, to do with them as you please."

12 Then the king's scribes were summoned on the thirteenth day of the first month, and it was written just as Haman commanded to the king's satraps, to the governors who were over each province and to the princes of each people, each province according to its script, each people according to its language, being written in the name of King Ahasuerus and sealed with the king's signet ring.

13 Letters were sent by couriers to all the king's provinces to destroy, to kill and to annihilate all the Jews, both young and old, women and children, in one day, the thirteenth day of the twelfth month, which is the month Adar, and to seize their possessions as plunder.

Esther 3:9–13

Learning of the decree that all the Jews were to be destroyed, Mordecai takes steps to save his people. Having Esther as queen will work to his advantage in this dire situation. As he

revealed to Esther what had been decreed, he gives us the book's most famous words. They are found in verse fourteen of chapter four.

“For if you remain silent at this time, relief and deliverance will arise for the Jews from another place and you and your father's house will perish. And who knows whether you have not attained royalty for such a time as this?”

Esther 4:14

What powerful words. Though God is not specifically mentioned, it is God's power to which Mordecai is drawing Esther's attention. The thought is, “Esther, perhaps God has been at work to put you in this position to help with our situation.” When God places opportunities before us it is critical that recognize them and properly respond to them.

The book then follows the efforts of Esther and Mordecai to save the Jewish people from being killed. In the end, it is the evil Haman who is put to death, along with all the enemies of the Jews (Esther 7:1-95). It is then Mordecai who is honored instead of Haman.

Indeed, Mordecai was great in the king's house, and his fame spread throughout all the provinces; for the man Mordecai became greater and greater.

Esther 9:4

The events of the book of Esther describe the beginnings of the Feast of Purim. This feast is still celebrated today by the Jewish people.

Through the events covered in the book of Esther, it is clear, that even though there is no mention of God, the Almighty was very much involved in protecting His people. What wonderful lessons Esther holds for us today. What great examples we have in Mordecai and Esther and trying to make a positive difference in the lives of others.

The Books of Poetry

The Old Testament books of poetry may follow the book of Esther, but chronologically speaking, these books were written years earlier. David is the author of many of the Psalms. This would take us back to the period of First and Second Samuel. Solomon is the author of many of the proverbs and the book of Ecclesiastes. This takes us back to First Kings. Job is believed to have been a contemporary of Abraham's. This would take us back to before the Law of Moses.

These books contain comforting words, praises to God, and timeless wisdom for handling life and its associated challenges. As our overview will demonstrate, they are a valuable source of comfort and insight.

Job

The book of Job is believed to be the oldest book in our Bible. The events of the book are thought to have occurred, perhaps in the days of Abraham. The reasons for such a belief come from the fact that there is no mention of the Law of Moses, Israel, the priesthood, the tabernacle, the temple, or even Jerusalem. The book records Job offering sacrifices for his children. "The Chaldeans and Sabeans are represented as roving marauders who fell upon Job's flocks and herds..."¹⁴ For reasons such as these, the book is generally assigned to the patriarchal period.

The author of the book is not known. However, the Bible would indicate that Job was a real person, and that the book is not merely poetical fiction. Job is mentioned by the prophet Ezekiel, who in the same passage references Noah and Daniel (Eze. 14:14, 20). In the New Testament, James makes mention of Job (James 5:11).

The book of Job deals with the problem of suffering in life. At the same time, it reveals the power of maintaining one's faith during periods of trial. The book shows us that suffering in life is not limited to the unrighteous. The faithful will also suffer, and will often not understand the reasons for it. This was Job's confusion. While his friends insist that he had done something to bring about the wrath of God upon himself, Job maintains his innocence. As the book opens we are given a picture of outstanding character of Job.

1 There was a man in the land of Uz whose name was Job; and that man was blameless, upright, fearing God and turning away from evil.

¹⁴ A Commentary on Job, *Homer Hailey*, 19.

2 Seven sons and three daughters were born to him.

3 His possessions also were 7,000 sheep, 3,000 camels, 500 yoke of oxen, 500 female donkeys, and very many servants; and that man was the greatest of all the men of the east.

4 His sons used to go and hold a feast in the house of each one on his day, and they would send and invite their three sisters to eat and drink with them.

5 When the days of feasting had completed their cycle, Job would send and consecrate them, rising up early in the morning and offering burnt offerings according to the number of them all; for Job said, "Perhaps my sons have sinned and cursed God in their hearts." Thus Job did continually.

Job 1:1-5

From this scene of faithful Job the book cuts to a scene in heaven. There, the sons of God (angels) are presenting themselves before the Lord, and among them was Satan (Job 1:6ff). At this gathering, Satan accuses God of putting a hedge around Job. He insists, the great man of faith was only such because God had richly blessed him. The Devil says, "But put forth Your hand now and touch all that he has; he will surely curse You to Your face" (Job 1:11).

Then the Lord said to Satan, "Behold, all that he has is in your power, only do not put forth your hand on him." So Satan departed from the presence of the Lord.

Job 1:12

Given such authority, the Devil seemingly wastes no time. In one day, Job lost his family and most of his possessions. It all happened so suddenly and without any warning. One by one, messengers arrived to inform Job of disaster after disaster. And before each messenger could finish his report, another would arrive with even more bad news.

14 a messenger came to Job and said, "The oxen were plowing and the donkeys feeding beside them,

15 and the Sabeans attacked and took them. They also slew the servants with the edge of the sword, and I alone have escaped to tell you."

16 While he was still speaking, another also came and said, "The fire of God fell from heaven and burned up the sheep and the servants and consumed them, and I alone have escaped to tell you."

17 While he was still speaking, another also came and said, "The Chaldeans formed three bands and made a raid on the camels and took them and slew the servants with the edge of the sword, and I alone have escaped to tell you."

18 While he was still speaking, another also came and said, "Your sons and your daughters were eating and drinking wine in their oldest brother's house,

19 and behold, a great wind came from across the wilderness and struck the four corners of the house, and it fell on the young people and they died, and I alone have escaped to tell you.”

Job 1:14–19

How would any of us have reacted to such horrific events? How many of us would have cursed God? The faithful character of Job is revealed in the way he responds to such devastating events.

20 Then Job arose and tore his robe and shaved his head, and he fell to the ground and worshiped.

21 He said, “Naked I came from my mother’s womb, And naked I shall return there. The Lord gave and the Lord has taken away. Blessed be the name of the Lord.”

22 Through all this Job did not sin nor did he blame God.

Job 1:20–22

While we are impressed with Job’s attitude and conduct, Satan was not. He again issues a challenge to God concerning Job.

4 Satan answered the Lord and said, “Skin for skin! Yes, all that a man has he will give for his life.

5 “However, put forth Your hand now, and touch his bone and his flesh; he will curse You to Your face.”

6 So the Lord said to Satan, “Behold, he is in your power, only spare his life.”

7 Then Satan went out from the presence of the Lord and smote Job with sore boils from the sole of his foot to the crown of his head.

8 And he took a potsherd to scrape himself while he was sitting among the ashes.

9 Then his wife said to him, “Do you still hold fast your integrity? Curse God and die!”

10 But he said to her, “You speak as one of the foolish women speaks. Shall we indeed accept good from God and not accept adversity?” In all this Job did not sin with his lips.

Job 2:4–10

Not only has Job lost everything, his possessions, his children, his livestock, now he has lost his health. Still, Job maintains a right attitude toward God.

It is at this point in the narrative that we introduced to Job’s friends. There are three mentioned initially, and a fourth appears later in the text (Job 32:2).

11 Now when Job’s three friends heard of all this adversity that had come upon him, they came each one from his own place, Eliphaz the Temanite, Bildad the Shuhite and Zophar the

Naamathite; and they made an appointment together to come to sympathize with him and comfort him.

12 When they lifted up their eyes at a distance and did not recognize him, they raised their voices and wept. And each of them tore his robe and they threw dust over their heads toward the sky.

13 Then they sat down on the ground with him for seven days and seven nights with no one speaking a word to him, for they saw that his pain was very great.

Job 2:11–13

From this point, until chapter thirty-eight, the inspired text is a dialog between Job and his friends. His friends accuse him of sin, and Job denies it. According to their theology, suffering occurred in one's life as a result of God punishing the individual for sins they had committed. The disciples of Jesus wrongly held this same type of theology (cf. John 9:1-3). It would appear that Job himself once held to this kind of thinking. His suffering gave him a clearer understanding.

At times, the accusations of Job's friends are cruel. Notice a few examples of their "comforting" words to their suffering friend. Eliphaz is the first to offer consoling words. At first, he is complimentary toward Job.

1 Then Eliphaz the Temanite answered,

2 "If one ventures a word with you, will you become impatient? But who can refrain from speaking?"

3 "Behold you have admonished many, And you have strengthened weak hands.

4 "Your words have helped the tottering to stand, And you have strengthened feeble knees.

Job 4:1–4

He starts off with some nice words, speaking of how Job had helped others. As he continues, his words are not so nice.

5 "But now it has come to you, and you are impatient; It touches you, and you are dismayed.

6 "Is not your fear of God your confidence, And the integrity of your ways your hope?"

7 "Remember now, who ever perished being innocent? Or where were the upright destroyed?"

Job 4:5–7

Here he begins his accusations. He asks Job, "Whoever perished being innocent?" This was their false theology. We know this is not true. The innocent have always been victims of suffering. This is addressed in the New Testament (cf. Matt. 5:10-12; 23:34ff; 1 Pet. 2:19-25).

As Job maintains his innocence, Eliphaz, while beginning with a compliment, becomes more and more bold in his approach to Job. Notice later in the text how the tone of his speech changes.

5 “Is not your wickedness great, And your iniquities without end?
6 “For you have taken pledges of your brothers without cause, And stripped men naked.
7 “To the weary you have given no water to drink, And from the hungry you have withheld bread.
8 “But the earth belongs to the mighty man, And the honorable man dwells in it.
9 “You have sent widows away empty, And the strength of the orphans has been crushed.
10 “Therefore snares surround you, And sudden dread terrifies you,
11 Or darkness, so that you cannot see, And an abundance of water covers you.

Job 22:5–11

This is a list of false charges against Job. The book of Job began with a description of his wealth and his faithfulness. Eliphaz, knowing Job is wealthy, implies that he obtained and maintained his wealth by depriving others.

Following Eliphaz and his accusations, came Bildad and his charges against Job. Here is how his speech to Job begins.

1 Then Bildad the Shuhite answered,
2 “How long will you say these things, And the words of your mouth be a mighty wind?
3 “Does God pervert justice? Or does the Almighty pervert what is right?
4 “If your sons sinned against Him, Then He delivered them into the power of their transgression.

Job 8:1–4

Bildad comforts Job by saying, “You’re full of hot air!” He then suggests that Job’s children got exactly what they deserved, for they too were sinners, like Job. No wonder Job later told these men, “Sorry comforters are you all” (Job 16:1).

After Eliphaz and Bildad, Zophar takes his shot at Job. He too tried to convince him of his sin.

“Shall a multitude of words go unanswered, And a talkative man be acquitted?

Job 11:2

Basically, he accuses Job of uttering nothing but meaningless words as the man of faith defended himself against the charges of his comforters. Zophar continues:

“But would that God might speak, And open His lips against you,

Job 11:5

In other words, “Job, I wish God Himself would speak to you and tell you how you have sinned.”

Through all these false accusations and false theology, Job maintains his innocence. Finally, God speaks, directly addressing Job.

1 Then the Lord answered Job out of the whirlwind and said,

2 “Who is this that darkens counsel By words without knowledge?

3 “Now gird up your loins like a man, And I will ask you, and you instruct Me!

Job 38:1–3

God challenges Job with a series of questions which Job cannot answer. In it all, God shows Job that there are things too great for the man of faith to understand (cf. Rom. 11:33-36). Through it all God never answers Job’s questions. And in the end, Job didn’t need any answers from God. Job gained a greater confidence in God’s power and goodness. How wonderful it would be if we could all gain such confidence in the Almighty.

1 Then Job answered the Lord and said,

2 “I know that You can do all things, And that no purpose of Yours can be thwarted.

3 ‘Who is this that hides counsel without knowledge?’ “Therefore I have declared that which I did not understand, Things too wonderful for me, which I did not know.”

4 ‘Hear, now, and I will speak; I will ask You, and You instruct me.’

5 “I have heard of You by the hearing of the ear; But now my eye sees You;

6 Therefore I retract, And I repent in dust and ashes.”

Job 42:1–6

As the book of Job closes, God blesses Job by greatly restoring what Job had lost (Job 42:10ff). Job’s friends are rebuked by God for their foolishness and instructed to have Job pray for them (Job 42:8-9).

This Old Testament book contains a wealth of lessons for dealing with suffering, and properly comforting those who are going through trials. The closing chapters (38-42) remind us of the awesome power of God.

Psalms

One of the most-loved sections of inspired Scripture is the book of Psalms. Through the years these poetic verses have provided comfort, inspiration, encouragement, hope, correction, and direction to all who have turned to them in a time of crisis or discouragement. Though they are thousands of years old, the Psalms are as relevant today as when they were first penned. As with all Scripture, the Psalms contain a treasure chest of divine instruction for living acceptably before God. One person in describing the Psalms wrote:

The Book of Psalms is the oldest hymnal known to man. This ancient hymnal contains some of the most moving and meaningful expressions of the human heart.¹⁵

Another writes:

Among all the books of antiquity, none has made such a powerful appeal to the human heart as The Psalms.¹⁶

Still another:

Of all the books in the Old Testament the Book of Psalms most vividly represents the faith of individuals in the Lord. The Psalms are the inspired responses of human hearts to God's revelation of Himself in law, history, and prophecy. Saints of all ages have appropriated this collection of prayers and praises in their public worship and private meditations.¹⁷

As each of those quotes so eloquently states, the Psalms contain timeless expressions of the heart that speak to every generation. They are written from (and during) the many experiences of life: loneliness, discouragement, failure, loss, victory, misunderstanding, being under attack. Because the Psalms are based on real life experiences, and because they are the inspired word of God, they contain wisdom, experience, knowledge, and encouragement that can help us today in our daily living.

The title "Psalms" as we find it in our English Bibles comes from the Greek translation of the Old Testament. The Greek word *psalmoi*, from which the title is derived, translates from a Hebrew word that speaks of music accompanied by stringed instruments. Under the influence of

¹⁵ Charles Swindoll, *Living Beyond the Daily Grind* (New York, N.Y: Inspirational Press, 1994) p. 17.

¹⁶ Charles F. Pfeiffer, *The Wycliffe Bible Commentary, Old Testament*, (Chicago: Moody Press) 1962.

¹⁷ Walvoord, John F., and Zuck, Roy B., *The Bible Knowledge Commentary*, (Wheaton, Illinois: Scripture Press Publications, Inc.) 1983, 1985.

the Septuagint and of Christianity, the word psalmos came to designate a “song of praise” without an emphasis on accompaniment by any stringed instrument.¹⁸ In the Hebrew Bible the title of Psalms translates: “Book of Praises.”

The Psalms are often referred to as “The Psalms of David.” Perhaps this is because his name appears on more Psalms than any other writer. In addition to the Psalms that bear his name, he is also given credit in the New Testament as the author of some Psalms which do not list his name. For example Psalms 2 and 95 have no author listed. However, in the New Testament their authorship is ascribed to David (cf. Ac 4:25; Heb. 4:7). Based on this, it is safe to say that David may well be the author of other Psalms which do not bear any name. In addition to David, we find Psalms authored by the sons of Korah, Asaph, Ethan, Heman, Moses, and Solomon.

There are 150 psalms in our Bible. At one time, they were simply individual expressions of poetry. As the years passed these were collected to form smaller books, and with the smaller books put together, we have the collection of psalms we find today. In the Hebrew Bible they are divided into five books, each corresponding to one of the five books of Moses. Most English translations make reference to these individual “books” prior to the start of each designated book. Interestingly, each “book” closes with a doxology (Psalm of Praise).

Book One (Psalms 1-41) relates to the book of Genesis. It is a collection of psalms primarily about man. For example, in psalm 1 we have the righteous and the unrighteous contrasted. Psalm 5 is the prayer of David for protection from the wicked. Psalm 8 gives us the familiar words, “What is man that You are mindful of him?”

Book Two (Psalms 42-72) relating to the book of Exodus has much to say about deliverance (cf. Ps. 42:1-2; 43:1; 46:1ff; 51ff; 54:1ff).

