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01-00 Video-Transcript - Why Study The Bible

WHY STUDY THE BIBLE?

Dr. Haddon Robinson.

I'd like to challenge you to read the Bible. Now I realize of course that is probably not high on your to-do list. In fact, if you're a reader it may not be one of the books you plan to read this year. But I'd still like to challenge you to do it, because I think you would get a great deal from it for all kinds of reasons. You ought to study the Bible because it has such an impact upon our lives, an impact we don't realize.

It takes something like names, you know somebody by the name of Paul or James or John or Abraham or David or Daniel, those are Bible names. They come out of the text of Scriptures. Or if you have some friends who are women, it's amazing how many of them have gotten their names from the Bible: Esther, Sarah, Rebecca, you probably call her Becky, Mary and Martha, Ruth. Now I know those women have gotten their names from their late aunt or their grandmother, but trace it back and you end up in the Bible.

I mean, just on a little thing like names the Bible has had its influence. Or there are ways in which we talk without realizing how much of the Bible we know. Have you ever heard somebody talk about "the handwriting is on the wall"? It usually means there's some dire consequences out ahead. That came from the Bible, one of the corking good stories you find in the Old Testament.

Or you see a beautiful garden and you say, "That's an Eden." Well that's the name of the first garden mentioned in the Bible. Or somebody does a deed for another person and they say, "You know, he was really a good Samaritan." It's strange that we would use that, because I doubt that you've ever bumped into a Samaritan, and what's a good Samaritan? Well it comes from a story Jesus told and that story was so powerful that it's become part of the way we think.

Somebody has said that, "If you really tore the Bible out of all of literature, all of English literature, the literature would fall apart." Again and again there are references to the Bible. So at least one reason you ought to read it is to be an intelligent, well-informed reader or somebody who is perceptive about what's going on in society. But there are better reasons for reading the Bible than the fact that it's had an impact on the culture.

You ought to read it because the Bible is not really a single book. It's like a library; and whatever your taste is in literature, you'll find it in the Bible. For instance, do you like stories? The Bible is filled with them. In fact, the major way that the biblical writers communicate their ideas is through story. Their stories are as exciting as modern novels. There are stories in the Bible about great temptation, the way people fell or the way people stood against it. Stories in the Bible, this holy book, are about betrayal, murder, rape, robbery, adultery, broken families, and the consequences. You read the Bible stories, and you'll be amazed at how relevant and up-to-date they are. Sure times have changed, but people haven't.

Or if you walk through the library of the Bible, you'll find poetry, a lot of poetry. Now the poetry that you read in the Bible isn't exactly like the poetry that we grew up with. At least the poetry I

knew as a youngster was rhymes: "Mary had a little lamb, it's feet were full of soot, and everywhere that Mary went, it's sooty foot he put," or something like that. Well that's not what we mean by poetry in the Bible.

Poetry in the Bible deals with images and deals with emotions, the kind of experience that you've had. There's a book right in the middle of the Bible filled with poetry. We call it Psalms. It's really a book of ancient hymns or poetry. Wherever you turn in that collection of Psalms, there's something that will reflect your experience. Some of those poems are rich and exciting. The poet is trying to get hold of a feeling of upbeat-ness and triumph. Other poems deal with depression and questions.

Some of those poems deal with a man who feels that he may have lost his faith. He's hanging onto it by his fingertips. And then there are other poems that are poems of a quiet confidence. In this collection of poems we call the Psalms, the 23rd poem, the 23rd Psalm, is one that people who don't even read the Bible may know. David, the greatest king that Israel ever had, sat down to write, and he said, "The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want." When David wrote that psalm, he was thinking of God as a Shepherd, but more interesting he was thinking of himself as a sheep.

Now think about that. I don't know of any king who would want to be represented by a sheep. Kings like the image of a lion or a tiger, an eagle, even a vulture. But a sheep, so defenseless, so dependent, everything a great king wouldn't want to be. And yet in that poem with that image he writes as a sheep about his shepherd. And that's how you can understand the psalm.

He says, "I shall not want, He makes me to lie down in green pastures. He leads me besides still waters." He's not talking about a picnic; he's talking about the way a sheep is provided for by its shepherd. He takes it to places of plenty and places of refreshment. All of that is to say that one kind of literature you have is story, but the other kind is poetry.

Or there is another kind of a story in the Bible, we call them parables. Jesus told them. It takes a great deal of genius to be able to construct a parable. A parable is a story that lies alongside the truth, and you have to think about the parable, and then you have to think about the truth and see what the relationship is.

One parable Jesus told is called the parable of the prodigal son. Robert Bridges, a Unitarian and a literary critic, said that, "This is an absolutely flawless piece of work." Rudyard Kipling said, "It's the greatest short story ever written." You can see why. It's a story that could take place in your neighborhood. I mean on your street. Maybe even in your home. It's about a kid who had everything, good home, good parents, but he wouldn't settle for that.

He didn't want just a room of his own; he wanted a life of his own. And so he takes off to go to the far country. You've known people like that haven't you? And well there it is in Jesus' story. And because we can identify with it, we can understand what Jesus is saying.

And so the Bible is a book of different kinds of literature. Whatever you like in literature, you'll find in the Bible. But there's something else. Not only has the Bible woven its way into the fabric of our thought, not only is it a book of different kinds of literature, but even more important, the Bible helps us understand what we would not understand by ourselves.

Have you even wondered about life, about the mess we're in? The Bible deals with that mess. It opens with a creation in which God says of His creation, "It's good." In fact, He says it over and over again. "Yeah, that's good." And then when He makes men and women, He says, "Oh, that's very good." Only two, three pages later, everything goes wrong, and within four pages of the beginning you've got a young man who murders his brother, and the rest of the Bible carries that out.

Have you ever wondered how we got into the mess we're in? For example, I think everybody wants peace. I don't know any leader who doesn't say he wants peace. Everybody wants peace, wants to bring peace. But, for less than 50 years in all of recorded history, we have not had wars in which people killed each other, maimed each other.

Why Study the Bible?

Ever wonder: If everybody is so insistent that they want peace, why don't we have it? The Bible deals with that. The Bible tells us how we went wrong, and even more important, it tells us how we can be made right. I don't know who you are, but I suspect that you sense in yourself an incompleteness. There are things you have done that nobody else may know about, but you know about them and you wonder sometimes, if you had to stand before God and give an account for the living of your days, how would you do it? All kinds of people have wondered that.

The Bible answers that question. The Bible tells you not only about the mess we're in, or the mess you're in personally, or I'm in, it tells us how in spite of that mess we can have a relationship with the eternal God. Think of it, by the reading of this book and understanding what it's teaching, you can be joined to the timeless life of God.

Since that is true, I think you'd want to read this book, because it promises not only a good life here, it promises eternal life in the ages to come. At any rate, those are some reasons for reading this book, the Bible. And we'd like to help you with it. There are things about the Bible that can be difficult. I mean, it was written 2,000, 3,000 years ago, and even though you know the land in which it was written, Israel and what we call Iraq today, you know the map will be the same. Maps don't change.

But there are places that were called one thing then, called another thing now, so we want to help you with that just to bring it up-to-date so that you don't have to wonder about strange names or strange places. We'll do our best to sit beside you, try to anticipate your questions and get you into the glorious experience of reading the greatest book that was ever written, the Bible.

01-01 Video Transcript 1 – Old Testament Basics

Old Testament Basics - Lesson 01.
Dr. Sid Buzzell.

Lesson One.

The Old Testament isn't important, it's much more than that, it's essential. In fact, when we read Paul's words to Timothy in 2 Timothy 3, he said, "All Scripture is inspired by God and is profitable." And what Paul was referring to in this statement is the Old Testament, because the Old Testament tells us about God. It tells us about us. It tells us that God created us for a relationship with Himself.

Tragically, it also tells us that sin entered into the human condition and that this relationship that God designed between Himself and us was fractured; it was split. And so much of the Old Testament story tells us about God's plan, God's design to restructure, to rebuild, to heal the relationship between Himself and the people He created to love and to love Him. The people He created to communicate His truth to and to receive worship from.

The Old Testament is a collection of books. Now when we use the word book, it's important to understand that we refer to the Bible as a book, but it's a book that's made up of a collection of books. In fact, in the Old Testament there are 39 books written by various authors. We'll talk about that in a moment. So in these lessons when you hear me refer to a book of the Bible, don't let that confuse you, because it is a book that's put together in a collection of books called the Bible.

Now we said the Old Testament is about God, but the Old Testament doesn't really defend the existence of God or even explain it. It assumes it. In fact, when we read the Old Testament, the fourth word we come to is, "In the beginning God." That's assumed. And if we don't get beyond that fourth word, we really have trouble with the whole rest of the Bible, not just the Old Testament but the New Testament as well.

So how we think about God is crucial, and that's what is so filled with the Old Testament is who God is, what He's like, His love, His grace, His character, and the effort He's put forth in His love and His grace to heal this relationship between Himself and His alienated people.

Now the Old Testament contains characters and events that are familiar to people who don't even read the Bible. I mean most people have heard of Adam and Eve. We've heard about Abraham, we've heard about the plagues in Egypt, we know about Moses, we hear about the Ten Commandments.

We go to a motel and we read the Gideon Bible. We hear about Samson and Delilah. We hear about Solomon's wisdom. There are just so many things that are almost household words to us, but often we don't even recognize they're in the Old Testament. Or if we do, we don't recognize who they are or where they fit.

And this is some of the most important and valuable literature ever written. So what we want to do with these 10 lessons is to try to give ourselves a flow, give ourselves a sense of perspective: Who was Samson? When did he live? What did he do? What do these Ten Commandments refer

to? Why were they given? To whom were they given? What do they mean? And those are some of the things we want to look at as we go through these 10 lessons on the Old Testament.

Now the reason the Old Testament is so crucial is that it tells us about God. It teaches us what He's like. It teaches us about His love. It also teaches us about the standards He has laid down for us to live by. And when we violate those standards, the Old Testament tells us that God patiently and graciously reaches out to the people who have disobeyed Him and calls them back to Himself.

We find that from the opening to the end of the Old Testament is this continued story of God's forgiveness of His people, their rebellion, and His willingness to call them back and to forgive them and to restore the relationship.

We also learn about Jesus in the Old Testament. Jesus is God's ultimate answer to the sin problem, to the alienation between God and the humans He created. We find Him from the beginning in Genesis right through to the end of the Old Testament in Malachi. There are continual references to Jesus, to the Messiah, to the Great Priest who would come and deliver us from evil and restore us to this relationship with God.

The Old Testament is so packed with essential truth, but sadly for many of us it's a closed book. In fact, let me try an experiment with you. If you have a Bible, go to the first page of Genesis. Now this is after the Table of Contents and any maps or anything like that. Just go to Genesis chapter 1, and then go to the end of the Old Testament, the end of Malachi, and put your finger there.

And then you go to the beginning of the New Testament in Matthew, and then you go to the end of the New Testament, at the end of the book of Revelation before you get to your maps and all that, and you just look at this and you see this is the New Testament. This is the Old Testament. As important as this is, this is also essential, but look at the difference in size.

And what's sad is that so much of the Bible is closed to many people because they just don't understand how it works. What we want to do in these 10 lessons is to help you understand how it works. There are 39 books in the Old Testament. Seventeen of the books, the first 17 books, are mostly narrative. They tell the story.

In other words, you begin in Genesis and then you go through to the book of Esther, and those 17 books tell the story of the Old Testament. What's confusing for many people is that they don't understand that even before you get to the books of Job and Psalms, the storyline of the Old Testament ends at the book of Esther.

And then we have 5 books of poetry and wisdom: Job, Psalms, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, and the Song of Solomon. Four of those books, all except Job, are attributed to David and to Solomon. So they come at a particular time in Israel's history. The third collection of books, we have the narrative books that tell the story, we have Old Testament poetry and wisdom, and then the last section of the Old Testament, are the 17 prophets, the 17 writing prophets.

And so that's how the Old Testament is divided, and we will take each of those segments apart and look at them a bit more closely in each of these 10 lessons so that we have a working knowledge of how the Old Testament works.

Well, why read and study and meditate on this ancient literature? Why navigate our way around the Old Testament? Well, Paul said it best, "All Scripture is from God." This isn't the work of brilliant men, although the men who God used to write it were brilliant. It's the work of God. It's not wisdom thought up by some sage. All Scripture is inspired by God, and it's profitable.

Paul said, "It's profitable for doctrine, or for a way of thinking about the world." It's profitable to show us when we're in error, when we're living our lives in ways that are going to lead to tragedy. It's profitable for correction. It doesn't just point out where we're wrong, it shows us how to get right. And then further it's profitable to equip every person who reads it for good works.

So it takes us from being wrong to how do we get right to how do we get excellent. So these Old Testament books are a treasure. These Old Testament books are a guide to living life superlatively. But we have to read them, we have to understand them, and we have to live them. It's God's message of love and grace and wholesomeness to you and to me.

01-02 Video Transcript 2 – Genesis

Old Testament Basics - Lesson 02.

Old Testament Basics.

Dr. Sid Buzzell.

Lesson Two.

In Lesson One, we said that the Bible is more than an important book, it's an essential book. But for it to have any value at all it has to be read. It doesn't help us by laying on our coffee table closed up. But what I find with a lot of people who try to read the Old Testament is that it's confusing. It's hard to navigate your way around it.

In fact, if you go to the books of Esther, Job, and Psalms, three books in a row, you've really gone from the beginning of Jewish history to the end. And then the book of Psalms occurs pretty much in the middle. So people read that and say, "Where am I? What's going on?" And then we come to the Prophets and we say, "Who were these guys? What are they doing? What are they all about?"

Well the reason for that is that the Bible isn't arranged like a normal history book. It doesn't begin at the beginning and end at the end. The Old Testament is arranged according to the types of literature. And the first 17 books of the Old Testament, Genesis through Esther, are chronological books. They're narrative books; they tell the story of the Old Testament. Then we have 5 books of wisdom and literature: the Psalms, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, that poetry and wisdom material. And then the last 17 books of the Old Testament are Prophets.

And if you don't know where the Prophets fit or when those Psalms were written, it's difficult to find the historical context and help them make sense. So the first thing an Old Testament reader has to do is get the story fixed. What is the storyline? What's going on? And then once we have that storyline, we can plug the Prophets in where they belong. We can figure out when Ecclesiastes was written and who wrote it and why was it written? And it just helps us read if we know what's going on around the context of everything that was written.

So in this lesson what I'd like to do is work just through those chronological books. In the next lesson, we'll fit everything together and plug in those other books. So by the end of the third lesson, the next lesson, you should be able to go through the whole Old Testament, pick any book you want, and plug it in where it goes. And then when you read it you have the historical context. You know what the author was trying to do with that book, and suddenly it makes a whole lot more sense.

Now we mentioned that the first part of the Old Testament was the chronological books, okay, but there really are two kinds of those books that tell the story of the Old Testament. Some of the books actually move the story forward. There are 11 of those. And that's what we want to focus on today. Those 11 books from Genesis through Nehemiah begin at the beginning and end at the end of the Old Testament era.

Now there are other books that tell the story. There are other narrative books. I call those the "color books." Think of it this way, the 11 books we're going to look at today are like a movie film spliced together. You go to the end of one book, and we just splice it to the next chronological book. And so as we look at these 11 books, we see the story unfolding just like watching a film.

But every once in a while there is a book, and there are 5 of these books, where it's like the Old Testament writer said, "Well now wait a minute, let's stop the film here. There's something we need to look at. Let's take a closer look at these laws. Let's see what those laws are." Or, you know, in the book of Judges for instance, it seems everybody is so evil and it's all so corrupt, but the writer said, "But wait a minute, there's another story. Look at this."

And so we plug in the book of Ruth. Now the book of Ruth and the book of Deuteronomy don't move the story forward, they stop the story and they give us a snapshot of life during that period of time. So before we plug in the color books, we'll do that in the next session, this time for this lesson what we want to do is move straight down through those 11 books, okay? So by the time we finish today, you'll be able to think your way through from the beginning in Genesis to the end of the Old Testament period of time in the book of Nehemiah.

We divide the Old Testament history into four eras, four periods. The first is the period of the beginnings and that covers three of these chronological books, Genesis, Exodus, and Numbers. At the end of Numbers, we move into the settlement period, which covers two books, the books of Joshua and Judges.

At the end of Judges, we move into the kingdom era, which covers four books, 1 Samuel, 2 Samuel, 1 Kings, 2 Kings. At the end of 2 Kings, the nation of Israel is destroyed. It's wiped out by the Babylonians, and the people are carried off into slavery in Babylon. And that's called the period of the exile. It's the 70-year period of time where the people are in exile. And then the Jews are allowed to return home, which completes that fourth period of the exile and the reconstruction.

The books of Ezra and Nehemiah tell us the story of how the Jews went back home and rebuilt their city, their temple, and their life. So that's the quick view. Now let's add a bit of detail. Let's go back through it again.

We begin with Genesis, Genesis is called the book of beginnings because it tells us where it all came from. It begins with creation. It also tells us the beginning of the Jewish nation in Genesis chapter 12 with Abraham and Sarah and their descendants. The book of Genesis ends with the people of Israel, Abraham's descendants, living in Egypt as favored guests of the Pharaoh.

Then there's a 400-year period of silence. That period of silence ends with the book of Exodus, which is the second book in the chronological development of Old Testament history. When Exodus opens, the people are slaves. They want to get out of Egypt; they don't like it there anymore. So God raised up a deliverer named Moses. And the book of Exodus is the book of salvation, the book of deliverance.

That's where we find the story of the Red Sea and Mount Sinai and the Ten Commandments and the people of Israel going across the Sinai Desert to enter their land. They get right up to the edge of their land, up to the brink of the land, and they refuse to go in. So the next book tells us that the story isn't a book of the people of Israel in their land, it's a story of Israel wandering in the wilderness because they refused to enter the land.

So the book of Numbers is the book of wanderings. It tells a story of that generation dying off in the wilderness. Well, when that generation who had refused to go into the land died off, their children were allowed to enter the land. And that moves us to the next period, the second era in Old Testament history, the period of the settlement.

The book of Joshua talks about how the people did enter the land. It contains the story of the parting of the Jordan River. It's a story of Jericho falling down, the walls of Jericho. That's where we find those stories. As the people would enter the land, they settled down, divided it up among the 12 tribes.

But those people didn't follow God's laws. Instead they rebelled and went their own way. And the book of Judges is the next book that moves the story forward, and that's another tragic story of failure, of disobedience to God. And so this book of Judges is a period of time when Israel rebelled against God. They came under oppression from their enemies. And we read stories about Gideon and Samson, who were judges, and that's where we find those kinds of stories.

At the end of the book of Judges, the people demanded a king. And so the next four books that move the story forward are the books that talk about the kingdom era. The book of 1 Samuel talks about preparation for the kingdom. The book of 2 Samuel tells us the story of David, which is the establishing of the kingdom. The book of 1 Kings talks about how the nation Israel split itself into two nations: Israel and Judah. And the book of 2 Kings talks about how both Israel and Judah were defeated by foreign powers and essentially carried off into slavery or obliterated. And we'll look at that in more detail when we look at the kingdom era.

The destruction of Judah, the destruction of Jerusalem (the capitol city of Judah), and the destruction of the temple in Jerusalem lead us to the fourth period, the last period of the Old Testament story: the period of exile and reconstruction.

We call it the period of exile because after the Babylonians had destroyed Jerusalem they carried the inhabitants of Jerusalem off into captivity into exile outside the city of Babylon where they lived for 70 years. With God's providence and God's care for His people, He allowed the Persians to rise to power and defeat the Babylonians, and the Persians allowed the Jews to go back home.

So the last two books of the Old Testament story, the book of Ezra and the book of Nehemiah, are telling us the story of how these released people, these delivered people, were able to go back home and rebuild their temple and rebuild the walls of Jerusalem, and that's where the Old Testament period ends.

It's a story of great success and a story of tragic failure. It's a story of God's involvement with His people. It's really a story of God's patience, of God's grace, of God not forcing His people to live the way He wants them to live. But it's also the story of the tragic consequences when God's gracious directions are ignored and people self-destruct.

But the beautiful part of the story is that at the end of the Old Testament God has not abandoned His promises to His people. He still loves them; He still patiently cares for them just like He does with us.

01-03 Video Transcript 3 – Genesis

Old Testament Basics - Lesson 03.

Old Testament Basics.

Dr. Sid Buzzell.

Lesson Three.

In the last lesson we looked at the story line: the 11 books from Genesis to Nehemiah that tell the Old Testament story. What we left out was a whole bunch of detail, and we're going to add some of that in this lesson. We want to plug in the color books, the books that we said were the still shots that stop the flow and give us some information about detail.

We're going to look at the poetry and wisdom literature and say, "Where does that fit?" When did that occur in the story line?" And then we're going to plug in the Prophets and see when they occurred, because without that historical background it's difficult to really interact and get into the prophetic story, the prophetic message.

The first of the color books we look at is the book of Job. Now, time wise, Job was a contemporary of Abraham. So when you think of Abraham's story in Genesis chapter 12, that's where chronologically you would plug Job in. But Job doesn't move the story forward. In fact, Job is written mostly in poetry. But Job gives us a picture of what life was like during that time. Job was a godly man, a good man. He didn't have the Old Testament law. He lived before that period of time. That's important to understand.

He couldn't go and read the book of Exodus and see what God's law was. He had some kind of a personal relationship with God that was not based on all of the information that we have today, but he still was a good and godly man. He was so good in fact that Satan challenged God and said, "You know, if You didn't give Job so much good stuff, he wouldn't follow You for a minute."

And God said to Satan, "All right, put your hand on it, and I guarantee you Job will stand with Me." So this book of Job is really Job's test. And the beautiful part of the story is how in spite of his friend's accusations that "the only explanation for your pain and your suffering is that you're an evil man, you've done something to disobey God," Job knew better. And so all of these discussions that take us through the book of Job are helping us understand: how does a good and godly person respond when pain hits, when difficulty hits?

So Job is the first of these color books, and he fits in right at the time of Abraham. The second color book is the book of Leviticus. Listen to the name, L-e-v-i-t-i-c-u-s. Levi-ticus almost. It comes at the period of Sinai right during the period of Exodus. Remember, we said the people of Israel stopped at Mount Sinai. They got the Ten Commandments and all of these other laws.

Well all of those other laws, or most of those other laws that regulated Israel's religious life, which was conducted by the tribe of Levi, is contained in this book of Leviticus. So that's where you plug that book in. When you think of Sinai and the Ten Commandments and God giving the law, that's where you plug the book of Leviticus in.

The third color book is the book of Deuteronomy. Once again it doesn't move the story forward, but it brings great insight into a particular period in Israel's time. You put the book of Deuteronomy right between the book of Numbers, which was the end of the time of the wandering in the wilderness, and the book of Joshua, which is when the second generation of Israel, the children of the people who came out of Egypt, were preparing to go into the land of Canaan, the Promised Land.

And God said to Moses, "I want you to rehearse this law that I gave you at Sinai. I want you to go over the whole thing again with this generation so they understand this is their law, Deuteronomy, second law, Deuteronomy, it plugs in right there between the end of the book of Numbers and the beginning of the book of Joshua.

The next color book goes all the way down to the end of 2 Kings. The books of 1 Samuel, 2 Samuel, 1 Kings, and 2 Kings tell us the story of the kings as that story moves forward. But then the books of 1 and 2 Chronicles are a commentary from God's perspective on these kings. The books of Samuel and Kings tell us the human view; this is how it looks like historically. The books of 1 and 2 Chronicles say, "But let's look at this from more of a religious, more of a pious look at these kings and see how they were as God viewed them." So the books of 1 and 2 Chronicles fit in right there during that period of the kingdom.

The next color book is the book of Lamentations. Now Lamentations sort of gets kicked around. Sometimes Lamentations appears with the Prophets because it was written by Jeremiah the prophet. Sometimes it's included with the poetry books because it is poetry. But I'm including it with the color books because what it gives us right at the end of the book of 2 Kings.

After the Babylonians had destroyed the beautiful city of Jerusalem, had crushed this wonderful temple that Solomon had built, carried off all the gold and all the silver and, most tragically, all of the people, old Jeremiah the prophet was left behind. They didn't take him to Babylon; he was too old. He couldn't contribute anything. So here he is sitting on the rubble of Jerusalem looking at what used to be the temple, his heart broken because he saw the actual reality of what sin looks like in the human life. To him it was a tragic, awful, awful reality.

And the book of Lamentations comes from the word lament. I've been there. I've looked at my own failure at times and lamented and wept. And that's why this book of Lamentations, I believe, is included: to show the reader that while God is patient and God is gracious, God is also just. And God is also faithful to His Word, and His Word said to the people way back at Sinai, "If you obey Me and follow Me, I will bless you and I will protect you. If you disobey me, you're on your own. If you want to live life your way, you're going to have to accept your consequences." So as you read this beautiful poetic piece called Lamentations, plug it in right there.

The last of the color books is the book of Esther, which is written during the time of Ezra, think Ezra and Esther. While Ezra tells us the story of what life was like back in Jerusalem when the people had come back from their Babylonian captivity, Esther tells us the story of the people who didn't come back to Jerusalem but stayed in the Persian Empire.

And so we get that color of what life was like for people who didn't return. So those are the color books, and we plug them in to give us some insight into the rather rapid treatment we gave last time of the historical accounts, the chronology books.

Now what are left are the Prophets and the poetry and wisdom literature. The poetry and wisdom literature was constructed and put together and compiled primarily by David and Solomon. So think, the book of 2 Samuel and the early part of 1 Kings tell us about David's life and Solomon's life.

So while these poems were written throughout Old Testament history and these Proverbs were gathered from many generations, they were gathered by David and Solomon. So that's why we put the poetry and wisdom literature right at the period of 2 Samuel and the first part of 1 Kings.

Now the Prophets: all 17 of them occurred from the period of the division of the kingdom recorded in the middle of the book of 1 Kings through the end, through the time we talked about in Nehemiah. Two of the prophets prophesied during the exile: Ezekiel and Daniel. Three of the prophets prophesied during the reconstruction period: Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi. All of the rest of the prophets we plug in during that period from the middle of 1 Kings through the end of 2 Kings.

So to get the historical background of those prophets, that's where you plug them in right there in that divided kingdom era, the exile era, and the reconstruction era. So that is the Old Testament. The 11 chronology books tell the story. We plug in the color books to give us still shots, to give us an expanded view of what was going on during those periods of time. We have Israel's wonderful poetry and wisdom that all occurred, was gathered together, under David and Solomon, so we plug that into the kingdom era. And then we have the Prophets, who also began at the division of the kingdom and go through the end of the Old Testament.

When you put all that together, all of these books, what do you get? What is this about? What it's about is the fact that God created us for Himself. He created us in His image. He created us for an intimate relationship with Himself. Our sin, our rebellion, which is explained in Genesis chapter 3, the fall of man, the first disobedience of God still plagued God's people all the way through the Old Testament and right up to today.

And this Old Testament story says that even though we fail, we serve a God who always says, "Come back, I will forgive you. I will welcome you. I created you not for hostility, but for love and for a relationship." If we don't learn that when we read the Old Testament, we've really missed the point of it all.

01-04 Video Transcript 4 – Genesis

Old Testament Basics - Lesson 04.

Old Testament Basics.

Dr. Sid Buzzell.

Lesson Four.

In Lesson One, we talked about the Old Testament. We talked about what it is and why it exists. In Lesson Two, we talked about the flow of Old Testament history. We looked at the 11 chronology books so that we had the story. The next lesson, Lesson Three, we plugged in the color books, the Prophets, and the poetry.

What we want to do with the rest of these lessons is go back and look at each of these time periods, the beginning, the settlement, the kingdom, the exile and reconstruction, and look at it in a bit more detail. So what you see is we're just building, adding detail as we go along so that as you get the story in your mind then you are able to flush it out. It's almost like building a file cabinet, and each of these four eras is a drawer in your file cabinet, and now as we add detail you go back and you know which drawer to open and where to put all this detail.

So if you've got the structure in your mind, the period of the beginnings, the period of the settlement, the period of the kingdom, the period of the exile and the reconstruction, this lesson is talking about this first period, the period of the beginnings. It covers chronologically three books: Genesis, Exodus, and Numbers. It also includes three color books, the book of Job, the book of Leviticus, and the book of Deuteronomy, which is actually a bridge book from the period of the beginnings to the period of the settlement.

Now the time covered by this period of beginnings we have to divide into two segments. Genesis 1–11, which contains the story of the creation and the story of Noah and the great flood is almost impossible to set specific times on. That's a period of great mystery. Scholars have studied it, but we just don't want to make specific clear time frames back there.

When we can begin to measure time is with Abraham in Genesis chapter 12. Abraham lived around 2100 bc. The Jewish nation began around 2100 bc with Abraham, and that's about as far on the other side of Jesus as we are on this side of Jesus. This period of beginnings then, if we begin with Abraham in 2100 and we go through the end of the book of Numbers, we're looking at about a period of 700 years. It's an enormous amount of time. So stop and think about this period from Abraham to the end of the book of Numbers as about a 700-year period of time.

Genesis is called the book of beginnings. We call it that because it has three beginnings. It begins with creation, the beginning of everything: God created. In fact, the fourth word of the Old Testament in our English translation, "In the beginning God", that's the key. This is a book about God. If you can't get beyond the fourth word of the Old Testament, you may as well just close it up. Because if God isn't at work there, there's really nothing going on that we can believe or understand or make sense of.

So it is a story first of all about God, but it is a story second of all about God and His relationship with the people He created. When we read the story of creation in Genesis 1 and 2, we only find one time that God created anything in His own image, and that was us. And I believe the writer

constructed it that way so that we would understand that of all the things God created, nothing mattered as much to God as you and me.

So this whole story that we read is about the relationship between God and the people He created in His own image. Partially that means we were created to understand God, to interact with God, to communicate with God, to love God, to worship God. Why are we here? What is your purpose and mine? There is no higher calling placed on any human being than to know God, to love God, to worship God. That's what this is about.

Tragically, after God created Adam and Eve, they disobeyed God, sin entered the human condition and that relationship that God created us to have with Himself was fractured. There is alienation. And the rest of the story tells about what God was doing to overcome that fracture, to build a bridge back between Himself and the people He created to live in a relationship with Himself.

Sadly, that bridge didn't work very well; and in Genesis 6–11 we read the story of Noah and the flood where God said, "Man is so wicked I'm going to start over again. Just as I started with Adam and Eve, I'm going to start again with Noah and his family and the animals that I put in this great ark." So we have a second beginning in the book of Genesis.

Those people, the descendents of Noah, responded to God pretty much the same way the descendents of Adam and Eve did. And once again we come to chapter 11 of the book of Genesis, and we find the people trying to build their own pinnacle, their own pyramid that will reach to the heavens. And instead of allowing God to reach down and touch them, they wanted under their own power and under their own wisdom to build something where they could get themselves back to God.

And God said, "You know, I'm going to start again, this isn't working." But this time instead of wiping everybody out, God began with this couple, Abraham and Sarah. We talked about them in an earlier lesson. Abraham and Sarah were selected by God because of their godliness, because of their relationship to God. These were people who did follow God and what they knew about God.

God said to them in Genesis chapter 12, "I am going to make you into a great nation. Your descendents will be like the sand of the sea, you can't count them. I will be your God, and you will be my people. Your descendents will be my people, my special people. All of this land that you walk on I'm going to give it to you. It's your land, you own it." Okay, so this Abrahamic covenant entered into a special relationship with Abraham and Sarah and their descendents, the Jewish people.

The rest of the Old Testament is about these descendents of Abraham. God said, "I will be your God, and you'll be my people." He said, "I will give you a land," and then probably the most important, "I will bless you. You and I will have a special relationship. I will be your God, and you will be my people."

Now I'm stressing that. I've camped there just a little bit, because if we don't, we won't understand that the whole rest of the Old Testament is about the descendents of Abraham, the people of Israel. Now interestingly, Abraham had two sons. His son Ishmael became the father of

the 12 Arab nations. Isaac had two sons: Jacob and Esau. And Jacob had 12 sons who became the fathers of the 12 tribes of Israel.

Both the descendents of Abraham through Isaac, and the descendents of Abraham through Ishmael, claim this promise that God made to Abraham as their own. And that's why if you read this morning's paper, and it almost doesn't matter which morning we're talking about, you read still about the hostility and the competition between these two descendents of Abraham as they decide sometimes through warfare whose land is this really.

So what happened with Abraham in 2100 bc is still affecting our world today in ad 2100. So it's quite an interesting moment in history. As you read the story of Abraham's descendents through Isaac and Jacob and then Jacob's 12 sons, we understand that 11 of Jacob's sons were hostile toward the one son named Joseph because Joseph was the favored son. It was apparent to the 11 other brothers that Joseph would inherit the majority of Jacob's vast fortune.

So in their minds, Joseph had to be gotten rid of. So they sold him into slavery, which is sort of tragic when you think of 11 brothers selling one of their brothers into slavery. But that's what they did. And the slave traders took Joseph down to Egypt. Joseph became a slave in Potiphar's household. He was so faithful to God and to his master that he rose to be the head slave, the steward, the keeper of Potiphar's household. Potiphar's wife took a liking to Joseph and tried to enter into an illicit relationship with him, which Joseph absolutely refused.

She told her husband, Potiphar, that Joseph tried to attack her, and Potiphar threw Joseph into prison. So he went from being the favored son of a fabulously wealthy farmer to being a slave. He worked his way up to be the steward, the head slave in Potiphar's household; and now he's in prison. So once again we see this faithful man of God rising wherever he was. Wherever God put him he rose to the top, and now he's running the prison.

It was at this time, while Joseph was managing Pharaoh's prison, that Pharaoh had a dream and it frustrated him because he couldn't find anybody to interpret the dream for him. And then somebody told Pharaoh that this prisoner named Joseph could interpret dreams. Well, Joseph did interpret the Pharaoh's dream, and the Pharaoh was so pleased that he made Joseph the prime minister of Egypt. So here now Joseph has risen again a third time to a place of prominence, but in this place of prominence he's ruling one of the wealthiest and most powerful nations on the planet.

Well, there was a great famine up in the land of Canaan where Joseph's 11 brothers and his father Jacob were living. So, through a series of events, Joseph invited his father and his brothers to move to Egypt. And they lived out their lives on this very prime real estate in Egypt as guests of the Pharaoh. And that's the end of the book of Genesis.

And then there's a 400-year period where we don't really know much about specifically what went on. The next book in this period of beginnings is the book of Exodus, which opens not with the people of Israel living as guests of the Pharaoh, but as slaves. They cried out to God for deliverance. God raised up a man named Moses, who led them out of Egypt into their new land.

Many of you are familiar with some of the events that occurred during this time. The 10 plagues on Egypt were part of God's process of allowing the Pharaoh to let his people go. The parting of

the Red Sea occurs there as the people of Israel were moving out of Egypt into the desert, and God opened up the sea to help them escape from Pharaoh's armies.

The period of manna, God feeding them bread in the wilderness, water from the rock, all these things occurred during this period of time. The high point of the book of Exodus is when the people of Israel stopped at Mount Sinai, and there we realize God gave them the Ten Commandments. We realize God gave them these other 620 laws that regulated their life politically, socially, religiously. But what God really did there is turn them from a great big family of Abraham into a real nation.

He said, "You have a King. I, God, am your King. You have a constitution, this law that Moses brought down from the mountain. That's your constitution. You have a land. You're heading there. It's your land. You have a promise: if you obey Me, I will provide for you and protect you. If you disobey my laws, I will not provide for you and I will not protect you, you're on your own."

And then the rest of the book of Exodus just tells us how these people moved across the desert right up to their land. Well, God didn't raise Moses up primarily to take the people out of Egypt. The goal was not just to get out of Egypt, but to get into their land. That goal was thwarted. The people came up to the edge of their land. They sent 12 spies in to check out the land. Ten of those 12 spies came back and said, "You know what? God was right, that is one beautiful land. You wouldn't believe the fruit and the vegetables and the beautiful architecture, wonderful land. However, there is a problem: great walled cities, highly trained armies. Giants live in that land, no way we can go in that land and take it as our own. We're out of here."

Well, Moses and Aaron (Moses' brother, the high priest) and Joshua and Caleb were four people who stood up against these people who could not believe God, who refused to go forward into the land. But they lost that battle. And the people turned back from the land, refused to go forward. But then they discovered they couldn't go back either.

There's no way they could go back to Egypt. So the dilemma was: we refuse to go forward, we can't go back. What are we going to do? And God said, "You only have one option. Live out your life here in this desert." So the next book that we look at in this period of beginnings is the book of Numbers, which is a tragic story of this generation of Israel wandering around in the desert until they died. It's a sad story of people who say, "I know how to live my life. I don't need God to tell me. I'm afraid of what God has out there. What feels secure to me is what I want to do."

The people of Israel were not the last people to disobey God and spend their whole life meaninglessly, aimlessly wandering around until they die. God says, "I have a better plan. Follow Me, I will take you to places you never dreamed possible."

I have to make that choice every day. Am I smarter than God, or is God smarter than me? Am I going to follow my own wisdom, or am I going to come to this book, including the Old Testament, and say, "Lord, what's Your way of living?" It seems to be a pretty simple choice, doesn't it?

01-05 Video Transcript 5 – Genesis

Old Testament Basics - Lesson 05.

Old Testament Basics.

Dr. Sid Buzzell.

Lesson Five.

In this lesson, we talk about the period where Israel actually moved into their land and settled there. Remember last lesson we talked about the period of the book of Numbers where the people get right up to the land, they sent in the spies, and the spies brought back a bad report, and the people were afraid to go in the land.

So God said, "If you don't want to go in the land, you don't have to go in the land. But you can't go back." So that story was a tragic story of these people dying off in the wilderness by their own choice. And now we're back to the land again, their children are ready to go in, and the books of Joshua and Judges tell us that story.

So there are actually four books that talk about the story of the settlement. Joshua and Judges are the chronological books. They move the story forward. But then we also have the book of Ruth, which occurs during the period of Judges. Judges is about the failure of the people. The book of Ruth talks about the success of a family in that period of time.

And then we have really what's called a bridge book; the book of Deuteronomy takes us from the period of the Numbers to the period of Joshua. You remember we said that it was the children of the people who came out of Egypt that actually went into the land of Canaan. And at Sinai, God gave the Law, the Ten Commandments and all of the laws of Israel, to the generation of people that had come out of Egypt.

And now to make sure that this generation understood that this was not their parents' law, it's their law, we have a whole rehearsal of God's Law that He had given to Moses. That's why it's called Deuteronomy. Deutero means second; nomos is the Greek word for law. So it's really the second giving of the Law, and so we put the book of Deuteronomy as a bridge between the period described in Numbers and the period described in the book of Joshua.

Now we take this period called the settlement. It's a period that covers about 350 years. And we have to divide that era into two subsections. The book of Joshua talks about how the people actually invaded the land and divided the land up among the tribes. Then, the book of Judges talks about the period following Joshua's death. And it's a period of rather tragic time where the people disobeyed God. That covers a period of about 320 years.

So the settlement is a total period of 350 years that we divide into two eras, the era described in the book of Joshua, which covers about 25 years, and then the book of Judges, which covers about 320 years. So you get some sense that as you read the books of Joshua and Judges you're covering a vast amount of time, a vast amount of history in Israel's life.

Let's look more closely for a bit at the book of Joshua. We said the book of Joshua, which covers a period of about 25 years, is a crucial period in Israel's life. It talks about how they invaded the land and how they divided the land up among the tribes. In this early part of the invasion and the settling down of the land, we have some miraculous events. We have the crossing of the Jordan

River, and this event of crossing the Jordan River sort of is a bookend that closes out the period of going across the desert.

You remember in the book of Exodus the Red Sea opened so that the people could go through safely out of Egypt, and now the closure of that period and the beginning of their settling in their land is a similar miracle of the Jordan River drying up so that the people could go across and go into their land.

The first city they encountered was this mammoth scary city of Jericho with its huge walls. And you can see this group of people looking at those massive walls and saying, "Now what do we do? You know, maybe our parents were right. We have no business trying to take this land." But God said, "You know what? I've got a plan for you." So to reassure these people and to give them confidence that they really could go in and take this land, God not only dried up the Jordan River so they could cross, but then in the first place they encountered, this mammoth city, God said, "I'm going to destroy that city too."

And you perhaps remember the story of Jericho. And then the rest of the story of the book of Joshua talks about various battles and how they went to place after place, many times looking at these cities and these armies and saying, "There's no way we can conquer these people." And time after time God reassured them: "I'm in this with you. You follow Me. You're going to win."

And so that's the early story. And then one of the most wonderful stories in the whole book of Joshua, which you really shouldn't miss as you read it, is Caleb's story. Caleb and Joshua were two of the spies, two of the 12 spies that originally went into the land the first time they were at the land and came back with a favorable report.

They believed, they knew, they were confident that in spite of the giants, in spite of the walled city, in spite of the trained armies, as Caleb said, "We can certainly go in and take that land." So don't miss the wonderful story of Caleb.

Also don't miss the personal story of Joshua in all of this. Joshua was a man particularly selected by God for this overwhelming task of leading these people into that land. We read that under Moses, during Moses' life, Joshua was the general. Whenever there was a battle, it wasn't Moses who led the troops. It was Joshua.

We also see, as we mentioned, that Joshua, along with Caleb, was one of the faithful spies who came back believing God. Joshua was with Moses on Mount Sinai. Nobody else was there, just Moses and Joshua.

We read that God commanded Moses to appoint Joshua as his successor. So Joshua wasn't Moses' choice only, Joshua was also God's choice. And when God told Moses to put Joshua in charge after he departed, He promised Moses that He would be with Joshua just like He was with Moses.

And then in the early chapters, the first two chapters of Joshua, we read that God personally commissioned Joshua and gave him the secret of success. He said, "This book of the Law, this Law that God gave to Moses, shall never be absent from your mouth. But you will walk in it, you will meditate on it, and you will follow it, and you will teach it."

So the book of Joshua tells us the people invaded the land against overwhelming odds, were led by this godly man named Joshua, and they settled in their land, they divided it up, and the people began to carry on life there in their new land that God had given them.

After Joshua died, the story moves into the second phase of the settlement period. And it is as tragic as the book of Joshua is successful. Unfortunately, after Joshua died there was no single strong godly leader to keep people on track, to keep people focused on God. And so the story of Judges really is a story of a cycle. The people would turn away from God, they would start to follow the gods of the Canaanites, and God would raise up a nation to judge them, a nation to oppress them.

The people would then under that oppression cry out to God, and God would raise up a deliverer. He would raise up a hero to rally the people together and drive out that opposing army. Those individuals who God raised up to rally the people were called judges, and that's where the name of the book comes from.

The period of Judges as we said covers a period of about 325 years. This was a long time. This covered many generations of Israel's people. There were 14 judges from Othniel, who was the first one, to Samuel, who we'll see in the book of Kings as well. Samuel was the last of the judges. And this cycle of disobedience, oppression, and restoration under a judge carries on throughout that whole period of 325 years.

Some of the judges you may be familiar with. You just never placed them here before. But the story of Gideon, remember the story, the marvelous story of Gideon and how God delivered the people of Israel from the Midianites, from this small army that Gideon had put together? The reason God took Gideon through such a process is He wanted there to be no question that this was not Gideon's work; this was God's work. Fascinating story! You really need to read that story of Gideon.

Another of the famous judges that most people know about is a man named Samson. Again many people don't associate Samson with this period of Judges. They know the name, they know the story, but they don't remember who he was. And he was one of these men that God raised up to deliver the people of Israel from the Philistines. So also as you're reading the book of Judges, look for this fascinating story.

One of my favorites is a judge named Deborah, a woman who God used in a marvelous way to deliver the people of Israel from oppression. She was able to do what the men couldn't do, and so it's wonderful to read how God used this marvelous woman as a faithful servant to drive out the enemies of Israel by raising up an army and inspiring them to do what no one else thought they were able to do.

Another important thing to understand is that these judges really never rallied the whole nation of Israel. These judges were local, they took a particular tribe or sometimes they combined a couple of tribes, but these weren't national leaders. They weren't leaders over the whole nation. Also it's important to understand that there were long periods of time where there were no judges, and in fact one of the themes that we find repeated in the book of Judges is this theme that everyone did what was right in his own eyes.

We also read four times in the book of Judges, "there was no king in Israel." Now you remember who their king was? You remember on Sinai when God gave the Law, He said, "I am your King." So it's really not that there was no king. It's that the people accepted no king. So the tragic story of the period of Judges is a period of leaderless-ness, except when the people were in such desperate straits that they would cry out to God and God would raise up a leader for a temporary period of time in a certain locale to deliver the people from oppression. Sounds kind of grim, doesn't it? Sounds like nobody remembered God. And that's why we have this one color book called Ruth, because what God wanted us to know is that even though generally the people refused to follow God, they would not have God as their king, and everyone did what they thought was right, the book of Ruth tells us that throughout the nation there were pockets of people who still followed God.

And this book of Ruth tells a story of a woman named Naomi and her family going to a foreign country to Moab and settling there. And it tells a story of how one of Naomi's sons married a Moabite woman named Ruth. The men in the family died, and we see this scary moment with Naomi and Ruth, Naomi being in a foreign land without a husband. Now in those times that was a very vulnerable position to be in.

Naomi said, "I'm going home." Ruth said, "I'm going with you." And so they came back to Bethlehem where Naomi was from, and they followed the laws of God. And there was a man there named Boaz who also followed the laws of God. And because Ruth and Naomi and Boaz were faithful to God and followed the pattern that God had laid down for them to follow, Ruth and Boaz married and they had a son.

And right at the end of the book we understand why this story is included. We find, at the end of the story, old Naomi, Ruth's mother-in-law, holding this baby in her arms. And the writer gives us a brief genealogy to tell us that this baby that was born to Boaz and Ruth would be the father of Jesse, the father of David, the father of Jesus.

And this story tells us how God in His sovereignty in that terrible period of unfaithfulness maintained His faithfulness to His promises that He had made to Israel; and this Moabite woman, because she was faithful to God's leading, became the great, great, great, however great grandmother of Jesus Himself.

So in our periods of great unfaithfulness, it's important to realize that God is always faithful. And no matter how grim the world is around us, God is looking for men and women who will say, "I'm going to follow God." And we have no idea what God is going to do with our life if we just faithfully follow Him.

01-06 Video Transcript 6 – Kingdom Era

Old Testament Basics - Lesson 06.

Old Testament Basics.

Dr. Sid Buzzell.

Lesson Six.

This lesson is about the kingdom era. After the people of Israel went through their long time with the judges, over 300 years of, I guess, really frustration in the sense of failure, they came to the last of the judges, a man named Samuel. And they said, "We're tired of being led by judges, you know, we want a king. Every time we go into battle with one of these other nations, they have a king and we don't. We're led by priests. They're nice people, and some of them have been great heroes, but we've never rallied all of our tribes together into one nation with a king. And that's what we want."

And Samuel resisted, but eventually he gave them a king. And so we find this next long period of time where Israel was being led by kings. There are a number of books that we have to look at as we consider the kingdom period. The chronology books, the books that carry the story forward, are 1 and 2 Samuel and 1 and 2 Kings. So read those two books and that gives you the flow of the history.

Then there are three color books. First and 2 Chronicles give us a different version of the kings. They're the same kings, but they look at them from God's perspective, while the books of Kings look at them from the human perspective. And then the book of Lamentations shows us the heartbroken prophet Jeremiah sitting at the end of this kingdom period, sitting in the rubble of Jerusalem weeping over the destroyed city of Jerusalem and over the destroyed temple.

