New Geneva Introduction to the *Old Testament*



Edited by

R.C. Sproul

Adapted by Don K. Clements

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Preface

When the New Geneva Study Bible was first published in 1995 as a result of the outstanding work of the Foundation for Reformation, I was among the thousands (millions?) of Christians thrilled to have in my hands not only the text of the Bible, but also the explanatory and reference text that had been compiled—what was, in fact, “the most comprehensive set of helps in Bible study format for Christians interested in the Reformed tradition.” The editorial staff and contributors had produced what was thought by many to be the best work since the original Geneva Study Bible.

When that version went out of print at the beginning of the 21st Century, and was replaced by two separate revisions and updates—one based on the NIV text and the other based on the ESV text—these concise, accessible, understandable introductions from the New Geneva Study Bible seemed to be lost (except to those of us who had purchased the original). When I designed the curriculum for an on-line training course, I purchased a number of books containing introductory materials to the books of the Bible. Some were far too technical for use by the average reader and those that even came close were written as textbooks, carrying exorbitant prices.

In an effort to produce volumes of both New and Old Testament introductions, Dr. Luder Whitlock, President of the Foundation for Reformation (the copyright holders for this material), asked his Board to grant Metokos Press permission to reprint this work in the present format. They agreed. I am confident that many more readers will now both enjoy reading this material and be better equipped in their service to God as officers, teachers, students, parents, and individuals. Many have a need for this general introductory material in order to better understand and interpret the various books of the Bible.

To Dr. Luder Whitlock, former President of Reformed Theological Seminary, who was the driving force to bring out the writing of the New Geneva Study Bible to begin with. He, like me, was saddened that the Bible went out of print. Moreover, I am extremely grateful that the Foundation for Reformation, where he still serves as President, was willing to allow these book introductions to be republished in this form.

Don K. Clements, Narrows, Virginia, April 2006

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Contributors

The production of the New Geneva Study Bible involved the joint efforts of the contributors and editors. The process was similar to that of Bible translation in which each person had a creative function.

The Old and New Testament contributors wrote introductions, outlines, and annotations for specific books of the Bible. The annotations in particular were edited and revised at length by the editorial staff. The contributors then responded concerning all editorial changes and revisions. Thus, the final form of the study material represents the combined work of contributors and editors. The result is the most comprehensive set of helps in study Bible format for Christians interested in the Reformed tradition.

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Introduction to the Pentateuch

The first five books of the Bible (Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy), commonly called “the Law” or “the Pentateuch” (Greek pentateuchos,“five volume [book]”), are the first and most important section of the Old Testament in both Jewish and Christian Bibles. The threefold division of the Hebrew Bible into Law, Prophets, and Writings can be traced as far back as the New Testament (Luke 24:44) and the prologue to Sirach (c. 180 B.C.). The arrangement of the Old Testament in Christian Bibles, based on the Greek Old Testament (the Septuagint; c. 150 B.C.), also gives the Pentateuch such primacy.

Author and Date. References to the Pentateuch by such terms as ”the Book of Moses” (Neh. 13:1; 2 Chr. 25:4), “the Book of the Law of Moses” (Neh. 8:1), “the Law of the Lord” (1 Chr. 16:40; Ezra 7:10), and “the Book of the Law of God” (Neh. 8:18) are largely restricted to writings following the Babylonian exile of the Jews in the sixth century B.C. It is uncertain whether references to “the law” in earlier books refer to the Pentateuch or to parts of it (e.g., Josh. 1:8; 8:34; 2 Kin. 14:6; 22:8). The New Testament uses similar designations for the Pentateuch (Matt. 12:5; Mark 12:26; Luke 16:16; John 7:19; Gal. 3:10). These various headings underscore the Mosaic authorship of the Pentateuch and its binding authority. That is, Israel’s divine King caused His commands to be written down through Moses (c. 1400 B.C.).

Besides these titles indicating Moses’ authorship, Jesus said, “Moses… wrote about Me” (John 5:46), and He explained to His disciples on the road to Emmaus what the Scriptures said about Him “beginning at Moses” (Luke 24:27). The Pentateuch itself tells of Moses’ decisive contribution to it: he wrote the great legal code, the Book of the Covenant (Ex. 24:3-7), and the exposition of the law recorded in Deuteronomy (Deut. 31: 24-26).

During the past two centuries, however, most scholars who do not accept the Bible’s own witness about its authorship have held that it was composed by editors in the period following the Babylonian exile of the sixth century B.C. Such scholars maintain that the editors creatively pieced together at least four earlier literary documents. The theory is based on the following observations: the distribution of divine names, especially “Elohim” and “Yahweh”; variations of vocabulary, such as the different Hebrew words for “maidservant”; similar stories (e.g., Gen. 12:10-20; 20:1-

19; 26:1-11); the repetition of laws, such as those for the Passover (Ex. 12:1-20, 21-23; Deut. 16:1-8); and supposedly varying theologies. They regard the Pentateuch as a composite of works by "Yahwist," the "Elohist," the "Deuteronomist," and the "Priestly" writer. The corresponding documents, conventionally abbreviated "J," "E," "P," and "D," are assigned approximate dates of 950, 850, 600, and 500 B.C.

More recently the consensus of the scholars following the view has been significantly modified. On the basis of literary forms and archaeological evidence it has become clear that the alleged documents contain older material, some of which might even go back to Moses. Today it is thought that the writers of "J," "E,""P," and "D" were themselves editors who collected and arranged earlier materials. The goals and methods that led to the original specification of diverse sources for the Pentateuch have been subject to continuing discussion. At the same time, there is increasing admiration for the unified structure of the Pentateuch.

In conformity with known practices in the ancient Near East, Moses probably used literary sources. Sometimes these are clearly identified (e.g., Gen. 5:1; Num. 21:14); in other places they may be inferred by distinctive literary styles (cf. Gen. 1:1—2:3 and Gen. 2:4-25). Then too, prophets of later times who succeeded Moses in mediating God's authoritative word (cf. Deut. 18:15-20) kept the text up-to-date linguistically and historically, adding some material such as 36:31 and Moses' obituary (Deut. 34: 1-12).

Unity. The Pentateuch is both a composite document of individual books and also a seamless narrative of a complete story from creation to the death of Moses. Both aspects are important.

In the first place, each of the books has its own interest and unity. Genesis reveals its literary structure by repeating ten times the formula, "this is the history" or "this is the genealogy" of what follows. Exodus reveals itself to be a unity in a number of ways. For example, the law promulgated in chs. 19—40 is based on the narrative of Israel's exodus from Egypt (chs. 1—18; Ex. 19:3-6). Without the narrative, the law has no historical foundation. God confirmed His call to Moses by leading the nation out of Egypt back to Mount Horeb, the mountain where Moses was commissioned in the first place (Ex. 3:1, 12). Leviticus is a liturgical manual for priests. Numbers recounts Israel's march from the wilderness of Sinai to Canaan. As the Exodus from Egypt memorialized by the Passover prefigures the salvation of the new Israel from sin through the sacrifice of Christ, so the history in

Numbers dramatizes the spiritual march of all God's children through a wilderness on their way to the Promised Land, warning them not to lose faith. Finally, Deuteronomy records Moses' exposition of the law he received at Mount Sinai.

At the same time, the five books of the Pentateuch are linked together as a continuous narrative. Exodus continues the story begun in Genesis of the Israelites who had gone to Egypt (Gen. 46:26, 27; Ex. 1:1). Moses fulfills Joseph's deathbed oath to carry up his bones out of Egypt (Gen. 50: 25; Ex. 13:19). Leviticus 1—9 explains the rituals of the tabernacle, as a kind of supplement to the instructions for building it found in Ex. 25—40. Leviticus also shows how the service for ordaining priests, outlined in Exodus 29, was carried out. Numbers shares many connections with Exodus and Leviticus; large portions of all three books take place in the wilderness of Sinai and share similar ceremonial regulations and concerns. In his first address in Deuteronomy, Moses summarizes Israel's history from Sinai to Moab as recorded in Numbers. In his second address he makes frequent allusions to Exodus, repeating with slight modification the Ten Commandments and Israel's response to them (Ex. 20 and Deut. 5).

Theme. The Pentateuch is a mixture of history and law. These are not unrelated: the narrative history explains the laws. For example, the law about circumcision is given in the narrative about God's covenant with Abraham and Sarah (Gen 17:9-14), and breaking the Sabbath is made a capital offense in the story about gathering sticks on the Sabbath (Num. 15:32-36). But as noted above, the Pentateuch's main interest is God's covenant with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, His deliverance of their descendants from Egypt, and their obligation to keep the laws of God given to them in the Sinai desert.

God's purpose in bringing Israel out of Egypt is that they would worship Him, and become a holy nation for Him. Through them, His blessing would reach all the nations of the world. According to Galatians, this gracious promise announced to Abraham is the same gospel preached by Jesus Christ and realized through His death and resurrection (Gal. 3:8, 14). The enduring power of the Pentateuch is not a mystery, but a consequence of its inspiration by the Spirit of God.

Genesis

The First Book of Moses Called Genesis

Author. Because this anonymous book is part of the unified Pentateuch, establishing its authorship and date cannot be separated from the composition of that "Five-Volumed Book" ("Introduction to the Pentateuch"). Evidence relating to Genesis itself, however, suggests that, like the remainder of the Pentateuch, Moses gave the book its essential substance and later editors supplemented it, all by the Holy Spirit's inspiration.

It would be arbitrary to exclude Genesis from the New Testament testimony that Moses (fifteenth century B.C.) authored the Pentateuch. More specifically, our Lord said that "Moses therefore gave you circumcision" (John 7:22; Acts 15:1), which is uniquely given in Gen. 17. It is not surprising that the founder of Israel's theocracy gave this masterful foundation to the Law. Its historical narrative furnished the theological and ethical underpinnings of the Torah: Israel's unique covenantal relationship with God (Deut. 9:5) and its singular laws (e.g., the Sabbath, 7:2 note). Moreover, since creation myths are basic to pagan religions, it is natural that Moses would have included a creation account opposing the pagan myths. This account is, in addition, foundational to the Law Moses mediated (1:1—2:3 notes).

This Bible's own witness to Moses' authorship is supported by extrabiblical data. The first eleven chapters of Genesis share many parallels and conscious dissimilarities with ancient Near Eastern myths that preceded the time of Moses and were known to him (Mesopotamian creation accounts such as the Enuma Elish, and flood accounts such as those included in the Atrahasis Epic and the eleventh tablet of the Gilgamesh Epic). Names and customs in the narratives about the patriarchs (chs. 12—50) accurately reflect their era, suggesting an early author with reliable documents. The Ebla texts (twenty-fourth century B.C.) mention Ebrium, possibly the Eber of Gen. 10:21, and the Mari texts (eighteenth century B.C.) attest to names such as "Abraham," "Jacob," and "Amorite." The practice of granting a birthright (i.e., additional privileges to the eldest son, 25:5-6, 32-34; 39:3-4; 43:33; 49:3) was widespread in the ancient Near East, and the sale of an inheritance (25:29-34) is documented at different periods in this area. The adoption of one's own slave (15:1-3) is found in a Larsa letter from Old Babylonia, and the adoption of Ephraim and Manasseh by their grandfather (48:5) may be

compared with a similar adoption of a grandson at Ugarit (fourteenth century B.C.). The gift of a female slave as part of a dowry and her presentation to her husband by an infertile wife (16:1-6; 30:1-3 and notes) are attested in the laws of Hammurabi (c. 1750 B.C.). These and similar facts corroborate the historical reliability of the narrative.

Date and Occasion. Given the biblical and extrabiblical evidence linking Genesis and its contents to Moses and his era, we may reasonably conclude that the book dates from the fifteenth century B.C. Certainly, for example, since David (c. 1000 B.C.) set the creation account of Gen. 1 to music (Ps. 8), a date of composition in the second millennium is indicated for Gen. 1. Readers should be aware, however, that, although occasionally words known only from the middle of the second millennium appear in the text, the grammar of the Pentateuch was updated at some point, as were some place-names (14:14 note). Also, the list of kings in 36:31-43 was apparently added after the time of Saul.

Like its authorship and date, the purpose of Genesis cannot be considered apart from its place within the Pentateuch as a whole ("Introduction to the Pentateuch"). The Pentateuch is a unique combination of history and law, a history that explains the origins of its laws. For example, the narratives in Genesis explain the rite of circumcision (17:9-14), the prohibition against the sciatic tendon (32:32), and Sabbath observance (2:2, 3). More importantly, its narrative recounts God's election of Israel to a unique covenant relationship with Him, in order to bless a fallen world. That covenant relationship consists of God's commitment to the patriarchs to make of their elect offspring a great nation and the chosen nation's commitment to obey Him and so to become a light to the Gentiles. Genesis recounts the origins of this redemptive nation reaching back to the beginnings of mankind and the world and of the conflict between the kingdom of God and the kingdom of Satan in which the nation was to play a crucial role.

The Hebrew title, following the ancient custom of naming books by their first word(s), is bereshith, "in the beginning." The Greek title, based on the book's content, is genesis, "origin." Both titles are appropriate since the book is about the origin of history.

Interpretive Difficulties. The tension between Genesis and modern science about the origins of the universe and of living species is largely resolved when it is recognized that they are speaking from different

perspectives. Genesis is concerned about who created and why, not about how and when. Science cannot answer the former questions, and Genesis is largely mute about the latter (1:2, 5, 6, 11 and notes).

For the past century scholars holding to the "documentary hypothesis" have contended that Genesis is composed of conflicting documents: J (for Jahweh/Yahweh, "the LORD"), E (for Elohim, "God"), D (for Deuteronomist), and P (for priestly writer). While this scheme is still widely accepted, few believe any longer that these documents can be used to reconstruct a history of Israel's religion because all the alleged documents contain what are thought to be "early" and "late" materials. In other words, the alleged four documents actually share elements and characteristics that were supposed to belong in only one of these hypothetical sources (e.g., J contains material that would be expected to occur only in E). To be sure, documents were composed in the ancient Near East by combining earlier written sources, but Moses himself probably used them (5:1 note). Moreover, many scholars today question the criteria used for identifying these alleged sources and emphasize instead the unity of the text as we have it. For example, the Flood story, once thought to be a classic example of the documentary hypothesis, is now conceded to have remarkable integrity (6:9—9:29 note). See "Introduction to the Pentateuch."

Characteristics and Themes. A study of the literary structure of Genesis discloses the following highlights. After the prologue Genesis is divided into ten parts marked out by the formula: "This is the genealogy [or 'history'] of." This heading is followed by a genealogy of the person named or by stories involving his notable descendants. The first three accounts pertain to the pre-Flood world and the last seven to the post-Flood period. Accounts one through three and four through six parallel one another: (a) stories about the developments of mankind universally at the creation and at the recreation after the Flood (accounts one and four respectively); (b) the genealogy of the redemptive lines through Seth and Shem (accounts two and five); and (c) the stories of the epochal covenant transactions with Noah and Abraham (accounts three and six). The final two pairs of accounts expand the Abrahamic line, contrasting his rejected offspring, Ishmael and Esau (accounts seven and nine), with stories about the elect, Isaac and Jacob respectively (accounts eight and ten).

The key to the stories is often given in an opening revelation: e.g., the promise to Abraham (12:1-3), the prenatal sign of the rivalry between Jacob and Esau (25:22, 23), and Joseph's dreams (37:1-11). A transitional section is

found at the end of the accounts (e.g., 4:25, 26; 6:1-8; 9:18-29; 11:10-26; Outline).

The closing section of the last account contains strong links with Exodus, concluding with an oath Joseph elicited from his brothers to take his embalmed body with them when God came to their aid and returned them to Canaan (50:24, 25; Ex. 13:19).

The book's focus on the origins of Israel unfolds against a backdrop of matters affecting the world. Moses tells us that prior to God's election of the patriarchs, the fathers of Israel (chs. 12-50), mankind asserted its independence from God by striving to know good and evil apart from God in defiance of His command (chs. 2; 3). Humans proved their depravity by token religion, fratricide, and unrestrained vengeance (Cain, ch. 4); by tyranny, harems, and thinking evil continually (the pre-Flood kings, 6:1-8); and by erecting an anti-kingdom against God (Nimrod and the infamous tower, 10:8-12; 11:1-9 note). God's verdict about mankind stands: "the imagination of man's heart is evil from his youth" (8:21).

Just as miraculously and surely as God sovereignly transformed the dark, empty void at earth's origin (1:2) into a glorious habitat for mankind and brought it to rest (1:3—2:3), so also God sovereignly elected His covenant people in Christ to conquer Satan (3:15) and to bless the depraved world (12:1-3). Unconditionally He elected the patriarchs, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, promising to make of their elect descendants the nation destined to bless the earth, a promise entailing an eternal seed, land, and king (12:1-3, 7; 13:14-17; 17:1-8; 26:2-6; 28:10-15). Before Jacob was born and had done either good or evil, God chose Jacob, not Esau, his older twin brother (25:21-23). He chose Jacob, even though he cheated his brother, deceived his father, and blasphemed God (ch. 27). God even used Judah's scandalous wrongs against Tamar, and her daring ruse as well, to advance the messianic line (ch. 38). The heavenly King displayed his glorious rule by miraculously preserving the matriarchs in pagan harems (12:10-20; ch. 20) and opening their barren wombs (17:15-22; 18:1-15; 21:1-7; 25:21; 29:31; 30:22). He overrode man's ways and customs by time and again choosing the younger, not the older, to inherit the blessing (25:23 note). Blatant prophecies and subtle types are sterling witnesses that God directs history. For example, Noah prophesied Shem's subjugation of Canaan (9:24-26), and the greater Exodus led by Moses was prefigured when God delivered Abraham and Sarah from the oppression of Egypt with wealth (12:10-20 note).

God inclined the heart of His elect to trust His promises and to obey His commands. Against all hope, Abraham counted on God to give him an innumerable offspring, and the lawgiver says that God credited that as righteousness (15:6). Confident of God's sure promises, Abraham gave up his rights to the land (ch. 13); and Jacob, renamed "Israel" and clinging only to God (ch. 22), symbolically gave back the birthright to Esau (ch. 33). At the beginning of the Joseph story, Judah sold Joseph as a slave (37:26, 27), but at its end the former slave trader was willing to become a slave in the place of his brother (44:33, 34). Secure in the truth that God's gracious design had brought good out of sins as heinous as murder and slave trading, Joseph forgave his brothers without recrimination (45:4-8; 50:24).

What was begun in Genesis is fulfilled in Christ. The genealogy begun in ch. 5, and advanced in ch. 11, is completed with the birth of Jesus Christ (Matt. 1; Luke 3:23-27). He is the ultimate offspring promised to Abraham (12:1-3; Gal. 3:16). The elect are blessed in Him because He alone, by His active and passive obedience, satisfied the law's demands and died in their stead. All who are baptized into Christ and united with Him by faith are Abraham's descendants (Gal. 3:26-29). The bold prophecies and subtle types in Genesis show that God is writing a history leading to a rest in Christ. On the threshold of biblical prophecy Noah predicted that the Japhethites would find salvation through the Semites, a prophecy fulfilled in the New Testament (9:27 and note), and God Himself proclaimed that the woman's seed would destroy Satan (3:15). That Seed is Christ and His church (Rom. 16:20). The gift of the bride to Adam prefigures the gift of the church to Christ (2:18-25; Eph. 5:22-32); Melchizedek's priesthood is like the Son of God's (14:18-20; Heb. 7); and as Israel redeemed out of bondage in Egypt found rest, resources, and refuge in the Promised Land, the church redeemed out of the cursed world finds that life in Christ (13:15 note). The paradise lost by the first Adam is restored by the Last Adam. This marvelously unified sacred history certifies that the focus of Genesis is Christ.

Outline of Genesis

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II. Account of Heavens and Earth (2:4—4:26)

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B. The Fall and Its Consequences (ch. 3)

C. Escalation of Sin in the Line of Cain (4:1-24)

D. A Godly Remnant (4:25, 26)

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B. Escalation of Sin Before the Flood (6:1-8)

IV. Account of Noah (6:9—9:29)

A. Preparation for the Flood (6:9—7:10)

B. The Flood and Salvation (7:11—8:19)

C. God's Covenant Not to Destroy the Earth (8:20—9:17)

D. Prophecies About Noah's Sons (9:18-29)

V. Account of Shem, Ham, and Japheth (10:1—11:9)

A. Table of Nations (ch. 10)

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VI. Account of Shem (11:10-26)

VII. Account of Terah (11:27—25:11)

A. Genealogy (11:27-32)

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2. Deliverance from Egypt (12:10-20)

3. Lot's Separation from the Land (ch. 13)

4. Victory over the Eastern Kings (ch. 14)

5. God's Covenant Ratified (ch. 15)

6. Hagar and Ishmael Rejected (ch. 16)

7. God's Covenant Confirmed (ch. 17)

8. Sarah to Have a Son (18:1-15)

9. Lot's Rescue from Sodom (18:16—19:38)

10. Protection from the Philistines (ch. 20)

11. Birth of Isaac and Blessing in the land (ch. 21)

12. God’s Oath to Bless the World Through Abraham’s Offspring (22:1-19)

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2. Death of Sarah (ch. 23)

3. Isaac’s Marriage to Rebekah (ch. 24)

4. Isaac the Sole Heir (25:1-6)

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VIII. Account of Ishmael (25:12-18)

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B. Covenant Blessings on Isaac (ch. 26)

C. Jacob’s Theft of Esau’s Blessing (27:1-40)

D. Covenant Blessings on Jacob and His Exile (27:41—32:32)

E. Jacob Sent to Laban (27:41—28:9)

F. Encounter with the Angel at Bethel (28:10-22)

G. Conflict with Laban (29:1-30)

H. Birth of Tribal Fathers (29:31—30:24)

I. Jacob’s Prosperity and Flight from Laban (30:25—31:55)

J. Encounter with Angels at Mahanaim and Penuel (ch. 32)

K. Esau’s Reconciliation with Jacob (33:1-17)

L. Transition to Jacob: Itinerary and Deaths from Shechem to Mamre (33:18—35:29)

X. Account of Esau (36:1—37:1)

XI. Account of Jacob (37:2—50:26)

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B. The Sins of Jacob’s Family (37:12—38:30)

C. Joseph’s Rise to Rulership over Egypt (chs. 39—41)

D. Joseph’s Ruse and the Reconciliation of the Covenant Family (chs. 42—45)

E. Transition to Exodus (chs. 46—50)

1. Migration to Egypt (46:1-27)
2. Preservation in Goshen (46:28—47:31)
3. Jacob’s Blessings on the Twelve Tribes (48:1—49:28)
4. Jacob’s Death and Burial in Canaan (49:29—50:14)
5. Joseph’s Death in Egypt with the Promise of Canaan (50:15-26)

Exodus

The Second Book of Moses Called Exodus

Author. In the New Testament Jesus calls Exodus "the book of Moses" (Mark 12:26; cf. 7:10), and there are no compelling reasons to deny the Mosaic authorship of the book (Introduction to the Pentateuch: Author and Date).

The title of the book, "Exodus," is derived from the Greek word exodos (Luke 9:31), which means "exit" or "departure." The book takes its name from the central event of Israel's departure from Egypt, recorded in the book's first fifteen chapters.

Date and Occasion. Given Moses' authorship of Exodus, we should date the book after the exodus event (c. 1450-1440 B.C.) and before his death about 1406 B.C. According to the dating below, Moses' birth would have just fallen within the reign of Thutmose I, Hatshepsut, the widowed queen of Thutmose II, assumed male titles and even a beard as she reigned from 1504-1483 B.C. Perhaps she was the Pharaoh upon whose death Moses returned to Egypt from Midian.

Exodus carries forward the story of God's fulfillment of His promise to Abraham to bless him and make of him a great nation (Gen. 12:2). It begins by referring to the descent of Israel into Egypt (1:1-7); this connects through Gen. 46:8-27 with the Genesis narratives. The book concludes with Israel at Sinai where the tabernacle is completed. The events covered in the book may be placed against their historical background as follows.

Joseph's rise to power (1:5) is best set in the favorable conditions for Jacob's family created by the rule over Egypt of the Semitic Hyksos (c. 1700-1550 B.C.). The reference at 1:8 to a new king "who did not know Joseph" likely refers to the expulsion of the Hyksos by the eighteenth dynasty founder Ahmosis I (1570-1546 B.C.). If the Exodus is dated c. 1450-1440 B.C. (Interpretive Difficulties below), the Pharaoh of the oppression was probably Thutmose I (1526-1512 B.C.), while the Pharaoh of the Exodus was Thutmose III (1504-1450 B.C.) or Amenhotep II (1450-1425 B.C.). This dating would allow a possible identification of the incoming Israelites with the Habiru, a group mentioned in the Tell el-Amarna letters (correspondence between Egypt and its Syro-Palestinian vassals during the fourteenth century B.C.). The Habiru were a social or occupational class commonly attested in texts from 2000 B.C. onwards. They were political outcasts in Palestine (Gen. 14:13 note).

The written preservation of the words of God's covenant has central importance for the theology of the Book of Exodus. God not only speaks His words to His assembled people at Sinai, He also gives them His Ten Commandments in writing, "written with the finger of God" on tablets of stone (31:18; cf. 32:15, 16; 34:1, 28). The terms of the covenant were further specified by the so-called "Book of the Covenant" (20:22—23:19), the words of God written down by Moses, the mediator of God's covenant (24:4, 7; 34:27).

The Sinai covenant (19:1—20:21; ch. 24) resembles in both form and content the state treaty form of the second millennium B.C., particularly the Hittite state treaties. These treaties included a preamble (20:2), stipulations (20:3-17), ratification (24:1-11), and blessings and curses. A copy of the treaty was often preserved at the sanctuaries of the parties (e.g., the two tablets of 31:18). Also, the similarity of the content of the case laws of chs. 21—23 to ancient Near Eastern codes (particulary the Code of Hammurabi of Babylon, c. 1750 B.C.) has often been noted.

Interpretive Difficulties. The date and route of the Exodus have been subjects of considerable debate. Biblical chronology dates the exodus event at 480 years before the reign of Solomon (1 King 6:1). This would place the event at about 1440 B.C. This early date is consistent with Judg. 11:26, which declares that three hundred years had elapsed since Israel entered Canaan. The c. 1440 B.C. date is also supported by 12:40, 41, where 430 years is the duration of Israel's stay in Egypt. The Pharaoh of the Exodus would then be Thutmose III or Amenhotep II.

Advocates of a much later date appeal to the name "Raamses" (or "Rameses," Gen. 47:11) as one of the store cities built with Israelite labor (1:11). Rameses II (1304-1236 B.C.) is taken to be the Pharaoh of the Exodus, and the approximate date set at 1270 B.C. This is held to be more consistent with the archaeology of cities destroyed in Palestine and with the lack of earlier settlement in Transjordan (the region east of the Jordan River and the Dead Sea). However, more recent discoveries in Transjordan and a new evaluation of the destruction of Jericho have weakened the case for the late date.

The route of the Exodus began at Rameses. Its exact location is the subject of considerable debate, though modern Qantir is the site most favored (Tell el-Daba). From there the Hebrews journeyed south to Succoth (13:20). Here, apparently unable to move on, the Hebrews turned northward (14:2). Three sites are mentioned, Baal Zephon, Migdol, and Pi Hahiroth. Baal Zephon is associated with Tahpanhes, bordering Lake Menzaleh, one of the salt lakes

between the Mediterranean and Gulf of Suez. There were three possible routes of Israelite escape. The “way of the land of the Philistines” (13:17) connected Egypt with Canaan by the heavily fortified coastal route. A second route, the way of Shur, began near the Wadi Tumilat in the Delta area, crossed to Kadesh Barnea, and branched off to Canaan. The Egyptian boundary wall of Shur may have been a major obstacle to this route. In leading the people south to southern Sinai, the Lord not only brought them to the mountain He had designated to Moses, but distanced them from further contact with the Egyptians. The deliverance through the sea may have been on a southern extension of Lake Menzaleh.

The Sinai peninsula is a triangle of land measuring approximately 150 miles across at the top and 260 miles along the sides. Two arms of the Red Sea, the Gulf of Suez and the Gulf of Aqaba, flank it. The Hebrews proceeded south along the west coast of the Sinai. The bitter waters of Marah (15:22-25) are usually identified with Ain Hawarah (some forty-five to fifty miles south of the tip of the Gulf of Suez), but Ain Musa may be the correct location. Elim with its many springs and trees has been identified as Wadi Gharandel, the encampment by the Red Sea (Num. 33:10), about seven miles south of Ain Hawarah. The wilderness of Sin would best be identified with Debbet er-Ramleh, a sandy plain along the edge of the Sinai Plateau. If the traditional location of Mount Sinai as Jebel Musa is correct, Israel would have then turned inland by a series of valleys to Jebel Musa, traveling through the desert of Rephidim, where they fought against the Amalekites (17:8-16). Rephidim was the last encampment in the wilderness of Sinai before the sacred mountain. Then they proceeded to Mount Sinai (ch. 19) where they received the law.

Characteristics and Themes. Several major themes are evident in the Book of Exodus. First, it tells how the Lord liberated Israel from Egypt to fulfill His covenant with the fathers. A second major element of the book is the covenant revelation at Sinai, which specified the terms of relationship between the holy God and His people. The third theme issues from the first two and is their consummation: the reestablishment of God’s dwelling with man. Each of these themes involves a triumph of divine grace: God’s mighty rescue of His people from slavery in Egypt, His thunderous self-revelation at Sinai, and His gracious condescension to dwell with His erring people in the tabernacle. The unfolding of these themes also reveals the Lord’s holiness and grace in His covenant law and in the ceremonial symbolism of Israel’s life and worship.

Crucial to the narrative is Moses’ role as mediator between God and man. As God’s chosen servant, Moses is the mediator of judgment against Egypt, and

is the one through whom God delivers Israel. Through Moses God gives His revelation at Sinai. Moses also shepherds the people through the wilderness to the Promised Land. He pleads for the people, and he is the one through whom the Lord provides food and water. But Moses' role in the history of redemption prepares pointedly for Christ, the Mediator of the new covenant (Deut. 18:15). The revelation that Moses receives of God's name "abounding in goodness and truth" (34:6) justifies the building of the tabernacle, but the description of the Lord points forward to the coming of the true tabernacle, the incarnate Christ, the greater Servant of the Lord (John 1:14, 17; Heb. 3:1-6).

God's law reveals His holy nature and requires holiness of the people among whom God will dwell. The ceremonial regulations for Israel's life and worship (chs. 25—31; 35—40) mark out the separation of Israel as the people among whom God lives and rules, demonstrating His kingdom before the nations.

In addition to its description of the historical events by which Israel was delivered to become God's people, Exodus also presents a major illustration of God's saving work throughout history. The savior God redeems His chosen people from the powers of evil, judges those powers, and claims His people as His firstborn son, a holy nation of priests among whom He dwells by His Spirit. The pattern of divine victory over enemies, followed by the establishment of the divine dwelling place, is repeated in Christ's first and second advents (e.g., Eph. 2:14-22; Rev. 20:11—22:5).

The symbolism found in Exodus becomes reality in the new covenant (Jer. 31:31-34; Col. 2:17; Heb. 10:1). The sprinkled blood of animal sacrifice is now replaced by the blood of Christ (24:8; Matt. 26:27, 28; Heb. 12:24; 1 Pet. 1:2). The symbolic substitution of the Passover lamb is fulfilled in Christ, the Lamb of God, our Passover sacrifice (John 1:29; 1 Cor. 5:7). His "exodus" at Jerusalem (Luke 9:31) accomplishes the salvation of the true people of God. God's new covenant people are joined to Jesus Christ, in whom the Gentiles become the people of God, members of the commonwealth of Israel and fellow citizens with the Old Testament saints (19:5, 6; Eph. 2:11-19). The full meaning of the description of Israel in Exodus may now therefore be applied to the churches of the Gentiles (1 Pet. 2:9, 10).

Outline of Exodus

I. God Delivers His People: The Exodus (1:1—15:21)

A. God in Faithfulness Remembers Israel (chs. 1; 2)

B. God Calls Moses to Deliver Israel (3:1—4:26)

C. Pharaoh Rejects God's Demand (4:27—7:13)

D. God's Judgment Against Egypt (7:14—10:29)

E. God Delivers Israel from Egypt (11:1—13:16)

F. God Saves Israel at the Red Sea (13:17—15:21)

II. God Leads His People: The Wilderness Testing (15:22—18:27)

A. Marah to Elim: God Brings Healing (15:22–27)

B. Wilderness of Sin: God Provides Food (ch. 16)

C. Rephidim: God Provides Water (17:1-7)

D. Rephidim: God Provides Protection (17:8-16)

E. Mountain of God: God Provides Organization (ch. 18)

III. God and Israel Enter into Covenant (chs. 19—24)

A. Preparations for the Covenant (ch. 19)

B. God Proclaims the Covenant (chs. 20—23)

C. Israel Ratifies the Covenant (ch. 24)

IV. God Reveals the Pattern of the Tabernacle and Its Ministry (chs. 25—31)

A. The Tabernacle, Courts, and Furnishings (chs. 25—27)

B. The Priestly Ministry (chs. 28—30)

C. Artisans for the Tabernacle Construction (31:1-11)

D. Sign of the Covenant and the Tablets (31:12-18)

V. Israel's Rebellion, Judgment, and Restoration (32:1—34:35)

A. Israel's Idolatrous Worship (32:1-6)

B. Israel Judged for Idolatry (32:7-29)

C. God Threatens to Withdraw His Presence from Israel (32:30—34:9)

D. God Renews His Covenant (34:10-35)

VI. Israel's Artisans Prepare the Tabernacle (chs. 35—39)

A. Israel Admonished to Remember the Sabbath (35:1-3)

B. Freewill Offerings for the Tabernacle (35:4-29)

C. Craftsmen Called to Begin the Work (35:30—36:17)

D. The Curtains, Boards, and Veils are Made (36:8-38)

E. The Furnishings are Fashioned (37:1—38:8)

F. The Courtyard is Made (38:9-20)

G. Summary: Treasurer's Report (38:21-31)

H. The Priestly Garments Are Sewn (39:1-31)

I. The Work Completed (39:32-43)

VII. Israel's Artisans Erect the Tabernacle (ch. 40)

A. Instructions for the Tabernacle Erection (40:1-16)

B. Moses Supervises the Raising of the Tabernacle (40:17-33)

C. God's Glory Fills the Tabernacle (40:34-38)

Leviticus

The Third Book of Moses Called Leviticus

Author. The conclusion that Moses wrote Leviticus derives from the internal character of Leviticus itself and of the Pentateuch as a whole, as well as from Old and New Testament references to Moses as the author of the Pentateuch. For a more complete discussion of issues relating to Mosaic authorship, see "Introduction to the Pentateuch."

Date and Occasion. Leviticus everywhere reports the words of God to Moses and his brother Aaron, but it never states when and how these words were written down. The precise date Leviticus was committed to writing remains somewhat uncertain, though it doubtless occurred during the wilderness wandering prior to Moses' death (c. 1406 B.C.). The majority of critical scholars place the writing of Leviticus in the postexilic era (c. the sixth century B.C.), many centuries after Moses. This view is improbable, however, because the content of Leviticus does not fit such a late period: the worship of the second temple differed significantly from that enjoined in Leviticus, and Leviticus is presupposed or quoted by earlier books such as Deuteronomy, Amos, and, most obviously, Ezekiel. Other arguments against the origin of Leviticus in Moses' time are also unconvincing. The book reflects the ideals of worship and holiness that were accepted in Israel from the time of Moses to the fall of Jerusalem in 587/86 B.C.

Characteristics and Themes. No book in the Old Testament presents a greater challenge to the modern reader than Leviticus, and imagination is required to picture the ceremonies and rites that form the bulk of the book. However, it is important to try to understand the rituals in Leviticus for two reasons. First, rituals enshrine, express, and teach those values and ideas that a society holds most dear. By analyzing the ceremonies described in Leviticus, we can learn about what was most important to the Old Testament Israelites. Second, these same ideas are foundational for the New Testament writers. Particularly the concepts of sin, sacrifice, and atonement found in Leviticus are used in the New Testament to interpret the death of Christ.

Precisely because the rituals of Leviticus are so central to Old Testament thinking, they are often obscure to us, because the writers did not need to explain them to their contemporaries. Every Israelite knew why a particular sacrifice was offered on a specific occasion and what a certain gesture meant. For ourselves, every hint in the text must be grasped to understand these things. And a judicious reading

between the lines is sometimes required.

Leviticus is part of the covenant law given at Sinai. The ideas that inform the whole Sinaitic covenant, including God's sovereign grace in choosing Israel and His moral demands, are also presupposed here. Certain themes are especially prominent in Leviticus. First, God is present with His people. Second, because God is holy, His people must also be holy (11:45). Since man is sinful, he cannot dwell with the holy God. Contact between the sinner and the divine holiness may result in death. Hence, atonement for sin through the offering of sacrifice is of paramount importance. These themes may be elaborated as follows.

1: The Divine Presence. Every act of worship is performed "to the Lord" e.g., 1:2), who dwells with His people in the tabernacle of meeting. Because God is present in the Most Holy Place, entry is barred to all but the high priest once a year on the Day of Atonement (16:17). Though God's presence is usually invisible, He may manifest His glory on special occasions such as the ordination of the priests (9:23, 24). The greatest of God's gifts is that He deigns to dwell with His people (26:12).

2: Holiness. The aims of Leviticus are summarized in 11:45: "you shall therefore be holy; for I am holy." Man is meant to be like God in his character. That involves imitating God in daily life. The holiness of God involves His being the source of perfect life in its physical, spiritual, and moral dimensions. Animals offered to Him in sacrifice must be free of blemish (1:3), and priests who represent God to man and man ot God must be free of physical handicaps (21: 17-23). Those who suffer discharges, particularly of blood, or who have disfiguring skin diseases are barred from worship until they are cured (chs. 12-15). Physical health is seen to symbolize the perfection of divine life. But holiness is also an inward matter of attitudes issuing in moral behavior. The theme of holiness is especially emphasized in chs. 17-25, which are chiefly concerned with personal ethical conduct, summed up in 19:18 as "you shall love your neighbor as yourself."

3: Atonement Through Sacrifice. Since man failed to live up to God's righteous requirements, a means of atonement was essential so that both his moral lapses and his physical failings could be pardoned. To this end Leviticus gives the most extensive descriptions of the sacrificial system (chs. 1-7), the role of the priests (chs. 8-10, 21-22), and the great national festivals (chs. 16; 23; 25) found in the Old Testament. These great ceremonies were designed to make possible the co-existence of the holy God with His sinful people.

Through the symbols and rites it describes, Leviticus paints a picture of God's character that is presupposed and deepened in the New Testament. Leviticus teaches

that God is the source of perfect life that He loves His people, and that He desires to dwell among them. In this we see a foreshadowing of the Incarnation, when "the Word became flesh and dwelt among us" (John 1:14). Leviticus also shows clearly man's sinfulness: no sooner are Aaron's sons ordained than they profane their office and die in a fearful display of divine judgment (ch. 10),. Those suffering from skin disease or bodily discharge, as well as those guilty of grave moral sins, are barred from worship because their imperfections are incompatible with a holy and perfect God (chs. 12-15). The symbols of Leviticus teach the universality of human sin, a doctrine endorsed by Jesus (Mark 7:21-23) and Paul (Rom. 3:23). Caught between divine holiness and human sinfulness, man's paramount need is for atonement. It is here that Leviticus has the most to teach the Christian, for its ideas are taken up and developed by the New Testament in describing the atoning work of Christ. He is the perfect sacrificial Lamb, who takes away the sin of the world (John 1:29). His death is the ransom for many (Mark 10:45). His blood cleanses us from all sin (1 John 1:7). Above all, Jesus ifs the perfect High Priest who enters not the earthly tabernacle once a year on the Day of Atonement (ch. 16), but has ascended to the heavenly tabernacle forever, because He has not offered merely a goat for the sins of His people, but His own life (Heb. 9; 10). The rending of the temple veil when Jesus was crucified was a visible demonstration that His death opened up the way to God for all believers (Matt. 27:51; Heb. 10:19, 20). Furthermore, Leviticus restricts salvation to the old covenant community of Israel. The food laws (ch. 11) and the prohibitions on mixtures (19:19) reminded Jews of their unique status. But the New Testament opens the kingdom to all nations and abrogates the food laws (Mark 7:14-23; Acts 10), while at the same time insisting on the separation of te church from the world (John 17:16; 2 Cor. 6:14-7:1). And while the Old Testament sufferer had to wait for God to heal him (ch. 14), in the Gospels God in Christ drew near and healed both lepers and those with discharges (Luke 8:43-48; 17:12-19). The God of Leviticus, whose essential character is shown to be holy life, is shown in the Gospels to be present in Christ and His redemptive work.