Book Three (Psalms 73-89) relating to Leviticus, as many believe, has its emphasis on the sanctuary and on responding to God in worship (Ps. 73:1; 74:2).

Book Four (Psalms 90-106) beginning with psalm 90 and the prayer of Moses, relates to the book of Numbers and wandering of the people (cf. Ps. 95:7-11; 96:11-13).

Book Five (Psalms 107-150) relating to the book of Deuteronomy is full of thanksgiving and praise for God’s faithfulness and His word.

Most people think of the Psalms as a book full of praises to God. And while it is true that many psalms involve expressions of praise, many are full of complaints and cries to God for help (cf. Ps. 3:1, 2; 4:1; 5:1; 10:1; 13:1-3; 22:1ff; 54:1). Some Psalms are penitential in nature. This means they are expressions of repentance toward God for sins committed (Ps. 6; 32; 38; 51; 102;

¹⁸ Christoph Barth, *Introduction to the Psalms*. N.Y.: Scribners and Sons, 1966, p. 1

130; 143). There are Psalms known as Messianic Psalms. These are prophetic in nature toward Jesus Christ (Psalm 2; 22; 110).

Psalms is a book of Hebrew poetry. These poetic expressions of the heart teach us about life and about God. The language of the psalms is rich and often very symbolic. Understanding this is critical in approaching a study of the psalms.

Proverbs

The purpose of the book of Proverbs is spelled out very clearly in the first six verses of this Old Testament book of wisdom. It all has to do with the obtaining of wisdom.

- 1 The proverbs of Solomon the son of David, king of Israel:
- 2 To know wisdom and instruction, To discern the sayings of understanding,
- 3 To receive instruction in wise behavior, Righteousness, justice and equity;
- 4 To give prudence to the naive, To the youth knowledge and discretion,
- 5 A wise man will hear and increase in learning, And a man of understanding will acquire wise counsel,
- 6 To understand a proverb and a figure, The words of the wise and their riddles.

Proverbs 1:1–6

We have in these first six verses the process of obtaining wisdom. Knowledge to Understanding to Discretion to Correction, and then to better Understanding, and so on.

1. **To know** (1:2) *Knowledge*
2. **To perceive** (1:2) *Understanding*
3. **To give** (1:3-4) *Discretion*
4. **To learn** (1:5) *Correction*
5. **To understand** (1:6) *Understanding*

How would you define wisdom? Lots of general ideas could be offered: Knowledge applied. Experience in life. Practical insight. Strong's defines the Hebrew word wisdom as involving skill (in war), or shrewdness. The idea of skill gives us a good picture of one who is wise. Think of it in terms of life. One who is skilled at living is one who is considered wise.

The book of Proverbs gives us inspired wisdom. This is wisdom from God. This is wisdom that it is far superior to the wisdom of man (James 3:13-17, 1 Cor. 1:18-25, 2:6-14). Such wisdom can give us the skills needed to successfully battle through this life.

One commentary summed up the importance of this valuable collection of wisdom that we know as Proverbs like this:

“The Book of Proverbs is a book of moral and ethical instructions, dealing with many aspects of life. The teachings in this book guide its readers in how to lead wise, godly lives and how to avoid the pitfalls of unwise, ungodly conduct. It has a broad, timeless appeal because of its great variety of subjects and their relevance to everyday life. Proper and improper attitudes, conduct, and characteristics are referred to repeatedly and in succinct, penetrating ways. Proverbs is God’s book on ‘how to wise up and live.’ It is His treasure book of wisdom.”¹⁹

In the book of Proverbs we can find the wisdom we need to handle many of life’s problems. Proverbs addresses a wide variety of subjects from which we can gain practical insights. Much of the book is written as counsel from a father to a son on how to get through life and avoid some of its pitfalls—pitfalls which we often bring on ourselves due to foolish behavior. Following the wisdom of Proverbs does not guarantee we will never suffer the struggles of these pitfalls, but through the application of its wisdom and teaching we can certainly avoid many of them.

The Book of Proverbs begins with the declaration: “The proverbs of Solomon the son of David, king of Israel.” Solomon’s name also appears in Proverbs 10:1 and 25:1. However, Solomon is not the book’s only author. For example, Proverbs 22:17-24:22 and 24:23-34 are clearly said to be the words of the wise, which would seem to indicate others, perhaps including Solomon. Proverbs 30 begins ‘The words of Agur...’ and Proverbs 31, ‘The words of King Lemuel.’ Of who Agur and Lemuel were, nothing much is known.

It is likely that some of the proverbs not bearing Solomon’s name were proverbs he had collected. The book of Ecclesiastes has this with respect to Solomon:

In addition to being a wise man, the Preacher also taught the people knowledge; and he pondered, searched out and arranged many proverbs.

Ecclesiastes 12:9

Also along the lines of authorship, it is interesting to note that 1 Kings 4:32 says Solomon spoke 3,000 proverbs. Yet only a little over 500 of these are recorded in the Bible. Discussion as to what happened to the other 2,500 or so would be purely speculative.

Dating the Book of Proverbs as a whole is difficult. The unknown origins of some of the other authors makes the dating of those sections impossible. Solomon is thought to have reigned

¹⁹Walvoord, John F., and Zuck, Roy B., *The Bible Knowledge Commentary*, (Wheaton, Illinois: Scripture Press Publications, Inc.) 1983, 1985.

as king in Israel from 971 to 931 BC. Thus the proverbs bearing his name were probably written during that time period. Proverbs chapters 25-29, though written by Solomon, were copied by the men of Hezekiah. (cf. Proverbs 25:1) Hezekiah reigned as King in Judah from 715 to 686 BC some 230 years after Solomon was King in Israel.

The truths of wisdom presented in the Book of Proverbs are most commonly presented in three kinds of couplets.

1. **Contrastive:** Contrastive couplets use the word *'but'* in making a contrasting comparison.

A wise son accepts his father's discipline, But a scoffer does not listen to rebuke.

Proverbs 13:1

Through insolence comes nothing but strife, But wisdom is with those who receive counsel.

Proverbs 13:10

2. **Completive:** These proverbs use the words *'and'* or *'so'* in completing the various thoughts they portray.

The heart knows its own bitterness, And a stranger does not share its joy.

Proverbs 14:10

Commit your works to the Lord And your plans will be established.

Proverbs 16:3

3. **Comparative:** These use the words *'better/than'* or *'like/so.'*

16 Better is a little with the fear of the Lord Than great treasure and turmoil with it.

17 Better is a dish of vegetables where love is Than a fattened ox served with hatred.

Proverbs 15:16-17

24 It is better to live in a corner of the roof Than in a house shared with a contentious woman.

25 Like cold water to a weary soul, So is good news from a distant land.

Proverbs 25:24-25

Not all of the verses in proverbs are composed of two lines, some have three (1:27, 6:13, 30:20, 32-33, 31:4). Some have four (30:9, 14-15, 17, 19). One has six (30:4).

As with any portion of Scripture, there are great truths to learn from the book of Proverbs. These inspired ancient sayings are as relevant today as when they were first written.

Ecclesiastes

The book of Ecclesiastes is a journal believed to have been written by Solomon. The Bible Knowledge Commentary offers this helpful information regarding Solomon as the book's likely author.

The author of Ecclesiastes identified himself, in Hebrew, as Qōheleṭ (1:1-2; cf. 1:12; 7:27; 12:8-10). Though this is sometimes treated as a proper name and hence transliterated, the presence of the article on the Hebrew word in 12:8 (and probably also in 7:27) shows that it is a title. The Old Testament uses this title of no other person. Nor is the form of the verb from which the title is derived used elsewhere. Therefore the exact meaning of this term is in doubt. Suggestions for its significance are generally drawn from the related Hebrew noun "assembly." For example, the Septuagint entitles the book Ekklēsiastēs ("one who calls an assembly"), whence the English word "Ecclesiastes." Several English versions of the Bible translate Qōheleṭ in relation to the function he supposedly played in the assembly (e.g., "The Teacher," NIV; "The Preacher," KJV; "The Leader of the Assembly," NIV marg.).

The author also identified himself as a "son of David" (1:1), a "king in Jerusalem" (1:1), and "king over Israel in Jerusalem" (1:12). Moreover, in the autobiographical section (1:12-2:26) he said he was wiser "than anyone who [had] ruled over Jerusalem before" him (1:16); that he was a builder of great projects (2:4-6); and that he possessed numerous slaves (2:7), incomparable herds of sheep and cattle (2:7), great wealth (2:8), and a large harem (2:8). In short he claimed to be greater than anyone who lived in Jerusalem before him (2:9). These descriptions have led many Jewish and Christian interpreters to identify the author as Solomon though his name is never explicitly used in the book.²⁰

In his journal, Solomon chronicles his quest to find meaning and satisfaction in life. The perspective in the book is described as "life under the sun." In other words, he describes earthly life as mortals living under the sun. Solomon wanted to know what life was really all about and where its true meaning and purpose were to be found.

12 I, the Preacher, have been king over Israel in Jerusalem.

13 And I set my mind to seek and explore by wisdom concerning all that has been done under heaven. It is a grievous task which God has given to the sons of men to be afflicted with.

14 I have seen all the works which have been done under the sun, and behold, all is vanity and striving after wind.

15 What is crooked cannot be straightened and what is lacking cannot be counted.

²⁰ Walvoord, J. F., Zuck, R. B., & Dallas Theological Seminary. (1983-). *Vol. 1: The Bible knowledge commentary : An exposition of the scriptures* (975). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.

16 I said to myself, “Behold, I have magnified and increased wisdom more than all who were over Jerusalem before me; and my mind has observed a wealth of wisdom and knowledge.”

17 And I set my mind to know wisdom and to know madness and folly; I realized that this also is striving after wind.

Ecclesiastes 1:12–17

What Solomon discovers is that life “under the sun,” without God, is all vanity. Vanity is a term used over twenty times in the book. In other words, without God, life is pointless.

In his quest for meaning and satisfaction, Solomon tries nearly everything. This was a man who had the resources to do such experimentation. Notice how he records his testing in his journal.

1 I said to myself, “Come now, I will test you with pleasure. So enjoy yourself.” And behold, it too was futility.

2 I said of laughter, “It is madness,” and of pleasure, “What does it accomplish?”

3 I explored with my mind how to stimulate my body with wine while my mind was guiding me wisely, and how to take hold of folly, until I could see what good there is for the sons of men to do under heaven the few years of their lives.

4 I enlarged my works: I built houses for myself, I planted vineyards for myself;

5 I made gardens and parks for myself and I planted in them all kinds of fruit trees;

6 I made ponds of water for myself from which to irrigate a forest of growing trees.

7 I bought male and female slaves and I had homeborn slaves. Also I possessed flocks and herds larger than all who preceded me in Jerusalem.

8 Also, I collected for myself silver and gold and the treasure of kings and provinces. I provided for myself male and female singers and the pleasures of men—many concubines.

9 Then I became great and increased more than all who preceded me in Jerusalem. My wisdom also stood by me.

10 All that my eyes desired I did not refuse them. I did not withhold my heart from any pleasure, for my heart was pleased because of all my labor and this was my reward for all my labor.

11 Thus I considered all my activities which my hands had done and the labor which I had exerted, and behold all was vanity and striving after wind and there was **no profit under the sun.**

Ecclesiastes 2:1–11 (Emp. mine)

Note those last words, ‘no profit under the sun.’ Not one of the many things Solomon tried brought him lasting joy or peace. They satisfied for only a brief time. Solomon knew there had to be something greater.

One of the reoccurring subjects of the book is death. It appears that the thought of death greatly troubled Solomon. Consider some of the many references to death in his journal.

The wise man's eyes are in his head, but the fool walks in darkness. And yet I know that one fate befalls them both.

Ecclesiastes 2:14

Thus I hated all the fruit of my labor for which I had labored under the sun, for I must leave it to the man who will come after me.

Ecclesiastes 2:18

A time to give birth and a time to die; A time to plant and a time to uproot what is planted.

Ecclesiastes 3:2

For the fate of the sons of men and the fate of beasts is the same. As one dies so dies the other; indeed, they all have the same breath and there is no advantage for man over beast, for all is vanity. All go to the same place. All came from the dust and all return to the dust.

Ecclesiastes 3:19–20

So I congratulated the dead who are already dead more than the living who are still living. But better off than both of them is the one who has never existed, who has never seen the evil activity that is done under the sun.

Ecclesiastes 4:2–3

As he had come naked from his mother's womb, so will he return as he came. He will take nothing from the fruit of his labor that he can carry in his hand.

Ecclesiastes 5:15

It is better to go to a house of mourning Than to go to a house of feasting, Because that is the end of every man, And the living takes it to heart.

Ecclesiastes 7:2

For the living know they will die; but the dead do not know anything, nor have they any longer a reward, for their memory is forgotten. Indeed their love, their hate and their zeal have already perished, and they will no longer have a share in all that is done under the sun.

Ecclesiastes 9:5–6

Whatever your hand finds to do, do it with all your might; for there is no activity or planning or knowledge or wisdom in Sheol where you are going.

Ecclesiastes 9:10

As his journal comes a close, Solomon shares what he has learned. What he has learned is that in order for life to truly have meaning and purpose, one must serve God.

13 The conclusion, when all has been heard, is: fear God and keep His commandments, because this applies to every person.

14 For God will bring every act to judgment, everything which is hidden, whether it is good or evil.

Ecclesiastes 12:13–14

The book of Ecclesiastes is a wonderful resource. It reminds us of the true meaning of life. It sharpens our perspective by showing us what is really important “under the sun.”

Song of Solomon

The Song of Solomon may be the least studied book in the Old Testament. Solomon is mentioned in the first verse of the book as its author (cf. 1 Kings 4:32-33). Hence, the title, “Song of Solomon.” However, in Hebrew the actual title would be “Song of Songs.”

Without a doubt, it is one of the most mysterious books in the Bible. Many questions exist as to how to it should be interpreted. As to the many ways the book can be (and is) interpreted, Charles Swindoll has this:

The possibilities include (1) allegory, which dismisses any literal meaning and believes the Song is a parable of God’s love for Israel, Christ’s love for the church, or Christ’s love for the individual believer. (2) Type believes in the literal meaning as well as a greater spiritual meaning that points to our “marriage” relationship with God (see Isa. 54:4-8; 62:5; Eph. 5:22-23). (3) Drama, in which three characters perform a primitive play: the maiden, who is faithful to her shepherd lover, spurns wealthy Solomon’s advances. (4) Satire, which follows the story line of the dramatic view but puts more bite into Solomon’s rejection. (5) Literal, sees the love of two actual people, Solomon and the Shulamite, being celebrated in poetic form.²¹

²¹ God’s Masterwork Vol. 2, Charles R. Swindoll, 70.

The Major Prophets

The Major Prophets incorporate the works of Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and Daniel. In contrast to “The Minor Prophets” their works are larger in scope. All four “major prophets” ministered to the southern kingdom, Judah. Isaiah preceded Jeremiah in Judah. Ezekiel and Daniel were contemporaries, prophesying during the years of exile in Babylonian captivity. In this lesson we will take a brief survey of all four of their prophetic works, as well as Jeremiah’s lamentation for Jerusalem.

Typically, when we think of a prophet, we think of one who can predict the future. In terms of the prophets in the Bible, such an ability was made possible because God was speaking through these men (2 Pet. 1:20-21). The prophetic writings in Scripture contain predictive prophecies in regards to such things as the Messiah, world governments, the church, Israel, and the New Covenant. However, we should not look at their works solely on the basis of predictions. The prophets revealed God’s word to the people of their generation. They shared the Almighty’s feelings about their conduct, good or bad. They ministered to the people by offering instruction, warnings, rebukes, and comfort (cf. 2 Tim. 2:16-17).