Also during this period of time, which was the pinnacle of Israel's Old Testament history, we have the books of poetry and wisdom. We're going to spend a whole session on Old Testament poetry and a whole session on Old Testament wisdom literature. But when we look at those books, the books of Psalms, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, and Song of Solomon, you have to impose those on this period of time because it was the kings David and Solomon who were primarily responsible for those books of Psalms and Proverbs, Ecclesiastes and Song of Solomon. So it gets a little bit complicated, and you may want to actually view this portion of the tape twice to get this fixed in your mind because it's a crucial period but it is a bit complicated. This kingdom era covers a period of 460 years, a long, long, time. We divide it into three periods.

The first period in this kingdom era is the preparation for the kingdom. It's the period of Samuel's life. Samuel was the last of the judges, but he was also the kingmaker. He anointed Saul the first king of Israel; he also anointed David the second king of Israel. The period of Samuel's life that's recorded in the book of 1 Samuel covers a period of about 55 years. It's a long time.

Israel was transitioning from the period under the judges to the period under the kings. And the great hero, magnificent man, this man Samuel, if you read his life in these early chapters of 1 Samuel, it's astounding that in this era called the Judges that this one man could rise up and be such a man of God. A true hero is this man Samuel.

And God came to Samuel and said, "If the people want a king and they refuse to be led by Me, then let's give them a human king. And I have appointed the man I want to be the first king, go

anoint this man Saul." And so Saul was the first of Israel's kings, and he ruled during this period called the united kingdom.

Now the time frame for the kingdom era is about 460 years. And we divide that kingdom era into three phases. The first is the preparation for the kingdom, and that's the period of Samuel's life. Samuel was the great kingmaker, the one who anointed the first two kings of Israel.

The second phase of the kingdom era is called "the united kingdom." For a number of years, actually for 120 years, Israel was united under three kings as one nation. But then after Solomon we move to the third era, which is called "the divided kingdom." We're going to look at that in a bit of detail, but as you think about the kingdom era think about the preparation for the kingdom under Samuel.

Think of Israel as one nation under three kings: Saul, David, and Solomon. And then recognize that after Solomon died, his son came to the throne and the people rebelled against his son. And actually then for the rest of the kingdom era we have two nations, not one. So as you read about the latter part of this kingdom era, you'll be reading about Israel, but then you'll also be reading about Judah.

And many people say, "What is this? What is Judah? What is Israel?" Just remember that after Solomon died, his son split the kingdom and now you have the kingdom of Israel and you have the kingdom of Judah. And it's almost like in the United States where we had a period of a civil war where there was the Union and the Confederacy. That's similar to what we read about in the latter part of Israel's kingdom era.

The first period under Samuel was a period that lasted about 55 years. You read about that in 1 Samuel 1–10. Remember now, the kingdom hasn't been initiated yet but Samuel in those first years (chapters 1–10), a 55-year period of time, was transitioning Israel from its period under the judges to the first of the kings.

The second era, the united kingdom, covers a period of 120 years. Interestingly, there were three kings: King Saul, King David, King Solomon. Each of them reigned for about 40 years. So for 120 years, Israel was at its glory days. These were the high-point times for Israel, the time when their greatest literature was written, the period of the Psalms, most of the Psalms.

The period of Solomon gathering and writing the Proverbs, it's when he wrote the book of Ecclesiastes. The book of Song of Solomon, this great period of Israel's literature was during this period of the united kingdom.

Let's look at each of these kings during this united kingdom period. The first king was King Saul. Now Saul never brought all the tribes together, but they were thinking of themselves as one nation. Saul's story is a tragic story. Physically, he was ideal. The Scriptures tell us that he stood head and shoulders above any other man in Israel. He was sort of his own giant, and he rallied the people together. And there was a good time, but not a great time, because although King Saul was qualified physically, we understand that there was something about him that made him not qualified mentally, emotionally, and most of all spiritually.

An interesting note that we read in 1 Samuel about King Saul that really characterizes his reign: he was actually doing pretty well up until that story of David and Goliath. Do you remember that, David and Goliath? Goliath was the giant who came and challenged Israel's army, actually

saying, "We don't have to see a lot of people die in battle, just send one man out to fight me; and if your man beats me, you win. If I defeat him, we win."

Well, everybody including Saul, Israel's giant, was in their tent hiding under their sleeping bags. Nobody wanted to go out and take on this giant. And then this young kid came down. He brought some sandwiches down to his brothers who were in the army. David wasn't even in the army. But David was the one who said, "Who is this giant challenging God? Don't you people believe in our God?" And David said, "I'll go out and take him on."

Well, you know the story, and David did take him on. He defeated the giant. Right after that, as the armies were marching back home, verse 6 of chapter 18 of 1 Samuel says, "It happened as they were coming . . .", "they" being the armies of Israel, "when David returned from killing the Philistine, that the women came out of all the cities of Israel, singing and dancing, to meet King Saul with tambourines, with joy, and with musical instruments." The women sang as they played, and here's what they sang: "'Saul has slain his thousands, and David his ten thousands.'" Then Saul became very angry, for this saying displeased him. And he said, "They have ascribed to David ten thousand, but to me they've only ascribed thousands. Now what more can he have but the kingdom?" Saul looked at David with suspicion from that day on."

From that moment, Saul stopped leading Israel and started protecting his turf. That was the tragic end of Saul. Saul died on the battlefield, and the next king was David. David was the great uniter. David did in fact rally all 12 tribes of Israel, and they became welded together into one nation. Militarily, they expanded their borders. Spiritually, they came together. David was not only a great general, a great leader of armies, but David was a man who worshipped God with his whole heart.

David's story is a story of great success. Tragically, as many people know, David is also a man who failed God. In fact, when you think about David, there are two ways of thinking about David. We think about David and Goliath, but we also think about David and Bathsheba, David's great moments, David's tragic moments. But even after his moral failure with Bathsheba, God didn't give up on David.

In fact, we read after David's death, when God was talking to his son Solomon, we read over and over again, "David was a man who followed Me with his whole heart." David failed God, but God never failed David. David was God's man. In fact, in 2 Samuel 7 we have the Davidic covenant given, where God said to David, "There will always be one of your descendants sitting on the throne of Israel, and someday one of your descendants will be a man who will bless the whole world. He will be the ruler of the world."

And that's the great messianic promise that was given to David and that was fulfilled in Jesus in the New Testament. David was the great poet. We'll read about him more. We'll hear more about him when we talk about the Psalms and the wisdom literature.

David's son Solomon was also a great, kind, brilliant man, gatherer and writer of proverbs. He wrote music. He was just a marvelous man, very gifted. I sometimes wonder if, as we read Proverbs 3:5-6 though, that we don't read some of his own struggle. The advice he gave was: "Trust in the Lord with all your heart. Do not lean on your own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge God."

Solomon did that in the early years of his life, but I believe at the end of his life he lost that struggle. In fact, the Scriptures tell us that he did. So, like David, Solomon was a man of great gifts, the man who did marvelous things. He built the temple in Jerusalem for God. But his life ended tragically. He followed God, but unlike his father, David, he did not follow God with his whole heart.

In fact, after Solomon died, his son Rehoboam came to the throne and he continued in the ways of his father, Solomon. The people rebelled. They had been heavily taxed by Solomon. And they came and asked Rehoboam for some relief from the taxes, and Rehoboam said, "I'm only going to tax you more heavily. I'm the king, and I can do what I want."

Well, the 10 northern tribes said, "We've had enough." So they selected their own king, a man named Jeroboam. And so the 10 northern tribes kept the name Israel and actually became a separate nation. The two tribes in the south, the tribe of Judah and the tribe of Benjamin, then became their own nation. Actually, these two nations, Judah and Israel, at times were even in civil war against each other. Sometimes they fought together against the common enemy, but far more often they didn't.

King Jeroboam in the north set up his own temple, his own idols, appointed his own priesthood. And so for all of the years that Israel existed separated from Judah, they were led by evil kings, kings who just led them further and further away from God.

Israel existed for 210 more years. After Solomon died and the nations divided and split, the nation Israel, those 10 northern tribes, continued on for 210 years. And then God brought the Assyrians to totally destroy and annihilate that northern nation called Israel.

The southern nation of Judah lasted for an additional 135 years. And in 586 [bc], God raised up the Babylonians to come and destroy the southern nation of Judah. And that leads us to this next period of time, which is a heartbreaking tragic period called the exile.

Israel came out of Egypt under Moses; they had every opportunity to live in a land flowing with milk and honey. They had God as their King. They had God-given rules and regulations to help them live their lives in ways that would honor God and make them wildly successful. They refused; they had a better way to live. And finally, in 722 [bc], the northern nation was destroyed. In 586, the southern nation was destroyed and the people of Judah were carried off into captivity. And once again, now in 586, they're living in a foreign land, slaves under a foreign power. Can we begin to estimate the tragic results of people who want to live their lives as they see fit? People who, as amazing as it sounds say, "You know, I really am smarter than God. God says I should live this way, but I've got a better way."

Israel tried it. They tried it generation after generation, failure after failure, until finally now they're back in slavery. That's not the end of the story. We'll pick it up in the next lesson and see how God allowed them to go back to their land and rebuild it.

01-07 Video Transcript 7 – Genesis

Old Testament Basics - Lesson 07.

Old Testament Basics.

Dr. Sid Buzzell.

Lesson Seven.

At the end of the last lesson, the people of Judah, the inhabitants of Jerusalem, had been taken captive by the Babylonians and been transported over to Babylon to live outside that great city of Babylon. In this lesson, we want to look at a bit more detail on that destruction and what it was like to live in exile, and then also to talk about how the Persians allowed the Jews to go back home and rebuild their lives and their culture back in their own homeland.

This period of exile and reconstruction is taught in 11 Old Testament books. Now it gets a little complicated, so just work through with me here. This is a bit detailed, but work with me. The chronological books are 2 Kings 25 and Jeremiah 52. Those two chapters, the last chapter of 2 Kings, the last chapter of Jeremiah, actually describe how the Babylonians finally destroyed Jerusalem and took the people away. The books of Ezra and Nehemiah describe how the people were released from bondage in Babylonian by the Persians and allowed to go back home and rebuild their life and their culture, so the three chronology books, or actually four chronology books.

Second Kings 25 and Jeremiah 52 give us the chronology of the destruction of Jerusalem. And then the books of Ezra and Nehemiah tell the story of rebuilding the land after they were allowed to go home by the Persians. Two color books: the book of Lamentations describes the horrible feeling that Jeremiah the prophet had as he saw his beautiful city of Jerusalem and God's temple lying in rubble. The book of Esther, written during the reconstruction period, gives us a picture of life for the people who didn't return to Jerusalem but stayed in the Persian Empire and lived in the city of Babylon.

Okay, you tracking with me there? It's a little bit difficult. We're going to come back and talk about this in a bit more detail. So I'm giving you the overview. I'll come back and revisit this. And then the next series of books that we have to look at to flush out this period are six of the prophetic books. There are six books written by prophets during this period of exile and the period of reconstruction and we will talk about those briefly and then we will look at them in more detail when we study the lesson on the prophets, okay?

So what we've said is this exile and reconstruction is covered in 11 books. It's covered in 2 Kings. The end of 2 Kings and the end of Jeremiah tell us the story of the destruction of Jerusalem. Then we jump ahead to the books of Ezra and Nehemiah that talk about how the Jews were allowed to go back home and rebuild what the Babylonians had destroyed. And then there are six prophets that prophesized during this time. And as we read their prophecies we get more detail and more color about what life was like during this period of exile and during this period of reconstruction.

Okay, now let's look at a bit more detail, and as we look at this it'll flush out what we've already talked about. The time period covered during the exile and the reconstruction is a period of a little over 200 years, actually about 210 years. And we divide this 210 years into two segments. The first segment is the actual period of exile, 70 years, 70 years the people were in exile. And

then the reconstruction period from the time the Jews were allowed to go back home to the end of the Old Testament covers a period of 136 years. Okay, so that's the time period we're looking at, a total period of over 200 years. Seventy of those years the Jews were in exile and then the next period, about 130 years, the people were allowed to go back home and rebuild their land.

Now let's talk for a bit about this exile. It's easy to think that it was an event, that the Babylonians came, destroyed Jerusalem, and carried these people off into captivity. But actually what happened was that the Babylonians came and besieged various cities in the province of Judah and defeated those cities and took those people back into exile. But they were not ever able to actually destroy Jerusalem. Jerusalem was a great, fortified city.

But this deportation, this movement of people from Judah and Jerusalem over to Babylon, occurred over three different deportations. Now here's why I tell you that. In one of the first deportations, a young man named Daniel was captured and taken back to the city of Babylon. So when you read the book of Daniel, those first 6 chapters of Daniel, you'll read about what life was like for these early captives who were taken back and actually taken into the city of Babylon and became members of the court. These young men were trained and taught and cultivated to be future leaders in the empire of the Babylonians.

In another deportation, a young man named Ezekiel was captured and he was taken among those captives back to Babylon. But unlike Daniel, Ezekiel didn't actually go into the palace and live in the palace. Ezekiel lived outside the city of Babylon with many people who were just taken there basically as slave labor to work and to cultivate the land and to grow crops for all of the people that were being imported by the Babylonians to live around the great city of Babylon and become part of the Babylonian Empire.

A third part of the story is told in the prophet Jeremiah. He was a prophet who was trying to urge the kings to obey God and to allow God to protect the city of Jerusalem. And so this third view of this period leading up to the actual destruction of Jerusalem is given by Jeremiah in his prophecy.

It would almost be like if you were watching CNN during that time and you'd hear Jeremiah saying, "Now from Jerusalem let me give you the latest scoop on what's going on inside Jerusalem as the Babylonians are threatening and they're moving into our province of Judah and they're destroying all these cities. And I'm telling the kings that they better turn or burn. They better get with it or God's going to destroy them. Now to you, Daniel."

And then Daniel says, "Now from inside the palace of Babylon and the rule of Nebuchadnezzar, let me tell you what's going on actually inside. I've got the inside scoop. Now Ezekiel, what's going on out there in the fields?" And then Ezekiel gives us a report of what life is like for people living out in the fields, out in the villages of Babylon, around Babylon, outside Babylon.

And so what you get, what God gives us are these various views of what life was like in the final gasp of Jerusalem, this nation of Judah before the Babylonians finally came in and besieged Jerusalem for years. The people were actually starving to death inside the city of Jerusalem. And then finally they built up these mounds of dirt that allowed them to get up and finally actually destroy the city of Jerusalem and carry the rest of the people off.

So it wasn't just an event. And so to get a picture of what this period was like, you actually have to read the books of Daniel and Ezekiel, which are prophets. You have to read the latter chapters of the book of Jeremiah, another prophet, and then you have to read those latter chapters of the book of 2 Kings.

So that's why we say it gets a little bit complicated, because you don't get the story in any one place. Well, finally the Babylonians did destroy the city of Jerusalem and they took off the last of the inhabitants, exported them over to Babylon. Now when we use the word "Babylon," realize that Babylon was an empire, the Babylonian Empire. The capital of Babylon was the city of Babylon.

And even after the Persians destroyed the Babylonian Empire and became the new empire, their leaders, the emperors of the Persian Empire, still lived in the city of Babylon. So even after the Babylonian Empire moves off from history, you still read about the city of Babylon, because it was such a magnificent city that the Persians who defeated the Babylonians and took over their city didn't destroy it; they just lived there.

So now for 70 years, the people of God are living as vassals, as virtual slaves around the city of Babylon. And then in 538, the Persians defeated the Babylonians. And now the Persians are ruling over that part of the world. Well, when the Assyrians, you remember the Assyrians, in 722, the Assyrians destroyed the northern nation of Israel. Their policy to keep the defeated peoples subservient was to destroy culture, to destroy nationalism, and to destroy religion.

The Assyrians forced the peoples they defeated to intermarry so that you no longer had a person who said, "I am an Israeli." You had a person who said, "Well my mother was an Israeli, my father was a Philistine, so I guess I'm an Assyrian." And so the Assyrians obliterated the culture and religion of the peoples that they defeated.

God preserved Jerusalem from being defeated by the Assyrians. He supernaturally protected Jerusalem from this fierce huge army of the Assyrians and preserved them until the Babylonians were in power, because the Babylonians' policy was to take people as a group, allow them to keep their nationality, allow them to preserve their culture, allow them to practice their religion, but just to move everybody in mass over to the city of Babylon.

And so all around Babylon you have these peoples living together in their culture around the city of Babylon. During the exile, that's where the people of Judah lived. The Persians had a third policy, and so God preserved Judah as a people living outside of Babylon until the Persians came into power. And in 536, the Persian emperor Cyrus wrote a decree. And he said, "You know what? We don't want all these people living around here.

Another way to keep the Persian Empire strong is to keep these people happy, to keep them productive. Let them go home."

So he said to the Jews, "Go home. Go back to Jerusalem. Rebuild your city, rebuild your temple, carry on your life, carry on your religion. Plant your crops, carry on commerce and business, and we will rule you in your own homeland with governors. And those governors will tax you and send the tax money back here to the Persian Empire."

So now the good news was the Jews could go home. And so this next period of time called the reconstruction period, a period of 136 years from Cyrus' decree in 538 until 400 bc when the Old

Testament period ends, is the story of these people who are now delivered and able to go back home and rebuild their city and rebuild their temple.

The first part of that story is recorded in the book of Ezra. Ezra tells the story of the first waves of Jews who returned to their homeland and rebuilt the temple. Chapters 1–6 of the book of Ezra tell the story of rebuilding the temple. After chapter 6 of Ezra, you have a 58-year period gap, and as you're reading the book of Ezra, it's important to realize that when you end chapter 6 and then your eyes just move to chapter 7, there's a 58-year gap there. If you don't realize that, you're sort of reading along in that second part and saying, "What's going on here?" So take your Bible, and maybe right between there just draw a couple lines and put 58 years. The latter part of the book of Ezra, chapters 7–10, talks about a great revival under the scribe Ezra. In chapter 7, Ezra himself came back to Jerusalem and discovered the Law in the rubble of the temple that they were rebuilding and read the Law. And it was a great revival.

So the rebuilding of Jerusalem's temple is recorded in the book of Ezra chapters 1–6. Chapters 7–10 of Ezra tell the story of a great revival among the people. Well, building a temple is one thing; the enemies of the Jews who lived around Jerusalem didn't work overly hard to keep the Jews from rebuilding their temple. There was some opposition, you'll read about that in the book of Ezra, but every time they tried to rebuild the walls, the enemies of the Jews came in and destroyed those walls.

A city with a temple is a city that can be a religious city, but a city with walls becomes a military threat. So the enemies of the Jews who lived around Jerusalem worked overtime to keep them from rebuilding the walls. So for 90 years, from Cyrus' decree allowing the Jews to go home, for the next 90 years the people were never able to rebuild those walls.

Enter Nehemiah, the book of Nehemiah. The first 6 chapters of Nehemiah tell us how 90 years after the Jews returned to their land, they were able to rebuild their walls. Make no mistake about it because Nehemiah makes it completely clear that this was not just the work of Nehemiah, this was the work of God. Because in chapter 6 of the book of Nehemiah we read, "The walls were completed in 52 days, and even the enemies of God said this was the work of God." Magnificent story, marvelous story!

And then just as the latter chapters of the book of Ezra record a revival among the people, so Nehemiah 7–13 also talks about another revival among the people of God. So this period of time is an extremely important period. But if you don't understand what's going on, that the people had been in captivity, and then when you start reading the books of Ezra and Nehemiah they're back in their land and they're rebuilding the temple, that can be very confusing if you don't understand what actually happened during that period of time.

But not all the Jews went back. Just because Cyrus made a decree allowing the Jews to go home and many, many did, not all of them went home. Many of them stayed there in the Persian Empire. And so this color book of Esther tells a story of what life was like for the people who didn't return, the people who stayed back in the city of Babylon under the Persian rulers.

The story of Mordecai and Esther is an intriguing story. It's a marvelous story of how God protected His people even there in the captivity. But if you don't understand when this occurred or what the situation was, the book of Esther makes no sense at all. So realize that the books of Ezra and Nehemiah are the chronological books that tell the story of the rebuilding of Jerusalem.

Not everybody went home and went back to Jerusalem, and this color book of Esther tells another part of the story of what life was like for Jews after the Persians had defeated the Babylonians.

Then you add the prophets of Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi to that reconstruction period, and you get God's view of what life should be like during this time. People got discouraged. People were greedy just like today. Not everybody wanted to participate in rebuilding the temple and rebuilding the walls. They wanted to rebuild their own homes; they wanted to rebuild their own lives.

And so God raised up these three prophets of Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi to urge the people and to encourage the people to cooperate with what He was doing there in Jerusalem in rebuilding life and culture and most of all relationship with Himself for the people who had returned, a marvelous period, intriguing period of history for the Jews.

The one thing we see throughout is the story that we've seen all through the Old Testament, although God's people were unfaithful to Him, He was always faithful to them. People then weren't really all that different from people today. They were people; they were humans. They had their struggles. They had their tragedies. They had their disappointments. Some of them handled those disappointments and tragedies very poorly. They got angry at God. They shook their fist in God's face and said, "I'm gonna do it my way."

But then there's always the story of the Ezras and the Nehemiahs and the Esthers and the Haggais and the Zechariahs and the Malachis who say, "It may appear that God has abandoned us, but we know better. And the way we handle our tragedies and our disappointments is we don't shake our fist in God's face, we come and embrace God. And by faith we get the strength that we need to handle those disappointments and those tragedies in our life."

Don't we still have that same choice today when life doesn't go the way we want it to? What's our response? The awful addition to the tragedy by shaking our fist in God's face; or comfort, encouragement, and strength and direction by coming to God and saying, "God what should we do now?" I think the second way and the books that tell us about the destruction, the exile, and the reconstruction certainly affirm that the only wise way to live life is God's way.

01-08 Video Transcript 8 – Genesis

Old Testament Basics - Lesson 08.
Dr. Sid Buzzell.

Lesson Eight.

In this lesson, we study some of the Bible's most beautiful and exalted literature. In fact it's some of the most beautiful literature ever written anywhere. In this session, we're going to be studying Old Testament poetry. Most of this poetry came from the time of David and Solomon but not all of it. Many people believe that that's the only poetry found in the Bible, but let's just talk for a minute about where we find poetry in the Bible.

Actually five books are written entirely or almost entirely in poetic form. The book of Psalms: most people think of poetry and all they think of is Psalms, but the Proverbs, that piece of wisdom literature, is also written almost exclusively in poetry. The Song of Solomon and the book of Lamentations are written entirely in poetry. And the book of Job is almost entirely written in poetry. There's an opening section and a closing section that's written in prose, but the whole middle part of the book of Job is written in poetry.

Many of the narrative books, remember we talked about the books that carry the story forward, we think of them as narrative and they are, but they also contain sections of poetry. Some of the most intricate and beautiful poetry in the Old Testament is found in the book of Genesis, in the book of Exodus, Judges has poetry, 1 and 2 Samuel both have poetry in them.

So when we read the chronology, when we read the narrative books of the Old Testament, we often find ourselves in poetic sections. All but two of the prophetic books contain poetry, some long sections. Isaiah has some of the most beautiful poetry in all of the Old Testament.

There are only seven of the 39 Old Testament books that don't contain poetry. So while most of the poetry is contained in what we call the poetic literature, we also realize that from Genesis right through to the end of the Old Testament is sprinkled with this magnificent form of writing called poetry.

Well, what distinguishes poetry? What makes a piece of literature poetry in the Hebrew sense? Now poetry doesn't deal with what the writer is saying. It has nothing to do with what the writer is saying. It has everything to do with how the writer is saying what he is saying. When you think poetry, you think of distilled language. You think of intense expression of thought. It's a condensed way of expressing truth, and it draws the reader into the process. When you're reading narrative, when you're reading many of the sermons that are recorded in the prophets, they're giving us their truth; they're explaining that truth.

Poetry is written in such a way that the reader has to interact with what the writer has put on the page. When we say it's distilled language, you have to see the writer of Old Testament poetry working very hard to find that particular word that fits, to find the particular interaction between the lines. It's difficult to write poetry, and you can almost hear the poet thinking in his mind, "If I'm going to work this hard to write it, they're going to have to work to understand it." Because the poet understood that truth discovered is more powerful than truth given.

So, if you try to read Old Testament poetry quickly, casually, easily, it won't work. You have to get into the process. Now Old Testament poetry isn't like most western poetry, it doesn't rhyme. It doesn't have meter. What sets poetic literature apart in the Old Testament is what's called parallelism. In other words, the writer would write a line and then he would write another line that corresponded with that first line.

And while the first line makes sense, and the second line makes sense, the meaning of the poetic structure is between the lines. It's almost like a boy scout rubbing two sticks together until he gets a fire. And what the writer of poetry wants you to do is rub those two lines together, and I like to say the meaning is in the middle. While there is meaning in the first line and meaning in the second line, the real meaning of Hebrew poetry emerges when the relationship between the lines is discovered.

Let me give you an illustration. Psalm 118:1 contains two lines where the thought of the second line expands on the thought of the first line. Listen and see if you can see how the lines work. The first line says, "O give thanks to the Lord, for He is good." So the psalmist is calling the reader to give thanks to the Lord, and then he gives a reason why we should give thanks to the Lord.

But then the writer wanted to expand on that thought so line two says, "for his loving kindness is everlasting." "O give thanks to the Lord, for he is good." Now what I mean by "he is good," is that his loving kindness is everlasting. So the second line expands on the thought of the first line. So when you're reading Hebrew poetry, read the two lines and then ask yourself how does line 2 relate to line 1? What's the relationship? What is the poet doing with these lines?

Now the vast majority of Hebrew poetry is put together in two-line verses. Some verses carry three lines, a very few contain four, and rarely you'll find a five-lines verse of Hebrew poetry. That's how Hebrew poetry works. And if we don't read it as it's designed, we don't really get the beauty of the expression. So we have to work with the poet's craft. Let's look at another illustration. Sometimes the relationship between the two lines of Hebrew poetry is what's called synonymous, in other words the writer will just repeat what he said in the first sentence. "The earth is the Lord's, and all it contains." Second line: "The world and those who dwell in it." That's Psalm 24:1. So you see the second line just repeated the first line. "The earth is the Lord's, and all it contains, the world and those who contain it." Sometimes the lines are set in contrasts. When you see the word but introducing the second line, you know it's contrast. Psalm 1:6: "The Lord knows the way of the righteous, but the way of the wicked will perish."

Sometimes a second line just completes the first line. Psalm 2:6: "I have installed my king upon Zion." The second line, "my holy mount," just completes the thought. Sometimes the two lines compare something. For instance in Psalm 42:1: "As the deer pants for the water brooks, so my soul pants for You, O God." So the second and the first line just compare something. My heart pants for you in the way that a deer pants for the water brooks.

So ask yourself, "What is the relationship between the lines?" Now that may seem like a lot of information to throw at you, but my concern is that sometimes when I get into the Psalms or into the Proverbs, I want to read a whole chapter, and I just find myself reading along and my mind isn't really processing. It's not really working with the poet. And so I don't really benefit, my eyes are just going down the page.

Read poetry slowly. Read poetry with your mind engaged. Read poetry by asking what is the first line saying? What is the second line saying? What's the relationship between the two lines? It's interesting that Psalm 1, the gateway to the Psalms, talk about the person who is blessed. And in verse 2 it says that the blessed person delights in the law of the Lord and meditates on it day and night.

What the psalmist is telling us in Psalm 1 is that if you don't meditate on these psalms, they really won't speak very loudly to you. So that's how Old Testament poetry works. We said there are five books that are written mostly in poetry, two of them are wisdom books. Proverbs and Job are wisdom books but they're written in poetic form. Remember we said poetry doesn't deal with what the writer is saying but how the writer is saying what the writer is saying.

We'll study those books, Proverbs and Job, in the next lesson, because while they're written in poetry, they are wisdom books. The book of Psalms, the book of Song of Solomon, the book of Lamentations are written in poetry, but they are too of poetry. They are written as poetry in poetic form to exalt our minds, to lift us up into the presence of God.

The book of Psalms was written over many years of Israel's history. The earliest psalm, Psalm 90, is a psalm of Moses, so it was written in Moses' day. Psalm 137 was obviously written either during or after the exile. So from the time of Moses to the time of the exile is the period covered by the Psalms.

David wrote many of the psalms, collected many others. So we understand that most people associate the Psalms with the kingdom era, with David's life, because David was the primary poet. The Psalms are prayers. The Psalms are the expression of the human heart toward God. Now what's interesting about that is most of the rest of the Bible, in fact the rest of the Bible, is God's message to us. It's, "Thus saith the Lord." Those sayings of God are inspired.

All Scripture is inspired by God, but what we read in the Psalms are God's inspired way of showing us how we should talk to Him. All the rest of Scripture comes this way, it's God speaking to us, the Psalms are God inspiring people about how we should talk to God.

Some of those Psalms express worship. Some express thanks for deliverance. Some express great confidence as the psalmist was in deep trouble and came to God and poured out his trouble, but by the end of the psalm the psalmist is confidently thanking God because he believes God is going to deliver him.

Some of the Psalms express anger and frustration toward God. Some of them talk about terrible feelings toward enemies. But what we discover in the Psalms is that there is nothing in our heart, there is nothing in our mind that we can't express to God honestly, confidently, and openly.

So as you read the Psalms, sometimes you'll say, "I can't believe anybody would say that to God," Well, God knows what's in our mind and our heart before we say it. And he's saying, "The only safe place you can come and say these deep feelings that trouble you is to Me. If you said these things to your enemies, it would infuriate them. So say them to Me. That's what I'm here for."

Sometimes when we're angry at God and we're frustrated at God, God says, "I can take it, don't be afraid. Come and tell Me how you feel. Let's deal with it. Let's put it on the table." So these Psalms, as beautiful as they are, also teach us how to pray.

A second book along with the Psalms that's included in the poetic literature is the Song of Solomon. Song of Solomon is a difficult book for many people. It actually doesn't even mention God. It's a story of a young man and a young woman who are attracted to each other. They have a courtship, there's a wedding scene, a beautiful wedding scene all written in poetry. Then there's the culmination of their love, their affection for each other.

It speaks in poetic language about the sexual fulfillment of their marriage. Tension enters the relationship, gives a touch of reality there. The tension is resolved and the book closes with this story, this beautiful story of a loving relationship between a man and woman who fall in love, get married, and fulfill their marriage relationship.

That troubles some people. Why is that in the Bible? I guess I would ask, "Why isn't this in the Bible? Why wouldn't it be in the Bible?" God is never embarrassed about how He created us. We read in Genesis that the purpose of the sexual relationship between a man and a woman is procreation. We read in 1 Corinthians that the purpose of a healthy sexual relationship between a man and a woman is to prevent people going outside of that marriage relationship to find that fulfillment.

What we find in the book of the Song of Solomon is that God created sex as something that should be marvelously enjoyed between a man and a woman who are married. It's a beautiful story. It's written in poetic form. Sometimes when you read it you'll have to stop. And as we said talking about the Psalms, you're going to have to work with the poet to see what the poet is doing with this beautiful story. But that's the Song of Solomon.

A third book that's written purely in poetic form, not wisdom literature but just as poetry, is the tragic book of Lamentations. We've referred to it a couple of times. It seems like Lamentations fits in a number of places. It becomes a color book. It becomes a chronological book. Here it becomes a poetic book, because that's how it's written. And the prophet sat on this rubble expressing his deep sorrow, the deep tragic story of people's disobedience, but he expressed it in this beautiful poetic form. A book that should be read, that should be savored.

Old Testament poetry expresses thoughts about God in deep meditative fashion. And you can see God presented in the poets like you don't see Him presented anywhere else. Take the time to listen to the psalmist in Psalm 1, "Delight in the law of the Lord, but meditate on it." Let God speak to you in the depths of your soul by forcing your mind and your heart to work with the poet.

You have to think, you have to pray, you have to meditate if you're going to read Old Testament poetry the way it was designed to be read. Cooperate with the writer; let God deepen the roots of your soul by spending time in this beautiful poetic literature.

01-09 Video Transcript 9 - Genesis

Old Testament Basics - Lesson 09.
Dr. Sid Buzzell.

Lesson Nine.

In this lesson, we introduce the Old Testament's wisdom literature. Now it's important to understand that the whole Old Testament and New Testament contain wisdom. From Genesis to Malachi, from Matthew to Revelation, the purpose of these writers is to help us understand that the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom.

But there are three books in the Old Testament that focus so much on wisdom that we actually call them the "wisdom literature." The books of Job, Proverbs, and Ecclesiastes are usually referred to as the wisdom literature in the Old Testament. But before we look at these books, let's take a few minutes and talk about wisdom. What is it?

The Hebrew word is *chokmâh*, and it was used throughout the Old Testament to talk about people who did things with skill. The basic meaning of the word *chokmâh* or *châkam* is skill. It was used to describe the people who embroidered the priest's garments back in the book of Exodus. These garments were to be beautiful; they were to represent the nature and work of God.

So when they selected people to do that embroidery, they selected people who didn't just do embroidery, they did it with *châkam*, great skill, so that other people who did embroidery would look at the priest's garment and say, "Now that's embroidery." It's also the people who did the metal work on the tabernacle, who were chosen specifically because they did metal work with *châkam*, with skill.

People who parented well, people who administrated well, people who led well, various things that people could do with great skill, with great dexterity, they did with *châkam*. The noun form of that is *chokmâh*. And when we come to the book of Proverbs, for instance, and we read over and over again about wisdom, it is this word *châkam* or *chokmâh*.

What Solomon was saying is that when you see a person living life with wisdom, their whole life is characterized by skill. And just as a person who does embroidery would look at the embroidery on the priest's garment, just as somebody who does metal work would look at the metal work on the tabernacle, the Old Testament tabernacle and say, "Now that's how it ought to be done. I do metal work but I wish I could do it like that." Well, as people looked at a human life and saw how that person related to other people, saw how that person related to their work, saw how that person parented, how that person functioned as a spouse, how that person managed their money, everything about that person they would say, "That person lives life with *chokmâh*. I think that's how life ought to be lived."

But most especially in the Old Testament wisdom literature as we see how a person relates to God and how that person's relationship with God bleeds out through every other aspect of their life, we say, "That's wisdom." So when you think of wisdom and you read the book of Proverbs, and you read the book of Ecclesiastes, and you read the book of Job, these books that are given to wisdom, what God is showing us in these three books is this is how life is lived with beauty, with balance, with dexterity. This is how life ought to be lived.

That's why Proverbs 1:7 and Proverbs 9:10 become such crucial statements, because in these two places, Proverbs 1:7 and Proverbs 9:10, we read that, "The fear of the Lord is the beginning." Until we have a right way of thinking about God and we see God for who God is, for who God says He is, and we see ourselves for who we are, for who God says we are, and we get that relationship squared away, that's the first step of living a wise life.

And that's really what the whole Bible is about: How do we live this wise life? The Prophets, for instance, tell us God's perspective on our world and how we actually live a wise life or a foolish life by reading those sermons in the prophets. The Psalms lead us to love and worship God so that we will trust Him enough to live life the way He tells us it ought to be lived.

The narrative literature, what we've been calling the chronological books, the time books, the books that tell us the story, they're full of stories, absolutely full of stories of people who did follow God and live a wise life and people who refused to follow God and lived a foolish life; and we see the value of living the life well as God teaches us and the folly of living life as a fool.

And so as we read throughout this whole Old Testament, we understand that passage after passage is helping us come to this point where we trust God enough to live life with *chokmâh*, with skill, with wisdom.

So when we refer to the Old Testament wisdom books, we must hear three things. First of all, wisdom is about living life with skill. And in the Old Testament sense, you can't possibly live life with skill, with wisdom, unless you have a proper fear of the Lord. Secondly, there are three books, Job, Proverbs, and Ecclesiastes, that are primarily given to teaching us wisdom. And third, we understand that while Job, Proverbs, and Ecclesiastes are the wisdom books, that they are certainly not the only books that communicate wisdom and teach us how to live a wise life.

What I'd like to do in the rest of this lesson is focus in on these three books of wisdom, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, and Job, because they make an enormous contribution to us about how we can live life with beauty and balance and texture, with wisdom, with skill.

The book of Proverbs is primarily a collection of wise sayings. Most of them were written by Solomon, but not all of them. That's another misconception. People think Solomon wrote all of the Proverbs. He wrote the majority of them. He collected many others from other wisdom literature, from other wise sages. Some of them were collected by others. So as you read the book of Proverbs, you'll see headings periodically as you're reading along that introduce other people who either wrote or collected some of this wisdom literature.

Proverbs 1:1-7 is a particularly important section because it introduces in condensed form the purpose of the Proverbs. And as we said about poetry, if you don't understand how poetry works, if you don't understand how the Proverbs work, you don't read them with maximum contribution.

It begins this way, "The proverbs of Solomon the son of David, king of Israel." And then there's a series of infinitives. Now if it's been a long time since you had English, an infinitive is a word that introduces a purpose. It's usually introduced by the word *to*. Listen to this: "The proverbs of Solomon the son of David, king of Israel. To know wisdom and instruction, to discern the sayings of understanding, to receive instruction, to give prudence . . . to understand a proverb and a figure, the words of the wise and their riddles."

So you see, these infinitives introduce the purpose of Proverbs really as twofold. One is to give us wisdom, but secondly the Proverbs are like a mental gymnasium. The Proverbs being poetry are set up with two lines usually, once in a while more, but usually two lines that work together to produce a thought. And like other poetry, the meaning is in the middle. And the writer of Proverbs had to develop two skills. The first was an astute observation of life. These were wise sages. They looked at life and they saw how life worked and they wanted to capture the lessons that they saw in life.

But then the second skill was an ability to cleverly craft that observation into a proverb, into a poetic structure that forced the reader to ask what is the meaning of the first line, what is the meaning of the second line, and as I put these two lines together what is the truth that comes out of that process?

Proverbs many, many times don't give up their meaning easily. They say to the reader: you're going to have to work at this, because the mind is a muscle. And just like a bodybuilder will go into the gym and lift those weights to build those muscles, the wise person goes into the gymnasium of Proverbs and works that mental muscle to strengthen it.

So if you read a proverb, and it doesn't make sense to you right away, that's by design. So if you're a lazy reader, if you're not serious about learning, many of these proverbs will never yield up their meaning to you. So my invitation to you is the same as my invitation to me, if you want to live a wise life, you've got to cultivate wisdom. And if you're going to cultivate wisdom, you're going to have to work at it.

So don't blame the Proverbs if you read one and you say, "Huh?" That's by design, that's your challenge, that's my challenge to meditate, to prayerfully think my way through, "What is the message here?"

Another truth about Proverbs is their title. Some people come and say, "You know I read that proverb. It says, 'Train up a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not depart from it.' I trained up my child in a way he should go, and God promised me." I say, "Now wait, wait, wait, where did you read that?" "Oh, in the book of Proverbs." I say, "Well, the title of the book isn't Promises, it's Proverbs." These are wise observations of life, which say you increase the probability of a child who doesn't depart from God's way if you raise the child in that way. You increase the probability of gathering wealth if you work hard and invest wisely. You increase the probability of having a good relationship with your children, or with your spouse, if you relate to them in the way that the Proverbs say is a wise way to relate.

But it doesn't guarantee it. It just says you increase the probability of that happening. So don't misunderstand and call these promises. Read them, follow them, but understand they are not guarantees. You and I do not control life.

The Proverbs divide into two. The book of Proverbs divides itself into two large sections. Chapters 1–9 are an introduction to the Proverbs. It's written in poetry. Many of those poetic statements in there read like proverbs, and they are, but in those first nine chapters we find long sections that fit together. It flows.

The poetic verses combine to make a longer statement in those first nine chapters. And what Solomon is doing in those chapters is introducing us to the actual proverbial literature. And the actual proverbs begin in chapter 1 and go through chapter 31 . So read it that way. Many sections

of chapters 10–31 are self-contained. Each verse is a self-contained unit, but that's not always the case.

So as you're reading in the second part of Proverbs, look for those proverbs that string together. Proverbs 31, for instance, is a series of proverbs, but it strings together. It holds together into a larger unit of thought. So as you're reading, as you see proverbs that seem similar to you, see that as a string of proverbs.

The book of Ecclesiastes is another of those books like the Song of Solomon that have driven people crazy for years. What in the world is the writer doing with that? It seems to be so difficult. It seems to make life so hopeless, so meaningless. In fact, the theme introduced in verse 2 of the book of Ecclesiastes says, "Vanity of vanities, all is vanity." And that word "vanity" means vapor, life is "poof," you just get it figured out and it changes on you. You just get things moving in the right way, and it does a U-turn on you.

In fact, the whole book of Ecclesiastes is full of twists and turns and dead-end streets and contradictions. And you read a statement that says one thing; you read the next passage it seems to say exactly the opposite. It's a very troubling book. In fact, the way we outline the book of Ecclesiastes, the first section says, "Life is beyond comprehension. You will never figure it out. So what you have to do is learn to live a happy life in a world you will never fully understand."

The second part of the book of Ecclesiastes says, "You will never control life. Life is out of our control. Learn to live a happy life in a world you cannot control." Now you may be saying, "Wait a minute, didn't you just say the book of Proverbs says that I do have some control, that I increase the probability of being happy with my adult children if I invest in them as young children? Doesn't the book of Proverbs say that if I live a wise life that it will be a happier life and a more enriched life?"

Yeah, Proverbs does say that, and there is truth to that, that I do have some control over my life. But what drives some people to distraction, to extreme frustration, is the reality that life doesn't always work like Proverbs says.

I think if we read the book of Proverbs and we read the book of Ecclesiastes as two ends of a spectrum, we have a better understanding of what life is like. The wise person says, "I do need to live my life in certain ways because it does increase the probability that my life will be a good life." But the wise person also says, "But you know there are so many parts of life I just don't understand, and I'm going to have to learn how to live happily in a world I don't understand. And no matter how much I invest in my life, I've discovered that I do not have absolute control of my life. There are things that happen that I can't control, I can't fix. And so I have to learn to live life in a world I can't completely control. But that doesn't mean I give up, it doesn't mean I become cynical or despair, because Proverbs says that I do have some control."

You see how it works? Either Ecclesiastes without Proverbs is nonsense, or Proverbs without Ecclesiastes becomes a rip-off. So it's finding the balance and working our way across the tension between the message of Ecclesiastes and the message of Proverbs.

But there's another reality at work here. Ecclesiastes opens with the question, "What advantage can I gain with all my labor under the sun?" The writer of Ecclesiastes is saying, "How can I build a hedge around myself? What advantage can I gain by working frantically?" And the word

that's translated labor means that endless, frantic frenzy of work, "by working myself to death to build protection this side of the sun."

The book of Ecclesiastes talks about life under the sun. You really don't find much about God in the book of Ecclesiastes. There are some God statements in Ecclesiastes, but what's interesting is in those God statements, after they're finished, we go right back into the pit, right back into the confusion. And I believe part of the message of Ecclesiastes is that throwing out God words, having a distant concept of God is not the answer.

Now here's something else. The book of Proverbs 1:7 says the beginning of wisdom is to fear God: "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom." And that statement is at the beginning of the book of Proverbs 1:7, and it's at the end of the introduction to Proverbs 9:10, just before we get into the proverbial statements.

Remember, the fear of the Lord is the first step. It's the beginning. Now we come to the end of the book of Ecclesiastes, just a few verses from the end after we've gone through all of this convoluted way of living, all these dead-ends, all these contradictions, all these starts and stops and frustrations, and I don't understand and I can't control. And we come right to the end, and the writer says, "The conclusion, when all has been heard, is fear God and keep His commandments."

I think Proverbs says, "Let's begin with the fear of the Lord and see how life works." The book of Ecclesiastes says let's look at life without God, or with this casual acquaintance with God, and see how life looks that way. And after we've lived life that way with all of its frustrations and all of its anxiety, we come to the end and we say, "You know what? I've tried it on my own. As Solomon said, 'I had all the wealth, all this wisdom, but I tried to live life on my own, finally I concluded that the fear of the Lord is the only way that works.'" That's Proverbs and Ecclesiastes.

Now the third book of wisdom is the book of Job. And Job deals with a different problem. We call Job a "wisdom book" because it wrestles with this lifelong deep-seated problem of why do good and godly people suffer? Complicated question. Job's friends, Job's counselors, thought they knew why Job was suffering. It was because Job sinned.

And as you read these seemingly endless dialogues, or they aren't really dialogues, they're arguments between Job and his friends, argument after argument after argument comes up, "Job when "The proverbs of Solomon the son of David, king of Israel: To know wisdom and instruction, to perceive the words of understanding, to receive the instruction of wisdom, justice, judgment, and equity; to give prudence to the simple, to the young man knowledge and discretion, a wise man will hear and increase learning, and a man of understanding will attain wise counsel, to understand a proverb and an enigma, the words of the wise and their riddles. The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge, but fools despise wisdom and instruction" (Proverbs 1:1-7 nkjv) are you going to admit that the reason you're suffering is because you've sinned, you've violated God?" And Job keeps defending his innocence all the way through until the end when God says to Job, "You're right, you are not suffering because you're evil. You're suffering for a much higher purpose."

Most of us somewhere, either very close to the surface or deeper in our mind, think when we suffer it's because I've done something wrong. Or even worse, when you suffer I think you must have done something wrong. I believe the whole book of Job, this long, lengthy series of debates

between Job and his counselors, finally convinces us when I suffer, or when you suffer, there may very well be another explanation for suffering other than evil.

So don't be too hasty to judge yourself, don't be too hasty to judge other people. Job is a long, long book that goes carefully and systematically through the arguments that say, "If you hurt, it's because you're evil," to say, although that's universally accepted, that is not necessarily true.

Three books of wisdom, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, and Job, but they're not the only places in the Old Testament wisdom is found. If we want to live a wise life, the first decision we have to make is: God is who He says He is. I am who I say I am. And God really is smarter than I am.

01-10 Video Transcript 10 – Genesis

2 Samuel-2 Kings: The Difference Leaders Make - Lesson 2.

1 Kings: Israel's Decline and Division.

I. Succession (1:1-2:11).

A. Introduction.

First Kings is certainly logically named because it is all about kings. You have the story of Solomon in 1 Kings 1-11 . And then starting with chapter 12 and following all the way through to the end of 2 Kings, we have the stories of forty additional kings. Solomon, David's eighth-born son, became his successor. The fact that he was number eight gives you a bit of an indication of how much intrigue and difficulty there was in the succession.

B. David's Last Days

Indeed, the question of who will succeed David is what 1 Kings raises in the beginning of the book. David's fourth-born son, Adonijah, thought of himself as the logical successor. The firstborn son, Amnon, had been killed by the third-born, Absalom. The second-born son had apparently died at a young age. Absalom had been killed in battle by David's general, Joab; and so Adonijah, number four, was ready to take over. At the beginning of 1 Kings, David is old and he has hypothermia; he cannot get warm, and his advisors do something that shows their own lack of moral judgment. In those days, it was thought by the pagans that a king had the right to reign only as long as he was sexually active.

So, to try to prove that David should still be king, they have a nationwide beauty contest, and thus come up with the prettiest young thing they can find in ancient Israel, a woman named Abishag. They bring her to the king and have her go to bed with him. But in fact, the king is far too preoccupied trying to keep warm to have any romantic interests in this new wife. That is proof to Adonijah that he ought to be king, his dad is washed up. So, he schedules a big ceremony and feast and has himself anointed and proclaimed as king. When the noise of this reaches the palace, people there immediately fly into a panic because David had already promised Solomon that he would be king.