Leviticus, the Latin form of the Greek title of the book, means "about Levites." The Levites were the tribe of Israel from which the priests were drawn; they were responsible for maintaining Israel's worship facilities and practices. The title is apt, because the book is primarily about worship and fitness for worship. However it is not addressed solely to priests or Levites, but also to lay Israelites, telling them how to offer sacrifices and to enter the presence of God in worship. Leviticus speaks to humanity in every age, reminding us of the depth of our sin, but also pointing us to the sacrifice of Him whose blood is far more effective than the blood of bulls and goats.

Outline of Leviticus

I. Laws on Sacrifice (chs. 1-7)

A. Instructions for the Laity (1:1 – 6:7)

1. The Burnt Offering (ch. 1)

2. The Grain Offering (ch. 2)

3. The Peace Offering (ch. 3)

4. The Sin Offering (4:1 – 5:13)

5. The Trespass Offering (5:14 – 6:7)

B. Instructions for the Priests (6:8 – 7:38)

1. The Burnt Offering (6:8-13)

2. The Grain Offering (6:14-23)

3. The Peace Offering (6:24-30)

4. The Sin Offering (7:1-10)

5. The Trespass Offering (7:11-36)

6. Summary (7:37, 38)

II. Institution of Priesthood (chs. 8-10)

A. Consecration of Aaron and His Sons (ch.8)

B. Aaron's First Sacrifices (ch. 9)

C. Judgment on Aaron's Sons (ch. 10)

III. Uncleanness and Its Treatment (chs. 11-16)

A. Unclean Animals (ch. 11)

B. Childbirth (ch. 12)

C. Skin Disease (chs. 13; 14)

D. Discharges (ch. 15)

E. The Day of Atonement (ch. 16)

IV. The Practice of Holiness (chs. 17-27)

A. Sacrifice and Food (ch. 17)

B. Sexual Behavior (ch. 18)

C. Principles of Good Neighborliness (ch. 19)

D. Capital Crimes (ch. 20)

E. Disqualifications for Priests (ch. 21)

F. Rules on Sacrifice (ch. 22)

G. Feasts (ch. 23)

H. The Tabernacle Lamps and Loaves (24:1-9)

I. Blasphemy (24:10-23)

J. Years of Release (ch. 25)

K. The Blessing and Curse (ch. 26)

L. Rules on Vows and Tithes (ch. 27)

Numbers

The Fourth Book of Moses Called Numbers

Author. Together with the rest of the Pentateuch, Numbers has traditionally been ascribed to Moses. This conclusion is based upon the unitary character of the Pentateuch and upon the clear witness of both the Old and New Testaments ascribing these books to Moses (Introduction to the Pentateuch: Author and Date). It is further supported by the obvious antiquity of the materials contained in the Pentateuch. The Book of Numbers itself refers to Moses' activity chronicling the events described in the book (33:2). That much of the book comes from Moses' hand does not rule out the possibility of later editorial activity and the likelihood that some portions were added after Moses' death (e.g., 12:3; and Moses' obituary in Deut. 34).

Date and Occasion. We may reasonably date the composition of the book to the period after the wilderness wandering (which followed the Exodus) and before the death of Moses in about 1406 B.C. The book begins with the preparations for the march across the desert, tells of experiences along the way, describes the failure of faith that led the exodus generation of Israelites to refuse to undertake the conquest of the Promised Land, tells of the forty years of waiting until a whole generation would die, and ends with the preparation for entering Canaan. Given its content, Numbers was evidently written as a warning to the generation of Israelites born in the desert, that they should persevere in faith and obedience where their parents had not. For future generations of God's people, the book would speak a similar message.

In the Hebrew Bible it was customary to designate each of the five books of Moses by the word with which it began. For Numbers, this practice was modified by using the fifth Hebrew word as a title. This word, translated "in the desert," is an apt description of the book's content, since it describes the nation's experience during forty years in the desert.

When the Bible was translated into Greek, its books were given Greek names. In the case of Numbers, the Greek translation abandoned the excellent Hebrew name, and used a Greek word meaning "numbers" (arithmoi) that actually describes only a few of its chapters. This somewhat inappropriate Greek title was carried over by translation into the English Bible translation.

Characteristics and Themes. Two themes – the gracious faithfulness and the sovereign power of Israel's covenant God – are vital to the message of Numbers. The events of Numbers vividly portray the faithfulness of the covenant God despite the

failures of an erring humanity. God directs His people as they prepare for their journey through the wilderness, comforts them in difficulties, deals with their fears and failures, and rebukes or punishes them when necessary.

This portrayal of God's covenant faithfulness is in sharp contrast with the book's repeated depiction of human faithlessness, the utter failure of humanity to meet God's standards by its own strength. Human failures are clearly portrayed and contrasted with the wise measures of the ever-faithful covenant God. Even Moses, the greatest leader of all, sinned and was not permitted to enter the Promised Land, although he saw it from a distance (20:9-11 note; 27:12-14). This shows that even the best of persons are still sinners and are saved only through the merits of Christ – salvation comes only through the grace of God.

A second major theme of Numbers is the sovereign power of God in History. Despite imposing obstacles, great dangers, and the failures of His people, God brings them safely through the wilderness. His sovereign power is sufficient for every eventuality.

Throughout the narrative, Numbers pictures the progress of God's people in redemption, pointing forward to Christ who is the true Water that makes life possible and the true Rock that provides safety. The work of Christ is foreshadowed by the typology of the red heifer (19:2-10; Heb. 9:13), the rock that provided water (20:11; 1 Cor. 10:4), and the raised serpent that brought life out of death (21:4-9; John 3:14, 15). The specific prophecy of the conquests of David, the coming one who would defeat Israel's enemies (24:15-19), foreshadows the time when Christ, who is the consummate fulfillment of the Davidic covenant, will universally be recognized as the greatest King of all.

Outline of Numbers

I. Preparation for the Journey Through the Desert (1:1 – 10:10)

A. The Men of War Numbered (ch. 1)

B. Positions for the Cmp and March Assignes (ch. 2)

C. The Levites Numbered and Their Duties Described (chs. 3; 4)

D. Removal of Defilement from the Camp (ch. 5)

E. A Special Type of Separation - the Nazirite Vow (6:1-21).

F. Arrangements for the Religious Life of the Camp (6:22 0 9:14)

G. God's Provision for Direction and Guidance (9:15-10:10)

II. From Sinai to the Plains of Moab (10:11 – 22:1)

A. The First Stage of the Journey (10:11-36)

B. Rebellion and Disaffection (chs. 11; 12)

C. The Crisis at Kadesh Barnea (chs. 13; 14)

D. Laws After the Crisis (ch. 15)

E. The Great Rebellion of Korah, Dathan, and Abiram (ch. 16)

F. The Budding of Aaron's Rod (ch. 17)

G. Duties and Privileges of Priests and Levites (ch. 18)

H. Arrangements for Cleansing (ch. 19)

I. Moses' Sin at Meribah (20:1-13)

J. Events on the Way to the Plains of Moab (20:14-22:1)

III. The Balaam Incident (22:2-25:18)

A. The Summoning of Balaam (22:2-40)

B. Balaam's Prophecies (22:41-24:24)

C. The Aftermath of the Balaam Incident (24:25-25:18)

IV. Preparations for Entering Canaan (chs. 26-36)

A. The New Census (ch. 26)

B. The Problem of Zelophehad's Daughters (27:1-11)

C. Appointment of a Successor for Moses (27:12-23)

D. Rules for Offerings and Special Feasts (chs. 28;29)

E. Rules About Vows (ch. 30)

F. Vengeance on the Midianites (ch. 31)

G. The Apportionment of Transjordan (ch. 32)

H. A Summary of Journeys from Egypt to the Plains of Moab (33:1-49)

I.Plans for Division of Canaan (33:50-34:29)

J. Levite Towns and Cities of Refuge (ch. 35)

K. The Second Problem of Zelophehad's Daughters (ch. 36)

Deuteronomy

The Fifth Book of Moses Called Deuteronomy

Author. By its own testimony (1:1, 5; 31:22), Deuteronomy is the work of Moses. Mosaic authorship is affirmed many times elsewhere in the Old Testament (e.g. 2 kin. 14:6), in ancient Jewish sources (e.g., Josephus), and in the New Testament. This view was almost universally held until the rise of rationalistic criticism in modern times (Introduction to the Pentateuch: Author and Date).

Critics correctly point out that the last chapter could not have been written by Moses. It is widely agreed that ch. 34 is an addendum, perhaps appended by Joshua. In the same way, the Book of Joshua ends with the death of Joshua, this record clearly having been supplied by the author of the Book of Judges, who appended verses from Judges to the end of Joshua (Judg. 2:7-9; cf. Josh. 24:29-31). Likewise, the first verses of Ezra are copied and appended to the last chapter of Chronicles (Chronicles ends in the middle of a sentence). This way of linking a subsequent book to the preceding one (or variations of this practice) was common in antiquity and was intended to show the proper sequence of scrolls or clay tablets. It is probably that Joshua added the note on Moses' death and Israel's acceptance of Joshua in order to link his own book to Moses' great production. Such obvious additions do not, however, negate the general authorship of Moses.

More controversially, some critics have alleged that the language of 1:1, 5 indicates that the writer of the book must have been located on the west side of the Jordan River, i.e., in Canaan (the Hebrew phrase here translated "this side of the Jordan" is often translated "the other side of the Jordan" of "beyond the Jordan"). Such a description, they argue, belies the credibility of Deuteronomy as a work of Moses, since Moses never crossed the Jordan. This argument assumes that the Hebrew phrase in question must always refer to the region east of the Jordan. It is evident, however, that the precise meaning of the phrase must be determined by the context, and that it can refer either to Transjordan (the region to the east of the Jordan and the Dead Sea, 1:1-5; 3:8; 4:41, 47, 49) or to Canaan itself (3:20, 25; 11:30; Josh. 9:1, 10). Here it clearly means the region east of the Jordan, as the geographical descriptions indicate (1:1, 5).

Date and Occasion. In the nineteenth century, biblical critics contended that Deuteronomy was written about 620 B.C., as part of the religious reform of

King Josiah, in which he insisted that worship be centered in Jerusalem. The law of the central sanctuary (ch. 12) was said by these critics to have been the invention of a writer in the time of Josiah. Since the early twentieth century, however, this view has received less favor. Some have dated Deuteronomy as early as Samuel, others as late as the Exile. Many critics still date the book in the seventh century B.C., which is the period of Josiah. But these scholars also question the unity of the book. If some parts seem "early" (from Moses' time), they ascribe those parts to an old tradition that has conveniently been preserved. If other parts seem "late" (during or after the time of Josiah), they are called "later editions" or due to "late editing." Such elastic, subjective, and speculative methods cannot be conclusively disproved without a copy from Moses' own time, which no one possesses. No concrete evidence rules out the composition of Deuteronomy at the time of Moses, making reasonable allowances for additions by someone like Joshua, who appended Moses' obituary to the book, and for some later updating of Hebrew grammar and place names.

The background and setting of the book reflects conditions prior to the conquest of Canaan under Joshua. There is no mention of a king in Judah or of the city of Jerusalem, which is mentioned over one hundred times by the prophet Jeremiah (who wrote in Josiah's day). It is unlikely that a sixth-century author would make no allusion whatever to that capital city or its temple. The twelve tribes are represented as one nation (instead of, as in Josiah's period, the kingdoms of Judah and Israel). The Transjordan cities of refuge are named, while those in Canaan (which were named later by Joshua) are not. The Babylonian names of months are not used, and there are no Persian loan words in the vocabulary, even though such words would be expected to appear in a work supposedly written during a period when these empires were dominant. Moses, Aaron, and Joshua are named, but no later persons or later historical incidents are mentioned. It is unlikely that a later author, even one well-versed in the lore of the past, could so completely avoid the use of later terms and the mention of persons and events of his own period.

Perhaps most significant is the general conformity of Deuteronomy's structure to the covenant or treaty form of the mid-second millennium B.C. (the approximate time of Moses). We find the following treaty elements in Deuteronomy: (a) a preamble identifying the covenant mediator (1:1-5); (b) a historical prologue reviewing previous covenant history (1:6-4:40); (c) stipulations expounding the covenant way of life (4:44-11:32; 12-26); (d) a declaration of sanctions stating the blessings for obedience and curses for disobedience of the covenant (chs. 27-30); and (e) a provision for the

administration of the covenant after the death of the inaugural mediator (chs. 31-34). The main divisions from the covenant documents of Moses' lifetime, then, are discernible in the fifth book of the Pentateuch, Deuteronomy.

We conclude, therefore, that Deuteronomy was written by Moses, Israel's lawgiver, before his death in 1406 B.C.

Characteristics and Themes. Deuteronomy has been much used both by Christians and ancient Jews. It is quoted in the New Testament over fifty times, a number exceeded only by Psalms and Isaiah. The book contains much exhortation. The detailed legal material (chs. 14-16), much of which parallels Leviticus, is not as familiar or as much used as the rest, although it has importance for special purposes.

The book is a repetition of the law and history of Israel. It consists mainly of three great speeches and a legal compendium given by Moses at the end of his life, while the people were encamped in the plains of Moab, just before Joshua took command and led the people in the conquest of Canaan. The conquest of Transjordan had been successfully concluded, and Moses challenged the people in these farewell addresses.

As Moses' farewell messages to his people, the book combines exhortation and commandments, and serves as an example of how the Law should be taught. The opening address (1:5-4:40) recounts the experiences of Israel under Moses' leadership. Deuteronomy does not speak of how Moses confronted Pharaoh and how the miracles of the ten plagues forced Pharaoh to let the people go, but it alludes to the Exodus repeatedly (five times in the first address: 1:20, 34; 4:20, 34, 37). Moses recounts God's providential and miraculous care for the people during the journey from Egypt to Sinai. Then he details their defeat both spiritually and militarily at Kadesh Barnea. There are references here to events recorded in Numbers, but like the record in Numbers, almost nothing is said about events of the forty years of wilderness wandering. The journey around Edom toward Transjordan is mentioned, and the defeat of the kings Sihon and Og is recorded in fuller detail than in Numbers. Then comes the allocation of land in Transjordan for the tribes of Reuben, Gad, and half of Manasseh (as in Num. 32), and the narrative ends with reference to Moses' plea for himself to enter Canaan, which God disallows (as in Num. 27:12-23). Moses concludes the address with exhortations to be loyal to the Lord.

The second address (4:44-11:32) is composed of exhortations. Some consider this address as continuing to 26:19 with inclusion of the laws and regulations of chs. 12-26. The speech begins with the Ten Commandments,

almost exactly like the wording in Ex. 20, aside from the fourth commandment (5:12-15 note). The terror of the theophany (a visible self-revelation of God) is recalled with the call to obedience. Only the Ten Commandments are given directly by the voice of God; the rest of the law is mediated through Moses (5:22 note). The famous Shema, "Hear, O Israel: The Lord Our God, the Lord is one," is given in 6;4, with the exhortation to teach, remember, and obey. The following chapters are sprinkled with examples of God's care and judgements since leaving Egypt – all allusions to material in Exodus and Numbers. These examples serve to warn Israel to trust the Lord and not themselves. This leads to a promise of success in the coming wars of Canaan.

The laws (chs. 12-26) include regulations for worship, clean foods, slaves and debts, annual feasts, judges, cities of refuge, and various matters of conduct. Most of these have some parallel to material found in the previous books of the Pentateuch, which will be noted at the appropriate places.

The third address (chs. 27-30) is a powerful exhortation to obey the laws of the Lord. It includes the solemn ceremony to be held in the valley between Mount Ebal and mount Gerizim, near Shechem, after Israel had secured a foothold in Canaan – a ceremony reminiscent of the covenant ceremony of Ex. 20:1 – 24:8, and duly carried out by Joshua (Jos. 8:30 – 35). These laws and exhortations were given by Moses with emphasis on Israel's obligation before God to hear and obey the law of the Lord.

The final sections of the book are equally important and powerful (31:1-34:2). They include the installation of Josua as Moses' successor, the great Song of Moses celebrating the greatness of God and His care for his covenant people (ch. 32), Moses' song of blessing of the twelve tribes after the fashion of Jacob's blessing of his twelve sons in Gen. 49 (ch. 33), and finally, the addendum describing the death of Moses (ch. 34).

Through types and prophecy this book also points us to Christ. He is the Passover Lamb (16:1 note) and the coming Prophet (18:15-19 note). Moses, the founder of Israel's theocracy, mediated the old covenant, but Jesus Christ, the Son of God, mediated the new covenant (Jer. 31:31-34). The substance of the covenants is the same, but their manner of administration differs significantly. Whereas the old covenant was written on tablets of stone, Christ writes the new covenant through the Spirit of the living God on the tablets of human hearts (2 Cor. 3:3). The old covenant was ratified with Israel's promise, "we will hear and do" (5:27; cf. Ex. 19:8; 20:19). But the new covenant depends on God's better promise, "I will… write it on their hearts" (Jer. 31:33; Heb. 8:7). The old covenant called for shedding

the blood of animals; the everlasting new covenant was instituted once and for all by the blood of Christ (Jer. 32:30; Heb. 9:11 – 28). The old covenant calls for a heart religion, but it failed through human weakness and became obsolete after its fulfillment at Calvary (Rom. 8:3; Heb. 7:12; 8:13).

The Book of Deuteronomy, the fifth book of Moses, receives its title from the Septuagint, which called it Deuteronomion, meaning the "Second Law," or the "Repetition of the Law."

Outline of Deuteronomy

I. Introduction (1:1-5)

II. Moses' First Address (1:6-4:40)

- A. The Travel from Horeb to the Arnon River (1:6-2:23)
- B. The Transjordan Campaign and Settlement (2:24-3:29)
- C. Exhortation to Obey God's Law (4:1-14)
- D. Warning Against Idolatry (4:15-40)

III. Interlude: Cities of Refuge in Transjordan (4:41-43)

IV. Moses' Second Address (4:44-11:32)

- A. Preface and the Ten Commandments (4:44-5:22)
- B. Mediation of the Rest of the Law by Moses (5:23-33)
- C. Love and Obedience to the One True God (ch. 6)
- D. Promise of Victory and Call to Separation (7:1-10:5)
- E. Parenthesis: The Levites Set Apart for Service (10:6-9)
- F. The Charge to Love and Obey the Great and True God (10:10-11:25)
- G. First Mention of Ebal-Gerizim Liturgy (11:26-32)

V. Reiteration of Laws for Israel's Worship and Conduct (chs. 12-26)

- A. One Place of Sacrifice, Penalty for Idolatry (chs. 12;13)
- B. Laws of Worship: Cleanness, Judges, King, Priesthood, Prophet (chs 14-18)
- C. Laws of Conduct: Cities of Refuge, War, Purity, Honesty (chs. 19-25)
- D. Firstfruits and Tithes, Concluding Exhortations (ch. 26)

VI. Moses' Third Address: The Covenant and Ebal-Gerizim Liturgy (chs. 27-30)

A. The Cursings and Blessings at Ebal and Gerizim (chs. 27; 28)

B. The Moab Covenant (chs. 29; 30)

VII. The Conclusion of Moses' Ministry (chs. 31-34)

A. Transfer of Leadership to Joshua (31:1-29)

B. The Song of Moses (31:30-32:52)

C. Moses' Blessing on the Twelve Tribes (ch. 33)

D. Addendum: The Death of Moses and Eulogy for Him (ch. 34)

Introduction to the Historical Books

The collection of books in the Protestant Old Testament known as the "historical books" extends from Joshua through Esther. It relates the history of ancient Israel from the conquest of Canaan under Joshua, through the divided kingdoms of Israel and Judah, the fall of the two kingdoms to Assyria and Babylonia, and the restoration of Judah from exile in the sixth century B.C. Each of these twelve books narrates important events in God's dealings with His covenant people.

The books of the Old Testament were first recorded on scrolls and continued to be transmitted in this form through several centuries of use. It was not until the development of the "codex" (the book format first popularized by Christians in the production of the New Testament books) that the order in which the individual books of the Old Testament were to be arranged became an issue. The chronological arrangement of the twelve historical books familiar in Protestant Bibles derives from the order found in the great Septuagint (the Greek translation of the Old Testament) codices produced by Christians in the first four centuries A.D.

The historical books are arranged quite differently in Hebrew Bibles. The books of Joshua, Judges, Samuel, and Kings are grouped together as the "former prophets" and constitute the first half of the second division of the Jewish canon, the "Prophets." The second half of the division, the "latter prophets," consists of Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and the twelve "Minor Prophets." The books of Chronicles, Ezra, and Nehemiah are found in the third division of the Jewish canon, known as the "Writings." Finally, Ruth and Esther are contained in a special subset of five books within the "Writings" known as the "Festival Scrolls," since Jewish tradition required them to be read on certain religious feast days (Ruth at Pentecost, Esther at Purim; the other "scrolls" are Song of Solomon, Ecclesiastes, and Lamentations).

The arrangement of the historical books in the Jewish canon helps us to recognize two important blocks of material within the historical books. Each group of books was completed at a specific time in Israel's history and has particular theological interests and emphases. Scholars now recognize that the books of Joshua, Judges, Samuel, and Kings (the "former prophets") are a carefully constructed history of Israel completed during the Babylonian exile (the component books were actually begun much earlier; see their respective introductions). Similarly, the books of Chronicles, Ezra, and Nehemiah form a second major block of material completed during Judah's restoration from exile. Although there is disagreement among scholars regarding whether they are the work of a single author, these books do share certain theological interests related to their later historical setting.

The books of Joshua, Judges, Samuel, and Kings are referred to by scholars as the "Deuteronomistic History" since the Book of Deuteronomy serves as their historical and theological preamble. Building on Moses' narration of God's saving acts for His people from Abraham through the arrival of the Israelites at the border of the Promised Land, the Deuteronomistic History continues the story from the conquest of that land under Joshua to Jehoiachin, the last surviving Davidic king (2 Kin. 25:27-30). A brief concluding note that Jehoiachin was released from prison to live at the Babylonian court sets the date of the completion of the Deuteronomistic History in the uncertain years of the Babylonian exile. The collection is a serious attempt to write an accurate history of Israel and Judah using the conventions of ancient Near Eastern historiography.

The concerns of these books are not, however, of merely antiquarian interest. This history reiterates from Deuteronomy both such specific issues for the life of the covenant community as the "law of the king" (Deut. 17:14-20; cf. 1 Sam. 8:10-18) and such fundamental theological concepts as blessings for obedience and curses for disobedience (Deut. 28). Indeed, the dominant theological theme of the Deuteronomistic History may be summed up in the statement, "Sin brings punishment; repentance brings restoration" (see especially the repeated cycles of sin, oppression, repentance, and deliverance in the Book of Judges). The repeated sins of idolatry and injustice throughout the histories of Israel and Judah culminated in the ultimate punishment of exile from the Promised Land (Deut. 28:47-68; 2 Kin. 17:7-23; 23:26, 27). The final author of the Deuteronomistic History sees in Jehoiachin's release from prison a glimmer of hope that repentance will again bring restoration; but it remains for him only a hope.

The books of Chronicles, Ezra, and Nehemiah return to telling the story of God's people once that hope has become a reality. Ezra-Nehemiah (originally a single book) extends the history of Judah from the proclamation of Cyrus allowing the first of the Judean exiles to return to Palestine (c. 538 B.C.) through the final resettlement of Jerusalem (c. 400 B.C.). It recounts the rebuilding of the temple under Zerubbabel, the repair of Jerusalem's walls under Nehemiah, and the reconstitution of religious life under Ezra. Chronicles retells the story of the chosen people from Adam (in its genealogies) to Cyrus's proclamation, focusing on the history of Judah under the rule of David and his descendants. Approximately half of Chronicles is taken word for word from the books of Samuel and Kings.

These books are deeply concerned with how God's people should respond to His gracious act of restoring Judah. Since the Babylonian exile had been a punishment for failure to maintain full covenant loyalty to the Lord, the writers of these books were chiefly concerned with the lessons to be drawn from Israel's older

and recent history for maintaining the religious purity of the people. Ezra-Nehemiah looks upon God's actions in making a new beginning for His people and emphasizes the need of the newly constituted community to maintain separation from other peoples so as not to fall back into the sin of idolatry. The theological emphases in Chronicles in this regard are twofold. First, Chronicles stresses the importance of the temple, its worship, and its officials in directing the religious life of God's people. Second, it focuses attention on the central role of the Davidic house in the proper administration of the temple and in the religious life of the people.

As the years passed, it became clear that the hopes of the restored community for the resumption of rule by a descendant of David as king over Judah would not be realized. The people continued to read in Chronicles about the glorious history of David's rule and how David and his descendants (most notably Solomon) preserved true worship in Jerusalem. As they reflected on this history, their hopes were directed toward the future Son of David, the Messiah, who would be the perfect leader of the community's religious life. The history of God's saving acts for His people was not to end with Esther's role of rescuing them from destruction by the Persians, or even Ezra and Nehemiah's work of reestablishing them in the Promised Land.

Joshua

The Book of Joshua

Author. The author of the Book of Joshua is unknown, and our knowledge of the time it was written depends on the interpretation of certain clues within the book. Theories range from the view that the book was largely composed by Joshua himself (the tradition of the Talmud) to the hypothesis that it was written by someone long after the Jews returned from the exile in Babylon. From the standpoint of the final form of the book, it is probable that a man or group committed to the theological framework of the Book of Deuteronomy gave Joshua its canonical form. See "Date and Occasion" below and "Introduction to the Historical Books."

Date and Occasion. The precise time the Book of Joshua was composed is not clear. Comments within the book itself, such as notices that something is true "to this day," suggest that many of its sources came from a time between the death of Joshua (24:29-31) and the time of Samuel (c. 1050 B.c.). Because Sidon is still reckoned as Phoenicia's leading city (11:8; 19:28), some would date the book no later than 1200 B.c.; after that time Tyre gained the ascendancy. Jerusalem is as yet unconquered (15:63), a feat accomplished by David (2 Sam. 5:6-10), and Gezer is not as yet under Solomon's rule (16:10; 1 Kin. 9:16).

Many scholars today date the final form of the book from its relationship to the Pentateuch and the rest of the Former Prophets (Characteristics and Themes below). The introduction of Joshua overlaps with the conclusion of Deuteronomy. Josh. 1:1 matches Deut. 34:1-12, especially v. 5, where Moses is called "the servant of the LORD" for the first time. The conclusion of Joshua (24:29-31) is repeated as part of the introduction to Judges (Judg. 2:6-9).

On balance it appears that the book was written after Joshua's death but before Saul (c. 1050 B.c.) and his successors. The author wrote doubtless to recount the astounding fulfillment of the Lord's promises under Joshua. At the same time, recognizing the need to consolidate the conquest of the land, the author wrote in hope of the rise of another faithful servant who, like Joshua, could lead the Israelites to victory over every enemy still in the land.

Interpretive Difficulties. Any attempt to relate the accounts of the Book of Joshua to data gained from archaeological investigations must

reckon with the nature of both the biblical record and the archaeological evidence. All historical writing is selective in what it records and interpretive in the manner in which it presents its material. Biblical history has a particular interest in the purposes of God. Archaeological evidence is often ambiguous and illustrative rather than specific in the information it yields.

The task of correlating archaeological data and the biblical record is well illustrated by the debate over the Book of Joshua. Among those who accept the biblical representation of a violent conquest of the land, there are basically two schools of thought. One believes there is persuasive archaeological evidence (such as the destruction of Canaanite cities and occupation patterns) for a violent and successful Israelite invasion of Canaan around 1250 B.C. The other argues that archaeological evidence (such as that at Jericho) together with texts like 1 Kin. 6:1, Judg. 11:26, and Ex. 12:40, indicates that the conquest should be dated earlier, around 1400 B.C. The difficulties arise from uncertainties about the identification of modern sites with biblical locations, disputes over the dating of materials, biblical chronology, and how certain data should be interpreted.

Characteristics and Themes. The main theological idea in the Book of Joshua is the promise of God to give the land of Canaan to the descendants of Abraham, the people of Israel (Gen. 12:7). This one aspect of the promise to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob (Gen. 12:1-3) has dominated the contents of Genesis through Deuteronomy. Joshua testifies to God's faithfulness to this promise by recounting the successful entry of the Israelites into the land (2:1-5:12), the dispossession of its inhabitants (5:13-12:24; cf. Gen. 15:13-16 and notes), and the allocation of the territory to the twelve tribes (chs. 13-21). The closing sentence of the main body of the book (21:45) summarizes the theme of the book: "Not a word failed of any good thing which the Lord had spoken to the house of Israel. All came to pass" (21:45; see 23:14). This bold assertion of God's complete faithfulness is accompanied by the recognition that much of what was promised was still unrealized (e.g., 13:1; 23:5; Gen. 13:5 and note), and that the enjoyment of the fulfilled promise was always conditional upon the people's obedience (e.g., 23:12, 13, 15, 16). The full extent of the Promised Land would not be occupied until the reigns of David and Solomon. Joshua should be understood in relation to the Pentateuch, or Genesis through Deuteronomy in the Hebrew Bible, also called "the Law" (1:7, 8 and notes). The content of these books is summarized in 24:2-10. These verses recount the history of the descendants of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob from the time the promise was

first given to Abraham (Gen. 12:1-3) to the death of Moses (Deut. 34), who had led the Israelites from Egypt to the land promised to them by God. But the Pentateuch ends with the people still outside the Promised Land. Furthermore, the generation of Israelites who came out of Egypt had fallen under God's judgment because of their rebellion in the desert (Num. 13; 14; Deut. 1:26-36), and even the death of Moses is understood in these terms (Deut. 1:37; 32:48-52). In this context Joshua speaks of the faithfulness of the Lord to His promises made to the patriarchs, despite the rebellion of the earlier generation of Israelites and the judgment that had fallen on them.

Joshua should also be understood in relation to the history of Israel in the land, recorded in Joshua and the following books, through 2 Kings. The story is a tragic one as far as Israel is concerned. The nation failed to fol low the Lord wholeheartedly, and was all but destroyed by God's judgment in the form of the successive assaults by the Assyrians in the eighth century B.C. (2 Kin. 17) and the Babylonians in the sixth century (2 Kin. 25). The Book of Joshua confirms from the outset that the demise of Israel cannot be blamed on the failure of the power or the faithfulness of God.

The New Testament provides a third perspective from which the Book of Joshua should be understood. The promise of God, to which the Book of Joshua points, is the gospel preached "to Abraham beforehand" (Gal. 3:8; Gen. 12:1-3). This promise was kept by God through the time of Joshua and was ultimately fulfilled in Jesus Christ (Acts 13:32, 33; Heb. 4:8-11). The faithfulness of God proclaimed in the Book of Joshua is His faithfulness to the gospel of Christ. Israel's entrance into and occupation of the land prefigures the Christian's life in Christ (Gen. 13:15 and note).

Outline of Joshua

I. Prologue: The Promise and Its Consequences (ch. 1)

II. Entering the Land (2:1-5:12)

- A. The Promise and a Canaanite Harlot (ch. 2)
- B. The Promise and the Crossing of the Jordan (chs. 3;4)
- C. The Promise Remembered in the Land (5:1-12)

III. Conquering the Land (5:13-12:24)

A. The Commander of the Lord's Army (5:13-15)

B. Perishing and Surviving Under the Promise: Jericho and Rahab (ch. 6)

C. Presuming on the Promise: Achan (ch. 7)

D. Promised Victory: Ai (8:1-29)

E. The People of the Promise (8:30-35)

F. Canaanite Fear and Israelite Failure: Gibeon's Treaty and Curse (ch. 9)

G. The Conquest of the South (ch. 10)

H. The Conquest of the North (ch. 11)

I. List of Defeated Kings and Conquered Territory (ch. 12)

IV. Receiving the Promised Land (13:1-21:45)

A. The Command to Allocate the Land (13:1-7)

B. East of the Jordan: The Land Given to Reuben, Gad, and Half-tribe of Manasseh (13:8-33)

C. West of the Jordan (14:1-19:51)

1. Introduction (14:1-5)

2. Caleb: Example of Faithful Obedience (14:6-15)

3. Judah (ch. 15)

4. Ephraim and Manasseh (16:1-17:18)

5. The Other Tribes and Joshua (18:1-19:51)

D. Justice in the Promised Land: Cities of Refuge (20:1-9)

E. Cities for the Levites (21:1-42)

1. The Levites' Request (21:1-3)

2. The Allocation of Cities (21:4-8)

3. Lists of Cities (21:9-40)

a. Cities for the Kohathites (21:9-26)

b. Cities for the Gershonites (21:27-33)

c. Cities for the Merarites (21:34-40)

4. Total of Cities for the Levities (21:41, 42)

F. Concluding Summary (21:43-45)

V. Epilogue: (22:1-24:33)

A. Unity of Israel: Its Basis and Its Vulnerability (ch. 22)

B. The Demands of God’s Faithfulness (ch. 23)

C. Decision: Israel’s Choice at Shechem (24:1-28)

D. The End of an Era: The Deaths of Joshua and Eleazar (24:29-33)

Judges

The Book of Judges

Author. The original author of Judges is unknown, though we may infer certain things about him from his work. He evidently supported David's kingship over that of Saul's son Ishbosheth, who was from the tribe of Benjamin. The author's loyalty to David and the tribe of Judah would indicate that he lived and wrote during the early period of David's reign at Hebron. The writer of Judges addresses the Israelites of his day from the same theological point of view as the Book of Deuteronomy. The final form of the Book of Judges is doubtless the work'of a person or group that shared this perspective. See also "Characteristics and Themes," below, and "Introduction to the Historical Books."

Date and Occasion. The subject matter of Judges suggests that the book was composed during a period when there was strong controversy about whether the king should be from the house of David and the tribe of Judah, or from the house of Saul and the tribe of Benjamin. There were rival kings from these tribes when David ruled in Hebron, and Ishbosheth, Saul's son, ruled in the north. Judges ends with events that severely compromise the reputation of the tribe of Benjamin.

The events narrated in Judges span about 350 years, from the conquest of Canaan (c. 1400 s.c.) until just before Samuel, who anointed the first king of Israel (c.1050 B.c.). The first of the judges in the book, Othniel, appears during the generation following Joshua. Samson, the last judge in the book, was a contemporary of Samuel. During this period Israel was oppressed from within by the Canaanites and from without by the Arameans, Moabites, Midianites, Ammonites, Amalekites, Amorites, and Philistines.

Like the other historical books of the Old Testament, Judges might be treated as a sermon addressed to the covenant community at a time of crisis. The readers had not themselves experienced the events described in the book. Rather, the readers were of a later generation facing their own crisis in keeping the covenant. The stories of successes and failures either encouraged or sobered the later generation. Judges records a period of gross ignorance and sin. The people are depicted as unstable and easily led into idolatry. Extreme crimes are described in the book.

Gideon asks the question that is central to Judges: "if the LORD is with

us, why then has all this happened to us?" (6:13). There was warning in Deuteronomy that the result of turning away from God and serving idols would be the sort of suffering that took place during the period of the judges. God would seem to be absent and the land would be filled with sorrows (Deut. 31:16,17). Israel needed a king who could teach them how to keep their covenant with the Lord.

Characteristics and Themes. Judges can be divided into three distinct sections (Introduction: Outline). Each section has its own internal style and consistency, containing lively narration of God's people and leaders in action. Occasionally humorous, sometimes tragic, but never dull, the individual stories within the sections are complete in themselves.

Each episode and section employs verbal repetition, historical comparison, and quotations from the Book of Joshua to emphasize the connections between people, places, and events. The reader is invited to search for the pattern and moral framework of the history.

The central section of Judges (3:7-16:31), the bulk of the book, makes an extensive use of repetition. The author describes a repeating sequence of events. The Israelites do evil in the eyes of the Lord, turning to serve other gods. God becomes angry and delivers them up to oppressors. They cry out for help, and God raises up a judge to deliver them. The judge brings peace, but the nation returns to sin as soon as the judge dies. The repeated phrasing describing this pattern reinforces the point that the Israelites were unrepentant. While each judge and the details of the deliverance he brought varies, the end was inevitable: the people again did evil in the eyes of the Lord.

Six major judges are described, interspersed with the mention of six lesser judges. The opening and closing sections of the book are like bookends, enclosing the cyclical narratives about the judges. The introduction (1:1-2:5) points out Israel's general failure to conquer the land according to the provisions of the covenant God had made with them. The cycles of the twelve judges show that the judges could not lead the people into faithfulness to the covenant. There was a downward spiral of increasing disobedience. The conclusion (chs. 17-21) recounts two especially grievous examples of covenant disobedience. The writer repeats the brief, tragic observation, "There was no king in Israel; everyone did what was right in his own eyes."

The writer of Judges, like the authors of the other historical books,

calls the community of faith to obey the covenant, applying to their lives the teaching of Deuteronomy. He points to the successes and failures of previous generations, and challenges the people of David's time to be faithful to the covenant. He warns them prophetically about the dangers of the wrong kind of leadership.

According to Judges, Israel was falling away from the covenant and worshiping false gods as they forgot the Lord's acts of salvation in the past (2:10; 6:13). As in Deuteronomy, the sin of seeking other gods is the continuing pattern of covenant disobedience (Judg. 2:11, 12; 3:7, 12; 8:33; 10:6, 10; Deut. 4:23). The repeated cycles with the constant refrains, "the children of Israel did evil in the sight of the LORD" (2:11; 3:7, 12; 4:1; 6:1; 10:6; 13:1) and "everyone did what was right in his own eyes" (17:6; 21:25; cf. Deut. 12:8; 31:16, 17), were a sharp warning to Israel in David's early kingship that they absolutely needed a king who could enable the nation to keep the terms of their covenant with God.

Beyond these immediate applications for the original audience of Judges, we should observe that later readers doubtless saw in the book the hope for a new David who would teach them to keep their covenant with the Lord. This would be especially true of those who read the book in the days of the divided monarchy or during and after the exile to Babylon. In New Testament days, the, gospel of Jesus, the,son of David (Matt. 1:1), answers the longing of the readers of Judges for the presence of a godly king, and heightens the church's expectation of His return in glory.

Title. The title "Judges" refers to the twelve men God raised up prior to the time of Samuel to deliver Israel from their oppressors (2:11-19). The normal translation of the Hebrew noun and verb as "judge" and "to judge" can be misleading to modem readers, since the judges of Israel were military and political leaders rather than officials presiding over courts of law. Deborah is the only judge who is mentioned as having a judicial function in the usual sense (4:4, 5). The last judge, Samuel, was a priest and prophet. At one point God is called "the Judge" (11:27).

Outline of Judges

I. Introduction: Questions of Leadership and Conquest Completion (1:1-2:5)

A. The Promise to Judah (1:1,2)

B. Various Tribes in the Conquest (1:3-36)

C. Judah’s Successes (1:3-20)

D. Benjamin’s Failure to Take Jerusalem (1:21)

E. Joseph’s Success at Bethel (1:22-26)

F. Failures in Conquest by the Rest of the Tribes (1:27-36)

G. God’s Judgment for Disobedience (2:1-5)

II. Cycles of the Judges (2:6 – 16:31)

A. Pattern for All That Follows (2:6-3:6)

1. Joshua and the Generation After Him (2:6-10)

2. The Pattern of Israel’s Covenant Obedience (2:11-19)

3. God’s Judgment for Covenant Disobedience (2:20-3:6)

a. The Purpose in God’s Judgment (2:20-23)

b. The Instruments of God’s Judgment (3:1-6)

B. The Failure of Twelve Judges to Maintain Faithfulness to the Covenant (3:7-16:31)

1. Othniel (3:7-11)

2. Ehud (3:12-30)

3. Shamgar (3:31)

4. Deborah and Barak (chs. 4;5)

5. Gideon and His Son Abimelech (chs. 6-9)

a. Gideon (6:1-8:32)

b. Abimelech (8:33-9:57)

6. Tola (10:1,2)

7. Jair (10:3-5)

8. Jephthah (10:6-12:7)

9. Ibzan (12:8-10)

10. Elon (12:11,12)

11. Abdon (12:13-15)

12. Samson (chs. 13-16)

III. Two Grievous Sins (chs. 17-21)

A. The Danites and Idolatry (chs. 17;18)

B. Civil War: Israel Against Benjamin (chs. 19-21)

Ruth

The Book of Ruth

Author. The Book of Ruth, named after its principal character, is an anonymous short story. Rabbinic tradition held that the book, with Judges and Samuel, was written by the prophet Samuel. This is possible only if the book is dated early. Some would date Ruth as late as after the Jewish exile in Babylon, which took place during the sixth century B.C.