Isaiah

Though the book of Isaiah follows the books of poetry, as far as its location in the Bible, this is not the first time Scripture speaks of the prophet Isaiah. He first appears in the Scripture in 2 Kings 19:1. In fact, 2 Kings 18:20-20:21 read almost identical to Isaiah 36-39. Both books cover the same events in these specific chapters. Homer Hailey writes this about Isaiah the prophet:

From 2 Chronicles we know that in addition to his prophecy Isaiah wrote an account of the acts of Uzziah; apparently these acts are not recounted in the historical books of the Bible nor in the book bearing the prophet’s name (2 Chron. 26:22). We also know that Isaiah recorded a “vision” in which he detailed “the rest of the acts of Hezekiah, and his good deeds” (2 Chron. 32:32). We have no account of Isaiah’s death; neither do we know whether he lived at all beyond the time of Hezekiah and into the period of Manasseh’s reign. There is a tradition that he was sawed asunder on the order of Manasseh. This is apparently based on an apocryphal book, *The Ascension of Isaiah*. Moreover, Justin Martyr in his dialog with Trypho reproaches the Jews with the accusation, “whom [Isaiah] you sawed asunder with a wooden saw.” But there is no solid evidence of this. Though we would like to know more about the details of Isaiah’s personal life,

they have not been revealed. The prophet instead placed his emphasis on “the Holy One of Israel” and His control of the destiny of men and nations.²²

The book of Isaiah opens with a description of the sinful condition of the people of God. God compares them to the people of Sodom and Gomorrah (Isa. 1:9-10). It is not until the sixth chapter that Isaiah records his calling as a prophet of God. It is here we find some familiar words of Scripture.

8 Then I heard the voice of the Lord, saying, “Whom shall I send, and who will go for Us?” Then I said, “Here am I. Send me!”

9 He said, “Go, and tell this people: ‘Keep on listening, but do not perceive; Keep on looking, but do not understand.’

10 “Render the hearts of this people insensitive, Their ears dull, And their eyes dim, Otherwise they might see with their eyes, Hear with their ears, Understand with their hearts, And return and be healed.”

Isaiah 6:8–10

The book of Isaiah contains a number of significant Messianic prophecies. Many of these are well-known to even the casual student of Scripture. For example, here is a familiar prophecy concerning the virgin birth.

“Therefore the Lord Himself will give you a sign: Behold, a virgin will be with child and bear a son, and she will call His name Immanuel.

Isaiah 7:14

Here is another prophecy which speaks of the promise made to David concerning his descendant ruling on his throne.

6 For a child will be born to us, a son will be given to us; And the government will rest on His shoulders; And His name will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Eternal Father, Prince of Peace.

7 There will be no end to the increase of His government or of peace, On the throne of David and over his kingdom, To establish it and to uphold it with justice and righteousness From then on and forevermore. The zeal of the Lord of hosts will accomplish this.

Isaiah 9:6–7

²² Homer Hailey, *A Commentary on Isaiah*, 27-28.

Most all Christians are familiar with the fifty-third chapter of Isaiah and its portrayal of the suffering Servant. Here are a couple of familiar excerpts. Notice how each (though written hundreds of year to these events), is written in the past tense.

1 Who has believed our message? And to whom has the arm of the Lord been revealed?
2 For He grew up before Him like a tender shoot, And like a root out of parched ground; He has no stately form or majesty That we should look upon Him, Nor appearance that we should be attracted to Him.
3 He was despised and forsaken of men, A man of sorrows and acquainted with grief; And like one from whom men hide their face He was despised, and we did not esteem Him.
4 Surely our griefs He Himself bore, And our sorrows He carried; Yet we ourselves esteemed Him stricken, Smitten of God, and afflicted.

Isaiah 53:1–4

He was oppressed and He was afflicted, Yet He did not open His mouth; Like a lamb that is led to slaughter, And like a sheep that is silent before its shearers, So He did not open His mouth.

Isaiah 53:7

The prophet Isaiah spoke of the establishment of the kingdom “in the last days.” For many, this becomes a subject of debate as to whether or not the kingdom was actually established. If it was not established, Isaiah would be a false prophet, as would Jesus and John the Baptist who preached in their day that the kingdom was at hand. Isaiah wrote:

2 Now it will come about that In the last days The mountain of the house of the Lord Will be established as the chief of the mountains, And will be raised above the hills; And all the nations will stream to it.
3 And many peoples will come and say, “Come, let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, To the house of the God of Jacob; That He may teach us concerning His ways And that we may walk in His paths.” For the law will go forth from Zion And the word of the Lord from Jerusalem.
4 And He will judge between the nations, And will render decisions for many peoples; And they will hammer their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning hooks. Nation will not lift up sword against nation, And never again will they learn war.

Isaiah 2:2–4

As Luke describes the events of the day of Pentecost in A.D. 30, we find a fulfillment of that which Isaiah had prophesied (cf. Acts 2). Notice the similarities between the words of Isaiah and the events of Acts chapter two.

Isaiah 2

In the last days (Isa. 2:2)

All nations (Isa. 2:2)

From Jerusalem (Isa. 2:3)

Acts 2

In the last days (Acts 2:17)

All nations (Acts 2:5)

From Jerusalem (Acts 2:5)

Some object to the thought that the text in Isaiah found its fulfillment in the events outlined in Acts chapter two. They would argue that the nations have not yet hammered their swords into plowshares or their spears into pruning hooks, this indicating a time of great peace. They would ask, "Where is this great peace?" Turning to the book of Isaiah, they would note that the kingdom of prophecy was peacefully described with such images as the wolf dwelling with the lamb and the leopard with the young goat. We are told that the calf and the young lion would dwell together (Isa. 11:6-9).

6 And the wolf will dwell with the lamb, And the leopard will lie down with the young goat, And the calf and the young lion and the fatling together; And a little boy will lead them.

7 Also the cow and the bear will graze, Their young will lie down together, And the lion will eat straw like the ox.

8 The nursing child will play by the hole of the cobra, And the weaned child will put his hand on the viper's den.

9 They will not hurt or destroy in all My holy mountain, For the earth will be full of the knowledge of the Lord As the waters cover the sea.

Isaiah 11:6-9

Pointing to these *symbolic* types of images, but expecting (and applying) a *literal* fulfillment, some would question the existence of the kingdom. But should these images of peace be interpreted literally? In the verses just prior, Isaiah writes of how the Messiah "will strike the earth with the rod of His mouth, and with the breath of His lips He will slay the wicked" (Isa. 11:4). How would this be literally applied? Will Jesus have a literal rod protruding from His mouth? How will He slay the wicked with His lips?

The language here is obviously symbolic. This being true, the real question is: where is this peace to be found? In the world or in the kingdom of God? The answer of course is only in the kingdom of God. Writing of the language of Isaiah 2:1-4 Homer Hailey notes:

Here the prophet is certainly not speaking of the world, for its people will war continually, but rather of the all nations and many peoples who will come to the mountain of Jehovah's house. He

is describing the character of the citizens of the new kingdom. In the holy mountain they will learn war no more.²³

It is in the kingdom that real peace is found, peace between men and God (cf. Rom. 5:1), and peace between one another (Rom. 14:19). The prophecy of Isaiah is not about world peace, but rather, peace in the kingdom of Christ (cf. John 18:36).

Another interesting prophecy in Isaiah is the mention of king Cyrus. You will recall that Cyrus was the one who allowed the people in exile to return to Jerusalem (2 Chron. 36:22-23; Ezra 1:1-4). The interesting thing about the mention of Cyrus in Isaiah, is that it was over a hundred years before the decree! It was before Cyrus was even born!

“It is I who says of Cyrus, ‘He is My shepherd! And he will perform all My desire.’ And he declares of Jerusalem, ‘She will be built,’ And of the temple, ‘Your foundation will be laid.’”

Isaiah 44:28

The book of Isaiah is a powerful example of accuracy of God’s prophetic word (cf. 2 Pet. 1:20-21). This is well-stated in these words of God spoken through Isaiah.

So will My word be which goes forth from My mouth; It will not return to Me empty, Without accomplishing what I desire, And without succeeding in the matter for which I sent it.

Isaiah 55:11

Jeremiah

The book of Jeremiah opens with a description of the years he served as prophet of God (Jer. 1:1-3). Jeremiah then gives a brief description of God’s calling him to the role of a prophet (Jer. 1:4-10). As a prophet of God, Jeremiah had an inspired, but difficult message to speak. His was a message of doom and destruction. He spoke of a coming judgment upon the people of Judah because of their continued disobedience.

14 Then the Lord said to me, “Out of the north the evil will break forth on all the inhabitants of the land.

15 “For, behold, I am calling all the families of the kingdoms of the north,” declares the Lord; “and they will come and they will set each one his throne at the entrance of the gates of Jerusalem, and against all its walls round about and against all the cities of Judah.

²³ Homer Hailey, *A Commentary on Isaiah*, 49.

16 “I will pronounce My judgments on them concerning all their wickedness, whereby they have forsaken Me and have offered sacrifices to other gods, and worshiped the works of their own hands.

17 “Now, gird up your loins and arise, and speak to them all which I command you. Do not be dismayed before them, or I will dismay you before them.

18 “Now behold, I have made you today as a fortified city and as a pillar of iron and as walls of bronze against the whole land, to the kings of Judah, to its princes, to its priests and to the people of the land.

19 “They will fight against you, but they will not overcome you, for I am with you to deliver you,” declares the Lord.

Jeremiah 1:14-19

Jeremiah did as the Lord had instructed him. He warned the people that there would be consequences to their actions. Just as the Lord had warned him, the people would not listen. Anytime you find yourself as the one shouting “You are doing wrong!” or “Repent!” you are going to find yourself facing ridicule and rejection.

The people of Jeremiah’s day were so wicked and sinful, so rebellious and disobedient, God says to His prophet, “Shall I not punish these people? On a nation such as this shall I not avenge Myself?” (Jer. 5:29). Look at the scene of wickedness and the attitude of the people:

30 “An appalling and horrible thing Has happened in the land:

31 The prophets prophesy falsely, And the priests rule on their own authority; And My people love it so. But what will you do in the end of it?”

Jeremiah 5:30-31

False prophets telling the people what they wanted to hear. Priests who were out of control, showing a complete disregard for the Law; and yet, the people loved it! What a sad and tragic scene.

The question at the close of verse 31 is an appropriate one for the book of Jeremiah, “What will you do in the end of it?” The book of Jeremiah, and the short lamentation which follows it, describes the end of it. This is a great question for us to consider when tempted to sin, “What will you do in the end of it?”

Because of his message, Jeremiah became a thorn in the side of the people and they sought ways to rid themselves of this prophet of doom. Take a look at the people to whom Jeremiah had to minister in his years as a prophet of God.

“For from the least of them even to the greatest of them, Everyone is greedy for gain, and from the prophet even to the priest everyone deals falsely.

Jeremiah 6:13

There people were covetous and dishonest. Even the priests and prophets, who were to be examples to the people, were dishonest in their conduct.

“And they have healed the brokenness of My people superficially, Saying, ‘Peace, peace,’ But there is no peace.

Jeremiah 6:14

The priests and the prophets were giving the people a false sense of security. They told them, “Everything is okay.” You can picture them saying, “Don’t listen to Jeremiah. He doesn’t know what he is talking about.” They were like the teachers of whom Paul warned Timothy, who the people wanted because they tickled their ears (2 Ti. 4:1-4).

“Were they ashamed because of the abomination they have done? They were not even ashamed at all; They did not even know how to blush. Therefore they shall fall among those who fall; At the time that I punish them, They shall be cast down,” says the Lord.

Jeremiah 6:15

That last verse sounds very much like our world today. We too have forgotten how to blush. We have become so desensitized to sin that we sometimes fail to recognize it. Look at God’s instruction to the people as spoken through Jeremiah.

Thus says the Lord, “Stand by the ways and see and ask for the ancient paths, Where the good way is, and walk in it; And you shall find rest for your souls. But they said, ‘We will not walk in it.’

Jeremiah 6:16

These people were stubborn and rebellious. They were arrogant and proud. They refused to listen to warnings from God to repent.

“And I set watchmen over you, saying, ‘Listen to the sound of the trumpet!’ But they said, ‘We will not listen.’

Jeremiah 6:17

For approximately forty years Jeremiah preached to these people. He watched as they committed abominations before God. He watched as they turned and worshipped false gods. Yet, more than watch, Jeremiah continued to warn them. He was the sound of a trumpet signaling danger, but they would not listen. Finally, Jeremiah would watch as they would be carried away into Babylonian captivity.

Seeing all of this sin and rejection of God weighed heavily on Jeremiah. As he beheld their constant wickedness, he wept, and he wept often. He understood the coming consequences of their actions and it brought him to tears.

1 Oh that my head were waters And my eyes a fountain of tears, That I might weep day and night
For the slain of the daughter of my people!

2 Oh that I had in the desert A wayfarers' lodging place; That I might leave my people And go
from them! For all of them are adulterers, An assembly of treacherous men.

Jeremiah 9:1–2

Jeremiah was a man of compassion. Despite the rejection and ridicule he received from the people he continued to weep for them. However, God instructed him not to pray for them in terms of their being spared the coming judgment.

11 Therefore thus says the Lord, “Behold I am bringing disaster on them which they will not be
able to escape; though they will cry to Me, yet I will not listen to them.

12 “Then the cities of Judah and the inhabitants of Jerusalem will go and cry to the gods to whom
they burn incense, but they surely will not save them in the time of their disaster.

13 “For your gods are as many as your cities, O Judah; and as many as the streets of Jerusalem
are the altars you have set up to the shameful thing, altars to burn incense to Baal.

14 “Therefore do not pray for this people, nor lift up a cry or prayer for them; for I will not listen
when they call to Me because of their disaster.

Jeremiah 11:11–14

In view of all the difficulties he experienced as a prophet of God, delivering a difficult message that was rejected by the people, seeing the constant sin of the people, Jeremiah laments the day of his birth.

Woe to me, my mother, that you have borne me As a man of strife and a man of contention to all
the land! I have not lent, nor have men lent money to me, yet everyone curses me.

Jeremiah 15:10

14 Cursed be the day when I was born; let the day not be blessed when my mother bore me!
15 Cursed be the man who brought the news to my father, saying, "A baby boy has been born to you!" And made him very happy.

Jeremiah 20:14–15

What a difficult life he experienced as a prophet of God. Here he says, "I haven't lent anything to, or borrowed anything from anybody, but everyone curses me!"

"You shall not take a wife for yourself nor have sons or daughters in this place."

Jeremiah 16:2

God, who said, "It is not good for man to be alone", said it would be better if Jeremiah not marry, but rather be alone. His was a lonely life with (one would imagine) much time spent in solitude.

Jeremiah was locked up because of his message. He was beaten and put in stocks (Jer. 20:1-20). He experienced such rejection and opposition, that there were times he felt like quitting.

7 O Lord, You have deceived me and I was deceived; You have overcome me and prevailed. I have become a laughingstock all day long; Everyone mocks me.

8 For each time I speak, I cry aloud; I proclaim violence and destruction, Because for me the word of the Lord has resulted In reproach and derision all day long.

9 But if I say, "I will not remember Him or speak anymore in His name," Then in my heart it becomes like a burning fire shut up in my bones; and I am weary of holding it in, and I cannot endure it.

10 For I have heard the whispering of many, "Terror on every side! Denounce him; yes, let us denounce him!" All my trusted friends, Watching for my fall, say: "Perhaps he will be deceived, so that we may prevail against him and take our revenge on him."

Jeremiah 20:7-10

Though he felt like quitting and remaining silent about the impending doom, he just could not stop. He knew the danger they faced and he had to speak out. Oh that we all could have that same passion in our hearts for sharing the word of God.

The book of Jeremiah closes with a short historical record of the Babylonian siege against Jerusalem. This leads us right into the book of Lamentations.

Lamentations

This short little book in our Old Testament, sandwiched between Jeremiah and Ezekiel, is easy to miss. As one reads through the book of Lamentations the reason for its writing becomes very clear. Lamentations shows us the bitter consequences of sin.

Although his name does not appear in it, Jeremiah is thought to be the author of this short little book. There is some internal evidence that would point to Jeremiah's authorship. There are similar statements found in Jeremiah and Lamentations (cf. Jer. 30:14 with Lam. 1:2; and cf. Jer. 49:12 with Lam. 4:21).

Another reason many accept Jeremiah as the author, is because of a statement that is found in the Septuagint, at the beginning of Lamentations, that reads, "And it came to pass, after Israel was taken captive, and Jerusalem made desolate, that Jeremiah sat weeping, and lamented this lamentation."

Lamentations (as the title would suggest) is a very sad book, but not without hope offered. It begins with a detailed description of the devastation Jerusalem experienced at the hands of the Babylonians.

1 How lonely sits the city That was full of people! She has become like a widow Who was once great among the nations! She who was a princess among the provinces Has become a forced laborer!

2 She weeps bitterly in the night And her tears are on her cheeks; She has none to comfort her Among all her lovers. All her friends have dealt treacherously with her; They have become her enemies.

3 Judah has gone into exile under affliction And under harsh servitude; She dwells among the nations, But she has found no rest; All her pursuers have overtaken her In the midst of distress.