But could the decrepit David now carry this out? With the help of Bathsheba, who appears in these latter days to be David's favored wife, the group that supports Solomon has him anointed. Indeed, that catches on more popularly because, even though David is feeble, it is his own decision that they emphasize. Solomon actually becomes king in the popular mentality, and Adonijah has to recognize that his attempt at becoming king fizzled.

II. The Reign of Solomon (2:12-11:43).

A. Securing the Throne.

Now, if the rivalry was just the eighth-born son against the fourth born son, and then they shook hands, made up and all was settled, that would be one thing. But it was not so at all. Instead, we observe that Solomon works firmly to establish his power ruthlessly against all opposition. Eventually, on a fairly thin pretext, Solomon is able to have Adonijah put to death. Solomon puts to death other rivals to the throne as well, even Joab, who had been David's extremely successful military commander. With David's permission, he was also assassinated. At the end of chapter 2 in 1 Kings, we read this statement, "The kingdom was now firmly established in Solomon's hands." It came as the result of several occasions in which rivals to the throne, or rivals to

political power, or anyone that Solomon thought might get in his way, were systematically eliminated.

B. Wisdom and Folly.

Solomon had a tremendous advantage; he was interested in and skilled in wisdom. Now, wisdom has nothing to do with IQ. Biblical wisdom is not about IQ; it is not about experience; it is not about knowledge; it is not about academic skill; it is unrelated to those sorts of topics.

"Wisdom," as the Bible defines it and as the English word rather poorly translates the Hebrew word for wisdom, is the ability to make the right choices. That is what wisdom is. It is choice-making ability, and of course the Bible tells us that fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom, the theme of Proverbs, reminding us that we will not make the right choices in life unless God is at the beginning of our choice-making. To choose Him and to fear Him orients all our ability to make the right choices.

But God gave to Solomon that ability. Solomon was already a somewhat ruthless king. He was already somewhat determined to eliminate opposition to himself. But he's imperfect like the other kings were imperfect, and God's not going to stand in the way of Israel's blessing by renegeing on the chance to do good things for the lineage of David according to His promise in 2 Samuel 7. So Solomon, the successor to David, starts off wonderfully.

He gives wise rulings in difficult cases. The people are both fascinated and thrilled with their new king. However, taking advantage of his popularity, he also does something in chapter 4 that is not ideal. He reverses the tribal district system that had been in existence since the days of Joshua that had been revealed by God in the book of Deuteronomy. Instead, in chapter 4 we read how he appointed federal governors over the special districts that he created, districts that did not coincide with the original boundaries of the tribes in the Promised Land. We see, on the one hand, a king who is very wise and can make the right choices; but on the other hand, a king who takes into his own hands things that God had originally specified were to continue the way that God planned them.

We see a king who is enormously capable at helping people and ruling for them in difficult court decisions, in teaching proverbs to people, indeed in being so wise as it says at the end of chapter 4 that his wisdom spread to all the kings of the world, but who also spent an awful lot of time and energy building up his own personal wealth. Perhaps Solomon's greatest accomplishment is the building of the temple. David had wanted to do it, but God said, "No. Instead, I have something more important for you. I am going to build up your house; you do not build mine." God had promised that your son and successor, that is Solomon, would do that job.

C. A Temple for the Name of the Lord.

With chapters 5-6 and following, we find descriptions of Solomon's determination to build that temple, and to put it into the best possible condition it could be, to make it a house for the gathering of the nations. It is a wonderful success story. He gathers together workers; he makes arrangements with Hiram, the king of Tyre, in what we would call today Lebanon, in those days Phoenicia.

Building materials are provided for the temple, many of them brought by sea to the seacoasts and then tracked over land to Jerusalem. Quarrying is undertaken and a vast complex with a temple upon it is finally constructed.

It is a beautiful temple; it is lovely and it is successful. It took seven years to build, as 1 Kings 6 describes. Then we read these rather ominous words at the beginning of chapter 7: "It took Solomon thirteen years, however, to complete the construction of his palace." It took seven years

on the temple but thirteen years on his own house. Another contrast is Solomon doing the right thing for God in the temple, but then not doing the right thing in terms of paying so much attention to himself.

Further, chapters 7-8 describe the beauty of the tabernacle and its fine appointments; they describe how the ark was brought into the temple and Solomon's wonderful and theologically astute prayer of dedication for the temple. In chapter 9, God appears to Solomon and encourages him and warns him that if he is faithful he can have a long life of blessedness and success and prosperity. If, on the other hand, he is not faithful, there will be difficulties that come to him.

D. Solomon's Splendor.

In chapter 10, we read of the visit of the Queen of Sheba. This queen from the south, who had heard about Solomon but wanted to come and see for herself if he really was so wise. Could someone know so many proverbs, be so skilled at the interpretation of life, be able to describe the way choices should be made? Could this person, who was the collector and/or author of so many of those proverbs that are in what we call the book of Proverbs, really be as impressive as his reputation suggested? He was; and he had splendor in terms of his officers, in terms of his workers, in terms of the palace, and in terms of the public works projects that he had undertaken. There were just all sorts of things that he had accomplished for the people. On the other hand, we also read that, sadly, he had bankrupted the nation. So there came a time when he could not pay Hiram of Tyre what he owed him for building materials and construction help. He had to end up giving part of northern Israel over to Tyre as a payment for it, again, another kind of contrast.

E. Solomon's Spiritual Demise.

In chapter 11, we read about Solomon's spiritual and moral demise. After descriptions of many aspects of his greatness we read this: "King Solomon, however, loved many foreign women besides Pharaoh's daughter (Pharaoh's daughter having been his chief early wife)." He loved Moabites, Ammonites, Edomites, Sidonians, and the Hittites. They were from nations about which the Lord had told the Israelites, "You must not intermarry with them, because they will surely turn your hearts after their gods." It says "his wives led him astray." As Solomon grew old, his wives turned his heart after other gods and his heart was not fully devoted to the Lord his God, as the heart of David his father had been. David had plenty of imperfections but always was loyal to God; he worshiped the Lord alone. David trusted in the Lord alone, and knew that in the Lord alone was righteousness.

Solomon, however, followed Ashtoreth, the goddess of the Sidonians, and Molech, the detestable god of the Ammonites, etc. Solomon did evil in the eyes of the Lord. He did not follow the Lord completely as David, his father, had done. The chapter goes on to describe how Solomon actually introduced idolatry officially into Israel, how he built shrines for idol worship on the various hills around Jerusalem. At the end of Solomon's reign, around 931 B.C., we have a situation where people are worshipping the Lord, the true God, at the temple in Jerusalem. But they are also starting to worship this god, and that goddess, and various other deities at shrines that Solomon also built for them. So the great builder, the builder of the temple, the builder of the palace, and the builder of many of the public works projects around Israel, also became the builder of the pagan worship centers around the city of Jerusalem. Obviously, this was unacceptable to God, and God not only raised up a number of adversaries who fought him, but he also raised up a northerner named Jeroboam, who had been one of Solomon's officers, to oppose him and to seek to take the ten northern tribes away from Solomon's influence, in other words, the leader's revolt that would produce secession by the north from under the monarchy of Solomon.

III. Division of the Kingdom (12:1-14:31).

A. Jeroboam and Rehoboam.

When Solomon died, this very thing did happen as God had said it would. God said to Solomon, "Because of what you have done I am going to rip the nation from you, and I will leave one tribe", and He did (the tribe of Judah), as an indication of loyalty to His promise to David that there would always be a successor to him on the throne. "But most of the nation will no longer be governed by a king descended from your father David and you."

In chapter 12, Jeroboam led that revolution, and it did work. It was successful and the northern tribes broke away from Solomon's son Rehoboam once Solomon had died. Thereafter, we observe what amounts to a continuous civil war, sometimes hot, sometimes cold, but continuous, in which the north and the south are at odds. They were never again united, so there were only three kings who reigned over the whole country. There was Saul, there was David, there was Solomon; and after Solomon's death then the country splits apart, never again to be reunited during its political lifetime as a normal nation on the earth. And, there are going to be kings in the north and kings in the south.

B. Summary of Northern and Southern Kings.

It turns out, conveniently for our accounting system, that there were twenty northern kings until the north was destroyed and conquered and exiled by the Assyrians in 722 B.C. There were a total of twenty southern kings in the succession to Solomon, who reigned all the way to 586 B.C. when the Babylonians destroyed the south. It is the story of those twenty northern kings and those twenty southern kings that occupies the rest of 1 Kings and indeed on into 2 Kings.

C. Prophets: Part of the Story.

1 Kings is also the story of prophets. One of the things you have to keep in mind is that God does a lot through prophets in these books. Sometimes these are anonymous prophets; sometimes they are prophets who are identified, such as Elijah and Elisha. But the books of Kings are not only about kings; they are about the interaction, very often, of kings and prophets. There is one other big factor to keep in mind and that is the superpowers: Egypt, Assyria, and Babylon, the great three powers of the Fertile Crescent, the region in which the Israelites lived. We will see increasingly that those powers have influence upon the way that the course of events goes in Israel and Judah.

D. Calf Worship Instituted by Jeroboam.

When the nation divides Jeroboam, not wanting to send his people to worship at Jerusalem, which after all was a unifying place, sets up a counter-religion, a bogus substitute religion. Well, how will the people worship? Jeroboam decides that they will go right back to the practice that had taken place as described for us in Exodus 32 and 33 at Mt. Sinai when Moses was receiving the Ten Commandments up on the mountain and Aaron and the Israelites were worshipping golden calves down at the bottom.

Following that old tradition of worshipping God by golden calves, he has golden calves made as idols, sets them up at the northern city of Dan and the relatively southern city of Bethel; and there, he causes the Israelites to sin. After about chapter 13, we see that the northern ten tribes are not worshipping the Lord in the true and right way but are worshipping by means of idols. And we are going to see that, as a result, it is impossible for any northern king to do right in the eyes of the Lord fully. Some would be better than others, but generally all twenty of them will be

condemned. When you read about this king or that as a northern king, the summary statement made of him early on will be, "and he, too, did evil in the eyes of the Lord."

IV. Kings of Judah and Israel (15:1-22:53).

On the other hand, some of the southern kings were good. Of the total of twenty, the statement is made of eight of them that they "did good in the eyes of the Lord," although there are often qualifications listed. Nevertheless, if you add it up, of the forty kings of the divided monarchy that followed Solomon, sadly we observe that thirty-two of them did evil in God's opinion and only eight came even close.

A. Dynasty of Omri.

A powerful dynasty in the north is the dynasty of Omri. This dynasty is effectively represented by his son Ahab. Ahab dominates quite a few chapters toward the end of 1 Kings. He was really the north's most evil king; he was sold into idolatry by his own way of thinking. He married a Phoenician princess named Jezebel and effectively gave into her hand the religious leadership of the nation. Jezebel proceeded to persecute the prophets of the Lord. In spite of the counter-religion, in spite of the worship of idols, there were righteous prophets trying to bring the people back to faithfulness to God. Ahab, and Jezebel especially, however, were so successful in suppressing those true prophets that by chapter 17, we find the situation in which only one is actually able to show his face in public (most of them have gone underground and are in hiding). That one is God's prophet Elijah.

B. Elijah and Elisha.

For many chapters, starting in chapter 17, what Elijah does or what Ahab does kind of interact one with another. Soon enough, it is Elijah's successor, Elisha, who is the central figure. And for a time, toward the end of 1 Kings and the beginning of 2 Kings, you are reading more about prophets than you are about kings, because God wanted His people to know His Word; He wanted His truth to be understood. Strongly, a prophet like Elijah represented the Lord. Fiercely, though he stood for God and impressively though his miracles and those of his successor, Elisha, were visible to the people, sadly however, the attractions of idolatry were terribly powerful. And those attractions kept the people of Israel away from worshiping the true and living God almost all the time.

C. An Uneasy Alliance.

There is even a story in 1 Kings 22 of how both the northern and southern kings, for a short time, have made peace; so King Ahab and King Jehoshaphat are together going to war against a common enemy.

They cannot even get a true word from the Lord because all the prophets are false. They finally get one lone prophet named Micaiah to come and prophesy the truth and they hate it when he does.

D. Conclusion.

The northern and southern kings do not believe Micaiah. He predicts disaster for them. Indeed the book comes to a close right after that story of disaster, with King Ahab being killed in battle across the Jordan River to the east, and with the death of Jehoshaphat some years later, and the sad situation of an Israel unable to be obedient to God (i.e., turning to idolatry increasingly, not listening to true prophets, worshiping at locations that are illegal, and by worshiping golden calves that are not God's will but the very opposite thereof). One gets the impression that this

cannot last. One gets the impression, even as 1 Kings ends and 2 Kings begins, that this nation is going downhill and is going to be in big trouble.

03-Numbers Like In Parenthesis Already Done

Numbers-Joshua: The Tragedy of Fear and the Glory of Faith - Lesson 1.

Numbers: Life in a Parenthesis.

I. Preparation for Conquest of the Promised Land (1:1-10:36).

The book of Numbers is the story of Israel in the wilderness. Why were they there? The answer is that they started out there because Numbers tells the story starting out from Mt. Sinai after the Israelites had completed the process of receiving the Law, had built all the things they needed to worship God, had been organized as a people. They were ready to enter into the Promised Land.

A. Soldier Census and Camp Organization (1:1-2:34).

Indeed in Numbers 1, we see them leaving Mt. Sinai, organized and counted according to military units; that is, men who draw the sword for battle. But you know, at the end of the book there is another census in Numbers 26 that indicates they had to be counted again for battle because in between a whole new generation had grown up, and the reason for their being a whole new generation was sin, disobedience, lack of faith.

The story begins at Sinai; the Israelites leave and head for the Promised Land. They are going basically to the north. And we find that in the process of traveling they also are learning more about God's covenant. This is an important thing to appreciate about the book of Numbers, a book in which there is a mixture of historical activity, travels and events, and even battles, and reception of law.

As the people come into new circumstances, God explains laws that will help them live within His will in those new circumstances. As they encounter problems that they had difficulty figuring out because they could not extrapolate of the principles and paradigms of the Law at Sinai, God mercifully explained those laws to them through Moses. The book of Numbers is a combination of history and law, on and off through the various chapters.

B. Organization and Laws Related to the Levites (3:1-4:49).

Early on in the third and fourth chapters of the book, we get laws related to the Levites. It is helpful to appreciate the fact that God chose one of the tribes of Israel to be His special ministers. The whole nation was His people and His priests in one sense; but in particular, the tribe of Levi constituted the clergy. It was they who were specially entrusted with keeping His covenant laws, and teaching the people the content of those laws, and seeing to it that the nation remained pure. Of course, from the tribe of Levi came the priests; in particular, all those descended from Aaron constituted the priests.

C. Elimination of Defilement (5:1-6:27).

We have in chapters 5 and 6 some laws relating to the elimination of defilement, again, the kind of thing that is related to the purity of the people and along the lines of some of what was introduced in the book of Leviticus. Also in chapters 5 and 6 there is some teaching to the Israelites about property, the importance of respect for it, about adultery, and about the taking of vows. Vows are not something that the New Testament spends much time on, but in the Old Testament, especially for certain categories of people, vows were very important. They represented a commitment to serving God in a particular way, and so regulations for how vows are to be taken properly are provided in those early chapters.

D. Laws and Events Related to Worship and the Tabernacle (7:1-9:23).

With chapters 7-9, there are quite a number of laws and events that relate to worship at the tabernacle. The Tabernacle had just been built as the Israelites were at Mt. Sinai and now it was their responsibility to learn to use it, for the priests to learn how to take it down and put it back up again day after day as they traveled in the wilderness, so that it could be used properly for worship. The tabernacle was a portable tent shrine and it represented God's presence in the midst of the people, especially as the ark that held the Ten Commandments was in the midst of the tabernacle. Through it God represented himself among the people and His glory was manifested there. So laws concerning the tabernacle and worship thereat and its transportation are provided for us in chapters 7-9.

E. Departure from Mt. Sinai (10:1-36).

With chapter 10, we actually have the story of the departure from Mt. Sinai. The Israelites are on the road. Now they will be on the road unfortunately for thirty-nine years. They don't know that yet, as far as they know they are going to head straight for the Promised Land and enter into the land of Canaan and begin their conquest of that land under God's good grace. It could have been that way, but unfortunately, as the book goes on to describe, the people sinned against God.

II. Wilderness Years (11:1-25:18).

If we think of chapters 1-10 as a kind of first third of the book, an opening section, Part One let's say, we can think then of chapters 11 -25 as a kind of middle section. We will call chapters 11 - 25 Part Two of the book of Numbers. This is the section of the book where we read about those long years of wandering in the wilderness. What happened? Why were the Israelites stuck in the huge Sinai Peninsula going around from place to place and not making it into the Promised Land? What happened were two kinds of things that indicated lack of faith: one was regular and constant grumbling; a second was the Israelites chickened out from entering the Promised Land.

A. God Judges Complainers (11 :1-12:16).

We read in chapters 11 and 12 how the people complained about their food. They didn't like the food that they were getting. They didn't like the fact that God provided for them, daily, the same good nutritious stuff called "manna." They began to complain about it. Imagine giving people everything they actually need, but wanting more. It is not hard to imagine at all is it, because that is what we do. It is natural with human nature.

But in those same chapters, there is also an interesting account of how Aaron and Miriam complain about Moses. Now Aaron is Moses' older brother and Miriam is his older sister. They were with him, they helped him, they supported him through all these events, the trials in Egypt, and the Exodus from Egypt, and the year spent at Mt. Sinai, and so on. But people can get tired of what they are used to. They can become dissatisfied with circumstances that don't move as quickly as they would want them to, and they can single out somebody and begin to complain about some aspect of his leadership or character, or in this case his family.

We read that Moses had married a Cushite woman. The Cushites in the Old Testament were from the area of Africa that is called the Sudan. In other words, Moses had married a black woman, a woman who was not exactly of his race. It may well be that Aaron and Miriam were not usually racist in their thinking, but in this instance they adopted a racist posture and complained about that woman. God took care of the situation. It was an affront to Moses' leadership and it was an attack on a black woman. And God turned Miriam white, white with

leprosy. Shocked and corrected, they appealed to God for mercy and He did indeed heal them and there was no more talk of criticism of Moses' Cushite wife.

But it was characteristic of what was going on among the people. They left Egypt, were glad to get out, wanted to be headed for the Promised Land; but as they encountered difficulties, as they encountered just the time involved, as they encountered trials of traveling, they began to grumble.

B. Kadesh Barnea (13:1-15:41).

A second big event that occurred during that same block of material in the book of Numbers is the fact that the Israelites chickened out from entering into the Promised Land. Numbers 13 tells the story of sending scouts in to look over the land of Canaan. Each tribe sent a representative scout or spy. They traveled around the land, they looked it over, they saw the cities, they saw the countryside, they saw the agricultural areas, and they came back and gave a report to Moses and the people that described the wonderful land, a land where God would indeed bless them, where they could be happy and at home. But they also described the inhabitants of that land as giants.

We have no reason to think that anything but a very small number of them were tall like Goliath. Goliath was a part of a very small ethnic group that could grow to his very substantial stature. But they were not all basketball players; most of them were normal height. Yet the scouts were afraid, this from people who had been delivered by God from Egypt miraculously, this from people who had been through the Ten Plagues, from people who have seen God defeat the Amelikes before them back in the book of Exodus as they were approaching Mt. Sinai, from people who have been fed miraculously and provided for every step of their journey, from people who crossed the Red Sea on dry land. Now, they were afraid to fight.

You can understand some of it from a human point of view. Here are people who have never fought before. They were never part of any army; they were not good at what they did. They had a little bit of practice and a couple of encounters in the wilderness. But to think of themselves as fighting now as conquerors, rather than just defending themselves as they traveled along in the wilderness, that was hard for many people. Only two of the scouts, Joshua and Caleb, said, "Let's go, we can take it. God will be with us."

Ten of them said, "We haven't got a chance. We were as grasshoppers in their sight." That lack of faith meant that God turns them back and lets them wander in the wilderness until the new generation grows up. In other words what God does is to say, "Since you do not have the faith after all I have done for you to be my soldiers and enter into this Promised Land, then I will let you die out in the wilderness. I will let you wander around for year after year until most of you are dead and a whole new generation is grown up. I will let your children enter the Promised Land, but I will not let you."

C. Rebellion and God's Reaffirmation of the Priesthood (16:1-19:22).

So that is actually what happened. We see the Israelites traveling around the wilderness. As they travel, year after year, they begin to grumble as well. One of the big events takes place in chapters 16-19, where there is a rebellion led by Korah, Dathan, and Abiram. They begin to talk about how wonderful Egypt was, all the vegetables they ate, the fresh vegetables, and all the nice times they had there, all the countryside that they enjoyed, and so on. "We come out here in this wilderness and we are just going to die." They begin blaming Moses for that and they launch a rebellion and launched a rebellion against him with the idea that they would assume leadership

and actually lead the people back to Egypt. How soon we forget! God handles that rebellion very efficiently. He causes the earth to open and swallow them up, an earthquake-like fissure opens up in the ground, and they and those with them are simply swallowed up by the earth.

D. Defeat of Enemies East of the Jordan (20:1-25:18).

This does not mean, however, it is a good time in every way. The Israelites are inclined to all sorts of things that are far from what they should be. When we come to chapter 20, for example, we find the Israelites near the end of their journey. They are in Moab, which is a country that is just to the east of the Promised Land, right across the Jordan River. Basically all they will have to do is cross through part of Moab and then ford the Jordan and enter into Canaan and begin the conquest. From one point of view it looks like it is fine; they are ready to go, and things will go well. But some complications ensue.

The king of Moab is a character named Balak. He knows that his own forces will be quite inadequate to attack and prevent the Israelites from moving through his territory. Moab at this time was newly settled and probably had just a very small number of citizenry capable of coming out and forming a volunteer defense force. Balak gets the idea that if he cannot defeat the Israelites militarily maybe he can defeat them spiritually. In particular, he has a couple of things in mind. The first option is to hire a prophet. There is a well-known prophet to the east named Balaam. This prophet Balaam is one who has a reputation as being able to prophesy in the name of various gods and goddesses.

Balak sends messengers to hire Balaam to come and to prophesy in the name of Yahweh, the Hebrew for "Lord," the God of the Israelites. His theory is that if he can get this prophet (these prophets are suppose to be in good with the gods) to curse the nation of Israel maybe that will turn them back and prevent them from going through his territory, perhaps taking some of it in the process of their conquest. When Balaam agrees to go he says to Balak, "Now remember, I can only prophesy what this god Yahweh tells me to prophesy." It may have been something of a kind of an idle boast in the first instance, but God does in fact speak through Balaam.

Visualize this scene in chapters 22, 23, and 24: Balak has a whole group of government officials up on a high hill. They are standing there with Balaam the prophet, and looking forward to seeing how Balaam will curse the Israelites. And Balaam opens up his mouth and says things like this, "Balak brought me from Aram, the king of Moab from the eastern mountains. 'Come,' he said, 'Curse Jacob for me; come, denounce Israel.' How can I curse those whom God has not cursed? How can I denounce those whom the Lord has not denounced? From the rocky peaks I see them, from the heights I view them. I see a people who live apart and do not consider themselves one of the nations. Who can count the dust of Jacob or number the fourth part of Israel? Let me die the death of the righteous. May my end be like theirs!"

And Balak, of course, said to Balaam, "What have you done to me? I brought you to curse my enemies, but you have done nothing but bless them!" Try after try Balak gave Balaam one more chance, but Balaam kept prophesying as God put the words in his mouth. In spite of the fact that God's people had been so disobedient, in spite of the fact those Israelites had flaws and faults and grumbled a lot, in spite of their limitations, in spite of their weaknesses, God notified even the pagans that He was going to bless His people, make them mighty, and fulfill His promises concerning them to Abraham.

A very bad thing happens right after the Balaam incident. The Israelites are at a location called Baal of Peor, part of Moab, and they get into one of the most severe, sad religious practices of the day, that is, ritual prostitution. Chapter 25 of Numbers tells of one instance of the corruption of the people: how they engaged in the sexual practices that accompanied worship in the corrupt Moabite way of doing things, as people worshiped Baal and his girlfriend in the mythology of that day, Asherah. Part of what they did was have sex with prostitutes. The Israelites get into this as well. A plague ensues, and God stops that plague only when the Israelites take firm action and even kill the perpetrators. But it is a sad time and it is an indication of how God's people tend, easily enough, to turn away from Him.

III. New Census and Preparation for Conquest (26:1-36:13).

The third part of the book, chapters 26-36, involves the new census and the preparation for the conquest. A lot of time has passed; there is actually the passage of approximately thirty-eight years of time within the space of just a few verses.

A. Instructions and Preparations for Entering the Promised Land (26:1-30:16).

The second census is taken in chapter 26. The people are ready now. The count is of those who have basically been born and grown up in the wilderness. It is time to get ready for the entering into the Promised Land. This brings questions with it, for example a group of women who are all the daughters of one Israelite named Zelophehad. They come to Moses and say, "We are almost ready to enter into the Promised Land, the troops are being counted, everybody is organized, the invasion is being put into motion, but our father died without leaving any sons." The usual cultural expectation is that it is the sons who inherit the land and then they make sure that the women also get their fair share. The boys look out for the girls, the men look out for the women; that is how it works within the family. "But we have no brothers. What are we going to do?"

Moses brings their concern to God. And God gives them the answer that if there are no men in the family to inherit land of course the women must inherit. He instructed Moses that they must marry within their tribe so that the land must stay where maximum access to the family can be provided. After clearing up that and other kinds of questions, then the Israelites do prepare to enter the Promised Land.

B. Defeat of Midianites and Allocation of Land (31:1-35:34).

They are still on the east side of the Jordan River, so the chapters from 31-35 in this book talk about some battles that they fight on the east side of the Jordan where they are starting the process of entering the Promised Land. The Promised Land does go east of the Jordan, and so they must take care of that minor portion of the territory that they want to control first. All the tribes get together and they attack first the Midianites, then they attack other groups as well, and they begin to settle in the eastern regions of the Jordan River, across the Jordan from the main part of the Promised Land.

Moreover they receive information about a variety of laws, about offerings, about vows, about festivals, and even more information about how inheritance laws will work. You can see that there is a combination here beginning to take the land and wanting properly to possess it, God wanting them to possess it in an equitable way, to have access for everybody to that land. In modern times, most of the revolutions that have been fought have been fought over land, people who do not have access to ownership of land fighting for that right.

C. Fulfillment of Inheritance (36:1-13).

God wanted His people to distribute their land properly and fairly, and have everybody get equal access to the land. So concerns in the book of Numbers, as they will also be reflected in the book of Deuteronomy, tend toward this direction. There is that expectation that it is just not a matter of getting there and capturing the territory, but it is a matter of being a righteous people who occupy the land fairly, and to distribute it among themselves fairly according to God's design so that everybody is treated equally, everybody is a brother and a sister, everybody is receiving the land and caring about his neighbor as himself in the way that God designed. The book of Numbers comes to a close with the conquest starting and with the land, in a small way, being possessed and with God's nation, for all their faults, finally entering into Canaan.

04-2 Video Lecture Judges-Ruth - Lesson In Contrasts

Judges-1 Samuel: Israel's Choice From God-Rule to Human-Rule - Lesson 1

Judges and Ruth: Lessons in Contrasts, Ignoring God and Following God

I. Deterioration (Judges 1:1-3:4).

With the book of Judges comes a desperate struggle. The Israelites had the Promised Land. They were in it. It had been distributed to them to the extent that they were faithful. They had conquered it. The judges period is a period of decline, not of success. The Israelites show themselves increasingly unfaithful. Enemy after enemy attacks them, trying to take away this part of the Promised Land or that part of the Promised Land. The people, as a result of their sin, are not really up to holding on to it.

A. Military Decline.

The writer of the book of Judges, whoever it is, we do not know, has taken the trouble at the beginning of the book to say, at several points: "After Joshua died, such and such happened." You can look for that as you read through it. Then toward the end of the book the writer says in several places, "There was no king in Israel in those days. Everyone did what was right in his own eyes." The writer is emphasizing that after Joshua died there was trouble, things declined. Before the kingship, before the monarchy, the people really got into more and more trouble and desperately needed some kind of firmer leadership, more even leadership, than they experienced.

This book brings us from the death of Joshua all the way to the life of Samuel, who appears in the very next book that gives us substantial historical coverage; that is, I Samuel. It includes the descriptions of about a dozen judges. Now, we do need to appreciate the fact that these judges are described in different ways and not everything in the book is devoted to the judges. As a matter of fact, the judges are described only from the middle of chapter 3 to the end of chapter 16, and there is more to the book than that. But, they are central to the story. What we find is that there are a dozen judges listed, but only six of them are described in any detail. Six of the judges, therefore, we call "minor judges" from the Latin word *menor*, which means shorter or smaller. The descriptions of them are much smaller; some of them are just mentioned in a verse or two.

There are the major judges, of whom we have six. Those six major judges Othniel, Ehud, Deborah, Gideon, Jephthah, and Samson, tell quite a story. The story that they tell, the story that their acts and activities bring to our attention, is a story of decline. We see the decline, first of all, militarily. The Israelites under Joshua were conquerors, but the Israelites during the days of the judges progressively were less able, not merely to conquer, but even hold on to the territories they had conquered. So there is military decline.

B. Spiritual Decline

There is also spiritual decline; the people are heading off in the wrong direction religiously. What they are doing is worshiping various gods and goddesses, the ones that the local inhabitants have been worshiping for years and that are attractive to the Israelites, or the ones they brought with them from Egypt, like the golden calf, and so on. Worshiping these gods and goddesses, of course, is a direct violation of the Ten Commandments and is going to get them into trouble. So, there is military decline, and there is also spiritual decline. These people are not acting like God's people; they are not following the covenant, and they are not obeying God's Law.

C. Religious Decline.

In addition, there is also religious decline. Now, we mean by religious decline the formal things that surround spirituality are also going downhill; people are not worshiping like they should. They are not faithfully coming to the central sanctuary where the tabernacle is at Shiloh, or any other location. They are not showing up there as a nation three times a year as they should. They are not teaching the Law to their children. They are not offering sacrifices in the measure that they should. There is military decline, spiritual decline, religious decline, and then there is also moral decline.

D. Moral Decline

Morality is related closely to spirituality and religion, but we mean by moral decline just that their actual behavior as human beings is declining, and these instances of moral decline are described for us in the story we will talk about shortly. It is so easy it seems for a generation to abandon the values of a prior generation. We are told that as long as the Israelites were under Joshua they had done a fairly good job of keeping away from idolatry and all the other trappings of paganism. But once Joshua died, they turned to the things that they found natural to do in the culture of that day. Here are people who came out of the wilderness and have been busy occupying the Promised Land and busy with battles of conquest. They are settled at least to one degree or another. They begin to plant and to harvest; they begin to raise their herds and their flocks; they begin to plant the trees and tend the vineyards, and so on, that living in the land represents.

The Canaanites, the people who were still there in large measure because the conquest was so imperfect as the early chapters of Judges reminds us, were offering sacrifices, were worshiping various gods and goddesses, and were seeming to have success thereby. So the Israelites fell into the same thing and began worshiping this god or that goddess and leaving aside their confidence in the Lord to supply all their needs. It is what typically people do. They have a lack of confidence that their needs will be met by God alone, and so they begin to have faith in some other direction, other gods, other things, whatever it is, they did that.

E. Deuteronomic Cycle (Judges 2:7-19).

Something develops that chapter 2 describes for us that we see carried out throughout the book of Judges: it has been labeled the Deuteronomic Cycle. We see the people of Israel at first in this cycle, which relates to the warnings and descriptions and predictions of the book of Deuteronomy, safe, well, and faithful to God. Then, we see in their complacency, they begin to worship other gods and turn away from the Lord. What does He do? He does exactly what the book of Deuteronomy promises and guarantees He will do, He gives them over into the hands of their enemies. Their enemies then have success against them militarily, capture parts or large parts of their land, subdue them, put them under harsh treatment, take many things from them, not the least taxes, and then they are oppressed by their enemies. When things are not going so well, then they turn to the Lord and plead for deliverance. They call to Him. He is merciful, so He responds. They turn back to Him and get rid of their idols.

He has sent, in these cases, a judge to be His representative. He raised up somebody to lead them and protect them and deliver them. Usually, as long as the judge lives, in whatever part of the country of Israel the judge had come from, the people there, at least, will be pretty faithful. But, then the judge will die and the people will fall right back into sin again and will turn according to their natural inclinations (to pagan practices), and the cycle will go around again. They will once more be subject to their enemies. This cycle of safety, then disobedience, then subjugation to enemies, then calling out to God for help, and His rescuing them by a judge is called the

Deuteronomic Cycle. It is a pattern that we see again and again in the book of Judges and, indeed, it carries on into Samuel and Kings. We will see more of it in these books as well.

II. Deliverance (Judges 3:5-16:31).

A. Government.

One of the things that we observe is that the leadership in these days is a leadership that is "charismatic," not charismatic with regard to certain gifts of the Spirit as we sometimes hear the term in our day, but charismatic in terms that it is God's Spirit who is at work. It is the Spirit of God making things happen in these days. There is not otherwise a formal government. It is somewhat along the lines of anarchy, not anarchy in the sense of people rioting in the streets all day long, but anarchy in the sense that there is not much unity among the tribes.

There is not much government and response to government among the people. They are breaking up into small groups. There are rivalries between the tribes beginning to emerge. They are not getting along together, they are not seeing eye-to-eye, and they are going their own way. As we observe what happens with the various judges, we understand that almost all the judges are so local that they are really only rescuing a part of the people. So a judge leads this tribe against that foe, another judge leads another tribe or maybe a group of tribes against yet another foe. But we do not see much of a picture of the nation as a whole functioning together, working together, and serving God together.

This brings out the need for a true and good king over God's people, not just any king but a true and good king. So the book leads in that direction. There is even the story of an attempt at kingship in chapter 9 by a son of Gideon named Abimelech. That attempt failed, but the book ends with a strong emphasis on the fact that the Israelites really do need a true and good king.

B. Five Major Judges.

The judges start with Othniel, and then there is Ehud. Othniel led the people against a foe that we do not know much about called Cushan-Rishathaim, or doubly-evil Cushan. Then Ehud, in chapter 3, against Moab under the king at that time, named Eglon. Ehud succeeds by assassination, not a very pretty picture. It is important to remember that these judges are not necessarily exemplary. God raises them up and He uses them, but they are far from sinless and they certainly are not models for us to follow in much of what they do.

One of the persons who comes closest to being a model is, however, Deborah. She is a terrific judge and she works with her general, Barak, to defeat a coalition of Canaanite kings in the northern part of Israel (that is described for us in chapters 4-5). Then comes Gideon whose faith is weak but who finally after testing God, something that is not model behavior, does have the confidence to lead the Israelites into battle against the Midianites.

The next major judge is Jephthah in chapters 10-12. Jephthah, as part of the culture of his day, actually ends up sacrificing his daughter as a token of appreciation to the Lord for success in battle.

C. Samson, the Sixth Major Judge.

The final major judge is Samson in chapters 13-16. By this time, no one will even go with the judge. All the other judges had at least somebody with them; they gathered some troops, maybe only the troops of a single tribe, but at least they had people that they could lead into battle. Samson is alone. Things have gotten so bad that, by the time he has to fight the Philistines, he

does all his fighting by himself. He is also not a very moral person even though he has taken a vow to be a Nazirite, which is a specially dedicated person. He breaks those vows, and he gets involved with various women when he should not. He spends lots of time fooling around with the Philistines, who are supposed to be those whom he is fighting. In his tragic story, he is eventually taken prisoner and ends up killing as many people at his death as he did all the rest of his life fighting Philistines. He is in a temple; he is blinded; he is chained to columns; and as he pulls those columns down that supports the roof, a lot of people in the temple get killed. But the story does not end there; it does not end just with that tragedy, with one last judge fighting all by himself using the great powers that God had mercifully given him. It goes on from there downhill, even more of a tragedy.

III. Depravity (Judges 17:1-21:25).

A. Religious Disorder.

We read in chapters 17-18 about the religious disorder in which the Israelites are now led, even by a Levite: making idols and worshiping idols and departing almost completely from faithfulness to God's covenant.

B. Moral Disorder.

The last three chapters of the book tell a sad tale. Chapters 19-21 tell the story of another Levite whose concubine (that is, a non-inheriting wife) is raped and murdered at an Israelite town in the tribe of Benjamin called Gibeah. Representatives of the tribe come to the Benjamites and say to them, "Deliver to us for judgment these men from the town of Gibeah in your territory that did this horrible crime." The Benjamites say, "We will not. These are Benjamites. These are our people. Who are you to tell us to do that?" In other words, their loyalty to themselves within their own tribe is far more important to them than justice and righteousness and cooperation within God's covenant.

So what happens? The eleven tribes go to war against the one, and you know they are so inept for a long time, they cannot win. Finally, they succeed, and then after having decimated the population of the Benjamites, they come up with a somewhat ridiculous solution to it all. They allow the Benjamites, the men that are left, to capture as their wives women who come to a national festival. The women gather at the festival, and the men have not told them a thing. The Benjamites come out of the bushes, grab women, drag them off, and make them their wives. That is the level of brilliant thinking; that is the level of obedience; that is the level of spirituality to which things had declined in the days of the judges.

IV. Love Demonstrated (Ruth 1:1-2:23).

A. Grief, Loyalty, and Conversion.

But you know what? There was an exception. That exception centers around the town of Bethlehem, the little town of Bethlehem. It is the exception that is chronicled for us in the book of Ruth. A man from Bethlehem and his wife and their two sons, during a time when there was not much rainfall and there was famine, moved to Moab. The two sons died there and the father died as well. Those left were a woman named Naomi and her two daughters-in-law, Orpah and Ruth. Naomi heard that things were going better back in Bethlehem where she and her husband and sons had come from, and so determined to return.

The one daughter-in-law, Orpah, kissed her good-bye but the other daughter-in-law, Ruth, stayed with her. Ruth said these words, "Do not urge me to leave you or turn back from you. Where you go I will go; where you stay I will stay. Your people will be my people and your God my God."

That is the language of conversion. This woman, Naomi, who had suffered so much, had been such a witness to her daughter-in-law that her daughter-in-law wanted to return with her and worship the God that she worshiped. Ruth grew up in Moab where they worshiped their national god, Chemosh, that god and many other gods and goddesses as well. But so wonderful and effective was the witness of Naomi that Ruth wants to go back with her and say to her "Your God will be my God." She is going to convert to the worship of the Lord, the true God of Israel.

Naomi at the end of chapter 1 says to the people of Bethlehem as they return, "Do not use my given name, the name Naomi (in Hebrew means "sweet")." She says, "Call me Mara, because Mara means bitter." But even in that bitterness she says, "The Lord has caused it." Naomi understands that God will not give us more than we can bear. Well, it is a wonderful story because it is such an exception to the prevailing situation in the book of Judges.

The general picture in Judges is people being unfaithful and falling into the hands of their enemies and getting themselves into all kinds of trouble, and leaving God only turning to Him on occasions when they were in terrible difficulty, and then only temporarily. In this story, there is an exception that occurs during the same time period in the days when the judges ruled. We see faithfulness and its outworking.

B. Surprising Kindness.

After Ruth and Naomi get to Naomi's ancestral home, the home that Naomi had left some years earlier, Ruth goes out to take advantage of the gleaning laws. Good Israelites, as there were many in Bethlehem, allowed foreigners, aliens, to go among them and to pick up whatever the harvesters dropped or the things at the edges of the field that could be eaten. Ruth is noticed by a man named Boaz. She is in his field and he notices her. He learns that she is that woman who came from Moab and has converted to faith in the Lord. This impresses him and so he not only instructs his workers to let her have a free hand in gleaning, but he even tells them to leave some good stuff for her to pick up.

He invites her to lunch when all the workers are eating lunch and strikes up a conversation with her. He wants to encourage this woman who has converted to his precious Lord. Once this is known, we see Naomi and Ruth making some very important decisions.

V. Love Rewarded.

A. Ruth's Marriage Proposal.

Actually, in the book the women really know how to operate; they know that a righteous man like Boaz can be trusted. They know the things to initiate, and they make a lot of the key decisions. Trusting in God, they know they can initiate certain kinds of actions that will come to good fruition under God's hand. As time goes by, Ruth, knowing that Boaz is interested in her, is very positive, actually proposes marriage to him. She does this in a non-normal way; she goes and lies down at his feet, showing that she wants to belong to him.

One night when he is sleeping at a threshing floor, staying out and watching the grain to be sure no one comes and steals it during those days when so many raiders did attack the Israelites, he accepts that proposal of marriage. But there is a hitch. Numbers 26 and 31 say when women without husbands marry, they have got to be very careful whom they marry, and the land has to go to the next of kin. There is someone closer to Naomi's family even than Boaz. Fortunately, he does not want to get the land that could come with marrying Ruth, the land that was in Naomi's ancestral family, because he says it would endanger his own inheritance. Presumably, he has

already promised a certain amount of land to his sons, and if he married Ruth and had other children it might dilute the amount of land his sons could have.

B. Consolation: New Family.

Things work out in such a way, as Boaz faithfully superintends them in the city gate at Bethlehem, that he and Ruth are able to get married. They have a child, and the child is taken by Naomi and nursed. Naomi has the wonderful, deep fulfillment of caring for a child again. She who had been bereft now has a little boy named Obed.

As the book ends, we realize this, in fact, was a story about David's great-great-grandmother. That is what it was about, because the lineage of the genealogy at the end takes us right down to King David. God was at work in the midst of a tough time, in the midst of a corrupt time, in the midst of a decline, morally, spiritually, militarily, and religiously. With good people faithful to Him, He was able to do things that countered the trends, and that in fact a wonderful part of His overall plan, through David and also down to Christ, the Son of David, of whom Ruth and Naomi are also ancestors.

05-2 Video Lecture 1-Samuel

Judges-1 Samuel: Israel's Choice From God-Rule to Human-Rule - Lesson 2.

1 Samuel: A Case Study in Integrity.

I. Introduction.

First Samuel is a book of transition. It tells the story of the transition from the days of the judges to the monarchy, the kingship of Israel. The end of the book of Judges says in several places, "There was no king in Israel; everyone did what was right in his own eyes." It says that by way of disapproval: Israel did need a king. There are three big figures, three big human characters, in 1 Samuel, and they are Samuel, Saul, and David. To a considerable degree, the book is their story. Approximately the first third of the book deals with Samuel, who is the last judge. He is not mentioned in the book of Judges but he is the last judge of Israel. Then comes Saul who is Israel's first king, though not a very successful king in the overall scheme of things. Then comes David. David actually dominates most of 1 Samuel, even though David is not yet king in the eyes of the people. He does get anointed as king, an advanced kind of anointing in which God indicates that David will be king, but it is not until 2 Samuel that David actually assumes the throne.

It is important to appreciate the fact that 1 and 2 Samuel go together. They are a unit and they are divided into first and second books because of their length. It is a little like those videos that you get from the video store that have two cassettes because the movie is too long to get on one. That is why we have the terms 1 Samuel and 2 Samuel. Nevertheless, the story of 1 Samuel does come to a convenient end with the death of Saul, which is a logical breaking point. We can speak of 1 Samuel as a unit, as we do in this lesson.

II. Samuel's Background, Call, and Leadership (1:1-8:22).

A. Background.

Samuel is a fine figure. He is a godly judge. He really does contrast with judges like Gideon or Jephthah or especially Samson in the way that he is successful militarily, leading the Israelites against their primary enemy, the Philistines; in the way that he is loyal to the Word of God, to God's covenant; in the way he teaches that Word to the people of Israel, and the faithfulness with which he carries on his work as a judge. The judges were actually political military leaders. But as political military leaders, they also had a secondary role: that was their judicial role in which people came to them, sort of like going to the Supreme Court of a country, to get rulings on difficult legal matters. Samuel functioned in that way for the people of Israel. He was respected and revered; and his godliness is a fine model, a fine example for us, and always has been appreciated by people who have read this book.

B. Call.

The story begins with Hannah's concern, that she would have a child. She was childless for a long time, and it was hard for her in that culture to be comforted by anything else but the thought of finally having a child. When God in His mercy gave Hannah a child, He did give her a special child, Samuel. She dedicated him to the Lord; and he served the Lord as an assistant to the high priest Eli at the tabernacle at Shiloh. The stories about his childhood are interesting, because he really was called by God. He was called at a young age. He was called with the "double naming" that in the Bible indicates tenderness and affection. God calls him, "Samuel, Samuel."

C. Leadership

After he grows up, he becomes a judge and experiences in his lifetime some of the gains and losses that were characteristic of those days before the monarchy in Israel, in the eleventh century B.C. One thing that happened during his early years was the loss of the ark of the covenant in battle to the Philistines. This is described in the early chapters of 1 Samuel as a terrible blow to the people. Indeed, upon hearing the news, the high priest Eli falls over dead of an apparent heart attack or stroke, so severe was the news to him. The ark represented God's presence among His people and so they brought it out with them into battle, this big box carried by poles through golden rings with the Ten Commandments inside. This was the people's symbol of the presence of God.

The fact that the enemy could capture that important symbol is an indication of the way that things were going. In other words, the Israelites were losing the Promised Land. Bit by bit, little by little, they were actually losing territory, losing various battles. And the Philistines, who originally started along the Mediterranean seacoast on the west, were making more and more inroads into the heartland of Israel proper, capturing this town and that, this region and that, taking away people's homes and fields. And so, it was a difficult time.

III. The Anointing and Rejection of Saul as King (9:1-15:35).

Samuel, faithful to God as an adult, taking over as one of the judges, was able to stem that tide in many ways. We read in some of the chapters about his successes militarily as he led the people. But, he was getting very old. Soon enough, as is described for us in chapters 8-10, the people of Israel begin to demand a king. Their motives for demanding a king were not ideal. They say, in chapter 8, when they come to Samuel: "Give us a king so that we can be like the other nations."

This was always a problem for the people of Israel, a tendency to think in terms of copying others. That is one of the factors that got them into idolatry so easily and so constantly. It is one of the factors that made them compromise religiously. It is one of the factors that tended to take their attention away from the Lord and trust in Him and place it in military might and political alliances. In chapter 8, they are doing it again. They are saying to Samuel, "You are old, you have gone into retirement. Your sons, who have been appointed to be judges as successors to you, are corrupt; they are taking bribes. We cannot stand this. We need a king. Let us get rid of the whole system of judges. Give us a king that we can be like the other nations."

In particular, they wanted a king who would lead them out into battle. They sensed their own disorganization after Samuel became too old to lead them as a warrior in battle. They were keenly aware that they were losing frequently, if not almost always, and they needed help. They thought in terms of the way it worked in other countries, where a king had as his first responsibility military leadership. God was not, in fact, against giving them a king; but God wanted to give them the right kind of king and for the right reasons. Through Samuel (in his role as prophet, since he was not only judge but also prophet), God warned the people that He could give them a king, but their king could turn out to be one who would take more and more power to himself, who would build up the monarchy, who would virtually enslave certain categories of people, who would bring about some successes but also would change the scope of things politically for the people of Israel, taking away some of their freedoms.

A. God Chooses Saul.

Nevertheless, they wanted a king and God in His goodness gave them one. Now the king they got was Saul, and we read in chapters 11 -15 about the early part of Saul's kingship. At first he was enormously successful in leading the people in battle. He was a very tall individual, strong

and tall. This was impressive; people naturally liked him as a leader when they just looked at him. In addition, he seems to have had some real military skill. Unfortunately, he was also capable of fear. Some kind of psychological imbalance appears to have accompanied Saul in at least some ways. He was erratic as a leader, unpredictable, sometimes heroic; other times afraid. He was sometimes completely obedient to the Word of God and the principles to holy war; other times violating that very convention that God had insisted His people undertake if He were to bless them.