Date and Occasion. The Book of Ruth can be dated in the time of Samuel (c. 1050 B.C., at the beginning of Israel's monarchy), the time of David (c. 1000 B.C.), or the century following the exile in Babylon (c. 450 B.C.). The reference to David in 4:17, the genealogy of 4:18-22, and the explanation of an apparently antiquated custom in 4:7 indicate a time after David had begun to reign. The book's portrayal of good relations between Moabites and Israelites suits best the early period of David's rule. All told, a time early in the monarchy may be affirmed as readily as any other.

This universally appealing narrative has evoked diverse conclusions concerning its purpose. Such a story does not need a moral to justify its popularity, but that it had a moral, or at least a theological purpose, is beyond doubt. Biblical interpreters have had no trouble finding a purpose; the challenge is to find a single, dominant theme.

Ruth has been understood to celebrate the following: (a) that a proselyte, even from Moab, can be faithful to the Lord and gain full membership in Israel; (b) that qualities of loyalty and covenant faithfulness in a foreigner can be a model for Israel's response to the Lord; (c) that the Lord as Redeemer will restore the exiled family of Israel to its land. In light of the epilogue (4:18-22), however, and assuming a date close to the time of David, the major purpose seems to include showing that David's kingship is legitimate. The primacy of the tribe of Judah (the father of Perez; 4:12, 18) had already been established in Israel, despite Tamar's strange act of desperation (Gen. 38). Now the primacy of David must be established, even though there is a Moabite in the line. Boaz is the model for the relative who redeems, while Ruth beautifully reflects God's faithful covenant love, claiming refuge under the Lord's wings, and clinging to Naomi. If God has drawn together all these disparate strands so carefully to bless the line of David, is that not one more reason to affirm David's initially fragile claim to the throne?

Interpretive Difficulties. The issues that have fascinated scholars arise directly from puzzling elements in the narrative. These may be divided into the

following groups: (a) questions about purpose, related to difficulties in dating and origin; (b) questions about legal customs, especially the family obligations of a close relative of a deceased person; and (c) internal difficulties, such as the relationship between 4:12, 17 and the genealogy in 4:18-22. An abundant literature addresses each of these areas, with sometimes little agreement. It is one of the remarkable phenomena of biblical research that such debates leave unaffected the powerful impact this simple account has on every generation of readers.

Characteristics and Themes. Though clearly an important historical document of its period, the narrative of Ruth is told with dramatic intensity and movement. The story moves quickly through its various stages, each part marked with elements of irony and suspense, all contributing to a symphony of divine providential fulfillment. The Lord inspires Naomi's return, Ruth's covenant faithfulness, and Boaz's righteous adherence to the law. The book closes with a genealogy of King David, the descendant of Boaz the Israelite and Ruth the Moabite, a young woman who took refuge under the Lord's wings (2:12) and was rewarded by God, who "gave her conception" (4:13).

Ruth and Boaz are part of a longer line that often shows God's grace combined with human frailty. One of David's ancestors was Perez (4:12, 18), son of an irregular union between Judah and his own daughter-in-law, Tamar, who was "more righteous" than the patriarch himself (Gen. 38:26). The closing few verses of Ruth (4:18-22) are commonly said to be a later addition to the book, but genealogies are not unusual in ancient narratives. Also, this genealogy underlines a particular value of Ruth, its revelation of the mixed ancestry of King David and through him, of Jesus Christ.

Looking beyond this witness to the legitimacy of David's kingship, we should note the significance of the book in the light of the gospel. Ruth follows the faith of Abraham, as she leaves home and family to go to a foreign land under the Lord's care. The universal scope of the gospel comes to light as Ruth the Moabite finds the blessing promised to all the nations in Abraham's descendants. Finally, Ruth becomes an ancestor of Christ, who in Himself will reconcile to God such different nations as Moab and Israel.

Outline of Ruth

I. The Death of Elimelech and His Sons (1:1-5)

II. Naomi and Ruth Return to Bethlehem in Judah (1:6-22)

A. Naomi and Her Daughter-in-law Leave Moab (1:6,7)

B. Naomi Urges Orpah to Go Back Home (1:8-14)

C. Ruth's Solemn Promise (1:15-18)

D. Naomi's Bitter Homecoming (1:19-22)

III. Ruth Gleans in the Fields of Boaz (ch.2)

A. Ruth Goes Out to Glean (2:1-3)

B. Boaz Meets Ruth (2:4-16)

C. Naomi's Assessment of Boaz (2:17-23)

IV. Ruth Visits Boaz at the Threshing Floor (ch. 3)

A. Naomi's Plan (3:1-5)

B. Boaz Discovers Ruth (3:6-13)

C. Ruth Returns to Naomi (3:14-18)

V. Boaz Redeems Ruth (ch. 4)

A. The Close Relative Excuses Himself (4:1-6)

B. Ruth and Boaz Are Married Before Witnesses (4:7-12)

C. The First Child Is Welcomed and Blessed (4:13-17)

D. Genealogy from Perez to David (4:18-22)

1 Samuel

The First Book of Samuel

Author. The books of Samuel do not directly name their author, and it seems likely that the association of Samuel's name with these books reflects the role he played in anointing Israel's first kings. Samuel is described as an old man in 8:1 and as having already died in 25:1, long before many of the events of I and 2 Samuel had even taken place. However, I Chr. 29:29 attaches the names of Samuel and his prophetic successors Nathan and Gad to certain written sources, portions of which may have been incorporated into the written history of Israel as it took shape. The books of Samuel were probably given their final form by someone deeply influenced by the theology of the Book of Deuteronomy ("Introduction to the Historical Books").

Date and Occasion. As with authorship, the books of Samuel give no clear indication of the date they were written. Joshua, Judges, Samuel, and Kings all clearly contain information from sources contemporary with the events narrated in them, but their final form was not set until the time of Judah's exile in Babylon (see "Introduction to the Historical Books").

In the latter half of the eleventh century B.C., a time when the international powers of the ancient Near East were preoccupied with internal conflicts, Israel was transformed from a loosely knit tribal confederation into a united monarchy. The institution of the monarchy was a new stage in the political and religious history of Israel, although the idea of kingship itself would have been known to Israel from the practice of its neighbors (Judg. 3:12; 4:2; 8:5). What is remarkable is not that Israel eventually installed a king, but that it resisted doing so for so long. One cause of Israel's reluctance is revealed in the words of Gideon, "I will not rule over you, nor shall my son rule over you; the LORD shall rule over you" (Judg. 8:23). A fundamental tenet of Israel's faith was that the Lord Himself (Yahweh) was Israel's Sovereign, their Great King (8:7; 12:12; Num. 23:21; Ps. 5:2; Mal. 1:14). Nevertheless, the opening books of the Bible contain indications that Israel, in accordance with the divine will, would one day have a human monarch (Gen. 49:10; Num. 24:7, 17-19; cf. Gen. 17:6, 16; 35:11). Moses anticipated a time when Israel would be settled in the Promised Land and would desire a king, and he gave instructions to regulate kingship when it came (Dent. 17:14-20; cf. 28:36). As 1 Samuel opens, that time has almost arrived.

It is difficult to attach firm dates to most of the events recounted in Samuel. Although definite figures are given for the duration of David's reign over Judah and Israel (2 Sam. 5:4, 5), there is no clear indication of how long Saul reigned (13:1 note). The specific years of David's and Saul's reigns have to be established by working back from the dates of events recorded in Kings, which have their own chronological difficulties (see Introduction to 1 Kings). There is broad consensus that David had consolidated his rule over both Judah and Israel shortly before 1000 B.C. (Judah, c. 1010 B.C.; Israel, c. 1003 B.C.). David's lifetime can he dated about 1040 to 970 B.C. Samuel could have been born about1100 B.C.

Characteristics and Themes. The books of 1 and 2 Samuel are masterpieces of literature. Their basic purpose is to give a historical account of the emergence and early development of the Israelite monarchy under Saul and David. The history is selective, and the nature of the selections reveals the theological concerns of the books. Kingship in Israel came into being through the mediation of a prophet, and the written history of this change has a prophetic point of view.

The narratives of 1 and 2 Samuel are written in an economical style, using a variety of narrative techniques: keywords (2:29 note); comparative characterizations (Saul and Jonathan, David and Uriah; see 13:22 note, 14:6 note, and 2 Sam. 11); repetition and variation (Saul's two confessions in 15:24, 25, 30); and analogy (Nabal compared with Saul, ch. 25). Sensitivity to such literary features can open the door to theological and historical understanding, and to a sense of the unity of the text.

The basic plot of 1 Samuel is Saul's rise to power and subsequent rejection. As noted above, the books of Samuel focus on an important innovation in Israel's religious and political life-having an earthly king. The subject of 1 Samuel is largely the intersecting careers of three figures: Samuel, Saul, and David. The key issue is how a human king can be accommodated in the framework of the covenant relationship existing between God and Israel. How can Israel have a king without compromising God's kingship?

In the Hebrew Bible, 1 Samuel follows the Book of Judges, which ends with the doleful refrain, "In those days there was no king in Israel; everyone did what was right in his own eyes" (21:25; cf. 17:6; 18:1; 19:1). This refrain can also describe the first chapters of I Samuel. As the book opens, Israel is without a human king, and the Israelites are unconcerned with honoring their

divine King. Even the priests, the sons of Eli, simply do what is right in their own eyes (2:12-17).

The first unit relates the birth of Samuel and his call to be a prophet (chs. 1-3). In a famous song, Hannah praises God for the birth of Samuel (2:1-10). Her song introduces basic theological themes of the books-the sovereignty and holiness of God, divine reversal of human fortune, divine deliverance, and the futility of trusting human strength. Kingship is anticipated in a reference to the Lord's "anointed," "His king" (2:10). The story of the downfall of the priestly house of Eli introduces the theme of divine rejection and its causes.

The section 4:1-7:1 is often called "the ark narrative." In these chapters the Lord demonstrates His power, first against Israel's attempt to exploit the ark as if it were a magical talisman, and second in a devastating march through the Philistine cities. In 7:2-17 God's power to deliver Israel and defeat Israel's enemies is displayed through God's man, Samuel. Against this backdrop, the sinfulness of the people's demand for a human ruler (ch. 8) is clearly seen. It is not that Israel is never to have a human monarch, for a king has long been anticipated. What is objectionable is for the people to want a king "like all the nations" (8:5), because this desire is a rejection of the greatest King, God Himself (8:7). In spite of the folly of the people's request, God will grant it, provided the people are warned about the potential abuses of monarchy, and provided the king himself is willing to submit to God's rule.

Israel's first king proves to be a disappointment. Saul is introduced in 9:2 as an impressive person of striking proportion, presumably what the people wanted. The prophet Samuel told Saul that he would rule Israel, and then anointed him in the Lord's name (9:26-10:1). Soon afterward the Spirit of God overcame Saul and he prophesied with a company of prophets. He gathered a force from all Israel and led them to victory over the Ammonites. He was approved by the people, and Samuel publicly anointed him king (10:24; 11:14, 15). Clearly the kingship in Israel is conceived of as requiring the special direction of God.

On two important occasions Saul fell short of what God required. When he was instructed to wait for Samuel, Saul's patience expired and he offered a sacrifice that Samuel should have performed (13:8-14). Secondly, when God issued a commandment to destroy the Amalekites, Saul followed only half-way (ch. 15). He preserved the life of the king and many of the

animals. Samuel denounced him sternly and took sword in hand himself to cut down the king. At this time Samuel prophesied that Saul had been rejected and that God had given the kingdom to someone else (15:28). God's favor was removed from Saul (28:17).

The fall of Saul's dynasty is coincident with the rise of David. David, like Saul, was chosen by God to be king. But in his case God's choice was somehow deeper. David was not without faults, but ultimately God promised him that He would not reject him on that account (2 Sam. 7:8-16). He would punish him, but He would preserve him. David married Saul's daughter Michal and became the intimate friend of his son Jonathan, yet even as he did so Saul's jealousy and suspicion fell on him. Saul became deranged and tried to kill both David and Jonathan (18:11; 19:1; 20:33). David was forced to flee from the court and become a fugitive in his own country.

At the last Saul's original calling to deliver his people from the Philistines was reawakened in him, and he fought a disastrous battle at Gilboa. Unwilling to be captured, King Saul committed suicide, opening David's path to the throne

In many ways David's career typifies that of his greater Son, Jesus Christ. Both were sanctioned by a prophet, David by Samuel (3:20; 16:13) and Jesus by John the Baptist (Matt. 14:5; John 1:29-31; 5:31-35). The Spirit of the Lord came upon both (16:13; Mark 1:9-11). Both were rejected by jealous kings (18:9; Matt. 2:16) and were warned to flee for their lives (ch. 20; Matt. 2:13-15). Rejected also by their own people without cause (23:12; John 19:15), both learned in exile to depend on God.

Title. The books of Samuel have had various titles. The Septuagint (the Greek translation of the Old Testament) and the Vulgate (a Latin translation of the whole Bible) group them with I and 2 Kings as First, Second, Third, and Fourth "Kingdoms" or "Kings." Jewish tradition distinguished Samuel and Kings, but did not divide Samuel into two books until the fifteenth century A.D.

Outline of 1 Samuel

I. Before the Monarchy: God Rules and Rescues His People (chs. 1-7)

A. God’s Man: Samuel and Eli at Shiloh (chs. 1-3)

1. Samuel’s Birth and Hannah’s Song of Thanksgiving (1:1-2:10)

2. The Rejection of the House of Eli (2:11-36)

3. The Initiation of Samuel as Prophet (ch. 3)

B. God's Power: The Ark of God and Philistia (4:1-7:1)

1. The Ark is Captured by the Philistines (ch. 4)

2. The Ark in Philista (ch. 5)

3. The Ark Is Returned to Israel (6:1-7:1)

C. God's Victory: Samuel Versus the Philistines at Mizpah (7:2-17)

II. The Beginning of Monarchy: The People Demand a King (chs. 8-12)

A. Samuel Hears and God Grants the People's Request (ch. 8)

B. Saul's Rise: Designation by Samuel and Demonstration in Battle (chs. 9-12)

1. Saul Anointed by Samuel (9:1-10:16)

2. Saul Publicly Selected by Lot at Mizpah (10:17-27)

3. Saul Rescues Jabesh Gilead from the Ammonites (ch. 11)

4. Samuel Issues Warnings About Monarchy (ch. 12)

III. The People's Choice: The Reign and Rejection of King Saul (chs. 13-15)

A. Saul Versus the Philistines: Saul's First Rejection (chs. 13;14)

1. Jonathan Attacks the Philistines; Saul Fails the Test (ch. 13)

2. Jonathan Leads the People to Victory; Saul Fails the Test (ch. 14)

B. Saul Versus the Amalekites: Saul Rejected (ch. 15)

IV. God's Choice: The Rise of David and Fall of Saul (chs. 16-31)

A. David's Rise Delights All but Saul (chs. 16-18)

1. David Anointed by Samuel and Introduced to Saul (ch. 16)

2. David and Goliath (ch. 17)

3. David and the House of Saul (ch. 18)

B. Saul Seeks David's Life (chs. 19-23)

1. Saul's Attempts to Kill David Are Thwarted (ch. 19)

2. Jonathan Aids and Encourages Daivd (ch. 20)

3. David Deceives Ahimelech at Nob and Escapes to Gath (ch. 21)

4. Saul Destroys the Priests of Nob; David Delivers the People of Keilah (22:1-23:6)

5. Saul Pursues David but Is Thwarted by the Philistines (23:7-29)

C. David Protects Saul's Life (chs. 24-26)

1. David Spares Saul's Life in the Cave (ch. 24)

2. Abigail Keeps David from Murder in His Dispute with Nabal (ch. 25)

3. David Spares Saul's Life in the Camp (ch. 26)

D. David Hides with the Philistines; Saul Takes His Own Life (chs. 27-31)

1. David Flees to the Philistines (ch. 27)

2. Saul and Medium at En Dor (ch. 28)

3. David Rejected by the Philistines (ch. 29)

4. David Recovers What Had Been Taken by the Amalekites (ch. 30)

5. Saul, Wounded on Mount Gilboa, Takes His Own Life (ch. 31)

2 Samuel

The Second Book of Samuel

Author. The author of 2 Samuel is unknown. Although some of the material recounted in 1 Samuel may have been derived from writings by the prophet Samuel (cf. 1 Chr. 29:29), all the events reported in 2 Samuel occurred after his lifetime.

Date and Occasion. In their original form, 1 and 2 Samuel were a single book. This book was completed as part of the "Deuteronomic History" during the exile of Judah in Babylon (see "Introduction to the Historical Books"). The narratives are based on sources and traditions contemporary with the events themselves.

Characteristics and Themes. With Saul now dead (1 Sam. 31), the way is open for David to take the throne without lifting his hand against "the LORD'S anointed" (cf. I Sam. 24:5, 6). David became a king by stages, first over Judah and then over all Israel (l:l5:5). Though his ascendancy over Judah proceeds smoothly, blood is spilled before he becomes king over the whole nation. The narratives emphasize that David is innocent of the deaths of Abner (Saul's former general) and Ishbosheth (Saul's only surviving son), as he was innocent of the deaths of Saul and Jonathan.

The attention of the narrative then shifts to the transactions, both political and theological, by which David's throne is established. David's acquisition of a capital city, his resounding defeat of the Philistines, and his transfer of the ark of God to his newly established capital, Jerusalem, are recounted in chs. 5 and 6. Then the Lord, after refusing David's offer to build a house for Him, makes a covenant with David that He will build a house or dynasty for David that will endure forever. This promise is the continuation and specification of the divine covenant with the patriarchs and is a major development of the messianic hope that will be fulfilled in Christ (7:4-17 note). David's principal achievements included his military victories (expanding Israel's borders to the limits promised to Abraham in Gen. 15:18) and his covenant faithfulness to Jonathan, which David expresses by showing kindness to Mephibosheth (chs. 6-8).

The Davidic covenant of ch. 7 establishes that the purposes of God for the house of David are sure. The promise does not make it impossible for David or his descendants to forfeit some of the temporal benefits of their privileged position if they should fall into sin. Domestic and political chaos followed David's sin against Uriah and Bathsheba (ch. 11). When confronted by Nathan (ch, 12), David's

repentance is genuine, and God's forgiveness is immediate. Yet sin still has its consequences. With his ability to exercise proper authority impaired (perhaps by a sense of guilt), David witnesses his own sins replicated in the lives of his sons (13:21 note). Not until he has survived two rebellions, first by his own son Absalom and then by Sheba, son of Bichri (ch. 20), does David's reign regain a measure of equilibrium.

Thematic closure is provided for the books of Samuel by a kind of epilogue in chs. 21-24. The chapters are symmetrical in outline, and at the center are two poems celebrating the two fundamental reasons for David's blessedness. First, the Lord is his deliverer (22:2-5 1), and second, the Lord has made an "everlasting covenant" with him (23:1-7). Framing this poetic core are lists of David's champions (21:15-22; 23:8-39). the human agents of his success. Finally, the first and last sections are accounts of how David made atonement for Saul's sin against the Gibeonites (21:3), and then for his own sin of taking a census of the people (ch. 24). In the first case David averted a famine by handing over for death seven of Saul's family. In the second, he accepted the judgment of a plague upon the nation, but pleaded with God that it be cut short before Jerusalem was struck. David's prayer was heard. David was disqualified from building a temple because of the blood he had shed during his life (1 Chr. 22:8; 28:3), but these books reveal the fervency of his heart and how he valued his relationship with God above all else.

Outline of 2 Samuel

I. God Enthrones David over Judah and Israel (1:1-5:5)

A. David Becomes King over Judah (1:1-2:7)

1. David Avenges and Laments the Deaths of Saul and Jonathan (ch. 1)

2. David Anointed King over Judah (2:1-7)

B. David Becomes King over Israel (2:8-5:5)

1. Abner Makes Ishbosheth King over Israel, and There Is War Between the Houses of Saul and David (2:8-32)

2. Abner Goes over to David and Is Murdered by Joab (ch. 3)

3. Ishbosheth Is Assassinated, and David Becomes King over All Israel (4:1-5:5)

II. David Gains a City and a Promise of an Everlasting Dynasty (5:6-10:19)

A. David Establishes His Capital in Jerusalem (5:6-6:23)

1. David Captures Jerusalem and Defeats the Philistines (5:6-25)

2. David Brings the Ark of God to Jerusalem (ch. 6)

B. God Promises David an Everlasting Dynasty (ch. 7)

C. David's Achievements as King (chs. 8-10)

1. David's Victories and Officers (ch. 8)

2. David's Kindness to Mephibosheth (ch. 9)

3. David's Kindness to Hanun Is Rebuffed, and War with Ammon Ensues (ch. 10)

III. David Sins and Suffers the Consequences (chs. 11-20)

A. David Sins and Finds Reconciliation (chs. 11;12)

1. Bathsheba and Uriah (ch. 11)

2. David Repents, but His Sin Carries Consequences (ch. 12)

B. David's Sons Sin, but Reconciliation Is Incomplete (chs. 13;14)

1. Amnon Commits Sexual Sin, and Absalom Commits Murder (ch. 13)

2. Absalom Returns to Jerusalem but Is Not Fully Reconciled to David (ch. 14)

C. Absalom Rebels and Dies (chs. 15-18)

1. Absalom Revolts Against David and David Flees Jerusalem (ch. 15)

2. Shimei Curses David (ch. 16)

3. Hushai Confuses the War Council of Absalom (ch. 17)

4. Absalom Is Killed by Joab and Mourned by David (ch. 18)

D. God Restores David's Reign (chs. 19;20)

1. David Returns to Jerusalem (ch. 19)

2. Sheba's Attemptss to Secede (ch. 20)

IV. Epilogue: Last Words About David's Reign (chs. 21-24)

A. A Famine Resulting from Saul's Sin Is Stopped (21:1-14)

B. Human Agents of David's Success (21:15-22)

C. David Sings the Praises of God (ch. 22)

D. David's "Last Words" (23:1-7)

E. More Human Agents of David’s Success (23:8-39)

F. A Plague Resulting from David’s Sin Is Stopped (ch. 24)

1 Kings

The First Book of the Kings

Author. Jewish tradition held that Jeremiah wrote 1 and 2 Kings and Lamentations as well as the prophecy under his name. The points of view of Joshua, Judges, 1 and 2 Samuel, and 1 and 2 Kings, are very similar, and because they develop the theological ideas expressed in Deuteronomy, they are often called "the Deuteronomic History" by modern authors. But the author of 1 and 2 Kings is not identified in the books themselves, and his identity cannot be known with certainty.

Date and Occasion. Indications are that the books were compiled from historical sources during the time the Jews were exiles in Babylon. Second Kings ends while the last king of Judah, Jehoiachin, is detained in Babylon (2 Kin. 25:27-30). Since there is no mention of the return of the people from exile in 538 B.C., it is probable that the final edition of the work was completed at the midpoint of the Babylonian exile (560-550 B.C.).

Earlier materials are no doubt also present. First, the author clearly had access to a variety of sources, both administrative and prophetic. The names of his sources: "the book of the acts of Solomon" (l Kin. 11:41), "the chronicles of the kings of Israel" (1 Kin. 14:19), and "the chronicles of the kings of Judah" (1 Kin. 14:29). Probably the author also had access to material recounting the lives and ministries of the prophets. Second, there are a number of statements in 1 and 2 Kings that describe conditions that prevailed before the time of the captivity, and yet say of them that they continue "to this day" (1 Kin. 8:8; 9:20, 21; 12:19; 2 Kin. 8:22). Such statements point to the existence of pre-exilic material that was subsequently included in Kings. Third, the final chapter of 2 Kings is distinguished by a detailed chronology by day, month, and year of events surrounding the final siege of Jerusalem and the destruction of the temple.

Second Kings has a somewhat unusual ending. The book seems to reach its climax with the reign of Josiah (2 Kin. 23:25), but this optimism is clouded by a prophecy of impending judgment (2 Kin. 23:26, 27). Moreover, the narrative stops abruptly with Judah in Babylon, with no theological summary or conclusion. For these reasons, some scholars believe that the main work of writing Kings was done before the time of the Exile. In this theory, the original book of Kings was composed during the reign of King Josiah, and someone living during the Exile updated this history with a brief record of Judah's final years. But whether one holds to this two-edition hypothesis or to a one-edition (exilic) hypothesis, the book has a unified

perspective.

Characteristics and Themes. Kings as History. Characteristic of the author is a fondness for recording in detail many features of his nation's past. This genuine interest in the dates, figures, and institutions of the kingdom of Israel appears in his record of preparations for the temple (1 Kin. 5), its dimensions and decoration (1 Kin. 6), and its furniture and vessels (1 Kin. 7:13-51). The writer gives the length of reigns for monarchs in both kingdoms, and he synchronizes their reigns with each other.

The author organizes and presents Israel's experience with kingship in periods in order to provide a clear and meaningful account of his nation's past. Beginning with an evaluation of the united monarchy under Solomon (1 Kin. 1-11), the author carefully depicts its dissolution (1 Kin. 12:1-24) and the formation of two separate entities, Israel in the north and Judah in the south. He goes on to present the separate history of each realm, until the fall of the northern kingdom in 722 B.C. (2 Kin. 17). The alternation between the northern kingdom (usually called Israel) and the southern kingdom (usually called Judah) can be confusing, but it is central to the author's purpose of presenting a unified history of all the Israelite tribes.

In portraying the divided kingdom, the writer points out important differences between the two realms. Kingship in Judah was relatively stable, under the descendants of David, but kingship in Israel was unstable, and there was a succession of dynasties. Twenty kings from nine different families ruled over Israel in the northern kingdom during its existence of about two hundred years. In contrast, twenty kings from one family ruled over the southern kingdom for about three hundred fifty years. The writer concludes his coverage of the northern kingdom with a lengthy commentary on its major shortcomings (2 Kin. 17:7-34).

To consider Kings as no more than history of the monarchy would strip the book of its theological value, since the author is not a dispassionate observer, merely chronicling his nation's past. Nevertheless, the historical value of his work should not be underestimated. In composing a coherent and meaningful account of his nation's past, the biblical writer has provided an invaluable service to anyone who wants to understand this momentous era in Israelite history.

Kings as Theology. Kings is not only a history, but also a work of theology, a reflection on God's ways with His people Israel, whom He had delivered from the "iron furnace" of Egypt to be His own "inheritance" (1 Kin. 8:51-53). In composing a work of theological history, the writer takes lessons from the past to serve his people in the present and future. There are a number of central themes that inform his overall point of view and his evaluation of the monarchy.

1. The People as God's Elect. Israel was not in itself better than any of the other nations. Israel did not first choose God; rather, God "separated them from among all the peoples of the earth" according to His unfathomable grace (1 Kin. 8:53). Holiness results not from any intrinsic merit, but from God's election (Deut. 7:6; 26:18, 19).

Kings emphasizes the solidarity of Israel. The writer is concerned for all the tribes of Israel. Although he severely criticizes the northern kingdom and its monarchs because of their cultic apostasy, the writer still considers these tribes to be part of Israel, and he shows sustained interest in them. Even after the northern tribes are exiled by the Assyrians, the author does not forget them. He both documents and commends Josiah's reforms in Samaria (2 Kin. 23:15-20).

2. "My Servants the Prophets." Prophets play a major role during the Israelite monarchy. In writing about the prophets, the author is interested in their ministry as bearers of God's Word. The prophets passionately insist on undivided allegiance to the Lord, opposing any alliance or political posture that might jeopardize the distinctiveness of Israelite religion. Not surprisingly, this strict adherence to the covenant often pits the prophets against kings and queens who were willing to compromise in politics and religion with Israel's neighbors. Although the writer gives most of his attention to Elijah and Elisha, he mentions many other prophets: Nathan (I Kin. 1:22), Ahijah (1 Kin. 11:29-39; 14:1-18), Shemaiah (1 Kin. 12:21-24), Micaiah (1 Kin. 22:8-28); Jonah (2 Kin. 14:25); Isaiah (2 Kin. 19:1-7, 20:14), and Huldah (2 Kin. 22:14-20).

3. One God, One Sanctuary. Yahweh is Lord of the cosmos and ruler over the kingdoms of the earth (2 Kin. 19:15). God leads His people into battle, answers their prayers, honors their sacrifices, and displays a special concern for the poor and oppressed. Undivided devotion to God is a hallmark of the covenant (1 Kin. 18:21, 39).

Related to the existence of the one supreme God is the author's contention that there can be only one central sanctuary (Deut. 12). The construction of the temple by Solomon is a major event in Israelite history. Accordingly, great attention is given in 1 Kings to the preparations for and construction of this edifice, including detailed descriptions of its dimensions and furnishings.

Consistent with this emphasis on one God and one temple is the prohibition of worshiping gods or worshiping at other cult sites. As the book of Kings depicts the deterioration in devotion to God during the course of the divided kingdom, the problem is not so much a wholesale abandonment of Yahweh for other gods, but combining worship of Yahweh with worship of foreign gods. The in1 of Canaanite

worship was especially strong in northern Israel which, with the sponsorship of its monarchs, used Canaanite rituals, beliefs, and cult c This type of religious syncretism also affected The writer cites the worship of other gods as a reason for the defeat and exile of both Israel and Judah (2 Kin. 17:7, 16, 19; 21:3-5).

4. Covenant and Kingship. Both the and the Davidic covenants figure prominently in The writer evaluates the conduct of king and alike on the basis of the covenant established at Sinai.

Viewing the relationship between God and Israel as a covenant means that every human institution is subject to the authority of God. Thus, although monarchy is God-ordained, its power is by no means absolute. King and people alike are responsible for remaining faithful to their covenant with God, and the king is evaluated according to whether he knows Torah (or Law).

The author gives particular attention to loyalty toward God as manifested by justice and unwavering support of the temple in Jerusalem. Of the eight southern kings who receive positive estimations, only Hezekiah and Josiah are singled out for their devotion to Yahweh (2 Kin. 18:5; 23:25). Hezekiah is esteemed for removing the high places in Judah and for his unwavering trust in God during Sennacherib's invasion (2 Kin. 18:3-7). The author bestows high honor on Josiah for refurbishing the temple and carrying out sweeping reforms in both Judah and Samaria (2 Kin. 22:2; 23:25). Because Jehu purged Israel of Baal worship, he is the only one northern kings to receive a commendation (2 Kin. 10:30).

Chronology. The Book of Kings is filled with chronological data. The author dates the building of the temple 480 years after the Exodus (1 Kin. 6:1). He provides figures for the length of David's and Solomon's reigns, and he gives explicit information on the reigns of all of Judah's and Israel's kings. During the period divided kingdom, the author synchronizes the start of each king's reign with the regnal year of the king in the other kingdom. The author also lists the king's age upon accession and the name of his mother for the Judean kings.

Coordinating this data with Assyrian, Babylonian, and other extrabiblical records is a challenging task, since knowing how long a given king reigned does not establish precisely when he reigned. The dates of the fall of Israel and the fall of Judah are known with some certainty, and other major dates can be calculated from them. One scheme is as follows:

970 B.C. End of David's Reign

970-930 B.C. Solomon's Reign

930 B.C. Division of the Kingdom

722 B.C. Fall of Israel

586 B.C. Fall of Judah

Title. The books of Kings concern the history and demise of the monarchy in Israel from the last days of David (970 B.C.) to the exile in Babylon almost four centuries later (586 B.C.). The two books comprise one unit within a larger group of books-Joshua, Judges, 1 and 2 Samuel, and 1 and 2 Kings-traditionally called the "former prophets" and more recently known as the Deuteronomistic (or Deuteronomic) History. These books are a continuous narrative, and it is helpful to recognize their essential unity.

The two books of Kings were originally one book. In the Septuagint (the Greek translation of the Old Testament), the Vulgate (the Latin translation), and most other versions, the work is divided in two. This division was for convenience of copying or publication and was not based on content. The reigns of Ahaziah (1 Kin. 22:51-53; 2 Kin. 1) and Jehoshaphat (1 Kin. 22:41-50; 2 Kin. 3) overlap both books. In the same way the prophetic ministry of Elijah appears in both volumes (1 Kin. 17-19 and 2 Kin. 1; 2).

Outline of 1 Kings

I. The Reign of Solomon (chs. 1-11)

A. Solomon Established as David’s Rightful Successor (chs. 1-4)

1. Solomon’s Succession to the Throne (1:1-2:11)
2. Solomon’s Consolidation of Power (2:12-46)
3. The Gift of Wisdom (3:1-15)
4. Solomon’s Wisdom Exemplified (3:16-4:34)

B. Major Accomplishments of Solomon’s Reign (chs. 5-10)

1. Preparations for Building the Temple (ch. 5)
2. Construction of the Temple (ch. 6)
3. Construction of a Royal Palace (7:1-12)
4. Furnishing the Temple (7:13-51)
5. Solomon’s Temple Prayer and Dedication (ch. 8)
6. God’s Twofold Response (9:1-9)
7. Solomon in All of His Glory (9:10-10:29)

C. Solomon’s Spiritual and Political Decline (ch. 11)

1. Solomon’s Sins (11:1-13)

2. Punishments Against Solomon (11:14-25)

3. Jeroboam’s Rise: Punishment and New Hope (11:26-43)

II. The Early Divided Kingdom (chs. 12-16)

A. The Secession of the Northern Tribes (12:1-24)

B. Jeroboam I of Israel (12:25-14:20)

1. Jeroboam’s Gold Calves (12:24-33)

2. Two Prophets (ch. 13)

3. Judgment Against Jeroboam Decreed (14:1-20)

C. Rehoboam of Judah (14:21-31)

D. Abijam of Judah (15:1-8)

E. Asa of Judah (15:9-24)

F. Nadab of Israel (15:25-32)

G. Baasha of Israel (15:33-16:7)

H. Elah of Israel (16:8-14)

I. Zimri of Israel (16:15-20)

J. Omri of Israel (16:21-28)

K. Ahab of Israel (16:29-34)

2 Kings

The Second Book of the Kings

Author. The two books of Kings were originally one book that has been divided for the convenience of scribes or printers. Although Jeremiah was traditionally considered the author of Kings, most scholars now believe that it was the work of an unknown writer or group of writers who finished compiling it during the Judean Exile (see "Introduction to 1 Kings: Author").

Characteristics and Themes. Second Kings begins during the reign of Ahaziah in Israel and Jehoshaphat in Judah. It carries the history through the exile of King Jehoiachin in Babylon. One of the high points of the book is the reign of Hezekiah, the first great reformer of worship at the temple (18:4). After the fall of Samaria, the northern kingdom of Israel, Hezekiah began the process of reunifying the people of the divided kingdom. The climax of the book is the reign of Josiah, the second reformer of the temple (22:3-23:24). Both Hezekiah and Josiah are singled out for their incomparable devotion to the Lord (18:5; 23:25). See "Introduction to l Kings: Characteristics and Themes."

Date and Occasion. In the concluding chapters of the book, Jerusalem is captured by the Babylonians. The account of the fall emphasizes the rapid sequence of events culminating in the theft of the temple furniture and treasures. The ending of the book is abrupt and has led scholars to propose that the last two chapters were written during the exile in Babylon. See "Introduction to I Kings: Date and Occasion."

Outline of 2 Kings. (Continued from Outline of 1 Kings)

III. Prophets and Kings (I Kin. 17:1-2 Kin. 8:15)

A. The Prophets and Ahab (1 Kin. 17:1-22:40)

B. Jehoshaphat of Judah (1 Kin. 22:41-50)

C. Ahaziah of Israel Defies Elijah (1 Kin. 22:51-2 Kin. 1:18)

D. Elijah Succeeded by Elisha (2:1-18)

E. The Ministry of Elisha (2:19-8:15)

1. Elisha and the Prophets (2:19-25)

2. Elisha and the War Against Moab (ch. 3)

3. Elisha's Ministry to the Needy (ch. 4)

4. Elisha and Naaman of Syria (ch. 5)

5. Elisha and the Prophets (6:1-7)

6. Elisha and the Syrian Siege of Samaria (6:8-7:20)

7. Elisha and the Shunammite Woman (8:1-6)

8. Elisha and Hazael of Syria (8:7-15)

IV. The Late Divided Kingdom (8:16-17:41)

A. Jehoram of Judah (8:16-24)

B. Ahaziah of Judah (8:25--29)

C. Jehu of Israel (chs. 9; 10)

1. Jehu Anointed King (9:1-13)

2. Jehu's Bloody Coup (9:I4-37).

3. Jehu Massacres Ahab's Family (10:1-17)

4. Jehu's Campaign Against Baal Worship (10:18-36)

D. The Coup Against Athaliah of Judah (ch. 11)

E. Jehoash of Judah (ch. 12)

F. Jehoahaz of Israel (13:1-9)

G. Jehoash of Israel (13:10-25)

H. Amaziah of Judah (14:1-22)

I. Jeroboam II of Israel (14:23-29)

J. Azariah of Judah (15:1-7)

K. Zechariah of Israel (15:8-12)

L. Shallum of Israel (15:13-16)

M. Menahem of Israel (15:17-22)

N. Pekahiah of Israel (15:23-26)

O. Pekah of Israel (15:27-31)

P. Jotham of Judah (15:32-38)

Q. Ahaz of Judah (ch. 16)

R. Hoshea of Israel (17:1-6)

S. Reflection on the Exile of Israel (17:7-23)

T. Resettlement by Assyrian Deportees (17:24-41)

V. Judah Alone (18:1-25:30)

A. Hezekiah (chs. 18-20)

1. Summary (18:1-8)

2. Assyrian Invasion (18:9-37)

3. Divine Deliverance (ch. 19)

4. Hezekiah's Illness (20:1-11)

5. The Babylonian Envoy (20:12-21)

B. Manasseh (21:1-18)

C. Amon (21:19-26)

D. Josiah (22:1-23:30)

1. Repairing the Temple and the Discovery of the Book of the Law (ch. 22)

2. Reforms in Jerusalem, Judah, and Samaria (23:1-20)

3. Covenant Renewal and Passover (23:21-28)

4. Death in Battle with Necho of Egypt (23:29,30)

E. Jehoahaz (23:31-34)

F. Jehoiakim (23:35-24:7)

G. Jehoiachin (24:8-16)

H. Zedekiah (24:17-20)

I. The Babylonian Exile of Judah (25:1-21)

J. The Assassination of Gedaliah (25:22-26)

K. Jehoiachin in Exile (25:27-30)

1 Chronicles

The First Book of the Chronicles

Author. Jewish tradition regarded Ezra as the primary author of Chronicles, Ezra, and Nehemiah. At least two reasons make this identification plausible: the book was written following the Babylonian exile of the Jews, near the time of Ezra's ministry (Date and Occasion below), and many passages in Chronicles sympathize with the priestly concerns of Ezra (Characteristics and Themes below).

Other considerations cast doubt on the traditional view of authorship. The date of composition for Chronicles cannot be limited to Ezra's lifetime (Date and Occasion); the focus on kingship characteristic of Chronicles is not present in Ezra's teaching; and Ezra's distress over the apostasy associated with intermarriage is not a prominent theme in Chronicles. In other words, historical and scriptural evidence does not point decisively to Ezra. By convention, the anonymous author is known as "the Chronicler."

The Chronicler had more than one written source. He depended on a number of biblical texts, especially Samuel and Kings, but also the Pentateuch, Judges, Ruth, Psalms, Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Zechariah. There are specific citations of several royal sources not otherwise known, such as "the account of the chronicles of King David" (27:24), "the book of the kings" (2 Chr. 24:27), "the book of the kings of Israel" (9:1; 2 Chr. 20:34), "the book of the kings of Judah and Israel" (2 Chr. 16:11; 25:26; 28:26; 32:32), and "the book of the kings of Israel and Judah" (2 Chr. 27:7; 35:27; 36:8). The Chronicler used prophetic sources, including the writings of Samuel (29:29), Nathan (29:29; 2 Chr. 9:29), Gad (29:29), and others (9:29; 12:15; 13:22; 26:22; 32:32). Variations of style and content in the work suggest that there may have been still other unspecified sources.