4 The roads of Zion are in mourning Because no one comes to the appointed feasts. All her gates are desolate; Her priests are groaning, Her virgins are afflicted, And she herself is bitter.

5 Her adversaries have become her masters, Her enemies prosper; For the Lord has caused her grief Because of the multitude of her transgressions; Her little ones have gone away As captives before the adversary.

6 All her majesty Has departed from the daughter of Zion; Her princes have become like deer That have found no pasture; And they have fled without strength Before the pursuer.

7 In the days of her affliction and homelessness Jerusalem remembers all her precious things That were from the days of old, When her people fell into the hand of the adversary And no one helped her. The adversaries saw her, They mocked at her ruin.

8 Jerusalem sinned greatly, Therefore she has become an unclean thing. All who honored her despise her Because they have seen her nakedness; Even she herself groans and turns away.

Lamentations 1:1–8

Reading the book of Lamentations, one cannot help but think of all the warnings the people had ignored from God. One cannot help but be reminded of the question posed to the people, “What will you do in the end of it?” Lamentations describes the bitter end of sin.

As Jeremiah walked among the rubble of what was once Jerusalem, one Palmist described the scene taking place in Babylon.

1 By the rivers of Babylon, There we sat down and wept, When we remembered Zion.
2 Upon the willows in the midst of it We hung our harps.
3 For there our captors demanded of us songs, And our tormentors mirth, saying, “Sing us one of the songs of Zion.”
4 How can we sing the Lord’s song In a foreign land?

Psalm 137:1–4

In reading through Lamentations and the devastation it describes, be sure to reference the chart on page 28 of this material, which illustrates the fulfillment of the curses spelled out in the Law of Moses, should the people choose to disobey God.

Lamentations, in spite of graphic depictions of destruction due to God’s wrath, does contain a beautiful picture of mercy and love. As Jeremiah walked among the rubble and ash of Jerusalem, he penned these inspiring words:

21 This I recall to my mind, Therefore I have hope.
22 The Lord’s lovingkindnesses indeed never cease, For His compassions never fail.
23 They are new every morning; Great is Your faithfulness.
24 “The Lord is my portion,” says my soul, “Therefore I have hope in Him.”
25 The Lord is good to those who wait for Him, To the person who seeks Him.
26 It is good that he waits silently For the salvation of the Lord.

Lamentations 3:21–26

Ezekiel

The book of Ezekiel opens with the prophet telling us exactly when God called him into such a role (Eze. 1:1-3). He tells us he is among the exiles in the land of Babylon. The reference to the thirtieth year is believed to be his age at the time of his calling (cf. Num. 4:3). Ezekiel was a contemporary of Daniel. However, when Daniel was taken to Babylon he was placed in a position in the king’s court. Ezekiel remained among the captives. His task was to minister to the exiles by delivering the word of God to them.

He was a married man (24:15-18) and a priest (1:3). All of his life he would have looked forward to the day when he would officiate as one of God's holy priests. He'd have gotten himself ready, kept himself scrupulously clean (4:14) so that nothing would interfere with his fulfilling that vocation - but God had something else in mind.²⁴

As with many of the prophets of God, Ezekiel's task was not an easy one. At one point God makes the prophet unable to speak, except only as God would open His mouth (Eze. 3:24-27). This Divinely imposed silence lasted for a lengthy period time. It would last until God, through the Babylonians, would destroy the city of Jerusalem (Eze. 24:25-27).

God asked his prophet to do some difficult and often strange things in delivering the word of the Lord. Consider the following example from the fourth chapter.

1 "Now you son of man, get yourself a brick, place it before you and inscribe a city on it, Jerusalem.

2 "Then lay siege against it, build a siege wall, raise up a ramp, pitch camps and place battering rams against it all around.

3 "Then get yourself an iron plate and set it up as an iron wall between you and the city, and set your face toward it so that it is under siege, and besiege it. This is a sign to the house of Israel.

4 "As for you, lie down on your left side and lay the iniquity of the house of Israel on it; you shall bear their iniquity for the number of days that you lie on it.

5 "For I have assigned you a number of days corresponding to the years of their iniquity, three hundred and ninety days; thus you shall bear the iniquity of the house of Israel.

6 "When you have completed these, you shall lie down a second time, but on your right side and bear the iniquity of the house of Judah; I have assigned it to you for forty days, a day for each year.

7 "Then you shall set your face toward the siege of Jerusalem with your arm bared and prophesy against it.

8 "Now behold, I will put ropes on you so that you cannot turn from one side to the other until you have completed the days of your siege.

Ezekiel 4:1-8

One of the most difficult experiences the prophet had to face was the loss of his wife. Listen to how Ezekiel explains the situation, and how God instructed him to respond.

15 And the word of the Lord came to me saying,

16 "Son of man, behold, I am about to take from you the desire of your eyes with a blow; but you shall not mourn and you shall not weep, and your tears shall not come.

²⁴ Jim McGuigan, *The Book of Ezekiel* (Fort Worth, TX: Star Publications, 1979), 8.

17 “Groan silently; make no mourning for the dead. Bind on your turban and put your shoes on your feet, and do not cover your mustache and do not eat the bread of men.”

18 So I spoke to the people in the morning, and in the evening my wife died. And in the morning I did as I was commanded.

19 The people said to me, “Will you not tell us what these things that you are doing mean for us?”

20 Then I said to them, “The word of the Lord came to me saying,

21 ‘Speak to the house of Israel, “Thus says the Lord God, ‘Behold, I am about to profane My sanctuary, the pride of your power, the desire of your eyes and the delight of your soul; and your sons and your daughters whom you have left behind will fall by the sword.

22 ‘You will do as I have done; you will not cover your mustache and you will not eat the bread of men.

23 ‘Your turbans will be on your heads and your shoes on your feet. You will not mourn and you will not weep, but you will rot away in your iniquities and you will groan to one another.

24 ‘Thus Ezekiel will be a sign to you; according to all that he has done you will do; when it comes, then you will know that I am the Lord God.’ ”

Ezekiel 24:15–24

As a sign to the people, the prophet was unable to mourn the loss of his wife. The people in turn were not to mourn the destruction of Jerusalem.

The book of Ezekiel contains some mysterious type of language. Highly symbolic. Ezekiel has been compared to the book of Revelation. One commentator noted:

The Revelation is a Christian rewriting of Ezekiel. Its fundamental structure is the same. Its interpretation depends upon Ezekiel. The first half of both books lead up to the destruction of the earthly Jerusalem; in the second they describe a new and holy Jerusalem. There is one significant difference. Ezekiel’s lament over Tyre is transformed into a lament over Jerusalem, the reason being that St. John wishes to transfer to Jerusalem the note of irrevocable doom found in the lament over Tyre. Here lies the real difference in the message of the two books. Jerusalem, like Tyre, is to go forever.²⁵

Here is a list put together that illustrates some of the similarities between the two books:

1. The Throne-Vision (Rev. 4/Eze. 1)
2. The Book (Rev. 5/Eze. 2-3)
3. The Four Plagues (Rev. 6:1-8/Eze. 5)
4. The Slain Under the Altar (Rev. 6:9-11/Eze. 6)

²⁵ Philip Carrington, *The Meaning of Revelation* (London: SPCK, 1931), 65. As quoted by David Chilton in *Days of Vengeance*, 21.

5. The Wrath of God (Rev. 6:12-17/Eze. 7)
6. The Seal on the Saint's Foreheads (Rev. 7/Eze. 9)
7. The Coals from the Altar (Rev. 8/Eze. 10)
8. No More Delay (Rev. 10:1-7/Eze. 12)
9. The Eating of the Book (Rev. 10:8-11/Eze. 2)
10. The Measuring of the Temple (Rev. 11:1-2/Eze. 40-43)
11. Jerusalem and Sodom (Rev. 11:8/Eze. 16)
12. The Cup of Wrath (Rev. 14/Eze. 23)
13. The Vine of the Land (Rev. 14:18-20/Eze. 15)
14. The Great Harlot (Rev. 17-18/Eze. 16, 23)
15. The Lament over the City (Rev. 18/Eze. 27)
16. The Scavenger's Feast (Rev. 19/Eze. 39)
17. The First Resurrection (Rev. 20:4-6/Eze. 37)
18. The Battle with Gog and Magog (Rev. 20:7-9/Eze. 38-39)
19. The New Jerusalem (Rev. 21/Eze. 40-48)
20. The River of Life (Rev. 22/Eze. 47)²⁶

In the first chapter of the book the reader is immediately confronted with the highly symbolic language of Ezekiel. There the prophet gives a description of the cherubim (Eze. 1:4-21). While not specifically called cherubim, in chapter ten these same living beings are so designated (Eze. 10:1ff). Here is a summary of what Ezekiel describes.

- Human form (Eze. 1:5).
- Four faces: man, lion, bull (face of cherub in 10:14), eagle (Eze. 1:6, 10; 10:14).
- Four wings (Eze. 1:6).
- Legs were straight (Eze. 1:7).
- Soles of feet like soles of a calf's hoof (Eze. 1:7).
- Gleamed like burnished bronze (Eze. 1:7).
- The hands of a man under their wings (Eze. 1:8; 10:8).
- Moved like bolts of lightning (Eze. 1:14).
- Great sound from their wings (Eze. 10:5).
- Whole body, backs, hands, and wings were full of eyes all around (Eze. 10:12).

Can you imagine seeing a being matching this kind of description? What an incredible scene! We should keep in mind that the cherubim were presented to Ezekiel in such a way as to

²⁶ Chilton, 21.

symbolically communicate the spiritual significance of the vision he was beholding. This would also seem to be the case for the images of cherubim which were in the tabernacle and later in the temple.

In the vision seen by Ezekiel, God appeared in the form of a man. Though we know God is not a man, He presents Himself to Ezekiel in a form in which the prophet could relate and understand (Eze. 1:26). The same would seem to be true for the appearance of the cherubim. What they actually look like is without a doubt, far beyond our physically limited human comprehension.

This being the case, what are we to make of the vision of the cherubim? What does it mean that they had four faces? What about their four wings? What about possessing the hands of a man? What about the strange wheels full of eyes round about?

We must understand that because these things are not specifically explained to us, anything we, or anyone else could offer in response to those questions is only theological speculation. I have learned in my study of God's word, that nothing within His word is placed there by mere chance or accident. There is reason and purpose for every jot and tittle (Matt. 5:18). However, many of the reasons and purposes of God remain a great mystery to us (cf. Is. 55:8, 9; Rom. 11:33). Such would seem to be the case with the faces of the cherubim.

A Valley of Dry Bones

Any study of Ezekiel is sure to include chapter thirty-seven. There are two significant prophecies to be discussed in this chapter. The first involves the valley of dry bones. The second involves the stick of Ephraim and the stick of Judah. We will begin with an interpretation of the valley of dry bones.

1 The hand of the Lord was upon me, and He brought me out by the Spirit of the Lord and set me down in the middle of the valley; and it was full of bones.

2 He caused me to pass among them round about, and behold, there were very many on the surface of the valley; and lo, they were very dry.

3 He said to me, "Son of man, can these bones live?" And I answered, "O Lord God, You know."

4 Again He said to me, "Prophecy over these bones and say to them, 'O dry bones, hear the word of the Lord.'

5 "Thus says the Lord God to these bones, 'Behold, I will cause breath to enter you that you may come to life.

6 'I will put sinews on you, make flesh grow back on you, cover you with skin and put breath in you that you may come alive; and you will know that I am the Lord.' "

7 So I prophesied as I was commanded; and as I prophesied, there was a noise, and behold, a rattling; and the bones came together, bone to its bone.

8 And I looked, and behold, sinews were on them, and flesh grew and skin covered them; but there was no breath in them.

9 Then He said to me, “Prophesy to the breath, prophesy, son of man, and say to the breath, ‘Thus says the Lord God, “Come from the four winds, O breath, and breathe on these slain, that they come to life.” ’”

10 So I prophesied as He commanded me, and the breath came into them, and they came to life and stood on their feet, an exceedingly great army.

11 Then He said to me, “Son of man, these bones are the whole house of Israel; behold, they say, ‘Our bones are dried up and our hope has perished. We are completely cut off.’

12 “Therefore prophesy and say to them, ‘Thus says the Lord God, “Behold, I will open your graves and cause you to come up out of your graves, My people; and I will bring you into the land of Israel.

13 “Then you will know that I am the Lord, when I have opened your graves and caused you to come up out of your graves, My people.

14 “I will put My Spirit within you and you will come to life, and I will place you on your own land. Then you will know that I, the Lord, have spoken and done it,” declares the Lord.’”

Ezekiel 37:1-14

What a strange vision Ezekiel beheld. He sees a valley of “very dry bones.” Note the emphasis in the text of their being very dry (Eze. 37:2). This would seem to be similar to the scene on Mount Carmel with Elijah. However, Elijah made sure the trench around the altar was *very wet* (1 Kings 18:33-35).

The meaning of this strange vision is given to the prophet. Though the nation was in captivity, and it seemed as if all hope was lost, they would again experience life. There would certainly be a fulfillment of this in the later return to rebuild Jerusalem, such as we saw in our studies of the books of Ezra and Nehemiah. In a broader scope, the passage would seem to find fulfillment of the New Covenant. In this way, the prophecy would be Messianic in scope (cf. Eze. 24:23-24; 37:24-25).

Interpreting the Two Sticks

The second half of chapter thirty-seven contains the prophecy of the stick of Ephraim and the stick of Judah. It is important we understand the meaning of this prophecy.

15 The word of the Lord came again to me saying,
 16 “And you, son of man, take for yourself one stick and write on it, ‘For Judah and for the sons of Israel, his companions’; then take another stick and write on it, ‘For Joseph, the stick of Ephraim and all the house of Israel, his companions.’
 17 “Then join them for yourself one to another into one stick, that they may become one in your hand.
 18 “When the sons of your people speak to you saying, ‘Will you not declare to us what you mean by these?’
 19 say to them, ‘Thus says the Lord God, “Behold, I will take the stick of Joseph, which is in the hand of Ephraim, and the tribes of Israel, his companions; and I will put them with it, with the stick of Judah, and make them one stick, and they will be one in My hand.” ’
 20 “The sticks on which you write will be in your hand before their eyes.
 21 “Say to them, ‘Thus says the Lord God, “Behold, I will take the sons of Israel from among the nations where they have gone, and I will gather them from every side and bring them into their own land;
 22 and I will make them one nation in the land, on the mountains of Israel; and one king will be king for all of them; and they will no longer be two nations and no longer be divided into two kingdoms.
 23 “They will no longer defile themselves with their idols, or with their detestable things, or with any of their transgressions; but I will deliver them from all their dwelling places in which they have sinned, and will cleanse them. And they will be My people, and I will be their God.
 24 “My servant David will be king over them, and they will all have one shepherd; and they will walk in My ordinances and keep My statutes and observe them.
 25 “They will live on the land that I gave to Jacob My servant, in which your fathers lived; and they will live on it, they, and their sons and their sons’ sons, forever; and David My servant will be their prince forever.
 26 “I will make a covenant of peace with them; it will be an everlasting covenant with them. And I will place them and multiply them, and will set My sanctuary in their midst forever.
 27 “My dwelling place also will be with them; and I will be their God, and they will be My people.
 28 “And the nations will know that I am the Lord who sanctifies Israel, when My sanctuary is in their midst forever.” ’ ”

Ezekiel 37:15–28

This passage is a favorite in the Mormon religion. According to their interpretation, the stick of Ephraim is a reference to the book of Mormon. The stick of Judah is said to be a reference to the Bible. Thus, according to the prophecy, God would make the books one. However, the book of Mormon refutes their own doctrine. In Alma 10:2-3, Nephi is a descendant of Manasseh, not Ephraim!

Ephraim was one of the two sons of Joseph. Manasseh was the other. While Manasseh was the older and was entitled to the blessing, the blessing rather went to Ephraim (Gen. 48:8-22). According to the blessing Ephraim was to become the greater of the two (Gen. 48:19). Homer Hailey gives an excellent summary of the two sons.