B. Saul Is Rejected as King.

There came a time when Saul violated the principle of holy war that says you cannot take plunder or spoil and you must annihilate the enemy. He took all kinds of goats and sheep in a battle and brought them home as spoils of war and also a king named Agag, an Amalekite king, to kind of show off, here's the king that we defeated and captured. Samuel, very old by this time, but a person God needed to employ, once again, came to Saul and told him that God had decided to reject him as king. Now, you know in the Bible we find many instances of a judgment sentence from God that is pronounced, but the execution of that judgment sentence comes at a later time. The prophets do this a great deal. They will announce a judgment upon this nation or that city with the understanding that in due time, when God decides, that judgment will actually be carried out. So the announcement of the judgment is a different thing from the imposition of the judgment.

This happens even back in the Garden of Eden with the prediction of "the day you eat it, thereof, you will surely die." When Adam and Eve ate the forbidden fruit, they did not keel over; but rather their judgment had been announced, their death would eventually come, they became mortal. So this announcement of a judgment sentence on Saul, that he is rejected as king and will be removed as king, is actually given relatively early on in his career as king. In fact, years will go by during which time many stories about Saul, his weaknesses and problems and occasional successes, and many stories about David will take place.

IV. Parallel Lives of Saul and David (16:1-31:13).

At the same time however that Saul is rejected as king, God is not leaving His people without a plan. He is not saying, "I gave you the monarchy and now I am taking it away from you." Samuel is told to go to a rather small town, Bethlehem, just a few miles to the south of Jerusalem. He is told to go there to the family of Jesse, and he is told to anoint the person whom God will show him to be king over His people.

A. David Anointed King.

Samuel makes the trip and he finds Jesse, and he asks Jesse to bring his sons out for examination as it were. Each of them proceeds before Samuel by age from the oldest down, but none of them is the one that God indicates to Samuel He has chosen. Samuel is puzzled, as are all of them. So Samuel, sensitive to God's leading, knowing that none of these were chosen, says to Jesse, "Isn't there someone else? Do you have any other sons?" Jesse says, "Well, yes there is one other, but he is really a kid; he is out tending the flocks." Samuel says "Get him." And when he arrives, though this young man, David, is very young and quite possibly rather short in stature, in other words, scrawny, God impresses on Samuel that this is the one who will be king.

It is an instance of God doing the reverse of what cultural expectations would suggest. In the ancient world, it was the oldest son who generally got the privilege. If there was an opportunity, you gave it to the oldest son. The oldest son got a double inheritance right; the oldest son would

be the successor in a monarchy. And here we have a case of the youngest son, the one least likely for anybody from a human point of view to choose. But as Samuel reminds the people, we look on the externals, but God looks on the heart. God sees the inside, so in the same way that Abraham, not the oldest son, was chosen by God to be the leader of faith and the beginner of a people. In the same way, Isaac was not his oldest son but was the child of promise. In the same way, Jacob was not the firstborn of Isaac but was the child of promise. In the same way, Joseph was the eleventh-born of Jacob's children but became the most prominent of the sons, and so on. So we have Moses as well, the third-born in his family of leaders of the Exodus, Miriam, Aaron, and Moses.

We now have David as the youngest son, the least likely to be chosen; yet God, who is looking not at externals but real character, is making a decision contrary to what anybody at the scene expected. Thereafter, David knows that he is to be king, very few others do, it is a private anointing just at a family's house. Even so, conscious of the fact that God has chosen him to be king, David is very careful to be respectful of the Lord's anointed. Indeed what happens then is David becomes more and more successful militarily. He first goes out to visit his brothers who are with Saul in a battle against the Philistines, and there is a champion challenge given.

B. David and Goliath.

The Philistines have got their combat champion named Goliath. He is big, and he is ready to fight. They issued the challenge to the Israelites to come and fight this guy, sending out the best Israelite warrior, the two of them to fight, and then the winner to proclaim that his side will now be superior to the other. It is sort of a proxy battle in which one champion fights on behalf of each side. Saul did not know whom to send. Goliath is described in some of the manuscripts, most of the ones that are often used or have been historically used for our English translations, as six cubits and a span tall. That would be nine feet, nine inches tall, extremely tall. He is, however, described in many other manuscripts, including the Dead Sea Scrolls, as four cubits and a span. That is six feet, nine inches tall; in other words, a real good NBA player but not inhumanly tall. He was an imposing figure in those days when the average individual was only about five feet high. This relatively small individual, David, pesters Saul, in effect asking him to allow him to go out and fight Goliath.

Could there be any hope that this little guy could win against that huge seasoned warrior? There are two factors: one of them, a very modest factor from a human point of view, David was a slinger. One of the kinds of skills in battle that the Israelites had was slinging stones. The book of Judges mentions 400 left-handed slingers that were in the Benjamite army. David was skilled with a sling, projecting stones at a high speed, but that is really very minor in the story compared to the fact that God was with David. It was God's will to bring David to prominence in this way. So a relatively unknown, quite young, probably on the short side, individual goes out not even wearing armor because the armor that Saul tried to put on him was just too cumbersome for him to be able to move his arms to get the stone out of the sling. He is up against a huge champion from the Philistines who has got full armor and a sword and a spear and even a shield carrier out in front of him. But David knocks him to the ground and cuts off his head.

Thereafter, of course, David is seen as a hero among the people.

C. Saul and David.

The Philistines still renege on the deal. They do not actually agree to be servants of the Israelites as they had projected that they would in advance of the encounter. David joins Saul as Saul's

commander-in-chief. David becomes the general of Saul's army, inspires the troops, leads them ferociously, and they begin to have success. Saul invites David to marry into his family, and David marries Michal, one of Saul's daughters, and now he is Saul's son-in-law. But, that same instability that seems to have affected Saul increases, and sadly enough it seems to be enhanced by Saul's spiritual instability, the same kind of thing that caused God to reject him as king. Saul begins to spend more and more of his time not interested in fighting the enemy but in getting rid of David. He becomes jealous of David; he becomes jealous of David's success within his own family, and David's friendship with the crown prince Jonathan. We see Saul in many of these chapters in the book chasing David. David ends up having to leave Saul's home territory in Benjamin to go on the run. David has to gather around himself a kind of private army, and he lives off the land almost like a bandit might. There are occasions where, in his desperation, he even joins temporarily with the Philistines and places himself at their disposal, along with his private army, as a kind of mercenary. God protects him from ever having to fight against the Israelites, and eventually David is able to, of course, be a very successful leader against the very Philistines that he got to know so well.

D. Saul Goes to Endor.

At the end of the book, we find the Philistines advancing; we find them making more and more inroads into Israel. Saul, having diverted his attention from fighting them to pursuing David, has ruined the military strategy that could have brought success. And we see Saul increasingly departing from loyalty to the Lord, the God of Israel. Indeed, very close to the end of the book, Saul is at a place called Endor; and he actually consults a witch, a woman who is called in the Hebrew "an owner of a pit," or "a pit-lady." She is a woman who alleges that she can call down into this pit in the ground and can have contact with the spirits of the dead and through them get information about the future. It is a sad indication of the way that Saul's faithfulness to God had deteriorated.

E. Saul and Jonathan Slain on Mt. Gilboa.

Finally at the end of the book, in chapter 31, we find Saul and Jonathan fighting valiantly on Mount Gilboa, where they have been attacked by Philistines and are trying to hold them off. One problem is that Gilboa is more than two-thirds of the way from the Mediterranean to the Jordan River. In other words, it is not nearly in the heartland of Israel; it is really in that part of Israel that the Israelites first took under Joshua. The Israelites are being driven back so far that they are back into some of the early places in their holdings of the Promised Land. There at that battle, Saul loses his life, and Jonathan loses his. The Israelites are brutally defeated; large numbers of them are killed, the rest flee.

The tragic story of Saul comes to an end, one who was anointed by God, one who was tall and strong, one whom God was willing to give skill and ability and success to, but who turned away from God increasingly, who had let his fears and his sinful inclinations possess him, and who even had rejected the best military leader, David, he ever had. Saul is dead, Israel is defeated, and 1 Samuel comes to an end.

Numbers-Joshua: The Tragedy of Fear and the Glory of Faith - Lesson 2

Supplement One.

The Bible and Two Crucial Disciplines for Studying It

I. Introduction to Old Testament Background

In this unit, you will probe the premise that the biblical record is God's self-revelation, which is founded on a twofold principle of covenant and authority. The Bible is very clear about the fact that God's self-revelation took place in real time and in real places. And indeed, the land where the descendants of Abraham were instructed to settle played a significant role in the subsequent history of Israel. You will learn more about the discipline of archaeology, the importance of pottery to relative chronology, and about the archaeological periods associated with the Levant, more generally called the Holy Land.

II. God's Word

Scripture is God's self-revelation to the reader. It is God's invitation to hear "His" story. It is where God makes Himself known. The Bible claims to be not only a revelation from God, but also an infallible record of that revelation. It documents the person and acts of God, Creator of the universe. At the core of that self-revelation is the concept of covenant. Even the English designation of Old Testament and New Testament indicates that covenant was a core concept of these collection of books (testament = covenant).

A. Covenant.

In the Old Testament, the Hebrew *berit* ("covenant") was a legally binding obligation, and thus could be commanded (Judges 2:20; Psalms 11 9:9). Hebrew terms related to "covenant" express pledge and commitment, which actually create the covenant. This is the concept by which the Israelites gave definitive expression to the binding of themselves to their God, Yahweh.

The covenant tradition of Israel was rooted in the conviction of Yahweh's intervention to rescue a group of Hebrew slaves out of Egypt and in the covenant-making on Mt. Sinai, in which Yahweh revealed the basis of Torah, which was to form the moral foundation of Israel's life. This covenant was a legally binding obligation, especially as it related to God and to human redemption.

B. Authority

We know this covenant was valid because it was backed up by the authority of the self-revealing one, the Creator of the universe. God has authority both in the sense that He has absolute possibility or freedom of action, being under neither necessity nor restraint, and also in the sense that He is the only ultimate source of all other authorization and power (cf. Luke 12:5; Acts 1:7; Jude 25). In relation to the universe, the authority of God is indeed that of Creator as well as Ruler. It is worked out in both nature and history. Thus God controls the natural and historical forces that fulfill His purposes (Rev 6:8; 9:3,10,19).

Authority is what makes the books of the Old and New Testaments different from all other literary works. In 2 Timothy 3:16, Paul refers to the Old Testament as being "God-breathed," or inspired. These Scriptures, having divine authorization, carry the authority of God Himself. Similarly, being God's Word, they have the freedom of God, not innately or inherently, but by

virtue of their divine authorship or authorization. The ultimate stress, however, lies not on Scripture but on the God who rules the universe. "To the only God our Savior be glory, majesty, power and authority, through Jesus Christ our Lord, before all ages, now and forevermore! Amen" (Judes 25).

III. Physical Geography.

The study of geography is an essential part of biblical exegesis. It is not generally recognized that the Bible is the only book of the religions of the world that puts any emphasis on geography. But in the biblical record almost every event is anchored to a specific location. From Abana to Zuzim, there are about 2,000 place names in the Bible, including regions and countries, cities and villages, mountains and valleys, seas and rivers.

The area known as the Near and Middle East, or Western Asia, originally consisted of separate cultural entities, which gradually merged to assume a common identity under the aegis of the Persian Empire. This vast complex of territories was bounded by the Mediterranean Sea, the Black Sea, the Caucasus Mountains, and the Central Asian steppes or deserts, and, to the south, by the seas of the Indian Ocean. Its coherence was related to the fact that it was made up of three concentric zones: the Syrian-Arabian Desert, the plains of the Fertile Crescent, and the highlands of Anatolia, Armenia, and Iran.

A. Fertile Crescent and Egypt.

The Syrian-Arabian Desert was an enormous void that no caravan could cross without camels. Nomads had traveled back and forth along its fringes from time immortal in search of pasturage for their herds. The nomadic tribes were a continual threat to the sedentary residents of the zone made fertile by rain and irrigation. The Tigris and the Euphrates, the two great rivers coming down from the Armenian Mountains, amply watered the territory called Mesopotamia on the eastern horn of the Fertile Crescent. This area also contained desert regions, its north differing greatly from its south. It reached from the Persian Gulf northwest through Mesopotamia, then west to north of Syria, then southwest through Syria and Palestine to the Nile River valley and delta in Egypt.

The Nile carried the water of Lake Victoria for 3,000 miles over the desert sands to the Mediterranean. The final 750 miles of the Nile bisected the area known as Egypt in antiquity. Annual flooding replenished the fertility of the soil, which would otherwise have been depleted by the early inhabitants. Ancient Egypt was divided into an Upper Kingdom (along the narrow strip of river valley in the south) and a Lower Kingdom (essentially the delta area in the north).

The countries of the Levant lay on the western horn of the Crescent. Part of the prosperity of this region was due to its seacoast and its situation at the focal point of the trading routes from Asia and Africa. Unfortunately, for the most part the Mediterranean coast was largely outside the Jewish sphere of influence. The coastal area north of Mount Carmel was controlled by Phoenicia and its two principal cities: Tyre and Sidon. The area south of Carmel was usually controlled by Philistia, which in the end gave its name to the area, i.e., Palestine.

B. Land of Palestine

The land of Palestine is easily divided into four basic longitudinal, or north-south, geographical regions: (1) the coastal plain, (2) the central hill country, (3) the Jordan rift, and the (4) Transjordan plateau.

1. The coastal plain extends northward from Sinai along the Mediterranean coast to the border of modern Lebanon. It narrows progressively from a twenty-mile width near Gaza on the Philistine plain to twelve miles near Joppa on the border of the Plain of Sharon, to less than two miles along the Plain of Dor, south of Haifa. Mount Carmel, a northwesterly extension of the central highland, interrupts the coastal plain where it meets the Mediterranean Sea at the modern city of Haifa. North of Mount Carmel, the Plain of Acco, some five to seven miles in width, ends abruptly at the white limestone cliffs of Rosh Hanikra, the ancient "Ladder of Tyre." Beyond this point, narrow plains occur irregularly along the coast between the mountains that extend to the sea. This was the area that the Phoenicians occupied in antiquity.

2. The hills of Galilee comprise one of four main regions into which the central highlands can be divided. The Galilean Mountains consist of alternating ridges and valleys running east-west. Then comes the Jezreel plain, enclosed by mountains, but with gates to the coast, the Sea of Galilee, and the Transjordan. South of it stretches the central range from the north to south. It dips to the Beersheba depression, which runs east-west. The land then rises into the mountain wilderness of the Negev and Sinai.

3. The Afro-Syrian rift is a north-south fault that runs from Asia Minor to Africa, which reaches its deepest point in the land of Israel. This cleft in the earth's surface begins in the plain between the Lebanon and Anti-Lebanon Mountains to the north and extends southward through Palestine, the Gulf of Eilat (Aqaba), and on into Lake Nyasa in Africa, a distance of 3,000 miles. The rift valley in Palestine averages ten miles in width and varies in altitude from about 300 feet above sea level in the north to 1,290 feet below sea level on the surface of the Dead Sea, the lowest point on earth apart from the ocean depths. The rift valley can be divided into five areas: the Huleh Valley, the Sea of Galilee, the Jordan Valley, the Dead Sea, and the Arabah.

4. The Transjordanian hills that rise sharply from the eastern floor of the rift valley are broken into regions by wadis, which penetrate into the valley from the east. These wadis are stream beds that are usually dry, but which may flood during the rainy season. In the north, the Yarmuk River enters the valley slightly south of the Sea of Galilee. It provides a natural boundary between the present states of Syria and Jordan, while in biblical times Bashan, to the north, was separated from Gilead, to the south. No natural boundary separated the region of Moab from that of the Gilead, but the northern boundary was generally eastward from the north end of the Dead Sea. The Wadi el-Hasa, the biblical brook Zered, which enters the Dead Sea at its southeastern corner, provided a natural boundary between Moab and Edom to the south. The mountains of Edom rise in places to a height in excess of 5,000 feet.

IV. Archaeology.

Much of what is known about past civilizations has been discovered through archaeology. Archaeology is the scientific study of the material remains of past human life and activities. The simplest method of archaeology is surface exploration, but the usual site for excavation in the lands of the Bible is a "tell." The Arabic word tell, commonly meaning "hill," has been taken over by archaeologists to designate a hill that has been formed from the debris of human occupation, built up in successive layers over the centuries through a sequence of habitation, destruction, and reconstruction. There are thousands of tells of this nature in the Middle East.

A. Biblical Archaeology.

The archaeology of the Bible cannot be confined to the land of Palestine. The biblical story began at the eastern end of a long rectangle where the Tigris and Euphrates Rivers join to run

into the Persian Gulf, and where Ur, the Sumerian seaport, lay at the culminating point of the great trade routes over desert, mountain, and sea. When the last apostle laid down his writing instrument near the end of the first century of the Christian era, the church had been established in Rome, then ruler of all the territory where the story of the Bible had taken shape and form. Rome, the great city of seven hills located on the Tiber River, was near the western end of the same long rectangle of lands. In other words, this rectangle central to biblical archaeology went from Ur in the southeast corner, to the Caspian Sea in the northeast corner, and Rome in the northwest corner, to Carthage in the southwest corner.

Biblical archaeology, therefore, is a specialized field within the larger field of general archaeology, related to those lands that played significant roles in the unfolding of the Hebrew story and the subsequent founding of the Christian church. Within these lands, lie the remains of seven great empires: Egyptian, Hittite, Assyrian, Babylonian, Persian, Greek, and Roman (or those significant parts of them that had a place and a part in the biblical account). In addition, countless kingdoms, principalities, and city-states, and numberless people who came and went, left memorials of their culture meaningful for the study of the Bible in that same area.

B. History of Biblical Archaeology

It is difficult to pinpoint the exact beginning of biblical archaeology. The great American scholar, William F. Albright, traces a genuine scientific interest in the archaeological remains of Palestine back to travelers of the sixteenth century. In the middle years of the seventeenth century, the Roman Pietro della Valle produced an account of travels in Palestine that contains true archaeological descriptions. Other travelers also wrote down their observations, but for the most part they sensed the romantic impact of the remains of long-vanished civilizations, but missed their scientific and historical significance.

Napoleon's expedition to Egypt in 1798 may be seen as the beginning of scientific archaeology. The French conqueror was rightly convinced that Egypt was the strategic key to the Mediterranean. He took the unprecedented step of attaching a scholarly deputation to his military staff. Napoleon's concern for the protection and copying of the bilingual inscription found on the Rosetta stone is on record and is entirely to his credit. Another highlight took place in 1830, when the pictorial script of Egypt was successfully deciphered.

Paul E. Botta, a physician and the French consular agent in Mosul, began excavations on the mound of ancient Nineveh in 1842, but, failing to find anything of monumental size, turned to the site of Khorsabad, ten miles north. Here he discovered almost immediately huge sculptures from the ruins of the palace of Sargon II. In 1845, Austen Henry Layard began excavations at Nineveh. His discovery, almost immediately, of the palace of Ashurnasirpal II brought into the British Museum treasures superior to those discovered by Botta. The race of the archaeological treasure hunters was on.

George F. Grotefend was the first to decipher Persian cuneiform in 1815, and Henry Rawlinson soon followed by deciphering the Old Persian text on the Darius' Behistun Inscription by 1846. Between 1846 and 1855, Rawlinson, Edward Hincks, and Jules Oppert succeeded in unraveling the mysteries of the Akkadian script. Apart from the advances in understanding ancient languages, little progress was being made in the mid-nineteenth century toward scientific excavation.

The missing tool, a means of scientific dating, required for the accurate interpretation of archaeological finds was finally discovered and introduced into Palestinian archaeology by W.

M. Flinder Petrie. Petrie became convinced that if enough attention were given to unpainted pottery it could be just as effective an instrument for dating as the painted and much rarer pottery used by classical archaeologists.

Following World War I, in the fifteen years from 1920 to 1935, archaeological excavation in Palestine proceeded on an unprecedented scale. Perhaps the most noteworthy of the technical advances was the firm establishment of the chronology of Palestinian pottery. This was due in large part to the work of William F. Albright from 1926 to 1932 during his excavations at Tell Beit Mirsim (possibly biblical Debir). Since the close of World War II, refinements and improvements in excavation techniques have continued to be made. Of primary importance was the work of Kathleen Kenyon at Jericho, from 1952 through 1958. Another notable trend of post-World War II archaeology was the application of physical science techniques to the analysis of archaeological data. The carbon 14 method of dating organic material was but one of a group of highly specialized techniques that included such procedures as neutron activation, thermoluminescence dating, and resistivity surveying.

C. Dating of Finds

Chronology is a subject of great importance to biblical archaeology. Relative chronology is to be carefully distinguished from absolute chronology. Most archaeological data provide us at best with relative chronology: Level II was later than Level III and earlier than Level I. Accordingly, the types of material found in those levels can be arranged typologically and sequentially.

As mentioned above, one of the most important items in establishing a chronological sequence is pottery, painted and unpainted. Pottery is the most profuse artifact recovered by archaeologists in the lands of the Bible. These are classified by their characteristics and are helpful in developing a chronology of the site. There are several features that make pottery the ideal material for relative chronology: (1) Styles changed rather frequently. (2) It was relatively inexpensive, and subsequently quite plentiful in the ancient Near East. (3) It was fragile and once broken practically useless. (4) Sherds of pottery are almost indestructible. In addition, pottery does not dissolve in water and is not consumed by fire. As a result of these factors, pottery is the most plentiful and the most reliable means of building a relative chronology available to the modern archaeologist.

D. Archaeological Periods

Biblical archaeology lies within the Holocene Epoch of geological study and the anthropological cultural levels of the New Stone Age and later. Time frames are delineated primarily on the basis of significant technological changes. There is broad general agreement among scholars on the sequence of cultural development and on the suggested dates. For the biblical world, these are as follows:

1. Aceramic (Pre-pottery) Neolithic Age / circa 9000-6000 B.C.
2. Neolithic-with-Pottery Age / circa 6000-5000 B.C.
3. Chalcolithic Age (introduction of copper tools) / circa 5000-3200 B.C.
4. Early Bronze Age (copper tools predominated) / circa 3200-2000 B.C.
5. Middle Bronze / circa 2000-1600 B.C.
6. Late Bronze Age / circa 1600-1200 B.C.
7. Iron Age (introduction of iron tools) / circa 1200-300 B.C.
8. Hellenistic Period / circa 300-63 B.C.
9. Roman / 63 B.C.-A.D. 323

Of course, the Aceramic Neolithic Age did not end concurrently throughout the biblical world. The discovery of how to make plastic clay, fashion it, fire it, and so fabricate pottery was probably localized to one place (or more), from which the craft spread into other areas. Likewise, the discovery of metallurgical competencies spread, probably more slowly because of the more limited sources of copper ore and the higher skill level needed to make copper tools as compared to the manufacturing of pottery.

E. Significant Archaeological Finds

There are several major archaeological finds that have shed a great deal of light onto the early patriarchal period. These include the Nuzi (Tell Yorghan Tepe) archive, which is the most important personal library uncovered in the ancient Near East. Nuzi was a city near modern Kirkuk, Iraq. It dates from the time of the Hurrian Empire of Mitanni from 1500 to 1350 B.C. It features a large number of family documents such as marriage contracts, adoption agreements, and land transfers. The Amarna (Tell el-Amarna) archive preserves almost 400 documents of correspondence that passed between the pharaohs of Egypt and the nations of the Near East in the fourteenth century B.C. These letters record the social and political situation in the land of Canaan in the Late Bronze Age.

Ugarit (Tell Ras Shamra) was a bustling seaport and city-state in northern Syria in the Late Bronze Age. The myths and legends of Ugarit permit us to glimpse the conceptions of the supernatural that infused Canaanite life and thought and to observe their cultic rites and practices, especially those associated with Baal. Another significant archaeological discovery was Ashurbanipal's library at Nineveh, a capital of Assyria. This archive introduced the modern world to ancient classics such as the Gilgamesh Epic, with its startling parallel to the biblical flood, and Enuma Elish, which discloses some of the Babylonian creation theology. In addition, archaeology has given historical credence to many people mentioned in the Bible, such as the prophet Balaam (Numbers 22-24). Texts found at Deir 'Allah (on the east side of the Jordan River) attest to his existence.

Numbers-Joshua: The Tragedy of Fear and the Glory of Faith - Lesson 3.

Deuteronomy and Joshua: The Benefits of Obedience.

I. First Sermon: Review of Israel's Recent History (Dt 1:1-4:49).

A. Emphasis on the Covenant.

Deuteronomy and Joshua go together in many ways. Deuteronomy brings to an end the books of Moses, it is a restatement of God's covenant for the new generation about to enter the Promised Land; and then Joshua is the story of the conquest of that land, at least the beginnings of it. When we look at Deuteronomy we see that it is not giving the Israelites a whole bunch of new information, but it is stating for them God's law in a way that sort of packages that law around the emphasis on covenant. The book of Deuteronomy is organized especially as a covenant all by itself as a book. The original Sinai covenant starts with the Israelites at Mt. Sinai in the second part of Exodus and continues with the book of Leviticus, and then even has some sort of appendixes in the book of Numbers as the law is being fleshed out in the action and lives of the people as they traversed the wilderness.

B. Renewal of the Covenant.

In the case of Deuteronomy, Israel is gathered in one place: the plains of Shittim in Moab, right across the Jordan River from the Promised Land proper, the land of Canaan. As his last great act, Moses delivers to the people an inspired speech of the law. He renews God's covenant with them. We find Moses preaching the law to a new generation of people. What did he emphasize?

Well, he emphasizes the fact that God loves His people. God's covenant love for them is important, and in turn they must love God. This, again, is not love in the sense of feeling a certain way toward God; it is how one acts. It is doing acts of love for God and on God's behalf, as one relates to others.

II. Second Sermon: Review of Sinaitic Laws (Dt 5:1-26:19).

A. Love Is Obedience.

Another emphasis is God's special choice of Israel as His people. This is a theme of the book of Deuteronomy. Israel is not just any nation. Israel is a nation that God rescued out of Egypt and shaped in the wilderness, protected and cared for, and built into His own people. Their responsibility certainly is to act like it. How do they act like it? They keep His covenant; they obey His law. Obedience is faithfulness. Obedience is proof that they love Him and belong to Him, that they are His people.

B. Choose to Serve God.

Another theme that one finds in addition to the theme of love is the theme of choice. God has chosen them as compared to any other nation. Is this because God does not like other nations? Certainly not, that is not the emphasis at all. But rather, to this nation has been entrusted the responsibility of specially serving God, of being the stewards of His Word, of knowing His covenant and what His righteousness consists of, of living as a holy people for Him. This means they are under a burden, and so they are warned. If they do keep His law, their life on the earth will be long. But if they don't, they will rapidly be thrown off from the Promised Land into captivity.

Already in chapter 4 this prediction is made. The whole sweep of Israel's history is outlined in just a few verses of chapter 4, from about verses 21 -31. You can see the plan there. They will be

long in the land, but eventually they will worship other gods and will dishonor God, breaking His covenant. Then He will give them into the hand of their enemies who will deport them. And then in exile they will finally turn back to Him. In His mercy, He will bring them back, a renewed people, not only into their land physically, but into His protection and into His new covenant spiritually.

C. Unity of God's People.

Another theme that Deuteronomy brings before us is the unity of God's people. They cannot just keep some laws, spread out, and get along with some neighbors. They cannot just see themselves as free to do whatever they want, as long as it does not get them in too much trouble in the local scene. No, they are supposed to be a people who function together. One particular way in which they function together is worship.

We find in Deuteronomy a very strong emphasis on corporate worship. This is a very important biblical theme. Everybody has to worship together. Deuteronomy 12 tells us that God plans to take His tabernacle and place it somewhere once they get into the heartland of the Promised Land. There, everybody will gather three times a year. The whole nation will come, the people from the distant edges of the nation, the people near the central sanctuary. It does not matter, they will all gather together three times a year. They will especially worship as a nation. They will come at the time of the Passover in the spring; they will come at the time of Pentecost in the summer; they will also come at the time of Tabernacles in the fall, three great festivals. Worshiping together, they will show their unity as a people.

Isn't that the way we show our unity? Isn't it by worshipping together? Of course, we show our love for one another and our care in many other ways. But certainly, worship is one of the key ways that God's people indicate they belong to Him, all together as a unified people.

D. God's Faithfulness.

Another theme is God's faithfulness to His promises. This is very big in Deuteronomy. Moses tells the people about their responsibility to keep the law. As he describes their stipulations, he also emphasizes for them by way of the prologue, part of the covenant, how faithful God has been. "God delivered you; God cared for you." Who did God do this for? Who else has ever had anything like this happen? Who worships any other gods that they think can come close to this in terms of beneficence, kindness, and loving faithfulness? The mercy of God, His constant faithfulness, His loyalty, these are great themes of the book of Deuteronomy that Moses stresses for the people.

E. God's Self-revelation in His Word.

There is also the concept of God's self-revelation in His Word. This is something that we do not often pay much attention to, but God's Word is where we find out about Him. If you want to know God and you do not have a Bible, you are in trouble. It is hard. You can know some things about God; you can know general things about God, but God has caused His Word to be the place where we are to go to learn. He has put it in black and white. He has written it down for us. Moses makes much in Deuteronomy of this aspect of the Israelite responsibility to know that Word, to teach it to their children, to read it regularly, to live by it, not to let it depart from their minds, but to cause it to be firmly fixed therein.

F. God's Sovereignty over the World.

Another theme is the importance of God's sovereignty over the world and world events. The Israelites were a pretty small people on the scene. There were big powers like the Egyptians, or the Hittites, or the Babylonian Empire, or the Hurrian Empire, or any of a number of other empires. Israel was pretty small. Remember that when the spies in the book of Numbers looked over even the land of Canaan, which itself was not all that big, they felt outnumbered and outclassed by what they saw. The Israelites needed the encouragement of realizing that God was really in charge of all things, all nations. God would make happen for them what He chose to make happen. They did not need to fear; they did not need to lack confidence.

People in those days often believed in local gods and goddesses. They believed that an individual who worshiped a god was, in a certain sense, localizing that god. And where gods were worshiped, they might have some power; but if you get to some place where a god was not worshiped, that god probably did not have much power in that location. But the Israelites needed to know that the one true God, the God who had rescued them and made them a people, in fact, was sovereign over the entire world.

III. Third Sermon (Dt 27:1-34:12).

A. Curses and Blessings.

Yet another theme of the book is God's grace in abundance toward His people. He gives them more than they deserve; He gives them a lot. It is not just sustenance; it is not just the minimal. Deuteronomy emphasizes that, with its long lists of blessings that God provides for His people. On the other hand, He demands obedience as proof of faith and love. There are also plenty of curses listed in the book, covenant curses as part of the sanctions of the covenant. And Deuteronomy 28-32 is replete with these, descriptions of all the miseries the people can get themselves into if they do not obey God and keep His law.

B. Succession.

Another concern of the book is succession. This, after all, is a new group of people to whom Moses is preaching. Most of them had not been in Egypt. They have been born, instead, in the wilderness and were a new generation ready to enter the Promised Land. They were oriented forward to that experience; they were the successors to those who had lived in Egypt, and they need to have a sense of proper succession, the idea of the generations coming and going, the idea that every new generation must renew the covenant with God. Every new generation must for itself be faithful. A generation could not count upon the benefits that had been passed down to it by a prior faithful generation. It had to make its own commitment of faith and obedience to God.

C. A Successor to Moses.

The succession from Moses is also an issue at the very end of the book. What will happen when Moses dies? Well, the answer is that God will be faithful. He will have a successor. In the very last chapter of the book, chapter 34, we read about Moses' death, about the care with which God buried him. He had led the people faithfully. Yet for all the strong and wonderful things he had done, He was actually a very meek and humble person, not that he did not have vigor and force in what he did, but that he put others ahead of himself. In other words, he knew how to love neighbor as self and how to love God with all his heart.

IV. Preparations for Entering the Promised Land (Jos 1:1-5:15).

There is a transition from Deuteronomy to Joshua, and in a way it is embodied, in part, in the transition from Moses to Joshua because, of course, the book of Joshua bears the name of Joshua, who is one of its main characters. I'd like to emphasize for you, since this is the first

book of the Bible that is named after a single individual, that Joshua is not actually the hero of the book. Joshua is not the most important figure in the book that bears his name. The hero in the book of Joshua is God. God is the one who makes things happen. God is the one who leads His people. God is the one who protects them. God is the one who gives them victory. Joshua is an important player, but the real emphasis is on God as the supreme leader, God as the sovereign, God as even the warrior, for His people.

V. Conquest of the Land (Jos 6:1-12:24).

A. Central Campaign.

When we look at the book of Joshua we observe that the Israelites entered the Promised Land and then after a central campaign went to the south, and after a campaign in the south went to the north. One of the things you observe in following that process is that quite a number of chapters are given to the campaign which we call the central campaign, the entry campaign. The Israelites crossed the Jordan River in a kind of reenactment of the experience they had had at the Red Sea. They went on dry land across a riverbed. God dams up the waters for them and allowed them to experience again, as a new generation, the same kind of miracle that their fathers had experienced forty years prior.

In addition, He brings them into the Promised Land, part of that land opposite Jericho, a great ancient city with huge walls. Now how were the Israelites to conquer the Promised Land if it had so many cities with high walls? Sure, they could start elaborate siege works, but besieging a city takes years. If they would have to siege every single city, since most of them were defended with very high impenetrable walls that an army of infantrymen could not breach, except after long, slow, patient effort, they would never mop up the Promised Land in their lifetimes.

So, God gives them, in the situation of Jericho, a real encouragement. They actually do not fight for the city at all. They march around the city. They march around one day; they march around another. After six days, they march around on the seventh day, seven times, and then God causes the walls of that city to crumble down flat so the Israelites can just walk in over the rubble, come in and take captive the citizenry, and begin the conquest of the Promised Land.

B. Holy War.

It is an incredible kind of war. God did the fighting for them; they did not do it themselves. In this connection, we observe that there are a number of ways in which the Israelites are entering into a battle, a series of battles, a war, or a series of wars, always from a different angle from which we might think soldiers would approach a battle from. That is, they are fighting what scholars call a "holy war." This holy war is characterized by quite a number of special features. The Israelites actually do not get paid. They are all volunteer soldiers. This is different from what happens in most of the ancient world. In most warfare in the ancient world, people were allowed to take whatever they could gain. As they were successful in battle, they were able to get rich. Whatever they could carry off after they defeated their enemies, they could keep.

But the Israelites could not do that. They were allowed no pay; they were allowed no plunder. They could not take the spoils of war, that was all dedicated to God. They fight with only a volunteer army, no professional soldiers. They fight only for the taking and holding of the Promised Land, not for personal gain in any way. They fight as the Lord's soldiers, as Yahweh's soldiers, as God's army. And accordingly, they cannot just decide when to go into battle. We see this in the book of Joshua. God tells them where to go and where to fight and what to do. It is at His behest that they fight; and furthermore, no particular political leader can tell them when to

fight. Only one of God's prophets can do that. In the case of Joshua, he is both a general and a prophet, so he is one to whom God can speak. But this is a special type of warfare, not the normal sort.

It is especially important to note that it cannot be a warfare that they fight just anywhere or any time. They only fight at God's call, only because they hear God's voice through a prophet, and only for the taking and holding of the Promised Land. Finally, if they go into this kind of war and somebody violates these provisions, violates the provisions that they are not in it for themselves but are fighting as God's army for Him, not for reward of any sort, then the violator becomes the enemy.

C. Ai.

This leads to the story that takes place in chapter 7 of Joshua, right after the terrific success they had at Jericho, a wonderful miraculous delivery of a city into their hands. They then proceed to a little town called Ai. Ai in Hebrew means "ruin." We expect that this is not much of a place. And yet, after they start to attack little "ruin," they are driven back, a number of them are killed, and we find Joshua on his face on the ground, saying, "Lord, what have you done? Have you brought us over the Jordan to kill us?", because Joshua, of course, cannot figure out what is going on. It is supposed to be a holy war. It is supposed to be a special kind of process in which God does the fighting for His people, so that they always win; and here they have lost a battle against an inferior force, against a little ruined town. The answer is that some of the Israelites had been taking plunder during the attack on Jericho.

One of them is singled out as an example. In fact this story, sadly, is presumably intended by the writer of Joshua, whoever it was, we do not know, to be an indication of the kinds of things in general that the Israelites did that would keep them from a completely successful campaign in the Promised Land. Though Joshua did lead the troops at God's behest through the central part of the country (and then headed further south and mopped up territories in the south and then went on to defeat a coalition of Canaanite kings in the north), the fact is that the Israelite conquest was only partial.

D. Incomplete Taking of the Land.

The book of Joshua and the following book of Judges give lists of places that they did not capture and mention large numbers of groups who stayed with them right in the Promised Land, though they were not native Israelites. In other words, the lack of faithfulness as sampled in chapter 7 was widespread enough that in spite of all the warnings, the Israelites really did not do as thorough a job of the conquest as God had wanted them to do.

VI. Allocation of Territories (Jos 13:1-24:33).

A. Assignment of Land.

However, God is faithful even when His people are not. After the campaigns winds up, then there is the assignment of the land. This starts with chapter 13, and it is a very long section of the book, and it goes until the end of chapter 21. It is not very exciting reading: lots and lots of lists of towns and cities, long descriptions of borders of tribal territories. But it is very important information. Here after all that time, after centuries of time, since God had originally promised this land to the descendants of Abraham, the descendants of Abraham were being handed that land. They may have imperfectly occupied it, and they may have made some serious flaws in their conquest as they were not as faithful to God as they should have been, but He is giving them the land.

B. Intertribal Rivalry.

As the lot falls to this tribe or that family or clan, the land is distributed. And after that wonderful, though somewhat tedious, description of a fulfillment of a great promise, then we read about the fact the people themselves were falling into disunity. Chapter 22 describes intertribal rivals, tribes almost going to war against one another. Fortunately, that does end in proper negotiation under the covenant and a restoration of unity, but it does bode ill for the future. If these tribes, after all the good that has been done for them, cannot stay together, live together, or work together, maybe there is in their future a dissolution, and we will see that when we come to 1 and 2 Kings.

C. Joshua's Final Message.

In chapter 23, there is a wonderful story of Joshua's appeal to the people to remain faithful. It is great reading. He had to make it, because that generation needed to renew the covenant, too. Just as the first generation of Israelites had made their covenant at Sinai, the second generation under Moses, toward the end of Joshua's life, there was yet another generation. They needed to be faithful, and so he brings before them again God's covenant, and urges them to keep the law, to be obedient, to put away their idols and to stay with the Lord, who alone could bless them and protect them.

The final chapter of the book is an account of the renewal of that covenant, along with Joshua's death. Joshua stresses for the people that they have got to serve the Lord. "Serve" can mean "worship"; it can mean "work for"; it can mean "be obedient to"; it can mean "belong to"; it covers a lot of territory. Joshua says, "I have done it. My family has done it. Will you do it too? Will you serve the Lord?" And the people say they will, so he swears them to it, to serve Him fully, to really obey Him. So Joshua dies, having led that generation, having been faithful to God. At the end of the book of Judges, we will see what happens to transition from there. And in the end of Joshua, we will see what happens as it transitions into the book of Judges. Once Joshua is gone, things will not be as good.

08-1 Samuel A Case Study In Integrity

Judges-1 Samuel: Israel's Choice From God-Rule to Human-Rule - Lesson 2

1 Samuel: A Case Study in Integrity.

I. Introduction.

First Samuel is a book of transition. It tells the story of the transition from the days of the judges to the monarchy, the kingship of Israel. The end of the book of Judges says in several places, "There was no king in Israel; everyone did what was right in his own eyes." It says that by way of disapproval: Israel did need a king. There are three big figures, three big human characters, in 1 Samuel, and they are Samuel, Saul, and David. To a considerable degree, the book is their story. Approximately the first third of the book deals with Samuel, who is the last judge. He is not mentioned in the book of Judges but he is the last judge of Israel. Then comes Saul who is Israel's first king, though not a very successful king in the overall scheme of things. Then comes David. David actually dominates most of 1 Samuel, even though David is not yet king in the eyes of the people. He does get anointed as king, an advanced kind of anointing in which God indicates that David will be king, but it is not until 2 Samuel that David actually assumes the throne.

It is important to appreciate the fact that 1 and 2 Samuel go together. They are a unit and they are divided into first and second books because of their length. It is a little like those videos that you get from the video store that have two cassettes because the movie is too long to get on one. That is why we have the terms 1 Samuel and 2 Samuel. Nevertheless, the story of 1 Samuel does come to a convenient end with the death of Saul, which is a logical breaking point. We can speak of 1 Samuel as a unit, as we do in this lesson.

II. Samuel's Background, Call, and Leadership (1:1-8:22).

A. Background.

Samuel is a fine figure. He is a godly judge. He really does contrast with judges like Gideon or Jephthah or especially Samson in the way that he is successful militarily, leading the Israelites against their primary enemy, the Philistines; in the way that he is loyal to the Word of God, to God's covenant; in the way he teaches that Word to the people of Israel, and the faithfulness with which he carries on his work as a judge. The judges were actually political military leaders. But as political military leaders, they also had a secondary role: that was their judicial role in which people came to them, sort of like going to the Supreme Court of a country, to get rulings on difficult legal matters. Samuel functioned in that way for the people of Israel. He was respected and revered; and his godliness is a fine model, a fine example for us, and always has been appreciated by people who have read this book.

B. Call.

The story begins with Hannah's concern, that she would have a child. She was childless for a long time, and it was hard for her in that culture to be comforted by anything else but the thought of finally having a child. When God in His mercy gave Hannah a child, He did give her a special child, Samuel. She dedicated him to the Lord; and he served the Lord as an assistant to the high priest Eli at the tabernacle at Shiloh. The stories about his childhood are interesting, because he really was called by God. He was called at a young age. He was called with the "double naming" that in the Bible indicates tenderness and affection. God calls him, "Samuel, Samuel."

C. Leadership.

After he grows up, he becomes a judge and experiences in his lifetime some of the gains and losses that were characteristic of those days before the monarchy in Israel, in the eleventh century B.C. One thing that happened during his early years was the loss of the ark of the covenant in battle to the Philistines. This is described in the early chapters of 1 Samuel as a terrible blow to the people. Indeed, upon hearing the news, the high priest Eli falls over dead of an apparent heart attack or stroke, so severe was the news to him. The ark represented God's presence among His people and so they brought it out with them into battle, this big box carried by poles through golden rings with the Ten Commandments inside. This was the people's symbol of the presence of God.

The fact that the enemy could capture that important symbol is an indication of the way that things were going. In other words, the Israelites were losing the Promised Land. Bit by bit, little by little, they were actually losing territory, losing various battles. And the Philistines, who originally started along the Mediterranean seacoast on the west, were making more and more inroads into the heartland of Israel proper, capturing this town and that, this region and that, taking away people's homes and fields. And so, it was a difficult time.

III. The Anointing and Rejection of Saul as King (9:1-15:35).

Samuel, faithful to God as an adult, taking over as one of the judges, was able to stem that tide in many ways. We read in some of the chapters about his successes militarily as he led the people. But, he was getting very old. Soon enough, as is described for us in chapters 8-10, the people of Israel begin to demand a king. Their motives for demanding a king were not ideal. They say, in chapter 8, when they come to Samuel: "Give us a king so that we can be like the other nations."

This was always a problem for the people of Israel, a tendency to think in terms of copying others. That is one of the factors that got them into idolatry so easily and so constantly. It is one of the factors that made them compromise religiously. It is one of the factors that tended to take their attention away from the Lord and trust in Him and place it in military might and political alliances. In chapter 8, they are doing it again. They are saying to Samuel, "You are old, you have gone into retirement. Your sons, who have been appointed to be judges as successors to you, are corrupt; they are taking bribes. We cannot stand this. We need a king. Let us get rid of the whole system of judges. Give us a king that we can be like the other nations."

In particular, they wanted a king who would lead them out into battle. They sensed their own disorganization after Samuel became too old to lead them as a warrior in battle. They were keenly aware that they were losing frequently, if not almost always, and they needed help. They thought in terms of the way it worked in other countries, where a king had as his first responsibility military leadership. God was not, in fact, against giving them a king; but God wanted to give them the right kind of king and for the right reasons. Through Samuel (in his role as prophet, since he was not only judge but also prophet), God warned the people that He could give them a king, but their king could turn out to be one who would take more and more power to himself, who would build up the monarchy, who would virtually enslave certain categories of people, who would bring about some successes but also would change the scope of things politically for the people of Israel, taking away some of their freedoms.

A. God Chooses Saul.

Nevertheless, they wanted a king and God in His goodness gave them one. Now the king they got was Saul, and we read in chapters 11 -15 about the early part of Saul's kingship. At first he was enormously successful in leading the people in battle. He was a very tall individual, strong

and tall. This was impressive; people naturally liked him as a leader when they just looked at him. In addition, he seems to have had some real military skill. Unfortunately, he was also capable of fear. Some kind of psychological imbalance appears to have accompanied Saul in at least some ways. He was erratic as a leader, unpredictable, sometimes heroic; other times afraid. He was sometimes completely obedient to the Word of God and the principles to holy war; other times violating that very convention that God had insisted His people undertake if He were to bless them.

B. Saul Is Rejected as King.

There came a time when Saul violated the principle of holy war that says you cannot take plunder or spoil and you must annihilate the enemy. He took all kinds of goats and sheep in a battle and brought them home as spoils of war and also a king named Agag, an Amalekite king, to kind of show off, here's the king that we defeated and captured. Samuel, very old by this time, but a person God needed to employ, once again, came to Saul and told him that God had decided to reject him as king. Now, you know in the Bible we find many instances of a judgment sentence from God that is pronounced, but the execution of that judgment sentence comes at a later time. The prophets do this a great deal. They will announce a judgment upon this nation or that city with the understanding that in due time, when God decides, that judgment will actually be carried out. So the announcement of the judgment is a different thing from the imposition of the judgment.

This happens even back in the Garden of Eden with the prediction of "the day you eat it, thereof, you will surely die." When Adam and Eve ate the forbidden fruit, they did not keel over; but rather their judgment had been announced, their death would eventually come, they became mortal. So this announcement of a judgment sentence on Saul, that he is rejected as king and will be removed as king, is actually given relatively early on in his career as king. In fact, years will go by during which time many stories about Saul, his weaknesses and problems and occasional successes, and many stories about David will take place.

IV. Parallel Lives of Saul and David (16:1-31:13)

At the same time however that Saul is rejected as king, God is not leaving His people without a plan. He is not saying, "I gave you the monarchy and now I am taking it away from you." Samuel is told to go to a rather small town, Bethlehem, just a few miles to the south of Jerusalem. He is told to go there to the family of Jesse, and he is told to anoint the person whom God will show him to be king over His people.

A. David Anointed King.

Samuel makes the trip and he finds Jesse, and he asks Jesse to bring his sons out for examination as it were. Each of them proceeds before Samuel by age from the oldest down, but none of them is the one that God indicates to Samuel He has chosen. Samuel is puzzled, as are all of them. So Samuel, sensitive to God's leading, knowing that none of these were chosen, says to Jesse, "Isn't there someone else? Do you have any other sons?" Jesse says, "Well, yes there is one other, but he is really a kid; he is out tending the flocks." Samuel says "Get him." And when he arrives, though this young man, David, is very young and quite possibly rather short in stature, in other words, scrawny, God impresses on Samuel that this is the one who will be king.