Date and Occasion. The final verses of 2 Chronicles indicate that it was written after the release of the exiles from Babylon in 538 B.C. The absence Hellenistic influences suggests that the history was composed before the Alexandrian period (that is, before 331 B.C.). Nevertheless, opinions vary over the precise date of composition.

Some interpreters have proposed that the Chronicler wrote as early as the reconstruction of the temple under Zerubbabel (c. 520-515 B.C.). At least three pieces of evidence support this view. First, the Chronicler consistently presents the temple and its personnel in close partnership with the royal line of David. This emphasis suggests a date near the time of Zerubbabel, when expectations of royal

and priestly partnership were high (Zech. 4). Second, there is close attention to the details of priestly and Levitical duties (1 Chr. 6:1-53 note). This suggests a connection with the time when the new temple order was being established. Third, the writer's omission of Solomon's downfall due to intermarriage with pagan women (1 Kin. 11:1-40; Neh. 13:26) suggests that Chronicles may have been written before intermarriage had become a major issue in the community following the exile in Babylon.

The majority of interpreters have dated Chronicles during or shortly after the ministries of Ezra and Nehemiah, in the latter half of the fifth century or the early decades of the fourth century B.C. It is reasonable to locate the book during the period from about the time of Zerubbabel to soon after the ministries of Ezra and Nehemiah. The major themes of the book fit well within these boundaries (between 515 and 400 B.C.).

The Chronicler wrote for historical and theological reasons. His extensive use of historical documents and devotion to numerical and chronological details (e.g., 1 Chr. 5:18; 2 Chr. 14:1, 9; 16:1, 12, 13) indicate that he intended to give his readers an accurate historical record. But he did not merely offer information about the past; he also wrote to convey a relevant theological message. Comparing the Chronicles with Samuel and Kings reveals that this account of Israel's past is shaped to address the needs of the community recently returned from Babylonian exile. It was written to encourage and guide the readers as they sought the full restoration of the kingdom.

The people who had returned from the exile faced many difficulties. The restoration had not brought about the dramatic changes for which many had hoped. Instead, they had to endure discouraging economic hardship, foreign opposition, and internal conflict. These difficulties raised many questions. Who are the legitimate heirs to the promises God gave His people? What political and religious institutions should be embraced? Was there hope for a new Davidic king? The historian who wrote Chronicles addressed these and similar questions.

Characteristics and Themes. The theological message of Chronicles may be summarized in many ways, but three concerns are prominent. These are the people of God, the king and temple, and divine bless.

First, the people of God. Throughout his history the writer identifies the-people who should be counted as heirs of God's covenant promises. The prominence of this theme appears in his frequent use of the expression "all Israel" (1 Chr. 11:1; 2 Chr. 10:1; 29:24). On the one hand, the author considered those who had been released from Babylonian exile to be the people of God. Representatives of Judah, Benjamin, Ephraim, and Manasseh, who had returned to the land were the chosen

people (1 Chr. 9:3 note). On the other hand, the author considered the restoration of Israel to be incomplete as long as any of the tribes remained outside the land, separated from the Davidic king and the Jerusalem temple. As a result, the Chronicler is careful to include both the northern and southern tribes in his genealogies (2:3-9:1), to present the picture of the united monarchy under David and Solomon extending to all the people (11:1 note), and to depict the reunification of the northern and southern kingdoms in the days of Hezekiah. The returned exiles were the remnant of God's people, but they looked forward to the restoration of all the people of God. As Hezekiah put it, "For if you return to the LORD, your brethren and your children will be treated with compassion by those who lead them captive, so that they may come back to this land; for the LORD your God is gracious and merciful" (2 Chr. 30:9).

Second, the king and temple. Chronicles presents the people of God as organized around two central institutions, the Davidic throne and the Jerusalem temple. The genealogies give special attention to David's lineage (1 Chr. 2:10-17; ch. 3) and to the organization of priests and Levites (1 Chr. 6). David's line had been chosen by God as the permanent dynasty over the nation (1 Chr. 17; 2 Chr. 13:5; 21:7; 23:3), and the establishment of David's throne was a demonstration of divine love and blessing for Israel (1 Chr. 14:2; 2 Chr. 2:11). The historian also focuses on the temple as the place where God's name resides (2 Chr. 7:12, 16; 33:7). The joy and splendor of music in temple worship is revealed (6:31-47; 9:15-16, 33; 13:8; 15:16-24, 28; 23:5; ch. 25; 2 Chr. 5:1-13; 7:6; 23:13; 29:25-30; 34:12; and notes).

The full restoration of the kingdom could not take place apart from the Davidic king and the Jerusalem temple. As the Lord said to David, "I will set up your seed after you, who will be of your sons; and I will establish his kingdom. He shall build Me a house, and I will establish his throne forever" (1 Chr. 17:11, 12).

The third concern is divine blessing and judgment. The author shows his readers how to receive God's blessings in their day. He stresses the close connection between fidelity and blessing, infidelity and punishment (1 Chr. 28:9; 2 Chr. 6:14; 7:2-22; .7-9; 21:12-15; 24:20; 28:9; 34:24-28). The rituals in the temple could not in themselves secure God's blessing for Israel; there had to be obedience to the Mosaic law and to prophetic and priestly instruction. The Lord blessed those who upheld the purity of temple worship and relied on Him alone (1 Chr. 5:20; 2 Chr. 13:18; 14:7; 32:20, 21). When the people or the kings turned to sin, an immediate retribution of illness and military defeat often followed (1 Chr. 10; 2 Chr. 13:1-16; 16:12; 28:1-5; 33:1-11). Even so, the people could be restored to blessing by seeking God in repentance and prayer (1 Chr. 21:1-22:1; 2 Chr. 7:13-15; 12:1-12; 33:10-13). The Chronicler shows that the full restoration of God's people would come only as they

lived in fidelity to the Lord. Azariah says it well: "If you seek Him, He will be found by you; but if you forsake Him, He will forsake you" (2 Chr. 15:2).

The book's treatment of the people of God, the kingship and temple, and divine blessing and judgment, has immediate reference to the Jewish community in reconstruction following the Babylonian exile. The New Testament reveals that the kingdom will ultimately be restored in Christ, the promised Son of David.

The book's concept of the people of God becomes a reality in Christ. Like the community of the restoration, those who follow Christ are the heirs of Israel's promises (Gal. 3:14, 29; 4:28; Eph. 2:11-22; 3:6). The church extends beyond Israel to include the Gentiles (Luke 2:32; Acts 9:15; 11:1, 18), and in the end all of God's elect "the Israel of God" (Gal. 6:16), will be united under the lordship of Christ.

The hope for David's throne to be restored was fulfilled in Christ. He was born the Son of David, the heir to the Davidic covenant (Luke 1:32; Rom. 1:3; Rev. 22:16). Christ met all the conditions of obedience placed on David's line (Rom. 5:19; Phil. 2:8; Heb. 5:7-10). In the Resurrection, Christ took His throne in heaven (Acts 2:33-35; Eph. 1:20-23; Phil. 2:9; Rev. 3:21), from which He leads His people into blessing and victory (Rom. 8:37; Eph. 4:7-13). He will reign until all His enemies are defeated (1 Cor. 15:24-26).

The purposes of the temple are fulfilled in Christ. Christ was Himself the perfect sacrifice for sin (Heb. 9:11-28; 1 Pet. 3:18; 1 John 2:2). He mediates our prayers and intercedes on our behalf in heaven (Heb. 3:1; 4:14-16; 6:20; 7:26; 8:1). As our High Priest and Captain, He will bring all His people into the presence of God (John 14:1-4; 1 Thess. 4:16-17).

Finally, the book's revelation of divine blessing and judgment is realized in Christ. Jesus bore the judgment of God on sin and set His people free to follow the path of obedience (Rom. 3:21-26). He gives His people new life and makes them citizens of God's kingdom (John 3:16; Phil. 3:20).

As the outline below indicates, the book may be divided into four sections. Each part contributes specific elements to the overall theological purpose. The first concerns genealogies and is discussed below. The united monarchy, its division, and its reunion, are discussed in the Introduction to 2 Chronicles.

Genealogies in the Ancient Near East had a variety of forms and functions. Some of the passages in Chronicles trace a single family line through many generations (2:34-41). Others sketch several family lines together (6:1-3). The genealogies sometimes skip generations without notice, emphasizing significant persons and events (6:4-15). Ancient genealogies often included brief narratives

highlighting important events, and the writer of Chronicles pauses on occasion to tell a story (I Chr. 4:9-10; 5:18-22).

Ancient genealogies set out not only family relations, but political, geographical, and social connections. The Chronicles contain an assortment of lists, including families (e.g., 1 Chr. 3:17-24), political relations (e.g., l Chr. 2:24, 42, 45, 49-52), and trade guilds (e.g., I Chr. 4:14, 21-23).

An essential purpose of the extensive genealogies is to establish that the returned exiles are the legitimate continuation of God's elect people. The writer works this out by reporting the election of Israel from all peoples (1 Chr. 1:2-2:2), the arrangement of the tribes of Israel (1 Chr. 2:3-9:1), and the representation of the tribes that returned from Babylon (1 Chr. 9:16-34).

The genealogies focus on the order of the tribes of Israel, especially the role of the families of David and Levi. If the people were to receive the blessings of God, they must observe carefully the divinely ordained arrangements. Their responsibility for obeying is established by their designation as God's elect people.

The Book of Chronicles, now in two parts as I and 2 Chronicles, was originally without title. The words of its traditional Hebrew name appear often in the books of Kings as part of longer phrases (e.g., l Kin. 14:29), and in other places by themselves (Neh. 12:23; Esth. 2:23; 6:1). Jerome in the fourth century, and Luther in the sixteenth, called the book "The Chronicle of the Entire Sacred History." The modern English title is from this tradition.

Outline of 1 Chronicles

I. The Genealogies of God’s People (1 Chr. 1:1-9:34)

A. Adam to Israel (1:1-2:2)

B. The Tribes of Israel (2:3-9:1)

1. Judah (2:3 – 4:23)

2. Simeon, Reuben, Gad and the Half-tribe of Manasseh (4:24-5:26)

3. Levi (ch. 6)

4. Issachar, Benjamin, Naphtali, Manasseh, Ephraim, and Asher (ch. 7)

5. Benjamin (ch. 8)

6. Summary (9:1a)

C. Returnees from Exile (9:1b-34)

II. The United Monarchy (1 Chr. 9:35 – 2 Chr. 9:31)

A. Saul (9:35-10:14)

1. Genealogy (9:35-44)

2. Death (ch. 10)

B. David (chs. 11-29)

1. Widespread Support (chs. 11;12)

2. Preparations for the Temple (chs. 13-29)

a. Centralization of Worship (chs. 13-16)

b. Commission to Prepare (ch. 17)

c. Military Preparations (chs. 18-20)

d. Discovery of Temple Site (21:1-22:1)

e. Commission of Builders (22:2-19)

f. Arrangement of Personnel (chs. 23-27)

g. National Celebration and Solomon's Commission (chs. 28; 29)

2 Chronicles

The Second Book of the Chronicles

Author. Early Jewish tradition regarded Ezra as the author of the Chronicles, but it is doubtful that the work can be decisively dated within his lifetime (see "Date and Occasion"). The book is widely considered to be by an anonymous author, usually called "the Chronicler," who composed his history of Israel and Judah by drawing on a number of biblical (e.g., Samuel and Kings) and extra-biblical sources (e.g., the no longer extant writings of Nathan, Ahijah, and Iddo, 9:29). See "Introduction to 1 Chronicles: Author."

Date and Occasion. Chronicles was written to encourage and guide the community that had returned from exile in Babylonia as they sought to reestablish their lives as the people of God in the land He had promised to the patriarchs. Exactly when in this period of restoration the book was completed, however, is difficult to ascertain. Although some evidence points to the social and political situation among the first groups of returnees, the genealogies in the early part of the book (see especially 1 Chr. 3:17-24 and notes) suggest a date shortly after the ministries of Ezra and Nehemiah, c. 400 B.C. (see "Introduction to 1 Chronicles").

Characteristics and Themes. The Chronicler retells the history of Israel and Judah in order to provide theological answers to three fundamental questions which arose after the Jews returned from exile in Babylonia. How can it be known who are the heirs to God's covenant promises after the dislocation of exile and return? What was to become of their central political and religious institutions, the Davidic throne and the Jerusalem temple, and how would they be related to one another in the restored community? Thirdly, how were the people to understand the experience of exile and restoration in the light of God's law and grace, His judgment and forgiveness? The discussion of these themes begun in the Introduction to 1 Chronicles is continued here with respect to 2 Chronicles.

The United Monarchy under Solomon (1:1-9:31). The opening section of 2 Chronicles depicts Solomon as the divinely blessed successor of David. The Chronicler passes over Solomon's struggle for power (1 Chr. 23:1 note) and his later downfall due to intermarriage (1 Kin. 11:1-40). He shows Solomon as the king of "all Israel" (1 Chr. 11:1 note), and as the prime instrument for constructing the temple in Jerusalem (2:1-8:16). There is a brief notice of his death (9:29-31).

Solomon's reign is narrated in a topical and symmetrical form, opening and closing with passages describing the king's wisdom and wealth (ch. 1; 9:13-28). Just

inside these passages are sections about his international relations (ch. 2; 8:17-9:12). Inserted between these passages are sections about the building of the temple and Solomon's other projects throughout Israel (3:1-5:1; 8:1-16), and in the center is the description of the temple dedication (5:2-7:10) and the divine response to it (7:12-22). A concentric. outline of this kind emphasizes the topics in the middle, in this case the dedication of the temple.

The Divided Kingdom (10:1--28:26). The record of Israel's history from Rehoboam to Ahaz focuses on events in the southern kingdom of Judah. Although the Book of Kings is the source of much of the information, Chronicles omits large blocks of material dealing with the -northern kingdom of Israel. The focus of Chronicles is Judah and its capital Jerusalem, the place of the Davidic king and the temple of God.

The kings of the period are measured by the ideal of the united monarchy. The king must be faithful to the Law of Moses; he must support the temple order established by David and Solomon; and he must listen to prophetic and priestly instruction. Some kings are evaluated negatively (Jehoram, 21:4-20; Ahaziah, 22:1-9; Ahaz, 28:1-27), others positively (Abijah, 13:1-14:1; Jotham, 27:1-9). For the most part the records are mixed (Rehoboam, 10:112:16; Asa, , 14:2-16:14; Jehoshaphat, 17:1-21:3; Joash, 22:10-24:27; Amaziah, 25:1-28; Uzziah, 26:1-23).

God blessed His people when they were faithful, and chastised them when they turned away from Him. Victory, security, and prosperity came to those who sought the Lord. Defeat, trouble, and illness came upon those who forgot Him.

The Reunited Kingdom (29:1-36:23). Beginning with Hezekiah, Israel entered a new phase of her history. Like David and Solomon, Hezekiah was able to unite the faithful of Israel and Judah around the Davidic throne through worship and celebration at the temple (29:1 note and 29:24 note). This reunited people experienced periods of failure: Manasseh's apostasy (33:1-10), the reign of Amon (33:21-25), and the kings of Judah just before the Babylonian exile (36:2-14). But each failure was followed by God's gracious renewal of the people: Manasseh's restoration (33:11-17), Josiah's reforms (34:3-35:19), and the return from exile in Babylonia (36:22-23).

Despite the failures of the reunited kingdom, period demonstrate the requirements placed on those God continued to grant blessings to His repentant who longed for the full restoration of the kingdom. people. He extended His mercy to them, offering The nation must turn to the Lord in humility and live them His blessing. At the same time, the events of the faithfully before Him.

***Outline of 2 Chronicles. (Continued from Outline of 1 Chronicles*)**

II. The United Monarchy (1 Chr. 9:35 – 2 Chr. 9:31)

A. Saul (1 Chr. 9:35-10:14)

B. David (1 Chr. 11-29)

C. Solomon (2 Chr. 1-9)

1. Wisdom and Wealth (ch. 1)
2. International Assistance (ch. 2)
3. Temple Building and Furnishings (3:1 – 5:1)
4. Temple Dedication (5:2-7:11)
5. Divine Response to Dedication (7:12-22)
6. Conclusion to Temple Building (8:1-16)
7. International Recognition (8:17 – 9:12)
8. Wisdom and Wealth (9:13 – 28)
9. End of Reign and Death (9:29 – 31)

III. The Divided Kingdom (2 Chr. 10-28)

A. Rehoboam (chs. 10-12)

B. Abijah (13:1 – 14:1)

C. Asa (14:2 – 16:14)

D. Jehoshaphat (17:1 – 21:1)

E. Jehoram (21:2-20)

F. Ahaziah (22:1-9)

G. Athaliah (22:10 – 23:15)

H. Joash (23:16-24:27)

I. Amaziah (ch. 25)

J. Uzziah (ch. 26)

K. Jotham (ch. 27)

L. Ahaz (ch. 28)

IV. The Reunited Kingdom (2 Chr. 29-36)

A. Hezekiah (chs. 29 – 32)

B. Manasseh (33:1-20)

C. Amon (33:21-25)

D. Josiah (chs. 34; 35)

E. Josiah’s Successors (36:1-14)

F. Exile and Release (36:15-23)

Ezra

The Book of Ezra

Author. It is not known who wove together into their present form all the documents included in Ezra and Nehemiah (Characteristics and Themes below). De spite an earlier view that a single author wrote the books of Chronicles, Ezra, and Nehemiah, the consensus among scholars is that the historian who wrote Chronicles ("the Chronicler") was probably not the author of Ezra and Nehemiah (Introduction to I Chronicles: Author). Ezra kept a journal or "memoirs" (7:28 note), as Nehemiah did also. Given his literary skills (7:6 and note), Ezra may well have been the compiler of the books of Ezra and Nehemiah, as is held by Jewish tradition.

Date and Occasion. Ezra and Nehemiah can be dated in the period 430-400 s.c. The narratives were written to encourage the Jews who had returned from exile by revealing to them that though Israel was still under Persian rule, their sovereign God was continuing His redemptive work and reestablishing true worship among them.

Characteristics and Themes. Although modern Bibles treat Ezra and Nehemiah as two separate books, they were originally a single work. They are treated as one composition in the Hebrew Bible, the Talmud, Josephus (c. A.D. 37-100), and the oldest manuscripts of the Septuagint (the Old Testament Greek translation). Origen (A.D. 185-253) was the first to separate Ezra and Nehemiah into two books.

Ezra-Nehemiah is a historical narrative composed of numerous originally separate documents, woven together to form a beautiful and powerful whole. Lists play a significant role in Ezra and Nehemiah. There are lists regarding (a) the temple articles (1:9-11), (b) those who initially returned from exile (2:3-70, repeated in Neh. 7:8-73), (c) the leaders who returned with Ezra (8:2-14), (d) those involved in mixed marriages (10:18-43), (e) those who rebuilt the wall (Neh. 3), (f) those who sealed the covenant (Neh. 10:1-27), (g) new residents in Jerusalem and those in the villages (Neh. 11), and (h) the priests and Levites who returned with Zerubbabel (Neh. 12:1-26).

Much official correspondence has also been included. These letters were written in Aramaic, the language of international diplomacy at that time.

There is (a) the letter of Rehum to Artaxerxes (4:11-16), (b) the reply of Artaxerxes (4:17-22), (c) the letter of Tattenai to Darius (5:7-17), (d) the memorandum regarding the decree of Cyrus (6:2-5), (e) the reply of Darius to

Tattenai (6:6-12), and (f) the letter of Artaxerxes on behalf of Ezra (7:12-26).

In addition, the decree of Cyrus (1:2-4) and materials from Ezra and Nehemiah themselves have been included (7:27-9:15; Neh. 1:1-7:5; 12:27-43; 13:14-31).

Three themes of Ezra and Nehemiah can be found in the decree of Cyrus (1:2-4). First, rebuilding the temple in Jerusalem is God's objective in the history of redemption at this point; second, the people of God as a whole, and not merely the great leaders, are vital for accomplishing this purpose. Third, the written word is a powerful tool used by God to accomplish His objective.

Cyrus commissioned the return from exile for the express purpose of rebuilding "the house of the LORD God of Israel" (1:3). Cyrus's commission was directed toward the people of God as a whole, not toward this or that leader. The long lists of otherwise unknown people testify that the people of God as a whole are responsible for rebuilding.

Cyrus's written decree was the human instrument generating the action in Ezra and Nehemiah. Written documents play a major role in the subordinate actions as well. Letters stop and start the work on the temple (4:23; 6:6-7). A letter gives Ezra authority to carry out reforms (7:25-26). The written word of God is a moving force in the narrative (3:2; 10:3; Neh. 8:1; 9:13). This theme is significant, since the era involved is that of the last Old Testament prophets (Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi). There was to be a period of silence after them, during which the people of God would be governed exclusively by the written word. The silence was broken by John the Baptist, the forerunner of Christ.

The overall purpose of Ezra and Nehemiah is to affirm that God works sovereignly through responsible human agents to accomplish His redemptive objective. Cyrus issued his decree because the Lord had moved his spirit (1:1). Those who returned came back because the Lord had moved their spirits (1:5). Ezra succeeded because the good hand of God was upon him (7:9). Artaxerxes supported the work of rebuilding because the Lord had put it in his spirit (7:27). Human beings acted freely and responsibly under the providence of God to bring His plans to fruition (see "God Reigns: Divine Sovereignty" at Dan. (4:34).

Outline of Ezra

I. Return of the Exiles and Rebuilding of the Temple (chs. 1-6)

A. Return of the Exiles (chs. 1;2)

1. The Decree of Cyrus (1:1-4)
2. Preparations for Returning (1:5-11)
3. The list of Returnees (ch. 2)

B. Rebuilding of the Temple (chs. 3-6)

1. Rebuilding of the Altar (3:1-6)
2. Rebuilding of the Temple Proper (3:7 – 6:22)
    a. Rebuilding Begun (3:7-13)
    b. Opposition to Rebuilding (ch. 4)
    c. Rebuilding Resumed (5:1,2)
    d. Opposition to Rebuilding (5:3-6:12)
    e. Rebuilding Completed (6:13-22)

II. Return of Ezra and Rebuilding of the Community (chs. 7-10)

A. Return of Ezra (chs. 7;8)

1. Ezra's Return (7:1-10)
2. Ezra's Commission (7:11-26)
3. Ezra's Doxology (7:27, 28)
4. Ezra's Companions (8:1-14)
5. Ezra's Return (8:15-36)

B. Rebuilding of the Community (chs. 9;10)

1. Ezra's Reaction to Intermarriage (ch.9)
    a. Ezra Hears (9:1,2)
    b. Ezra Grieves (9:3,4)
    c. Ezra Confesses (9:5-15)
2. The People's Reaction to Ezra (ch. 10)
    a. The People Grieve (10:1)
    b. The People Confess (10:2)
    c. The People Repent (10:3-17)
    d. The People Who Were Guilty (10:18-44)

Nehemiah

The Book of Nehemiah

Author. Ezra and Nehemiah were originally a single book composed from a variety of historical sources, including the personal memoirs of Ezra and Nehemiah. According to Jewish tradition, Ezra was responsible for compiling these sources into their current form (see "Introduction to Ezra: Author").

Date and Occasion. Assuming the traditional view of authorship, these narratives were written during the period 430-400 s.c. to encourage the Judeans who had returned from exile in Babylon and were reestablishing their community in and around Jerusalem (see "Introduction to Ezra: Date and Occasion").

Characteristics and Themes. The major theme of Ezra and Nehemiah is that God works sovereignty through redemptive purpose. The author develops this theme in Nehemiah with particular attention to the rebuilding and dedication of the defensive walls of Jerusalem (1:1-7:3; 12:27-43) and the reconstitution of the whole people called "Israel" in their covenant relationship with God (7:4-13:31). See "Introduction to Ezra: Characteristics and Themes" for further discussion of the themes of Ezra and Nehemiah as a whole.

Outline of Nehemiah

I. Return of Nehemiah and Rebuilding of the Wall (1:1 – 7:3)

A. Return of Nehemiah (1:1 – 2:10)

1. Preparations for the Return (1:1 – 2:8)

a. Report from Judah (1:1-3)

b. Response of Nehemiah (1:4-11)

c. Request Before the King (2:1-8)

2. The Trip and Beginning of the Conflict (2:9, 10)

B. Rebuilding the Wall (2:11 – 7:3)

1. Inspection and Proposal (2:11-18)

2. First Escalation of the Conflict (2:19,20)

3. Rebuilding Begun (ch. 3)

4. Second Escalation of the Conflict (4:1-6)

5. Rebuilding Continued (4:7-23)
6. Internal Problems Threaten the Rebuilding (ch.5)
7. Climax of the Conflict (6:1-14)
8. End of the Conflict (6:15 – 7:3)

II. Return of the Exiles and Rebuilding the Community (7:4-13:31)

A. Return of the Exiles (7:4-73)

1. The Need to Repopulate Jerusalem (7:4,5)
2. Record of Returnees (7:6-73)

B. Rebuilding the Community (7:73-13:31)

1. Renewing the Covenant (7:73-10:39)
   a. Reading of the Law (7:73-8:18)
   b. Confession of Sin (9:1-37)
   c. Ratification of the Oath (9:38-10:39)
2. Dedication of the Wall (chs. 11;12)
   a. Listing of Residents (ch.11)
   b. Listing of Priests and Levites (12:1-26)
   c. The Dedication Proper (12:27-43)
   d. Provisions for Clergy (12:44-47)
3. Reformation of the people (ch. 13)
   a. Exclusion of Foreigners (13:1-3)
   b. Attention to the Temple (13:4-14)
   c. Observance of the Sabbath (13:15-22)
   d. The End of Intermarriage (13:23-31)

Esther

The Book of Esther

Author. Although the author of the Book of Esther is unknown, his interest in the origin and observance of the festival of Purim, his intense nationalism, and his intimate knowledge of the Persian court, customs, and geography suggest that he was a Persian Jew living in Susa.

Date and Occasion. The Earliest possible date for the book is sometime after the events described in it, that is, the fifth century B.C. The latest possible date is during the first century B.C. A late fifth or fourth-century dating is now generally preferred by scholars, who point to linguistic evidence as well as the author’s favorable attitude toward the Persian king and Gentiles in general as evidence for an early date.

The writer of Esther clearly intended his book to explain the origin of the celebration of Purim, to establish Purim as a festival celebrated by each new generation of Jews, and to regulate its observance (9:20-32).

Interpretive Difficulties. The question of whether the Book of Esther belongs in the canon of Scripture has been raised from an early period by both Jews and Christians, though the book's commendation of the popular festival of Purim argued strongly in favor of its inclusion in the Jewish canon. Objections voiced by some Christians to Esther's canonicity included its absence from some of the earliest lists of canonical books, its lack of citation in the New Testament, its lack of overt references to God and to religious practices, its excessive Jewish nationalism, and its spirit of vengeance. Some of these objections were alleviated when the early church adopted an expanded version of the Book of Esther found in the Septuagint (the Greek translation of the Old Testament). This Septuagint text contains over one hundred verses, not found in the Hebrew text, that made the book more religiously acceptable to some. These additions include a dream of Mordecai about the coming destruction of the Jews and prayers of Mordecai and Esther for deliverance. However, when the Protestant churches judged the shorter Hebrew version of Esther to be the authoritative version, objections to the book's canonicity resurfaced.

The violence in the Book of Esther is a kind of civil war, which Cicero called the worst of all calamities. The author of Esther shows the relief of the people when justice triumphs, and does not criticize the means employed,

such as the hanging of Haman's sons. But it would be a mistake to consider these events as models for behavior. The extreme situation and threat under which they happened limits what can be concluded from them. The author does not engage in moral reflection about the massive killing and the motives of avengers. The reader struggling with some of the questions that arise needs to go to other places, such as the prophets, Job, or Revelation, where the discussion includes them and answers may be found. Positively, the Book of Esther testifies clearly to the invisible hand of Providence, which will not allow the covenant people to be utterly destroyed.

Characteristics and Themes. The Book of Esther is renowned for the high quality of its literary artistry, which functions as the principal vehicle for its religious meaning. The author skillfully uses narrative tensions created by reversals or sharp contrasts of fortunes and expectations, and by roles that are often highly ironic in nature. Notice the two descriptions of banquets of Ahasuerus and his wife, the first described in full detail and the second presented tersely (L 1-8, 9); the striking contrast between the initial portrait of the king as powerful and pompous (1:1-8) and the subsequent revelation of his incompetence and weakness; the effective contrast between the king's response when Vashti failed to appear before him and when Esther appeared unannounced (1:11-21; 5:1-3); the ironic reversal of Haman's career (6:4-12); the pathetic scene in which Haman pleads for Esther's mercy, only to be accused of attempted rape (7:7-9); and the poetic justice of hanging Haman on his own gallows. The last is an example of the ironic reversals in the fortunes and position of Haman and Mordecai (7:9-10; 8:1-2; 9:25). Such reversals, when compared with those of the Exodus, the Babylonian exile, and even the Crucifixion and Resurrection, subtly reveal God's hand in the salvation history of His people.

The writer also uses repetition or duplication to weave the various parts of the story together. For example, notice the three references to official records ("chronicles") located at significant turning points in the narrative (2:23; 6:1; 10:2). There are three sets of paired banquets marking the beginning, middle, and end of the book: the banquets of Ahasuerus (1:3-4, 5-8), Esther (5:4-8; 7:1-10), and the two celebrations of Purim (9:18-32). See also the banquet theme in 1:9; 2:18; 3:15; 8:17; 9:17; the threefold mention of the size of Ahasuerus's empire (L1; 8:9; 9:30); the repeated promise to Esther of "up to half the kingdom" (5:3, 6; 7:2; cf. 9:12); the repeated insistence that the Hebrews did not plunder their enemies (9:10, 15-16); the two accounts of Esther's hidden identity (2:10, 20); the double assembling of

virgins (2:8, 19); Haman's two interchanges with his wife and friends (5:10-14; 6:13-14); the two veilings of Haman's head (6:12; 7:8); the two references to the subsiding of Ahasuerus's anger (2:1; 7:10); and the two reminders that the laws of the Medes and Persians cannot be altered (1:19; 8:8). The use of the number "seven" is noteworthy (1:5, 10, 14), as is Esther's repeated request and reception of favor (2:9, 15, 17; 5:2, 8; 7:3; 8:9).

The literary technique of foreshadowing is also employed in the Book of Esther. Most striking is the prediction of Haman's wife that he would "surely fall" because Mordecai was a Jew (6:13). The author is a master of suspense and paces the speed of the narrative well. The constant references to time not only present the events as history (1:1, 2) and underscore the theme of God's providential working in history, but also keep the story moving (e.g., 2:1, 15, 19, 21; 3:1).

The writer of Esther creatively builds upon the symbolic or typical aspects of the names of two of the main characters to show how the personal antagonism between Haman, the archenemy of the Jews, and Mordecai, the faithful Jew, was part of the historic conflict between Israel and the Amalekites. This conflict provides the foundation for the plot against all the Jews (2:5 note; 3:1 note). Similarities in phrasing, setting, story line, and emphasis also suggest that the Joseph story was an important model for the writer of Esther (note the similarities between 2:2-4 and Gen. 41:34-37; 3:10 and Gen. 41:42; 8:6 and Gen. 44:34).

A number of important themes are intertwined in the book. The theme of feasting or banquets establishes the setting of the main action of the narrative, culminating with the celebration of Purim, and contrasting with the theme of fasting (4:3, 16; 9:3 1). A contrast of obedience and disobedience also runs through the book. The initial disobedience of Vashti in ch. 1 sets the stage for the challenges facing Esther about obeying Mordecai (2:10, 20; 4:8-16) and standing up against the king's law (4:11, 16; 5:1, 2). The stage is also set for Mordecai's refusal to obey Haman's command, and his contrary willingness to carry out Esther's instructions (4:17) and to serve both the Persian king and the best interests of the Jews (10:3). The theme of providential protection of the Jews, as indicated in 4:14, is basic to the narrative and is a reason for the book's continuing significance among the community of faith. Related to this theme is that of rest and relief from enemies, which the feast of Purim commemorates (9:16, 22, cf. Deut. 25:19). Though God is not explicitly mentioned in this book, the reader nevertheless learns through the narrative that God is always, if invisibly, present with His

people. He continues to guide and protect them today, even as He defended them in ancient Persia.

Outline of Esther

I. Selection of Esther as Queen (chs. 1;2)

- A. The Downfall of Queen Vashti (ch.1)
- B. The Rise of Queen Esther (2:1-18)
- C. A Conspiracy Discovered (2:19-23)

II. Plot to Destroy the Jews (chs. 3;4)

- A. Haman's Promotion and Plot (ch. 3)
- B. Mordecai's Counterplan (ch.4)

III. Esther Saves the Jews (5:1-9:15)

- A. Esther's Uninvited Audience with the King
- B. Haman's Plan to Hang Mordecai (5:9-14)
- C. Haman's Humiliation and Mordecai's Reward (6:1-13)
- D. Haman's Execution (6:14-7:10)
- E. Plan for Deliverance of the Jews (ch. 8)
- F. Victory for the Jews (9:1-15)

IV. Establishment of the Feast of Purim (9:16-32)

V. Epilogue (ch. 10)

Job

The Book of Job

Author. The relationship between the opening narrative of the book (the prologue, chs. 1; 2) and the content of Job's discussions with his friends (the dialogue chs. 3-27) make it clear that Job was not the author of this book. Had he known what took place in the divine council, there would have been no point to the debate over whether Job had brought on his sufferings by sinful conduct. Rather, God used a skilful poet from the covenant community to write this remarkable book. The language presents many challenges to the translator because of its poetic grammar and its rich vocabulary. We know that the author was an Israelite since he refers to God by the covenant name "Yahweh," while Job and his companions (see 1:1) use such terms as "God" and "the Almighty" (12:9 is the only exception). The probability is that the poet used sources from patriarchal times, including some from Job himself, in composing the book.

Date and Occasion. We do not know exactly when the author of Job lived and wrote, but the classical Hebrew of the prologue places him after 1500 B.C. The final form of the book may not have appeared until the era of Solomon or somewhat later when Hebrew wisdom literature reached its zenith. The discovery of fragments from Job among the Dead Sea scrolls has ruled out attempts to date Job as late as the second century B.C.

Among the wisdom writings of the Old Testament the Book of Job stands with Ecclesiastes as a kind of anti-wisdom. It counters the traditional wisdom as it wrestles with the difficult question of suffering along with the affirmation that God is just and good. The book deals with this subject with a frankness that is often baffling. The book does not suggest that there is an evil deity, or that God's power is limited. Instead it praises the Creator's sovereignty, wisdom, and glory. That the God of Job is neither evil nor limited is seen in two portrayals of Job's relationship with God.

The first is taken from the book's prologue and epilogue. The prologue depicts Job's submission to the divine will in the midst of suffering. There Job appears as a good man trusting the goodness of his God. Finally, in the epilogue (42:7-17), God honors his trust by restoring him.

The second portrait shows Job's indignation over his plight. He thinks that God has become his enemy and is unjustly afflicting him. Job comes to this conclusion because he knows that God is sovereign. Had he believed in a limited

deity, he would have had no problem with God's justice or goodness, since then he could not hold God responsible for every event, including his misfortune.

The church has often emphasized only the message of the prologue and epilogue because it is easier to understand. The reference of James 5:11 to the "patience" or "perseverance" of Job is not based on a shallow interpretation that ignores the central section of dialogues. James is not stressing Job's passivity, but his "perseverance" and, with it, God's compassion and mercy in accomplishing His purposes. God's purpose in Job's suffering is the key to understanding the seeming discrepancy between the tranquil Job of the prologue (chs. 1; 2) and the raging Job of the central section. God's purpose is complex, involving more than one question of faith.

Characteristics and Themes. Compositions similar to the Book of Job appear in Mesopotamian and Egyptian sources from Old Testament times. One ("A Dialogue About Human Misery") is about a counselor who criticizes a sufferer for his impiety while the sufferer struggles over the character of the gods. The literary format of Job is not unique among documents from the ancient Near East, consisting of a prose prologue, a poetic dialogue, and finally a prose epilogue. But there is no other work dealing with the problem of human suffering in light of the transcendence and goodness of God that approaches the theological depth, literary sophistication, and practical application of the Book of Job.

The book's exploration of the themes associated with God's purpose in human suffering unfolds in the following manner. In the prologue we view the GodJob relationship from the divine perspective. God chose Job to be one of His suffering servants, an instrument through whom to accomplish a spiritual triumph: "Have you considered My servant Job?" (1:8, 2:3). Satan falsely accuses Job of serving God for the sake of material blessings (1:9-11). Job is given the high calling of remaining true to God even when everything is taken away, and grim suffering becomes his daily lot. Will Job do as the Adversary predicts, and curse God to His face? This is the question that drives the moving drama of the book as Job loses his initial confidence and sinks into despair. If Job remains faithful, God through Job will show that the Adversary is a liar.

While the prologue gives us the divine perspective, the central section of speeches presents the human perspective. As a human being he is ignorant of what took place in the divine council. He struggles with a traditional view, a perversion of Proverbs, that all suffering is an immediate punishment of human sins. Job's counselors, like many others, considered the depth of Job's suffering

to be adequate evidence that his sin was great (cf. John 9:2).

As Job confronts the heartless counselors used by Satan to accuse him falsely, he says things for which he must later repent (42:5, 6). He knows the counselors are wrong, but he cannot understand how a pious person like himself should suffer so much when the godless enjoy prosperity and health (12:6).

Like the psalmists, Job often complains to God in the language of legal disputes. Some of what Job says shocks his friends. While they say all the right things about God, they never say anything to Him. Job wrestles with God and tells Him every doubt and fear. His relationship with God is vital while theirs consists of dead aphorisms. It is not so much what they say, as how they apply it to Job, that shows the arrogance of their insisting that they know why Job is suffering. They are insensitive (13:4, 5; 16:2; 19:21), as well as shallow and presumptuous regarding divine things. Job has been falsely accused; he is not suffering for his sins, though he cannot avoid wondering about this. But even though he imagines God is angry with him, in his better moments he still believes God is just and will provide a Redeemer (16:19-21; 19:23-27).

This hope becomes a reality when Job finally has the face-to-face audience with God that he requested (13:15-18; 31:35-37). When God appears in the storm (chs. 38-41), Job is not rebuked as one suffering for his sins, but is humbled before the Lord as one whose ill-advised speech had obscured God's purpose (38:2; 42:2, 3). God reveals Himself as Job's friend, bringing him before the astonishing works of creation to show him that the One he has reproached is sovereign in goodness and power. Job recognizes that God is and remains his friend.

When his eyes have seen the Lord and he has repented in dust and ashes, Job has come to understand that God on His throne is sovereign, and rewards those who belong to Him despite times of pressure and pain. The reader learns that Job suffered, not because he was one of the worst of men, but because he was one of the best, and that his ordeal glorified his God.

Outline of Job

I. Prologue (1:1 – 2:13)

A. Job Blessed and Blameless (1:1-5)

B. Job Tested (1:6-2:13)

1. Satan Accuses Job (1:6-12)

2. Job’s Commitment Despite Tragedy (1:13-22)

3. Satan Accuses Job Again (2:1-6)

4. Job’s Faith Despite Personal Suffering (2:7-10)

5. The Arrival of the Counselors (2:11-13)

II. Dialogue (chs. 3-27)

A. Job Laments His Birth (ch. 3)

B. The First Cycle of Speeches (chs. 4-14)

1. Eliphaz (chs. 4;5)

2. Job’s Reply (chs. 6;7)

3. Bildad (ch. 8)

4. Job’s Reply (chs. 9;10)

5. Zophar (ch. 11)

6. Job’s Reply (chs. 12-14)

C. The Second Cycle of Speeches (chs. 15-21)

1. Eliphaz (ch. 15)

2. Job’s Reply (chs. 16;17)

3. Bildad (ch. 18)

4. Job’s Reply (ch.19)

5. Zophar (ch. 20)

6. Job’s Reply (ch. 21)

D. The Third Cycle of Speeches (chs. 22-26)

1. Eliphaz (ch. 22)

2. Job’s Reply (chs. 23;24)

3. Bildad (ch. 25)

4. Job’s Reply (ch. 26)

E. Job’s Closing Discourse (ch. 27)

III. Interlude on Wisdom (ch. 28)

IV. Monologues (chs. 29-41)

A. Job’s Final Oration (chs. 29-31)

1. Past Blessing, Honor, and Personal Benevolence (ch. 29)

2. Present Dishonor and Suffering and No Benevolence (ch. 30)

3. A Protestation of Innocence Under Sanctions and Oath (ch.31)

B. Elihu's Speeches (chs. 32-37)

1. Apology for Speaking (32:1-5)

2. The First Speech (32:6 – 33:33)

3. The Second Speech (ch. 34)

4. The Third Speech (ch. 35)

5. The Fourth Speech (chs. 36;37)

C. God's Responses (38:1-42:6)

1. God's First Discourse (38:1-40:2)

2. Job Humbled (40:3-5)

3. God's Second Discourse (40:6-41:34)

4. Job Repentant (42:1-6)

V. Epilogue (42:7-17)

A. The Counselors Rebuked (42:7-9)

B. Job Restored (42:10-17)

Introduction to Hebrew Poetry

The most prominent distinguishing feature of Hebrew poetry is the repetition of ideas, called parallelism. An idea is stated and then immediately expressed again in different words, with the concepts of the two lines corresponding more or less closely. The types of parallelism were described by Lowth (1753) as belonging to three basic categories. These are: synonymous, in which the idea is repeated in a similar way; antithetic, in which the idea is stated by opposition; and synthetic, in which the second line develops or extends the thought of the first rather than merely repeating it. Other categories have also been distinguished. For example, in emblematic parallelism one line is a figure of speech and the other puts the same idea literally, explaining the figure. In step, staircase, or climactic parallelism, the succeeding lines carry the idea forward, each one adding a new element to what went before. Characteristic examples of the types mentioned are: (a) synonymous, Ps. 113:7; Ps. 147:10 (b) antithetic, Ps. 1:6; Prov. 10:1; (c) synthetic, Ps. 52:9; (d) emblematic, Prov. 25:4, 5; and (e) step, Judges 5:30; Ps. 29:5, 6; 65:4.