From the first of Jewish nationalism Ephraim played a leading role: Joshua, the spy and later leader under and after Moses, was an Ephraimite (Num. 13:8, 16); Ephraim's future glory and power were foretold by Moses (Deut. 33:17); Samuel, the prophet-judge was of Ephraim (1 Sam. 1:1); and Jeroboam, the first king after the division of the Kingdom, was of the same tribe (1 Kings 11:26). The capitol of the northern tribes was within the territory of Ephraim. Ephraim retained supremacy from the division of the kingdom to the captivity of Israel. The terms "Ephraim" and "Israel" become synonymous (Isa. 7:8-9; 9:8-9; Hos. 4:16-17; 5:3; 9:1, 3).²⁷

What this vision of the two sticks represents is the joining of two nations, not two books. The two nations being Israel and Judah. And when would this joining together take place? It would occur under the New Covenant (vs. 26). Notice how the prophet is told, "My servant David will be king over them" (vs. 24). David here is symbolic of the Messiah, who would be a descendant of David's.

What a powerful and comforting message this would be to the exiles. Their seemingly very dry bones would be given life by God. There would come a time when they would again enjoy peace. Despite their desperate situation, there was still hope. What an awesome God we serve!

Daniel

Children in Sunday school learn about the prophet Daniel. They hear the account of the four Hebrew children in the fiery furnace, or Daniel in the lion's den. However, the book of Daniel is full of adult lessons. This book of prophecy contains some important prophecies which many find difficult to understand. In addition, the man Daniel gives us a wonderful example in character and commitment to God. It is sad that accounts from the book of Daniel are often limited to our children. It is way past time, that we as adults give more attention to the book of Daniel.

As the book opens, Daniel tells us how he came to be in Babylon (Dan. 1:1-6). Right away we are given a picture of his commitment to remain faithful to God. Daniel refuses to eat the king's diet. He would not defile himself with food that was not acceptable for him to eat (Dan.

²⁷ Homer Hailey, *Mormonism* (Fort Worth, TX: Star Publications, 1992), 19.

1:8ff). God is pleased with Daniel's commitment and blesses him in this foreign land (Dan. 1:15-19).

In the second chapter of Daniel, God blesses Daniel in interpreting Nebuchadnezzar's strange dream. Understanding the meaning of Daniel's interpretation is critical. How we understand and apply it relates to other Bible prophecies concerning the establishment of the kingdom and accomplishments of Jesus Christ.

One of the major eschatological tenets of dispensational premillennialism that comes from this dream and its interpretation, is the belief that, "in the last days," the antichrist will rule over some form of a revived Roman Empire. This teaching is found repeatedly in various end-time books. According to Hal Lindsey, "...the prophetic Scriptures tell us that the Roman Empire will be revived shortly before the return of Christ to this earth. A new Caesar will head the empire..."²⁸ John Walvoord agrees, "The prediction that there will be a ten-kingdom stage of the revival of the Roman Empire is one of the important descriptive prophecies of the end time."²⁹ Statements like these by dispensational writers could be multiplied many times over.

Let's take a closer look at this dream and Daniel's inspired interpretation. A proper understanding here helps connect the Old Testament to the New Testament.

36 "This was the dream; now we will tell its interpretation before the king.

37 "You, O king, are the king of kings, to whom the God of heaven has given the kingdom, the power, the strength and the glory;

38 and wherever the sons of men dwell, or the beasts of the field, or the birds of the sky, He has given them into your hand and has caused you to rule over them all. You are the head of gold.

39 "After you there will arise another kingdom inferior to you, then another third kingdom of bronze, which will rule over all the earth.

40 "Then there will be a fourth kingdom as strong as iron; inasmuch as iron crushes and shatters all things, so, like iron that breaks in pieces, it will crush and break all these in pieces.

41 "In that you saw the feet and toes, partly of potter's clay and partly of iron, it will be a divided kingdom; but it will have in it the toughness of iron, inasmuch as you saw the iron mixed with common clay.

42 "As the toes of the feet were partly of iron and partly of pottery, so some of the kingdom will be strong and part of it will be brittle.

43 "And in that you saw the iron mixed with common clay, they will combine with one another in the seed of men; but they will not adhere to one another, even as iron does not combine with pottery.

²⁸ Hal Lindsey, *The Late Great Planet Earth*, 77.

²⁹ John Walvoord, as quoted by Thomas Ice and Timothy Demy, *Facts on Bible Prophecy*, 173.

44 “In the days of those kings the God of heaven will set up a kingdom which will never be destroyed, and that kingdom will not be left for another people; it will crush and put an end to all these kingdoms, but it will itself endure forever.

45 “Inasmuch as you saw that a stone was cut out of the mountain without hands and that it crushed the iron, the bronze, the clay, the silver and the gold, the great God has made known to the king what will take place in the future; so the dream is true and its interpretation is trustworthy.”

Daniel 2:36–45

In his dream, Babylon’s king saw a large statue, awesome in appearance, with a head of gold, breast and arms of silver, belly and thighs of bronze, its legs of iron, and its feet partly of iron and partly of clay. Daniel informs the king that the various parts of the statue represented four world kingdoms, three of which would follow Babylon’s reign as a world power. Scholars often debate the specific identities of these four kingdoms, but the majority view is as that they represent Babylon, Medo-Persia, Greece, and Rome. The four strange beasts later described in Daniel chapter seven parallel these same four kingdoms (Dan. 7:3-7).

Kingdom	Daniel 2	Daniel 7
Babylon	Head of Gold	Lion with wings of an Eagle
Medo-Persia	Breast and Arms of Silver	Bear raised up on one side
Greece	Belly and Thighs of Bronze	Leopard with four wings like a bird
Roman	Legs of Iron, Feet and Toes: Iron and Clay	Dreadful and terrifying beast

As with many elements of dispensationalism, the popular concept of a revived form of the Roman Empire seems to arise more from a need to fit a specific system of eschatology as opposed to being true to the Bible.

As a result, the dispensational interpretation of Daniel’s prophetic revelation of Nebuchadnezzar’s dream is fraught with serious theological consequences. One of the most

severe consequences is that it calls into question the person and power of Jesus Christ as well as the inspired prophetic words of Daniel. This is seen in their teaching that Christ did not establish the kingdom at the time appointed in Bible prophecy. It is their position that Jesus postponed the establishment of the kingdom. Hal Lindsey states well the dispensational interpretation:

Had the people received Him, He would have fulfilled the kingly prophecies in their day...But when the Jewish nation as a whole rejected Christ, the fulfillment of His kingship was postponed until the final culmination of world history.³⁰

Popular teachers like Lindsey insist the Jewish rejection of Jesus forced the establishment of the kingdom to be postponed. While this might seem like a clever way out of an obvious theological problem, the text will not support such a conclusion. Nor does this interpretation diminish in any way the resultant consequences to this position. To insist that the kingdom was postponed is to readily admit that it was due in the first century. And if it was due in the first century (in the days of those Roman kings), but was not established, means Jesus failed to accomplish what was prophesied. No matter how dispensationalists try to spin their interpretation, there is no other way around this severe consequence: It makes Christ a failure! Any view of scripture that essentially turns our Lord into a failure needs to be wholly rejected.

According to Daniel, in the days of those kings (the fourth kingdom, Rome) the God of heaven would set up a kingdom which would never be destroyed” (Dan. 2:44). Did this occur? Absolutely!

During His earthly ministry (which occurred in the days of those Roman kings), Jesus preached, “The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel” (Mark 1:15). Jesus is very clear about the timing of the kingdom of God. Without any stated conditions that would dictate its delay or postponement, He says the kingdom was at hand. More to the point, He states, “the time is fulfilled.” What time? The time prophesied in scripture for the coming of the kingdom. This is in complete harmony with the prophetic words of Daniel.

Was the kingdom established in the days of those (Roman) kings? The scriptures positively affirm its first century establishment. The apostle Paul says we have been transferred into the kingdom of God’s beloved Son (Col. 1:13). How could we be transferred into a kingdom that did not exist because it was postponed? The same apostle told the church at Corinth when the end comes Christ will hand over the kingdom to the Father (1 Cor. 15:24). This clearly implies the

³⁰ Hal Lindsey, *There’s a New World Coming* (Santa Ana, CA: Vision House Publishers, 1973), 30.

existence of the kingdom. In his first letter to Timothy, Paul refers to Jesus as “the King of kings and Lord of lords” (1 Tim. 6:15). Dispensationalists speak of Jesus returning to earth to be King of kings, Paul declared this is a position our Savior already holds.

The apostle John wrote of how he was in the kingdom and in the tribulation (Rev. 1:9). Was the inspired apostle unaware that the kingdom had been postponed and even more, that the tribulation was still in the future? Of course not! John was (in the first century) in the kingdom and tribulation. In a scene depicting Christ’s ascension to heaven, John records the voices of those around the throne of God saying, “You have made them to be a kingdom...”(Rev. 5:10).

Jesus says, “All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth” (Matt. 28:18). If Jesus possesses all authority, why does He need to return to earth to become King? New Testament Scripture is unmistakably clear: The kingdom was established in the days of the Roman kings.

The Prophecy of the Seventy Weeks

We turn now to another important prophecy in the book of Daniel. It is found in the closing verses of Daniel chapter nine (Dan. 9:24-27). These prophetic words are the cornerstone of modern dispensationalism. In many respects, its whole system of eschatology rests on these ancient prophetic words.

It is from these inspired verses that dispensationalism derives such false end-time concepts as a future seven years of tribulation, the church age, the antichrist establishing a peace covenant with Israel, the antichrist later breaking that same peace covenant, and the final destruction of the antichrist in the battle of Armageddon. Though none of these popular ideas are mentioned in this text many Bible teachers repeatedly expound on them.

If it can be demonstrated that these prophetic words have been fulfilled, then dispensationalism’s all-important cornerstone is removed, leaving it weak and without any Scriptural support. Such will be the goal in this section of our study.

24 “Seventy weeks have been decreed for your people and your holy city, to finish the transgression, to make an end of sin, to make atonement for iniquity, to bring in everlasting righteousness, to seal up vision and prophecy and to anoint the most holy place.

25 “So you are to know and discern that from the issuing of a decree to restore and rebuild Jerusalem until Messiah the Prince there will be seven weeks and sixty-two weeks; it will be built again, with plaza and moat, even in times of distress.

26 “Then after the sixty-two weeks the Messiah will be cut off and have nothing, and the people of the prince who is to come will destroy the city and the sanctuary. And its end will come with a flood; even to the end there will be war; desolations are determined.

27 “And he will make a firm covenant with the many for one week, but in the middle of the week he will put a stop to sacrifice and grain offering; and on the wing of abominations will come one who makes desolate, even until a complete destruction, one that is decreed, is poured out on the one who makes desolate.”

Daniel 9:24–27

Dispensationalism is largely based on the belief that the seventieth week of this prophecy has yet to be fulfilled. Dispensationalists contend that the Jewish rejection of Jesus and His resultant death led to the stopping of “God’s prophetic clock.” The comments of Chuck Smith are typical of this view.

Jesus Christ was cut off without receiving His kingdom. He did not bring in the age of everlasting righteousness, as is so evident today...We have yet to complete the seventieth seven year period.³¹

The consequences to such an interpretation are profoundly immense. Of first concern is that it calls into question the very power of God and the accuracy of His inspired prophets. For dispensationalism to be true, God’s word must be false. Teachers of this eschatological school will vehemently deny such a charge. But as we will see, this is an unavoidable consequence to this flawed system of belief. The Bible is clear: God’s word does not fail. God through the prophet Isaiah declared:

So will My word be which goes forth from My mouth; It will not return to Me empty, Without accomplishing what I desire, And without succeeding in the matter for which I sent it.

Isaiah 55:11

God’s promise is that His word will never fail. This should be a powerful comfort to us. We can know that His wonderful promises are sure (cf. Heb. 6:18, 10:23). We can stand on His promises. The dispensational interpretation of the prophetic text in Daniel calls into question such a wonderful certainty.

According to this popular eschatology, God did not accomplish the full seventy-week scope of the prophecy. If God’s word failed here, how many other times did it (or might it) fail? False prophets were identified by the failure of their prophecies. If the words spoken did not come to

³¹ Chuck Smith, *The Final Curtain* (Eugene, OR: Harvest House, 1991), 16.

pass the “prophet” was to die (Deut. 18:20). Do dispensationalists really want to include Daniel among the many false prophets who have been exposed over the years?

Not only does this teaching make God’s word to fail, it also turns Jesus Christ into a failure! Once again, dispensationalists will deny such a charge, but the conclusion is inevitable. According to their view, Jesus Christ (due to the Jewish rejection) failed to establish His kingdom on earth. This point considered, what makes dispensationalists confident Jesus will not fail again when He returns the second time? If He failed once, the possibility exists that He might fail again! What would happen then? Is there a contingency plan if this should occur? I have heard no prophecy teacher speak of any such plan.

Another serious consequence to this teaching is what it does to the church. With the stopping of God’s prophetic clock, dispensationalism inserts a gap or parenthesis between the sixty-ninth and seventieth weeks. This gap is what they call “the church age.” Dispensationalist John Walvoord writes:

Not only do the Scriptures indicate that the church of the present age is a distinct body of believers, but there is good evidence that the age itself is a parenthesis in the divine program of God as it was revealed in the Old Testament.... Those who distinguish clearly between the church and Israel have recognized the present age as an unexpected and unpredicted parenthesis as far as Old Testament prophecy is concerned.³²

According to Walvoord, the church is nothing more than an accident. We were never meant to exist as a united body of people. We came into being as an organization because Jesus failed to establish an earthly kingdom. Christ’s failure led to this current, but temporary, “church age,” which has now lasted nearly two-thousand years—much longer than the original scope of the prophecy—even in dispensational terms!

This makes the church, Christ’s beautiful bride, nothing more than an afterthought in the plan of God. Some dispensationalists deny this, stating that the church was always in God’s plan, it was just never revealed in the Old Testament. However, according to Walvoord, the church was never predicted. Any interpretation that results in these types of unavoidable conclusions and necessary consequences must be completely rejected!

Understanding the Seventy Weeks

It is during the supposed future seventieth week of this prophecy that dispensationalists believe the antichrist will be revealed. During this time (seven years in length), they believe there

³² John Walvoord, *The Rapture Question* (Findlay, OH: Durham Publishing, 1957), 23-24.

will be tribulation on the earth—the final three and half years being great tribulation. The rapture of the church will signal the start of this seventieth week. All of which sounds very interesting and intriguing, but nothing of this nature is found in the Bible.

True to his righteous character, this prophetic text finds Daniel praying. Specifically, he is praying for the people of Judah, who because of their sins were being punished by God (Dan. 9:1ff). This divine punishment found them in Babylonian captivity with their holy city, Jerusalem, destroyed. Daniel acknowledges their sin and seeks the Lord's forgiveness. He had been reading in the book of Jeremiah that the punishment for Jerusalem was to be seventy years, which were now reaching their conclusion. As he is praying, Daniel is visited by the angel Gabriel who outlines for him the future of Israel as the covenant people of God (Dan. 9:24-27). Gabriel informs Daniel, "Seventy weeks have been decreed for your people and your holy city" (Dan. 9:24a).

The decree of seventy weeks clearly relates to the seventy years of punishment spelled out by the prophet Jeremiah (Jer. 25:11-12; 29:10). As the seventy years of punishment were to be considered as one unit of decreed time, so too should the seventy weeks. Viewed as a single decreed unit of time there is no reason to suppose any additional gaps (or parenthesis) of time. Any such additions would be a change to the original intended scope of the prophecy. The decree was "seventy weeks," not seventy weeks and two-thousand years.

Based on the scope of prophetic events to take place during these seventy weeks, it is clear that they should not be interpreted as literal weeks. I know of no commentator who interprets them in such a way. Nearly all understand the seventy weeks as symbolically representative of seventy weeks of years. As a week of days is a period of seven days, so a week of years would be seven years; thus, 490 years ($70 \times 7 = 490$).

In support of this view, commentators will usually point to texts such as Numbers 14:34 and Ezekiel 4:4-6 where the year for a day principle is found. In those two texts, we are told this is how the time was being reckoned, we are not told such in the passage in Daniel. In some respects, this weakens this interpretation of the seventy weeks.

While the majority of Bible scholars follow this method of reckoning the time, there is another school of thought. It is based on the more literal interpretation of the Hebrew text, which would be seventy-sevens.

Seven is often used symbolically in scripture for spiritual perfection or completeness. Using this method of interpretation, the seventy-sevens would not be limited to 490 literal years. The period would consist of whatever numbers of years were required to bring about the full (spiritually perfect) scope of the prophecy.

In this way, the seventy-sevens should remind us of the words of Jesus to Peter in regards to forgiveness. When Peter asked how many times he should forgive, Jesus responded, “I do not say to you, up to seven times, but up to seventy times seven” (Matt. 18:22). Jesus did not mean a literal 490 times of forgiveness. The number was merely symbolic for perfect forgiveness.