It is an instance of God doing the reverse of what cultural expectations would suggest. In the ancient world, it was the oldest son who generally got the privilege. If there was an opportunity, you gave it to the oldest son. The oldest son got a double inheritance right; the oldest son would

be the successor in a monarchy. And here we have a case of the youngest son, the one least likely for anybody from a human point of view to choose. But as Samuel reminds the people, we look on the externals, but God looks on the heart. God sees the inside, so in the same way that Abraham, not the oldest son, was chosen by God to be the leader of faith and the beginner of a people. In the same way, Isaac was not his oldest son but was the child of promise. In the same way, Jacob was not the firstborn of Isaac but was the child of promise. In the same way, Joseph was the eleventh-born of Jacob's children but became the most prominent of the sons, and so on. So we have Moses as well, the third-born in his family of leaders of the Exodus, Miriam, Aaron, and Moses.

We now have David as the youngest son, the least likely to be chosen; yet God, who is looking not at externals but real character, is making a decision contrary to what anybody at the scene expected. Thereafter, David knows that he is to be king, very few others do, it is a private anointing just at a family's house. Even so, conscious of the fact that God has chosen him to be king, David is very careful to be respectful of the Lord's anointed. Indeed what happens then is David becomes more and more successful militarily. He first goes out to visit his brothers who are with Saul in a battle against the Philistines, and there is a champion challenge given.

B. David and Goliath.

The Philistines have got their combat champion named Goliath. He is big, and he is ready to fight. They issued the challenge to the Israelites to come and fight this guy, sending out the best Israelite warrior, the two of them to fight, and then the winner to proclaim that his side will now be superior to the other. It is sort of a proxy battle in which one champion fights on behalf of each side. Saul did not know whom to send. Goliath is described in some of the manuscripts, most of the ones that are often used or have been historically used for our English translations, as six cubits and a span tall. That would be nine feet, nine inches tall, extremely tall. He is, however, described in many other manuscripts, including the Dead Sea Scrolls, as four cubits and a span. That is six feet, nine inches tall; in other words, a real good NBA player but not inhumanly tall. He was an imposing figure in those days when the average individual was only about five feet high. This relatively small individual, David, pesters Saul, in effect asking him to allow him to go out and fight Goliath.

Could there be any hope that this little guy could win against that huge seasoned warrior? There are two factors: one of them, a very modest factor from a human point of view, David was a slinger. One of the kinds of skills in battle that the Israelites had was slinging stones. The book of Judges mentions 400 left-handed slingers that were in the Benjamite army. David was skilled with a sling, projecting stones at a high speed, but that is really very minor in the story compared to the fact that God was with David. It was God's will to bring David to prominence in this way. So a relatively unknown, quite young, probably on the short side, individual goes out not even wearing armor because the armor that Saul tried to put on him was just too cumbersome for him to be able to move his arms to get the stone out of the sling. He is up against a huge champion from the Philistines who has got full armor and a sword and a spear and even a shield carrier out in front of him. But David knocks him to the ground and cuts off his head.

Thereafter, of course, David is seen as a hero among the people.

C. Saul and David.

The Philistines still renege on the deal. They do not actually agree to be servants of the Israelites as they had projected that they would in advance of the encounter. David joins Saul as Saul's

commander-in-chief. David becomes the general of Saul's army, inspires the troops, leads them ferociously, and they begin to have success. Saul invites David to marry into his family, and David marries Michal, one of Saul's daughters, and now he is Saul's son-in-law. But, that same instability that seems to have affected Saul increases, and sadly enough it seems to be enhanced by Saul's spiritual instability, the same kind of thing that caused God to reject him as king. Saul begins to spend more and more of his time not interested in fighting the enemy but in getting rid of David. He becomes jealous of David; he becomes jealous of David's success within his own family, and David's friendship with the crown prince Jonathan. We see Saul in many of these chapters in the book chasing David. David ends up having to leave Saul's home territory in Benjamin to go on the run. David has to gather around himself a kind of private army, and he lives off the land almost like a bandit might. There are occasions where, in his desperation, he even joins temporarily with the Philistines and places himself at their disposal, along with his private army, as a kind of mercenary. God protects him from ever having to fight against the Israelites, and eventually David is able to, of course, be a very successful leader against the very Philistines that he got to know so well.

D. Saul Goes to Endor.

At the end of the book, we find the Philistines advancing; we find them making more and more inroads into Israel. Saul, having diverted his attention from fighting them to pursuing David, has ruined the military strategy that could have brought success. And we see Saul increasingly departing from loyalty to the Lord, the God of Israel. Indeed, very close to the end of the book, Saul is at a place called Endor; and he actually consults a witch, a woman who is called in the Hebrew "an owner of a pit," or "a pit-lady." She is a woman who alleges that she can call down into this pit in the ground and can have contact with the spirits of the dead and through them get information about the future. It is a sad indication of the way that Saul's faithfulness to God had deteriorated.

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E. Saul and Jonathan Slain on Mt. Gilboa.

Finally at the end of the book, in chapter 31, we find Saul and Jonathan fighting valiantly on Mount Gilboa, where they have been attacked by Philistines and are trying to hold them off. One problem is that Gilboa is more than two-thirds of the way from the Mediterranean to the Jordan River. In other words, it is not nearly in the heartland of Israel; it is really in that part of Israel that the Israelites first took under Joshua. The Israelites are being driven back so far that they are back into some of the early places in their holdings of the Promised Land. There at that battle, Saul loses his life, and Jonathan loses his. The Israelites are brutally defeated; large numbers of them are killed, the rest flee.

The tragic story of Saul comes to an end, one who was anointed by God, one who was tall and strong, one whom God was willing to give skill and ability and success to, but who turned away from God increasingly, who had let his fears and his sinful inclinations possess him, and who even had rejected the best military leader, David, he ever had. Saul is dead, Israel is defeated, and 1 Samuel comes to an end.

09-2Samuel The Difference - Leaders Make Us

2 Samuel-2 Kings: The Difference Leaders Make - Lesson 1.

2 Samuel: David's Great Reign.

I. Triumph of David (1:1-10:19).

A. The Defeat of Saul on Mt. Gilboa (1:1-27).

Second Samuel opens with David hearing the news of Saul's death. The Israelites have been defeated in battle at Mount Gilboa by the Philistines. Things looked bleak. There was now no king as far as most of the people knew. But David understood that God had called him to be king. Indeed David had been anointed some years prior by Samuel to be the successor to Saul when Saul had been rejected as king. But David still had a keen appreciation for Saul, whom he had served as a military leader, and Saul's son Jonathan, who had been for a long time David's best friend.

In 2 Samuel 1, we read a beautiful musical lament that David wrote for Saul. This may have been one of his earliest writings; at least this may have been one of the earliest popular writings that David wrote among the songs and other things that he composed. He says in it, "O mountains of Gilboa, may you have neither dew nor rain, nor fields that yield offerings of grain. For there the shield of the mighty was defiled, the shield of Saul, no longer rubbed with oil. From the blood of the slain, from the flesh of the mighty, the bow of Jonathan did not turn back, the sword of Saul did not return unsatisfied. Saul and Jonathan, in life they were loved and gracious, and in death they were not parted."

David was saying this about Saul, the person who had pursued him for years and tried to kill him. David shows himself to have a deep sense of where respect should be given, and that respect is a very important thing to appreciate. Later David will commit quite a number of serious sins; he is hardly an example of good personal moral behavior. But on the other hand, David never forgets who he is to respect and how that respect is to be given to God in all situations. He never forgets the importance of his loyalty to God. He showed that kind of loyalty as well to Saul.

B. King over All of Israel (2:1-14:33).

But now it is time for a new king and David is the obvious choice, at least for the people of his own tribe; that is, the tribe of Judah. They come to him at Hebron, which is the largest city in the southern part of the tribal territory of Judah. They ask him to be king, he agrees, and they formally anoint him there. This is now a public anointing, which recognizes David is to be the king of all the people of Judah. However, there were many northerners still loyal to Saul.

The tribes did not always have a sense of unity with one another; and there was a tendency for the northern tribes to think differently than the southern tribes, a tendency for them to look to different political leaders, a regionalism that separated north from south. The northern tribes thought that it might be appropriate to try to continue with Saul's family in the monarchy. They continued to look to Saul's children as potential successors to him. The Bible tells us in 2 Samuel that there really was a long war between the house of David and the house of Saul. A lot of the time it was a kind of cold war; but there was a rivalry. David knew that God wanted him to be king over all Israel. And many of his family and supporters and the vast majority of Judeans wanted that to happen, whereas large numbers of people in the north did not want a southerner as

king over them. It would take seven years before, finally, David would be chosen as king over both the north and south. But eventually, he was.

C. City of David.

The story describes for us how he was, indeed, made king over the entire nation, north and south, in chapter 5. Then after accepting the united monarchy of the entire nation, David proceeded to do something very interesting. Though the Israelites were scattered all around the Promised Land and had some places more under their control than others, and were on the run in some places and firmly entrenched in others, one city, indeed, the biggest city in the whole territory, had never been taken. This was the city of Jerusalem. The suburbs had been taken. Israelites had been living there for centuries since Joshua, but the central city itself, called in those days by the name Jebus because the Jebusites lived there, was still in the hands of the local Canaanite population.

David determined to capture it; he and Joab, who was his cousin and chief military advisor and leader, set out with the men of Israel to capture the city. David, of course, had grown up near it, just a few miles south in Bethlehem, and he knew how to get into the city. They did, they captured it against the defiance of the Jebusites who said, "You will never take our city," because the Jebusites had been successful in keeping Israelites out for centuries. Once David captured the city, he made it his capital. Jerusalem then became a kind of a special territory, a little bit like the way the Vatican is a special territory in Italy, kind of its own state, the way that Washington, D.C. is not part of any of the other 50 states, but a separate district. That is what Jerusalem became under David.

It became the headquarter's city for the monarchy, for the royal family. Since it was right on the border between Judah to the south and Benjamin, the southern-most tribal district in the north, Jerusalem was an ideal location, a border city in the king's hands, not really part of the territory of any other tribe; and from there David could rule. What is significant about this is that Jerusalem turns out to be the place that God had chosen to set His name. Jerusalem, in other words, as we see the story unfold, is the fulfillment of the predictions made way back in Deuteronomy 12 that God would eventually place His name, His authority, His presence, in a certain location within Israel. David made that happen.

Jerusalem becomes an important topic in Scripture; more and more it comes to symbolize the presence of God. It is, of course, the place where the Lord Himself in the New Testament was crucified and where He was resurrected. But Jerusalem comes to have the metaphorical significance of the place where we are with God, since it indicates His presence on earth. Eventually, Jerusalem even comes to indicate heaven in the book of Revelation.

D. Other Conquests.

After conquering Jerusalem, David sets out to defeat the Israelites' most serious enemy, that is the Philistines. David was always a good military leader and his skills certainly do not fail him now, especially because God is with him. It is David who actually completes the conquest. Joshua certainly had faithfully gotten it underway, but the limitations of sin on the part of the people had kept them from being entirely successful. And the way that the Israelites had turned away from God during the days of the judges and parts of 1 Samuel also were tragic factors in limiting the conquest and causing the Israelites to have only a tenuous hold on the Promised Land. Under David the conquest gets finished.

David sets out systematically to take town after town, and city after city, and region after region, to eliminate all foreign influences therein. He has tremendous success in driving away oppressors, to free the people, to liberate the land. From north to south, he has tremendous success. There is not a battle that David enters into in which he is not successful. The ark is recaptured from the Philistines and brought back into Jerusalem.

E. Davidic Covenant.

We see in chapter 7, David wants to build a temple. He says to God, "I want to build You a house." Why would he want to do that? Well, it is because the people in ancient times in general were aware of the fact that it seemed appropriate to have a place where a god could manifest His presence; that is the general sense that ancient people had about a temple. But in particular, David really did love God and loved Him with his whole heart and cared about God's purposes. He wanted to honor God more than what was the case, in his mind at least, in the way that the tabernacle did so. The tabernacle, after all, was a portable tent shrine, and now Israel was settled. David had finished settling the people of God; and so, as he had captured Jerusalem, he wanted a place right there in the center of the people, a visible presence of God's abiding with them. The temple would do that. God said, "No, I do not want you to build a temple. Part of your job for Me has been war, and you are associated with war. I want My house to be a house of peace."

In addition, God actually wanted to do something first, something more important than getting a building built. He wanted to make a promise, to David and through David, of importance to the whole world. That is what we find in 2 Samuel 7. This chapter contains what is called the Messianic Covenant, the Davidic Messianic Covenant. It is the chapter in which God says to David, "You will not build a house for Me, but I will build a house for you", trading on the fact that the word in Hebrew for house can also mean "family" just as it can in English. "I am going to make it so that there will never fail to be a successor of yours over My people." Now, on the one hand, this could be interpreted in a rather trivial way as a promise that there would be many kings descended from David, that his family would be a dynasty of kings. But on the other hand, the grandness of the language clearly leads us to expect, as it led ancient Israelites long before the time of Jesus, that God was also predicting something greater than just a dynasty.

He was predicting an eternal kingship, a kingship that would never end. Somehow, out of this chapter, we know that a son of David was to come, and he would rule forever over God's people. Of course, the fulfillment of that is Jesus of Nazareth. It was He, just like David, born in circumstances that would not lead one to expect him to be king and not recognize him early on as king. But indeed with the approbation of God and representing God in the flesh, He was, in fact, the great king in fulfillment of this promise. Once David becomes king and receives this promise, we know that David will stand as a kind of archetype for the kingship of Christ. Thus David's life is a harbinger of the life of Christ, not, however, from a moral point of view. It is from the point of view of the office he holds and of the favor of God upon him, but his moral life sadly is far from exemplary.

II. David's Transgression (11:1-27).

Though David has victory after victory, and though David is magnanimous and effective in victory, there comes a time when we read these words from chapter 11 : "In the spring, at the time when kings go off to war, David sent Joab out with the king's men and the whole Israelite army. . . . But David remained in Jerusalem." In other words, there comes a time when arrogance begins to characterize David as a king. "Yes, I am supposed to go. Yes, that is what kings do (it

is the theory that the king leads the troops into battle, always at the forefront). But I am going to stay home this time and let Joab do it."

What David does, in lust, is eventually takes a married woman and sleeps with her, gets her pregnant, and then he schemes to cover it up by getting her husband killed. It is Bathsheba that he lusted after; her husband is Uriah. He commands Joab to have Uriah, who was a soldier, placed in the forefront of battle against what we would call today the area of Jordan, the ancient capital of Amman. There, fighting against the Ammonites, Uriah is in fact killed.

David then takes Bathsheba to be his wife, but the problem is he cannot do anything without God knowing it. So Nathan, the prophet, comes on behalf of God and says to David, "What you have done is a horrible sin and here is the consequence for you: The sword will never depart from your house." There is another use of the word house in the sense that David's family in general would now be subject to internal warfare. Much of the rest of the book of 2 Samuel describes events in which David's family, and thus David himself, suffer the consequences of that sin.

III. David's Trouble (12:1-24:25).

A. Family Discord.

David was not a very good father, not a very model parent. He did not intervene as he should have when his children needed guidance. He tended to let them sort of play off against one another. He didn't set a model for them and apparently did not pay too much attention to them at all. In consequence of that, this prediction came true in spades. For example, in chapter 13 we read of how David's oldest son, the crown prince Amnon, raped his half sister Tamar.

B. Absalom's Revolt.

Then we read of how Absalom, the third-born, furious that this had happened, assassinates Amnon. Absalom eventually, after fleeing for a while because he had killed the crown prince, returns to Jerusalem. Sensing that David has become more and more distant as a leader, more and more isolated, more and more selfish, more and more arrogant, Absalom begins to go around to the people and suggest to them that perhaps he would make a better king than his father. He does favors for the people; he is there and available to render judgments, or give advice, or to try to solve problems. Soon he is very popular. David's ratings have slipped down near the bottom and Absalom's are skyrocketing. In chapter 15, we read of how he launches a conspiracy against his own father, in other words a revolt, a rebellion.

At first it is successful. David has with him only a few close advisors and Philistine mercenary troops who are his personal bodyguards. They have to flee, cross the Jordan River, head over into the land of Gilead; and Absalom flees after them, having gathered an army. One of David's advisors actually tricks Absalom into waiting longer than necessary to go after David. Here is David's third-born son chasing his dad to kill him because he hates his dad so much and he wants to be king. What a sad situation. Absalom does not succeed because the wary and wily Joab, David's chief military advisor and leader, ends up being able to catch Absalom and assassinates him when Absalom gets caught in a tree riding his mule around chasing David. With the leader of the conspiracy, revolution dead, the troops slink home and David also essentially slinks home as well.

C. More Rebellion.

He is not popular; he did not suddenly become popular just because his son got killed in battle. David does reign a number of more years. He even has some kinds of successes and benefits

attend his way, but sadly it is not a happy ending to his career. Other rebellions come against David: one led by an influential Benjamite named Sheba who is chronicled for us in chapter 20. Then more wars come; the Philistines again seek power and influence and territory, and they fight against David. As of chapter 21 in 2 Samuel, things are kind of back to where they were in the days of Saul. God has taken seriously the great sin that David committed.

D. Census and Plague.

After a couple of chapters (chapters 22-23) we have some poems that David wrote, including his beautiful last words, and also a list of some of the men who fought with him who were his generals and colonels and majors, as it were, in the military. We find at the very end of the book of 2 Samuel David engaged, again, in a serious sin. This time it is not adultery and murder; this time it is imperialism. David decides to count all the fighting men in Israel, to have a military census. At first, he is opposed in this, but he insists on doing it. Why would David, who has people ready to fight for him anyway, want a complete count of every single person of fighting age? The answer is he wanted to go beyond the Promised Land.

The holy war that God allowed and sanctioned, the very special and limited war that God approved in the Old Testament, could be fought only for the taking and holding of the Promised Land, and David had already done that.

Now he is thinking of an empire, a bigger territory, of branching out, of capturing yet other nations, of becoming a great imperial king. God will not allow it, and so God brings a plague upon the people of Israel. David, brought short by this plague, aware that his sins have found him out once again, is immediately repentant. He pleads to God for mercy, and God is merciful. The plague ends and it comes to a stop right at a threshing floor, a great sort of stone dome at the height of the city of Jerusalem. The threshing floor was owned by a local Jebusite named Araunah, and David buys it from him. He puts an altar there, and thus he has purchased land for what will be the site of the temple that his son Solomon will build.

E. Concluding Thoughts.

David actually dies a couple of chapters into the book that we call 1 Kings, though it is a continuation of the story. His life comes to a tragic end there, but we should not think of his story as being a story of tragedy. It was a story of sin. It was a story of immorality. It was a story of ups and downs, great potential, and the frittering away of that potential by personal sins, a story of a king who soon becomes so unpopular that his own son drives him from office, and gets the vast majority of people eager to kill David.

But because God is behind the events, it is also a story of wonderful victory. It is a story of the beginning of the hope for a Messiah. It is a story of the expectation for a son of David to reign over Israel; and David launches that. His victories remind us of the victory of Christ. And we notice that, even in his sin, he never forgets his position of respectfulness, dependence upon, and loyalty to God. He repents when his sin finds him out. He senses his guilt and asks God for mercy, and God used him mightily to establish the Israelites in their land in fulfillment of the promises to Abraham. That is where we see the situation at the end of 2 Samuel.

2 Samuel-2 Kings: The Difference Leaders Make - Lesson 2.

1 Kings: Israel's Decline and Division.

I. Succession (1:1-2:11).

A. Introduction.

First Kings is certainly logically named because it is all about kings. You have the story of Solomon in 1 Kings 1-11 . And then starting with chapter 12 and following all the way through to the end of 2 Kings, we have the stories of forty additional kings. Solomon, David's eighth-born son, became his successor. The fact that he was number eight gives you a bit of an indication of how much intrigue and difficulty there was in the succession.

B. David's Last Days

Indeed, the question of who will succeed David is what 1 Kings raises in the beginning of the book. David's fourth-born son, Adonijah, thought of himself as the logical successor. The firstborn son, Amnon, had been killed by the third-born, Absalom. The second-born son had apparently died at a young age. Absalom had been killed in battle by David's general, Joab; and so Adonijah, number four, was ready to take over. At the beginning of 1 Kings, David is old and he has hypothermia; he cannot get warm, and his advisors do something that shows their own lack of moral judgment. In those days, it was thought by the pagans that a king had the right to reign only as long as he was sexually active.

So, to try to prove that David should still be king, they have a nationwide beauty contest, and thus come up with the prettiest young thing they can find in ancient Israel, a woman named Abishag. They bring her to the king and have her go to bed with him. But in fact, the king is far too preoccupied trying to keep warm to have any romantic interests in this new wife. That is proof to Adonijah that he ought to be king, his dad is washed up. So, he schedules a big ceremony and feast and has himself anointed and proclaimed as king. When the noise of this reaches the palace, people there immediately fly into a panic because David had already promised Solomon that he would be king.

But could the decrepit David now carry this out? With the help of Bathsheba, who appears in these latter days to be David's favored wife, the group that supports Solomon has him anointed. Indeed, that catches on more popularly because, even though David is feeble, it is his own decision that they emphasize. Solomon actually becomes king in the popular mentality, and Adonijah has to recognize that his attempt at becoming king fizzled.

II. The Reign of Solomon (2:12-11:43).

A. Securing the Throne.

Now, if the rivalry was just the eighth-born son against the fourth born son, and then they shook hands, made up and all was settled, that would be one thing. But it was not so at all. Instead, we observe that Solomon works firmly to establish his power ruthlessly against all opposition. Eventually, on a fairly thin pretext, Solomon is able to have Adonijah put to death. Solomon puts to death other rivals to the throne as well, even Joab, who had been David's extremely successful military commander. With David's permission, he was also assassinated. At the end of chapter 2 in 1 Kings, we read this statement, "The kingdom was now firmly established in Solomon's hands." It came as the result of several occasions in which rivals to the throne, or rivals to political power, or anyone that Solomon thought might get in his way, were systematically eliminated.

B. Wisdom and Folly.

Solomon had a tremendous advantage; he was interested in and skilled in wisdom. Now, wisdom has nothing to do with IQ. Biblical wisdom is not about IQ; it is not about experience; it is not about knowledge; it is not about academic skill; it is unrelated to those sorts of topics.

"Wisdom," as the Bible defines it and as the English word rather poorly translates the Hebrew word for wisdom, is the ability to make the right choices. That is what wisdom is. It is choice-making ability, and of course the Bible tells us that fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom, the theme of Proverbs, reminding us that we will not make the right choices in life unless God is at the beginning of our choice-making. To choose Him and to fear Him orients all our ability to make the right choices.

But God gave to Solomon that ability. Solomon was already a somewhat ruthless king. He was already somewhat determined to eliminate opposition to himself. But he's imperfect like the other kings were imperfect, and God's not going to stand in the way of Israel's blessing by renegeing on the chance to do good things for the lineage of David according to His promise in 2 Samuel 7. So Solomon, the successor to David, starts off wonderfully.

He gives wise rulings in difficult cases. The people are both fascinated and thrilled with their new king. However, taking advantage of his popularity, he also does something in chapter 4 that is not ideal. He reverses the tribal district system that had been in existence since the days of Joshua that had been revealed by God in the book of Deuteronomy. Instead, in chapter 4 we read how he appointed federal governors over the special districts that he created, districts that did not coincide with the original boundaries of the tribes in the Promised Land. We see, on the one hand, a king who is very wise and can make the right choices; but on the other hand, a king who takes into his own hands things that God had originally specified were to continue the way that God planned them.

We see a king who is enormously capable at helping people and ruling for them in difficult court decisions, in teaching proverbs to people, indeed in being so wise as it says at the end of chapter 4 that his wisdom spread to all the kings of the world, but who also spent an awful lot of time and energy building up his own personal wealth. Perhaps Solomon's greatest accomplishment is the building of the temple. David had wanted to do it, but God said, "No. Instead, I have something more important for you. I am going to build up your house; you do not build mine." God had promised that your son and successor, that is Solomon, would do that job.

C. A Temple for the Name of the Lord.

With chapters 5-6 and following, we find descriptions of Solomon's determination to build that temple, and to put it into the best possible condition it could be, to make it a house for the gathering of the nations. It is a wonderful success story. He gathers together workers; he makes arrangements with Hiram, the king of Tyre, in what we would call today Lebanon, in those days Phoenicia.

Building materials are provided for the temple, many of them brought by sea to the seacoasts and then tracked over land to Jerusalem. Quarrying is undertaken and a vast complex with a temple upon it is finally constructed.

It is a beautiful temple; it is lovely and it is successful. It took seven years to build, as 1 Kings 6 describes. Then we read these rather ominous words at the beginning of chapter 7: "It took Solomon thirteen years, however, to complete the construction of his palace." It took seven years on the temple but thirteen years on his own house. Another contrast is Solomon doing the right

thing for God in the temple, but then not doing the right thing in terms of paying so much attention to himself.

Further, chapters 7-8 describe the beauty of the tabernacle and its fine appointments; they describe how the ark was brought into the temple and Solomon's wonderful and theologically astute prayer of dedication for the temple. In chapter 9, God appears to Solomon and encourages him and warns him that if he is faithful he can have a long life of blessedness and success and prosperity. If, on the other hand, he is not faithful, there will be difficulties that come to him.

D. Solomon's Splendor.

In chapter 10, we read of the visit of the Queen of Sheba. This queen from the south, who had heard about Solomon but wanted to come and see for herself if he really was so wise. Could someone know so many proverbs, be so skilled at the interpretation of life, be able to describe the way choices should be made? Could this person, who was the collector and/or author of so many of those proverbs that are in what we call the book of Proverbs, really be as impressive as his reputation suggested? He was; and he had splendor in terms of his officers, in terms of his workers, in terms of the palace, and in terms of the public works projects that he had undertaken. There were just all sorts of things that he had accomplished for the people. On the other hand, we also read that, sadly, he had bankrupted the nation. So there came a time when he could not pay Hiram of Tyre what he owed him for building materials and construction help. He had to end up giving part of northern Israel over to Tyre as a payment for it, again, another kind of contrast.

E. Solomon's Spiritual Demise.

In chapter 11, we read about Solomon's spiritual and moral demise. After descriptions of many aspects of his greatness we read this: "King Solomon, however, loved many foreign women besides Pharaoh's daughter (Pharaoh's daughter having been his chief early wife)." He loved Moabites, Ammonites, Edomites, Sidonians, and the Hittites. They were from nations about which the Lord had told the Israelites, "You must not intermarry with them, because they will surely turn your hearts after their gods." It says "his wives led him astray." As Solomon grew old, his wives turned his heart after other gods and his heart was not fully devoted to the Lord his God, as the heart of David his father had been. David had plenty of imperfections but always was loyal to God; he worshiped the Lord alone. David trusted in the Lord alone, and knew that in the Lord alone was righteousness.

Solomon, however, followed Ashtoreth, the goddess of the Sidonians, and Molech, the detestable god of the Ammonites, etc. Solomon did evil in the eyes of the Lord. He did not follow the Lord completely as David, his father, had done. The chapter goes on to describe how Solomon actually introduced idolatry officially into Israel, how he built shrines for idol worship on the various hills around Jerusalem. At the end of Solomon's reign, around 931 B.C., we have a situation where people are worshiping the Lord, the true God, at the temple in Jerusalem. But they are also starting to worship this god, and that goddess, and various other deities at shrines that Solomon also built for them. So the great builder, the builder of the temple, the builder of the palace, and the builder of many of the public works projects around Israel, also became the builder of the pagan worship centers around the city of Jerusalem. Obviously, this was unacceptable to God, and God not only raised up a number of adversaries who fought him, but he also raised up a northerner named Jeroboam, who had been one of Solomon's officers, to oppose him and to seek to take the ten northern tribes away from Solomon's influence, in other words, the leader's revolt that would produce secession by the north from under the monarchy of Solomon.

III. Division of the Kingdom (12:1-14:31).

A. Jeroboam and Rehoboam.

When Solomon died, this very thing did happen as God had said it would. God said to Solomon, "Because of what you have done I am going to rip the nation from you, and I will leave one tribe", and He did (the tribe of Judah), as an indication of loyalty to His promise to David that there would always be a successor to him on the throne. "But most of the nation will no longer be governed by a king descended from your father David and you."

In chapter 12, Jeroboam led that revolution, and it did work. It was successful and the northern tribes broke away from Solomon's son Rehoboam once Solomon had died. Thereafter, we observe what amounts to a continuous civil war, sometimes hot, sometimes cold, but continuous, in which the north and the south are at odds. They were never again united, so there were only three kings who reigned over the whole country. There was Saul, there was David, there was Solomon; and after Solomon's death then the country splits apart, never again to be reunited during its political lifetime as a normal nation on the earth. And, there are going to be kings in the north and kings in the south.

B. Summary of Northern and Southern Kings.

It turns out, conveniently for our accounting system, that there were twenty northern kings until the north was destroyed and conquered and exiled by the Assyrians in 722 B.C. There were a total of twenty southern kings in the succession to Solomon, who reigned all the way to 586 B.C. when the Babylonians destroyed the south. It is the story of those twenty northern kings and those twenty southern kings that occupies the rest of 1 Kings and indeed on into 2 Kings.

C. Prophets: Part of the Story.

1 Kings is also the story of prophets. One of the things you have to keep in mind is that God does a lot through prophets in these books. Sometimes these are anonymous prophets; sometimes they are prophets who are identified, such as Elijah and Elisha. But the books of Kings are not only about kings; they are about the interaction, very often, of kings and prophets. There is one other big factor to keep in mind and that is the superpowers: Egypt, Assyria, and Babylon, the great three powers of the Fertile Crescent, the region in which the Israelites lived. We will see increasingly that those powers have influence upon the way that the course of events goes in Israel and Judah.

D. Calf Worship Instituted by Jeroboam.

When the nation divides Jeroboam, not wanting to send his people to worship at Jerusalem, which after all was a unifying place, sets up a counter-religion, a bogus substitute religion. Well, how will the people worship? Jeroboam decides that they will go right back to the practice that had taken place as described for us in Exodus 32 and 33 at Mt. Sinai when Moses was receiving the Ten Commandments up on the mountain and Aaron and the Israelites were worshiping golden calves down at the bottom.

Following that old tradition of worshiping God by golden calves, he has golden calves made as idols, sets them up at the northern city of Dan and the relatively southern city of Bethel; and there, he causes the Israelites to sin. After about chapter 13, we see that the northern ten tribes are not worshiping the Lord in the true and right way but are worshiping by means of idols. And we are going to see that, as a result, it is impossible for any northern king to do right in the eyes of the Lord fully. Some would be better than others, but generally all twenty of them will be

condemned. When you read about this king or that as a northern king, the summary statement made of him early on will be, "and he, too, did evil in the eyes of the Lord."

IV. Kings of Judah and Israel (15:1-22:53).

On the other hand, some of the southern kings were good. Of the total of twenty, the statement is made of eight of them that they "did good in the eyes of the Lord," although there are often qualifications listed. Nevertheless, if you add it up, of the forty kings of the divided monarchy that followed Solomon, sadly we observe that thirty-two of them did evil in God's opinion and only eight came even close.

A. Dynasty of Omri.

A powerful dynasty in the north is the dynasty of Omri. This dynasty is effectively represented by his son Ahab. Ahab dominates quite a few chapters toward the end of 1 Kings. He was really the north's most evil king; he was sold into idolatry by his own way of thinking. He married a Phoenician princess named Jezebel and effectively gave into her hand the religious leadership of the nation. Jezebel proceeded to persecute the prophets of the Lord. In spite of the counter-religion, in spite of the worship of idols, there were righteous prophets trying to bring the people back to faithfulness to God. Ahab, and Jezebel especially, however, were so successful in suppressing those true prophets that by chapter 17, we find the situation in which only one is actually able to show his face in public (most of them have gone underground and are in hiding). That one is God's prophet Elijah.

B. Elijah and Elisha.

For many chapters, starting in chapter 17, what Elijah does or what Ahab does kind of interact one with another. Soon enough, it is Elijah's successor, Elisha, who is the central figure. And for a time, toward the end of 1 Kings and the beginning of 2 Kings, you are reading more about prophets than you are about kings, because God wanted His people to know His Word; He wanted His truth to be understood. Strongly, a prophet like Elijah represented the Lord. Fiercely, though he stood for God and impressively though his miracles and those of his successor, Elisha, were visible to the people, sadly however, the attractions of idolatry were terribly powerful. And those attractions kept the people of Israel away from worshiping the true and living God almost all the time.

C. An Uneasy Alliance.

There is even a story in 1 Kings 22 of how both the northern and southern kings, for a short time, have made peace; so King Ahab and King Jehoshaphat are together going to war against a common enemy.

They cannot even get a true word from the Lord because all the prophets are false. They finally get one lone prophet named Micaiah to come and prophesy the truth and they hate it when he does.

D. Conclusion.

The northern and southern kings do not believe Micaiah. He predicts disaster for them. Indeed the book comes to a close right after that story of disaster, with King Ahab being killed in battle across the Jordan River to the east, and with the death of Jehoshaphat some years later, and the sad situation of an Israel unable to be obedient to God (i.e., turning to idolatry increasingly, not listening to true prophets, worshiping at locations that are illegal, and by worshiping golden calves that are not God's will but the very opposite thereof). One gets the impression that this

cannot last. One gets the impression, even as 1 Kings ends and 2 Kings begins, that this nation is going downhill and is going to be in big trouble.

11-1Kings Supplement Two

2 Samuel-2 Kings: The Difference Leaders Make - Lesson 3.

Supplement Two.

The Old Testament "Story" and its Sources.

I. Introduction to the Historical Books.

The English arrangement of the Old Testament historical books includes Joshua, Judges, Ruth, Samuel, Kings, Chronicles, Ezra, Nehemiah, and Esther. In the Hebrew arrangement, Joshua, Judges, and the books of Samuel and Kings constitute a group referred to as "The Former Prophets." Labeling them as prophetic rather than historical suggests these books were considered to be primarily theological in nature rather than annalistic. These books share a prophetic view of history where cause and effect are tied to the blessings and curses of the covenant. The remainder of the books, Ruth, Chronicles, Ezra, Nehemiah, and Esther, form part of the section of the Hebrew canon called "The Writings."

II. Historical Overview of Old Testament Times.

History may be defined as the interpreted record of the socially significant human past, based on organized data collected by the scientific method from archaeological, literary, or living sources. God as an actor in history will preclude the idea of history happening within a closed system. Of course, one must keep in mind that any historical record will include some events and exclude others, usually on the basis of availability of data and the special interests and concerns of the historian.

This selectivity is eminently discernible in the Old Testament account of Israel's history. The primary thrust of the Old Testament record is theological in nature. Those facts relevant to the grand themes of the divine purpose (for example, redemption) were retained while other possibilities were excluded. The Old Testament is not a history in the chronicling, political sense of the term, but a descriptive account of God's work in human affairs.

When reading the Old Testament historical books it is important to get the sweep of things, the big story. This is a remarkable story, an immensely moving passage through time, about 2,000 years of it, ending nearly 2,000 years ago. It is important for students of the Bible to have an understanding of the overarching structure of ancient Israel's history. The major segments of that history include: the patriarchal wanderings; the Egyptian sojourn and Exodus; the settlement of Canaan; the institution and development of the monarchy under Saul, David, and Solomon; the division of the kingdom; the destruction of the northern kingdom by the Assyrians; the destruction of Solomon's temple and the southern kingdom by the Babylonians; exile in Babylonia and Egypt; return to the land; and the rebuilding of the temple.

A. Patriarchal Age to Exodus (2000-1200 B.C.).

The Middle Bronze Age (2000 - 1600 B.C.) of Canaan that Abraham entered into was dominated by scattered city-states. In Syria there were power centers at Yam-had, Qatna, Alakh, and Mari, and the coastal centers of Ugarit and Byblos seemed to have been already thriving. In Palestine only Hazor is mentioned in prominence. As the period progressed there was more and more contact with Egypt, and extensive caravan travel arose between Egypt and Palestine.

The Hebrews voluntarily entered Egypt under Joseph, but subsequently were reduced to slavery. Suffering in Egypt, the Israelites cried to Yahweh for deliverance, which came in the person of

Moses. After a series of plagues that God sent upon the land of Egypt, Moses led the people across the Red Sea into the Sinai Peninsula. The most important event of the Hebrews' forty years in the wilderness was the giving of the Law at Mount Sinai. There, Moses received the Decalogue, and the tabernacle was constructed according to instructions received through divine revelation.

B. Settlement in Canaan (1200 - 1000 B.C.).

Victories in the Transjordan formed a prelude to victories in the Promised Land itself. After crossing the Jordan River, Joshua set up his base camp at Gilgal. His military strategy was designed to divide the Canaanite forces. Victories at Jericho and Ai in central Palestine divided the inhabitants of the land and provided a wedge from which the Israelites gained effective control. Although the land was not wholly occupied by the Israelites during Joshua's lifetime, it was distributed among the twelve tribes on both sides of the Jordan River. The Levites, whose concern was public worship, were not given a tribal inheritance, but were assigned forty-eight cities with the respective pasture lands.

The Israelite tribes formed a loose confederation during the period of the judges. The tribes settled in their respective territories and had to defend themselves against distant marauding bands and the local Canaanites who had not been dispossessed during the time of Joshua. During the twelfth century B.C. a migration of Philistines from Crete and the Aegean region took place. They settled along the coastal regions of southern Palestine and became the greatest threat to Israelite independence. The lack of strong central government was keenly felt during the time of the judges.

C. United Kingdom (1000 - 931 B.C.).

The books of Samuel record the beginnings of Israel's golden age, the one period of history during which Israel became a world power; however, Samuel was disheartened when the people asked for a king. It seemed to be a rejection of the theocracy, and of Samuel himself. Samuel was directed by Yahweh to anoint Saul, a Benjamite, as the first king of Israel. Saul was successful in maintaining the equilibrium with the Philistines throughout most of his reign, but after the battle of Mount Gilboa (in which Saul was killed) the Philistines occupied most of the central portion of Canaan.

When David came to the throne, one of his first tasks was to regain control of the Israelite territory. This was accomplished from his newly conquered, fortified base in Jerusalem. As a result of David's military successes, his son Solomon inherited an empire that stretched from the Euphrates in the north to Egypt in the south. Though Solomon's wisdom was widely recognized and the prosperity of his realm unparalleled, the empire decayed under his guardianship and was on the verge of collapse when his son Rehoboam took the throne.

D. Divided Kingdom (931 - 586 B.C.).

Rehoboam refused to come to grips with the economic chaos of the nation. Jeroboam, a former officer under Solomon, returned from exile in Egypt to lead a revolt that resulted in the establishment of an independent northern kingdom. This included the larger portion of Palestine proper, as over against the rival kingdom of Judah. The boundary between Israel and Judah ran south of Jericho, Bethel, and Joppa.

The three kingdoms that developed from the breakup of Solomon's kingdom in western Palestine, Aram (Syria), Israel, and Judah, strove for supremacy. Nearly concurrent with the rise

of the Aramaeans came the resurgence of Assyrian imperialism. During the reign of Hoshea, Israel rebelled against Assyria. Shalmaneser's campaign to the west began a three-year siege of Samaria, the capital. Upon its fall, the survivors were deported, the city destroyed, and the northern kingdom of Israel was annexed entirely into the Assyrian Empire (722 B.C.).

Judah continued for almost a century and a half after the fall of Samaria; however, during much of that period it was a tributary to Assyria. Nabopolassar the Chaldean revolted against his Assyrian lords and established one of the greatest empires of antiquity. The last kings of Judah rebelled against his son Nebuchadnezzar, which precipitated an eighteen-month siege of Jerusalem. This ended with the destruction of the city and its temple and the deportation of the citizens to Babylon (587 B.C.). With the destruction of Jerusalem, Judah ceased to exist as a sovereign state.

E. Exile and Return (550 - 450 B.C.).

The Jews who were deported from Jerusalem were permitted to settle in their own communities in Babylon. The prophet Ezekiel prophesied to such a community located at Tel-abib on the river Chebar near Nippur. During the years of exile, Israel became a religious community unrelated to any political entity or cultic center. This caused changes in its thinking and in its political institutions that have continued to the present. Although some Jews would later return to Jerusalem, the majority continued to live at a distance from the Holy Land. Their ties were cultural and religious, but not political.

The history of Israel between the destruction of Jerusalem and the return of the first group of exiles following the decree of the Persian king, Cyrus the Great (538 B.C.), is largely unknown. The temple utensils were retrieved from Esagila, the temple of Babylon, and entrusted to a Jewish prince who had been appointed governor of Judah, Sheshbazzar. About 50,000 Jews returned to their homeland with the blessing and help of Cyrus. The leadership of the returned exiles passed to Zerubbabel and Jeshua (or Joshua) the priest. They built the altar of burnt offerings and began the offering of daily morning and evening sacrifices on the site of the former temple (Ezr 3:2-3). The rebuilt temple was dedicated in 515 B.C.

III. Major Archives.

Archaeology has substantiated many historical events recorded in the Hebrew Scriptures. When modern excavators came across the Assyrian libraries buried in Mesopotamia, they discovered that the Assyrians were indebted to literary collectors and librarians from the Old Babylonian times. The Babylonian collectors had themselves gathered Sumerian as well as Babylonian tablets in a library. The famous Royal Library discovered at Nineveh we now know had a long history. Since the archives provide written records and literature, they have more to offer students of the Bible than any other kind of archaeological find.

More than a dozen major archives have been discovered in the ancient Near East, as well as a number of smaller archives, especially from the cities of Assyria and Babylonia. Most of these finds have been royal archives, but some have been personal archives such as those found at Nuzi. No Israelite archives have been unearthed as yet, though a few collections of ostraca have been found, notably at Samaria and Lachish.

A large portion of many of the archives was made up of economic texts, comprising mostly the documentation of various business transactions (for example, receipts). While these at times can contribute to biblical studies, much more significance is attached to other classes of literature.

Mythological texts, treaties, wisdom literature, epics, historiographical documents, and even occasional references to prophecy have all come to light. Religious texts such as omens, incantations, hymns, and prayers have often been included among the tablets and provide a background against which the faith of Israel can be studied.

A. Ebla (Tell Mardikh).

Tell Mardikh is an exceptionally large mound, covering 140 acres and rising some fifty feet above the surrounding area. It is situated in northern Syria on a plateau halfway between the modern cities of Hama and Aleppo. Ebla was the capital of a great Canaanite empire that flourished during the third and second millennia B.C. Under the great king Ibrum, the kingdom of Ebla controlled all the territory between Egypt and the Persian Gulf, including Palestine and Syria, Sumer and Akkad.

In 1964 scholars at the University of Rome decided to carry out an archaeological excavation in Syria, at Tell Mardikh. After many years of less than spectacular results, 42 tablets of the Ebla archive were discovered in 1974. In 1975, another 15,000 or so tablets were unearthed, and the 1976 season produced an additional 5,000. The tablets were in various sizes and shapes and date back to the third millennium B.C.

The tablets fall into five categories: economic-administrative texts, including rations for palace personnel, offerings for temples and deities, lists of tributes paid to Ebla, etc.; (2) lexical texts, including school exercises, lists of animals, fishes, birds, geographic places, rolls of professions and personal names; (3) historical and juridical texts; (4) literary texts, including mythological stories, hymns to deities, incantations, and collections of proverbs; and (5) syllabaries, texts designed for learning Sumerian, for example, grammatical texts with verb paradigms in Sumerian and Eblaite.

B. Mari (Tell Hariri).

Mari was an important political center in northern Mesopotamia in the third and early second millennia B.C. The ancient city has now been identified with Tell Hariri, which is located some fifteen miles north of the Iraqi border and less than two miles west of the Euphrates River. This position permitted Mari to benefit from the intersection of the caravan routes that led from southern Mesopotamia to the Upper Euphrates and the route that led westward to the Mediterranean coast.

The outstanding architectural discovery of this period was the royal palace of Zimri-Lim, a contemporary of Hammurabi, king of Babylon. The palace covered an area of eight acres. A part of the palace was set aside for administrative offices, and the archives of this complex have yielded some 25,000 cuneiform tablets. These include economic, legal, and diplomatic texts. Several of the Mari texts reveal striking similarities to biblical prophetic texts. A god (especially Dagon) reveals himself spontaneously to a diviner-prophet, and, speaking in the imperative, sends the diviner with a message to the king.

C. Nuzi (Tell Yorghhan Tepe).

In 1925, Edward Chiera of the Oriental Institute began excavations at Tell Yorghhan Tepe, a few miles southwest of Kirkuk in Iraq and recovered approximately 1,000 cuneiform tablets from the ruins of what proved to be a wealthy businessman's home. The tablets recorded the business affairs of the family during the fifteenth century B.C. Included on the tablets was the name of the town, Nuzi.

The Nuzi documents were written in Akkadian but with a generous sprinkling of Hurrian words, so that the texts have become a valuable resource for reconstructing the language of the Hurrians. They are of particular interest to students of the Old Testament because they record social customs that are very similar to those recorded in the Bible in connection with the patriarchs; significantly, these tablets come from the same general area of Mesopotamia as the family of Abraham.

D. Amarna (Tell el-Amarna).

Illumination of the social and political situation in the land of Canaan in the Late Bronze Age, including the activities of the Habiru, has come from Tel el-Amarna in Egypt. The Amarna era in Egyptian history (ca. 1375-1350) is connected with Amenhotep IV, the "heretic pharaoh," who introduced new religious ideas in Egypt. He changed his name to Akhenaten, which encouraged the sole worship of the Aten and actively discouraged the worship of the other gods of Egypt.

The cuneiform tablets found there constituted a part of the diplomatic correspondence between the Amarna pharaohs and the rulers of the major power centers of Asia, the Hittites, the Assyrians, the Mitannians, the Kassites, the Cypriotes, and the kings who ruled the city-states of Syro-Palestine. Valuable information on the nature of the Canaanite language in the Amarna period has also been gleaned from the tablets.

The numerous references to the activities of the Habiru as a disruptive social element in Canaan has stirred much scholarly debate. The name varies in form from Sa-Gaz in the Sumerian language to Habiru (more correctly Hapiru or Apiru) in Akkadian. References to the class of people designated by the term have been found in texts ranging back into the Early Bronze Age, from such diverse sites as Mari, Haran, Hattusas, Ugarit, Alalakh, and Amarna. Although some have tried to equate these peoples with the Hebrews, there is ample evidence to question the proposed equation of Hapiru = Hebrew.

E. Ugarit (Tell Ras Shamrah).

Ugarit was an ancient city-state on the Mediterranean Sea north of modern Latakia. Excavations of the site of Ras Shamrah, which have brought to light a city on the Syrian coast from the fourteenth and thirteenth centuries B.C., are of great importance for biblical studies. The importance lies in the retrieval of texts in the local script and language, which has revolutionized both the linguistic knowledge of Northwest Semitic in its most ancient stage (and consequently Hebrew), and the knowledge of the terminology, style, and content of Canaanite literature of mythological and religious nature.

The Ugaritic texts testify to a number of social conventions that were also found in ancient Israel, including rituals of death and mourning, slavery for debt, and the practice of blood revenge. Of even greater interest are the legends and myths of Ugarit. There are two legendary epics about the ancient kings, Keret and Danel, and mythological texts about the gods of Ugarit, Baal and Anath; El, the patriarch of the gods; Athtart; Mot, the god of sterility and death; and others. The myths and legends of Ugarit permit us to glimpse the conceptions of the supernatural that infused Canaanite life and thought and to observe their cultic rites and practices.