The corresponding parts of parallel lines often help to explain each other. Two lines together may define an idea more clearly than one alone. More recently, it has been observed that even if the two lines are practically identical, there is still a special effect due to repetition alone. In this sense, all parallelisms are to some extent synthetic. However, the usual analysis has not lost its validity and is widely used in discussions of biblical poetry.

It is helpful to study the techniques of antithesis, figurative speech, and so on, in simple parallelisms, because the same techniques are combined in more complicated examples. Thus Ps. 92:12-15 has synonymous and emblematic elements that compare a flourishing tree with a righteous person, and define the righteous person as one who is planted, or remains, in God's house. The fruit of the tree is the praise of God's righteousness. Comparing and contrasting the balanced parts of parallel expressions is the basic key to understanding as well as enjoying biblical poetry.

The meter or rhythm of Hebrew poetry has been a subject of continuous debate. It seems established that there is at least one clearly defined meter, the qinah or lament, having three beats and then two in each line. But there is no general agreement about other proposed meters. In any case, while the parallelism of ideas can be carried over and appreciated even in translation, meter is much harder to replicate. The same is true of features like alliteration, rhyme, and other effects depending on the sound of words. In Hebrew poetry these are not nearly as important

as parallelism.

Another formal feature, which is often indicated in the margins or notes of translations, is the acrostic. In this type of composition lines or stanzas begin with successive letters of the alphabet. This technique, like parallelism, would help in memorizing and teaching. It may also be a way of suggesting that the subject has been handled completely. The outstanding example is Ps. 119.

Poetry in general, and not just Hebrew poetry, is characterized by compression of ideas and economy of expression. This means that transitions are often left out and the relationship of ideas is left for the reader to determine. For example, in the Psalms there are many confusing changes of subject, and ideas that seem unrelated may nevertheless occur next to each other. But the difficulty and subtlety of poetic language can be regarded as a virtue. Good poetry rewards the effort required to understand it, as well as to memorize it.

Psalms

The Book of Psalms

Author. Many of the psalms begin with a title linking the psalm with a particular individual or group, using a Hebrew preposition that could possibly indicate dedication ("to David"), subject matter ("about David"), or authorship ("by David"). However, one of the few psalm titles with an expanded context leaves no doubt that the title intends to identify the composer of the psalm (Ps. 18). David is by far the most frequently cited author, most of his psalms being in the first two books (see Structure), though there is a small collection of psalms by him at the very end (Ps. 138-145). The tradition that associates David with singing and psalm composition is so strong that there is little doubt that David wrote the psalms that bear his name (1 Sam. 16:14-23; 2 Sam. 1:17-27; 2 Sam. 22; 2 Sam. 23:1; 1 Chr. 6:31; 15:16; 16:7; Ps. 18; Amos 6:5).

Other authors appear in psalm titles: Moses (Ps. 90), Solomon (Ps. 72; 127), the sons of Korah (Ps. 42-49; 84; 85; 87; 88), the sons of Asaph (Ps. 50; 73-83), and Ethan the Ezrahite (Ps. 89). A number of psalms have no designated author (e.g. Ps. 1; 10).

Date and Occasion. The titles of the psalms show that they were composed by individuals in response to a particular corporate or individual experience.

The dates and occasions of the psalms (see introductory paragraphs to the psalms in the notes) range from the time of Moses (Ps. 90), to the experiences of David (Ps. 51), to the time after the exile of the Jews in Babylon (Ps. 126). Still, the psalms collected for use in public worship were never so specific that they could not be used in new situations.

Forming the collection took several centuries, arriving at its present form some time after the exile in Babylon. The name "Psalms" means "songs," and is taken from the Septuagint, the early Greek translation of the Old Testament. This is the name used in the New Testament (Luke 20:42; 24:44; Acts 1:20).

Characteristics and Themes. ***Titles***. The titles of individual psalms are usually not assigned a verse number in translations, giving the impression that they are separate from other verses. In the Hebrew Bible the titles are usually numbered as the first verse. The titles are either an original

part of the psalms, or at least from extremely early tradition.

The titles may be divided into five basic types: authorship, historical, musical, genre (literary type), and instructions for use in worship.

1. Authorship Titles. See the discussion under "Author" above.

2. Historical Titles. There are fewer historical than authorship titles (Ps. 3; 7; 18; 30; 34; 51; 52; 54; 56: 57; 59; 60; 63; 142). The authenticity of the former has been disputed, although there is no textual evidence that they were added later. However, some believe that apparent disharmony between psalm and title (as in Ps. 30) or between the title and other books (Ps. 56 compared with 1 Sam. 2L10-15) indicates that those titles are late and artificial. Others argue that if historical titles were added later, whoever added them would have made sure they matched the content of the psalm. To give an example, why would a later editor connect Ps. 30 with the dedication of the temple when there was no mention of the temple in the psalm?

The historical titles may give us an indication of the origins of a psalm (see below), but they are of limited help in interpretation. That is, while psalms may have been written in reaction to particular historical events, the composers were careful not to be specific in the body of the poem.

The psalms were intended to express what others could share in formal and public worship, and were not private poems. However, the interpreter is not bound to reconstruct the historical background of all the psalms (a practice of many earlier psalm commentators).

3. Genre Titles. A number of the terms in the titles classify the psalms into genres, or literary types. It is difficult to know the precise meaning of the terms used. Some are found often: mizmor (a "song," e.g. Ps. 139) and shir ("song"), others rarely. In today's discussion literary types are determined from the content of the psalms and not from the titles.

4. Musical Notations. Some of the genre terms, as above, are also musical notations, notably mizmor (from a verbal root "to sing") and shir ("song"). Others are of less certain meaning. A few are probably names of tunes (e.g., Ps. 60, "Set to `Lily of the Testimony' ").

Selah is a word that occurs frequently in the body of the psalms. Its meaning is unknown, though it could be a musical term, like "rest" or "interlude."

5. Instructions for Use in Worship. Occasionally the titles indicate how the psalms were used in formal worship. Of these the best known are the

"Songs of Ascents" (Ps. 120-134; see the introductory paragraph to Ps. 120).

Structure. The psalms are arranged in five books. Each book closes with a doxology and benediction (Ps. 1-41; 42-72; 73-89; 90-106; 107-150). Jewish tradition is that the number five was chosen to match the five books of Moses.

Psalms I and 2 are the entryway into the sanctuary of the Psalms, and Ps. 146-150 conclude the book with a long doxology. Ps. 1 transforms the prayers and praises originally offered in the temple into a book for meditation in meetings and at home.

The first two books celebrate Israel's golden age during the time of the united monarchy. Ps. 2 and 72 are prayers that the king will extend the rule of God to the ends of the earth. All the psalms in Book I are attributed to David, except Ps. 1, 2, and 33. Laments in the first two books always conclude with praise.

By contrast, Book III (Ps. 73-89) is dark. The first psalm of the section complains that the righteous suffer. The last psalm of the section laments that the Davidic covenant seems to have failed, with the king's crown rolling in the dust. Ps. 88 is as the only psalm without praise.

Book IV (Ps. 90-106) turns to God Himself who has been Israel's help in ages past. In this book Moses is mentioned seven times; he is mentioned only once before (Ps. 77). Psalms 93-99, called "enthronement psalms," look to God's reign on earth. The writer of Hebrews assigns the praise of God celebrated in Ps. 102:25-27 to Jesus Christ (Heb. 1:10-12).

Book V begins by thanking God for bringing Israel back from the exile. The book includes psalms holding up David as a model for piety (138-145) and psalms predicting the reign of Christ (110).

Genres. Distinguishing characteristics allow the psalms to be assigned to literary groups for the purpose of study. Following are the literary types commonly used.

1. Hymns of Praise. Hymns are easily recognized by their exuberant praise of the Lord. God is praised for who He is and for His power and mercy. For examples, see Ps. 8; 24; 29; 33; 47; 48.

2. Laments. Laments express an emotion opposite to that of praise. In the lament, the psalmist opens his heart honestly to God, a heart often filled with sadness, fear, or even anger. With few exceptions the laments turn to the Lord with confidence at the end. For examples, see Ps. 25; 39; 51; 86; 102;

120.

3. Thanksgiving Psalms. A psalm of thanksgiving is appropriate when the Lord answers a prayer of lament. The first three psalm types form a kind of triad. The psalmist sings hymns when he is right with the Lord, laments when he is out of harmony with Him, and gives thanks when the relationship is reestablished. For examples see Ps. 18; 66; 107; 118; 138.

4. Songs of Confidence (or trust). Some psalms have trust as their dominant mood. These are often short and contain a striking metaphor that captures the psalmist's trusting attitude. For examples, see Ps. 23; 121; 131.

5. Kingship Psalms. Since God, the King of the universe, is the subject of the Psalms and since David, the human king, is both singer and subject of many psalms, kingship is an important concept in the Psalter. However, a few psalms focus so intensely either on God's kingship (Ps. 24; 93) or on the human king (Ps. 20; 21; 45) that they stand out.

6. Wisdom Psalms. For biblical wisdom we commonly turn to books like Proverbs, Job, Song of Songs, and Ecclesiastes. In these books are practical directions for how God wants us to live our lives. The "wisdom psalms" make use of themes found in the wisdom books. For instance, the strong contrast between the righteous and the wicked found in the Book of Proverbs is found in Ps. 1. For other examples, see Ps. 37 and 49.

Poetic Style. No special knowledge is needed to recognize the poetic quality of the Psalter. Instead of sentences forming paragraphs, the psalms are composed of short poetic verses of nearly equal length. This characteristic is easily recognized on the printed page.

Poetry is deliberate communication that pays particular attention to its own form. The poetic language addresses not only the mind but the imagination and emotions. To say "The LORD is my Shepherd" (Ps. 23:1) does more than inform. The metaphor of a shepherd evokes a picture and touches the emotions in a way that a didactic statement would not.

Parallelism is the most obvious poetic device in Old Testament poetry. Ps. 6:1 is a good example:

O LORD, do not rebuke me in Your anger, Nor chasten me in Your hot displeasure.

To interpret parallel lines, it is important to bear in mind that the second line continues and carries forward the thought of the first. In this verse, the first line asks the Lord not to punish in word, while the second part

asks Him not to punish in deed.

Examples may be found of lines that are even more similar (Ps. 2:1) and of those where it is harder to recognize the connection (Ps. 2:6). But the general principle of interpretation is that the second half of a poetic verse carries forward the thought of the first half. See "Introduction to Hebrew Poetry."

Theology of the Psalms. Just as the Psalter was formed during the entire period of the Old Testament, so the theology of the psalms is as large as the Old Testament. Martin Luther called the Psalms "a little Bible, and the summary of the Old Testament."

Christian readers of the Psalms appreciate the relationship these ancient songs have to Jesus Christ. Jesus told His disciples after the Resurrection that "all things must be fulfilled which were written in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms concerning Me" (Luke 24:44). The Old Testament, including the Psalms, looked forward to Christ's coming, His suffering, and His glory. Jesus and the New Testament writers use psalm after psalm to express His suffering (Matt. 27:46) and His glorification (Matt. 22:41-46). In addition, Jesus was revealed as the object of the worship of the psalms.

Since Christ is the Second Person of the Trinity, the hymns and laments of the psalms are directed to Him as to the Father and the Spirit. Jesus is both a singer of the psalms (Heb. 2:12) and the focus of their interest. We can sing to Him our praise, tell Him our complaints and petitions, and thank Him for His goodness. We extol Him as our King, rest our confidence in Him, and look to Him as the embodiment of God's wisdom.

The Curses of the Psalms. Some psalms cry out not only for the righteous to be vindicated, but also for God to punish the wicked (Ps. 69:22-28). Such prayers reflect the calling of Israel to holy war as God's instruments of judgment. With the coming of Christ to bear God's judgment, the warfare of God's people continues, directed now against "spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places" (Eph. 6:12). In their present warfare, Christians are commanded not to curse, but to bless their personal enemies, overcoming evil with good (Rom. 12:17-21).

Title "Psalms" means "songs" and is taken from the Septuagint, the early Greek translation of the Old Testament. The New Testament uses this name (Luke 24:44; Acts 1:20). The corresponding Hebrew word mizmor occurs frequently in the psalms and means a vocal or instrumental song.

Outline of Psalms

I. Book I, Psalms 1-41

II. Book II, Psalms 42-72

III. Book III, Psalms 73-89

IV. Book IV, Psalms 90-106

V. Book V, Psalms 107-150

Introduction to the Wisdom Literature

Job, Proverbs, and Ecclesiastes make up the wisdom literature of the Bible. Wisdom literature has a recognizable approach as well as a distinctive range of subject matter that makes it a separate department of study. In these books the term "wisdom" and its synonyms, such as "understanding," are used noticeably more often than in other parts of the Bible. These books can be distinguished from the Prophets and the histories of the Old Testament by the way truth is revealed in them. Like the historians, the wisdom writers rely on observation and study. But they make greater use of introspection and meditation than the historians. Unlike the historians, the sages do not discuss Israel's history. They say little or nothing about Moses, the Law, the kings, geography, or politics. Instead, the wisdom writers speak of the human condition as such, in its enduring aspects. They bring to it the perspective of the divine majesty and superintending providence, pondering the question of how the creature should think about the Creator. They give special attention to the problem of human suffering.

Wisdom literature resembles prophecy in the use of poetry and the expression of profound truths. But, in their role as messengers of God, the prophets transmit divine messages directed to specific situations. They also predict the future. The sages observed the world around them, and under the guidance of the Spirit drew conclusions about human nature and living a life that is pleasing to God.

Other poetic sections of the Bible, like the Psalms (Ps. 8:3, 4), may deal with themes similar to those found in wisdom literature, and such sections are commonly regarded as showing the presence or influence of the wisdom tradition. Indeed, wisdom is a kind of human tradition or culture. It is found not only in Israel but in other civilizations as well. A constituent part of all wisdom, in addition to its philosophy, is practical advice and teaching on how to live. Yet the wisdom of the Bible is distinctive, because in all its ways through the heights and depths of human experience it relies on the God of Abraham, the Father of Jesus Christ. Wisdom has its source and beginning in "the fear of the LORD" (Prov. 9:10), both in its ideas and equally in its methods and morals.

In His revelation through the sages, the Spirit of God ranges from direct and homely proverbs, to the puzzling, often difficult words of Ecclesiastes, and to the mysterious and sublime words of Job. It is often said that the parables of Jesus are allied to the wisdom tradition. This association shows that the proverbial, humble, and seemingly human origin of much wisdom literature is not an obstacle to perceiving its divine inspiration. On the contrary, it is the many-sided wisdom of

God that is revealed in wisdom literature.

Proverbs

The Book of Proverbs

Author. Proverbs is a collection of wise sayings from a number of authors. Solomon's name appears in 1:1; 10:1; 25:1. Chapter 30 is attributed to Agur, and ch. 31 to Lemuel. That Solomon was a key figure in the wisdom movement and wrote many proverbs is clear from I Kin. 4:29-34. Solomon's general influence upon the Book of Proverbs is considerable, and his direct authorship of much of the material need not be doubted. The statement in 1:1 ("The proverbs of Solomon") need not be taken, however, to assert more than the leading role of the king in the compilation. The Solomonic title may refer as much to the stamp of Solomon's character on the wisdom literature as to its direct authorship. While it is obvious that he did not write the whole book as we have it, 1:1-7 indicates that this is no haphazard collection, but a purposeful construction with certain aims.

Date and Occasion. Nothing in the literary forms or content of Proverbs demands a dating later than the fall of Jerusalem and the Babylonian exile of the sixth century s.c. The whole work is consonant with that period, although when the book reached its present form is impossible to say. Parts of it are from the time of King Hezekiah (25:1).

Characteristics and Themes. The Book of Proverbs displays two major forms of wisdom writing. In chs. 1-9 there are a number of longer constructions that are similar to the "instruction" of some early Egyptian literature. Some dependence in form and content should not surprise us, given the common concerns of wisdom in all cultures. Whether the form developed in schools for the elite (as in Egypt) or in the home (as was probably the case in Israel), the content is wisdom for life as it was taught to the youth by an elder. The instruction generally begins with an address ("My son"), followed by exhortations and commands with supporting explanations and encouragements.

The other major form in Proverbs is a one sentence proverbial saying, found mainly in 10:1-22:16 and 25:1-29:27. These sayings are frequently given in a parallel form, in which the second line makes a direct contrast with the first, or in which the second line carries forward the idea contained in the first. The contrasting parallel is typically used to compare wisdom with folly and righteousness with wickedness.

Another prominent form is the numerical saying (6:16-19; 30:15, 16, 18, 19), which, particularly with the one-sentence sayings, appears to promote the perception of order in the complex issues and experiences of life. By groupings and comparisons of these the task of gaining and assessing knowledge proceeds so that we learn what the good life is and how to pursue it.

For additional discussion of the characteristics, themes, and poetic forms of Proverbs, see introductions to the Wisdom Literature and to Hebrew Poetry. Proverbs, like the Law of Moses, bears witness to Christ by portraying His person and work. The Law presents the righteousness and holiness of Christ, the great descendant of Abraham who would inherit God's covenant blessings and mediate them to all nations (Gal. 3:14). Proverbs and the other wisdom books display the wisdom and discernment of Christ. According to the New Testament, Jesus Christ is the wisdom of God incarnate (1 Cor. 1:24, 30; Col. 2:2, 3).

The Book of Proverbs does not touch on several of the more prominent religious themes in the Old Testament. But through dealing with what are often considered the more mundane areas of life, Proverbs teaches us that all of life is to be lived to the glory of the sovereign Creator. There is a moral order to all of creation, and violations of that order only lead to adverse consequences.

Outline of Proverbs

I. Prologue: the Purpose of the Book (1:1-7)

II. Wisdom’s Instructions (1:8-9:18)

- A. Recommendation of Wisdom (1:8,9)
- B. Warning Against Violence (1:10-19)
- C. Rewards of Wisdom (1:20-33)
- D. Wisdom as a Divine Gift and Human Task (ch. 2)
- E. The Lord’s Discipline (3:1-12)
- F. Hymn to Wisdom (3:13-20)
- G. Guidance in Life’s Way (3:21-26)
- H. Precepts on Human Relationships (3:27-35)

I. Commendations of Wisdom (ch.4)

J. Warning Against Adultery (ch. 5)

K. Cautionary Instructions (6:1-19)

L. More Warnings Against Adultery (6:20-7:27)

M. Wisdom's Call and Self-commendation (ch.8)

N. Competing Calls of Wisdom and Folly (ch. 9)

III. Proverbs of Solomon (10:1-22:16)

IV. Instructions of the Wise Men (22:17-24:22)

V. More Sayings of the Wise Men (24:23-34)

VI. More Proverbs of Solomon, Copied by Hezekiah's Men (chs. 25-29)

VII. The Words of Agur (ch. 30)

VIII. The Words of King Lemuel (ch. 31)

A. The Good King (31:1-9)

B. The Good Wife (31:10-31)

Ecclesiastes

The Book of Ecclesiastes

Author. To many interpreters of Ecclesiastes, the lineage (1:1), kingship in Jerusalem (1:12), unsurpassed wisdom (1:16), and unrivaled wealth (2:4-9) of the author indicate that Solomon (1 Kin. 3; 4:21-34; 10), calling himself "the Preacher" (1:12), is the author of Ecclesiastes. There is a concluding tribute to the book (12:9-14), praising Solomon's wisdom and summarizing with the central admonition to "fear God and keep His commandments" (12:13).

Some interpreters, however, believe that the type of Hebrew language used in the book, as well as the negative view of rulers suggested in it (4:13; 7:19; 8:2-4; 10:4-7), indicate that the work was written after Solomon's time and presented as a legitimate voice of the wisdom tradition that has Solomon as its most famous exponent, therefore going by his name.

It is notable that Ecclesiastes is not a summary of other wisdom teaching, but a particular statement of wisdom teaching that deepens it while adding to its broad appeal.

Date and Occasion. Those who see the book as coming from a writer later than Solomon generally date Ecclesiastes after the Jewish exile in Babylon, which occurred in the sixth century B.C. If it is assumed that Solomon was the author, the book is to be dated from the tenth century B.C.

Ecclesiastes has been understood as an apologetic work, that is, an attempt to recommend faith in God by way of answering negative arguments. As such an attempt, the book often seems to express a secular point of view, arguing that life is meaningless. In the face of such arguments the writer comes to the conclusion that faith in God is the only avenue to satisfaction in life. While the book's teaching may be used in evangelism, most Jewish and Christian interpreters have understood Ecclesiastes to be addressed to God's people, rather than to those who are ignorant of God or in rebellion against Him. The book is God's wise counsel to those who know His ways but have found them perplexing and troubling.

Characteristics and Themes. Ecclesiastes searches for an answer to the question, What is the advantage of humanity's work and wisdom? Work and wisdom comprise two main themes of the book. The word "profit" and its related words such as "more" (6:8) occurs eighteen times. Another

important word, "vanity," which conveys the notion of uselessness, occurs 38 times. This key term is used in the motto that frames the book (1:2; 12:8), which in each case is accompanied by a poem related to the motto (1:3-11; 1:7-12:7). Apart from these obvious literary structures, no consensus has been reached about the book's structure. Its crosscurrents of optimism and pessimism make the overall intention of the book difficult to discern. Nevertheless, the blocks of material that comprise the book mostly relate to these two themes. A helpful outline arranges these blocks into three cycles (1:3-3:8; 3:9-6:7; 6:8-12:7), each, though formulated differently, beginning with the crucial question "what is the profit?" The question is raised also at the end of both 5:16 and 6:11.

The first cycle contains three pairs of sections about work and wisdom (1:12-15 and 1:16-18; 2:1-11 and 2:12-17; 2:18-26 and 3:1-8) presenting the conclusion that although the employment of human labor and understanding provides satisfaction of accomplishment, the profit achieved by a person is canceled by death.

The second cycle (3:9-6:7) treats the theme of humanity's labor, contrasting it with God's perfect enduring works and counseling enjoyment of the simple blessings God provides in this life, even in the face of human oppression. The third cycle (6:8-12:7) elaborates the theme of human wisdom, contrasting it with the inscrutability of God's ways.

Solomon's conclusion that death makes vain all human labor and wisdom on earth ("under the sun"; 1:14, 17: 2:11, 17) does not mean that people should abandon society and culture to lead an ascetic life. Neither does the Christian priority of proclaiming the gospel for the conversion of sinners (a "labor ... not in vain," 1 Cor. 15:58) mean Christians should abdicate their cultural responsibilities. On the contrary, Solomon commands (9:7-10) God's people to enjoy life, despite its futility, harsh realities, and uncertainties, and to work with full vigor. This practical approach to life is neither a version of Greek stoicism nor a product of human effort: it is a gift of God (3:13; 5:19) for those who fear Him and keep His commands (5:1-7; 12:13, 14). Ecclesiastes teaches both the human responsibility to obey God joyfully, and God's sovereign provision of the ability to obey.

Ecclesiastes grapples with the question of how people should live (6:12) in a world where the good Creator (3:11, 14) and just Judge (3:17) sovereignly ordains that "bad" things happen to the righteous (7:13, 14) as well as to the wicked, and not according to what they deserve (8:14; 9:1).

The gift of contentment is to be exercised not only in the face of human oppression (3:22-4:3) but under the futility and death (9:7-10) that God imposed upon the human race because of sin.

Relating the book to Christ and the New Testament, we would make the following points. If the divine verdict of righteous or unrighteous is not rendered in this life, it will be given after death, at the Judgment (3:17; 12:14). Ecclesiastes teaches existence after death (9:10; 12:7), but the resurrection of the body is not mentioned; the resurrection of Christ, which guarantees the resurrection of believers to eternal life (1 Cor. 15), was still in the future.

The sphere of creation discussed in Ecclesiastes is indicated by the synonymous phrases "under the sun," "under heaven," and "on earth." Solomon's determination that everything is futile is not applied to transcendent heavenly reality; there is no contradiction between Solomon and Paul. Whatever earthly treasures are gathered by Adam's descendants will be taken away, but heavenly labors performed through the Second Adam who conquered death are never in vain (1 Cor. 15:58).

In summary, Ecclesiastes teaches how God's elect, pilgrims in this world "under the sun" (1 Pet. 1:1), but also citizens of heaven (Phil. 3:20), should live amid the profound frustrations and tensions of the present evil age (Rom. 8:18-23).

Title. "Ecclesiastes" is a translation of the Hebrew word qoheleth, meaning "assembler of the covenant community" and conventionally translated "preacher."

The term "Ecclesiastes" was used by the Septuagint (Greek) translation of the Bible and by the Vulgate (Latin) translation.

Outline of Ecclesiastes

I. Introduction (1:1)

II. Motto (1:2)

III. Limitations of Work and Wisdom (1:3-3:8)

A. Cycles in Creation (1:3-11)

B. Futility of Work and Wisdom (1:12-18)

C. Ephemeral Rewards of Work and Wisdom (2:1-17)

D. Enigmas of Work and Wisdom (2:18-3:8)

IV. Work in Fear Before God Whose Work Endures (3:9-6:7)

A. God as Creator and Judge (3:9-21)

B. Contentment or Envy (3:22-4:16)

C. Sincere Commitment to God (5:1-7)

D. Dissatisfaction in Work (5:8-6:7)

V. Wisdom in Humility Before a Judging God Whose Wisdom Is Unfathomable (6:8-12:7)

A. The Futility of Contending with God (6:8-12)

B. What Is Good for Man (7:1-18)

C. Wisdom's Power (7:19-8:8)

D. Unfulfilled Judgment (8:9-9:10)

E. Folly's Power (9:11-10:7)

F. Advice for Wise Living (10:8-12:7)

VI. Motto (12:8)

VII. Conclusion (12:9-14)

Song of Solomon

The Song of Solomon

Author. According to the title, the Song belongs to Solomon. The Hebrew phrase "which is Solomon's" (1:1) can be translated "by" Solomon (as its author), or "for" Solomon (as the person to whom it is dedicated). The traditional view among Jews and Christians is that Solomon was the author (cf. 1 Kin. 4:32).

Date and Occasion. If the Song was written by Solomon, it would have been composed in the mid-tenth century s.c. Dedication of the Song to Solomon might also favor this date, as do certain other features of the book (cf. 6:4 note).

Many interpreters, both Jewish and Christian, have regarded the Song as an allegory of God's love for Israel or the Church. The association of the book with Solomon, however, points us in the direction of the wisdom literature of the Old Testament. Wisdom literature is distinguished, among other things, by its focus on the common sphere of human relationships. The Book of Proverbs uses language similar to that of the Song of Solomon in talking about marital love (Prov. 5:15-19), the subject of the Song. This love must finally be seen in the context of the even greater love of God that the Bible as a whole reveals. The beauty and worth of sexual love is affirmed at the beginning of the Bible, where the difference and relationship of the sexes is associated with the creation of humanity in God's image (Gen. 1:27; cf. 2:19-25). If sexual love were evil in itself, it would be inappropriate as an allegory of Christ's love for His church.

The Song of Solomon reveals three qualities of love between a man and a woman: self-giving, desire, and commitment. In all these ways love reflects the greater love of God our Creator. God delights in us and gives Himself to us. God desires us wholly for Himself. God feels deeply both the pain and pleasure of His relationship with us. Although it is not proper to attribute sexuality to God, there is an analogy between the love we experience in marriage and the love that God has for us. The Old Testament prophets compare the love of God for His people to the love of a bridegroom for the bride (e.g., Jer. 2:2; Hos. 2:14-20). Christian marriage, according to Paul, should be modeled on the most perfect expression of such love, the self-giving love of Christ for His church and its willing response (Eph. 5:22,

33). The climax of the Song of Solomon is the praise of vehement and faithful love (8:6, 7).

The Song of Solomon shows us love outside Eden, not free from sorrow, but still beautiful and a reflection of God's own love for us. It looks back to the gift of love in creation, and forward to the perfection of love in One greater than Solomon, the Lord Jesus Christ.

Characteristics and Themes. The Song is written in verse, as love poetry. The lines are short and rhythmical, the language rich in imagery and highly sensual. The poem deals more with emotions than with rational ideas, requiring a special sensitivity in the reader: It is irrelevant, for example, whether the woman who is described in 6:9 is really "perfect" in any way that could be proven. The word is an expression of her beloved's deep affection for her, and that is all that the images are intended to be. The Song is a rhapsody of love: an outpouring of the words and feelings of people who are experiencing human, sexual love with all its pains and pleasures. It is a book for those who want to know, or to remember, what it is like to be in love.

Although not a formal drama, there are nevertheless exchanges between the characters within the poem. It is possible to identify the characters who speak certain lines based on clues provided by the gender, number, and person of the Hebrew verbs and pronouns, even though interpreters do not always agree on the precise divisions and identifications, The speakers have been identified by capitalized headings inserted in the translation (no such headings appear in the Hebrew text). The most important characters are "the Shulamite" (6:13), a young country girl; "the beloved," her shepherd lover (1:7; 6:3); and "the daughters of Jerusalem," who function much like the chorus in a drama (2:7). There are numerous minor figures-Solomon himself is mentioned (1:5; 3:7, 9, 11; 8:11, 12), as are the mothers of the young lovers (6:9; 8:5), her brothers (cf. 8:8, 9), their friends (5:1), and the city watchmen (3:3; 5:7).

The presence of these characters has led many commentators to propose that the book is about a relationship between the girl and the shepherd, with Solomon as an intruder. But it is hard to see how Solomon could appear so unfavorably in a book that was either written by him or dedicated to him. It has proved difficult to identify a clear story line of the interactions between these three characters, or even to decide which words are Solomon's and which the shepherd's. Because of such problems, many

writers have argued that the book is an anthology of love poems with common themes rather than a unified work. But such a division of the book into separate poems is unhelpful and unnecessary.

The poem is perhaps best understood as expressing the depth of love between the Shulamite girl and her beloved shepherd in the language of romantic fantasy. She envisions him as a dashing king, the prince of her dreams. In this interpretation Solomon is the archetypal lover, not an intruder. Yet he is not presented as one who must be envied. The Song shows us a world in which a country girl and a shepherd can be as happy and fulfilled as a king on his throne (8:11, 12).

A refrain is found at three points in the Song (2:7; 3:5; 8:4), addressed to the "daughters of Jerusalem." Its essence is: "Do not try to force the situation. Let love take its natural course and its own time." This refrain creates movement and suspense. The lovers experience separation, hostility, and interference, but the refrain anticipates that the relationship is nevertheless moving forward. There is a sense of fulfillment at the end of the book, when the lovers, together at last and at ease in public, walk arm-in-arm to the home of the parents, the place where their relationship began (8:5). The following two verses praise the excellence of love (8:6, 7). This is the climax of the Song, but not quite the end. It concludes by quietly echoing some of the key elements of the work (8:8-14).

Between the expressions of longing at the beginning and the consummation at, the end, there is what seems to be a dream sequence in chs. 3-6 (3:1; 5:2). In this section the girl dreams about her wedding and the lovemaking that will follow. There is everything that we might expect here: erotic reveries, nightmares, fears of losing her lover, and romantic experiences that transform him into a prince. In her dreams, the girl's wedding becomes a splendid, royal occasion, and the lover is identified with Solomon himself.

Despite the romantic images and fantasies in this book, there is realism in it. The author knows about erotic desire, meddling relatives, and the struggle to establish a relationship in the face of separation and hostility. He understands that we no longer live in the Garden of Eden, but in a fallen world, where love, too, has its pain. But there remains also idealism. The overwhelming impression that the book leaves with the reader is that love is beautiful, and can provide deep satisfaction and contentment.

Title The title has been translated "The Song of Solomon," "Song of

Songs," and "Canticles" (from the Latin word for "song"). The word "song" in the title is the common Hebrew word for a happy song, with no special religious connotation. The whole phrase "song of songs" is a superlative expression meaning "the greatest song," announcing that the book is a single song of outstanding quality.

Outline of Song of Solomon

I. Desire for Love (1:1-2:17)

- A. Title (1:1)
- B. Mutual Praise and Longing (1:2-2:7)
- C. Visit of the Beloved (2:8-17)

II. The Bride's Reverie (3:1-6:3)

- A. Dream of Separation (3:1-5)
- B. Wedding Procession (3:6-11)
- C. Praise of the Shulamite (4:1-5:1)
- D. Anxiety in Love (5:2-6:3)

III. Mutual Praise and Longing (6:4-8:4)

- A. Praise of the Shulamite (6:4-10)
- B. Union of the Shulamite and Her Beloved (6:11-8:4)

IV. The Value of Love in Union (8:5-14)

- A. In Praise of Love (8:5-7)
- B. Conclusion (8:8-14)

Introduction to the Prophets

The idea of prophecy is introduced in the Old Testament by the relationship between Moses and Aaron. Since Moses declined to speak on his own, Aaron was appointed by God to serve as Moses' "spokesman" (Ex. 4:12-16); Aaron would act as Moses' "mouth" to speak for him. Aaron's role is later described as being Moses' "prophet" (Ex. 7:1, 2). Likewise, the prophet of God is one who transmits the words of God. While God is not unable to speak-as the burning bush, the bringing of the Law, and the still small voice heard by Elijah show-His choice is to speak His words to His people through the voice of human beings, who are His agents of revelation.

According to Heb. 1: 1, the revelation of the Old Testament period was given in "various ways." The phenomena of Old Testament prophecy illustrate this point. There are visions, trances, enigmatic actions, inner compulsion, signs, and wonders. It is difficult to summarize these aspects of an institution that covered many times and situations, although it should be observed that the message of prophecy is in the words of the prophets, and their actions can hardly be interpreted on their own. Old Testament prophecy is not dark or chaotic, and does not lead people into selfish, occult, and self-destructive paths. As God's voice, the prophets exhorted, threatened, and encouraged the public. To the continual sin of the human heart they opposed the contrary word of God.

The history of Old Testament prophecy is generally divided into three main periods. The prophets who ministered during the early years of the monarchy in Israel and Judah are known to us only from what is recorded about them in the historical books. Such important prophets in Israel's history as Samuel, Nathan, Elijah, and Elisha belong to this "preclassical" period of Israelite prophecy. Since they did not write down their prophecies in separate books, these prophets are often better remembered for what they did than for what they said. The "classical" period of Israelite prophecy in the eighth and seventh centuries B.C. saw the first collections of written oracles. The prophets during this period appear to cluster around two great crises: the fall of Israel to the Assyrians (Amos and Hosea in Israel, Isaiah and Micah in Judah), and the fall of Judah to the Babylonians (Zephaniah, Nahum, Habakkuk, and Jeremiah). Finally, the "exilic and postexilic" prophets spoke God's word to the people during the dark years of the Babylonian exile (Ezekiel and Daniel) and the period of Judah's restoration

in Palestine (Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi).

The content of the Protestant canon of Scripture indicates that the prophetic ministry as the precursor of the kingdom of God fell into silence between Malachi and John the Baptist. Malachi predicted that the Messiah would be preceded by a reappearance of Elijah (Mal. 4:5, 6). Elijah was not reincarnated, but his authority was heard again in John the Baptist. The character and message of John the Baptist form a kind of summary description of his prophetic predecessors. John was a person separated from society, but whose message could compel them to listen. He appeared before kings and suffered persecution from them. His message called people to change their ways and return to God. He predicted the coming and the greatness of Jesus Christ. In all these ways he resembles the Old Testament prophets.

Just as John the Baptist had disciples (Luke 7:19; John 1:35-37; cf. Acts 19:1-5), so the Old Testament prophets were assisted by servants (1 Kin. 19:19-21; 2 Kin. 5:20) and accompanied by prophetic guilds known as "the sons of the prophets" (2 Kin. 2:3-7, 15; 4:38; 6:1-3; cf. 1 Sam. 10:10-12). Based on the evidence of Baruch's relationship with Jeremiah (Jer. 36:4, 14-18, 32), it seems that these prophetic guilds played an important part in writing down the oracles delivered by the prophets and preserving the books that bear their names. A noticeable feature of the prophetic books is that they often bring short passages together whose only connection is that they came from the same prophet. There is little narrative or connective writing, and the original historical reference may be impossible to recover.

The prophetic books were originally written on separate scrolls, long before the production of long books in one physical unit was possible. Not surprisingly, then, the order of the prophetic books in the finished canon of Scripture shows some variation. The Old Testament received by the Protestant churches is identical in content with the Hebrew Bible, despite the differences in the order of the books. In general, like the New Testament books, the order of the prophetic books is a compromise of overlapping considerations of length, date, and authorship. Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel, self-evidently "major prophets," are arranged chronologically at the head of the collection. The relatively short books of the twelve "minor prophets" (counted together as one book in the Hebrew Bible) then follow in roughly chronological order. In the Hebrew Bible, Lamentations and Daniel (the last of the "major prophets" in the Protestant canon) are included in "the Writings," with Job, Psalms, and other books, notably Ezra and Nehemiah,

which deal with the same period of history.

The words of the prophets are the message of God to the people of God. Although they contain a wide range of subjects and styles, there are some recurrent themes that are useful to review.

1. The figure of marriage often occurs, as the Lord impresses on His people the closeness of His relationship with them and its foundation in His solemn commitment to them (Ezek. 16:8-14; Hos. 2:14-20).

2. The covenant lawsuit (Hebrew rib) is a form in which God brings against the people the complaint that they have broken their covenant with Him (Hos. 12:3; Mic. 6:1-3). The features of a courtroom, such as witnesses and a formal accusation, identify this form. Often the prophets indicted the rich, the powerful, and the religious elite for oppressing the poor. The prophets criticized the nation as a whole with the charge that there was no "knowledge of God in the land" (Hos. 4:1). The people knew about God, but they had not maintained a faithful and trusting relationship with Him.

3. The oracles against the nations are speeches denouncing the enemies of God's people and condemning anyone who commits the sins described (Jer. 46-51; Ezek. 25-32). Israel is not always held up as more righteous than its neighbors.

4. The moral teaching of the prophets includes decisive pronouncements that defy the will of sinners. The prophets condemn dishonesty, cruelty, pride, and sensuality. They denounce false religion, but also the distortion of true religion, especially any ritual that conceals an empty heart:

5. The tension between true and false prophecy can emerge in conflicts between God's prophets and either the prophets of false gods (the prophets of Baal, 1 Kin. 18:22) or prophets who claim falsely to speak in God's name (Hananiah, Jer. 28). The proof that a prophet comes from God and is not an impostor follows from the prophetic commission to transmit the divine word (Deut. 18:20-22). The prophecies must be true, including prophecies that foretell future events. The life of a prophet must be agreeable to God's word. Finally, the prophet's message must be consistent with the character and teaching of God.

6. Many prophecies refer to the Messiah. In the course of His life on earth, Jesus fulfilled numerous predictions. Together these prophecies are a persuasive witness to the unique status of Jesus, the focus of the prophetic

word. The New Testament says that "the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy" (Rev. 19:10), and that "all the promises of God" are "Yes" and "Amen" in Him (2 Cor. 1:20).