Both interpretations of seventy-sevens (or weeks) are based on some form of symbolism. Either the seventy weeks are going to be symbolically interpreted as representing a literal seventy weeks of years (limited to exactly 490), or they are going to be viewed as being symbolic of a period of years (not limited to 490). To properly determine which interpretation works best, we need to first consider the scope of prophetic events to be accomplished during this period.

The Scope of Prophetic Events

According to the words given to Daniel, there were six prophetic events to be accomplished during the seventy weeks (Dan. 9:24). Other events to occur within the scope of the prophecy are mentioned later (Dan. 9:25-27), but these six appear to be the primary focus:

1. To finish the transgression.
2. To make an end of sin.
3. To make atonement for iniquity.
4. To bring in everlasting righteousness.
5. To seal up vision and prophecy.
6. To anoint the most holy.

In properly interpreting these prophetic events, one must remember that Daniel was told that each related to “your people and your holy city.” The scope of these six prophetic events must then be interpreted in relation to Israel and Jerusalem.

To finish the transgression speaks directly to the prayer of Daniel wherein he acknowledged the sin of the people (cf. Matt. 23:32; 1 Thess. 2:16). In this sense, it would speak of Israel completing in full her sin against God. This would occur in their rejection of Christ and the subsequent demand for His death. At that time, the people shouted, “His blood shall be on us and on our children!” (Matt. 27:25).

To make an end of sin seems to connect with finishing the transgression. Another reading of the text would be, to seal up sin. Homer Hailey notes that this should be the preferred rendering, giving the example of sins “being reserved for judgment and punishment.”³³ This would be

³³ Homer Hailey, *A Commentary on Daniel*, 188.

consistent with the words of Jesus to the nation of Israel, “Your house is being left to you desolate” and “Upon you will fall the guilt of all the righteous blood shed on the earth” (Matt. 23:34-38).

To make atonement for iniquity and to bring in everlasting righteousness both point to Christ’s death and its accomplishments (Rom. 3:25; 1 Cor. 1:30; Heb. 2:17; 1 Pet. 3:18). Christ’s sacrifice would make true atonement, something the many animal sacrifices in the temple could never do (Heb. 10:4).

To seal up vision and prophecy is not a sealing up of all vision and prophecy. We know that not all has been fulfilled in terms of Christ’s Second Coming, the resurrection of the dead and eternal judgment. The vision and prophecy contextually would again point to Christ’s atoning death and His bringing in of everlasting righteousness. As the day of His death drew near, Jesus told His disciples, “Behold, we are going up to Jerusalem, and all things which are written through the prophets about the Son of Man will be accomplished” (Luke 18:31). After His death,

Jesus told the two Emmaus bound disciples, “These are My words which I spoke to you while I was still with you, that all things which are written about Me in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms must be fulfilled” (Luke 24:44). In connection with these thoughts, Jim McGuiggan notes of this aspect of the prophecy in Daniel:

...it may speak of God’s work in hardening the hearts of the unbelieving that they do not see. This work of God is spoken of in Isaiah 29:10-11 where the word of the Lord (the vision) is become “like the words of a sealed book.” The hardening of the hearts of the rebellious resulted in the crucifixion of our Lord which wrought redemption of the world.³⁴

To anoint the most holy could be applied to any number of ideas. Hailey noted that in the Old Testament, most holy was applied to places, the altar, sacrifices, days, persons, and other things.³⁵ This may be true, but how should it be applied here? The NASB added the word “place”, which may be interpreted in regards to the temple that was to be rebuilt upon the release of the people. However, there is no account in the Scriptures of a temple ever being anointed.

Based on what we have seen thus far in regards to the atoning work of Christ as prophetically outlined in this verse, the anointing of the most holy would appear to be a reference to the Messiah. Jesus Himself in quoting from the prophet Isaiah declared, “The Spirit of the Lord is upon Me, because He anointed Me...” (Isa. 61:1; Luke 4:18). To the household of Cornelius,

³⁴ Jim McGuiggan, *The Book of Daniel* (Lubbock, TX: Montex Publishing, 1978), 152.

³⁵ Hailey, 191.

Peter declared, “You know of Jesus of Nazareth, how God anointed Him with the Holy Spirit” (Acts 10:38). Jesus was the Most Holy who was anointed (cf. Matt. 3:13-17).

All of this considered, it should not be hard to see that the six events prophetic events outlined in this text have all been fulfilled. There is nothing still future in any of these words. Despite the seemingly clear teachings of scripture in this regard, dispensationalists believe all have yet to be fulfilled. In their eschatology, these are all future events to be fulfilled at Christ’s Second Coming.

What then did Jesus accomplish on the cross? If He did not make atonement for iniquity and bring in everlasting righteousness, then what was the cross all about? To deny the fulfillment of the scope of Daniel’s prophecy is to deny the accomplishments of Jesus Christ!

Establishing a Starting Point

The scope of the prophecy understood, we must now establish the starting point for the seventy weeks. Establishing this will help us understand how to apply the seventy-week period—whether literally or symbolically. Fortunately, Gabriel gave Daniel the starting point we need. Unfortunately, this starting point is the subject of much debate. Daniel was told that from the issuing of a decree to restore and rebuild Jerusalem until the Messiah there would be seven weeks and sixty-two weeks (Dan. 9:25). Thus, the starting point for the seventy weeks is the time when this decree was issued. While that might seem simple, there is a real challenge here: There were three decrees given! One must accurately determine the specific decree of which Gabriel was speaking.

Those who view the time as being a literal 490 years prefer either the decree of Ezra in 458 B.C. or that of Artaxerxes I to Nehemiah in 444 B.C. From either of these two dates they subtract the 483 years (7 + 62 weeks = 69 weeks or 483 years) and arrive at the approximate time of Christ.

Dispensationalists typically use the 444 B.C. date. Counting from this point by the number of days on the Hebrew calendar, they manage to get to A.D. 33, which they point to as the year of Christ’s death, the end of the sixty-ninth week, and the stopping of God’s prophetic clock.

Many preterists prefer the Ezra date of 458 B.C. as a starting point. Using this date they get to A.D. 26 and the start of Christ’s earthly ministry. They would identify this as the close of the sixty-ninth and the start of the seventieth week. In verses twenty-six and twenty-seven of this text we see that the Messiah is cut off (killed) in the middle of the seventieth week; thus, three and a half years after the start of His ministry or around A.D. 30. The timing of all this works out very nicely if (and only if) the decree mentioned by Gabriel is the one given to Ezra. And if

(and only if) the seventy-sevens are to be interpreted as seventy weeks of literal years (490 years).

While the starting points of Ezra (458 B.C.) and Artaxerxes I (444 B.C.) might each have some interpretative merit, in harmonizing some other key Old Testament passages, the true starting point for this prophecy would have to be the decree given by King Cyrus. Through the prophet Isaiah, God says of the Persian King:

“It is I who says of Cyrus, ‘He is My shepherd! And he will perform all My desire.’ And he declares of Jerusalem, ‘She will be built,’ And of the temple, ‘Your foundation will be laid.’”

Isaiah 44:28

“I have aroused him in righteousness And I will make all his ways smooth; He will build My city and will let My exiles go free, Without any payment or reward,” says the Lord of hosts.”

Isaiah 45:13

Cyrus himself declares, “The Lord has appointed me to build him a house in Jerusalem” (2 Chron. 36:23; Ezra 1:2). As a result of this, Cyrus issues the first decree to restore and rebuilt Jerusalem (Ezra 4:5; 5:13ff; 6:3). This would appear to be the decree of which Gabriel spoke to Daniel.

It is important to note that Daniel was specifically told, “You (Daniel) are to know and discern that from the issuing of a decree...” The only decree that Daniel would have known was the one given by Cyrus. Daniel would not have been alive to hear the decree given to Ezra or that of Artaxerxes I to Nehemiah. How could Daniel have known and discerned the timing for the prophecy if he never heard the decree?

The decree of Cyrus was given in 538 B.C. This would indicate that the seventy weeks should not be interpreted as a literal 490 years. In this case, ironically, the more literal interpretation of a symbolic seventy-sevens works much better. This allows for the full scope of prophetic events outlined without the limitation of 490 years.

No Future Seventieth Week

As mentioned earlier, a key element to the dispensational interpretation of this text is the belief that the seventieth week is still unfulfilled. If it can be shown that this final week has already been fulfilled then the dispensational interpretation is shown to be false. Some simple math and a little common sense will demonstrate this to be the case.

Daniel is told that the Messiah will be cut off (Dan. 9:26). The Hebrew word (*karat*) rendered “cut off” is used elsewhere in scripture for one being put to death (Lev. 7:20; 17:4). It means to cut, kill, or to eliminate.³⁶ This is clearly a reference to Christ’s crucifixion, which, according to the words given to Daniel occurs after the sixty-two sevens. These sixty-two sevens follow a period of seven sevens (vs. 25). Thus, when Jesus was crucified sixty-nine sevens had been completed ($7 + 62 = 69$).

That stated, let’s take it one very important step further. One of the key words to keep in mind in properly understanding the full completion of the seventy weeks is the word “after.” The Messiah was to be crucified after sixty-nine sevens. If the crucifixion occurs after sixty-nine sevens, it obviously occurs in or during the seventieth seven.

As clear and simple as this would appear, dispensationalist Thomas Ice disagrees, stating, “... Jesus would be crucified after the completion of the seven and 62 weeks, but before the beginning of the seventieth week.”³⁷ Ice is not alone in his conclusion, fellow dispensationalist Chuck Missler agrees. “Verse 26 deals with events after the 62 weeks (therefore, also after the earlier seven, thus making it after the total of 69 weeks), and yet before the 70th week begins... not all the weeks are contiguous.”³⁸

Ice and Missler cannot admit the seventieth seven has occurred. Their eschatological position will not allow for such a logical conclusion. They are forced to conclude that after 69 means before 70. Such defective reasoning is very revealing as to the weakness of the dispensational interpretation of this passage.

The prophecy clearly states the crucifixion would occur after sixty-nine sevens. If it is after the sixty-nine, it is in the seventieth seven. This being true, the seventieth seven has already occurred! And if the seventieth seven has already occurred, there is no future seventieth week for which we today need to be looking.

The fulfillment of the seventieth seven becomes even clearer when the words of verse twenty-seven are understood. Daniel is told, “And he will make a firm covenant with the many for one week, but in the middle of the week he will put a stop to sacrifice and grain offering” (Dan. 9:27a). The debate regarding this verse surrounds the identity of the “he.” Who is the one who makes a firm covenant and in the middle of the week puts a stop to sacrifice? In the

³⁶ Harris, R.L., Harris, R.L., Archer, G.L., & Waltke, B.K. *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament* (Chicago: Moody Press, 19199, c1980). 456.

³⁷ Thomas Ice, *The End Time Controversy*, 333.

³⁸ Chuck Missler, Mark Eastman (Coeur d’Alene, ID: Koinonia House, 1997), 233.

dispensational interpretation, this is the antichrist. The covenant he makes is a peace covenant with national Israel. Walvoord notes, “Obviously the covenant is an attempt to bring peace to the Middle East...”³⁹ Such an interpretation betrays futurism’s foolish attempts to read current events into ancient Bible prophecy.

But wait, there’s more! The dispensational interpretation gets even more contrived. In the middle of this future “week” (three and half years after the rapture), the antichrist breaks the peace covenant and orders a cessation of sacrifices in the supposed rebuilt temple. This all leads to the battle of Armageddon, which Jesus ends at His Second Coming. All of these sensationalistic ideas are falsely read into the text.

Contextually, the “he” of this verse relates to the Messiah (Dan. 9:26). The Messiah is the main subject. Some would argue that the “he” relates to the prince who is to come. Such an argument cannot successfully stand. The subject there would be the people and not the prince. The text reads “the people (subject) of the prince who is to come” The only logical choice for the “he” is the Messiah—the Most Holy who was anointed (Dan. 9:24).

It is the Messiah who makes firm the covenant. There is nothing in this text about a future antichrist making and breaking peace covenants. The NASB translation of “he will make a firm covenant” is misleading. The Hebrew word rendered “make firm” means “to strengthen, or to cause to prevail.”⁴⁰ It is not that Christ makes a new covenant. Rather, He strengthens or causes an existing covenant to prevail. Which covenant? Since it is the Messiah (and not the antichrist) who makes the covenant to prevail, it could relate to either the Abrahamic or Davidic covenant (cf. Acts 2:29-36; Gal. 3:16-17, 29); both ultimately relate to the New Covenant that was promised and established (Jer. 31:31ff; Heb. 8:9ff).

The strengthening of this covenant occurs in the seventieth seven (week) of the prophecy. In the middle of this symbolic period (the 70th week) the Messiah (not the antichrist) puts a stop to sacrifice and grain offering. He does this through His once for all sacrifice for sins (Rom. 6:10; Heb. 7:27; 9:28; 1 Pet. 3:18). His sacrifice made all others ineffective. It is also significant to note that Christ’s sacrifice occurs in the middle of the seventieth seven (vs. 27). This again confirms the truth that there will be no future seventieth week.

The strengthened covenant is with the many (vs. 27). These words should remind us of the words of Jesus as He instituted the Lord’s Supper, “This is My blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many...” (Matt. 26:28). The same thought would apply to His stated mission,

³⁹ John Walvoord, *Prophecy in the New Millennium* (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel, 2001), 56.

⁴⁰ Harris, R.L., Harris, R.L., Archer, G.L., & Waltke, B.K., 148.

“The Son of man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many” (Matt. 20:28). The wonderful accomplishments of Jesus are written all through this prophecy. How sad that dispensationalists (in their twisted interpretation) ascribe them to the evil activities of the antichrist.

Desolations were Determined

If it is the Messiah who strengthens the covenant, who is “the prince who is to come”? Who are the people of the prince who destroy the city and the temple (sanctuary)? One possible interpretation would have the Roman general Titus as this prince. The people of the prince would then be the Roman armies.

Another view would conclude that this prince is also a reference to the Messiah. This interpretation is strengthened by the parable of the marriage feast in which Jesus described a king sending out invitations to a wedding feast for his son. As the king’s slaves announced the invitation, they were mistreated and killed. This enraged the king and He sent His armies, destroyed those murderers, and set their city on fire (Matt. 22:1-7). The message of this parable fits well with Jesus’ pronouncement of doom upon the Jewish nation of the first century, “Behold, your house is being left to you desolate” (Matt. 23:38).

If the prince is the Messiah, the people of the prince would again be a reference to the Roman armies—as directed by the Lord (cf. Isa. 45:1; Eze. 30:24; Dan. 1:1-2). The people of the prince, Rome, would destroy the city and the sanctuary. The city is Jerusalem and the sanctuary is the first century Jewish temple. This was the same temple of which Jesus declared, “Not one stone here will be left upon another, which will not be torn down” (Matt. 24:2). According to the prophecy of Daniel, this would occur on the wing of abominations when one would come to make desolate...even until a complete destruction.” The language of this text is in complete harmony with that found in the Olivet discourse.

Therefore when you see the abomination of desolation which was spoken of through Daniel the prophet, standing in the holy place let the reader understand.

Matthew 24:15

But when you see Jerusalem surrounded by armies, then recognize that her desolation is near.

Luke 21:20

All this considered, we again find a first century fulfillment of events that are portrayed by many popular Bible teachers as still being future. The desolation and destruction described to

Daniel concerned the destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70. As we have demonstrated with the inspired scriptures, there is nothing here about the antichrist. There is no mention of any gap in God's prophetic timetable that was to be anticipated. Nor is there any reason to suppose a future seventieth week full of great tribulation ominously looming on our horizon. All of these sensationalistic ideas fall apart with a proper interpretation of this prophecy.

The End of Time

Another interesting prophecy in Daniel that should be discussed, are in reference to "the end of time." However, which "end of time" is being described? Daniel is told:

But as for you, Daniel, conceal these words and seal up the book until the end of time; many will go back and forth, and knowledge will increase.