F. Nineveh (Ashurbanipal's Library).

In the spring of 1850, Austen Henry Layard and his assistant, Hormuzd Rassam, made a significant find at Nineveh, thousands of clay tablets representing the library of the Assyrian

king Ashurbanipal. The famous library was collected by Ashurbanipal "in order that he might have that which to read." He had been educated in both Akkadian and Sumerian.

The contents of the library may be divided into two main categories: the royal archives, and literary works in general. The royal archives contained letters written by the king and others written to the king by sovereigns, princes, and state functionaries on all sorts of matters. Also found were contracts made with and by the royal house and economic texts dealing with every phase of palace life. The literary texts may be divided as follows: (1) philological, syllabaries, lexicons, and grammars of Assyro-Babylonian and Sumerian; (2) juridical, legal texts dealing with social practices and points of law concerning familial relationships, ownership of property, contractual agreements, etc.; (3) historical, annals of the kings; and (4) religious, including myths of Creation, the Flood, hymns, prayers, lamentations, and wisdom motifs.

IV. Monuments and Inscriptions.

In addition to archival material, ancient monuments and inscriptions have contributed to our knowledge of the history of Israel. Some of the monuments and inscriptions unearthed by archaeologists name kings of Israel or Judah. Others refer to events that are known from the pages of the Old Testament. The following examples are among the most significant artifacts of this kind.

A. Mesha Inscription (Moabite Stone).

A stele of black basalt found at modern Dhiban (Old Testament Dibon) in the Transjordan, contained an inscription of about thirty-four lines commemorating various military and building activities of Mesha king of Moab in the ninth century B.C. This inscription is the primary evidence for the Moabite language, a Canaanite dialect in the group of Northwest Semitic languages. It is closely related to Hebrew in grammar and vocabulary but has affinities with Ugaritic, Phoenician, and Aramaic.

When King Mesha of Moab came to the end of his reign, he had a monument inscribed recounting all his accomplishments. Called the Moabite Stone, the inscription includes a report of how Moab had come under the domination of Israel during the reign of Omri, but had regained its independence and recaptured some territory from Israel during the reign of a later king. It provides the only extrabiblical reference to the concept of placing things under the ban (Hebrew herem) as Joshua did at Jericho (Jos 6:17-19). The herem was a strongly religious activity, involving a vow or promise to give the spoils of war to the deity who had commanded the attack and insured victory. In addition, it also contains the oldest extant extrabiblical occurrence of Yahweh as the name of the God of Israel.

The inscription is of primary importance as extrabiblical testimony to the relationship between Israel and Moab in the ninth century. It is a valuable supplement to the account of Mesha's revolt against Israel in 2 Kings 3:4-27. He attributes his success to the god Chemosh, who was regarded as the source of victory or defeat. Mesha also described his extensive construction of new towns and rebuilding of others previously destroyed. He apparently used Israelite captives in these endeavors.

B. Stele of Shalmaneser III.

Shalmaneser III (who reigned from 858-824 B.C.), son of Ashurnasirpal II (884-859), grandson of Tukulti-Ninurta II (889-884), was one of the founders of the Assyrian Empire. He was faced with opposition on the north, west, and south fronts, and finally, in his closing years, with civil

insurrection. He left detailed records, so that it is possible to reconstruct much of his reign. Inscriptions speak of Shalmaneser's western campaigns against coalitions that included kings Ahab and Jehu of Israel.

The first direct contact between Assyria, the major power of Mesopotamia in the Iron Age II period, and Israel occurred in the time of King Ahab but is not mentioned in the Bible. The inscriptions of Shalmaneser III record the battle of Qarqar on the Orontes River in 853. Among the confederacy that opposed Shalmaneser's army was King Ahab, who was one of the leaders of the opposition. The Black Obelisk discovered at Nimrud, which preserves the accounts of Shalmaneser's campaigns from his eighteenth to thirty-first years pictures Jehu, or more likely, his representative, bowing before him with the tribute signifying submission to Assyrian suzerainty. This occurred in 841, Jehu's first year on the throne, after the obliteration of the line of Ahab.

C. Sennacherib's Prism (Taylor Prism).

Sennacherib, son of Sargon II and father of Esarhaddon, was king of Assyria and Babylonia from 705-681 B.C., and Layard's excavations in 1849-50 revealed the palace of Sennacherib and the famous Taylor Prism, which records the annals of Sennacherib, including his siege of Hezekiah's Jerusalem. Sennacherib details his success against 46 cities of Judah and his deportation of more than 200,000 Israelites. He also boasts of imprisoning Hezekiah in Jerusalem by subjecting the city to siege, "As to Hezekiah, the Jew, he did not submit to the yoke . . . Himself I made a prisoner in Jerusalem, his royal residence, like a bird in a cage."

The prism gives no hint of Sennacherib's suffering a defeat and does not record the outcome of the siege on Jerusalem, but it does note how he received tribute from Hezekiah. Hezekiah "did send me, later, to Nineveh, my lordly city, together with 30 talents of gold, 800 talents of silver, precious stones, antimony, large cuts of red stone, couches (inlaid) with ivory, etc." Thus the inscription confirms the military details as presented in the Bible (2Ki 18-19; 2Ch 32; Isa 36-37), but fails to provide any substantiation of the role ascribed to the Lord or the victory claimed in Scripture. Likewise, it says nothing to contradict the version of the events recorded in Scripture.

D. The Cyrus Cylinder.

Biblical connections with Persia are limited to the exilic and postexilic periods. The Iranian plateau knew a long history of fragmentation before the establishment of the Persian Empire in the sixth century B.C. By 550 B.C. the Median ruler, Astyages, was defeated by the Persian leader, Cyrus the Great. From this Medo-Persian base, Cyrus went on to establish the Persian Empire. Cyrus conquered Babylon in 539 B.C., and consequently the Jews in exile in Babylon came under Persian control.

Cyrus instituted a new approach to foreign policy. This policy was built on the philosophy that offering increased autonomy to subject peoples would increase loyalty to the empire, not undermine it. The Cyrus Cylinder, a clay cylinder containing the royal decree granting various peoples permission to return, does not mention Judah specifically, but Scripture reports that Judah enjoyed such a benevolence (2Ch 36; Ezr 1). Part of the inscription reads, "May all the gods whom I have resettled in their sacred cities ask daily Bel and Nebo for a long life for me and may they recommend me [to him]; to Marduk, my lord, they may say this: 'Cyrus, the king who worships you, and Cambyses, his son.'"

12-2Kings Israels Decline And Division

2 Samuel-2 Kings: The Difference Leaders Make - Lesson 4.

2 Kings: Israel's Decline and Destruction.

I. Introduction: Attraction of Idolatry.

The book of 2 Kings is a book that follows directly after 1 Kings. Again, it is one of those situations where the division between the two is essentially for convenience. They really go together as a single book and in Jewish tradition, 1 and 2 Kings are together as a single book; that is the way they are described and understood.

Early on, we read about the Lord's judgment on a king named Ahaziah. The problem, as usual, is idolatry. In order to understand what happens in 2 Kings, it is useful to understand why it was that the Israelites kept turning to idols. Why was it that these people time after time, generation after generation, no matter what had happened, no matter what a prophet said or did, soon enough would revert right back to idolatry? What made idolatry so powerful in their thinking? What made these people soon, and sooner rather than later, get interested in becoming idol worshipers again? Why could not they stay with the Lord? From a human point of view, the answer is that the idolatry that they understood was a powerful attraction for them.

A. Provided a Guarantee.

Here is the way they thought of it: First of all, they thought of it as guaranteed. In their way of thinking, an idol guaranteed the presence of a god. If you could have that idol right there when you prayed, when you bowed down, when you kissed it and so on, that meant that the god was represented right there with you. It is a little like in modern times talking on the telephone. When we talk on the telephone, we say "I talked to so and so." Now what we really did was to talk to a piece of machinery. We said our words into a receiver, and we heard words out of the receiver, but the receiver made noises that represented for us the person we were talking to. They thought that same kind of way about idols. They thought of them as truly capturing the essence of the god or goddess, so to have the presence of the god or goddess was desirable. Now the Lord, on the other hand, refused to be represented by any such thing; and people found it hard to think of worshiping an invisible God. They were not sure that He was there.

B. Allowed for Selfishness

The second attraction was that it was selfish. True Israelite religion, as revealed by God to Moses and thereafter, required that people have ethics, that people live in a godly way. This was not required at all of people in the system known as idolatry; it was effectively a materialistic system. One thing that people believed that gods could not do in the ancient world was feed themselves. Now, the Israelites did not think this way, those who were orthodox; but all idolatrists did. They thought the gods had all kinds of power and could do anything but feed themselves, so the ability to feed the gods was one hold you had over the gods. They assumed that if they brought food to that idol, the god who that idol represented would have to bless them in return. So they had a control; they had a connection; they had a quid pro quo kind of arrangement.

C. It Was Easy.

Also, idolatry was easy, since you did not have to keep all kinds of commandments. The only thing you really had to do was worship frequently and generously. If you gave to the idol, what you understood the idol wanted, that was all that was required. You could be morally a complete

loser; you could misuse and abuse others for your own gain and profit. It did not matter. Keep the idol happy and that was all that was required. No ethical standards were imposed.

D. It Was Convenient.

Also, idolatry was convenient in the sense of everybody being able to worship whenever he or she felt like it. The Israelites had to go three times a year to one central sanctuary if they were orthodox and really worshiped the Lord. Corporate national worship was required and the procedures were elaborate. In idolatry, you could worship anywhere almost any time of day. There were, as the prophetic books described it, idol shrines "on every high hill and under every green tree." They were everywhere. It is a little like the sign "five barbers, no waiting." Shrines everywhere, no waiting. Sometimes a shrine would be just a little assemblage of some rocks under a tree and a little altar there on which a meal could be cooked, and one single priest and worshipers would go and worship the idol that was placed there by that priest and think that they had gotten through to a god or goddess.

E. Regarded as Normal.

Idolatry was regarded as normal. The Israelites were really an exceptional people to be told to worship an invisible God without using idols. Everybody else used idolatry; everybody else was caught up in that system. The powerful nations of the world, the great superpowers were the Egyptians, the Babylonians, and the Assyrians. The wealthy nations like Tyre, the city-state of Tyre, fabulously wealthy from its sea trade, worshiped idols there by the dozens. The Canaanites, among who the Israelites lived, worshiped idols. All the nations around them, the Moabites, the Ammonites, the Edomites, the Philistines, the Arameans, they worshiped idols; so it was strange, unusual, weird, and different not to engage in that practice.

F. It Was Logical.

Also, idolatry seemed logical. How could one god do everything that Moses had taught the people the Lord, the true God, could do? How could one god do all that? It simply did not make sense. There ought to be many, many gods and goddesses. Just as you need many advisors to a king and many workers for a project, surely there are all sorts of gods and goddesses. And each one needs his or her idol; and the idols help to remember who they are and to keep them straight, and so on. If you lived in the ancient world, you would probably do what most people then did. You would worship three kinds of gods: you would have a personal god; you would have a family god, who might be the personal god of one of your ancestors; and then you would have a national god. Now the Israelites never stopped worshiping and believing in the Lord as their national God.

II. Syncretistic Nature of Israelite Religion.

A. Yahweh: Israel's National God.

All during 1 and 2 Kings, even right down to the destruction of the north by the Assyrians and the destruction of the south by the Babylonians, they still would consider the Lord to be their national God in times of battle. In times of national danger, with regard to national events, they would worship Him. But when it came to personal matters, getting out of an illness; or getting your personal needs answered; or having a good crop this year; for family matters, things that would be shared in the rest of your clan or family, then you would worship this god or that goddess and not the Lord. That kind of thing that we call syncretism, the combining of various religious practices, was what characterized Israelite religion.

It seemed logical to them. "Let the Lord (Yahweh, as we pronounce His name in the Hebrew) do His thing on the national level; but when it comes to me or to my family, well, we are not going to go with a general practitioner like Him." Idolatry was also pleasing to the senses. It is nice to be able to make idols; it is nice to be able to have pictures of things all over the walls of the temples and shrines; it is nice to bow down to them and to kiss them and so on. It is pleasing to see things overlaid in gold or silver, that was an attraction. There was nothing to look at when you worshiped Yahweh, and that did not appeal to people.

B. Symbolic Meals.

There was also indulgence. True religion demands symbolic meals. The apostle Paul warns in 1 Corinthians 11 that if you are hungry, you do not go to Communion to stuff yourself; it is a symbolic meal. You discern in that meal the death of Christ; whereas, in ancient times, it generally was the case that people loved to indulge themselves. They would eat heavily in connection with idol worship; the bigger the meal, the better. They would drink heavily. Amos describes people drinking beside the altar of their gods, wine that they had taken away from poor people who had harvested that wine in the grape harvest and had it as their only means of livelihood to sell it. These people, having defrauded the poor, were now glugging down the wine as they lay beside the pagan altars. That kind of indulgence is what was very popular.

C. Symbolic Acts.

The final attraction was sexual. In most pagan worship, the opportunity for sex with a shrine prostitute was also provided. This was thought, in the mentality of that day, that mythological way of thinking, to stimulate the powers of nature. Everything that was created was procreated; in other words, it was born into being. People thought that you could, by the symbolic act of sex with a prostitute, actually sort of stimulate, and by sympathetic magic, you could cause the gods in heaven likewise to mate and to have offspring. These offspring would be the plants of the field or the trees or the goats or the sheep or whatever. Imagine the attraction of that sort of thing where people can actually indulge baser passions and get religious credit for it. All these reasons, corrupt and misleading as they were, far from the truth as they were, were attractive to the Israelites and caused, what we see so often in 2 Kings, the people again and again turning away from the true God and to idolatry.

III. Endings and Beginnings: A Tale of Two Prophets (1:1-8:15).

A. Conclusion of Elijah's Ministry.

When Elijah, who had stood alone for quite a time against that paganism and those attractions of idolatry, is described as taken up into heaven in 2 Kings 2 we know that this is an approbation of God; this is an indication of God's favor for the message that prophet spoke. We also read that Elisha, his successor, asks for succession in terms of "a double portion of your spirit." This can be misunderstood. It doesn't mean that you can have various levels of the Spirit of God, as if one person has level x and somebody has level 2x or whatever, but rather the double portion was always the portion of the heir. The double portion of the prophet is what the heir inherited.

It is a simple, natural way for Elisha to say, "May I be your spiritual heir? Do you as a prophet believe that God is telling you that I am to succeed you?" Elijah said, "I do not know. I have not been given that word from the Lord, but I do know this: If you see me taken from you, that will be a sign." So, in fulfillment of that prophecy, indeed Elisha did see him taken, and Elisha then succeeds Elijah.

B. Ministry of Elisha.

Many of the stories we read about in the early chapters of 2 Kings are stories about those things that Elisha does, particularly miracle stories: turning water to oil so that a widow can have livelihood; or cleansing water that is poison; or causing an axhead to float; or feeding a large number of people, almost in anticipation of Jesus' miracles of feeding the 4,000 and the 5,000.

IV. The Kings of Israel and Judah (8:16-17:41).

A. King Maker and Breaker.

One of the roles of the prophet was king maker and king breaker. When God decided that He wanted to have a king, He had a prophet anoint that king. That is how David became king; Samuel anointed him. Also, a prophet could announce that a king's time was over as Samuel had done to Saul. In the case of Elisha, he is a king maker; that is, he works for God to announce God's purposes. And one of the kings that he anoints is a king of Syria named Hazael. He is sent by God to anoint him, but he hates to do it. He says in the process, "I know all the harm you will do to the people of Israel." In other words, God used this prophet to anoint one of the enemies of Israel, because God's wrath against His people was so great that He was going to bring that enemy against them in punishment.

Another person that Elisha anoints is named Jehu. And this King Jehu will bring to an end that powerful dynasty of Omri that had included Ahab and other influential kings in the north. What Jehu does is to declare a great ceremony, "We are going to worship Baal, and we are going to have a great feast in his honor." He gathers together all of the family members of the dynasty in the north at that time, and he also gathers the southern kings, and then proceeds, in the middle of the feast, to kill them all. Fortunately, not all of them get killed; so there still is a successor for David in the south as God mercifully provides. But this is a very interesting time. Here is a northern king named Jehu who hates the worship of the false god Baal. In other words, the influence of Elijah and Elisha was such that for a time the north turned away from ardent Baal worship and closer toward the worship of the true Lord, the God of Israel. Unfortunately, it did not last long; it did not last long at all, and it did not last in the south as well. We see during the section of Kings that goes from chapters 11 -14 on, not many good kings either in the north or the south obeying God, keeping His commandments, eager to follow His covenant.

B. Assyria on the Move.

By the late 700s, toward the end of the eighth century B.C., the superpower Assyria, began to assert its dominance. A king named Tiglath-Pileser III, king of Assyria, began an empire-building plan in 745 B.C. His desire was to conquer all the territories he could. A reason for this was economic, not the only reason, but it was one of them. The Assyrians needed money for building projects, for the establishment of a powerful defense, for the indulgences of the king; and one way you can get money is to go take it by conquering another territory. Conquer somebody else's country, take everything out of it that you can when you conquer it, and then impose taxes on it annually so that they will have to pay tax and tolls and tributes of various kinds. You will have plenty of money then by impoverishing them to pay for the kinds of things your government wants to do. That was one of the motivators for Tiglath-Pileser, and so he set out to conquer every country he could conquer. And the more he conquered, the more he could impress people into his military and say to them, "You will either be killed or you will fight for me." The bigger the army he had, the more money he had to finance the army with, the more imposing his power would become.

C. Pekah and Rezin Form a Coalition.

Soon enough, both Israel and Judah were threatened. At the same time, they were turning to idolatry, to the false gods and goddesses and almost never turning to the Lord to deliver them. So we read in 2 Kings 15 -16 about the shenanigans that they pulled in those days, about their desperate acts trying to solve things, trying to gain power against the Assyrians. One of the most comical (if it were not so tragic) events is what we call the Syro-Ephraimite War. What happened is this: a king named Pekah in northern Israel aligned himself with a king named Rezin in Syria, and the two of them formed a coalition of all the nations in the area to try to fight off the Assyrians.

The time was 734 B.C. They naturally went to Judah to ask them to join in this coalition. "We are going to be able to beat the Assyrians; we are going to get freedom from them; we are going to have independence; we no longer will have to pay these enormous taxes, tolls, and tributes." These things looked good, and it looked good and was even appealing to King Ahaz, but God's prophet Isaiah said, "No way!" God wants you to trust in Him, not in these political military alliances. Let God defend you. And Ahaz listened to Isaiah the prophet; and so he says "no, we will not join you." Well, what would you do? They said if we have got Judah right in our midst, right in the center of the coalition, refusing to fight with us, let us attack them. We will conquer them. We will put our man on the throne of Judah, instead of this resistant guy, Ahaz; and then we will be truly united and attack the forces of the Assyrians. What would you do if you were Ahaz when that happened? He immediately sent messengers to the Assyrians saying, "Help! Because I will not fight you, they are attacking me."

D. Fall of Samaria.

This was not what God wanted; this was not what Isaiah had prophesied. Indeed, Isaiah rebuked Ahaz for doing that, but it did bring in the Assyrians. And the Assyrians did attack the members of that coalition, and they reduced at that time (734 and 733 B.C.) the northern part of Israel, the ten northern tribes, really down to one. They annexed virtually all of the north except for the tribal territory that we call Ephraim. You will see sometimes in the books that come from around that period reference to "Ephraim this" and "Ephraim that," because the north was reduced to that territory. You will also see references to Samaria because the capital city was in Ephraim, and really it was not a lot bigger than a city-state. It was nothing like the original boundaries. Most of the north was in the hands of the Assyrians. Then further, in chapter 17, we read the story of how just a decade later the Assyrians finally finished the job. They came and took also the territory of Ephraim and its capital city, Samaria, so the north was gone. By 722 B.C., the north was gone and it is now just part of the empire of Assyria.

V. From Accession of Hezekiah to the Captivity of Judah (18:1-25:30).

A. Hezekiah.

So what is to happen to Judah? Thereafter, a good king named Hezekiah on the throne of Judah, is usually faithful to God. His key advisor is the prophet Isaiah once again, and he listens to Isaiah nearly all the time. He makes some serious mistakes though, even after God spares Jerusalem when it is attacked by the Assyrians, so that in the vast Assyrian Empire in the western part of the Fertile Crescent only Judah is free, an isle of independence in the midst of conquered territory after territory after territory. But, Hezekiah does make some mistakes.

One of them is to show envoys from Babylon around Jerusalem. In chapter 20, you read how he, hoping that these Babylonians might turn out to be kind of rivals to the Assyrians and perhaps rescuers of the situation. He seeks an alliance with them and does everything he can to make

envoys from their king, Merodach-Baladan, like him and like the Judeans. The danger is that, of course, Babylon will eventually conquer Assyria and will be the enemy, not the friend.

B. A Short Time Remaining.

Chapter 21 tells of how, after Hezekiah's death, the worst king of the whole bunch comes to power and reigns fifty-five years and is so influential in bringing full-blown idolatry, corruption of all sorts, practices that are completely inimical to everything that God had taught. It can be only a matter of time until the nation of Judah, also the remainder state, that last part that has not yet been conquered, will also be conquered and its people exiled. One king remained in the way of that happening almost immediately, and that was Josiah. He instituted extensive reforms based on the Word of God in 2 Kings 22-23.

C. Fall of Judah and Jerusalem.

After Josiah's death in 609 B.C., his successor reverts back to the practices that condemn the nation to death, and death is its fate indeed. By chapter 25, we read of the fall of Judah and Jerusalem, now captured by a successor to the Assyrians, a superpower, the Babylonians. With that fall of Jerusalem comes the great exile. By the thousands, the people are taken and resettled in various parts of the Babylonian Empire. Northern Israel is gone; southern Israel is gone. There is no more nation; there is no more king. The people of God are defeated. They have been conquered, and large numbers of them are deported, and as the prophecy way back in Leviticus 26 has it, the land now lies in Sabbath, it is in rest.

13-Chronicles - God's Perspective On History

1 Chronicles-Nehemiah: Grace Greater Than a Nation's Sins - Lesson 1.

Chronicles: God's Perspective on His Story.

I. Introduction.

A. First and Second Chronicles a Unit.

The first word in 1 and 2 Chronicles is the word "Adam." Here is a book that is made up of two parts, first and second. It takes us right back to the beginning and shows us God's plan from the first human to the end of the time that Israel was an independent nation and indeed to the end of the exile, when its restoration by the grace of God, was just beginning. Chronicles gets its name from the fact that the first nine chapters contain a huge number of genealogies. All kinds of people are included in these genealogies; there is the lineage from Adam onward to Saul and David. There is the lineage of Saul's family, there are lists of the various Israelite tribes with a special emphasis upon Judah, and in particular there are lists of people who return from exile. That is the difference between Chronicles from Samuel or Kings.

The books of 1-2 Samuel and 1-2 Kings are telling the story of Israel's tragic history as a nation down to the exile, but they do not tell you what happens after the exile. You end 2 Kings reading about things that were occurring in the early days of the exile. The chronicle is written after the exile is over, and it is written from the perspective of the restoration from that exile. God had fulfilled His promises to punish His people severely if they disobeyed His covenant. He had been very patient for centuries and centuries, but the time did come when He delivered His people into the hands of their enemies. In the case of the Judeans, it was the Babylonians. But Jeremiah the prophet had promised that the exile would last only seventy years, and so there came a time when it was possible for the people to return from exile.

B. Author.

Whoever the chronicler was, whomever this inspired anonymous individual was who wrote the book, he was covering the material that we call 1 and 2 Chronicles from the angle of the fact that the exile was ending. Probably the chronicler wrote about 520 B.C. and the exile was not entirely over in one important sense: the temple was not yet rebuilt. The temple had been started already in 538 B.C., but only the foundation had been completed before interruption of the work. The chronicler writes at a time when that temple needs to be rebuilt. It had been destroyed in 586 B.C., and the chronicler and many other righteous Israelites were becoming apprehensive that, perhaps, it was not going to be completed in time within the seventy years that Jeremiah had predicted would be the case. Of course, God knew what would happen and God used the chronicler as one of many influences to motivate the people toward the completion of the temple.

II. Themes Found in Chronicles.

A. Temple of the Lord.

One of the themes we are going to see in the book of Chronicles is the story of the completion of the temple. It will look at the idea of the need for the completion of that temple from a historical retrospective. In other words, it will describe for us in detail how Solomon built the temple. It will take a lot of the material out of 1 Kings to allow us to see that. It will frequently mention the temple even in connection with kings like David who had only a minor role to play in planning it. The chronicler will emphasize that aspect highly. Moreover, the chronicler will describe the temple in stories that the books of Samuel and Kings do not even choose to mention.

God is inspiring the chronicler to encourage people who need to restore themselves as a people of God. That is the reason for going back to Adam; that is the reason for starting with nine chapters of genealogy. The mentality of the chronicler is restoration. Let us get back to what was good. Sure, there was a lot that was bad and the chronicler lays that out before you. Of course, people sinned. Of course, God judged the nation for its long history of repeated violations of His covenant and for turning to idolatry. But, says the chronicler, wherever we can see even the smallest trace in the past of what should have been done actually being done, let us look at it. Let us remember it; let us codify it; let us put it into print, so we will be able to benefit from it.

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The chronicler takes a look at this vast sweep of history, from the Creation all the way to the beginnings of the restoration of the Israelites and the freedom to return to Judah at the end of the Exile, and says what is good in that story. What can we use to encourage us, to inspire us, even to model our efforts, as we seek to become the people of God (that are forefathers were only sometimes and then only partially)?

B. Judah: A Southern Perspective.

In addition to the theme of the temple, we need to appreciate that the chronicler is also looking at things from a southern perspective. The north, the original ten tribes unfortunately highly corrupted religiously in the chronicler's day. The Assyrians had not only deported thousands and thousands of northerners to other parts of the Assyrian Empire, but had imported thousands and thousands of people that they had captured in other places they had conquered and put them in the north with their idolatrous and polytheistic and syncretistic practices. The north really was not very orthodox; it would be hard to find many people in northern Israel, north of Jerusalem and Benjamin, who were faithfully holding to the Mosaic Covenant.

As a result, the chronicler focuses of necessity on Judah, because there in Judah there really was a Scripture-driven concern to get back to faithfulness to God. In Judah, there were people by the thousands who wanted to obey the Scriptures. There was a large-scale interest and movement in learning from the mistakes of the past and following God's covenant law and following it faithfully. So, the chronicler is not going to pay much attention to the north; those stories that we find in 1 and 2 Kings, for example, about Elijah and Elisha, are not going to be mentioned by the chronicler. Most of the northern kings are mentioned only by way of chronological linkage to the southern kings. You will see the name of a northern king mentioned and how it is that a southern king connects chronologically and comparatively to the dates that that northern king reigned, but virtually nothing else about him. You will see just a tiny bit about the genealogy of Saul, but no substantial stories about him; and after the genealogies, the chronicler really picks up his story in chapter 10 with a description of David's reign.

That, again, is a reflection of the fact that God had made His covenant with David as we have it in 2 Samuel 7. The covenant indicated that the lineage, the real eternal lineage, the important lineage of the kings, the significant dynasty, was the dynasty of David. The northern kings were heterodox and actually illegal from the point of God's covenant, but David's lineage was the one to pay attention to. Thus, that is what the chronicler emphasizes. So, the chronicler's story is the story of Israel, now from the point of view of Judah. What was good about Judah? What did good kings do when they did good? How was faithfulness to the law and proper worship of the temple carried out?

Thus in the story of the past, the chronicler encourages people to think in the future. The monarchy, therefore, is made exemplary as much as possible. This is not a distortion of the story;

this is simply a selective focusing on those good things that the monarchy represented. The chronicler would be among those who would applaud the frequent statements, toward the end of the book of Judges, that there was no king in Israel and everybody did right in his own eyes. In other words, a king was needed. The chronicler applauds the idea that one can see in good kings, or even in the good thing that bad kings occasionally did, a program to follow in the direction of faithfulness to God.

C. Theocracy: God the True Ruler.

Additionally, the chronicler emphasizes yet another aspect of the history, and that is the theocratic aspect. Theocratic simply means "referring to God's rule." And you can see again and again in the chronicler an emphasis upon the way that a king was successful, or the nation under a king successful, if and only if that king and the nation as a whole were faithful to God. God is the ultimate king; God is the ultimate leader. God is the real source of wisdom, righteousness, judgment, and proper activity at all levels in the days of Israel prior to the exile and restoration. The chronicler wants to highlight that, on the one hand, he is a monarchist, very, very interested in what things good kings did. But on the other hand, he is a theocrat, interested in showing us how God was behind every good thing that every good king or nation did.

D. Priesthood.

The chronicler also is interested in the priesthood. You know, if the clergy are faithful in any society, if they are really preaching the Word of God, if they are really teaching the truth, if they are really living the example of righteous lives, people catch on. So, the chronicler pays attention to anything related to the priesthood that is positive in the past. In highlighting the priesthood, the chronicler is an encourager of the priests of his day. They needed encouragement; they needed to begin again to lead the people in proper worship of the Lord.

E. Worship.

That leads us to the topic of worship in general. Anything the chronicler can tell us in 1 and 2 Chronicles about worship in Judah in the past, he will be sure to bring up. The first responsibility of any believer or any group of believers is to worship the God in whom they believe. And the chronicler wants the Jews of 520 B.C. crammed into a space only about twenty-five miles by twenty miles or so (Judah was not a big territory even with part of Benjamin included in the way it was construed at that time), to be faithful worshipers of God. If they can get that right, if they can steadily and properly and honestly and earnestly worship God, then they are going in the right direction. The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom. Because a linkage to the past is a powerful motivator for many people, including most people in the ancient world, the chronicler will tell you about anybody's lineage that he can possibly mention.

III. Royal Lineage of David (1Ch 1:1-9:44).

The chronicler is concerned to show everything about Judah: the lineage of the people, the lineage of the priests, and certainly the lineage of the kings. As well, he wants the people to be sure that they organize their restoration around the temple, so the temple is the center of activity in many of the chronicler's stories, not again as a fabrication but simply as a refocusing. Samuel and Kings are telling the story from the point of view of the sinfulness of the people and the fact that they increasingly do not keep God's covenant. The chronicler is telling the story from the point of view of those exceptions that can be used as a model for getting the community back into faithfulness to God. And finally, the chronicler has a faith and a hope that manifests throughout these books that we call 1 and 2 Chronicles, a faith in God that God is faithful, that

He is good, that He rewards His people, that He keeps His part of the covenant even when Israel was not and a hope that things can come to a happy fruition.

The time in which the chronicler wrote was not an easy time for the people of Judah. Jerusalem lay in ruins, absolutely in ruins. Almost no one lived there except a few priests and Levites right around the temple area. The temple itself had been totally destroyed, absolutely, totally, right down to bedrock. Not even the foundation stones were there anymore. And the Israelites were just starting to build on the foundation they had laid in 538 B.C., a couple of decades before the chronicler started writing. He wanted those people to finish that project, to finish it by the deadline 516

B.C., and to get on with their lives under God. He had a hope that it could take place, that they could really become a people of God.

The Judah who had disgraced itself and had disobeyed the Lord, who had been sent into a horrible captivity, could by faithfulness and by modeling itself on the good kings of the past and by looking to the Lord with hope turn out to be God's people once again, His own special family, His own covenant people doing His will upon the earth.

IV. Reign of David (1Ch 10:1-29:30).

A. Coming to Power

With David, the emphasis upon his coming to power emphasizes, in chapters 10-12, how much God is with him and behind that story. So in 1 Chronicles 10 and on to chapter 12, we see God at work. God is the hero of the story, God leading David and choosing him to become king. We have there are many of the same materials that we can find in Samuel and Kings, but condensed in the direction of emphasizing faithfulness on the part of David to God.

B. Ark, Temple, Covenant.

With chapters 13-17, the chronicler has especially emphasized two things: the return of the ark, getting that ark back to Jerusalem where the presence of God can be symbolized, and then also plans for the temple. We know that David very much wanted to build the temple, but we also know that he did not get it done in his own lifetime. The chronicler, however, highlights the fact that it was David's design. He was concerned to do it; he saw the need for it; he understood that a temple was a place where worship of the proper sort could be organized.

C. Military Victories.

The chronicler does not leave out David's military victories, and you know the chronicler wrote in a time when there were risks and dangers from Israel's enemies. Israel had been, under David, a powerful nation; and even some of David's successor kings had been quite successful in subduing neighboring states. Both neighboring states have not forgotten that, and they were inclined, if possible, to try to attack and suppress the Judeans. Indeed, one of the reasons that the temple had not been built further upon the foundation laid in 538 B.C. was the kind of opposition that the chronicler is well aware of, that his audience is well aware of, and that they need to get beyond. The chronicler selects certain stories about David that indicate how God allowed him, even against great odds, to be victorious, to comfort the people who faced great odds themselves in building the temple and rebuilding the city of Jerusalem.

D. Arrangements for Building Temple.

The arrangements for the temple really do dominate the heart of 1 Chronicles. Chapters 21-29 consist mainly of those preparations and people involved: priests, singers who perform the

temple musical functions under David and other musicians, even divisions of gatekeepers and treasurers for the temple, and other officials. The chronicler knows of these from official sources that presumably were saved, brought to Babylon, and then brought back from Babylon with the returning exiles. With chapter 29 in which a description is given of gifts that people brought under David's influence and by his example for the building of the temple, David's death is then described as following those gifts. In other words, in a way what the chronicler tells you is that the last most significant thing David did was to lay all at the ready for the building of the temple.

V. Reign of Solomon (2Ch 1:1-9:31).

With 2 Chronicles, the story of Solomon comes in, and many of the things that are in the story are the same kinds of things we would find in 1 Kings chapters 1-11, including Solomon's great wisdom, and so on. But soon enough, much earlier than you see it in 1 Kings, there is a special emphasis upon the temple again: Solomon's preparation for that temple, Solomon's building the temple, the temple furnishings, the bringing of the ark into the temple, Solomon's prayer of dedication, the actual dedication ceremony itself. These are told with a greater relish and a certain degree of greater detail than one finds so extensively in the early chapters of 1 Kings. Solomon's other achievements are also mentioned, but there is much less on the negative side.

Solomon was an interesting study in contrasts; he had plenty of faults and plenty of things that were improper, along with all his good accomplishments. Everybody knows that in the chronicler's audience. They know that Solomon had his very, very serious negative attributes, but the chronicler does not need to dwell on those. The chronicler needs to bring his story about Solomon to a conclusion in 2 Chronicles 9 with positive things, the good things Solomon did, the things that can be seen as paradigms, as samples of the way that the restoration community in 520 B.C., or thereabouts, can learn from.

VI. Judean Monarchs from Division to Exile (2Ch 10:1-36:23).

After this, we read about a whole story of Judah, from the time of the death of Solomon to the exile into Babylonian captivity. With chapter 10, we have many of the same kinds of stories, stories that one reads about in 1 Kings 11-12 and following. But you are reading mainly about the Judean kings. Even though plenty about them is negative that is described, we are also reading about their positive aspects as well. A great example of this is 2 Chronicles 13.

A. Abijah

In Kings the Judean king, Abijah, is a rather minor figure. He gets a number of verses of description, but nothing like the story about him in 2 Chronicles 13. The whole chapter is about how he is at war with a northern king, Jeroboam, and how, in a conflict that is simply glossed over in 1 Kings, he is amazingly successful in a battle at Mount Zemaraim. Success comes because Abijah, for all his faults, really leads the troops in the name of the Lord. He really emphasizes obedience to the Lord and tells the northern troops in a speech he makes to them before the battle how they do not have a chance, because they are following all kinds of heterodox practices and worship; whereas, he and the Judeans are keeping the covenant and worshiping at the temple where God intended Israel to worship. That is just an example of the way the chronicler looks back at the record and selects out those things that would inspire the restoration community.

B. Positive Interpretation.

He also describes, with great gusto, the good things that kings like Hezekiah and Josiah did even can reach into history and mention something that again is glossed over in 2 Kings, and that is

the career of King Manasseh, who reigned fifty-five years as Judah's longest reigning king. What the chronicler brings to our attention is that even that rascal, that guy who gave his name to the phrase "the sins of Manasseh," did have a time when he repented and turned to God for help, when he tried to serve the Lord more faithfully than he had in the past, and how God blessed him for that and watched over him and rewarded him. That does not mean that Manasseh did everything properly and left a wonderful legacy. It only means that there was, even in that king, something to be found by way of example.

C. Bad News/Good News.

When we come to chapter 36, we are, again, at the point where the Israelites have been attacked by the Babylonians. After a two-year siege, they have finally fallen and gone into exile. But there is hope because the book ends with a little statement that summarizes something called the decree of Cyrus. Cyrus was a Persian king. The Persians were an empire that had beaten the Babylonians in war and taken over from them, just as the Babylonians, a century earlier, had beaten the Assyrians and taken over from them. The Persians had a new policy: let captured people go home, let exiles return to their homelands. And probably under the influence of Daniel, Cyrus the king of Persia said, "The Lord, the God of heaven, has given me all the kingdoms of the earth and He has appointed me to build a temple for Him at Jerusalem in Judah. Anyone of His people among you, may the Lord his God be with him, and let him go up." They are going to go home; and that is how 2 Chronicles ends.

14-Ezra And Nehemiah - Up From The Ashes.

1 Chronicles-Nehemiah: Grace Greater Than a Nation's Sins - Lesson 2.

Ezra and Nehemiah: Up From the Ashes.

I. General Introduction to Ezra-Nehemiah.

The key words to keep in mind for the books of Ezra and Nehemiah both begin with the letter "r": return and rebuilding. That is what these books are about. It is also useful to appreciate the fact that they really are a unit. In the same way that 1 and 2 Samuel are essentially one book (1 and 2 Kings, 1 and 2 Chronicles likewise), Ezra and Nehemiah are one book, one unified story.

A. Return to Judah.

The return aspect is an important thing to appreciate for us. Both Ezra and Nehemiah are returning to a place where they have never been. Ezra and Nehemiah are later figures than the figures say in days the chronicler describes. By the decree of Cyrus, the Persian king who did not practice exile and so allowed captured populations to return home, the Jews had been able to go back from captivity in what was formally Babylon, now part of the Persian Empire, as early as 540 B.C. By 539 B.C., waves of people were traveling back. But that is long before Ezra and Nehemiah come on the scene.

Ezra returns "to the place he had never lived" in 458 B.C., and Nehemiah returns to a place he had never lived in 444 B.C. If they had never been there (these people had grown up in Mesopotamia and never seen Judah with their own eyes), how is it that we can speak of them as returning? Well, the answer is that they saw themselves as living where they did not exactly belong. They saw themselves as having been born in a land of captivity, in a foreign land, in a place that was not their home. They understood that their home was the place God wanted them to be. It really is a remarkable analogy to our own situation, we who follow Christ understand that our home is not where we are now; we have not been to our home yet. We are headed for it; we are bound to go there; it is a promise. We look forward to it, but we are living in another land. We are living in the land of our birth, but not the land of our home.

B. Rebuilding a Holy People.

Well, this certainly was their feeling. They knew the Law of Moses, and they had grown up on it. They were righteous Jews; they had been trained in the Scriptures. They knew the stories of how their people had come into captivity. They knew the background from Samuel and Kings and Chronicles. They knew what could have happened and did not in the history of Judah; and of course, they knew also the teachings of the great prophets like Isaiah and Jeremiah. They knew how those prophets had denounced corruption and evil and social injustice and disobedience to God's covenant and idolatry. They came, when they returned to Judah, armed with a great asset, a confidence in and a knowledge of the Word of God. Indeed, what seems to have happened is that a large number of the Jews in exile got really serious about obeying God's Word.

Orthodoxy became important to the people. People saw what it was like to live in a purely idolatrous culture as Babylon was, and indeed, as Persia was after the Babylonians. They knew what it was like to experience the wrath of God on their nation. They knew the humiliation of being a captured and exiled people. They wanted relief from that; they wanted to do the right thing. They were converted back to faithfulness in God. Both Ezra and Nehemiah are contemporaries and are undoubtedly friends, who surely prayed for one another and met together often. We see them, in fact, cooperating together in a number of activities. These two great

leaders came to Judah, where they had never been in order to do what good they could for the Lord's Kingdom.

II. Restoration of the Temple (Ezr 1:1-6:22).

Now by the time Ezra arrived in 458 B.C., the temple had been already built and was in existence a long time, but the book that bears the name Ezra actually started earlier than that. We must appreciate the fact that Ezra comes on the scene, in the book that bears his name, only in chapter 7.

A. Decree of Cyrus.

Let us go back to the first few chapters, chapters 1-6 in Ezra, and see how they fill in for us the period from the first chance for Jews to return until the period when Ezra comes back as one of many ways who return from exile. Chapter 1 opens, again, with mention of the decree of Cyrus and with further elaboration on it. Cyrus was only too happy to allow Jews to return.

We know that Cyrus was one of the people that Daniel dealt with, and we have reason to believe that Daniel's significant influence in the Persian court produced a kind of favorable attitude that a king like Cyrus had toward the Jews. Because he did not just let them go home, he did not just say, "Okay, I do not do exiles, so you guys can go home." He said instead, "I am going to send you home with a purpose, and I am going to send you with money to carry out that purpose. I want you to build the temple in Jerusalem." Now he had a selfish motive. He certainly was not converted to the Law of Moses. His selfish motive was that the people would pray for him and his family once they rebuilt that temple. Now to a righteous Jew, this was no problem; they were glad to pray for any king or ruler. They understood what Paul tells us in Romans 13 about praying for and caring about any government, no matter how corrupt. That was a fine deal from the point of view of the Jews. Here they could get full official permission and support and financing to rebuild the temple.

B. Returnees.

In 539 B.C., we have the first wave of Jews heading back to Judah over those hundreds of miles of difficult terrain from Babylon to Jerusalem. They are led, at first, by someone who is named Sheshbazzar. He seems either to have died on the way or to have begun using another name, because by the time they actually get to Judah the person we see leading them is named Zerubbabel. At any rate, that difficult problem is not an essential one; we just appreciate the fact Zerubbabel is the name used of the individual who was the governor of Judah. He was a native Jew; he was even a descendant of David. He was appointed by Cyrus, king of Persia, to start rebuilding the city of Jerusalem, to start repopulating Judah, and to get the temple rebuilt as well. He had as an associate the high priest Joshua, or Jeshua, either name can be used.

C. Restoration of Worship.

In Ezra 3, we see the happy result of their collaboration. The foundation of the temple was laid. There was much rejoicing at this. The end of the chapter describes the fact that all the people gave a great shout of praise to the Lord because the foundation of the house of the Lord was laid. This was their center, this was the core of their relationship to God, and to think that they were finally getting the completely destroyed temple back with a foundation upon which the rest of the structure would be built. We read also that there were some older priests and Levites and family heads there who had been alive when the original exile had taken place. They had lived through the Exile. They were now elderly, but they had seen the former temple. When they saw the foundation being laid, while others were shouting for joy, they did the kind of thing that older

adults more often do at times of great emotion, tears came to their eyes. They were not crying because they did not like what they saw, but because they were deeply moved to think that God had been so faithful, that He had watched over His people during those long decades of exile and was now leading them to a restoration of His presence and favor. We are told the sound was heard far away, a mixture of weeping and of shouting for joy. It looked great, but immediately opposition came.

D. Opposition and Completion of the Temple.

Chapters 4-5 of the book of Ezra describe that opposition; it went on for decades. The temple did get built and happily, we see a description of that in the book after an opportunity for consultation with the Persian successor to Cyrus, that is, Darius, the Persian emperor. The people were able to be reassured that Persian support for the building of the temple was present. Encouraged by that, and also by what the writer of the book of Ezra -tells us was the faithful preaching of Haggai and Zechariah, the people did get moving.

Starting in 520 B.C., they worked earnestly for four years, and the temple was completed as described for us in Ezra 6 in 516 B.C. This was exactly seventy years after it had been destroyed, just as the prophet Jeremiah had predicted. There would be seventy years of exile and then God would again bless His people. They celebrated Passover. They have got the temple again, and they can come to a place and gather and celebrate the meal together. And all Israel, even though reduced in number and reduced in size, joyfully gathers under the leadership of the governor, Zerubbabel, and the high priest, Jeshua, to show their faithfulness to God, their love and appreciation for what He had done for them.

III. Reformation of the People (Ezr 7:1-10:44).

Quite a bit of time passes, and we move from 516 B.C. to 458 B.C.; and, unfortunately, things have not been kept up at the high level they were in 516 B.C. There has been considerable deterioration. It is human nature to expect that when you have worked hard to accomplish something, everything after that is supposed to go well, but it did not. In fact, as people became discouraged, a discouragement that is almost palpable in some of the prophecies of Zechariah and Haggai, we notice that they deteriorate in their faithfulness to God as well.

A. Ezra and His Commission.

By the middle of the fifth century B.C. (by 458 B.C.), when Ezra returns to Jerusalem, things are not good. Now Ezra was a priest. He was trained in the priesthood. He was also a scribe, meaning a scholar in the Word of God. He really was kind of a Bible school professor as it were, one who loved the Word of God and had mastered many, many parts of it, and certainly knew the Law of Moses. It was a big venture for him to come to Judah, but he had official permission to do it. He had support from the king of his time, King Artaxerxes.

B. Ezra's Distress over Religious Inter-marriage.

Now Ezra left for Judah with a retinue of people (the list of those who returned with him is provided for us in chapter 8), and upon his return to Jerusalem, he found many kinds of things that were not good. The temple was built and the temple courtyard was there with the altar on it where sacrifices could be offered, but the rest of the city remained totally in ruins. They had not rebuilt any other part of it, nobody was living there. A great big city with nobody living there, except near one part of it, the temple mount. Furthermore, Ezra encountered a particularly serious problem among the several that are mentioned in the book, and that was the same kind of problem that had gotten Solomon in trouble, the same kind of thing that caused his heart to drift

after other gods and goddesses and not be entirely loyal to the Lord. It was religious intermarriage.

The Bible never prohibits racial intermarriage; it is not an issue. In fact, there was plenty of racial and ethnic intermarriage. Think of the story of Ruth. She is a Moabitess who marries an Israelite, and that is in the lineage of David as well as the lineage of Jesus Himself. Think of Moses who marries a Sudanese woman, a black African woman. These are fine things, perfectly okay; but when religious intermarriage takes place, there are problems. When Israelite men married Philistine women or women of any of the surrounding nations and brought them into their homes, these women brought with them their polytheism, their idolatry, their syncretism.

Ezra, arriving several decades after the completion of the temple, found all sorts of examples of this. Israelite men had married, in large numbers, non-Israelite women; and we are told that the people of Israel, including priests and Levites as chapter 9 describes it, had married people with detestable practices like those of the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Amorites, the Moabites, and Egyptians, and so on. That intermarriage presented a serious, serious problem. Ezra said, "I sat appalled until the evening sacrifice." Then he says, ". . . after sitting in dust and ashes, I arose from where I was with my tunic and cloak torn, and fell on my knees with my hands spread out for the Lord my God." Ezra prays a prayer of confession on behalf of the people, "Lord, we have wronged You. We are going as a people little by little right back into the practices that you punished us for by the exile. When we did these things a century and a half prior to this, You knocked us out as a people. You eliminated us from the face of the earth as an independent nation. You made us slaves in a foreign country. And here we are doing it again."