The prophets often write in poetry. This, together with their reference to historical situations long past, can make translating and interpreting their words extremely difficult. Consequently, it is necessary to give particular attention to the original context.of the prophecy to provide the right foundation for hearing its enduring message. The prophets brought instruction and rebuke to people at all levels of society, denouncing every kind of sin. Religiously, they are "ethical monotheists"; socially, they are the unquenchable conscience of the just; spiritually, they are the precursors of the kingdom of God, announcing Jesus Christ to the world.

The distinctive ministry of the Old Testament prophets ended with the coming of Jesus as the last and greatest Prophet, as He Himself suggests (Luke 7:24-28). All the prophets before Him pointed to Him; when He was present, the future orientation of prophecy had to undergo a permanent change. At the Day of Pentecost, all the Lord's people received the Spirit (Acts 2:17; cf.. Num. 11:29), and the gift of prophecy continued with the "prophets" of the early church (Acts 21:10, 11; Rom. 12:6; 1 Tim. 4:14; Rev. L3). Their new authority and inspiration should be. distinguished from that of the Old Testament prophets.

The ministry of the Word was committed to the apostles, and then to the church founded on their testimony. The gospel is no longer proclaimed in the "various ways" that characterized the Old Testament prophets (Heb. 1:1). Yet the prophets of ancient Israel are the common property of the church of all ages, and after the passing of centuries, continue to be God's voice to His people.

Isaiah

The Book of Isaiah

Author. Isaiah was an aristocrat by birth, well-educated, and by calling a preacher of God's oracles. He was God's appointed instrument in Jerusalem.

Isaiah was married, and two of his children are named in the book: Shear-Jashub and Maher-Shalal-Hash-Baz (7:3; 8:3). According to tradition, Isaiah was martyred by being sawn in two (cf. Heb. H: 37).

Date and Occasion. Isaiah ministered for a period of more than forty years, from 740 until after 701 B.C. The opening sentence of Isaiah names the kings who ruled in Judah during that time: Uzziah (died 740 B.C.), Jotham (750-731 B.C.), Ahaz (735-715 B.C.), and Hezekiah (729-686 B.C.). It was an era of great political turmoil due to Assyrian imperialism.

In Jotham's reign there was a war between Judah and the united kingdoms of Israel and Syria (the SyroEphraimite crisis of 734-732 B.C.; Isaiah 7-9). In this war Ahaz, the King of Judah, was opposed by a coalition of forces from Pekah, King of Israel, and Rezin, King of Aram or Syria. Ahaz responded with fear and unbelief. He refused God's sign (7:10) and tried to find a political solution.

During the reign of Hezekiah, Judah and several other nations fought against Assyria under Sennacherib (705-681 B.C.). Sennacherib's response was to devastate the countryside of Judah and lay siege to Jerusalem itself. But unlike Ahaz, Hezekiah trusted in the Lord. He poured out his burden before God in prayer and trusted God's word through Isaiah (37:14-35).

During the second half of the eighth century the prophet railed against the leaders for their hypocrisy (1:10-15), greed (5:8), self-indulgence (5:11), and cynicism (5:19). With these sins they were bringing the nation to moral ruin. God raised up Isaiah to announce their fate (6:11-13). As Isaiah predicted, Israel was exiled in 722 B.C., and Hezekiah barely escaped the Assyrian destruction (36:1-37:37).

The exile of Israel in Babylon is the context of Isaiah's ministry of encouragement to the afflicted. In a brilliant series of wide-ranging, yet specific prophecies, Isaiah predicts the fall of pagan Babylon (46:1--47:15) and the salvation of Israel's remnant. He names Cyrus, the Persian, as God's anointed agent to restore the remnant to the land more than a century before

he came to power (44:24 15:13). He urges the remnant to flee from Babylon (48:20, 21). He challenges the people to renew their loyalty to the Lord when they return to the land (56:1-8) and to avoid falling back into acts of treachery (57:3-13).

Beyond this immediate salvation lsaiah predicted the coming of a Servant and Savior much greater than Cyrus. This anonymous Servant would bring justice to the nations (42:1--4), establish Israel in a new covenant with the Lord (42:5-7), become a light to the Gentiles (49:1-7), and take away the sins of His people (52:1353:12). The Servant would suffer willingly to achieve these victories, and God would reward and vindicate Him (50:4-11). The New Testament identifies the Servant as Jesus Christ, the incarnate Lord.

Interpretive Difficulties. For over two centuries scholars have disputed the unity of Isaiah. They have raised historical, philosophical, and linguistic issues to argue that the book is the result of a complex transmission through many hands. Briefly, they divide the book into three sections, assigning these to Isaiah of Jerusalem (chs. 1-39); to a prophet of the time of the Exile (second, or "Deutero-Isaiah," chs. 40-55); and to a post-exilic prophet (the "Third Isaiah," chs. 56-66).

Variations in language between the proposed divisions of the book may be due to differences in subject matter, changed perspectives, or the prophet's personal growth. The similarities among the three sections have led many critics to conclude that a final hand unified the work. These unifying features include the repetition of theological themes (Zion, the advent of God, the Davidic representative, and the outworking of the Lord's sovereign plan), the names for God ("the Holy One of Israel," 1:4 and note), and the unified message of judgment and salvation. Conservative scholars defend the traditional understanding that the book is all the work of one prophet, Isaiah. The book was published under his name (1: 1), and he is frequently mentioned in it (2: L; 7:3; 13:1; etc.).

Other books of the Old Testament that have multiple authors, such as Psalms and Proverbs, name them. Nothing in what this book says about its own authorship indicates more than one writer. In the New Testament, the apostle John attributes prophecies from Is. 6:10 and 53:10, allegedly from "Proto-Isaiah" and "Deutero-Isaiah," simply to Isaiah (John 12:38-41).

Modern critics assume that a prophet addresses only his contemporaries. They argue that since chs. 1-39 are addressed to the nation during the Assyrian invasions (ca. 740-700 B.C.), and chs. 40-55 to the exiles in Babylon (600-539 B.C.), and chs. 56-66 to the community after its return to the land (c. 539-500 B.C.), more than one prophet must have spoken. But prophets often ask one generation to participate by faith in a salvation that lies in the distant future. For example, even though

Israel's prosperity still lay in a remote future, Isaiah commanded the dispirited people to "Enlarge the place of your tent" (54:2).

The Old Testament views the covenant community as a historical unity. Every part of Israel participates in its past and future history. Moses addressed the generation born after their ancestors had entered into covenant with the Lord at Sinai as though they had been there (Dent. 5:3).

The critics assume that miraculous prophecy, such as naming Cyrus more than a century beforehand and predicting the birth of Jesus from the Virgin Mary, is impossible. But the Bible reproves philosophical naturalism. In fact, Isaiah reproaches Ahaz for this kind of unbelief (7:10-13). In chs. 40-55 the Lord validates His sovereign rule over the nations precisely by the powers of His prophets. Pagan prophets were deceived by their idols. They could not meet the Lord's challenge of showing that their past prophecies had been fulfilled, nor could they give any reliable prophecies of what was to come (41:21-29). By contrast, Israel's God fulfilled Isaiah's former prophecies about Assyria. He also predicted the future, mentioning Cyrus by name. Isaiah delivered these supernatural prophecies (41:21-29; 44:24-45:8) to leave unbelievers without excuse (48:3-5). Isaiah's remarkable prophecies about Christ's suffering and death put the case for supernatural prophecy beyond reasonable doubt.

Characteristics and Themes. Isaiah served God in the role of covenant prosecutor. His message consists of charges, condemnation, and judgments, as he declares God's curse on Israel, Judah, and the nations (1:2-31; 13-23; 56; 57; 65). Isaiah's autobiographical account of his call to become a messenger from the Lord's heavenly court is recounted in ch. 6. When Isaiah was summoned to represent the heavenly court in Jerusalem's earthly court, he discovered to his dismay that God was not sending him to save Israel but to harden their impenitent hearts (6:9, 10). Isaiah was to present to the people the Lord's complaint that they were faithless and rebellious (1:2, 3; 31:1-3; 57:3-10). God's people had become like the nations in their pride, sarcasm, and selfishness. They had lost the vision of God's kingdom of righteousness, love, and peace and had tried to establish their own kingdom. The prophet also serves as an advocate. He calls on the godly to seek the Lord, to hope for God's kingdom, to experience God's peace within, and to respond with faith to God's new acts of redemption. The Lord's covenant ends with blessings on Israel, not curses (Dent. 30:1-10). In the end, a godly remnant will survive the judgment.

The first part of the book, chs. 1-35, focuses on God's judgment on Israel by Assyria; the second, chs. 40-66, on the remnant's return from Babylon and their ultimate deliverance in the remote future (see the note on 36:1-39:8 for a bridge between these sections). The second part like the first begins with a vision of the heavenly court. Isaiah overhears God sending messengers to announce that Israel's punishment has been paid for and will come to an end (40:1-8). Isaiah's vision of God's kingdom is great, because it

includes the history of redemption from his day until the fullness of redemption. It embraces the exile, the return of the Jews from exile, the mission, ministry, and kingdom of Jesus Christ, the mission and hope of the church, Jesus' present rule over this world, and the restoration of all things in holiness and righteousness.

Isaiah was a master of his language, using a rich vocabulary and imagery. Many of his words and expressions are used nowhere else in the Old Testament. His imagery reveals that he knew the tragedies of war (63:1-6), the injustices of high society (3:1-17), and the disappointments of agriculture (5:1-7).

Isaiah was a gifted preacher. Through his poetic imagination and rhetorical style he exposed the folly of relying on human structures as over against the wisdom of trusting in God's kingdom. Although the ungodly harden themselves against the Lord (6:10), Isaiah's prophetic oracles move the godly to respond with awe and worship of God.

Outline of Isaiah

I. The Lord Is the Holy One of Israel (chs. 1-12)

A. Oracles of Judgment and Hope (chs. 1-5)

B. The Prophetic Call and Revelation of God’s Holiness (ch.6)

C. Oracles of Judgment and Hope During the War with Israel and Syria (chs. 7-11)

D. The Hymn of the Redeemed (ch.12)

II. The Day of the Lord in All Creation (chs. 13-23)

A. Babylon and Assyria (13:1-14:27)

B. Philistia (14:28-32)

C. Moab (chs.15;16)

D. Damascus and Ethiopia (chs. 17;18)

E. Egypt (chs. 19;20)

F. Babylon (21:1-10)

G. Edom (21:11, 12)

H. Arabia (21:13-17)

I. Jerusalem (ch. 22)

J. Tyre (ch. 23)

III. The Little Apocalypse (chs. 24-27)

A. The Immanence of the Day of the Lord (ch.24)

B. Joy in Transformation (ch. 25)

C. The Relationship Between God and His People (26:1-27:1)

D. Transformation (27:2-13)

IV. Judgment and Salvation (chs. 28-35)

A. The Kingdoms of This World (chs. 28-33)

B. The Day of Vengeance and Favor (chs. 34;35)

V. Isaiah and Hezekiah (chs. 36-39)

A. Sennacherib and Jerusalem (chs.36;37)

B. Hezekiah's Illness (ch. 38)

C. Hezekiah's Self-confidence and the Future Exile of Judah (ch. 39)

VI. The Glorious Kingdom of God (chs. 40-48)

A. The Proclamation of Restoration (ch. 40)

B. The Lord's Plan of Restoration (ch. 41)

C. The People, Witnesses to the Lord's Redemption (42:1-13)

D. The Restoration of Israel (42:14-44:23)

E. The Lord's Use of Cyrus (44:24-45:25)

F. The Fall of Babylon (chs. 46;47)

G. An Invitation to Return to the Lord and to Escape His Judgment on Babylon (ch. 48)

VII. The Ministry of Restoration (chs. 49-55)

A. The Servant of God and the Renewal of the Promises (chs. 49;50)

B. Encouragement to the Godly (51:1-52:12)

C. The Suffering Servant (52:13 – 53:12)

D. The Renewal of the Covenant (chs. 54;55)

VIII. Responsibility Toward and Certainty of the Glorious Kingdom (chs. 56-66)

A. The Pursuit of Justice and Promise of God’s Presence chs. 56;57)

B. Call to Repentance Because of God’s Covenant (chs. 58; 59)

C. The Nature of the Glorious Salvation (ch. 60)

D. The Grandeur of the Lord’s Favor and the Glory of Zion (61:1-63:6)

E. The Prayer for the Lord’s Deliverance (63:7-64:12)

F. The Benefits of God’s Salvation and the Severity of His Judgment (chs. 65;66)

Jeremiah

The Book of Jeremiah

Author. Jeremiah prophesied during the reigns of the last kings of Judah: Josiah (640-609 a.c.), Jehoahaz (609), Jehoiakim (609-598), Jehoiachin (598-597) and Zedekiah (597-586). The kingdom of Judah ended in the exile of most of its people to Babylon, chiefly as a result of two invasions by King Nebuchadnezzar (597 and 586 B.C.), though the first deportations occurred as early as 605 (Dan. l:l note). The northern kingdom, Israel, had been conquered by the Assyrians a century before Jeremiah began his ministry. Assyria itself fell to Babylon in 612 B.C., and the northern kingdom was never restored. Jeremiah announced the coming judgment of God on His people and lived to see his prophecy fulfilled.

This prophet was also a priest, from the priestly town of Anathoth in the territory of Benjamin (l:l note). A lonely figure because of his unpopular message (15:17), he was divinely forbidden to marry as a sign of the imminent cessation of normal life (16:2). He also found himself opposed to the authorities in the land and to all classes of people (26:8). As a result, his life was in serious danger more than once (11:18-23; 18:18; 26:8; 36:19; 38:6). His message placed him in the thick of political events. He was sought out especially by King Zedekiah for his comments on the likely outcome of the final onslaught of the approaching Babylonian armies (37:3, 17). Politically, it was a turbulent time as Egypt and Babylon contested the region. Jeremiah repeatedly prophesied a Babylonian victory, proclaiming that the Lord was using Nebuchadnezzar as His scourge. When Jerusalem fell, the Babylonian commander had a special commission from Nebuchadnezzar himself for the care of the prophet, whose fame had spread to the heart of the empire (39:11-14).

Date and Occasion. The background to the prophecy is the long struggle in Judah between the idolatrous worship of foreign gods, deeply embedded since the reign of Manasseh (696-642 B.C.), and the worship of the Lord, which Josiah attempted to restore in his reform (see 2 Kin. 22; 23). The reform began in 628 B.C. (see 2 Chr. 34:3 note) and was given fresh impetus by the discovery of the Book of the Law in 621 B.C. (2 Kin. 22:8). Jeremiah's call came in 626 B.C. (1:2 note). His early ministry coincides with Josiah's reform. Jeremiah testifies, however, to the reform's failure to make significant impact on the people's lives, as the religious abuses of Manasseh reemerged under Josiah's successors.

Characteristics and Themes. Jeremiah's message moved through phases that

do not correspond exactly to the structure of the book: (a) He called Judah to repent and avoid judgment that would otherwise come (e.g., 7:1-15). (b) He announced that the time for repentance was past, since judgment was now determined against the people (19:10, 11 notes). Judgment is the dominant note in the book, and is understood as the invocation of the final curse of the covenant, namely, loss of the Promised Land (Lev. 26:31-33; Deut. 28:49-68). (c) The Lord would save His people, or a remnant of them, through the exile (24:4-7 notes). Though the Babylonians would prevail over Judah at the Lord's command, this would be for a limited time only-Babylon, in its turn, would also fall (25:9, 11, 12). This prophecy was fulfilled in 539 B.C., when Babylon was defeated by an alliance of Persians and Medes under Cyrus, paving the way for the exiles of Judah to return (50:3; 51:1, 27, 28; 2 Chr. 36:20-23). This promise of eventual deliverance was Jeremiah's answer to the false prophets who had constantly challenged his message of judgment (28:1-4).

Jeremiah also had a message of salvation, but only on the other side of judgment (29:11-14). That message is crystallized in the prophecy of the new covenant (central text: 31:31-34). The new covenant prophecy is built around the main ingredients of the Mosaic covenant at Sinai: it spoke of God's desire to have a relationship with His chosen people, and of the requirement upon them to return His love with obedience (Ex. 19:3-6; Deut. 7:6-11). The new covenant speaks of the empowerment of God's people to obey Him (31:33 note, 32:40 note). Although it is promised in national terms (31:31 and note), it is something new, which the New Testament shows to be fulfilled in the greater "Israel of God" (Gal. 6:16) through Christ (22:30 note; 23:5 note; 30:9; 31:33 note; 33:18 note).

Jeremiah reveals his personal involvement with his message more fully than the other prophets (but cf. Is. 22:4; Mic. 1:8, 9), and he feels the agony of the people at the approach of the Babylonian armies, even before they feel it themselves (4:19-21; 10:19-22; 14:19-22). He also feels the passion of the Lord concerning the sin he witnesses (8:21-9:3 notes). His role is mediatorial in nature. This role is most poignant in the series of passages often referred to as the prophet's "Confessions" (11:18-20; 12:1-4; 15:10-18; 17:14-18; 18:19-23; 20:7-18). In these he expresses his anguish at the great burden of his prophetic calling, prays for vengeance on his personal enemies, and even accuses the Lord of having forced or deceived him (15:18; 20:7). Some of these prayers elicit answers from the Lord containing rebuke and reassurance (11:21-23; 12:5, 6; 15:19-21). The reassurance to Jeremiah in 15:19-21 is later echoed in a prayer of Ephraim, which receives its own answer (31:18-20). The Lord's good intention toward Jeremiah, therefore, becomes an earnest of His intended faithfulness to the whole people, through and beyond the imminent judgment.

The book contains various materials that make reading it as a continually unfolding narrative difficult. Much of Jeremiah comprises poetic oracles spoken by the prophet (e.g., chs. 2-6). At other times an argument is developed in a style that is sermonic or prosaic (e.g., 7:1-15). There is also third-person narrative about the prophet himself, presumably penned by someone else (e.g., 37-45), and ch. 52 happens to be an editorial appendix (see the last sentence of 51:64). The composition is therefore complicated, as might be expected from the length of Jeremiah's ministry alone (25:3), and conveys the full breadth and force of Jeremiah's ministry from the perspective of the fulfillment of his repeated warnings of coming punishment.

If the work was completed during the Exile, the latest historical point reached in the book, the purpose would be to chasten the exiles by encouraging them to ponder the meaning of their exile. At the same time it seeks to engender hope, since the prophet who had pronounced judgment, and had been proven right, had also preached a message of Judah's eventual restoration to the land and the nation's privileged relationship with God. Jeremiah evidently was assisted by Baruch in compiling the book, and Baruch may also have recorded the third-person narratives.

A clue to the procedure by which the various prophesies and sermons might have become a book is found in 36:4-6, where Baruch writes down all the words "from Jeremiah's mouth" (text note, v. 4). When the scroll is destroyed by Jehoiakim, the Lord commands Jeremiah to rewrite the scroll, with more words added. Reference is also made in 51:60 to Jeremiah recording his prophesies in a book.

The contents of the book are not arranged in chronological order, but rather thematically. Chapters 21-24 are framed by prophecies concerning each of Josiah's successors up to (but excluding) Zedekiah. Similarly chs. 35; 36 refer back to the reign of Jehoiakim, after scenes which involved Zedekiah.

Outline of Jeremiah

I. The Call of the Prophet (ch. 1)

II. Oracles Chiefly of Judgment on Judah (chs. 2-20)

A. Calls to Repent and Images of Judgment (chs. 2-6)

B. The Lord’s Freedom to Judge His People (chs. 7-10)

C. The Covenant Broken: First Confessions (chs. 11-13)

D. The Drought; Jeremiah as Intercessor (chs. 14;15)

E. Signs of Coming Judgmetn and a Confession (16:1-17:18)

F. A Sermon About the Sabbath (17:19-27)

G. The Potter, the Lord's Purposes, and the Trials of Jeremiah (chs. 18-20)

III. The End of the Davidic Dynasty; Salvation Only Through Exile (chs. 21-24)

A. Judgment Against Kings (chs. 21;22)

B. Judgment Against Prophets (ch. 23)

C. The Remaining Figs (ch. 24)

IV. The Necessity of Babylonian Dominance over the Nations (chs. 25-29)

A. Seventy Years of Captivity (ch.25)

B. Arrest and Trial of Jeremiah (ch. 26)

C. The False Prophets (chs. 27-29)

V. Promises of Restoration (chs. 30-33)

A. Return to the Land (ch. 30)

B. The New Covenant (ch. 31)

C. Certainty of the Lord's Deliverance (chs. 32;33)

VI. Jerusalem's Last Days (chs. 34-39)

A. Rejection of the Word of the Lord (chs. 34-36)

B. Imprisonments of Jeremiah (chs. 37;38)

C. The Fall of Jerusalem (ch. 39)

VII. The Aftermath of the Fall of Jerusalem (chs. 40-45)

A. The Governorship and Assassination of Gedaliah (40:1-41:10)

B. The Flight to Egypt; Prophecies There (41:11 – 44:30)

C. The Promise to Baruch (ch. 45)

VIII. Oracles of Judgment Against the Nations (chs. 46-51)

A. Against Egypt (ch. 46)

B. Against Philistia (ch. 47)

C. Against Moab (ch. 48)

D. Against Ammon (49:1-6)

E. Against Edom (49:7-22)

F. Against Damascus (49:23-27)

G. Against Arabian Tribes (49:28-33)

H. Against Elam (49:34-39)

I. Against Babylon (chs. 50;51)

IX. Appendix: the Fall of Jerusalem (ch. 52)

Lamentations

The Book of Lamentations

Author. The Book of Lamentations is traditionally attributed to the prophet Jeremiah. This has been true at least since the time of the Septuagint, the Greek translation of the Old Testament (c. 250 s.c.), where a note about the prophet's authorship of the book appears as a heading before the first verse. The idea of Jeremiah as the author may have been encouraged by 2 Chr. 35:25, where we are told that the prophet composed laments for King Josiah. There is no direct evidence in the book itself that Jeremiah was its author, although passages in the work distinctly recall his character and language, especially ch. 3 (Lam. 3:48-51; Jer. 14:17). However, since the book consists of five different poems that vary somewhat in style, sometimes seeming to be spoken by an individual (ch. 3) and sometimes by a community (ch. 5), it may be that the poems come from different pens.

Date and Occasion. The link be tween Lamentations and Jeremiah remains plausible, however, not only because of similar expressions, but also because of the setting and theme of the poems. The setting is clearly Judah, particularly Jerusalem, and almost certainly the period after the fall of the kingdom of Judah to the Babylonians in 586 B.C. and before the restoration of exiles in 538 s.c. The lament concerning the loss of Judah's king (2:2, 9), in distinction from other devastations of Jerusalem, fixes this occasion for the laments.

A setting during the period of the Babylonian exile makes Lamentations a fitting sequel to the Book of Jeremiah. As Jeremiah had foretold the fall of Jerusalem, Lamentations expresses the pain of the event itself.

Characteristics and Themes. The five chapters of the book are five poems. These poems take the form of laments, such as appear in other books of the Old Testament, principally the Psalms. Laments (both of the community and the individual) have certain typical characteristics, of which the most common are: (a) complaint about adversity, which the Lord either tolerated or even caused; (b) confession of trust; (c) appeal for deliverance, on the grounds of the Lord's character and His covenant; and (d) certainty of a hearing, often with an assurance that the enemies and persecutors will in turn experience the wrath of God (Ps. 74). The Book of Lamentations has these typical marks, though it represents a unique set of variations upon them. It is sometimes compared with a particular kind of lament, the funeral lament (Amos 5:1-3), but it does not quite fit this category, because Jerusalem is not uniformly portrayed as "dead."

The clearest evidence for meter in Hebrew poetry is the Book of Lamentations, which seems to use a line of five beats divided three-two. This meter is called qinah, after the Hebrew name for Lamentations. It is most often found in poetry of this sorrowful kind.

A second poetic form found in Lamentations is the acrostic, in which lines or sets of lines are arranged according to the twenty-two letters of the Hebrew alphabet. Each line or group of lines begins with the succeeding letter. This method may indicate that the poet is giving a complete treatment of the subject matter. The acrostic also provides a form for the literary expression of grief, allowing the writer to deal with themes that are almost too deep for words.

The purpose of Lamentations cannot be stated in a single word. In a sense its production was itself a way of coming to terms with the destruction of Zion. The center of gravity is the wrath of God against His people. God's wrath is taken to be just. Judah had sinned, and the prophets had given God's warning. Amos had spoken long before of a day of the Lord against His people (Amos 5:18), a day that now had come (Lam. L 12). Lamentations does not express total perplexity, as Job may at times appear to do. Instead, it justifies God's punishment of Judah and offers a vindication of the prophets who had predicted it.

Lamentations is anything but a work of passive resignation. God's wrath is accepted, but not without great emotional resistance. Could God behave like the enemy of His own people, and drive them to terrors that are painful even to describe (2:4, 5, 20-22)? Although the writer understands the justice of God, the agony and bewilderment of the event can be freely expressed. The book retains its power in times of anguish and sorrow.

Yet in his anguish this poet of the Exile is able to affirm that God is still merciful and faithful (3:22-36). This is the covenant God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, whose faithfulness to the patriarchs was a continuing foundation for new appeals to Israel and Judah to put their trust in Him (Mic. 7:20). Lamentations may be counted, perhaps with Abraham himself, as one of the supreme examples in the Old Testament of faith in God. Jeremiah had prophesied that there would be a definite end to the Babylonian exile (Jer. 25:11). Lamentations looks for such an end, and even hopes that Judah's enemies will be judged for their crimes against her. In this hope there is an understanding of the sovereignty of God over all the nations, the sovereignty that embraces all mysteries (3:37-39). In the days before His own cry of abandonment (Matt. 27:46) and the mystery of His redemptive suffering, Jesus made His own lament over

Jerusalem (Matt. 23:37-39; Luke 13:34, 35). The solemnity and compassion of

His words expresses the goodness and severity of God that undergirds the gospel (Rom. 11:22, 23).

Lamentations points beyond the humiliation of Jerusalem to the humiliation and exaltation of Christ. With this anchor, the world can know that God is good, and He will do good in His time ". .. to those who wait for Him" (3:25).

Outline of Lamentations

I. Jerusalem Once Great But Now Devastated (ch. 1)

II. The Lord’s Anger with Judah (ch. 2)

III. The Grief of the Community (ch. 3)

IV. Zion’s Degradation (ch. 4)

V. Disaster and Petition (ch. 5)

Ezekiel

The Book of Ezekiel

Author. We have no information about the prophet Ezekiel beyond what is known from the book bearing his name. Nebuchadnezzar had captured Jerusalem in 597 B.C. and carried away King Jehoiachin, the royal family, and the leading citizens and craftsmen (2 Kin. 24:14). Ezekiel was among this first group of deportees. His wife died during the captivity shortly before Jerusalem was destroyed by the Babylonians in 586 B.C. (24:15-18). If the prophet was thirty years old when he began his prophetic ministry (1:1), and this date corresponds to the fifth year of the exile of Jehoiachin (1:2, 3), Ezekiel was about twenty-six when he was carried into exile. The last date recorded in the book (April 26, 571 B.C., 29:17) shows that Ezekiel's ministry spanned at least twenty-three years, until he was about fifty. The circumstances of his death are not known.

Ezekiel was a priest (1:3). Priests ordinarily began their temple service at age thirty. However, in the year he would have begun his temple service Ezekiel was living in Babylon, seven hundred miles from Jerusalem. It was at this significant age in his life that God called Ezekiel to be a prophet. His prophetic endowment was recognized by the leaders among the exiles (8:1; 20:1).

"Ezekiel" means "God makes strong, hardens" (see note on 3:8). God addresses Ezekiel many times by the phrase "Son of man," meaning "person, human being." The phrase in this book emphasizes human frailty and insignificance as compared with the transcendence of God (contrast its use as a messianic title in Dan. 7:13; Matt. 26:64; Mark 14:62; Rev. 14:14).

Date and Occasion. Ezekiel witnessed much of the decline and fall of the Assyrian Empire. In place of the Assyrians the armies of Babylon under King Nebuchadnezzar were emerging as the dominant power in the ancient Near East. The city of Babylon was located in the region of Chaldea, and so the names "Chaldeans" and "Babylonians" are used interchangeably by biblical writers. The Babylonians and the armies of Pharaoh Necho of Egypt periodically fought over the territory formerly subject to the Assyrians along the coast of Syria and Israel; the kings of Judah in Jerusalem were caught in the middle.

Jehoiakim was placed on the throne of Jerusalem by Pharaoh Necho (2 Kin. 23:34) in 609 B.C. After the Egyptians were defeated by the Babylonians

at Carchemish in 605 B.C., Jehoiakim switched his allegiance and became a vassal of Nebuchadnezzar. He remained a Babylonian vassal for three years, and then switched his allegiance back to Egypt (2 Kin. 24:1). Jehoiakim died in the same month Nebuchadnezzar set out on an expedition to punish him. He was succeeded by his son Jehoiachin, who was left to face Nebuchadnezzar's wrath. After a brief siege, Jehoiachin was taken into captivity with much of the population of Jerusalem, including Ezekiel, in 597 B.C. (2 Kin. 24:8-12). Ezekiel settled with a colony of Jewish captives, possibly near Tel Abib, on "the River Chebar" (1:1), a canal flowing into the Euphrates southeast of Babylon.

Nebuchadnezzar installed Zedekiah, Jehoiachin's uncle, as ruler of Judah. He ruled until the destruction of Jerusalem in 586 B.C. Though in this way Zedekiah became the last king of Judah, Jehoiachin was considered the last legitimate ruler from the Davidic line. Dates in the Book of Ezekiel are all in terms of the years of Jehoiachin's exile. The reign of Zedekiah was characterized by a similar vacillation between Egypt and Babylon (17:15-19).

The exiles and many of those remaining in Jerusalem hoped that the Exile would be short, that those who had been deported would soon be returned to the city, and that Jerusalem would be spared further disaster. There were false prophets who wrongly encouraged this belief. Since the Lord had chosen Jerusalem as His dwelling and had Himself defended the city in the past, people believed Jerusalem was inviolable. Ezekiel had to warn the exiles that a worse fate was yet in store for Jerusalem.

No other prophetic book contains as many chronological notices. Ezekiel was conscious of the relevance of his message to the immediate historical situation. The chronology for the latter half of the first millennium B.C. (including the time of Ezekiel) is known from chronological records in the Bible and other documents in a variety of languages from the ancient Near East. Astronomical observations recorded by ancient scribes enable us to correlate the ancient and modern calendars with a high degree of confidence. The Book of Ezekiel contains indications of the date at more than a dozen places (1:1, 2; 8:1; 20:1; 24:1, etc.). These dates fall between 593 and 573 B.C.

Characteristics and Themes. The Book of Ezekiel may be divided into three parts. In the first two, Ezekiel announces judgment on Jerusalem (1-24) and foreign nations (25-32). The first years of Ezekiel's ministry were concerned with the immediate prospects of Jerusalem. It is only after a messenger arrived reporting the destruction of Jerusalem (33:21, 22) that Ezekiel's preaching became dominated by the promises of restoration and mercy for the future (33-48).

This three-part structure (judgment against Israel, judgment against foreign nations, grace and mercy for Israel) can be found also in Isaiah and Zephaniah.

Ezekiel is the only prophetic book that is entirely autobiographical, written in the first person from the vantage point of the prophet himself. The work also contains a larger number of symbolic actions than any other prophetic book (3:22-26; 4:1-14; 5:1-4; 12:10-20; 21:6, 7, 18-24; 24:15-24; 37:15-28). See note on 4:1-3. Ezekiel identified closely with his own message: he suffered in his body the consequences of representing God before the nation and of representing the nation under God's judgment. Ezekiel also uses many parables (chs. 15; 16; 17; 19; 23) and proverbs (12:21, 22; 16:44; 18:2, 3). The prophecy of Ezekiel had a profound effect on the Book of Revelation; many themes from this prophet recur in that book.

Several themes in Ezekiel's teaching are used with some frequency.

1. ***The Holiness and Transcendence of God***. Revelation to Ezekiel is often mediated by an angelic guide (chs. 8; 40-48). When Ezekiel does see a vision of God, it is "the appearance of the likeness of the glory of the LORD," God Himself remaining transcendent and hidden (1:28 note). God is Judge, all-knowing and all-powerful, surrounded in splendor and ruling over the affairs of nations.

God is holy. Sin is an affront to His holiness and must be judged. Israel is a rebellious nation, but the Exile is designed to produce a purged nation, a remnant ready to live in obedience before God (6:8; 9:8; 11:12, 13; 12:16; 14:22, 23).

2. ***The Grace and Mercy of God***. God's judgment of Judah and Jerusalem does not frustrate His purpose in electing Israel. God will show mercy to a remnant; these will inherit His promises afresh and enjoy restoration to their land. God will again be in their midst (48:35; cf. 11:20; 14:11; 36:23, 27, 28). The nation will again live under a Davidic prince (37:24, 25; 45:7) who will rule righteously (34:23). God will give to His people a new heart and a new spirit (36:24-28).

3. ***The Sovereignty of God***. God rules over the affairs and destiny not only of Israel, but also of all other nations (chs. 25-32). The words God spoke through the prophet will be performed.

4. ***Individual Responsibility***. The Exile had come about in part as a result of the cumulative guilt of generations of Israelites who had lived in rebellion against God and His law. While guilt always has a corporate dimension, Ezekiel, more than any prophet before him, emphasized the individual consequences of

disobedience and transgression. See notes on 18:1-32; 33:1-20.

Outline of Ezekiel

I. Judgment on Judah and Jerusalem (chs. 1-24)

- A. The Prophet's Call (chs. 1-3)
- B. Symbolic Actions About the Destruction of Jerusalem (chs. 4;5)
- C. Oracle Against the Mountains of Israel (ch. 6)
- D. The End (ch. 7)
- E. A Vision of Judgment in Jerusalem (chs. 8-11)
- F. Oracles About the Sins of Israel and Jerusalem (chs. 12-24)
    1. Two Symbolic Actions (12:1-2)
    2. Popular Proverbs (12:21-28)
    3. False Prophets and Prophetesses (ch. 13)
    4. Consequences of Idolatry (ch. 14)
    5. Parable of the Vine (ch. 15)
    6. Jerusalem as Child and Harlot (ch. 16)
    7. Parable of Two Eagles (ch. 17)
    8. Individual Responsibility (ch. 18)
    9. Dirge Allegory for Israel's Kings (ch. 19)
    10. A Review of the Nation's History and Her Future (ch. 20)
    11. Babylon, God's Sword (ch. 21)
    12. The Sins of Jerusalem (ch. 22)
    13. A Parable of Two Sisters (ch. 23)
    14. A Cooking Pot (24:1-14)
    15. The Death of Ezekiel's Wife (24:15-27)

R the II. Oracles Against Foreign Nations (chs. 25-32)

- A. Ammon (25:1-7)
- B. Moab (25:8-11)
- C. Edom (25:12-14)

D. Philistia (25:15-17)

E. Tyre (26:1-28:19)

F. Sidon (28:20-26)

G. Egypt (chs. 29-32)

III. Blessing for Judah and Jerusalem (chs. 33-48)

A. Ezekiel the Watchman (ch. 33)

B. The Shepherds of Israel (ch. 34)

C. Against Edom (ch. 35)

D. A Prophecy to the Mountains of Israel (ch. 36)

E. The Valley of the Dry Bones (37:1-14)

F. Two Sticks Becoming One (37:15-28)

G. Gog and Magog (chs. 38; 39)

H. A Vision of a Restored Jerusalem (chs. 40-48)

1. The Plan of the New Temple (chs. 40-42)

2. Regulations for the New Temple (chs. 43; 44)

3. The Holy District in the Land (45:1-8)

4. Regulations for Offerings (45:9-46:24)

5. A Life-Giving River (47:1-12)

6. Boundaries and Allotment of the Land (47:13-48:29)

7. The City Gates (48:30-35)

Daniel

The Book of Daniel

Author. The authorship and date of the Book of Daniel have been matters of considerable debate among biblical scholars. The dispute centers on the way Daniel's prophecies and visions look forward to a succession of four ancient empires, beginning with the Babylonian (chs. 2; 7; 11). Daniel describes in great detail the historical relations between the Seleucid and Ptolemaic kingdoms just prior to and during the time of Antiochus IV Epiphanes (ch. 11). To account for this detailed knowledge, many scholars conclude that the book must have been written by an unknown author about 170 B.C., during the lifetime of Antiochus IV Epiphanes and not during the time of Daniel, who was taken to Babylon in 605 B.C. However, representations in the book itself indicate that Daniel was its author (9:2; 10:2) and that it was written shortly after the capture of Babylon by Cyrus in 539 B.C. Also, Jesus quotes the prediction of "the abomination of desolation" found in this book as having been "spoken of by Daniel the prophet" (Matt. 24:15).

Date and Occasion. The arguments that have been offered for dating the Book of Daniel during the time of Antiochus IV Epiphanes involve three basic issues: (a) the nature of Old Testament prophecy; (b) historical problems; and (c) the Hebrew and Aramaic language in the book. Each of these topics needs to be considered in turn.

Generally speaking, the prophets of Israel were primarily concerned with the religious and social circumstances confronting their contemporaries, rather than with predicting events in the distant future. When the prophets did predict future events, it was normally of incidents in the near term, such as Jeremiah's prophecies about the imminent fall of Jerusalem to the Babylonians. Daniel's vision concerning the "king of the North" and the "king of the South" parallels exactly the history of relations between the Seleucid and Ptolemaic empires existing at the time of Antiochus IV Epiphanes (11:2-39 and notes), while the description of the circumstances surrounding the death of the king (11:40-12:3) does not correspond to what is otherwise known about Antiochus's death. On this basis some scholars argue that the Book of Daniel was written in Antiochus's time, shortly before his death. However, the idea that Israelite prophets did not predict events in the more distant future depends on the assumption that the prophecies in Daniel are late, as also those of Isaiah concerning Cyrus (Is. 44:28; 45:1). It

may also be the result of a rejection of prophecy in general.

Interpreters of the Book of Daniel who favor a late date of writing also propose that there are serious historical problems in the narratives about Daniel's experiences in Babylon, particularly concerning Belshazzar's relationship to Nebuchadnezzar (5:2 note) and the identity of "Darius the Mede" (6:1 note). They identify the four kingdoms foreseen by Daniel (chs. 2; 7) as the Babylonians, the Medes, the Persians, and finally the Greeks (including the Seleucids and Ptolemies). This identification is difficult because there is no evidence for a Median kingdom in an interval between the Babylonian and Persian kingdoms. Cyrus, the Persian king (550-530 B.C.), conquered the Medes in 549 B.C. and the Babylonians in 539 B.C. (5:1, 31 notes).

On the other hand, scholars who date the book in the time of Daniel interpret the sequence of kingdoms as the Babylonian, Medo-Persian, Greek, and finally Roman empires. They point to the reference to "the Medes and Persians" in 5:28 as evidence that Daniel considered them as together constituting one kingdom

Concerning the date of the language used in Daniel, it first must be noted that a large segment (2:4-7:28) is written in Aramaic rather than Hebrew. The reason for the change of language is not known. Some scholars have argued that the Aramaic is of a late type, pointing to the use of several Greek loanwords for musical instruments (3:5 note) as other evidence of a late date. Neither argument is convincing. There is abundant evidence of contacts between the Greeks and the Near East prior to the time of Alexander the Great. Such contacts are sufficient to explain the appearance of the Greek loanwords. The Aramaic and Hebrew of Daniel can be dated anywhere between the late sixth and early second centuries B.C. In other words, the language does not lend much weight to either the early or the late date proposal.

Interpretive Difficulties. The authorship and date of Daniel are not the only interpretive difficulties posed by the book. There are significant variations in overall approach to the book. These variations fall into three main categories. The first approach is taken by those who conclude that the book was written in the time of Antiochus Epiphanes. According to this view all references to events before the time of Antiochus are ordinary history, written after the events described. The only genuine prediction in the book would be of the anticipated death of Antiochus and the expected intervention

of God to establish His kingdom. However, Antiochus did not die in the manner depicted (11:36--12:3 note) and the kingdom did not materialize as apparently anticipated. See notes on 2:44; 7:14, 18.

A second, more traditional view finds the primary stress of the predictions of the book to be on the First Advent of Christ. This approach is usually associated with an amillennial or postmillennial eschatological position.