Daniel 12:4

Are these words given to Daniel describing the end of all time? Is this a reference to our generation? Many futurist writers believe this to be the case. Peter and Paul Lalonde write, "One of the most overlooked signs the Bible gives concerning the last days says that the generation before the return of Christ would see a great and unique increase in knowledge."⁴¹ As the authors continue, they describe how fast knowledge is increasing in our time. This is certainly true. Who would dare deny the incredible advancements that have been made in science, technology, medicine, and other fields of research? But is this the specific increase in knowledge that was being described to Daniel? Looking back over man's history there has always been an increase in knowledge. Going back in scripture to man's earliest days we can read of the descendants of Cain (Gen. 4:17ff). There we find that Jabal was the father of those who dwell in tents and have livestock (Gen. 4:20). Jubal was father of all who play the lyre and pipe (Gen. 4:21). Tubal-cain was the forger of all implements of bronze and iron (Gen. 4:22). These were all increases in knowledge. They were advancements that at the time might have been described as "amazing."

We see then that man has always been increasing in knowledge. To say that the increase in knowledge today is a sure sign that we have reached "the end" is purely speculative. There is nothing in Daniel's prophecy to indicate that ours is the specific generation being described. But if it is not our generation, which one? Can we know for certain? A closer look at the surrounding context will increase our knowledge in this area.

⁴¹ Peter and Paul Lalonde, *2000 A.D. Are You ready?* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 1997), 6.

Without turning this into a complete commentary on the book of Daniel, our remarks will have to be brief. In Daniel chapter nine, a coming end is described for Daniel's people and the holy city, Jerusalem (Dan. 9:24-27). Contextually, this same "end" is described in the chapters which follow in that great Old Testament book of prophecy (cf. Dan. 11:27, 40; 12:4, 9, 13).

Chapter twelve of Daniel opens with the words, "Now at that time..." (Dan. 12:1). At what time? At the time of the end. As Homer Hailey points out, at "the time of the siege of Jerusalem by the Romans."⁴² Hailey's conclusion is confirmed when we compare the words given to Daniel with those spoken by Jesus in His Olivet discourse.

Daniel is told (Concerning the Roman siege on the holy city):

And there will be a time of distress such as has never occurred since there was a nation until that time.

Daniel 12:1

Jesus said (Concerning the Roman siege on the holy city):

For then there will be a great tribulation, such as has not occurred since the beginning of the world until now, nor ever will.

Matthew 24:21

Both of these passages are clearly describing the same first century last days event. This same event is seen again at the close of verse seven, where Daniel is told, "...as soon as they finish shattering the power of the holy people, all these events will be completed" (Dan. 12:7b).

All of this considered, when Daniel is told about "the end of time," it is the end of time for his people, Israel. The "end of time" described in Daniel is not the end of the world, it was the end of Old Covenant Israel.

As for knowledge increasing, such would occur with the coming of the Messiah and the preaching of the apostles. Knowledge of this prophecy would increase and those with such knowledge would recognize the time of the end. This is seen in the words of warning from Jesus concerning Jerusalem's end:

⁴² Homer Hailey, *A Commentary on Daniel* (Las Vegas, NV: Nevada Publications, 2001), 241.

Therefore when you see the abomination of desolation which was spoken of through Daniel the prophet, standing in the holy place (let the reader understand), then those who are in Judea must flee to the mountains.

Matthew 24:15-16

When the people recognized the abomination taking place in the holy place, their knowledge would increase. They would understand the end was near and the need to flee the city.

The Minor Prophets

The Minor Prophets are only designated as such due to the shortness of their recorded messages. Though brief in their writings, they had “major” words from God to present to their readers. In the Hebrew Bible, the minor prophets form one book known as “The Twelve.” Their order is the same as we find in our Old Testament. It should be pointed out that their actual chronological order would be different than their canonical order. Though there is debate in regards to some of the writings, chronologically speaking, the Minor Prophets might look something like this:

Obadiah
Joel
Jonah
Amos
Hosea
Micah
Zephaniah
Nahum
Habakkuk
Haggai
Zechariah
Malachi

In our study, we will follow the canonical order of the Minor Prophets. If you have not spent much time looking at these books, you will be amazed at the lessons to be learned from these twelve inspired men. Sadly, the Minor Prophets may be the section of Scripture with which we are the most unfamiliar.

Hosea

The prophet Hosea ministered to the northern kingdom of Israel. His ministry was during the reign of Jeroboam II, around 750-725 B.C. Interestingly, Hosea dates his ministry by identifying

four kings of Judah (Hos. 1:1). Perhaps, this was Hosea's way of indicating his belief that the Davidic line of kings was the only true lineage (cf. 2 Sam. 7:12ff). One resource notes:

Hosea began his ministry when Israel, under Jeroboam II (793- 753), was at the zenith of its power. Hosea then witnessed the rapid disintegration and fall of the northern kingdom, going from its peak to its end in less than 30 years:

- Jeroboam II (793- 753). A reign of great prosperity.
- Zechariah (753- 752). Reigned six months; assassinated by Shallum.
- Shallum (752). Reigned one month; assassinated by Menahem.
- Menahem (752- 742). Unspeakably cruel; a puppet of Assyria.
- Pekahiah (742- 740). Assassinated by Pekah.
- Pekah (752- 732). Assassinated by Hoshea.
- Hoshea (732- 722). Fall of Samaria (721). End of northern kingdom.⁴³

Like Jeremiah warning Judah of the Babylonians coming to punish the people, Hosea warned Israel of the coming invasion of the Assyrians.

To help the prophet understand the sorrow and disappointment God was experiencing from the sinful conduct of the people, the Lord asked him to do the following:

When the Lord first spoke through Hosea, the Lord said to Hosea, "Go, take to yourself a wife of harlotry and have children of harlotry; for the land commits flagrant harlotry, forsaking the Lord."

Hosea 1:2

In obedience to God, Hosea marries a woman named, Gomer (Hosea 1:2). This marriage gives him insight into the feelings of the Almighty. Homer Hailey expressed it well:

Hosea was directed to marry "a woman of whoredom"; that is, a daughter of the age, one brought up under the influence of idolatry and in whose character would have been planted the seeds of immorality. She was not unchaste at the time of marriage but was a maiden of such background that in later conduct the fruit of idolatry was fully borne. Out of his experience with Gomer, Hosea came to understand as none other could the feeling of Jehovah for Israel. The real key to the book is the parallel between Hosea's experience with Gomer and Jehovah's experience with Israel.⁴⁴

⁴³ Halley's Bible Handbook, Electronic Edition, Hosea.

⁴⁴ Homer Hailey, *A Commentary on the Minor Prophets*, 128.

The sinful character of the nation during Hoses’s ministry as a prophet of God is clearly delineated in the book.

There is swearing, deception, murder, stealing and adultery. They employ violence, so that bloodshed follows bloodshed.

Hosea 4:2

Harlotry, wine and new wine take away the understanding. My people consult their wooden idol, and their diviner’s wand informs them; For a spirit of harlotry has led them astray, And they have played the harlot, departing from their God.

Hosea 4:11–12

They speak mere words, With worthless oaths they make covenants; And judgment sprouts like poisonous weeds in the furrows of the field.

Hosea 10:4

And now they sin more and more, And make for themselves molten images, Idols skillfully made from their silver, All of them the work of craftsmen. They say of them, “Let the men who sacrifice kiss the calves!”

Hosea 13:2

The referenced verses represent only a fraction of sins outlined in the book. Throughout the book the sins of the people are described. Following each description is God’s plea for the nation to return. The book could be simply outlined like this:

Judgment

Hosea 1:2-9

Hosea 2:2-13

Hosea 4:1-5:14

Hosea 6:4-11:7

Hosea 11:12-13:16

Salvation

Hosea 1:10-2:1

Hosea 2:14-3:5

Hosea 5:15-6:3

Hosea 11:8-11

Hosea 14⁴⁵

⁴⁵ Charles R. Swindoll, *God’s Masterwork*, Vol. 3, 5.

Joel

Joel was a prophet in Judah. The date of this prophet and the time of his writing is one of interpretative speculation. Homer Hailey writes:

The date of the book is as conjectural as the life of the man himself. It is variously placed from one of the earliest, *ca.* 900 B.C., to the period after the exile, *ca.* 400 B.C. Keil, Sampey, Young, and others - scholars of repute - defend as early date, about 830 B.C. Men of similar scholarship - Driver, Farrar, Pfeiffer, and others - contend for a post exilic date.⁴⁶

Homer Hailey presents a pre-exile date for the book, around 830 B.C. Whichever dates one chooses to assign to the book, the message of Joel is not hard to understand. It is a message of coming judgment. Joel's readers are told to "wail" (Joel 1:5, 8, 11, 13), to "awake" (Joel 1:5), to be "ashamed" (Joel 1:11). The coming day of the Lord is repeated as a warning (Joel 1:15; 2:1, 11, 31). In his inspired writing, the prophet speaks of destruction, consumption, ruin, and desolation.

In spite of the prophet's message of doom, the most familiar prophecy of the book is one of hope:

28 "It will come about after this That I will pour out My Spirit on all mankind; And your sons and daughters will prophesy, Your old men will dream dreams, Your young men will see visions.

29 "Even on the male and female servants I will pour out My Spirit in those days.

30 "I will display wonders in the sky and on the earth, Blood, fire and columns of smoke.

31 "The sun will be turned into darkness And the moon into blood Before the great and awesome day of the Lord comes.

32 "And it will come about that whoever calls on the name of the Lord Will be delivered; For on Mount Zion and in Jerusalem There will be those who escape, As the Lord has said, Even among the survivors whom the Lord calls.

Joel 2:28-32

Students of Scripture will recognize this as the prophecy quoted by the apostle Peter on the Day of Pentecost. Peter stated the fulfillment of this prophecy, as seen and heard in the wonderful events taking place in the city of Jerusalem, as the Holy Spirit fell upon the Apostles (cf. Acts 2;1ff).

⁴⁶ Homer Hailey, *A Commentary on the Minor Prophets*, 40.

Amos

Amos was a shepherd in Judah (Amos 1:1). He was called as a prophet and sent with a message from God, to the Northern Kingdom, Israel (Amos 7:14-15). The words, “Thus says the Lord” are repeated throughout the book (Amos 1::3, 6, 9, 11, 13; 2:1, 4, 6; 3:11; 5:4, 16; 7:17). Other similar expressions are also used throughout the book. This was the prophet’s way of getting the people’s attention. He is very clear and wants them to know, that the words he is speaking are from God.

Halley’s Bible Handbook has this regarding the date of the book:

This prophecy seems to have been delivered on a visit to Bethel (Amos 7: 10- 14), about 30 years before the fall of Israel.

According to Josephus, the earthquake (1: 1) occurred at the time when Uzziah was struck by leprosy (2 Chronicles 26: 16- 21); this would place Amos’s prophecy in about 750 b. c.

The reign of Jeroboam II had been very successful. The kingdom had been considerably enlarged (2 Kings 14: 23- 29). Israel was in the high tide of prosperity, but brazen in its idolatry and reeking with moral rotteness. It was a land of swearing, stealing, injustice, oppression, robbery, adultery, and murder.

It had been some 200 years since the Ten Tribes had set up the northern kingdom, with calf worship as its religion (1 Kings 12: 25- 33). During part of this time, Baal worship also had been adopted, and many of the abominable practices of Canaanite idolatry were still rampant. God had already sent the prophets Elijah, Elisha, and Jonah. But to no avail. Israel, hardened in its idolatry and wickedness, was speeding toward ruin when God sent Amos and Hosea in a final effort to stop the nation’s mad dash toward death.⁴⁷

The book of Amos begins with God pronouncing judgments on nations other than, Israel: Syria (Damascus 1:3-5), Philistines (Gaza 1:6-8), Tyre (1:9-10), Edom (1:11-12), Ammon (1:13-15), Moab (2:1-3), and Judah (2:4-5).

One can imagine how Israel must have initially enjoyed the prophet’s words. They were hearing all these other nations denounced for their sins. This man Amos must have seemed okay to them, even if he was from Judah. However, whatever joy they initially felt in his message was soon lost. The next judgement was pronounced against them, and came in even greater detail (Amos 2:6ff).

A study of the Minor Prophets reminds us that God is paying attention to our thoughts, words, and actions. The Bible is very clear: there will come a day of judgment. Let us learn from the warnings of the prophets given to others.

⁴⁷ Halley’s Bible Handbook, Electronic Edition, Amos.

Obadiah

The book of Obadiah is a prophecy of doom for the nation of Edom. Remember, the Edomites were descendants of Esau. The reason for the coming doom was their pride, and their participation in an attack against Jerusalem (vs. 11). Homer Hailey writes:

The prophet refers to an attack on Jerusalem which can be narrowed down to two possibilities: the days of Jehoram when the Philistines and Arabians attacked the city (848-844 B.C.; see 2 Chronicles 21:8-10, 16-17), and the destruction of Jerusalem by the Chaldeans (586 B.C.). Arguments for the later date is made by the “we” of Obadiah 1, “we have heard tidings from Jehovah,” which, in the mind of some, would include prophets other than Obadiah. This position is strengthened by statements from two additional prophets, Jeremiah (49:7-13) and Ezekiel (35:1-10), and by an unknown psalmist in Babylon who said, “Remember, O Jehovah, against the children of Edom the day of Jerusalem; who said, Rase it, rase it, even to the foundation thereof” (Ps. 137:7).⁴⁸

Jonah

Every young child who has attended Bible class has learned about Jonah being swallowed by the great fish. However, the book of Jonah contains some very adult lessons. The message it presents is a very challenging one to those who will listen and make proper application. The date of writing for the events recorded in this familiar Old Testament account is somewhere around 780 B.C.

Jonah was given some very clear and specific instructions from God. He was to go to Nineveh and preach repentance to them (Jonah 1:1). As one of God’s prophets we would expect he would do as he was told. However, Jonah disobeyed.

But Jonah rose up to flee to Tarshish from the presence of the Lord. So he went down to Joppa, found a ship which was going to Tarshish, paid the fare and went down into it to go with them to Tarshish from the presence of the Lord.

Jonah 1:3

Jonah went the opposite direction. God told him to go north, but he went south. Anytime we disobey God, it is going to lead us on a downward journey. Jonah’s downward journey is outlined in verse three. He went down to Joppa. He went down into the ship. He laid down to

⁴⁸ Homer Hailey, *A Commentary on the Minor Prophets*, 28.

sleep (Jonah 1:5). Later he went down into the sea (Jonah 1:15), and later still, down into the belly of a great fish (Jonah 1:17). Later still, he found himself down and discouraged (Jonah 4:3).

Why was Jonah so resistant to obey God? Because God had asked his prophet to preach to Israel's bitter enemy, the Assyrians. Jonah could not see why the people of Nineveh deserved an opportunity to repent. He could not understand why God would show mercy to them. Jonah wanted them lost! God was giving them an opportunity to be saved. Jonah hated them. God was demonstrating love to them.

If you are familiar with the account of Jonah, you know that he eventually makes it to Nineveh. Of course it took three days and three nights in the belly of a great fish to get Jonah back on course. When he arrives in Nineveh and begins preaching, he finds great success. The people listen and repent.

4 Then Jonah began to go through the city one day's walk; and he cried out and said, "Yet forty days and Nineveh will be overthrown."

5 Then the people of Nineveh believed in God; and they called a fast and put on sackcloth from the greatest to the least of them.

6 When the word reached the king of Nineveh, he arose from his throne, laid aside his robe from him, covered himself with sackcloth and sat on the ashes.

7 He issued a proclamation and it said, "In Nineveh by the decree of the king and his nobles: Do not let man, beast, herd, or flock taste a thing. Do not let them eat or drink water.

8 "But both man and beast must be covered with sackcloth; and let men call on God earnestly that each may turn from his wicked way and from the violence which is in his hands.

9 "Who knows, God may turn and relent and withdraw His burning anger so that we will not perish."

10 When God saw their deeds, that they turned from their wicked way, then God relented concerning the calamity which He had declared He would bring upon them. And He did not do it.

Jonah 3:4–10

God relents from the punishment He was going to bring upon Nineveh. This was a time to celebrate. The people of Nineveh had repented. Jonah was successful in delivering the word of God. However, look at Jonah's reaction to the events that occurred:

1 But it greatly displeased Jonah and he became angry.

2 He prayed to the Lord and said, "Please Lord, was not this what I said while I was still in my own country? Therefore in order to forestall this I fled to Tarshish, for I knew that You are a

gracious and compassionate God, slow to anger and abundant in lovingkindness, and one who relents concerning calamity.

3 “Therefore now, O Lord, please take my life from me, for death is better to me than life.” (Jonah 4:1–3).

Jonah is so upset at the mercy shown by God to Israel’s enemy. In Jonah’s mind they did not deserve God’s compassion and grace.