Ezra just wept and prayed and confessed to God. We are told that he even threw himself down before the house of God repeatedly. And as people who came to worship at the temple saw this, saw what he was doing, heard his prayer of confession, and realized that this righteous man was shocked and grieving over the sins of his people, they began to join him. A revival broke out. Ezra's deep concern, his desire for faithfulness, his chagrin at the sinfulness of his people, led to a catching of the idea that there needed to be repentance.

C. Dissolution of Illegal Marriages.

The book ends with a rather radical solution. These marriages were not legal marriages; they were illegal marriages. They simply could not be countenanced by the Word of God. Ezra forced those marriages to be broken up. This is not a model for normal behavior. We are, in the New Testament, advised that there really are not proper grounds for divorce. You do not solve things by divorce. But, in this particular case, those illegal marriages were set aside; they had never been proper in the first place. So by breaking up those marriages, an unusual and exceptional arrangement, Ezra helped restore righteousness to the people. Otherwise, of course, you would simply have idolatry everywhere in the homes. You would have polytheism everywhere in the homes. You would have syncretism, the merging, melting together of the worship of the true God of Israel with the false gods and goddesses of the surrounding peoples, everywhere in the homes of the families of people of Judah. It could not be tolerated, and radical steps had to be taken.

IV. Reconstruction of the Wall (Ne 1:1-7:73).

A. Nehemiah's Burden and Resolve.

Now Ezra's story is not entirely over, but we begin to focus, right after Ezra 10, coming into the book we now call Nehemiah, with another person from essentially the same time period. It is

only fourteen years later (444 B.C.). Nehemiah is working as an important government official. The term that is used is "cupbearer," but we should appreciate the fact that it does not mean he was only some guy who served coffee. A cupbearer is something like the title that we use today when we speak of secretary of state or secretary of defense. These are not people who take dictation; these are people who are major administrators. A worker term is used for them, secretary.

In ancient times, the person who might be in charge of the royal food distribution, or even somebody with a kind of a role that we might describe as something like secretary of the interior, might have the title cupbearer. So we believe that Nehemiah actually had a fairly important position; he was essentially a cabinet member or court official for the king. That is why he has such freedom to speak to King Artaxerxes as he does. Hearing about how bad things are, what a tough time Ezra and others are having, how much corruption there is in his people, Nehemiah also is concerned to return and rebuild.

Sometimes people will say Ezra's rebuilding was essentially spiritual and Nehemiah's was essentially physical. That is a bit of a distortion. Yes, Nehemiah does attend to the physical needs of the city, and in particular the rebuilding of the walls around Jerusalem, which still were broken down in most places. But he actually is doing that with a spiritual concern as well. Nehemiah, like Ezra, is an orthodox Judean in exile, someone who knows and loves God's Word and wants to be obedient to it. He petitions the king to allow him to return to this place he has never seen, to Judah, his ancestral homeland, that he might help the people.

B. Rebuilding of the Wall Around Jerusalem.

Upon his arrival, in chapter 2, he rides around the walls of Jerusalem. Nehemiah spends three days doing that. He does not tell anybody about it, yet he just keeps making a circuit of that wall, checking out everything, analyzing what needs to be done. In ancient times, if a city did not have a wall around it, it was terribly vulnerable, not just to invading armies (and there were plenty of groups that would not have hesitated to invade Israel and try to subjugate Jerusalem once again), but also just to banditry, just to burglary, just to various kinds of crimes where people could walk right into a city and perpetrate those crime.

How could the people rebuild the holy city unless they could first rebuild the walls? Nehemiah was an organizer of that rebuilding; he came with real clout. Ezra had come with the privilege of functioning as a priest and a religious leader. Nehemiah came with the privilege of the governorship; that is what Artaxerxes, the Persian king, had appointed him to. Using that power, he gets the people organized and starts rebuilding the wall. Now as you can imagine when people from surrounding nations see that wall being rebuilt, they are not pleased. They oppose it in all kinds of ways: they hire lobbyists; they write letters; and they try to influence Artaxerxes to prevent it from happening.

C. Completion of the Wall in Spite of Many Obstacles.

But Nehemiah organizes the people all the more, and when necessary solves whatever problems come, such as the fact in the process of rebuilding the wall, some people did not have their husbands and sons with them to work the fields and were becoming impoverished in that way. Others were so poor that they had gotten into terrible debt just to try to keep alive. Nehemiah straightens out financial problems; he straightens out social, legal, economic issues as well as straightening out those walls and getting them patched up. It was a quick job; it was a fast job. The basics of it were completed in fifty-two days. It was not an easy job to do that. A lot of what

they did was to fill in gaps in the walls with rubble and finish them or face them on the outside so that they would be adequate for at least deterring an invading army. For fear that they would be attacked, they had to keep their weapons either in their hands or at their sides or close by. Some of them were standing guard all night, even after having worked heavily during the day. But the wall got built.

V. Restoration of the People (Ne 8:1-13:31).

A. Ezra Reads the Law.

Then having that protection, Nehemiah got Ezra to come out of retirement, as it were, in chapter 8 and to read the Word of God to the people hour after hour. They were all gathered into a square in Jerusalem known as the Water Gate Square. There, hearing the Word of God, the people confessed their sins and committed themselves, as chapter 9 describes it at length and also on into chapter 10, the following of the Law. In other words, they renewed their commitment to God's covenant, to becoming again His covenant people, obedient to Him.

B. Repopulation of Jerusalem.

After that most important stuff was taken care of, it was then Nehemiah's concern to start repopulating the city. Everybody was living in the surrounding towns. Lots were drawn, and one out of ten people agreed that they would move into the city, clear the rubble, and begin building houses, and so on. He also put priests and Levites into service in the temple. As one of the final reforms, he got the Sabbath respected once again. Even such a basic thing as work on the Sabbath, as having the markets open on the Sabbath day, had to be straightened out, the people had degenerated so far.

C. Conclusion.

At the end of the book, which is autobiographical at many points, Nehemiah says, "Remember me with favor, O my God." He understands himself and his people to be dependent upon God's favor. I think, in fact, it is clear to us that God did remember him with favor. We certainly do. We think of Ezra and Nehemiah as rescuers of a nation that had deteriorated so far, after so much good, and so much benefit was sitting right there for them to reach out to. They needed revival; they needed return and rebuilding, both physically and spiritually, and Ezra and Nehemiah provided it.

15-Ezra And Nehemiah - From Parchments To Books.

Proverbs-Psalms: Singing the Sounds of Real Life - Lesson 3.

Supplement Four.

Developing Old Testament Study Skills.

I. Introduction to Understanding the Old Testament.

Scripture promises the one seeking wisdom and understanding that he or she "will understand the fear of the Lord and find the knowledge of God. For the Lord gives wisdom, and from his mouth come knowledge and understanding" (Pr 2:5-6). If one really wants to properly respond to the Bible message, one must know how to interpret it. Certainly many of the spiritual truths of the Old Testament can be ascertained through just a cursory reading of the text, but systematic study can yield far greater benefits. While it is true that in-depth Bible study will take more time and effort, there are principles and methodologies that can serve as guides for making the whole process quicker, easier, and more productive.

A. Hermeneutics.

Correctly interpreting and understanding the Old Testament can be an arduous, often puzzling, but intrinsically rewarding experience. Deciding to begin doing in-depth Bible studies may seem intimidating at first, but a knowledge of the art and science of hermeneutics should prove useful. The Greek verb *hermeneuein* means "to explain, interpret" or "translate," while the noun *hermeneia* means "interpretation" or "translation." Using the verb, Luke informs his readers that Jesus "explained" to the two disciples on the Emmaus road what the Scriptures said about him (Lk 24:27). Hermeneutics attempts to help us comprehend what a message, written, oral, or visual, is endeavoring to communicate.

If the goal of hermeneutics is the correct understanding of communication, then we need to learn what precepts and methods will be appropriate to the task. Hermeneutics provides various rules and techniques for acquiring a more complete understanding of the biblical text. To avoid interpretation that is arbitrary, erroneous, or that simply suits personal whim, readers may need to appeal to rules or principles for guidance. When one consciously sets out to discover and employ such principles, one investigates hermeneutics. However, hermeneutics is both a science and an art. There are rules, principles, methods, and tactics associated with biblical interpretation, but no mechanical system of rules will ever help one fully understand all the implications or nuances of any given text; that is where the art of interpretation enters in.

Questions related to biblical hermeneutics can often be difficult to answer and there may be various ways to go about answering them; but there should be agreement on one aspect of biblical hermeneutics according to Gordon Fee and Douglas Stuart: "A text cannot mean what it never meant. Or to put that in a positive way, the true meaning of the biblical text for us is what God originally intended it to mean when it was first spoken" (*How to Read the Bible for All Its Worth*, Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1982, p. 27). In other words, the interpreter must always keep in mind that the text under consideration is more than a piece of literature; it is the Word of God.

B. Exegesis.

Exegesis is a normal activity in which all of us engage on a daily basis, even if we don't call it by that name. Whenever we hear an oral statement or read a written one and seek to understand what has been said, we are engaging in exegesis. The term "exegesis" itself comes from the

Greek word *exegeomai*, which basically means "to lead out of." When applied to texts, it denotes the "reading out" of the meaning. The noun, therefore, can refer to interpretation or explanation. Thus whenever we read a text or hear a statement that we seek to understand and interpret, we are involved in exegesis.

The goal of biblical exegesis is to reach an informed understanding of the text under consideration. This is different from saying that the exegete seeks to determine the meaning of the text. The fact is there are various nuances of any text's meaning and different types of exegesis can address these different aspects. For this reason, the exegete can never hope to present the exegesis of a passage as if it were the final word. Rather, one does an exegesis of a passage in which a coherent, informed interpretation is presented, based on one's encounter with and investigation of that text at a given point in time. Exegesis does not allow one to master the text so much as it enables one to enter into it.

C. Relationship of Hermeneutics to Exegesis.

According to Walter C. Kaiser in *Toward an Exegetical Theology*, the relationship between hermeneutics and exegesis is as follows: Hermeneutics seeks to describe the general and special principles and rules that are useful in approaching the biblical text. Exegesis seeks to identify the single truth-intention of individual phrases, clauses, and sentences as they make up the thoughts of paragraphs, sections, and ultimately, entire books. Accordingly, hermeneutics may be regarded as the theory that guides exegesis; exegesis may be understood to be the practice of and the set of procedures for uncovering the author's (or editor's) intended meaning (p. 47).

In other words, hermeneutics stands in the same relationship to exegesis as the rule book stands to the game. The rule book is written in terms of reflection, analysis, and experience. The game is played by concrete actualization of the rules. Rules are not the game, but the game is meaningless without rules. Hermeneutics proper is not exegesis, but exegesis is applied hermeneutics.

II. Biblical Interpretation.

Interpretation is an activity in which a reader or hearer seeks to gain the shareable verbal meanings that an author or speaker has sought to transmit by linguistic signs. Not every meaning in an author's mind can be conveyed by language. As E. D. Hirsch has put it, "An author's verbal meaning is limited by linguistic possibilities but is determined by his actualizing and specifying some of those possibilities. Correspondingly, the verbal meaning that an interpreter construes is determined by his act of will, limited by those same possibilities" (Hirsch, p. 47).

The chance that an interpreter will succeed in grasping an author's verbal meaning is greatly enhanced by the limitations of possible meanings that have been imposed upon words by cultural norms and conventions. A linguistic symbol can represent an identical meaning for two persons because the range of what it can mean has been limited by convention. Of course, words often have several meanings, but the association a word has with other words in its context does much to indicate the unambiguous meaning that the author intended it to have at a certain place in his or her writing. Nevertheless, the interpreter always has to keep in mind there is some degree of speculation associated with the meaning of the communication he or she wants to grasp. In constructing a text whose author cannot be consulted, a claim to validity in interpretation can never have more than a high degree of probability.

Yet the more willing an interpreter is to submit the proposed construction of a text to the scrutiny of others who have also worked hard to understand it, the higher will be the probability of

achieving a consensus regarding the meaning its author wanted to transmit. The greatest difficulty to overcome in the interpretation of texts is the famous "hermeneutical circle," which refers to the path a thought takes as it attempts to find meaning.

Methodologically, it refers to the procedure that an interpreter follows as he or she turns from the parts of a sentence to the sentence as a whole and then, quite literally, from the whole back to the parts. Descriptively, the circle refers to that profound interrelationship that the words of a sentence have with the paragraph as a whole, and so on outward to the work as a unity, and then finally expanding to include all the elements contingent upon an adequate understanding of the text at hand, in short, the interrelationship of text and context, context and text.

To be sure, if all facets of a text were equally capable of being made into "evidence" to support several different ways of construing a text, then the hermeneutical circle could never be broken, and interpreters would waste their time discussing which view was correct. But as Hirsch points out, ". . . not all traits are genre-dependent . . . and not everything in verbal understanding is variable. Understanding is difficult, but not impossible" (p. 77). So discussion with a fellow interpreter about how a text should be construed is indispensable, precisely because another mind is able to bring one to see some of those relatively few invariable traits in a text that will fit only one interpretation of it. Therefore, validity in interpretation is possible as a matter of high probability, albeit not absolute certainty, and this makes the interpretation of biblical texts as worthy a pursuit of knowledge as that of any other field where only high probability, rather than absolute certainty, is attainable.

III. Procedures of Interpretation.

The exegetical method of research is the process by which a text is systematically explained. The text itself is regarded as a concrete expression from "sender" to "receiver." Since the sender and receiver are both now absent, the exegete must attempt to reconstruct this relationship through the text alone.

Any historical investigation into the meaning of a text must necessarily involve several tasks. The first task of the exegete is to examine the content of the text under investigation. The exegete must determine what the writer said by investigating: (a) The actual words of the author (textual criticism), (b) the meaning of those words (lexical data), and (c) the relation of those words to each other (grammar/syntax).

Then the exegete must try to determine why the writer said what he or she said. This includes: (a) examining the literary context; i.e., why he or she stated it where he or she did in the passage, and (b) the historical context; i.e., understanding the words in light of the background and culture of the author and his or her audience. In summary, by being sensitive to the meaning of the words of a passage or book in the context of its literary and historical setting, the exegete can attempt to recover the original message of the author.

Literary context is what most people mean when they talk about reading something in its context. Essentially, literary context means that words only have meaning in sentences, and for the most part biblical sentences only have meaning in relation to preceding and succeeding sentences. This means it is extremely important to determine the genre of the literature under consideration. In contemporary literature, biography will be read differently from mystery and drama differently from limerick. The type of literature affects how that writing will be approached and interpreted. This applies equally to the Old Testament. Prophecy is a different genre from

proverbial literature. The interpreter must identify the genre of what he or she is trying to interpret and discover as much as possible about that genre. This latter endeavor is approached through a wide variety of critical methodologies, which will be surveyed later on in this lesson.

The historical context, which will differ from book to book, has to do with several things: the time and culture of the author and his or her readers, that is, the geographic, topographical, and political factors that are relevant to the author's setting, and the occasion of the book, letter, psalm, prophetic oracle, or other genre. The most important question of historical context, however, has to do with the occasion and purpose of each biblical book and/or of its various parts. Here one wants to have an idea of what was going on in Israel that called forth such a document, or what the situation of the author was that caused him to write it. Again, this will vary from book to book, but can usually be found (when it can be found) within the book itself.

IV. Critical Methodologies.

In the balance of this lesson, we will be discussing the various ways of addressing the questions and problems modern students and interpreters encounter when exegeting the biblical text. The variety of methods to be discussed merely attests to the richness and diversity of the biblical documents, and these methods should be seen as complementary. No single way of approaching a text should be seen as exhausting the meaning of a passage, but rather as a way of dealing with one particular facet of a passage.

Each of these approaches is treated as a type of "criticism." Criticism is a comprehensive term, embodying a number of techniques employed in the study of (among other things) written documents in order to establish, as far as possible, their original text, the literary categories to which they pertain, style, authorship, date, purpose, and so forth. Biblical criticism embraces various critical disciplines, notably textual criticism, literary criticism, form criticism, rhetorical criticism, redaction criticism, historical criticism, structural analysis, and canonical criticism.

A. Textual Criticism.

The function of textual criticism is the restoration of the original wording of a document when alterations have been introduced (deliberately or inadvertently) in the course of copying and recopying the document by hand through the centuries. If the biblical autograph or original document was still available, scribal errors could be corrected by reference to it. But as the biblical autographs have long since disappeared, and the surviving copies differ from one another here and there, the original wording may be determined only by a careful comparative study of the copies. The main types of scribal errors have to do with accidental errors of the eye and ear, and have been categorized as follows:

1. Confusion of Similar Letters. A frequent cause of variant reading in Old Testament manuscripts and versions is the existence of several Hebrew letters of similar appearance. Here distinction has to be made between the archaic Canaanite script used in preexilic times and the later Aramaic square script. Evidence shows that the letters most susceptible to confusion in the Old Testament transmission history were resh/dalet, he/heth, and waw/yod, though other letters such as beth/kaph, were also misread.

2. Transposition of Letters. This scribal error, technically known as "metathesis", sometimes produces awkward readings as in Psalm 49:11, where the traditional text has "their inward thoughts;" the Septuagint, Peshitta, Targum, and Vulgate, however, all presume the reading

"their tombs," which fits the context much better and is normally adopted by modern commentaries and translations (RSV, NEB, JB, NIV).

3. Incorrect Word Division. In manuscripts of continuous script, it is understandable that words can sometimes be divided differently to yield conflicting readings. This is apparently what happened in Jeremiah 23:33, where the Masoretic text reads "what burden" but the Septuagint and Vulgate have divided the words as "you are the burden."

4. Haplography. This is the name of an error in manuscript copying in which a syllable, word, or line is omitted by accidental oversight because of the identity or similarity of adjacent material (opposite of dittography).

5. Dittography. This is the phenomenon of writing twice what should only have been written once. It is the opposite of haplography. A dittograph is an example of erroneous repetition.

6. Confusion of Similar-sounding Words. In addition to the errors of the eye (ocular), other mistakes are best explained as errors of the ear (aural). Two words particularly vulnerable to this kind of confusion were the Hebrew words *lo'*, "not," and *lo*, "his/its."

7. Deliberate Scribal Intervention. Sometimes there was a deliberate alteration of the text for purposes of clarification, correction, and apologetic.

Once the interpreter has reached a decision about the wording of the passage under consideration, another set of questions arise that has to do with the literary context of the passage. This encompasses the field of literary criticism.

B. Literary Criticism.

Literary criticism is a term that means different things to different people. However, it has three major definitions according to its historical, technical, and contemporary usage. It may refer either to (1) a particular approach to the analysis of Scripture that appeared in systematic form in the nineteenth century (often called source criticism) and which, considerably refined, is still practiced today (2) that investigation of a text that seeks to explicate the intention of the author through a detailed analysis of the component elements and structure of the text itself; or, quite broadly, to (3) any undertaking which attempts to understand biblical literature simply as literature, often in a manner paralleling the interests and methods of contemporary literary critics.

Such matters as the location of the passage within a larger literary unit and how it functions within this larger unit are often crucial in interpreting a passage. Since most of the biblical documents were originally written to be read aloud, this becomes a most important consideration, for this required ancient authors to be intentional and careful in how they composed and structured documents.

C. Form Criticism.

If literary criticism deals with how the passage relates to its larger literary unit, form criticism is more narrowly concerned with the passage itself. The father of form criticism was Hermann Gunkel, a German Old Testament scholar best known for his study of the Psalms. Form criticism seeks to recover the shorter oral compositions from which the Bible's written sources supposedly derived. The Bible contains a rich diversity of literary forms and genres and many of these

already existed prior to their actual appearance in the biblical text. For this reason, questions of the original setting of particular literary forms and genres are also crucial as one attempts to determine the "life situation" of a passage. Thus, Gunkel and his disciples claimed that the original setting of most of the psalms was the temple in Jerusalem.

Eventually, Old Testament form criticism began to focus more on the literary types of the present written text rather than on the Bible's oral pre-stages, with special attention being given to the literary form or genre of the passage, a parable, a prophetic oracle, a hymn, and so forth. Attention to these questions has arisen because of the recognition that form and the meaning are directly related; one reads a poem one way, a piece of prose another.

D. Rhetorical Criticism.

Rhetorical criticism is a term adopted in 1968 by the late Old Testament scholar James Muilenburg to denote a methodological approach to Scripture designed to supplement that of form criticism. Its task, he suggested, is to exhibit the structural patterns employed in the fashioning of a literary unit, whether prose or poetry, and to discern the various devices (such as parallelism, anaphora, etc.) by which the predications of the composition were formulated and ordered into a united whole ("Form Criticism and Beyond," *Journal of Biblical Literature*, 88 [March 1969], pp. 1-18). Questions of composition and structure are also dealt with here, as well as questions relating to the rhetorical style and mood of the passage.

E. Redaction Criticism.

Redaction criticism is best defined as the attempt to lay bare the theological perspectives of a biblical writer by analyzing the editorial (redactional) and compositional techniques and interpretations employed in shaping and framing the written and/or oral traditions at hand (see Luke 1:1-4). As used in biblical exegesis, redaction criticism refers to that stage of interpretation whose primary focus is the final written form or composition of a passage. It pertains to the final stage of the tradition, as it were, that has become crystallized in written form and asks what the author or final editor intended to say through the passage in its final form. Redaction criticism presupposes the insights and perspectives of textual criticism and form criticism.

Both redaction criticism and canonical criticism, by calling special attention to the final literary form of the biblical text, provide useful perspectives for the interpreter interested in the theological message of the biblical writings or the final canonical viewpoint as it has come to be expressed and formulated by the author or editor.

F. Historical Criticism.

Historical criticism, when narrowly defined, deals with the historical setting of a document: the time and place in which it was written; its sources, if any; the events, dates, persons, and places mentioned or implied in the text; etc. Its goal is the writing of a chronological narrative of pertinent events, revealing where possible the nature and interconnection of the events themselves. The historical criticism of documents proceeds on the basis of two related assumptions or perspectives. These may be designated as the internal and external historical aspects of a document. The internal historical aspects of a document are related to the historical and cultural dimensions described or depicted in the texts. The external historical aspects of a document are related to the historical, cultural, and biographical context in which the document was produced.

G. Structural Analysis.

Structural analysis is a method of analyzing data that arose in several disciplines within the humanities and social sciences, most notably anthropology, sociology, and linguistics, as well as in the study of literature. Its name derives from its analysis of "deep structures" inherent in human cultures and language that remain constant despite immense diversity of "surface structures." In literature, "deep structures" refer to the underlying functions, motives, and interactions among the main characters and objects in a narrative, and, most notably, the types of oppositions and their resolutions that develop as the text unfolds. "Surface structures" include plot, theme, motifs, and characterization; or in poetry, meter, rhyme, parallelism, and so on. Structural analysis deliberately ignores the historical background of a text and instead seeks to show universally recurring features in narratives from all cultures and eras. These features reveal a text's most fundamental meaning, irrespective of its author's conscious intention. In other words, for structuralists meaning resides not in the largely irrecoverable mental processes of a text's human author but in the actual words of the text itself.

H. Canonical Criticism.

James A. Sanders coined the term "canonical criticism" (*Torah and Canon*, Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1972) to denote a method of biblical criticism that operates subsequent to form and redaction criticism and seeks to determine the function of biblical texts in their historical contexts and investigates the nature of their authority. The essence of canonical criticism, as practiced by Sanders, lies in discerning the hermeneutics by which the ancient traditions were adapted for use in new contexts.

The term "canonical criticism" is also frequently applied to the approach to interpretation advocated by Brevard Childs (*Introduction to the Old Testament as Scripture*, Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1979). With Sanders, Childs shares a broad definition of canon, a concern for the theological significance of the biblical texts, and a concern for the function of the biblical texts within the community of faith that preserved and treasured them. Contrary to Sanders, Childs does not seek to determine the hermeneutics employed in the canonical process. Rather, the stance developed by Childs focuses on the shape and function of the final canonical text. According to Childs, this final shape is of special significance because (1) it alone displays the full history of revelation witnessed to by Scripture; (2) in it the community has exercised its critical judgment on the received traditions and modified them accordingly; and (3) by showing how the texts were actualized by generations removed from the original event and composition of the writings, the canonical shape may provide a hermeneutical key as to how we may actualize the text in our day.

V. Conclusion: Analysis and Synthesis.

The exegetical task may be said to fall into two fairly well-defined stages: analysis and synthesis. As the interpreter begins the task of exegesis, examining different aspects of the passage, whether they are literary, rhetorical, historical or whatever, will serve as a way of "breaking down" the passage into its component parts and problems and examining them as discrete units and issues. These separate analytic tasks will normally overlap, for each will inform the other.

As analysis takes place, the interpreter's understanding of the passage will gradually increase and the groundwork will be laid for synthesis. Synthesis, here, means the process by which the interpreter again "puts together" the text. The task is now to relate the preliminary analytical investigations to each other, weighing the significance of each, and deciding how each one will contribute to the overall interpretation of the text at hand.

16-Job - How A Good Person Grow Through His Suffering

Lamentations-Job: God's Path Through Pain - Lesson 2.

Job: How a Good Person Grew Through His Suffering.

I. Introduction.

The book of Job is a great old book that has intrigued people ever since it was written. It is a book rich in its textures. It is a book of wisdom that talks about how a person is supposed to live in a wicked world. It is a book that is not always easy to follow, and one reason for that is its structure. It has a prose introduction and a prose conclusion, but most of the book's 42 chapters are difficult Hebrew poetic discussions, dialogue back and forth with Job speaking, and then one of his so-called counselors speaking, and then Job giving a rejoinder, and then some other counselor making a point, and Job referring to that, and back and forth, and back and forth.

The discussion is at a high level. These are people speculating about whether life is fair or not; they are speculating about how God works in our world. They all agree that there is tragedy; they all agree there is suffering; they all agree there is hardship; they all agree there are pains and trials. But why did these things happen, and why is the world the way it is? Why is wickedness allowed by a good God to prevail? These are questions that they address in detail with impassioned arguments, with deep and long expressions of their opinions; and as their opinions work back and forth, one against the other, it is awfully easy for a reader to become confused.

We are going to try in this segment of our course to see the basics of the book of Job and to provide some guidelines for reading through the book. It is really a wonderful book. It is, as we have said, a book of wisdom. Wisdom is the ability to make choices in life, and of course, the right choices are always the choices that reflect God's will. Those are the choices we want to make. Job wanted to make them, and yet in the midst of his suffering, which he understood to be suffering that he did not deserve, it became very difficult for him to decide how to make the right choices. What were his choices in life?

II. Job's Dilemma (1:1-2:13).

A. Prologue.

Job's suffering, we learn in the prologue in chapters 1 and 2, the prose prologue, is the result of a kind of contest. God, in His supervision of the principalities and powers of this earth, confronts Job, and He confronts Job by Satan. How does He do it? In a conversation with Satan, God says, "Have you considered my servant Job?" Satan says, in effect, "Oh sure, he loves You and serves You and does Your will, and is generous and kind and all of that, as long as You have given him a healthy life, a lovely family, plenty of wealth and comfort. But you know, if You would give him over to me, I could make his life so miserable that he would actually curse You, God." So God says, "All right, I will give him over to you."

Thus, Job is confronted with a terrible set of miseries. Disasters of various kinds come on his family, he loses everything, and his children are gone. He and his wife are bereft of them, and his wealth is gone and all the things that he owned either die off or are destroyed in one kind of disaster or another. He himself becomes horribly sick, and he is pained with boils and sores all over his body. It is a terrible time.

His wife actually says to him unwittingly the very thing that would have caused Satan to win the contest. She says, "Curse God and die." She does not necessarily mean by that that she hates God and Job should too. It is just that they believed in those days that if a person were to go so far as

to curse God, God would kill him. So she is saying, "Give up." She is discouraged, she is beaten, she is forlorn. Job says, "No, I will not." Now Job does not know about the contest. He does not know that God has confidence he will come through his suffering without cursing Him, without giving up, without just saying, "I hate You God; may bad things happen to You; go kill me." That sets the scene.

B. Overview of Book.

Then after that prose introduction, with chapter 3 we begin what are called the dialogues of the book. There are three cycles of dialogues; that is, Job will speak, and then one of his comforters will speak (comforters Bildad, Zophar, and Eliphaz), and then Job will speak again, and one of them, and so on. This goes around basically three times, so there are lengthy speeches. Then in chapter 28, there is a wisdom interlude. Chapter 28 is not part of the dialogues; it is kind of a center of the book. If you are aware of it and do not just think it is a continuation of somebody's speech, you will realize that its words are profoundly helpful to you because it asks the question, "Where is wisdom to be found? Where do you get it?" The answer is: It is found with God. The person who turns to the Lord, who seeks Him, who studies His Word, is the person who finds wisdom, who knows how to make the right decisions in this life, who knows what life is all about, who is really clued in to how a human being should live on this earth.

Following the wisdom interlude, there are three monologues. Job speaks, then the reader sort of expects that another one of Job's comforters will, perhaps, come on and say something in response to Job. But this time a new character comes on the scene. His name is Elihu. We have not heard from him before. When Elihu arrives, there are some things that he says that, in effect, rebuke Job's comforters; and there are some things that he says that rebuke Job. It looks like the best Job is going to get is the words of Elihu, words that are ultimately very critical. Then, suddenly, God appears; and for five chapters, chapters 38-42, God speaks to Job. That is very important. God actually addresses this person He has allowed to suffer so much. With chapter 42, we read Job's closing poetic words of contrition. Then comes the prose epilogue. In that epilogue we learn how, as a result of God's continuing mercy to Job, everything is restored to him, new children are born, and his wealth is given once again, and he is allowed to have good health, and other sorts of prosperity come to him. This was not as a full compensation, it seems, for everything he has endured, but as an evidence of the kindness and love of God for His servant.

III. Job Laments and Debates (3:1-37:24).

That overview does not tell the whole story, because the story really takes place in the dialogues in which Job and the others debate the question, "How do you live in a wicked world? Is life fair? Is the kind of thing that has happened to Job something that he deserves?" So let us take a look in greater detail at those dialogues. Follow along as we summarize quickly what is contained in each chapter. It is a quick run-through, but if you are attentive you can appreciate the way the dialogue works.

A. Job's Lament (3:1-26).

Chapter 3 houses Job's initial words. This is what he says after all the suffering that he has been through, and after his wife has suggested to him that he just ought to curse God and die. He says what can be summarized in this way: "For the unhappy in this world, is it not better not to live at all or never to have lived in the first place?" In other words, if your life is full of suffering, if your life is characterized by hardship as his life now is, if it is more pain than joy, if it is more trial than delight, is it not better not to have lived? What good is living a suffering life? What

good is living an unhappy life? That is Job's question, and that is what chapter 3 is about. This is called his opening lament. He lays out, as it were, before the world this question: Is life worth living when it is full of hardship? That is a good question. It is a question a lot of people have asked, and it has been answered a lot of different ways.

B. Eliphaz's First Proposal (4:1-5:27).

One of Job's acquaintances named Eliphaz comes on the scene with the meritorious desire of comforting Job. Eliphaz is not an enemy of Job in any way; he is a friend and he wants to help Job. But Eliphaz comes from a perspective that many people have, and that perspective is that a good God would never allow a good person to suffer unless the good person deserved to suffer. In other words, any kind of misery, any kind of suffering, any kind of disappointment in this life, is some sort of punishment. There is something wrong with your life if it is not going smoothly. This is the mentality that comes forward in the so-called "health and wealth" gospel that one sometimes hears about. The idea is that if you have the right faith and if you are living the right life, you ought to be doing well. You ought to be prospering, you ought not to be suffering from disease, and so on; and Eliphaz represents that.

In chapters 4-5, Eliphaz has a turn at discussing this problem. Here is a friend of his that has had almost every imaginable kind of suffering come his way, who is sitting in dust and ashes, miserable, in pain, sick, and he tries to help him. From his perspective, Job needs to get some correction from God, as Job needs to get right with God. It would not have happened unless he was on the outs with the Lord, so he explains to Job that basically you get what you deserve in life. That is his message, of course implying that Job must have done something to deserve what he got. He also says that since God judges angels, surely He does the same with humans, doesn't He? And that is the way chapter 4 ends. If God is willing to judge angels (and the judgment of angels is a doctrine we see in Scripture with the fall of Satan to which Jesus refers, and so on), would not God judge humans? He is not going to let them go unjudged.

In chapter 5, his argument is: Do not be resentful; trust God to be fair; God is fair; that is His nature: for of course He is going to be fair. It ends with words that essentially can be summarized as simply this: God's correction is good for Job; God's correction is good for us, implying that these things that have happened are God's correction. We know that they are unusual. We know that Satan has been given powers to cause illness that he normally does not have. He has been given the power to cause various sorts of disasters, even bring about the events regarding the weather with storms and so on, things that Satan cannot typically do. God specially gave him those powers in connection with Job. But from Eliphaz's point of view, God had to have done it because something Job did displeased God. So he just wants Job to 'fess up and get right with God. How does Job respond?

C. Job's First Response to Eliphaz (6:1-7:21).

We read in chapters 6-7 Job's response. First, his misery is very real and he says, in effect: "I would like to die but not having cursed God. I do not want to just get killed by God, but I sure do not enjoy living anymore. I have done nothing wrong." Now that is quite a thing for Job to say. He does not mean that he is perfectly sinless and never did anything wrong, but he is saying, "I did not do anything to deserve this. My life is not the worst of the worst that would produce such extreme punishment that none of us has ever heard of before." In chapter 7, he says life is tough; he talks about the ways in which it is tough for many people, not just himself. Then he asks God at the end of chapter 7, not so much talking now to Eliphaz or any of the other comforters but to God Himself, "What have I done, God?"

D. Bildad's First Round of Advice (8:1-22).

It is now the turn in chapter 8 of another friend, Bildad. Now Bildad, just like Eliphaz, wants to help Job. He loves the guy and wants him to be encouraged and wants him to get free from these awful tortures that have come his way. We can summarize what he says in chapter 8 simply as, "Job, turn to God; he helps good people", meaning of course, "You have not been good, you have been bad, but God will help you if you turn to Him." Turn to God; He helps good people. That is the essence of the message.

E. Job Replies to Bildad (9:1-10:22).

Well, Job does not find the advice to be helpful. He wants to know why God has done this, and that is not the answer. He knows it was not the answer, because he did nothing to offend God. So in chapter 9, Job begins by saying: "How might I argue with God? I would like to have a conversation with God on this. I would like to get to Him; I would like to find out what is wrong. Why is He doing this to me? How can things so inappropriate happen to someone who has tried so hard to be righteous?" In chapter 10, he continues to ask by a lot of words that can be summarized in this way, "Why me, God?" And also, "Why this? Why such severe, awful suffering?"

F. Zophar's First Charge (11 :1-20).

In chapter 11 , a third so-called comforter comes on the scene. He also has the best intentions toward Job, and his message can be summarized very simply: "Job, repent. God will forgive you." Good advice if you need to repent, if what has happened to you is the result of your sin, but infuriating advice if it is not.

G. Job's Response to Zophar (12:1-14:22).

Job then responds in chapter 12; his response also continues in 13-14. He first makes the point, "I am worse off than many people who are evil. There really are evil people and you might argue they deserve disasters, but I am worse off than they are. Worse things have happened to me than any of us has ever known." In chapter 13, he says to Zophar, and also to the other comforters, "You cannot help me, but God could. God could help me. I want relief. I want to be able to plead my case directly with God. That is what would be satisfying."

Then addressing God predominantly in chapter 14, he says, "God, You have given man a miserable existence, haven't You?" Now by that, again, he does not mean that everybody suffers equally, but he has certainly come clear in his mind to the fact that many people do. He is really sensitive to the widespread suffering in this world, and he cannot understand why God has done it. What is God's purpose? How does it happen that so many people have to suffer? And though he does not know anybody who has suffered as much as he, he sure does wonder why they have to suffer.

H. Eliphaz's Second Speech (15:1-35).

In chapter 15, Eliphaz has a second chance, a second round. Now you know they have not gotten through to Job yet, so they start getting rather tough in their words, and Eliphaz says, "Job, you are a sinner. You are an impious doubter. You really do not put yourself on God's side. Don't you get it? It is the wicked who suffer."

I. Job's Second Response to Eliphaz (16:1-17:16).

Job responds in chapters 16-17, "You are no help. God has really afflicted me, but you are no help, are you?"

J. Bildad's Second Speech (18:1-21).

Bildad has a second chance, a second shot at Job. In chapter 18, he says, "Job, there is no future in being wicked", presuming, of course, that Job's resistance to their arguments is proof that he really did something wrong and is kind of fixed in his wickedness.

K. Job's Second Response to Bildad (19:1-29).

Job responds to him, too, in chapter 19: "My misery is great, but I deserve vindication. You deserve judgment." Now, of course, this is stated out of frustration and anger. But Job is really turning the tables on his comforters in saying, "You guys are wrong. You are seeing it the wrong way, and you need to be corrected."

L. Zophar's Second Speech (20:1-29).

In chapter 20, Zophar has a second chance. "Anything the wicked enjoy is only temporary." That is his message to Job, suggesting that Job has done something wicked, or many things wicked, and has been receiving punishment accordingly. "Their end is always terrible," he says, trying to paint a picture that Job will not like, but one that will hasten Job's repentance.

M. Job's Second Response to Zophar (21:1-34).

In chapter 21, Job responds: "The wicked often do well. It does not work that they get punished all the time. God should punish them, but He lets them do as well as the righteous. We all believe that God should punish the wicked and that the righteous should be rewarded. Why then does life work the way it works?" That is what Job was asking. It is a valid question; it is the kind of question we would ask under the circumstances, too.

N. Eliphaz's Third and Final Speech (22:1-30).

Eliphaz then has a third round. "A good God," he says in chapter 22, "would never punish a good human. He would help you if you would ever humbly pray for help." That is his message, God would not do this.

O. Job's Final Response to Eliphaz (23:1-24:25).

So, Job responds in chapters 23-24: "God's distance makes getting justice hard. Oh, I wish I could find out what is going on. He does not even seem to police the world; the evil fare just like other people do." Of course, Job is reflecting on the fact that there is a lot of wickedness in our world that God does not step in and eliminate instantly.

P. Bildad's Third and Final Argument (25:1-6).

Bildad has a third try. "Job," he says in chapter 25, "God is so good that none of us can be good compared to Him. Thus, by definition you deserve judgment. You are just not as good as God. That alone should allow you to think of yourself as worthy of punishment."

Q. Job's Final Response to Bildad (26:1-27:23).

Job says in chapter 26, "Some advice, God is all powerful. . . ." (in chapter 27) "But He has denied me justice. I know I am right, and I am not going to curse God, for God would then be justified in greatly punishing me."

R. Wisdom Interlude (28:1-28).

Then comes the wisdom interlude. At this point, we are reminded that if you want wisdom, you can find it only in fearing God.

S. Job's Reflections (29:1-31:40).

Following that, Job says in chapter 29, "I have been upright; I have lived a good life." Chapter 30 is a chronicling of his words in which he says, "Worthless people are making fun of me now. My hopes for life are dashed." He describes in chapter 31 the ways in which he was a righteous person and says, "If I had done this kind of evil or that kind of evil, sure, I would be deserving of judgment; but I did not do that." He protests his innocence.

T. Elihu's Charge (32:1-37:24).

Then comes Elihu, and his speech goes from chapter 32 to chapter 37. He says, "I am not partial to either side. Job, you are a sinner so 'fess up." God is fair and Job is both rebellious and sinful. Now that is really essentially the same kind of thing that the three earlier comforters were saying. Then he says, "Do you think you can make God respond to you? God does what is fair. He is superior to us all, He controls nature; He is surely above and distant from answering your puny concerns." Well, it looks like that is all Job is going to get, rebuke, in that he does not have any right to ask why.

IV. Job's Deliverance.

A. The Lord Speaks (38:1-40:2; 40:6-41:34)

Job responds in chapter 38-40, but only silently, because now God is talking and it continues into chapter 41. And finally, Job can blurt out the words that he says in 42, where he repents.

B. Job's Contrition (40:3-5; 42:1-6).

What is it that God says that causes Job to be satisfied enough to repent, to say "I should not have questioned you" (in chapter 42)? What is it? What is it that produces that response? The answer is God appears and just says to Job things like this, "Did you, Job, create everything? Do you control nature? Do you control the hippopotamus or the crocodile? In other words, are you able to run things like I am? Do you know how to do things like I know how to do, like how to control this universe like I know how to control it?" You know, that breaks through to Job. It is not an answer to every question that he had; it is not the solution to all of his musing about the nature of life. But, it is an important point, "Job, I know what I am doing. Do you realize that?" Then Job can then say, "I repent; I should not have questioned you."

C. Epilogue (42:7-17).

We know that it was a contest, and that the contest glorified God. God won! God says at the end of the book to the comforters, "Ask Job, my servant, to pray for you, because my servant Job has spoken correctly." In other words, Job was right: this life is not fair; there is much wickedness in it. Obviously, the answer is that one should not look for fairness in this world but should look for it in God's arrival. When that comes, when that finally happens, when the end of things happen that parallel God's own special arrival into Job's presence. Then we will see action; then we will know.

But Job never really finds out why he was tested, but it did glorify God. You know, we never find out either. We do not know why some of us get cancer, why some of us die young, why some lives are taken in car accidents, or why some people lose financially, or some people, who seem to be very wicked and cheat and do all kind of not very savory things, seem to get ahead. But we do know that God knows exactly what He is doing, and that faithfulness always honors

Him. We, who know Christ, know that in the final judgment all things will be set right, just as they really were for Job in the restoration part of the epilogue and as they will be for us, too.

17-Lamentations And Esther - What Gods People Do When The Bottom Falls Out

Lamentations-Job: God's Path Through Pain - Lesson 1.

Lamentations and Esther: What God's People Do When the Bottom Drops Out of Life.

I. Introduction.

In this segment of our course, we look at two books that come from the time of the exile. One is Lamentations, the other is Esther. Lamentations is from the year that Jerusalem fell, 586 B.C., or we believe it is at least close to that time; whereas, Esther is one of the last biblical books, the story about a people who did not return from exile, who did not follow the lead of Zerubbabel or Jeshua or Ezra or Nehemiah. Looking first at Lamentations, we will see a reaction to the destruction of Jerusalem; and then turning later to Esther, we will see how the Jews, who did not return from exile, survived and enjoyed God's blessing.

II. Lamentations.

Lamentations is a book that has in it basically what its name suggests, it has laments.

Lamentations is a poetical book; the whole book is poetry. It is five chapters worth of rather elaborate, rather lengthy poems that bemoan the terrible tragedy that was represented by having Jerusalem the capital of Israel, the city that David had captured from the local Canaanites and had made to be the centerpiece of his empire, the city that God had caused His name to dwell in, in fulfillment of His promises in the book of Deuteronomy, the city where Solomon had built the temple, where the people of God had worshiped for so many centuries, which as of 586 B.C., lay in ruins.

A. Structure of Book.

The five chapters of the book of Lamentations are really five individual poems, because they are each structured a little bit differently but they all are talking about the same kind of thing. In addition to their being poetic in general, they also have a special feature; that is, they are acrostic. Now acrostic poetry is the kind of poetry that goes through the alphabet. An acrostic poem starts with A and tells you something that begins with the letter A, and then the next verse perhaps starts with B and tells you something that begins with the letter B, and so on. An acrostic would be a little like this: Awful was the time when our city was destroyed; Bad were those days in which we lived after the siege and the conquest and the death of so many of our loved ones; Crummy was our existence as a people in those hard times. (Continuing down through the alphabet.)

B. Hebrew Pattern.

Now, of course, in Hebrew, which the book of Lamentations was written in, you go through the Hebrew alphabet. It has twenty-two letters in its alphabet, not twenty-six like English. There are twenty-two parts to each chapter of the book of Lamentations. In the case of the first two chapters, you get three poetic couplets making up each verse. The first part of the first poetic couplet of the three starts with a new letter of the alphabet, so all of the poetic couplets that make up verse 1 or chapter 1:1 start with the Hebrew equivalent of the letter A. The one A at the beginning covers for all three. The same thing with verse 2: the Hebrew equivalent of the letter B begins that rather long verse, and all three couplets follow after that one instance of the letter B, and so on. It is an acrostic pattern in which you end up with twenty-two verses.

The same essential pattern comes with chapter 2. Then in chapter 3, the acrostic actually triples. So what happens now is that there are, again, three poetic couplets making up each section of

material, but three of them each begin with the Hebrew equivalent of the letter A, and the letter B, and so on. In chapter 3, you have sixty-six verses because you have A, A, A and B, B, B and C, C, C, and so on. With chapter 4, there is a slackening of the intensity of the acrostic. In chapter 4, it is still going through the Hebrew alphabet, but now there are only two couplets, two poetic groupings, in each verse. And with chapter 5, the last chapter of the book, there are twenty-two verses still, but now not even in alphabetical order. It is no longer A, B, C, D, E, F. It is now A and G and W and L; it is all mixed up.

C. Structure Parallels Emphasis.

Thus, what we observe is that the book in its structure parallels the book in its emphasis. What is that emphasis? It is going through all the miseries that God has brought upon the people of Judah, and specifically upon the city of Jerusalem and its inhabitants. So the woes, the trials, the sufferings, the hardships, the discouragement, the despair, all of that is described in verse after verse, kind of through the alphabet, telling you how bad it was. It reaches a height in chapter 3, a kind of intensity where there is the triple acrostic pattern. Then it begins to lessen off and drop in chapter 4, where it is just two couplets per verse; and then by chapter 5 the book kind of dies out in a whimper. There are twenty-two verses suggesting the total number of letters in the alphabet, but not even in alphabetical order. It is as if the city of Jerusalem and its people are so tired, so weary, so drained of their strength, that they can hardly even gasp out the miseries that they experienced.

D. Six Elements of Hebrew Lament Poetry.

But as we said, this is a lament, and in the Hebrew Bible, a lament is not hopelessness. A lament is not a pattern in poetry in which you just say "we are gone, we are done, and we are through." A lament is actually a special type of poem that takes you through suffering but also expresses hope. In a lament, there are six elements: (1) There is the address; that is, you are praying to God. This is a kind of a prayer, the book of Lamentations. God is the one addressed. (2) There is the complaint. This is the section where the miseries are described. In Lamentations, ninety-five percent of the material is a complaint; it is describing in all kinds of ways, kind of ringing in the changes on the ways that the people suffered in the siege and the fall of the great city of Jerusalem from 588 to 586 B.C. (3) Then there is an expression of trust. All these laments have some expression of trust in them. Where God can be trusted, He has been faithful; and therefore the implication is that He will be faithful again. There is a hope factor, in other words. (4) There is also a plea for deliverance. Lamentations is asking God where are You? Will You help us? Will You come to us? Will You please work out your plan on our behalf? We have suffered so much at the hands of our conquerors, the Babylonians. (5) There is, as well, the word of assurance. Sometimes it is brief, sometimes it is lengthy, and there is, indeed, assurance in the book of Lamentations. In the midst of all the descriptions of sufferings, you do not want to slip by and miss the encouragement. (6) Then there is finally the testimonial. There is the commitment to praise God in the future, to honor Him, to thank Him, and to bless Him for the deliverance He will provide.

E. Rapid Change in Topics.

One interesting feature of laments in the Bible (and we have many of them in the book of Psalms, and some of them in the Prophets, and here a whole book devoted to that particular poetic style) is that the laments move from one element to another without warning. So you can go from the address to the complaint part, or from the trust to the deliverance plea, or from the assurance to the praise part, without warning. The writer does not say, "Now having spent some time talking about the great suffering, let us talk about are hope that we have in the Lord." No

warning is given; it just comes. It comes in the same way that a commercial comes when you are watching a TV program. People in ancient Israel were used to those changes and expected them in the same way that we are not shocked when we are watching a drama on television and somebody is suddenly advertising popcorn. It does not bother us, and we are used to that kind of interruption. They were used to the rapid transitions that are found in a book like Lamentations.