A third view finds one focus of the book to be primarily on Antiochus Epiphanes and the persecution of God's people during his reign. The other focus is on the divine intervention in human affairs at the end of time when God's kingdom is established. Stress does not fall on the First Advent of Christ (chs. 2; 9 notes), but rather on Antiochus and the Second Coming of Christ. This approach is usually associated with a premillennial eschatological position. Within this approach there are many differences in the interpretation of details by various commentators.

Characteristics and Themes. Daniel contains two different types of material. Six historical narratives are found in chs. 1-6, while four visions are found in chs. 7-12. The visions are almost exclusively predictive. Among the six narratives, ch. 2 contains a vision given to Nebuchadnezzar and Daniel's interpretation of it.

Reflection on the content of the historical narratives reveals that they are not a connected historical discourse, but are independent units placed together for a specific purpose. The narratives do not give a history of Israel under Babylonian or Persian rule, nor do they give a biographical history of Daniel or his friends. The common thread is an emphasis on the way the absolute sovereignty of God operates in the affairs of all nations (2:47; 3:17, 18; 4:28-37; 5:18-31; 6:25-28). Jerusalem may be destroyed with its temple in ruins, God's people may be in exile, and wicked rulers may seem triumphant, but God remains supreme. God is greater than all circumstances, and His' people should be true to Him in whatever situation they find themselves. Depiction of this truth is the controlling principle of Dan. 1-6.

Nebuchadnezzar's vision in ch. 2 shows that history is not under the control of other gods, nor can its mystery be discovered by human manipulation. History is under the control of the God who is utterly free to direct it and to reveal it as He pleases (Rev. 5:9). According to His sovereign pleasure He will intervene among the kingdoms of this world and establish a universal kingdom that will endure forever.

The visions (chs. 7-12) contain predictions of times in the future when this truth will be of particular importance for God's people. Although the Jews were persecuted during the time of their subjection to Babylonian and Persian rulers, there was no widespread and systematic attempt to abolish their faith. This did not happen until the time of Antiochus IV, who named himself "Epiphanes," meaning "God manifest," and ruled in the Seleucid Empire from 175-164 s.c. Antiochus tried to force the Jews to accept the culture of Hellenism and to abandon their religious practices. Many Jews submitted, but others refused and suffered severe persecution. One of the major reasons for writing the Book of Daniel was to prepare God's people for the time of Antiochus Epiphanes and to give them encouragement for this period of persecution. At the same time the book looks beyond the time of Antiochus Epiphanes to the coming of Christ. It is Christ who will destroy all human kingdoms and establish His eternal kingdom of righteousness and peace.

In addition to these overarching themes of Daniel, certain key concepts are relevant to discussion of the book. One of these is the "time of trouble" (12:1), commonly taken to be the "great tribulation" that is to precede the Second Advent of Christ (Matt. 24:21; Luke 21:23; Rev. 2:22; 7:14). Matthew links this trouble with "the abomination of desolation" (Matt. 24:15) predicted by Daniel (cf. Dan. 9:27; 12:11) and fulfilled by the Antichrist (the "man of sin" in 2 Thess. 2:3, 4).

The "Antichrist" may also be included in Daniel's theology (Dan. 7:8, 20-22, 24-27; 11:36-45). The word does not occur outside the letters of John (1 John 2:18, 22; 4:3; 2 John 7), but references to a person of satanic hatred who appears in the final days of human history before Christ's Second Advent are found in both testaments. The Antichrist sets up the "abomination of desolation" (Dan. 11:31; Matt. 24:15), exalts himself as a god (Dan. 11:36-39; 2 Thess. 2:3, 4) and is ultimately destroyed by Christ upon His return (Dan. 11:45; 2 Thess. 2:8 [cf. Is. 11:4]; Rev. 19:20).

The idea of the millennium also occurs in discussions of Daniel. The term "millennium" is derived from the Latin word for "one thousand" and designates the thousand-year period described in Rev. 20. The nature of the thousand years is understood differently by three general schools of interpretation, classified as follows: (a.) Premillennialists believe that the thousand years is a worldwide kingdom of peace and righteousness on earth to be established on earth after the Second Coming of Christ (Is. 2:1-5; 11:1-10). (b.) Postmillennialists believe that the thousand years is a period of

peace and righteousness to be established through the worldwide preaching of the gospel, resulting in the conditions described in passages such as Is. 2:1-5; 11:1-10. (c.) Amillennialists consider the thousand years as a figurative reference to the present age of the gospel. Accordingly, the millennium is not viewed as a future political order, but the spiritual kingdom of Christ's rule in the church.

In the postmillennial and amillennial views, the number "one thousand" is usually taken figuratively to mean a large unit of time rather than precisely 1,000 years.

Outline of Daniel

I. The Narratives (chs. 1-6)

A. God’s Vindication of Daniel and His Friends for Their Faithfulness (ch. 1)

B. Daniel’s Interpretation of Nebuchadnezzar’s Dream (ch. 2)

C. God’s Deliverance of Daniel’s Friends from the Fiery Furnace (ch. 3)

D. God’s Judgment on Nebuchadnezzar (ch. 4)

E. God’s Judgment on Belshazzar (ch. 5)

F. God’s Deliverance of Daniel from the Lions’ Den (ch. 6)

II. Daniel’s Visions (chs. 7-12)

A. Vision of the Four Beasts and the Establishment of God’s Kingdom (ch.7)

B. Vision of the Ram and the Goat (ch. 8)

C. Vision of the Seventy Weeks (ch. 9)

D. Vision of the Angel and the Future History of God’s People (chs. 10-12)

1. The Angel’s Message to Daniel (10:1-11:1)

2. Near Eastern History from the Time of Daniel to Antiochus IV Epiphanes (11:2-20)

3. The Rule of Antiochus IV Epiphanes (11:21:35)

a. His Accession and Character (11:21-35)

b. His Career (11:25:31)

c. The Destiny of God’s People During His Rule (11:32-35)

4. The Rule of the Antichrist (11:36-12:3)

a. His Character (11:36-39)

b. His Activities (11:40-45)

c. The Destiny of God’s People During His Rule (12:1-3)

5. A Final Message to Daniel (12:4-13)

Hosea

The Book of Hosea

Author. Little is known about the background and training of the author of this book, the prophet Hosea, son of Beeri (1:1). Though it is not clearly stated in the book, Hosea's familiarity with the geography (4:15; 5: 1, 8; 6:8, 9; 9:15; 10:5; 12:11) and history of the northern kingdom of Israel (5:13; 7:7, 11; 8:4, 9-14) suggests that he was a native of the northern kingdom.

Date and Occasion. The Book of Hosea came from his prophetic ministry, which embraced the critical years of religious decline and decay in the northern kingdom, from about 750 B.C. until a few years before the fall of Samaria in 722 B.C. Hosea's preaching focused on Israel's breach of her covenantal relationship with God, mixing the pure worship of the Lord with the idolatry of the surrounding peoples (religious syncretism), and on the impending judgment. However, Hosea's proclamation of the nature of God's love sounds a more positive note in the book. For a discussion of Hosea's marriage and family life, see "Interpretive Diffi culties" below.

During her final years, the northern kingdom of Israel was in a state of political and social decline. The economic prosperity and political security that the nation experienced during the reign of Jeroboam II (c. 793-753 B.C.) was followed by a period of political and social chaos and religious decline under the next six kings, who reigned for a combined period of twenty-five years (2 Kin. 15:8-17:41). Four of these kings were assassinated by those who usurped their thrones (Zechariah, Shallum, Pekahiah, and Pekah); one became a political prisoner (Hoshea, 2 Kin. 17:3, 4); and only one was succeeded by his son (Menahem, 2 Kin. 15:23).

Hosea's preaching reflects both the relative calm the kingdom experienced under Jeroboam II (2:5, 8, 13) and the later turmoil in domestic (7:3-7; 13:10, 11) and foreign affairs (7:8-12; 12:1). The Syro-Ephraimite war in particular (735-732 B.C.; 2 Kin. 15:27-30; 16:5-9; Is. 7:1-9) seems to stand behind Hosea's message in 5:8-10. Pekah of Israel had formed an alliance with Rezin of Syria in order to resist the expanding Assyrian empire ruled by Tiglath-Pileser III. Pekah then attacked Judah, which had refused to join the alliance with Syria. Assyria responded to Judah's request for assistance by attacking Syria's capital, Damascus, and systematically subjugating extensive territory in the northern kingdom of Israel.

The northern kingdom's political vacillation between Egypt and Assyria is also reflected in the text (5:13; 7:11; 8:9, 10; 9:3; 11:5; 12:1), This vacillation brought a

further attack by the Assyrians, the arrest of King Hoshea, the siege of Samaria, and finally the end of the northern kingdom. Although this end is expected by Hosea, the fall of Samaria in 722 B.C. had not yet occurred at the time of his prophecy (13:16).

The northern kingdom was in a state of spiritual decline during the final phase of its history. The ancient faith of Israel, which Hosea describes so beautifully using analogies of marital and parental love (2:14-23; 11:1-4), had become polluted by elements of the Canaanite fertility religion. Such fertility cults focused especially on the worship of Baal, a god thought to be the giver of rain and fertility. The Israelites incorporated elements of the Canaanite fertility religion into the orthodox faith, notably sexual rites that included ritual prostitution and drunken orgies (4:10-13). The worship of the Lord and the worship of Baal (whose name lit. means "lord" or "master") became intermingled and even identified (2:5-13). Religious corruption evidenced itself not only in this popular, syncretistic form of religion, sometimes called a "baalized" form of Yahweh worship, but also in the lives of the religious leaders. Through corruption, greed, and hardness of heart they not only neglected to instruct the people in the true faith, but also tolerated, and in some cases even sponsored, syncretistic religion (4:4-13; 5:1; 6:9).

Interpretive Difficulties. The question of how to interpret the personal events of Hosea's life that symbolically parallel his prophetic message has long perplexed readers of the Book of Hosea. Are the details given in chs. I and 3 about Hosea's family life to be understood literally or allegorically? Because of the moral perplexity posed by the holy God's command that Hosea marry a prostitute, throughout the ages there always have been interpreters who have understood the details of Hosea's married life allegorically. Others, arguing that 1:2 refers to the future, reason that Gomer became a prostitute only after the birth of their first child. Still others, advocating a modified literal reading, argue that Gomer was not a common prostitute but rather a woman involved in cultic prostitution related to the fertility religion of Baal. However, the prophet's actual marriage to an unfaithful wife would make the analogy with the Lord's relationship to Israel most vivid, and this seems to be what the text intends.

Similarly, questions have been asked about Hosea's children. Their names, like that of the child born to Isaiah and the prophetess in Is. 8:1-4, are intended to have symbolic significance (cf. Is. 7:3; Ezek. 23). The names given to Hosea's children (Jezreel, Lo-Ruhamah, and Lo-Ammi; 1:4, 6, 9 and notes) purposely illustrate Hosea's message about God's increasing displeasure with wayward Israel, but also convey the message of hope, renewal, love, and restoration (2:21-23 notes).

A related problem centers on the relationship between ch. 1, which presents a

third-person account of Hosea's marriage to Gomer and the birth of their children, and ch. 3, which is an account in the first person of God's instructions to Hosea about loving an unfaithful woman. Although these chapters have most often been regarded as a chronologically sequential account of a single marriage, some argue that two different women and marriages are described in these chapters. Still others have suggested that the chapters are not sequential, but rather describe the same episode. Textual and translation difficulties in the Hebrew text stand behind these different views. For example, the word "again" in 3:1 stands between "said" and "go" in the Hebrew, and it could mean either "The LORD said again" or "The LORD said, `Go again.' " Although these debates continue, the profound meaning of the prophet's marriage(s) as a picture of the Lord's relationship with Israel is clear.

Characteristics and Themes. Hosea's book is not about Hosea, but about God and His relationship to His covenant people, Israel. God emphasizes His uniqueness and sovereignty (12:9; 13:4). Because of His unique holiness (11:9), adoration of Him is the only proper response (3:5), and He tolerates no rival claim. As Sovereign, all is under His rule, whether fertility (2:8), Israel's history (5:14, 15), or the nations (10:10).

A number of themes recur throughout the book, themes that continue to carry religious significance for the community of faith today (14:9 note). The theme of covenantal unfaithfulness, movingly symbolized by Hosea's relationship with his promiscuous wife, permeates the book. Closely related to this theme is that of repentance. Hosea calls wayward Israel to return to the Lord in order to reestablish the intimate relationship she earlier had experienced with Him in the wilderness period (2:7, 14, 19, 20). Promises of restoration, such as those in 1:11 and 2:23, will be fulfilled under the new covenant through Jesus Christ (Rom. 5:8; Eph. 2:4-10). The themes of unfaithfulness and repentance summon those within the covenant community to repent and to renew their love relationship with the Lord.

Another important theme in the book centers around what it means to "know" or "acknowledge" God (2:20; 4:1; 5:4; 6:3, 6; 13:4). This seems to be a technical term for covenant intimacy, loyalty, and obedience. The book teaches that true knowledge of God is not merely the possession of correct information about Him, but includes the intimacy typical of marriage and family life, an intimacy evidenced in worship, lifestyle, and loyalty to the covenant LORD. Hosea also warns that sin can delude people into thinking that they know and understand God, when in fact they are far from Him (8:2).

A polemic against religious syncretism (the mixture of true and false religion) also pervades the book (2:2-13; 4:10-19; 5:4; 9:1, 10). Over and over again Hosea

points to the sin of the northern kingdom, which tried to wed the worship of the covenant LORD to Canaanite religion with its deification of sex and nature. The impossibility of such a marriage warns the church to remain loyal in a culture that encourages compromise and acceptance of principles and beliefs incompatible with biblical doctrine. Moreover, Hosea's vivid depictions of sin remind believers about the nature and consequences of human sin: it incurs divine judgment (9:9; 13:12); it causes severe crises in nature and society (4:3); and it corrupts the human personality. People become like the objects of their love (9:10).

Hosea's message is enhanced through his effective use of imagery. The strongest and most extended metaphors derive from the human experience of intimacy. Using the image of human marriage (chs. 1-3) and family life (11:1-4, 10), Hosea depicts God and His relationship with His people. In other figurative images God is compared to moth and rot (5:12), winter and spring rains (6:3), a lion (5:14; 11: 10; 13:7-8), a leopard (13:7), a bear (13:8), and a cypress tree (14:8).17

Outline of Hosea

I. Superscription (1:1)

II. The Lesson from Hosea’s Family Life (1:2-3:5)

- A. Hosea’s Wife and Children: A Parable of Judment (1:2-2:1)
- B. Unfaithfulness and Punishment (2:2-13)
- C. Reconciliation and Restoration (2:14-23)
- D. Redeeming Wife and Nation (ch. 3)

III. Hosea’s Prophetic Message (chs. 4-14)

- A. The Charge of Failure to Acknowledge God (4:1-6:3)
  1. The Lord’s Case Against Israel (ch. 4)
  2. Charges Against the Priests and People (ch. 5)
  3. Guilt and Punishment (chs. 9;10)
  4. God’s Unfailing Love (ch. 11)
- B. The Charge of Breaking God’s Covenant (6:4-11:11)
  1. Unfaithfulness and Decadence (6:4-7:16)
  2. Announcement of Judgment (ch. 8)
  3. Guilt and punishment (chs. 9; 10)

4. God’s Unfailing Love (ch. 11)

C. The Charge of Faithlessness Toward the Lord (11:12-14:9)

1. Israel the Deceiver (11:12-12:14)

2. The End of Compassion (ch. 13)

3. Return and the Promise of Renewal (ch. 14)

Joel

The Book of Joel

Author. The prophet Joel is identified only as "Joel the son of Pethuel" (1:1). Joel's keen interest in Jerusalem, particularly in the temple and its functionaries (e.g., 1:9, 13, 14; 2:14-17, 32; 3:1, 6, 16, 17), suggests that he lived in Jerusalem and ministered as a temple prophet. Although he does not appear to have been a priest (1:9, 13; 2:17), Joel prayed on the people's behalf (1:19, 20).

Date and Occasion. Since the Book of Joel contains no clear indications of when it was written, it is difficult to date the work. The book's vocabulary, linguistic parallels to other prophetic books, historical allusions, location in the canon, and other clues have been used in effort to date the work. Some scholars date the book in the ninth century s.c., and others to the period just prior to the Jewish exile in Babylon during the sixth century R.c. But most scholars now prefer a date following this exile, some suggesting the early postexilic period (c. 520-500 B.C.), and others proposing a later date in the fifth or even the fourth century B.C. A date after the exile seems most convincing, although there is good reason to conclude with Calvin that the date of the book simply cannot be known with certainty.

Characteristics and Themes. The unity of Joel was challenged by biblical critics of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. These critics thought that the section describing events of the author's time (1: I 2:17) and the section dealing with future occurrences (2:18 3:21) were written by different authors. Today, however, most scholars accept the book's essential unity. Such features as the repeated theme of the "day of the LORD" (1:15; 2:1, 2, 11, 3l; 3:14) and other identical or closely similar phrases shared by both sections (2:2 and 2:31; 2:10-11 and 3:16; 2:10 and 3:15; 2:11 and 31; 2:17 and 3:2; 2:27 and 3:17) point to the book's unity.

Interpreters throughout the ages have been faced with the question of whether to interpret the locusts in the Book of Joel literally or figuratively. Historically, the majority of interpreters have understood the locusts as symbols of future enemies (e.g., one manuscript of the Septuagint [Greek Old Testament] understood the four kinds of locusts to symbolize the Egyptians, Assyrians, Greeks, and Romans). But present-day interpreters see these creatures, at least in ch. 1, as actual locusts. Joel indeed moves quickly from an accurate description of a real devastation by locusts in ch. 1 to a description of the dreadful locust-like army of the Lord that blends the literal and figurative in ch. 2. It seems then that the destruction by locusts that Joel

had seen became the vehicle for his prophecy proclaiming the need to repent in view of the coming day of the Lord.

The central message of the Book of Joel concerns the coming day of the Lord. Joel introduces that day in the context of the then-present destruction of the land's vegetation, a destruction that was a sign of judgment against the covenant community. Only their return to God would avert the imminent day of the Lord that would "come as destruction from the Almighty" (1:15). In this first instance then, Joel, like Amos (Amos 5:18-20; cf. Zeph. 1:7-13), declares that the day of the Lord is a day of judgment against God's own people. Similarly, in ch. 2 the day of the Lord is described as a "great and very terrible" day (2:11), "a day of darkness and gloominess, a day of clouds and darkness" (2:2) in which the Lord leads His army against Israel. However, in the second part of the book, Joel introduces a second prophetic tradition about the day of the Lord, namely, that the day of the Lord is a day of judgment against the enemies of His people, whom He will protect and bless (Ezek. 25-32; Jer. 46-51; Is. 13). On the day of the Lord, the nations will be accountable for their crimes against the Lord's people and will be judged accordingly (3:2-16, 19). But the people of the Lord's inheritance will enjoy His protection and be spiritually and physically blessed (2:28-32; 3:16-18, 20, 21).

Repentance is a key theme in Joel's prophetic message. The call to repentance is given not merely to a select number of the covenant community, but rather to all the Lord's people who are called to return to Him: young and old, men and women, leaders and followers, and even those who might otherwise be exempted from community responsibilities (nursing mothers and newlyweds, 1:13, 14; 2:15-17). The return to God that Joel calls for involves the whole person. Such repentance is to be manifested externally through such actions as mourning, weeping, crying out to the Lord, and fasting (1:13, 14; 2:15-17). But merely external or ritual manifestations of repentance are not adequate, and the Lord calls the people to show the sincerity of their repentance by returning to the Lord their God "with all your heart" (2:12, 13). Joel also reminds God's people that motivation for repentance lies firmly in the nature of God: "He is gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and of great kindness" (2:13). Joel stresses that the hope of restoration lies ultimately in God, who exercises His sovereign freedom and grace in granting repentance and forgiveness to the people.

The Book of Joel has had an important place in the life of the church. The New Testament indicates that Jesus and His followers were familiar with the writings of Joel. The book's influence is most evident in the New Testament passages that speak of the end times. They use Joel's vivid images to describe the day of the Lord and the plague of locusts (e.g., Mark 13:24; Luke 21:25; Rev. 6:9; 9:2). Also

important are the promises in Joel 2:28-32, which Peter quotes at Pentecost, claiming they have reached their fulfillment in the event of Pentecost (Acts 2:16-21). Paul in Rom. 10:13 also refers to the prophecy; he uses Joel 2:32 to show that "there is no distinction between Jew and Greek." Salvation is offered to all peoples. As Joel had said: "whoever calls on the name of the LORD shall be saved" (2:32).

The church has continued to find the teaching in the Book of Joel on the day of the Lord to be an important source of hope and comfort on the one hand, and a word of warning on the other. In times of distress and trouble, Christians have found the promises about the ultimate blessing, protection, and vindication of the Lord's covenant community to be consoling and inspiring. At the same time, Joel's graphic depiction of the dreadful aspects of the day of the Lord has served as a reminder of God's holiness and judgment and as a continuing call to wholehearted repentance and holiness of life.

Outline of Joel

I. Superscription (1:1)

II. Crises Demanding Repentance (1:2-2:17)

- A. Recent Devastation by Locust and Drought (1:2-20)
- B. Future Assault by the Lord’s Army (2:1-17)

III. Responses of the Covenant God (2:18 – 3:21)

- A. Physical Renewal of the Land (2:18-27)
- B. Spiritual Renewal of the Lord’s People (2:28-32)
- C. Final Judgment (ch. 3)
  - 1. Judgment of the Nations (3:1-15)
  - 2. Blessing on God’s People (3:16-21)

Amos

The Book of Amos

Author. Tekoa in Judah, a village some five miles south of Bethlehem, was the home of the prophet Amos (1:1). He was a man of several trades: shepherd (1:1), livestock breeder, and dresser of sycamore-fig trees (7:14). Although his background was rural and apparently isolated from centers of learning, Amos clearly knew the surrounding nations and was acquainted with international history (1:3-2:3). He was also familiar with both the history of God's covenant people and the covenant itself, as his numerous references to the Law make clear. Amos had not studied to be a prophet (7:14), but the Lord sovereignly called him to this office. He ministered primarily to the northern kingdom of Israel (7:15), although his prophecies also addressed the sins of Judah (2:4, 5; cf. 9:11).

Date and Occasion. Amos's prophetic ministry took place during the reigns of Uzziah (sometimes called Azariah) of Judah (792-740 s.c.) and Jeroboam II of Israel (793-753 a.c.). During Jeroboam's reign there was peace between Judah and Israel. He had restored the boundaries of Israel in accordance with the prophecy of Jonah son of Amittai (2 Kin. 14:25). The northern kingdom had become wealthy and was enjoying a false sense of security, encouraged by the weakness of Egypt, Babylon, and especially Assyria, which had entered a temporary decline after the death of Adad-nirari III (810-783 B.C.). Israel faced no serious threat from Assyrian arms for about forty years.

Under Tiglath-Pileser III (745-727 B.C.), Assyria gained strength and expanded to the north and west. Judah soon became an Assyrian vassal, and the state of Damascus, which had stood between Israel and Assyria, became part of the Assyrian empire (2 Kin. 16:7-9).

Tiglath-Pileser III was succeeded by his son, Shalmaneser V (727-722 B.C.), who continued his father's policy of westward expansion, and forced Hoshea, king of Israel, to become his vassal. Hoshea rebelled, however, and mistakenly relied on Egypt for help, which never came. Then Shalmaneser besieged Samaria; after three years the Israelite capital fell (722 B.C.) and the northern kingdom of Israel came to an end (2 Kin. 17:3-6).

Characteristics and Themes. Amos may have delivered the prophecies of this book at different places in the northern kingdom, such as Samaria and Bethel. It is certain only that he fulfilled some of his prophetic ministry at Bethel (7:12, 13).

Unlike the messages of earlier prophets (with the possible exception of Joel), the words of Amos were preserved in writing, like those of his contemporaries Isaiah and Hosea. It was essential that these great covenant lawsuit messages be preserved, both as reminders of Israel's history, and for the promises of restoration and redemption they contained.

Amos attacks two major areas of sin commonly indicted by the prophets: idolatry and social injustice. Israel's root problem was its false religion-"having a form of godliness but denying its power" (2 Tim. 3:5). Although Israel maintained the ritual formalities of the law, and even exceeded them (4:4, 5), idolatry was commonplace (2 Kin. 17:9-17; Amos 5:26), as were violence and injustice (2:6-8; 4:1).

The God we encounter in Amos is the same Creator who made man in His image. He is God, and there is no other. He does not tolerate idolatry, which in reality is the worship of demons (Deut. 32:16, 17; 1 Cor. 10:20). The Lord is sovereign and is able to raise up one nation against another in judgment (1:3-2:3), a process that will continue until His return. God is also the Judge of His covenant people Israel, willing to raise up another nation against them (6:14). But for all this, He is a loving God who desires the life, not the death, of His people. Above all, He desires that they should "seek Me and live" (5:4; 1 Tim. 2:3, 4).

The Lord sent warnings to Israel in the form of hunger, thirst, blight, locusts, plagues, and military defeat, but the people had refused to see His hand in these (4:6-I1). Judgment must follow (4:12-5:20), and this punishment is portrayed in a series of verbal and visionary prophecies predicting wholesale destruction and exile. But the Lord chastises those He loves, and His judgment is really a sign of faithfulness to His covenant people. He promises to restore "the tabernacle of David, which has fallen down" (9:11), and the ultimate future of His people is portrayed in a concluding description that resembles Eden in its fruitfulness and blessedness (9:13-15).

Outline of Amos

I. Superscription and Introduction (1:1,2)

II. Judgments Pronounced on the Nations (1:3-2:16)

A. oracles Against Israel’s Enemies (1:3-2:30

B. Oracles Against Judah and Israel (2:4-16)

III. Prophecies Against Israel (chs. 3-6)

A. Divine Judgment Is Imminent (ch. 3)

1. Historical Background and Affirmation of Prophecy (3:1-8)

2. Summons to Pagan Witnesses (3:9,10)

3. Judgment Announced (3:11-15)

B. Israel Is Unrepentant (ch. 4)

1. Indictment of Social and Religious Sin (4:1-5)

2. Historical Review of Past Judgments (4:6-11)

3. Further Judgment Announced (4:12,13)

C. Lament and Call to Repentance (5:1-17)

1. Lament for Fallen Israel (5:1-3)

2. Warnings and Indictments (5:4-17)

D. No Escape from God's Judgment (5:18-6:14)

1. Woe Oracles Against Israel's Syncretism and Complacency (5:18-6:7)

2. Judgment Against Pride and Unrighteousness (6:8-14)

IV. Visions of Divine Retribution (7:1-9:10)

A. Judgment Averted by Intercession (7:1-6)

1. Vision of Locusts (7:1-3)

2. Vision of Fire (7:4-6)

B. Judgment No Longer Averted (7:7-9:10)

1. Vision of a Wall and Plumb Line (7:7-9)

2. Confrontation with Amaziah the Priest (7:10-17)

3. Vision of Summer Fruit (ch. 8)

4. Vision of the Lord by the Altar (9:1-10)

V. Restoration and Blessing (9:11-15)

A. Restoration of David's Dynasty (9:11,12)

B. Blessing of Abundance (9:13-15)

Obadiah

The Book of Obadiah

Author. We know little of the prophet other than his name, which means "servant of the LORD." The name itself is not unusual in the Old Testament. The value and authority of the message rests on the foundation that "the LORD has spoken" (v. 18), and not on the fame or prominence of the messenger.

Date and Occasion. Students of this prophecy have long debated the date of its composition. The prophet has in view a military assault on Jerusalem in which the Edomites gleefully took part (vv. 11-14), but he does not provide information that clearly dates the catastrophe. Some date the book in relation to an invasion of Judah by Philistines and Arabs during King Jehoram's reign (848-841 B.C.), in which it is presumed that the Edomites participated (2 Kin. 8:20-22; 2 Chr. 21:8-10, 16, 17).

Others relate the events prompting this prophecy to the invasions of Judah by the Babylonians, which resulted eventually in her collapse in 586 s.c. Both Scripture (Ps. 137; Ezek. 35:1-15) and Jewish tradition explicitly mention the Edomites' involvement in this final catastrophe, and the text of Obadiah seems to refer more naturally to this event.

Although the striking similarities between vv. 1-9 of this prophecy and Jer. 49:7-22 must be more than an impressive coincidence, they do not resolve the problem of dating Obadiah. We know that Jeremiah prophesied from about 626 B.C. until after 586; but whether one prophet quotes the other, or whether both prophets used an earlier source, is uncertain.

Characteristics and Themes. The prophecy is "concerning Edom" (v. 1) and is repeatedly addressed to that nation, but it was given to the covenant community as holy Scripture. The purpose, therefore, more than to warn Edom of imminent judgment, is to reassure God's people of His triumphant justice at work for them. Edom prospered, Judah lay defeated, and the moral order of the world appeared to have been overthrown by lawless forces. But the prophet Obadiah was raised up with a message of God's sovereign justice in order to strengthen His people's weakened faith. It is the righteous purpose of God, not the evil will of men, that determines history.

When the church suffers at the hands of God's enemies, she needs to return to the prophecy of Obadiah and renew her faith in the just God revealed there. He cares for His persecuted people, and behind their present circumstances He is always at work for them.

Outline of Obadiah

I. God's Declaration of War on Edom (vv. 1-14)

A. Superscription: Call to the Nations (v.1)

B. God's Resolve to Humiliate Proud Edom (vv.2-4)

C. God's Resolve to Loot Prosperous Edom (vv.5-7)

D. Edom's Vulnerability to God's Judgment (vv. 8,9)

E. Edom's Cruel Indifference to Judah's Trouble (vv. 10-14)

II. God's Promise of a New Moral Order (vv. 15-21)

A. Vengeance Against the Nations and Edom 9vv. 15, 16)

B. Deliverance for Jerusalem (vv. 17,18)

C. Land Possessed by the Lord's People (vv. 19-21)

Jonah

The Book of Jonah

Author. This fifth book of the twelve Minor Prophets takes its name from its principal character, Jonah the son of Amittai (1: 1). Of Amittai, nothing is known.

Outside of this composition Jonah is mentioned only in 2 Kin. 14:25, as "Jonah the son of Amittai, the prophet who was from Gath Hepher," the proclaimer of God's blessing to the northern kingdom of Israel during the reign of Jeroboam II (793-753 B.C.). In accordance with that prophecy, Jeroboam extended the borders of his kingdom beyond the frontier of Syria. The divine message to Nineveh found in this book was spoken through this same Jonah, although the author of the written narrative is unknown.

Date and Occasion. Based on 2 Kin. 14:25, the events recorded in the Book of Jonah should be assigned to the eighth century B.C. Determining the chronology of the book's composition is a difficult task, however, and the book has been dated between the eighth and late third centuries B.C. It should be noted that there is no compelling evidence precluding an eighth-century date for the composition of the narrative (3:3 note).

The reign of Jeroboam II provides the setting for the Jonah story. This monarch was one of the strong military leaders of Israel's history. According to 2 Kin. 14:25-28, he imposed his authority on the territories of Damascus and Hamath, thereby restoring Israel's northern frontier to where it had been in the days of Solomon (1 Kin. 8:65). It is clear that Jeroboam's reign, together with that of his Judean contemporary Azariah (also called Uzziah, 792-740 B.C.), ushered in a period of remarkable peace and prosperity. As both Elisha and Jonah had prophesied (2 Kin. 13:19-25; 14:25), the northern kingdom enjoyed territorial expansion at the expense of Syria. By the outward appearances of population growth, territorial expansion, and commercial activity, Israel was indeed blessed by God.

However, this was not the picture that was painted a few years later by the prophets Hosea and Amos, when the kingdom fell into a state of social, moral, and religious decay. Their messages consisted, in part, of indictment and judgment of the nation for mixing the prescribed worship of the Lord with the idolatry of the surrounding peoples (religious syncretism) and for social injustice (Hos. 2:1-13; 4:1-5:14; Amos 2:6-16; 3:9-15).

Despite the narrative's focus on the prophet, the Book of Jonah is a story about the mercy and love of God. The Lord was the God of Israel, and that nation had been the special recipient of His covenant mercy and salvation. But Jonah, along with many of his countrymen, had responded with a national pride and ethnic particularism that blinded him to the grand scope of God's grace. Jonah was to learn, along with the nation, that Israel did not have a monopoly on the redemptive love of God (Acts 10:34, 35; Rom. 3:29). The story affirms the words of Ps. 145:8: "The LORD is gracious and full of compassion, slow to anger and great in mercy."

Interpretive Difficulties. Some scholars have challenged the literary unity of the book, suggesting theories of composite authorship or of substantial changes by a later editor. More recently, questions have been raised with regard to the authenticity of Jonah's thanksgiving psalm in 2:2-9. Such arguments for the literary disunity in the composition are not convincing.

As for the interpretation of the Jonah story proper, four distinct approaches have been suggested: allegory, midrash, parable, and historical narrative.

Allegory is a method of teaching truths or principles by means of symbolic fictional narrative. A good example is John Bunyan's Pilgrim's Progress, an exciting fictional story that conveys the truth that the Christian life is a spiritual pilgrimage. However, the text of Jonah lacks any compelling indication that would call for such an allegorical understanding.

Midrash is a type of commentary on Scripture classically carried on by Jewish scholars during the first thousand years of the Christian era. Jonah is treated by some as a type of early midrash, or commentary, on passages like Ex. 34:6, 7 (cf. Jon. 4:2), a commentary in which the events depicted are not necessarily historical. Such an approach fails to reckon with credible defenses of the book's historicity, and appears to conflict with Christ's witness regarding Jonah's experiences (Matt. 12:39-42; Luke 11:29-32).

The interpretation of the Book of Jonah as a parable is perhaps the most common. A parable is a brief and usually fictitious story that conveys moral, religious, or spiritual truths. Parables are best illustrated by the teachings of Jesus (e.g., Matt. 13:45, 46; Luke 10:29-37; 15:11-32). Nathan's parable in 2 Sam. 12:1-4 is a good Old Testament example. This view understands the Jonah narrative as a moral story with a teaching aim. There are a number of objections, however, to understanding the Book of Jonah as

a parable, such as the unusual complexity and length of the story. This interpretation also deprives the book of its historical foundation.

In spite of its shocking surprises and sensational elements, Jonah should be understood as historical and prophetic narrative. The story centers on a specific figure and was written as a historical composition. Jewish tradition regarded the narrative as history, and Christ's allusions to the story (Matt. 12:38-41; Luke 11:29-32) lend further support to the historicity of the work. Jesus did not understand the Jonah story as a mere parable, but a narrative firmly rooted in historical reality.

Nevertheless, some scholars challenge the historical interpretation on several grounds, including the impossibility of the prophet's healthy survival inside the fish, the unlikelihood of the Ninevites' dramatic repentance, the size of Nineveh at the time, and the plant's fast rate of growth. Although some of these objections raise legitimate questions, most of the criticisms spring from assumptions that deny God's sovereignty in nature and history, including His ability to intervene supernaturally in the created order.

Characteristics and Themes. In addition to teaching the ethnic universality of God's mercy and love, the theme of God's universal sovereignty over man and creation is maintained throughout the book. God is presented as Creator, the Maker of land and sea (1:9). Creation responds obediently to His every command (1:4, 15, 17; 2:10; 4:6-8). Like the Assyrians of Isaiah's day (Is. 10:5-7), creation serves the will of the Creator.

In the New Testament, Jonah's theme of God's mercy on the nations is used by Jesus as a rebuke to unrepentant Israel (Matt. 12:38-41; Luke 11:29-32). If the Ninevites repented at the preaching of the prophet Jonah, who was rescued from confinement in the huge fish, how much more should Israel repent at the preaching of Jesus, the Son of Man, who will be resurrected from the tomb. In a sense, then, Jesus magnified God's mercy on the Gentiles in order to rouse Israel to envy and repentance; the apostle Paul would do the same by his preaching to the Gentiles (Rom. 11:11-14).

Outline of Jonah

I. Jonah Disobedient and Delivered (chs. 1; 2)

A. The Lord Commissions Jonah (1:1,2)

B. The Prophet Flees from the Lord (1:3)

C. The Lord Pursues Jonah: The Great Storem (1:4-16)

D. The Lord Preserves Jonah (1:17)

E. Jonah's Thanksgiving and Deliverance (ch. 2)

II. Jonah Obedient and Delivered (chs. 3; 4)

A. The Lord Commissions Jonah a Second Time (3:1,2)

B. The Prophet Responds in Obedience (3:3)

C. Jonah Preaches; Nineveh Repents and Is Delivered (3:4-10)

D. Jonah's Anger at God's Compassion (4:1-4)

E. A Lesson in Divine Love (4:5-11)

Micah

The Book of Micah

Author. Micah is identified by his hometown of Moresheth (1:1, 14), implying that he was an outsider to Jerusalem. Prophesying in the same period with Isaiah, he helped shape Israel's character and policies. Micah's inspired preaching (3:8) against injustice eventually brought Hezekiah to repentance and so saved Jerusalem (Jer. 26:17-19).

Date and Occasion. Micah preached preached during the reigns of Jotham (750-735 B.C.), Ahaz (735-715 B.C.), and Hezekiah (715-686 B.C.), a time of Assyrian expansion and dominance in the ancient Near East. The northern kingdom of Israel was gradually overrun by the Assyrians, with the capital of Samaria finally falling in 722 B.C. to the Assyrian king Shalmaneser V (727-722 B.C.). Ahaz of Judah allied himself with Assyria and modeled the worship at Jerusalem after Assyrian practices (2 Kin. 16:7-18). Ahaz's son Hezekiah later revolted, and much of Judah was overrun by the Assyrian king Sennacherib, though Jerusalem itself was miraculously spared (2 Kin. 18:17-19:37).

Within Israel and Judah during this time, a shocking contrast between the extremely rich and the oppressed poor developed due to the exploitation of Israel's middle class (2:8, 9) by greedy landholders (2:1-5). The oppressors were supported by Israel's corrupt political and religious leaders (ch. 3). Because of this failed leadership, the whole nation became morally corrupt and ripe for judgment (6:9-16; 7:1-7).

God raised up Assyria as His wrathful rod against His sinful people (Is. 10:5-11). As Micah predicted (1:2-7), Samaria did fall to the invading Assyrians. Judah felt the force of divine judgment when Sennacherib marched through the Shephelah (Judah's western foothills) and up to the gate of Jerusalem, as Micah had also foretold (1:8-16).

Characteristics and Themes. Micah arranges his nineteen prophecies into three cycles (Outline), each of which begins with prophecies of judgment and ends with a prophecy or prophecies of salvation, and each of which begins with the same Hebrew word rendered "hear" (1:2; 3:1; 6:1). The middle cycle has three prophecies of judgment (ch. 3) and seven of salvation (chs. 4; 5). The prophet uses word plays to predict judgment (see notes) and achieves vividness and immediacy by quoting his subjects (e.g.,

the false prophets trying to silence him, 2:6, 7; and the converted Gentiles going up to Jerusalem to worship, 4:2).

Micah primarily is a book of judgment proclaimed. The prophet declares that the holy and righteous God will no longer tolerate the persistent evil of His people (1:3). Many of Israel's sins are mentioned, ranging from idolatry and sorcery (5:12-14) to deceit and fraudulent dealings (6:10, 11). But Micah heaps special condemnation on those who oppressed the poor by seizing lands that God had intended as an inheritance for all His people (2:1-5; Num. 27:1-11 note). Judah's leaders, both political and spiritual, are also condemned for their oppression of the people and for their disregard of justice and truth (ch. 3).

Fundamental to Micah's proclamation of both judgment and restoration are the terms of the covenant relationship between God and His people. While God faithfully fulfilled His responsibilities under the covenant (6:1-5), the people wallowed in disobedience, and now the covenant curses were to be applied (6:13-16).

Despite his prevailing tone of impending punishment, Micah also looks beyond the judgment to future restoration and blessing. This too is rooted in God's covenant relationship with His people (Gen. 17:2 note). Faithful to His covenant promises to the patriarchs (7:20), the Lord will preserve a remnant of His people (2:12; 4:7; 5:3, 7, 8), and will raise up a Ruler out of Bethlehem in Judah-the Messiah Himself (5:1-5). Throughout the prophecies of salvation, Micah recognizes that Israel's restoration depends solely on the Lord's merciful forgiveness and sovereign initiative, not on the works of their hands (7:18, 19).