The question we need to consider is this: Where (or who) is our Nineveh? To whom will you refuse to go with the saving message of the Gospel? From whom will you deprive what God wants mankind to enjoy: peace, love, salvation, hope, and so many other wonderful blessings? Jonah went to Joppa hiding in a ship. Where have you gone to hide from the very clear responsibility we have to share the Gospel (Matt. 28:19-20; Rom. 10:11-15; 2 Tim. 2:2)?

We might call Jonah, “The Reluctant Prophet.” Let us not be “Reluctant Disciples.” Look for opportunities to share the Word of God with a friend, family member, or even an enemy. And for those who might wish to keep on hiding, a word of caution: Watch out for big fish!

Micah

Micah was a prophet in Judah. He was contemporary with the prophet Isaiah (cf. Isa 1:1 and Micah 1:1). In fact, a comparison between Isaiah 2:1-4 and Micah 4:1-3 will reveal they are almost word for word the same. Commentators have debated which is dependent upon the other. The similarities may just be the common prophetic announcement for that time, from two contemporary spokesmen for God.

In the first chapter, Micah proclaims a coming judgment on Israel (Samaria), and Judah. The judgment against Israel would be fulfilled by the Assyrians when they took the people of the land captive, and later filled the land of Samaria with foreigners (2 Kings 17). Judgement upon Judah would come later, through the Babylonians. The Assyrian invasion against Jerusalem was halted in the days of Hezekiah (2 Kings 18:13-19:37; Isaiah 36-37).

In the second chapter we see the reason for the judgment. The sins of the nation are outlined. One resource noted: “This chapter takes up the theme of social evil so common in the eighth century prophets (cf. Isa. 1:16–17, 21–23; 3:14–15; 5:8–23; 10:1–2; Hos. 7:1–3; 12:7 –8; Amos 2:6–8; 4:1; 5:10–13; 6:4–6; 8:4–6).”⁴⁹

⁴⁹ Zondervan Bible Commentary (1 Volume) Olive Tree Bible Software Electronic Edition.

In chapter three there is judgment spoken against the rulers. In chapters four and five there is prophecy of Messianic hope. In chapter six, we find the most familiar verses in the book of Micah.

6 With what shall I come to the Lord And bow myself before the God on high? Shall I come to Him with burnt offerings, With yearling calves?

7 Does the Lord take delight in thousands of rams, In ten thousand rivers of oil? Shall I present my firstborn for my rebellious acts, The fruit of my body for the sin of my soul?

8 He has told you, O man, what is good; And what does the Lord require of you But to do justice, to love kindness, And to walk humbly with your God?

Micah 6:6–8

Nahum

Nahum was a prophet in Judah. The date given the writing of this book is between 663 B.C. to 612 B.C. Homer Hailey writes:

The earliest date identifiable in the book is the fall of No-amon, the Egyptian Thebes (Nahum 3:8). The expedition alluded to was carried out Ashurbanipal, king of Assyria, about the year 663 B.C. In the campaign Thebes was destroyed and a great store of booty carried into Assyria. Nineveh was destroyed by the combined forces of the Medes and Chaldeans, 612 B.C. Somewhere between these two date Nahum announced the fall of Nineveh, the theme of the book.⁵⁰

As Hailey noted, the theme of the book is the fall of Nineveh (2:8; 3:7, 18). You will recall that Jonah was sent to Nineveh to preach repentance. Upon hearing Jonah's message, the people of Nineveh did indeed repent (Jonah 3:6-10). That took place a little over a hundred years prior to Nahum. The repentance that took place in the days of Jonah did not last. Hence, Nahum describes their punishment from God. This is the message the prophet Jonah would have loved to preach. Right toward the start of the book, the prophet reminds us that God is slow to anger (Nahum 1:3). Perhaps, this is a reference to message of God sent by Jonah, to Nineveh.

In the first chapter of the book, Nahum describes how God will avenge His enemies (cf. Rom. 12:19-21). This chapter is a strong warning for us today. While one may think their actions are going unnoticed by God, know that the Lord knows what you are doing and will bring it to an

⁵⁰ Homer Hailey, *A Commentary on the Minor Prophets*, 249-250.

end (1:9). As a means of encouragement for the people of Judah, to whom this message was delivered, God says through the prophet:

Thus says the Lord, “Though they are at full strength and likewise many, Even so, they will be cut off and pass away. Though I have afflicted you, I will afflict you no longer. “So now, I will break his yoke bar from upon you, And I will tear off your shackles.”

Nahum 1:12–13

To the people of Judah, Nineveh must appeared to still be at full strength. Yet, God says they are going to be brought down. God had used Assyria to punish Judah. However, He would no longer use Assyria in this way. No doubt, this was very encouraging to the people of Judah. In chapters two and three, the fall of Nineveh is described. In the form of an outline, Nahum might be looked in the following way:

Chapter One: God is the Judge

Chapters Two - Three: Nineveh is the Judged

Habakkuk

The date of writing for the book of Habakkuk is estimated to be between 612-605 B.C. He was a prophet in Judah. He is a prophet with whom we can all personally relate.

“God’s ways are not our ways.” We often use this expression without thinking about its meaning. Sometimes we say it out of frustration, sometimes out of confusion. At other times, we’re simply expressing our feeling that the world in general (and our little part of it in particular) is in a mess. We have a hard time seeing how God fits into it (or more accurately, how our mess fits into our understanding of God).⁵¹

This was certainly the case for the prophet Habakkuk. He looked around at the world of his day, specifically, Judah and Jerusalem, and wondered why God wasn’t do anything in response to all the wrongs the prophet was seeing.

How long, O Lord, will I call for help, And You will not hear? I cry out to You, “Violence!” Yet You do not save. Why do You make me see iniquity, and cause me to look on wickedness? Yes, destruction and violence are before me; Strife exists and contention arises. Therefore the law is

⁵¹ Stuart Brisco, *Hearing God’s Voice Above the Noise*, 117.

ignored and justice is never upheld. For the wicked surround the righteous; Therefore justice comes out perverted.

Habakkuk 1:2–4

Habakkuk wanted to know, why God was not doing anything about all these problems he was seeing. Ever wonder the same yourself? How many times have we all asked God, “Where are You?” Habakkuk would soon learn (and so must we) that God was (and is) very much at work. Look at God’s response to the confused and troubled prophet:

“Look among the nations! Observe! Be astonished! Wonder! Because I am doing something in your days— You would not believe if you were told. “For behold, I am raising up the Chaldeans, That fierce and impetuous people Who march throughout the earth To seize dwelling places which are not theirs.

Habakkuk 1:5–6

God informs Habakkuk, He was very much at work. However, He was working in a way that Habakkuk would not understand. The justice Habakkuk was seeking was coming. God was raising up the Babylonians to come and punish His own people. Confused at what God was doing, Habakkuk replies to God:

Your eyes are too pure to approve evil, And You can not look on wickedness with favor. Why do You look with favor On those who deal treacherously? Why are You silent when the wicked swallow up Those more righteous than they?

Habakkuk 1:13

Once again, we can relate to the prophet’s question. How could God use a wicked nation, to punish a people who were more righteous? This made no sense to Habakkuk, and it makes no sense to many of us.

God’s ways are certainly not our ways (cf. Rom. 11:33-35). His thinking, mercy, patience, justice, and love are all far greater. The Bible declares they are secret things that belong to God that we cannot know (Deut. 29:29). As a means of encouraging Habakkuk, God informs him, that Babylon too, will be judged for their sins.

With the encouragement he received from God, Habakkuk closes this wonderful book of prophecy with these inspiring words:

Though the fig tree should not blossom And there be no fruit on the vines, Though the yield of the olive should fail And the fields produce no food, Though the flock should be cut off from the fold

And there be no cattle in the stalls, Yet I will exult in the Lord, I will rejoice in the God of my salvation. The Lord God is my strength, And He has made my feet like hinds' feet, And makes me walk on my high places. For the choir director, on my stringed instruments.

Habakkuk 3:17-19

Though the world around him was given over to sin, though judgment was coming from God, Habakkuk found confidence in the nature and power of God. As we look at our world today, we can and must find the same great confidence in the Almighty.

Zephaniah

Zephaniah was a prophet in Judah. In the first verse, the prophet indicates that he is a descendant of king Hezekiah of Judah. Hezekiah was one of the good kings in Judah (2 Kings 18-20). Also in the first verse we learn that Zephaniah prophesied in the days of king Josiah (2 Kings 22-23:27). Being a descendant of Hezekiah, Zephaniah would have been related to Josiah.

In typical Old Testament prophetic style, Zephaniah's prophecy might at first be interpreted as the end of the world. Notice verses two and three:

"I will completely remove all things From the face of the earth," declares the Lord. "I will remove man and beast; I will remove the birds of the sky And the fish of the sea, And the ruins along with the wicked; And I will cut off man from the face of the earth," declares the Lord.

Zephaniah 1:2-3

Despite what might sound like the end of the world, the prophet gets very specific as to what is being described in the next verse.

"So I will stretch out My hand against Judah And against all the inhabitants of Jerusalem. And I will cut off the remnant of Baal from this place, And the names of the idolatrous priests along with the priests.

Zephaniah 1:4

The primary subject of the prophet's writing is the city of Jerusalem. This theme is found in the chapters one and three. In the second chapter other nations are described as about to suffer punishment, like Judah, by the hands of the Babylonians.

Gaza, Ashkelon, Ashdod, Ekron (2: 4) were cities of the Philistines. “ Kerethite people” (2: 5) is another name for Philistines. Cushites (2: 12): Cush was south of Egypt and north of Ethiopia; at the time of Zephaniah, a Cushite dynasty ruled Egypt.

Within 20 years all these lands—Philistia, Moab, Ammon, Cush, and Assyria, the terror of the world, with its proud capital Nineveh—would lay desolate under the heel of Babylon.⁵²

Sprinkled throughout all the descriptions of coming judgment, doom, and destruction, is a message of hope. The prophet refers to faithful remnant who will return to the land.

Seek the Lord, All you humble of the earth Who have carried out His ordinances; Seek righteousness, seek humility. Perhaps you will be hidden In the day of the Lord’s anger.

Zephaniah 2:3

And the coast will be For the remnant of the house of Judah, They will pasture on it. In the houses of Ashkelon they will lie down at evening; For the Lord their God will care for them And restore their fortune.

Zephaniah 2:7

“But I will leave among you A humble and lowly people, And they will take refuge in the name of the Lord. “The remnant of Israel will do no wrong And tell no lies, Nor will a deceitful tongue Be found in their mouths; For they will feed and lie down With no one to make them tremble.”

Zephaniah 3:12–13

The message of Zephaniah reminds us again, that no matter the difficulties that exist around us in the world, as God’s faithful children, there is always hope.

Haggai

The prophet Haggai, along with Zechariah and Malachi, take us to the period following the return from Babylonian captivity. This time frame is seen in the first verse of the book of Haggai.

In the second year of Darius the king, on the first day of the sixth month, the word of the Lord came by the prophet Haggai to Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel, governor of Judah, and to Joshua the son of Jehozadak, the high priest, saying,

Haggai 1:1

⁵² Halley’s Bible Handbook, Electronic Edition.

The message of the prophet was for the people working on rebuilding the temple and the city of Jerusalem. Please refer back to pages 48-50 of this material to see how the prophets message related to the work at that time.

Zechariah

Zechariah was a contemporary of Haggai. This is easily seen by comparing the first verses of each book. Each describes the time frame as the second year of Darius.

The book of Zechariah is longer than any of the other minor prophets. Its language more difficult, made up of series of a visions seen by the prophet (1:7-17; 1:18-21; 2:1-13; 3:1-10; 4:1-14; 5:1-4; 5:5-11; 6:1-8). These visions will remind the reader of the books of Daniel and Revelation. One of the most famous prophecies of the book concerns Jesus Christ.

“Then say to him, ‘Thus says the Lord of hosts, “Behold, a man whose name is Branch, for He will branch out from where He is; and He will build the temple of the Lord. “Yes, it is He who will build the temple of the Lord, and He who will bear the honor and sit and rule on His throne. Thus, He will be a priest on His throne, and the counsel of peace will be between the two offices.”’

Zechariah 6:12–13

The prophecy describes how Jesus (Branch) who will build the real temple of the Lord (cf. Matt. 16:18). Not only will He the temple, He will hold two offices. He will be Priest and King. Many years later from the time of this prophecy, the Hebrew writer discussed its fulfillment.

Now the main point in what has been said is this: we have such a high priest, who has taken His seat at the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in the heavens,

Hebrews 8:1

The Hebrew writer describes Jesus as our High Priest (Heb. 2:17; 4:14-16). Scripture describes Him as the King of kings and Lord and lords (1 Tim. 6:15; Rev. 19:16). Once again, Bible prophecy proves itself divine in nature (cf. Isa. 55:11).

Malachi

Malachi is the last of the Old Testament books. The prophet ministered in the post exile period of Israel’s history. Regarding the date of writing, one resource noted:

Malachi's book cannot be earlier than 516 /515 B. C., because that was when the second temple was finished. Scholars have placed him anytime from then on through the administration of Nehemiah in Jerusalem. Ezra came to Jerusalem in 458 B. C. and Nehemiah in 445 (according to the traditional reckoning).⁵³

As the book opens, God makes a powerful statement to Israel, reminding of His great love for them.

“I have loved you,” says the Lord. But you say, “How have You loved us?” “Was not Esau Jacob’s brother?” declares the Lord. “Yet I have loved Jacob; but I have hated Esau, and I have made his mountains a desolation and appointed his inheritance for the jackals of the wilderness.”

Malachi 1:2–3

The apostle Paul quotes these verses in the book of Romans (Rom. 9:13). When the prophet speaks of Jacob and Esau, he is not describing them as individuals, but rather as two nations (cf. Gen. 39:23). Edom came from Esau. God says through the prophet, they have been utterly destroyed and will not be able to rebuild (Mal. 1:4). Jacob (Israel) had been punished and was allowed to rebuild. God’s love for Israel was seen in so many ways. yet, what kind of love were they showing for Him?

“ ‘A son honors his father, and a servant his master. Then if I am a father, where is My honor? And if I am a master, where is My respect?’ says the Lord of hosts to you, O priests who despise My name. But you say, ‘How have we despised Your name?’ “You are presenting defiled food upon My altar. But you say, ‘How have we defiled You?’ In that you say, ‘The table of the Lord is to be despised.’ “But when you present the blind for sacrifice, is it not evil? And when you present the lame and sick, is it not evil? Why not offer it to your governor? Would he be pleased with you? Or would he receive you kindly?” says the Lord of hosts.

Malachi 1:6–8

The are rebuked for the sacrifices they are offering to God. Rather than unblemished animals, they are offering the blind and the lame. As such, they are despising the altar of the Lord and His name. The rebuke of the priests and the people continues in the second and third chapters of the book.

The last chapter of the book sets up a perfect transition from Old Testament to New. Here is the fourth chapter in its entirety.

⁵³ Expositors Bible Commentary, Abridged. Electronic Edition.

1 “For behold, the day is coming, burning like a furnace; and all the arrogant and every evildoer will be chaff; and the day that is coming will set them ablaze,” says the Lord of hosts, “so that it will leave them neither root nor branch.”

2 “But for you who fear My name, the sun of righteousness will rise with healing in its wings; and you will go forth and skip about like calves from the stall.

3 “You will tread down the wicked, for they will be ashes under the soles of your feet on the day which I am preparing,” says the Lord of hosts.

4 “Remember the law of Moses My servant, even the statutes and ordinances which I commanded him in Horeb for all Israel.

5 “Behold, I am going to send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and terrible day of the Lord.

6 “He will restore the hearts of the fathers to their children and the hearts of the children to their fathers, so that I will not come and smite the land with a curse.”

Malachi 4

A day of coming judgment, burning like a furnace is described. In addition, the prophecy describes Elijah coming. This reference to Elijah is actually describing John the baptist (Matt. 17:; whose message was consistent with the words of this prophecy.

10 “The axe is already laid at the root of the trees; therefore every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire.

11 “As for me, I baptize you with water for repentance, but He who is coming after me is mightier than I, and I am not fit to remove His sandals; He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire.

12 “His winnowing fork is in His hand, and He will thoroughly clear His threshing floor; and He will gather His wheat into the barn, but He will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire.”

Matthew 3:10–12

Understanding prophecies such as those found in Malachi provide us with a much greater ability to understand the New Testament. It is hoped this very brief overview of the Old Testament will inspire you to deeper study of these incredibly important thirty-nine books, and indeed, the whole Bible.