Outline of Micah

I. Superscription (1:1)

II. First Cycle: Judgment and Deliverance (1:2-2:13)

A. Judgment on Samaria (1:2-7)

B. Judgment on Judah (1:8-16)

C. Sentencing of Greedy Landholders (2:1-5)

D. Judgment Against False Prophets (2:6-11)

E. A Remnant Restored (2:12,13)

III. Second Cycle: Degradation and Exaltation (chs. 3-5)

A. Evil Rulers Condemned (3:1-4)

B. False Prophets Denounced (3:5-8)

C. Zion to Be Leveled (3:9-12)

D. Zion to Be Restored and Exalted (4:1-8)

E. From Present Distress to Future Salvation (4:9-13)

F. The Messianic Ruler (5:1-6)

G. The Remnant of Jacob Among the Gentiles (5:7-9)

H. The Lord Judges His People and the Nations (5:10-15)

IV. Third Cycle: Hope in Darkness (chs. 6;7)

A. The Lord's Allegation (6:1-8)

B. Covenant Curses Fulfilled (6:9-16)

C. Lament for a Broken and Corrupt Nation (7:1-7)

D. Hymn of Victory (7:8-20)

Nahum

The Book of Nahum

Author. Nahum means "comfort." His name is followed by the designation "the Elkoshite," probably a reference to the location of his birth or where he prophesied. Attempts to provide a closer identification of Elkosh have been unsuccessful. Proposals have included locations near ancient Nineveh, in Galilee (the name "Capernaum" perhaps derives from the Hebrew for "village of Nahum"), and in Judah. The internal witness of the book supports Judah as the general vicinity of Nahum's prophetic activity (1:15).

As is the case in most prophetic books, the person of the prophet recedes behind his message. Nahum has been incorrectly regarded as a narrow nationalist who, inspired by feelings of hatred and vengeance, proclaimed a message of judgment against Nineveh, and at the same time extended the promise of unconditional salvation to his own people, Judah. But this view overlooks that this book reflects the usual literary form of prophecies against foreign nations, and is to be compared with similar proclamations in Is. 13-23; Jer. 46-51; Amos 1; 2; and Obadiah.

As a true prophet of Yahweh, Nahum was profoundly aware that the Lord, the incomparable and allpowerful God, held universal dominion over the kingdoms of this world. Like his predecessor Isaiah, Nahum was also a gifted poet. Using a wealth of imagery and pictorial language, the prophet portrays the total destruction of Nineveh by an anonymous enemy, and so voices the universal relief and joy of all who suffered under the oppressive regime of a merciless tyrant.

Date and Occasion. Nahum's prophecy can be dated between the capture of Thebes by the Assyrian ruler Ashurba-nipal in 663 B.C., which Nahum reports as a past event (3:8), and the fall of Nineveh in 612 B.C., which Nahum prophetically foretells (3:5-7).

During this period of the seventh century B.C., two major crises arose in the Assyrian empire. One came from the threat of the Medes and the advancing Scythians (642-638 B.C.). The other, larger crisis was the Babylonian revolt (652-648 B.C.) under the leadership of Ashurbanipal's elder brother who was supported by the Elamites and peoples from the Iranian highlands. Ripple effects of this revolt were experienced as far away as Palestine and Syria. Eventually the revolt was suppressed by bitter warfare that shook the whole empire. A date for Nahum's prophetic activities before or during this period of upheaval is attractive. Because the

destruction of Thebes was apparently still fresh in the memory of his audience, a plausible date for Nahum's prophecy therefore falls between 660-650 B.C., in the days of King Manasseh of Judah, a loyal vassal of Assyria.

Characteristics and Themes. The Book of Nahum has a double title (1:1). It is called a "burden against Nineveh" and the "book of the vision of Nahum." "Burden" often indicates a divine message of judgment against a foreign nation (Is. 13:1; Mal. 1:1 note). "Vision" refers to a supernatural revelation to the prophet's inner sight or hearing. At times a prophet was instructed to write down a specific message (Is. 8:1, 2; 30:8) or even "all the words" that the Lord required him to speak (Jer. 36). The written form then provided a strong additional witness to the certainty of the fulfillment of those divine pronouncements. The prophecy's double title is solid confirmation of the authenticity of this oracle of doom against Nineveh and the inescapability of God's imminent judgment on the Assyrian kingdom.

This often neglected and disparaged book provides us with an important key for understanding past, present, and future history. Events do not occur as mere happenstance, but every particular of history is determined by the will, purpose, and power of God. In the opening hymn (1:2f8) and especially in 1:2, 3 (the "text" of Nahum's sermon), we learn that the Lord's government of history is in accordance with His character as the covenant God. He demands undivided submission everywhere and from everyone. Rejection of Him and of His law leads not only to the necessary consequences of chaos in society and in nature, but inevitably evokes His personal displeasure, resulting in just retribution.

God's patience must never be misunderstood as weakness. Corporate or individual sin will not be left unpunished. God ultimately ordains all the events of history. Nahum proclaimed the impending destruction of Nineveh as God's righteous judgment, and he invited his people to a joyful celebration of this event long before it took place.

Nineveh was a wicked, imperialistic, and deceitful metropolis with an arrogant and unscrupulous lust for power and domination manifested in merciless warmongering (3:1-4). In addition to its military exploits, Nineveh was condemned for its ruthless trade practices and insatiable materialism (3:16). Against this evil city Nahum delivered his message of divine vengeance and retribution (1:14; 3:5-7). No earthly power that defied God's law would finally escape His judgment.

Judgment, however, is not the Lord's final word. God's retributive judgment is also redemptive in that it furthers His loving purposes for His people and His covenant promises to them (1:15; 2:2). He destroys the forces of evil with the purpose of creating a new world of freedom (1:13), peace, and lasting

comfort. "He knows those who trust in Him" and cares for them (1:7). Those familiar with the message in the "book of the vision of Nahum" will better understand the necessity of the Cross of Jesus Christ, the Son of the jealous and avenging God. They will be able to proclaim from this book the glorified Christ, to whom all authority in heaven and on earth has been given (Matt. 28:18) and who is now guiding history toward that Great Day when He will hand over the kingdom to His Father, after He has destroyed all opposing powers, so "that God may be all in all" (1 Cor. 15:24-28).

Outline of Nahum

I. Superscription (1:1)

II. Nineveh's Just and Merciful Judge (1:2-14)

- A. The Lord's Jealousy and Power (1:2-8)
- B. Woe for the Wicked (1:9-14)

III. Nineveh Powerless Before the Lord's Army (1:15-2:13)

- A. Good News for Judah (1:15 – 2:2)
- B. Nineveh Captured and Plundered (2:3-10)
- C. Nineveh's Power Broken by the Lord (2:11-13)

IV. Nineveh's Irreversible Destruction (ch. 3)

- A. Judgment of the Wicked City Prophesied (3:1-7)
- B. Nineveh's Fate like that of Thebes (3:8-11)
- C. The Finality of Divine Judgment (3:12-19)

Habakkuk

The Book of Habakkuk

Author. Our only reliable information about Habakkuk and his prophetic activity comes from this book. The meaning of his name is uncertain. It may be connected with a Hebrew word meaning "to embrace," or with the name of an Assyrian plant, the hambakuku. The former may refer to his closeness to the Lord; the latter may suggest the penetration of Assyrian culture into Judean society. The reference in 1:1 to Habakkuk as "the prophet" may imply that he was well known. His use of the cultic and wisdom traditions of Israel in his preaching have given rise to the doubtful notion that he was a prophet attached to the temple in Jerusalem, though the suggestion that he worked in Jerusalem is attractive. We can be sure, however, that in this book we meet a true prophet with a burning zeal for the glory of the Lord. His "burden" or "oracle" (1:1 and text note) is remarkable in that it is not, in the first place, a word directed to the people, but an answer to his own painful questions.

Date and Occasion. Objective evidence for dating Habakkuk's prophetic activity is provided by 1:6. The reference to the Chaldeans, or Neo-Babylonians, as the threatening new world power indicates a period after the collapse of the Assyrian Empire (612-605 B.C.) but before the Chaldean armies of Nebuchadnezzar II captured Jerusalem and deported the young king Jehoiachin to Babylon in 597 B.C. (2 Kin. 24:8-17). Habakkuk apparently ministered during Jehoiakim's reign (609-598 B.C.) and was a younger contemporary of Jeremiah.

An important event during this period was the battle of Carchemish in 605 B.C., when Pharaoh Necho II and his Egyptian army, who had come to assist the Assyrians against Babylon, were soundly defeated by Nebuchadnezzar IL Soon afterward, Judah also, like the other previously independent kingdoms of Syro-Palestine, became subject to the powerful Neo-Babylonians. Habakkuk's inspired vision therefore may be dated to the period between 605 and 600 B.C. when the Babylonians became the dominant force on the international scene, mercilessly sweeping aside all opposition (1:5-17).

This time of international threat coincided with a period of increasing moral and spiritual deterioration in Judah. The evil reign of Jehoiakim formed a sad contrast to that of his father, the good king Josiah (Jer. 22:13-

19; 26:20-23). As they insolently flouted the covenant laws, the people of Judah increasingly lost their unique character (1:2-4).

Characteristics and Themes. Prophets were not only inspired preachers of divine messages to the people of God; they also shared the Lord's burden for His broken world and His deep concern for His wayward people. In this respect, Habakkuk closely resembles Jeremiah. But even more than with Jeremiah, Habakkuk's dialogue with God and his persistent prayers (2:1, 2; 3:2, 16) take the place of prophetic preaching as the heart of the message.

Habakkuk, a man with a burning passion for the honor of God (1:12; 3:3), experienced a profound spiritual crisis because of the Lord's seeming indifference to appalling spiritual conditions among His people (1:2-4). The absence of covenant life and obedience was dangerous to the people of God, but even more it was a rejection of the covenant Lord and an insult to Him. Because only divine intervention could change this deadly situation, Habakkuk was persistent in his appeal to the heavenly Judge, even when it seemed to be in vain (1:2). In response, the Lord revealed that the Chaldeans now appearing on the scene of history (1:6) would be His instruments of judgment. This cure seemed even worse than the disease and only added to the prophet's distress (1:12-17). How could the holy God, who cannot tolerate wrong (1:13), use such wicked people to fulfill His purposes? Does God really distinguish between good and evil in His sovereignty over history?

Convinced that the events of history were not determined by blind fate but by the righteous and holy God of Israel, Habakkuk expectantly waited on the Lord until he received an answer to his painful questions (2:1). The Lord's reply came in the vision introduced in 2:2, 3, which provides a true perspective on history and gives the divine promise about its outcome. This answer does not resolve all the painful questions, but it does teach God's people the way of covenant life in the here and now (2:3, 4). That way is to persevere in hope, waiting with confidence for the fulfillment of the Lord's unfailing promise. Although God's ways may be inscrutable, His purposes are consistent. They culminate in real life for the faithful, but woe and death for the self-sufficient and arrogant (2:4). The Lord's presence in His temple affirms His Lordship over history and assures us that in the end, His legitimate claim to the whole world will be universally acknowledged (2:14, 20; Is. 45:21-25; 1 Cor. 1-5:24-28).

The revelation of the Lord's sovereignty over history transforms Habakkuk's complaint into a hymn of joy (3:2-20). Instead of passively waiting for divine intervention, he now prayed positively that the Lord would act in accord with the deeds and qualities He displayed in the Exodus and at Sinai. Anticipating the future, Habakkuk in his prayer celebrates the Lord's coming (3:3-7), his judgment against nature and the nations (3:8-12), and His triumph over all opposition (3:13-15). From this perspective of faith, even the threat of severe calamity could not dampen Habakkuk's overwhelming joy in expectation of the coming salvation, a salvation guaranteed by the Lord's faithfulness to Himself and to His revelation (3:17-19).

Paul uses Hab. 2:4 as a foundational text for his proclamation of the gospel (Rom. 1:17; Gal. 3:11; cf. Heb. 10:35-39). Like Habakkuk (ch. 1), Paul knew that sin is incompatible with God's holiness and that the fatal tension between these opposites could only be resolved by divine intervention. The prophetic word to Habakkuk (ch. 2) reveals in principle the way God would deal with the incompatibility of sin and holiness. The Cross of Christ and the final Judgment are fulfillments of this revelation. Like Habakkuk, Paul also affirmed that true life was only possible in a relationship of total dependence on the Lord. Such dependence, based on the faithfulness of our God, transforms our existence in this world, filling our lives with joy in the certainty of God's faithfulness to His promises (2:3; 3:17-19).

For this reason, Habakkuk can be called a forefather of the Reformation. The key concepts of his preaching, as taken over by Paul, deeply influenced Luther and Calvin, and eventually became watchwords of the Reformation. Only the perspective of faith, or persevering and obedient trust in God, provides for meaningful existence in the world during the present period, between the "already" of initial fulfillment of God's promises and the "not yet" of their final realization.

Outline of Habakkuk

I. Superscription (1:1)

II. First Complaint: Departure from Covenant Life by God’s People (1:2-4)

III. First Response: The Lord Sends the Babylonians (1:5-11)

IV. Second Complaint: Why the Wicked Babylonians? (1:12-17)

V. Second Response: Life for the Faithful but Woe for the Wicked (ch.2)

A. The Crucial Distinction Revealed (2: 1-5)

B. From Woe to Worship (2:6-20)

VI. The Prayer of the Prophet (ch. 3)

A. Superscription: Invocation (3:1,2)

B. Divine Self-Revelation (3:3-15)

C. Faith’s Expectation and Jubilation (3:16-19)

Zephaniah

The Book of Zephaniah

Author. Zephaniah's lineage is traced back to the fourth generation, which is unique in the prophetic literature. This may indicate that the Hezekiah (715-686 B.C.) mentioned in the fourth generation is the well-known king of Judah by that name. The name Zephaniah, which means "Yahweh [the LORD] hides," is used of a priest who was a contemporary of Jeremiah (21:1; 29:25) and of other persons in the Old Testament (Zech. 6:10, 14). Though the prophet employs priestly vocabulary at several points (1:4-5, 7-9; 3:4, 18), there is no conclusive evidence to indicate he was officially associated with the temple.

Date and Occasion. Zephaniah prophesied in the southern kingdom of Judah when Josiah (640-609 B.C.) was king. However, there is some question as to whether the prophet's ministry preceded or followed Josiah's great reform of the nation's worship in 621 B.C. Zephaniah's denunciation of continuing syncretistic worship (mixing the idolatry of the surrounding peoples with the worship of the LORD) and of Baal worship points to a date prior to Josiah's reforms. All that can be said with certainty is that Nineveh had not yet been destroyed (2:13-15); therefore the prophet's message was spoken prior to its destruction in 612 B.C. Zephaniah would have been a contemporary of Jeremiah, whose call came in Josiah's thirteenth year (627 B.C.). If his ministry is dated in the earlier part of Josiah's reign, then he was instrumental in bringing about Josiah's reforms since the sins he attacked (1:4-6) are those abolished by Josiah's reforms (2 Kin. 23:4; 2 Chr. 34:1-7).

Characteristics and Themes. The focal point of the prophet's message is the day of the Lord, in which a foreign enemy, the Lord's sword of judgment (2:12; Is. 10:5), would inflict severe destruction upon Jerusalem (1:4, 10, 11; 2:1). This enemy has been variously identified as the Scythians, the Assyrians, or the Babylonians, depending on when the book is dated. Zephaniah's treatment of this subject is extensive. The day is near (1:7) and will be a day in which the wrath and anger of Israel's sovereign Lord will be directed against the wicked (1:15, 18; 2:2, 3). It is a day of darkness and gloom (1:15). So determined is the Lord to root out evil that He conducts a thorough search to ensure that the wicked will be found and destroyed (1:12). In that day pride will be vanquished (3:11), and the humble of the land (the remnant) saved (3:12, 17). The Gentiles also will come to faith in

the true and living God and will "call on the name of the LORD" (3:9; Joel 2:32).

A less obvious point, but one that is alluded to throughout Zephaniah, is the prophet's recognition of the importance of the Lord's covenant with His people. Although Zephaniah never uses the word "covenant," some passages echo details of previous covenantal encounters and provisions. Certainly the complaints against Judah reflect the Lord's anger at their neglect of the covenant obligations.

Like many of the other prophets, the book begins with a message of universal judgment (1:2, 3) and ends with an oracle of salvation in which both the nations (3:9) and the revitalized remnant of Israel (3:12, 13) are brought into a saving relationship with the Lord (3:19, 20). Zephaniah sees the judgment as transforming the world by bringing all people's works, both good and evil, under divine scrutiny. The restorative nature of God's wrath is indicated by the change of tone from the warnings of 1:2, 3("I will utterly consume everything") to the hope expressed in 3:14-17. Also, the prophet's terminology indicates his awareness of the messages of his predecessors (cf. 1:7 and Hab. 2:20; Zeph. 1:14 and Joel 1:15; Zeph. 1:7 and Is. 34:6).

Outline of Zephaniah

I. Superscription (1:1)

II. Prophecies of Judgment (1:2-6)

- A. Against All Nations (1:2,3)
- B. Against Judah (1:4-6)

III. The Day of the Lord: Accusation and Judgment (1:7-18)

IV. The Call to Repentance (2:1-3)

V. Prophecies Against the Nations (2:4-15)

- A. Philistia (2:4-7)
- B. Moab and Ammon (2:8-11)
- C. Ethiopia (2:12)
- D. Assyria (2:13-15)

VI. Accusation Against Jerusalem (3:1-5)

VII. Judgment Against All Nations (3:6-8)

VIII. The Purification and Restoration of Judah’s Remnant (3:9-20)

Haggai

The Book of Haggai

Author. The name "Haggai" means "festal," perhaps indicating that the prophet was born during a feast, but our knowledge of this prophet comes only from the Book of Haggai itself and from what the Book of Ezra mentions. The prophets Haggai and Zechariah cooperated to encourage the Jews who had returned from their sixth-century B.C. exile in Babylon to rebuild the temple at Jerusalem (Ezra 5:1; 6:14).

Date and Occasion. Haggai and Zechariah share a common historical background, both having begun their ministries in "the second year of King Darius" (520 B.C.). The Jews had returned to Palestine under the edict of the Persian king Cyrus in 538 B.C. and had begun to rebuild the temple. Opposition from the outside and discouragement from within caused them to abandon the project for about sixteen or seventeen years (Ezra 4:1-4). When Haggai and Zechariah began their work in 520 B.C., further opposition came from Tattenai, the Persian governor of Trans-Euphrates, which included Palestine (Ezra 5). But Darius I (Hystaspes), who ruled Persia from 522 to 486 B.C., reissued Cyrus' edict so that the temple was rebuilt within four years (Ezra 6:13-15). The second temple was dedicated on March 12, 516 B.C.

As for Haggai's messages themselves, we learn from his book that they were delivered between August and December of 520 B.C.

Characteristics and Themes. Haggai consists of four messages headed by the phrase "the word of the LORD came by Haggai the prophet" (1:1; 2:1; 2:10; 2:20). These four alternate between calls to repentance in light of God's curses on their land (1:1-11; 2:10-19) and promises of greater blessings on the temple and of the Messiah through the Davidic line (2:1-9; 2:20-23).

Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi use the title "LORD of hosts" more than ninety times (fourteen times in Haggai). This title has military connotations (God as the leader of Israel's armies, 1 Sam. 17:45), but also highlights God's glory (Ps. 24:10) and sovereign kingship over all creation (Amos 4:13).

Although Haggai is the second shortest book in the Old Testament, it is rich with profitable teaching for the church. Through Haggai His messenger

(1:13), the Lord calls upon the unfaithful remnant of His covenant people to repent and rebuild His temple. God's concern is based upon His own sovereign pleasure and His desire to be honored (1:8). The people's lack of concern to build the temple showed their deeper lack of desire for God's special presence. They were under the curses of the covenant (1:6, 9, 11 and notes) but did not realize it. In response to Haggai's ministry, the Lord stirred up the spirit of the people (1:14), and they obeyed (1:12).

Haggai reaffirms that the Lord is with His people, just as when He brought them out of Egypt (1:13; 2:4, 5). Haggai's ministry was based on the expectation that God would renew His covenant promises to Israel when He brought them back into the land from captivity in Babylon. Haggai's words draw on those of earlier prophets at a number of points (2:7, 8 and notes). The rebuilding of the temple was an important part of that renewal, and Haggai developed that hope by associating the temple with the coming times of the Messiah (2:9, 23 and notes). The Messiah as God's anointed representative on earth would bring His glory, peace, and prosperity to God's people (2:9). Zerubbabel prefigures that Messiah in Haggai's day, but ultimately only Jesus the Messiah would fulfill the promise made to Zerubbabel to be God's royal ruler ("signet ring") on earth (2:23). Today we are the recipients of these promises and look forward to the final visible enthronement of Christ as Ruler, when once again the Lord will shake heaven and earth (Heb. 12:26).

Outline of Haggai

I. The First Message: A Call to Rebuild the Temple (ch.1)

- A. The People’s Indifference and Poverty (1:1-11)
- B. The People’s Response: Repentance (1:12-15)

II. The Second Message: God’s Greater Temple and Blessings (2:1-9)

- A. Encouragement from God’s Presence (2:1-5)
- B. Encouragement from God’s Promise of Blessing (2:6-9)

III. The Third Message: God’s Blessing for a Defiled People (2:10-19)

- A. The Cause of Their Defilement (2:10-14)
- B. The Results of Their Defilement: Covenant Curses (2:15-17)
- C. God’s Determination to Bless Them (2:18,19)

IV. The Fourth Message: God’s Victory for His People (2:20-23)

A. God’s Overthrow of the Nations (2:20-22)

B. The Enthronement of God’s Ruler (2:23)

Zechariah

The Book of Zechariah

Author. Scholars differ widely on the authorship of the Zechariah. The author is identified in 1:1 as "Zechariah, the son of Berechiah, the son of Iddo." It has traditionally been held that this man was a sixth-century contemporary of Haggai and that the entire book was written by him. However, critical scholars have for some time argued that there were essentially two books (chs. 1-8 and 9-14). The first part is considered to be from the sixth century prophet himself, while the second part is assigned to a later time, usually the Maccabean era of the second century B.C. Various literary and historical arguments have been used to arrive at these conclusions, but all are tentative at best. There are no compelling reasons to conclude that Zechariah was not indeed the sole author of the book.

Date and Occasion. The historical background of Zechariah is the same as that of Haggai (Introduction to Haggai), but their ministries differed in Haggai's work centered on the rebuilding of the temple, while Zechariah's was largely designed to encourage God's people about the welfare of Jerusalem and its long-term future.

Characteristics and Themes. Zechariah contains a variety of literary forms. The visions of the first part are similar to the visions of Ezekiel and Daniel, in part because later prophecy in Israel employed more visions. The book is often taken to be an example of early apocalyptic literature (Introduction to Daniel: Characteristics and Themes), and certainly methods and themes characteristic of such literature are present in Zechariah. In ch. 14 a description of a final war against Jerusalem is given in which God comes as a victorious warrior to save His people from their enemies. Similarly, the visions of the horsemen (1:7-11), the four chariots (6:1-8), and the woman in the basket (5:5-11) might also be viewed as apocalyptic.

Our understanding of the teaching of Zechariah is greatly helped when we recognize that the prophet gives pictures of the future in snapshot fashion, in which the pictures are not placed in any particular sequence. When we read a passage, we see only what is happening in that snapshot, not how it relates to other snapshots. Further, the prophet portrays even the present blessings that Christians enjoy in terms of the imagery and customs of Old Testament life.

Zechariah's visions combine the present and future in an interwoven fabric that is impossible to tear apart. That is why it is often difficult to ascertain what time

period the prophet has in mind. The promises (e.g., 2:5, 11) relate to both the immediate audience in Zechariah's day and also to the distant future. This "telescoping," or compression of the near and distant future, is a common feature of the prophetic writings.

The welfare and future of Jerusalem as the holy city is a pervasive theme in Zechariah. Several of the visions develop this theme (1:7-17; 2:1-13; 5:1-4 and notes). Chapter 8 presents a picture of Jerusalem, with God in her midst, dwelling in beautiful tranquility. The book ends with a chapter developing this theme (ch. 14). Zechariah's focus on Jerusalem reflects the theme of the ideal Zion longed for in the Old Testament (Ps. 46; 48; 132).

Zechariah gives many explicit pictures of the Messiah, the Lord Jesus Christ. A pattern established between the Old Testament and the New Testament is that of Jesus as Messiah fulfilling promises the Lord spoke about Himself in the Old Testament. God's promises of what He will accomplish are realized through His Anointed One. This explains the frequent citations in the New Testament from this book. The Messiah is portrayed as the King who comes riding into Jerusalem in 9:9, 10, a passage quoted by Matthew at Jesus' triumphal entry (Matt. 21:1-11). Christ's betrayal and death are spoken of in 13:7. Zechariah also develops the messianic figure of "the BRANCH," who combines the offices of priest and king (3:8 note; 6:12 note).

The era of the Messiah is touched on in other passages, even where the Messiah is not explicitly mentioned. The promise in 2:5, 10 of God's dwelling in the midst of His people is realized in Christ (John L 14 and note). Similarly, the Feast of Tabernacles celebrated in 14:16-20 will find its fullest expression in the kingdom of the Messiah when the new Jerusalem comes down from heaven (Rev. 21:1-3).17

Outline of Zechariah

I. Encouragement for the Present (chs. 1-8)

A. Call to Repentance (1:1-6)

B. The Eight Night Visions (1:7-6:8)

1. The Man Among the Myrtle Trees (1:7-17)

2. Four Horns and Four Craftsmen (1:18-21)

3. A Man with a Measuring Line (ch. 2)

4. Clean Garments for the High Priest (ch. 3)

5. The Gold Lampstand and the Two Olive Trees (ch. 4)

6. The Flying Scroll (5:1-4)

7. The Woman in a Basket (5:5-11)

8. Four Chariots (6:1-8)

C. Appendix: The Crowning of Joshua as a Prophecy of the Coming Branch (6:9-15)

D. Social Problems and the Transformation of Jerusalem (chs. 7;8)

1. The Question Concerning Fasting (7:1-7)

2. The Failure to Do Justice and Show Mercy (7:8-14)

3. God's Blessings on Future Jerusalem (8:1-15)

4. The Question of Fasting Answered (8:16-19)

5. Extension of God's Blessings to Mankind (8:20-23)

II. The Future of God's Kingdom (chs. 9-14)

A. The First Prophetic Oracle (chs. 9-11)

1. The Coming of God the King from the North (9:1-8)

2. The King's Arrival in Jerusalem (9:9,10)

3. The Coming of God the King from the South (9:11-17)

4. The Shepherd-King's Destruction of Idols (ch. 10)

5. A Poem on the Destruction of Proud Nations (11:1-3)

6. A Picture of God's Shepherd (11:4-17)

B. The Second Prophetic Oracle (chs. 12-14)

1. God's Judgment on the Nations and the Salvation of Jerusalem (12:1-9)

2. The Mourning of God's People in Jerusalem (12:10-14)

3. The Cleansing of the Land of Judah (13:1-6)

4. The Stricken Shepherd (13:7-9)

5. The War Against Jerusalem (14:1-15)

6. The Final Celebration of the Feast of Tabernacles (14:16-20)

Malachi

The Book of Malachi

Author. The authorship of Malachi is a subject of debate. Scholars are divided as to whether the name "Malachi" is a personal name or a title. Both the Aramaic Targum and the Septuagint (Greek Old Testament translation) suggest something other than a personal name. The former identifies Malachi with Ezra. The latter translates the phrase "by Malachi" as "by the hand of his angel for `messenger']." The main arguments against viewing "Malachi" as the personal name of the prophet are the absence of specific data concerning his father and the lack of any mention of his place of birth. In addition, the phrase "burden of the word," which occurs in 1: l; Zech. 9:1; 12:1, is alleged to be an anonymous addition to those texts. Nevertheless, these are not compelling reasons for rejecting Malachi as a personal name. In the case of every other Old Testament prophetic book, a personal name is given. As with many of the prophets, we know little about the prophet's personal circumstances. But Malachi was "God's messenger," and the message he brought was from God (cf. Amos 3:7, 8).

Date and Occasion. Malachi is to be dated about the time of Ezra and Nehemiah. The reference to the "governor" (1:8) locates the book in the riod, and Malachi's emphasis on the law (Mal. 4:4) would indicate the time of Ezra's ministry of restoring the prominence and authority of the law (Ezra 7:14, 25, 26; Neh. 8:18). Some date the book between the coming of Ezra (458 s.c.) and the coming of Nehemiah (445 B.C.). Others place Malachi in the period between Nehemiah's two visits to Jerusalem, about 433 B.C.

Also important is the recognition that the conditions and problems that confronted Ezra and Nehemiah are also found in the prophecy of Malachi. All three spoke out against marriage to foreign wives (e.g., 2:11-15; Neh. 13:23-27). They condemned neglect of the tithe (e.g., 3:8-10; Neh. 13:10-14). They castigated the evils of a degenerate priesthood (e.g., 1:6-2:9; Neh. 13:7, 8), and criticized social sins (e.g., 3:5; Neh. 5:1-13).

Characteristics and Themes. The covenant theme is prominent in Malachi. Explicit references include: the covenant of Levi (2:5-9), the covenant of the fathers (2:10), the marriage covenant (2:14), and the Messenger of the covenant (3: l). In addition to these direct references, the book begins with a rehearsal of God's covenant love (1:2-5). The seriousness

of priestly incompetence and unfaithfulness is seen in the resulting erosion of covenant faithfulness among the common people, who broke faith in their marriages (2:10-16) and in their social and economic relationships (3:5), "profaning the covenant" (2:10). Unless they repent (3:7) they are under God's curse (3:9; Lev. 26:11 16; Deut. 28:15-68).

Malachi spoke to a disillusioned, discouraged, and doubting people whose experience did not harmonize with their understanding of the glorious promises found in the earlier prophets. Their vision of the coming messianic age did not materialize. Instead they experienced poverty, drought, and economic adversity, and they became disillusioned with God and their faith. Malachi's word confronts a people skeptical of the promises and therefore indifferent in their commitment to live in the light of those promises and to worship and serve the Lord with all their hearts. The book may serve as a catechism for times of doubt and disappointment, when the professing people of God are tempted to break faith with their covenant God. The prophet's ministry is to light the lamp of faith in a disheartened people by reminding them of God's electing love (1:2) and to set forth the continuing obligations of the covenant to those who truly know God (3:16-18).

One of the distinguishing features of this book is its "disputational" style. This is seen in the accusation by the covenant Lord against His people. The accusation is met by a cynical questioning of the charges. In response to the defiant response of the people, the prophet elaborates and defines the charges initially made. The book should be studied in the light of the structure, evident in the outline below, of six disputational dialogues. The structure reveals the role of this prophet as a covenant lawsuit advocate for God.

The uncommonly frequent use of the first person ("I") by the Lord in addressing the people lends an added sense of urgency and intimacy to the message of the book (1:2, 6, 14; 2:2; 3:5, 6, 10, 17; 4:5).

Outline of Malachi

I. Israel Doubts God’s Love for Them (1:1-5)

II. Degeneration of the Priesthood (1:6-2:9)

A. Contempt for God at the Altar (1:6-14)

B. Neglect of God’s Law (2:1-9)

III. Israel's Failure in Marriage Practices (2:10-16)

A. Marriage to Idolatrous Wives (2:10-12)

B. Divorce of Israelite Wives (2:13-16)

IV. God's Response to Sin (2:17-3:5)

A. The Guilty Weary God with Excuses (2:17)

B. The Purifying Work of the Messenger (3:1-5)

V. God's Desire to Bless (3:6-12)

A. His Unchanging Promise to Forgive the Repentant (3:6,7)

B. Israel Robs God (3:8-12)

VI. Distinction Between the Righteous and the Wicked (3:13-4:6)

A. The Harsh Words and Attitudes of the Cynical (3:13-15)

B. The Godly Conduct of the Faithful (3:16-18)

C. The Day of the Lord (4:1-6)

Introduction to the Intertestamental Period

As the history of the Old Testament drew to a close, the Hebrew community was chastened, divided, and expectant. It was chastened because the people recognized the grievous sin that led the Lord to judge them. It was divided. Many Jews had returned from exile and were worshiping God in Jerusalem, but many more had stayed in Persia, and still others had settled in Egypt and elsewhere. This scattering of the Jewish population is called the "Diaspora." But most of all, the people had not abandoned faith and hope. They knew the covenant promises of God to Abraham. They remembered the mighty arm of the Lord who redeemed His people from Egypt. And in them was developing an expectation for the Messiah who would accomplish God's saving purposes for His people and bring them the new Exodus they longed for.

Turning the page from the Book of Malachi to the first chapter of the New Testament is a leap of more than four hundred years. The Jews witnessed drastic changes in the surrounding cultures; inevitably, they too underwent serious internal transformation. The Persian Empire had given way to the whirlwind conquests of Alexander the Great. In the last third of the fourth century B.C., Alexander brought Greek culture, or "Hellenism," to the places he conquered, including much of the Middle East. After this, the affairs of the Jewish people were largely determined by confrontation with Greek culture.

The Ptolemies. Alexander the Great died in 323 B.C., and Palestine came under the rule of one of his Greek generals, Ptolemy, who also ruled Egypt. Little is known about life in Judea under the Ptolemies. Apparently, the Jews retained considerable freedom to practice their religion as well as a measure of self-rule under their own high priest. His office originally had a strictly religious purpose, but in the absence of a Jewish king, the office became the Jews' major political symbol. At the same time the community felt increasing pressure to adopt Greek ways of life.

The Jewish colony in Alexandria, Egypt, seems to have flourished under the Ptolemies. Being in the capital city of a pagan culture, however, the colony had a direct need to reckon with the new environment. Some Jewish intellectuals wanted to teach Gentiles the history of the Hebrews. Others attempted to combine biblical religion with Greek philosophy, a process that culminated some time later in the allegorical interpretations of Philo of Alexandria. Among various literary productions, the translation of the Pentateuch from Hebrew into Greek was completed late in the third century B.C. This work, along with the later translations of the other Old Testament books, is called the Septuagint (commonly abbreviated

with the Roman numeral "LXX"), named for the seventy scholars who according to tradition participated in the original translation. The New Testament authors wrote in Greek, and they often used the Septuagint when quoting the Old Testament.

The Seleucids. Another of Alexander's generals, Seleucus, became ruler of an empire that eventually extended from the western coast of Asia Minor (modern Turkey) to Babylon and beyond in the east. The Seleucid Empire established its capital in Antioch of Syria, north of Palestine, and presented a continual challenge to the Ptolemaic rulers. Finally, in 198 B.C., the Seleucid ruler Antiochus III was able to occupy Palestine.

No doubt the Jews were affected immediately by this change, but it was with the accession of Antiochus IV in 175 B.C. that Judea entered one of the most difficult periods ever faced by any Hebrew community. Also known as Epiphanes ("God manifest"), Antiochus IV began to feel the threat of the Romans, who were slowly but surely advancing to the east. In an attempt to strengthen and unify his empire, Antiochus stepped up the process of Hellenizing Palestine.

Some Jews welcomed this development and embraced the new culture, in effect rejecting their religious identity. Such apostasy strengthened the resolve of other Jews to resist the policies of Antiochus. He did not understand the character of Judaism, and unleashed the terrors of religious persecution. Copies of the Hebrew Scriptures were burned, observance of the Sabbath was prohibited, circumcision was outlawed—and violators were put to death. In 167 B.C., Antiochus desecrated the Jewish temple by setting up a statue of Zeus and sacrificing pigs to it. Many Jews regarded this blasphemy as the fulfillment of the prophecy foretelling "the abomination of desolation" (Dan. 11: 31; 12:11; cf. 9:27).

Shortly after this desecration, the Maccabean Revolt broke out. Under the leadership of Judas Maccabeus, or Judas the "Hammer," small bands of Jewish guerrilla fighters faced and repeatedly defeated large Seleucid armies. The Jews occupied Jerusalem and rededicated the Temple in 164 B.C. This event is still celebrated today in the Jewish feast of Hannukah. The history of these and some subsequent events is related in I Maccabees, one of the group of books known as the Apocrypha (or in the Roman Catholic Church, the Deuterocanonicals).

The Hasmoneans. Having tasted victory, the Jews were not happy with simply regaining the right to practice their religion. They fought to regain political freedom as well—something they had not enjoyed since their return from exile in Babylon in the sixth century B.C. After the death of Judas, his brothers Jonathan and Simon continued the war until 142, when Judea became independent and the Hasmonean dynasty was established. The name is derived from Hashmon, an

ancestor of the Maccabees.

But the struggle with Hellenization was not over. Even before independence, Jonathan Maccabeus had taken over the office of high priest, despite his not belonging to the proper family (the line of Zadok). According to many scholars, it was this event that led a group of strict Jews to turn away from their nation and establish the Essene community of Qumran, near the Dead Sea. Considering themselves the true Israel, this community developed a monastic lifestyle. They interpreted the Old Testament prophecies as being fulfilled in their midst, and looked forward to a final and imminent war that would destroy God's enemies. An extensive collection of their literature-the Dead Sea Scrolls—was discovered in 1947.

The Hasmonean (Maccabean) rulers dominated the priesthood. They progressively adopted Greek ways of life. In general, they received the support of the Sadducees, an aristocratic group that sought to preserve political stability. This conservative "party" acknowledged only the Pentateuch as fully authoritative (while other books had a lesser authority) and on those grounds resisted the doctrine of the resurrection (cf. Matt. 22:23-33; Acts 23:6-8). The historical origin of the Sadducees, as well as that of the Pharisees, cannot be pinpointed. Both groups are first mentioned by the historian Josephus in connection with the rule of John Hyrcanus I (134-104 B.C.).

The Pharisees, though not primarily a political group, may be regarded as the party of the opposition for much of this period. They protested the inroads of Hellenization in Jewish life, developed an extensive oral tradition, and generally sought to preserve the purity regulations of Judaism. By means of their interpretations of the law, however, they altered many of the biblical requirements. This practice in effect lowered the standards of God's holiness and helped foster the illusion that people could please God by their own efforts (Mark 7:1-13; Luke 18:9-14).

The Romans. In spite of some periods of prosperity, the Hasmonean dynasty, torn by internal strife, was unable to resist the advance of the Romans. In 63 B.C., the Roman general Pompey occupied Jerusalem. Continuing unrest led the Romans to make Herod the king of Judea. He was an Idumean by birth, but also a Jewish proselyte. He ruled from 37 B.C. until his death in 4 B.C.

Herod was obedient to Rome and ruled efficiently. His building projects, such as the construction of an artificial port in Caesarea-an astonishing engineering feat—made him famous in the ancient world. Of particular importance was his rebuilding of the temple in Jerusalem, an ambitious venture that began in 20 B.C. and continued until long after his death (John 2:20). These and other accomplishments earned him

his name "Herod the Great." Unfortunately, Herod's vices overshadowed his strengths. Egotistical, jealous, and distrustful, Herod at times was a madman, going so far as to murder some of his own children.

As the New Testament story begins, the Jews are subjected to a foreign power, ruled by an able but despotic figure, and still waiting for a salvation yet unfulfilled.

About Don K. Clements

Dr. Clements was ordained in July of 1974 in the National Presbyterian Church (the original name of the PCA). After several years as a pastor in Central Georgia Presbytery, he returned to the U.S. Navy, where he had previously spent 12 years on active duty prior to entering seminary. Having left as an enlisted man (Chief Petty Officer), he returned as a Navy Chaplain.

Serving ten additional years on active duty on assignments with Destroyer Squadrons in San Diego; at the Naval Air Station in Pensacola; as Chaplain for a nuclear-powered guided missile cruiser and a submarine tender in Norfolk, and finally as Chaplain of the Naval Hospital, Newport, RI, Don retired in 1985.

For the next 18 years, he pastored two “turn-around” church revitalizations of small churches in Blacksburg and Narrows, VA. On January 1, 2003 he moved full-time into a ministry he had developed called Metokos Ministries—Encouragement for Small Churches. Affiliated with the Presbyterian Evangelistic Fellowship (PEF) as an evangelist, Don works with small churches (mostly under 100 members) that need encouragement and resources to develop vision plans, go through pulpit transitions, and other specific needs. (Visit his website at www.metokos.org.)

Don holds an M.Div. (with honors) from Covenant Theological Seminary in St. Louis, and a D.Min. (in Adult Education) from Gordon Conwell Theological Seminary in South Hamilton, MA. He and his wife, Esther, have three daughters and two granddaughters.