F. Examples of Rapid Transitions.

At the height of the misery, at the height of the portion that we call the complaint portion of the lament in chapter 3, we can read words like this: "Like a bear lying in wait, like a lion in hiding, he dragged me ("he" being God and "me" being the city personified in this poem) from the path and mangled me. He left me without help. He drew his bow and made me the target of his arrows. He pierced my heart . . . I became the laughing stock of all my people; they mock me in song all day long. He has filled me with bitter herbs and sated me with gall (a reference to something that the Psalms also mention in terms of the way it can seem that God has abandoned someone, and of course that language also is applied to Christ in the New Testament). He has broken my feet with gravel; he has trampled me in the dust. I have been deprived of peace; I have forgotten what prosperity is."

This is the language of the people of Judah and of Israel, and of Jerusalem, its capital, the capital of that people personified for us. "I remember my affliction and my wandering, the bitterness and the gall (again that language). I well remember them, and my soul is downcast within me. Yet this I call to mind and therefore I have hope (sudden transition to trust and assurance): Because of the Lord's great love we are not consumed, for his compassions never fail. They are new every morning; great is your faithfulness. I say to myself, 'The Lord is my portion; therefore, I will wait for him.' The Lord is good to those whose hope is in him, to the one who seeks him; It is good to wait quietly for the salvation of the Lord."

G. Yet All is not Lost.

Then after that, verse after verse, chapter after chapter of misery, we must remember it is not a hopeless pattern. It is a pattern in which those who suffer are invited to express their sadness and their sorrow. Thus, a book like Lamentations serves for us as a kind of example of the way that one can be honest with God. One can bring before God one's complaints, what one really feels in suffering. When things are tough, you can tell God. But, it is not because you think He will not help you that you go on and on about what you are experiencing; it is precisely because you know He is the only one you can turn to with any hope.

So the book ends in its kind of whimpering fashion at chapter 5 with these words: "You, O Lord, reign forever; your throne endures from generation to generation. Why do you always forget us? Why do you forsake us so long? Restore us to yourself, O Lord (there, the plea for deliverance), that we may return; renew our days as of old unless you have utterly rejected us or are angry with us beyond measure." Had God utterly rejected His people? Was He angry with them beyond measure? To those who did not know His Word, His promises, the words of hope and prediction of the future that He had given through His prophets, some might have thought so; but it was not that way at all.

Lamentations does describe for us the bitterness of suffering through the beginnings of God's great covenant punishment, the Exile, but it certainly was not the end. The book looks forward, in fact, with hope to the way that God, who does reign forever, whose throne endures from generation to generation, will respond to the plea: "Restore us to yourself, O Lord, that we may

return; renew our days as of old." God had great things in store for His people. The year 586 B.C. was not the end of the history of Israel.

III. Esther: Queen of Persia.

A. Setting.

Now then, we turn to Esther. Esther is from a time much later, a century and a half or more later, during the days of Xerxes, one of the kings at the end of the fifth century B.C. It was the desire of most Jews who had been taken into captivity by the Babylonians to return when they could. When the Persians gave them that opportunity, many did. Indeed, wave after wave of people returned; and as late as 70, 80, 90 years after the original captivity, we see people returning. We see them returning more than a century after the original captivity, led by people like Ezra and Nehemiah. But there were some who did not. They did not return sometimes out of callousness, sometimes because they no longer had the faith to return. Some Jews, in Babylonian captivity, did not return because they were doing so well; some had succeeded.

Jeremiah had been inspired to tell the people to "settle down, build houses, pray for the blessing of God on the towns and cities where you are exiled to, make friends there. You are going to be there for a long time." Some of them did that so well that when the time came to return to Judah they were not very interested, especially of course the generations that were born in Mesopotamia, in the territory of the Babylonian Empire. To many of them, Judah was something that their parents or grandparents had talked about, but was not a place where they were at home. They were growing up in their country, their part of the world, their region, and that region was one part or another of the Babylonian Empire, and then successively after 540 B.C. when the Babylonian Empire fell to the Persians, one or another part of the Persian Empire. The story of Esther tells us about such people. There were Jews in various locations within the Persian Empire and Esther is one of them; and her uncle, Mordecai, another key figure in this interesting, fascinating story, is another.

B. A Too-Shy Queen?

The story begins in chapter 1 with a description of how King Xerxes is dissatisfied with his queen, Vashti. At a drunken-fest he wants to display her, to show her off to the crowd. She is offended and refuses. Is this because she is shy in public? No, probably because he wanted to display her in a debauched way, some kind of display with not all her clothes on or the like. She refuses and he and his drunken nobles say, "Hey, if women do this kind of thing, what will be next?"

So he is no great example, but the decision is made to find another wife. Now in the meantime, this king tries out a new woman every night, which was the system, not very admirable. He is no model for any of us to follow, but it was the system that he used. There was a sense in the ancient world that sexual prowess was somehow especially supposed to be manifested in kings. One way they could show they were fit to reign was by going to bed with a different woman every night. King Xerxes did that, and that was his practice.

Esther, a rather secularized Jew, was brought into the potential harem of the king and wanted to please the king. She wanted to be a success. So following the advice of the harem keepers, she, when her time finally came to spend her night with the king, impressed him and he liked her. He decided to make her his queen. She ends up in chapter 2 coming to be chosen as the replacement for, in the king's eyes, somewhat uppity Queen Vashti.

C. Threats.

In chapter 2 of the book, we read about a plot. This plot is overheard by Esther's uncle, Mordecai. It is a plot that some of the rather prominent individuals in the capital city of Susa had to kill King Xerxes, an assassination plot. Mordecai, aware of this, gets word to Esther about it. Esther agrees to intercede to prevent that from happening. Meanwhile, the plot thickens with the introduction of a character named Haman. This individual, Haman, is one of the king's nobles; he is very wealthy, thinks very highly of himself, and wants to be honored at all times.

The Jews felt that it was improper for them to bow down to various individuals because that would be showing allegiance to those individuals over God (by the time of Esther and Mordecai, that may have been more custom than deep religious sentiment). But Mordecai refuses to bow down, to get on ground with his face to the ground, and honor Haman when he passes by. Haman, noticing this and aware that Mordecai is a prominent Jew, decides that he is going to get back at all the Jews; he is not going to have that kind of thing. If this Jew can do that, the way to solve that is to get rid of Jews in general.

Haman begins to plot against the Jews. So you have, on the one hand, the plot against the king that is discovered by a Jew; and you have, on the other hand, a plot against a Jew by a prominent noble. Even though Mordecai, in effect, has saved the king's life, no particular reward is given him. The press of business in the empire is such that the king does nothing for Mordecai originally. Then as time passes, we know that Haman increasingly goes after Mordecai; and while that is happening, King Xerxes suddenly realizes that a huge amount of time has passed. He has not done anything for the guy who discovered that plot and turned in the perpetrators so that they could be appropriately punished.

D. Rewards.

King Xerxes says in chapter 6, "We have got to do something for this guy Mordecai." And he begins to ask around, "What should we do for someone the king really has taken a delight in, someone who pleases the king?" Haman, in his self-centeredness, his arrogance, thinks, "It has got to be me. I am the one he is planning to honor." He suggests the kinds of honors that should be given to such a person, and then the king does them for Mordecai. Haman is furious and betrays himself as no real friend of the king, as an enemy of the Jews, and one who, in fact, has all along been in it for himself and not for the empire.

So he gets hanged in chapter 7 on the very gallows that he had caused to be built, thinking that they would be used for a public hanging of this man that in his obsession he had made his enemy, Mordecai. Now one of the things that Haman had managed to accomplish was an edict, an edict from the government that the Jews could be attacked, that the Jews were enemies. Now this was the kind of paranoia that can get going a lot of times, it was not just against Jews. There are many times in history where governments have joined in supporting the paranoia of people against one ethnic group or another. But in this case, Haman had stirred up hatred against the Jews in general and had gotten the government edict issued; and a difficulty was that in the law of the Medes and Persians, you could not revoke laws. They felt that if they were going to make laws, you could not just have them last for a while until some king decided he did not like them, and so those laws stood.

E. Edicts.

How then were the Jews to be protected if an edict had gone out that on a certain day their enemies could attack them? Well, the answer is you warn the Jews and tell them that it is coming and you allow them to arm themselves and be ready for the attacks. That is what we see described in chapters 8-9 of the book. The Jews triumph: they are ready for their attackers; they are on guard. All of those in the empire who hate the Jews take advantage of this edict, "If you would like to, go attack a Jew", are able to do in their enemies, and thus eliminate opposition for themselves, and have much greater security than they had in fact before the edict was issued in the first place.

This story is the origin of a Jewish festival that came over time to be celebrated called the Feast of Purim. In this feast, children even regard Haman as a sort of boogiemer and remember Esther and Mordecai. In chapter 10, where the book ends, Mordecai's successes and favor and elevation are described for us, along with those of Esther.

F. Conclusion.

One interesting factor about this book, it never even mentions the name of God. Not because God is not behind the event, not because God does not love His people and care for them, but because these Jews are quite secularized. They are not talking God's language as it were, but it does not mean that God does not love them. Yes, there are accommodations; yes, they are fitting into the Persian Empire; and no, they are not among those who returned following the advice of the prophets. But they are still God's people. He still loves them and cares for them, wants His best for them, and protects them; and His protection is with them as the book of Esther draws to a close.

19-Psalms - Ancient Prayers For Modern People

Proverbs-Psalms: Singing the Sounds of Real Life - Lesson 2.

Psalms: Ancient Prayers for Modern People.

I. Introduction.

Perhaps the most popular book in the Old Testament is the book of Psalms. It seems that almost everybody loves the Psalms. In all cultures, at all times, people have turned to the Psalms for comfort, for encouragement, for delight, to help them express themselves to God as they have turned to Him in prayer. One reason for this is that the Psalms contain not only God's Word to us, but in a certain sense our words to God. The Psalms are all His Word. They are all His inspiration, but they are intended to be used by us to express to Him the things that are of concern. It turns out that in ancient Israel, the Psalms were used exactly this way. They were used by people and groups, who had one kind of thing or another that they wanted to get across to the Lord.

In other words, the Psalms are kind of samples or examples or perhaps guidelines that help a worshiper express to God what is on his or her mind. The Psalms constitute a big book; there is no Bible book bigger than the Psalter with its 150 psalms. You get some short ones, but you get some massive ones, like Psalm 119, far and away the longest chapter in the Bible. But it is not so much the length of a psalm. It is not so much where it is found in the groupings that are called books within the Psalter (those five books). It is not so much the individual vocabulary or the like. And it is certainly not the tunes, even though we know that every psalm was sung. We know that every psalm was a musical poem; it must have had a tune. We just cannot recover them now. What really is important about the psalms are their categories. If you know the categories, if you know the types of psalms, then you can employ them as they were intended to be employed.

Before we go into those categories, I do want to say something that is related to all of the categories. The Psalms are intended to be as all-purpose as possible. We can tell that from the way that they are written. The Psalms have an outlook that everybody is supposed to be able to identify with. If you have got a circumstance, there is supposed to be a psalm there to help you. If you have an interest, there is something in the Psalms to channel your interest, as God wants it channeled. We must think of the Psalms as all-purpose. This, I think, is one of the reasons that they have had such popularity at so many times and places. So many different people can unite around their love of the Psalms.

II. Ten Types of Psalms.

A. Lament Psalms.

The ten types of psalms, when understood, are really useful. The first of these types and most frequent in the Psalter is what we call the lament psalms. A lament is a type of prayer that is prayed when one is in a situation of trial or trouble, and when one is seeking a way out, when one is seeking deliverance. Let's look at the structure of the laments. We can take the time to do this and should because the laments actually constitute about seventy of the Psalms. They are far and away the most frequent types in the Psalter. One might say that there are seventy chapters in the Bible devoted to helping people through their suffering.

There are six ingredients in a typical lament psalm: (a) There is the address, in other words, God's name is always invoked, "O Lord" or "O my God." You are not just praying out there,

somewhere, to some sort of cosmic noodle soup; you are praying to the Lord, someone who knows you and loves you, and whom you presumably know as your Lord and Savior.

(b) Then there is the complaint: we call this by its standard, typical, traditional name, but it is really the section of the psalm that describes what trouble you are in, your misery, your suffering. Now interestingly, the complaint section of these lament psalms is virtually always one of four types of situations.

(1) The most frequent is being surrounded by enemies who are about to kill you. (2) The second-most frequent is being trapped somehow, maybe in a pit or in a deep, watery miry clay. (3) The third is being very sick, terribly sick, so that you are feverish and your body aches and you are miserable and your throat burns. (4) The fourth is the process of dying, sometimes even drifting down to hell metaphorically.

The problems in the complaint sections of the laments never include family problems, never include finances, and never include difficulty with the tax authorities, the equivalent of the IRS. They never include homework; they never include job difficulties and conflicts. But that is not because they do not cover those. It is because the psalmists tried to pick a few themes that, in their minds, stood for being really miserable, really suffering. The most common one, for example, is being surrounded by enemies about to kill you. This is not the case of you are just caught in warfare, but this is the whole world hates you. All kinds of people have come around you and they are laughing at you, and mocking you, and insulting you, and are just about to kill you to rid the earth of you, who are to them scum. That is the kind of thing, the kind of picture one gets in a lament psalm.

Why? Because that is the most common thing we experience in life? No, because these are intended to be sample complaints. In effect, the psalmist is saying, "You fill in at this spot what your problem really is." If your problem is financial, if your problem is a matter of your family, if your problem is social, if your problem is some psychological thing, you fill it in. We will put in an instance in the psalm, but you understand in your own mind that this is just a trigger for you whatever the difficulty is. And so, those four kinds of complaints, surrounded by enemies, confinement, sickness, death, stand for whatever your problem really is. The psalms are all-purpose in that way.

The psalmists have tried in those complaint sections to give instances that really are bad. What you do not want is a psalm that you go to for comfort, to pray to the Lord, that has as its complaint the fact that your hip joints may ache a bit on rainy days. That is not going to help you if you have got a more serious problem. We say, "You cannot out-complain the psalmist." The psalmist lists extreme kinds of circumstances: horrible confinements, terrible illnesses, actually dying, and being surrounded by a world of enemies that just hate you. It lists those in order to give you the sense that your misery, whatever it is, is understood; the psalm is at least as miserable in its complaint section as your particular problem.

(c) We have the address, the complaint, but then comes an expression of trust. In these psalms God may be trusted. He has proved Himself faithful in the past, and He can be trusted now to deliver. (d) Then comes the actual plea for deliverance, very briefly, perhaps nothing more than just "save me, O Lord." (e) Then there is some kind of statement of assurance; sometimes this may even have been said by a third party. When people sang these psalms as musical prayers in

the temple, it is quite possible that one of the temple singers or priests actually gave the word of assurance. (f) Then there is some kind of a word of praise that typically finishes off these psalms.

Now the order may not always be as we have described it, the elements may be reversed in some way, and there may be repetition of elements throughout a given psalm. But one can see this frequent lament type illustrated in Psalm 3: "O Lord (that is the address), how many are my foes (the complaint)! How many rise up against me! Many are saying of me, 'God will not deliver him (there is the picture of enemies mocking and hating him and reviling him).'"

Then comes the statement of trust: "But you are a shield around me, O Lord" (This can even be translated in the original, "You are my benefactor, my protector.") "You bestow glory on me and lift up my head." Then the plea for deliverance, "To the Lord I cry aloud. He answers me from His holy hill." A word of assurance, "I lie down and sleep. I wake again because the Lord sustains me. I will not fear tens of thousands drawn up against me on every side." Another deliverance plea: "Arise, O Lord! Deliver me, O my God. Strike all my enemies on the jaw; break the teeth of the wicked." Is this because the psalmist likes to see people get hurt? No, because in the spirit of the psalm, the enemies stand for whatever the psalmist's problems are. So we can say, "Crush those problems; get rid of them for me please, O Lord."

Then finally the element of praise: "From the Lord comes deliverance. Your blessing is on your people." Or as it can also be translated, "May your blessing be on your people." Notice the balance in a prayer like that, it is not all petition; you are not just asking. You are also expressing trust and assurance, and you are also praising God for who He is and for His faithfulness to you in the past and presumably in the future. That is one type of psalm, the lament, and knowing what it stands for helps make it all the more useful to us. Now we realize that when one sees a psalm that is like that (and you can spot them very easily by their structure and their themes), one knows that here is comfort in whatever kind of suffering or trial, major or minor, may come your way. Naturally, one wants to use the psalm appropriately. You would not choose to read a lament typically at a wedding! And you would not choose to use an individual lament when it is a group concern; rather, you will pick one of the corporate laments.

B. Thanksgiving Psalms.

A second type of psalm is the thanksgiving psalm. These psalms are prayed after one has gotten out of the kind of misery described in the lament psalm. Their purpose is to thank God for deliverance. The deliverance now has come, and you are no longer in the misery; you are out, so you pray a thanksgiving psalm. These have a characteristic structure of first, (a) an introduction, an intention to give thanks to God, then (b) the misery is described, then (c) the appeal that was given to God, then (d) the actual rescue (these are all in the past tense because the rescue has come), then finally (e) a testimonial of gratitude to God for delivering you (sometimes that testimonial takes the form of a promise to worship).

The most basic thing any believer can do is worship God. The most basic thing a person who is grateful to God can do is to give God worship, to declare His greatness; to praise Him, the essence of worship. We have a couple dozen of those psalms, the thanksgiving psalms in the Psalter. They are completely appropriate for the individual or group situation where people are thankful for something that has gone well. Again, the miseries in these psalms are of the four basic types that we talked about in connection with the laments. The miseries are usually either enemies or confinement or illness or death, standing for whatever you are actually in that was hard for you.

C. Hymns.

A third type of psalm is the hymn. We think of a hymn as meaning something we sing out of a hymnbook in church. But the more technical meaning of the word, as we use it in connection with Psalms, is a song of praise to God, which is specially directed to God as a psalm of praise to Him. There are three types of these for the most part: (a) one type is praising God as Creator, so we call these Creator hymns; their purpose is to glorify God for being the Creator of all. (b) A second type is called an Israel hymn. These are the types of psalms that praise God for creating a people and for protecting that people throughout their long lineage. (c) A final type is called history hymns. These are psalms that use as their basic theme the fact that God has been watching over history.

You know, in a lot of religions of the world, the gods and goddesses are not closely related to history. They just sort of exist, and what happens in history is not too closely related to your religion. But biblical faith is a very historical faith. God is at work in the world at all times. We might not be able to discern it (most of the time we can barely figure it out well in hindsight), but God is at work and that is what the history hymns emphasize.

Now, there is a structure to these types of psalms as well, and it is very simple. You can remember it by the initials SRR: (a) there is a summons to praise, then (b) a reason to praise (or in fact a long list of reasons sometimes), and then (c) a recapitulation. So the summons may be as simple as "let us praise the Lord," and then the reasons are usually introduced by "for" or "because"; and they constitute the heart of the psalm. And then finally comes a recapitulation, which may be as simple as "praise the Lord."

D. Enthronement Psalms.

A fourth category is enthronement psalms. Enthronement psalms are psalms that speak of the way that God is King. Of course, Israel had an earthly king and they knew all about kings; every nation in their day had a king. God is "the" King over all. God is on the throne, and He is on the eternal throne, the heavenly throne. His throne is above all earthly thrones. So these psalms emphasize this: God enthroned as King. And one way or another, they will almost always mention the word "throne" in some part of the psalm or another. Again, they are descriptive praises of God. The essence of praise, the essence of worship, is to declare God's greatness. That is what we do when we worship. We declare God's greatness. A psalm like this, an enthronement psalm, certainly does it.

E. Royal Psalms.

Another category is the royal psalm. These psalms were used to focus the attention of the people on God's good gift of government. The king is, of course, the person mentioned most in a royal psalm. These are psalms for prayers of protection. They are psalms of gratitude that God has allowed the king to lead the people in good ways.

As a royal psalm unfolds, one sees that it is not just some sort of idolizing of the human king. It is always thanks to God for the way that God benefited the king, or prayer to God for the king and that God will help the king, recognizing that the king alone, the human leader of government, can never do what is necessary on his own.

F. Psalms of Zion.

Yet another category is that of the psalms of Zion. These are psalms that can have a hymn format, they can be in the summons, reasons, and recapitulation format, but they are characterized more by their content than any particular format. They talk about Zion, about

Jerusalem. Their theme fits with that of the book of Deuteronomy and many parts of the former and latter prophets in the Old Testament that describe how good it is that God has dwelt with His people and made Himself close to them, how Zion, the name of the mountain at the center of Jerusalem, was a place where God allowed the Israelites to build a temple as a symbol of His presence among them, and how He caused His name, that is, His authority, His affective presence, to be with them. Zion is a revered place in the Bible. It is very important. That is where everybody came three times a year to worship, and it is what becomes in the writings of the prophets increasingly a symbol of not only God's presence on earth, but of God's eternal presence. The theme of Zion ends up having tremendous importance in the New Testament; it is Jerusalem that symbolizes heaven eventually in the Scriptures.

G. Wisdom Psalms.

Wisdom psalms are yet another category. The wisdom psalms have a kind of simple structure. It is described as this or that, "x" or "y": Will you go in this direction or will you go in that direction? Wisdom is the making of right choices: Will you make right choices that please God and show you are a righteous person, or will you make wrong choices that displease God and show that your heart is really in the direction of evil or wickedness? In the case of the wisdom psalms, there are certain categories one can observe. Contrast between the righteous and the wicked is emphasized; conduct in life is important as a theme; the fear of the Lord is usually mentioned. Comparisons and warnings may be present because those are ways to show the options, the choices.

Many of the wisdom psalms are acrostic; that is, they go through successive letters of the alphabet as starting points for the given verses. Sometimes one will see the wording, "better than": "This is better than that or to be preferred to that." Sometimes the wording "my son" or "my child" will be in there because that is the way that teachers addressed learners in Bible times. The teacher was often called "father" and the learner called "child." It would work that way in the family, but even the school kids called their teachers "father," and the teachers called the students "son" or "child." Also, often enough the psalm will use the word "blessed." "Blessed is the person who does not walk in the counsel of the wicked or stand in the way of sinners or sit in the seat of mockers," says Psalm 1, which is a wisdom psalm. "On the other hand, His delight is in the law of the Lord, and on His law he meditates day and night."

H. Trust Psalms.

Another category is that of a trust psalm. You know, most of you who know any psalms at all know the Twenty-third Psalm, and that is a trust psalm. It is a psalm in which (a) the first part of the psalm describes trusting God as a faithful shepherd, and then (b) the second part describes trusting God as a faithful host. In the first part of the psalm, you can trust Him because He is going to take good care of you, His sheep. In the second part, when you go to God's house, He feeds you well. He protects you against any harm that might come your way, your enemies, and you have abundance, so much so that you want to stay there forever. "I am going to stay in the Lord's house forever."

I. Liturgy Psalms.

Liturgies are another category. This is a little bit of a catchall category because liturgy simply means, "wording that may be used in worship." But we believe that in certain kinds of worship settings, liturgies like Psalm 15 or Psalm 68 or Psalm 82 were employed to emphasize one part of the service or another, one truth within the process of the worship service or life at the temple.

J. Torah Psalms.

A final category is that of the Torah psalm. There are not many of these, but it just happens that Psalm 119, the really big psalm in the Psalter, is a Torah psalm. Torah is a Hebrew word that means "the Law," the Mosaic Law, the covenant Law. These psalms emphasize the importance of knowing God's revealed truth. You want to know the Word of God, and they praise the benefits of knowing the Word, how valuable it is for you, and how important it is that you know it in order to please God.

III. Conclusion.

These are the ten basic types. If you know them, you can use them. You will sense them if you are aware of the categories as you read through the Psalter. You will employ them in your own prayer life as you should and as you are encouraged to do by the way that they are written. You will use them in worship and benefit from them in that context. They are all written to be both God's Word to us and as an encouragement to us to be our words to God as well.

20-Psalms - Developing Old Testament Study Skills

Proverbs-Psalms: Singing the Sounds of Real Life - Lesson 3.

Supplement Four.

Developing Old Testament Study Skills.

I. Introduction to Understanding the Old Testament.

Scripture promises the one seeking wisdom and understanding that he or she "will understand the fear of the Lord and find the knowledge of God. For the Lord gives wisdom, and from his mouth come knowledge and understanding" (Pr 2:5-6). If one really wants to properly respond to the Bible message, one must know how to interpret it. Certainly many of the spiritual truths of the Old Testament can be ascertained through just a cursory reading of the text, but systematic study can yield far greater benefits. While it is true that in-depth Bible study will take more time and effort, there are principles and methodologies that can serve as guides for making the whole process quicker, easier, and more productive.

A. Hermeneutics.

Correctly interpreting and understanding the Old Testament can be an arduous, often puzzling, but intrinsically rewarding experience. Deciding to begin doing in-depth Bible studies may seem intimidating at first, but a knowledge of the art and science of hermeneutics should prove useful. The Greek verb *hermeneuein* means "to explain, interpret" or "translate," while the noun *hermeneia* means "interpretation" or "translation." Using the verb, Luke informs his readers that Jesus "explained" to the two disciples on the Emmaus road what the Scriptures said about him (Lk 24:27). Hermeneutics attempts to help us comprehend what a message, written, oral, or visual, is endeavoring to communicate.

If the goal of hermeneutics is the correct understanding of communication, then we need to learn what precepts and methods will be appropriate to the task. Hermeneutics provides various rules and techniques for acquiring a more complete understanding of the biblical text. To avoid interpretation that is arbitrary, erroneous, or that simply suits personal whim, readers may need to appeal to rules or principles for guidance. When one consciously sets out to discover and employ such principles, one investigates hermeneutics. However, hermeneutics is both a science and an art. There are rules, principles, methods, and tactics associated with biblical interpretation, but no mechanical system of rules will ever help one fully understand all the implications or nuances of any given text; that is where the art of interpretation enters in.

Questions related to biblical hermeneutics can often be difficult to answer and there may be various ways to go about answering them; but there should be agreement on one aspect of biblical hermeneutics according to Gordon Fee and Douglas Stuart: "A text cannot mean what it never meant. Or to put that in a positive way, the true meaning of the biblical text for us is what God originally intended it to mean when it was first spoken" (*How to Read the Bible for All Its Worth*, Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1982, p. 27). In other words, the interpreter must always keep in mind that the text under consideration is more than a piece of literature; it is the Word of God.

B. Exegesis.

Exegesis is a normal activity in which all of us engage on a daily basis, even if we don't call it by that name. Whenever we hear an oral statement or read a written one and seek to understand what has been said, we are engaging in exegesis. The term "exegesis" itself comes from the

Greek word *exegeomai*, which basically means "to lead out of." When applied to texts, it denotes the "reading out" of the meaning. The noun, therefore, can refer to interpretation or explanation. Thus whenever we read a text or hear a statement that we seek to understand and interpret, we are involved in exegesis.

The goal of biblical exegesis is to reach an informed understanding of the text under consideration. This is different from saying that the exegete seeks to determine the meaning of the text. The fact is there are various nuances of any text's meaning and different types of exegesis can address these different aspects. For this reason, the exegete can never hope to present the exegesis of a passage as if it were the final word. Rather, one does an exegesis of a passage in which a coherent, informed interpretation is presented, based on one's encounter with and investigation of that text at a given point in time. Exegesis does not allow one to master the text so much as it enables one to enter into it.

C. Relationship of Hermeneutics to Exegesis.

According to Walter C. Kaiser in *Toward an Exegetical Theology*, the relationship between hermeneutics and exegesis is as follows: Hermeneutics seeks to describe the general and special principles and rules that are useful in approaching the biblical text. Exegesis seeks to identify the single truth-intention of individual phrases, clauses, and sentences as they make up the thoughts of paragraphs, sections, and ultimately, entire books. Accordingly, hermeneutics may be regarded as the theory that guides exegesis; exegesis may be understood to be the practice of and the set of procedures for uncovering the author's (or editor's) intended meaning (p. 47).

In other words, hermeneutics stands in the same relationship to exegesis as the rule book stands to the game. The rule book is written in terms of reflection, analysis, and experience. The game is played by concrete actualization of the rules. Rules are not the game, but the game is meaningless without rules. Hermeneutics proper is not exegesis, but exegesis is applied hermeneutics.

II. Biblical Interpretation.

Interpretation is an activity in which a reader or hearer seeks to gain the shareable verbal meanings that an author or speaker has sought to transmit by linguistic signs. Not every meaning in an author's mind can be conveyed by language. As E. D. Hirsch has put it, "An author's verbal meaning is limited by linguistic possibilities but is determined by his actualizing and specifying some of those possibilities. Correspondingly, the verbal meaning that an interpreter construes is determined by his act of will, limited by those same possibilities" (Hirsch, p. 47).

The chance that an interpreter will succeed in grasping an author's verbal meaning is greatly enhanced by the limitations of possible meanings that have been imposed upon words by cultural norms and conventions. A linguistic symbol can represent an identical meaning for two persons because the range of what it can mean has been limited by convention. Of course, words often have several meanings, but the association a word has with other words in its context does much to indicate the unambiguous meaning that the author intended it to have at a certain place in his or her writing. Nevertheless, the interpreter always has to keep in mind there is some degree of speculation associated with the meaning of the communication he or she wants to grasp. In constructing a text whose author cannot be consulted, a claim to validity in interpretation can never have more than a high degree of probability.

Yet the more willing an interpreter is to submit the proposed construction of a text to the scrutiny of others who have also worked hard to understand it, the higher will be the probability of

achieving a consensus regarding the meaning its author wanted to transmit. The greatest difficulty to overcome in the interpretation of texts is the famous "hermeneutical circle," which refers to the path a thought takes as it attempts to find meaning.

Methodologically, it refers to the procedure that an interpreter follows as he or she turns from the parts of a sentence to the sentence as a whole and then, quite literally, from the whole back to the parts. Descriptively, the circle refers to that profound interrelationship that the words of a sentence have with the paragraph as a whole, and so on outward to the work as a unity, and then finally expanding to include all the elements contingent upon an adequate understanding of the text at hand, in short, the interrelationship of text and context, context and text.

To be sure, if all facets of a text were equally capable of being made into "evidence" to support several different ways of construing a text, then the hermeneutical circle could never be broken, and interpreters would waste their time discussing which view was correct. But as Hirsch points out, ". . . not all traits are genre-dependent . . . and not everything in verbal understanding is variable. Understanding is difficult, but not impossible" (p. 77). So discussion with a fellow interpreter about how a text should be construed is indispensable, precisely because another mind is able to bring one to see some of those relatively few invariable traits in a text that will fit only one interpretation of it. Therefore, validity in interpretation is possible as a matter of high probability, albeit not absolute certainty, and this makes the interpretation of biblical texts as worthy a pursuit of knowledge as that of any other field where only high probability, rather than absolute certainty, is attainable.

III. Procedures of Interpretation.

The exegetical method of research is the process by which a text is systematically explained. The text itself is regarded as a concrete expression from "sender" to "receiver." Since the sender and receiver are both now absent, the exegete must attempt to reconstruct this relationship through the text alone.

Any historical investigation into the meaning of a text must necessarily involve several tasks. The first task of the exegete is to examine the content of the text under investigation. The exegete must determine what the writer said by investigating: (a) The actual words of the author (textual criticism), (b) the meaning of those words (lexical data), and (c) the relation of those words to each other (grammar/syntax).

Then the exegete must try to determine why the writer said what he or she said. This includes: (a) examining the literary context; i.e., why he or she stated it where he or she did in the passage, and (b) the historical context; i.e., understanding the words in light of the background and culture of the author and his or her audience. In summary, by being sensitive to the meaning of the words of a passage or book in the context of its literary and historical setting, the exegete can attempt to recover the original message of the author.

Literary context is what most people mean when they talk about reading something in its context. Essentially, literary context means that words only have meaning in sentences, and for the most part biblical sentences only have meaning in relation to preceding and succeeding sentences. This means it is extremely important to determine the genre of the literature under consideration. In contemporary literature, biography will be read differently from mystery and drama differently from limerick. The type of literature affects how that writing will be approached and interpreted. This applies equally to the Old Testament. Prophecy is a different genre from

proverbial literature. The interpreter must identify the genre of what he or she is trying to interpret and discover as much as possible about that genre. This latter endeavor is approached through a wide variety of critical methodologies, which will be surveyed later on in this lesson.

The historical context, which will differ from book to book, has to do with several things: the time and culture of the author and his or her readers, that is, the geographic, topographical, and political factors that are relevant to the author's setting, and the occasion of the book, letter, psalm, prophetic oracle, or other genre. The most important question of historical context, however, has to do with the occasion and purpose of each biblical book and/or of its various parts. Here one wants to have an idea of what was going on in Israel that called forth such a document, or what the situation of the author was that caused him to write it. Again, this will vary from book to book, but can usually be found (when it can be found) within the book itself.

IV. Critical Methodologies.

In the balance of this lesson, we will be discussing the various ways of addressing the questions and problems modern students and interpreters encounter when exegeting the biblical text. The variety of methods to be discussed merely attests to the richness and diversity of the biblical documents, and these methods should be seen as complementary. No single way of approaching a text should be seen as exhausting the meaning of a passage, but rather as a way of dealing with one particular facet of a passage.

Each of these approaches is treated as a type of "criticism." Criticism is a comprehensive term, embodying a number of techniques employed in the study of (among other things) written documents in order to establish, as far as possible, their original text, the literary categories to which they pertain, style, authorship, date, purpose, and so forth. Biblical criticism embraces various critical disciplines, notably textual criticism, literary criticism, form criticism, rhetorical criticism, redaction criticism, historical criticism, structural analysis, and canonical criticism.

A. Textual Criticism.

The function of textual criticism is the restoration of the original wording of a document when alterations have been introduced (deliberately or inadvertently) in the course of copying and recopying the document by hand through the centuries. If the biblical autograph or original document was still available, scribal errors could be corrected by reference to it. But as the biblical autographs have long since disappeared, and the surviving copies differ from one another here and there, the original wording may be determined only by a careful comparative study of the copies. The main types of scribal errors have to do with accidental errors of the eye and ear, and have been categorized as follows:

1. Confusion of Similar Letters. A frequent cause of variant reading in Old Testament manuscripts and versions is the existence of several Hebrew letters of similar appearance. Here distinction has to be made between the archaic Canaanite script used in preexilic times and the later Aramaic square script. Evidence shows that the letters most susceptible to confusion in the Old Testament transmission history were resh/dalet, he/heth, and waw/yod, though other letters such as beth/kaph, were also misread.

2. Transposition of Letters. This scribal error, technically known as "metathesis", sometimes produces awkward readings as in Psalm 49:11, where the traditional text has "their inward thoughts;" the Septuagint, Peshitta, Targum, and Vulgate, however, all presume the reading

"their tombs," which fits the context much better and is normally adopted by modern commentaries and translations (RSV, NEB, JB, NIV).

3. **Incorrect Word Division.** In manuscripts of continuous script, it is understandable that words can sometimes be divided differently to yield conflicting readings. This is apparently what happened in Jeremiah 23:33, where the Masoretic text reads "what burden" but the Septuagint and Vulgate have divided the words as "you are the burden."

4. **Haplography.** This is the name of an error in manuscript copying in which a syllable, word, or line is omitted by accidental oversight because of the identity or similarity of adjacent material (opposite of dittography).

5. **Dittography.** This is the phenomenon of writing twice what should only have been written once. It is the opposite of haplography. A dittograph is an example of erroneous repetition.

6. **Confusion of Similar-sounding Words.** In addition to the errors of the eye (ocular), other mistakes are best explained as errors of the ear (aural). Two words particularly vulnerable to this kind of confusion were the Hebrew words *lo'*, "not," and *lo*, "his/its."

7. **Deliberate Scribal Intervention.** Sometimes there was a deliberate alteration of the text for purposes of clarification, correction, and apologetic.

Once the interpreter has reached a decision about the wording of the passage under consideration, another set of questions arise that has to do with the literary context of the passage. This encompasses the field of literary criticism.

B. Literary Criticism.

Literary criticism is a term that means different things to different people. However, it has three major definitions according to its historical, technical, and contemporary usage. It may refer either to (1) a particular approach to the analysis of Scripture that appeared in systematic form in the nineteenth century (often called source criticism) and which, considerably refined, is still practiced today (2) that investigation of a text that seeks to explicate the intention of the author through a detailed analysis of the component elements and structure of the text itself; or, quite broadly, to (3) any undertaking which attempts to understand biblical literature simply as literature, often in a manner paralleling the interests and methods of contemporary literary critics.

Such matters as the location of the passage within a larger literary unit and how it functions within this larger unit are often crucial in interpreting a passage. Since most of the biblical documents were originally written to be read aloud, this becomes a most important consideration, for this required ancient authors to be intentional and careful in how they composed and structured documents.

C. Form Criticism.

If literary criticism deals with how the passage relates to its larger literary unit, form criticism is more narrowly concerned with the passage itself. The father of form criticism was Hermann Gunkel, a German Old Testament scholar best known for his study of the Psalms. Form criticism seeks to recover the shorter oral compositions from which the Bible's written sources supposedly derived. The Bible contains a rich diversity of literary forms and genres and many of these

already existed prior to their actual appearance in the biblical text. For this reason, questions of the original setting of particular literary forms and genres are also crucial as one attempts to determine the "life situation" of a passage. Thus, Gunkel and his disciples claimed that the original setting of most of the psalms was the temple in Jerusalem.

Eventually, Old Testament form criticism began to focus more on the literary types of the present written text rather than on the Bible's oral pre-stages, with special attention being given to the literary form or genre of the passage, a parable, a prophetic oracle, a hymn, and so forth. Attention to these questions has arisen because of the recognition that form and the meaning are directly related; one reads a poem one way, a piece of prose another.

D. Rhetorical Criticism.

Rhetorical criticism is a term adopted in 1968 by the late Old Testament scholar James Muilenburg to denote a methodological approach to Scripture designed to supplement that of form criticism. Its task, he suggested, is to exhibit the structural patterns employed in the fashioning of a literary unit, whether prose or poetry, and to discern the various devices (such as parallelism, anaphora, etc.) by which the predications of the composition were formulated and ordered into a united whole ("Form Criticism and Beyond," *Journal of Biblical Literature*, 88 [March 1969], pp. 1-18). Questions of composition and structure are also dealt with here, as well as questions relating to the rhetorical style and mood of the passage.

E. Redaction Criticism.

Redaction criticism is best defined as the attempt to lay bare the theological perspectives of a biblical writer by analyzing the editorial (redactional) and compositional techniques and interpretations employed in shaping and framing the written and/or oral traditions at hand (see Luke 1:1-4). As used in biblical exegesis, redaction criticism refers to that stage of interpretation whose primary focus is the final written form or composition of a passage. It pertains to the final stage of the tradition, as it were, that has become crystallized in written form and asks what the author or final editor intended to say through the passage in its final form. Redaction criticism presupposes the insights and perspectives of textual criticism and form criticism.

Both redaction criticism and canonical criticism, by calling special attention to the final literary form of the biblical text, provide useful perspectives for the interpreter interested in the theological message of the biblical writings or the final canonical viewpoint as it has come to be expressed and formulated by the author or editor.

F. Historical Criticism.

Historical criticism, when narrowly defined, deals with the historical setting of a document: the time and place in which it was written; its sources, if any; the events, dates, persons, and places mentioned or implied in the text; etc. Its goal is the writing of a chronological narrative of pertinent events, revealing where possible the nature and interconnection of the events themselves. The historical criticism of documents proceeds on the basis of two related assumptions or perspectives. These may be designated as the internal and external historical aspects of a document. The internal historical aspects of a document are related to the historical and cultural dimensions described or depicted in the texts. The external historical aspects of a document are related to the historical, cultural, and biographical context in which the document was produced.

G. Structural Analysis.

Structural analysis is a method of analyzing data that arose in several disciplines within the humanities and social sciences, most notably anthropology, sociology, and linguistics, as well as in the study of literature. Its name derives from its analysis of "deep structures" inherent in human cultures and language that remain constant despite immense diversity of "surface structures." In literature, "deep structures" refer to the underlying functions, motives, and interactions among the main characters and objects in a narrative, and, most notably, the types of oppositions and their resolutions that develop as the text unfolds. "Surface structures" include plot, theme, motifs, and characterization; or in poetry, meter, rhyme, parallelism, and so on. Structural analysis deliberately ignores the historical background of a text and instead seeks to show universally recurring features in narratives from all cultures and eras. These features reveal a text's most fundamental meaning, irrespective of its author's conscious intention. In other words, for structuralists meaning resides not in the largely irrecoverable mental processes of a text's human author but in the actual words of the text itself.

H. Canonical Criticism.

James A. Sanders coined the term "canonical criticism" (*Torah and Canon*, Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1972) to denote a method of biblical criticism that operates subsequent to form and redaction criticism and seeks to determine the function of biblical texts in their historical contexts and investigates the nature of their authority. The essence of canonical criticism, as practiced by Sanders, lies in discerning the hermeneutics by which the ancient traditions were adapted for use in new contexts.

The term "canonical criticism" is also frequently applied to the approach to interpretation advocated by Brevard Childs (*Introduction to the Old Testament as Scripture*, Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1979). With Sanders, Childs shares a broad definition of canon, a concern for the theological significance of the biblical texts, and a concern for the function of the biblical texts within the community of faith that preserved and treasured them. Contrary to Sanders, Childs does not seek to determine the hermeneutics employed in the canonical process. Rather, the stance developed by Childs focuses on the shape and function of the final canonical text. According to Childs, this final shape is of special significance because (1) it alone displays the full history of revelation witnessed to by Scripture; (2) in it the community has exercised its critical judgment on the received traditions and modified them accordingly; and (3) by showing how the texts were actualized by generations removed from the original event and composition of the writings, the canonical shape may provide a hermeneutical key as to how we may actualize the text in our day.

V. Conclusion: Analysis and Synthesis.

The exegetical task may be said to fall into two fairly well-defined stages: analysis and synthesis. As the interpreter begins the task of exegesis, examining different aspects of the passage, whether they are literary, rhetorical, historical or whatever, will serve as a way of "breaking down" the passage into its component parts and problems and examining them as discrete units and issues. These separate analytic tasks will normally overlap, for each will inform the other.

As analysis takes place, the interpreter's understanding of the passage will gradually increase and the groundwork will be laid for synthesis. Synthesis, here, means the process by which the interpreter again "puts together" the text. The task is now to relate the preliminary analytical investigations to each other, weighing the significance of each, and deciding how each one will contribute to the overall interpretation of the text at hand.

21-Daniel - The Power Of Faithfulness

Daniel: The Power of Faithfulness - Good Men in Bad Times - Lesson 1.

I. Overview of the Book.

The book of Daniel is noteworthy for its bifid structure. "Bifid" means organized into two obviously distinct parts. The first six chapters of the book of Daniel talk about Daniel's experiences, how he and his friends and associates were taken into captivity, and were transported to Babylon, settled there, and impressed into the civil service of Babylon.

The second half of the book, on the other hand, is talking about Daniel's visions. It is in that category of literature that we call apocalyptic. With chapter 7, there comes the descriptions of Daniel's visions, how he saw hidden truth revealed, how within that category that we call apocalyptic, there were symbols of things and images and the sweep of history described. What was hidden from the average person, that is, God's future plan, was shown to this prophet Daniel so that he might pass them on in comfort to the people of God in reassurance. The book really has two different sections to it; they both involve Daniel, but one is a story about him in chapters 1-6 and the other is prophecy from him in this apocalyptic vein in chapters 7-12.

II. History of Daniel (1:1-21).

A. Exiled to Babylon.

Chapter 1 begins with the story of his being taken into Babylon. Now Daniel may have been taken into Babylon even earlier than Ezekiel. Ezekiel was taken into Babylonian captivity in one of the early waves of captivity, in 598 B.C., and Daniel may have gone into exile at that time. But it is also quite possible that Daniel was taken into captivity even earlier in one of the very small token captivities that the Babylonians imposed upon the Judeans. The Babylonian practice was often to take some nobles, some members of the royal family, some of the capable leaders in the society, some of the best craftsmen, and exile them, and use them for their own benefit back in Babylon. This was useful to the Babylonians from a selfish point of view, but was also a warning to the population that they were conquering, that "we will take the rest of you just like we have taken these few people, if you do not kowtow to us, and if you do not pay our heavy toll, taxes, and tribute."

B. In Service to the King.

We find Daniel at the turn of the century, sometime around 600 B.C., in Babylon. We find him there placed into the service of the king, Nebuchadnezzar. We also find his three associates, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah, whom we better know from the names they were given in Babylon and most commonly used: Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. It was the practice of the Babylonians, as many conquering peoples did, to take the cream of the crop of their conquered countries and give them jobs in Babylon. They needed people who knew the local languages of all the territories that they conquered, and there were dozens and dozens of languages and dialects. They needed them as translators, they needed them as advisors, and they needed them to write letters and to compose documents that would relate to the administration of the Babylonians over those conquered territories.

But, they also needed them actually as civil servants, as members of the diplomatic corp, as functionaries within what we might call the Department of State. Daniel and Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego were groomed for this kind of purpose. Immediately, the faithfulness of Daniel and his associates shows and that faithfulness gets Daniel a reputation. Among other things, something so simple as their diet is of significance. The government is happy to feed these

people what they think are the very best foods, what we would think might constitute something of a junk-food diet, but Daniel says, "No, just give us vegetables. We will eat good, solid vegetables; we will not eat your rich, refined foods."

C. Four Servants of Yahweh,

At the end of a period of time (as we know in our day with a bit of knowledge of nutrition as we have it), Daniel looked a lot better than the others who were being groomed for government. He looked a lot healthier with all those vitamins and minerals in him and, as a result, impressed people. But that is only a symbol, a token of the fact that here was a person who was upright in character, who was mannerly, who was responsible, who worked hard to complete the assignments given to him; and so the king took notice of these people.

We are told he found none equal to Daniel and Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, so they entered the king's service. In every matter of wisdom and understanding about which the king questioned them, he found them ten times better than all the magicians and enchanters in his whole kingdom. The Babylonians, like their predecessors the Assyrians, were people who engaged a great deal in what we call the occult. They thought anybody who could do tricks or do magic or claimed to be able to do so was worth listening to. But here these young Jews were, in fact, ten times better because they spoke with the wisdom of God, not the trickery and cleverness and gimmickry of magicians and soothsayers and the like.

III. Nebuchadnezzar's First Dream: An Awesome Statue (2:1-49).

A. Joseph and Daniel: A Comparison.

In chapter 2, we read of a dream that Nebuchadnezzar had. Daniel is somewhat like Joseph. In the book of Genesis, Joseph is given by God the special ability to interpret dreams, and it allows him to advance in the civil service and become more and more prominent in a captivity of the Israelites in Egypt. Daniel does effectively the same, as God recreates that same kind of situation in the captivity of the Israelites in Babylon. Joseph was kind of an advance man for the people of Israel going down into Egypt, and Daniel is kind of an advance man for them, as they, much later, will be taken into captivity in Babylon.

B. Tell Me My Dream.

Nebuchadnezzar's dream is not all that complicated a dream in terms of what he saw; it was a dream of a statue that had various parts to it. Apparently, Nebuchadnezzar had been growing suspicious of the magicians and Chaldean soothsayers who alleged they could interpret dreams. After he had this dream that deeply impressed itself upon him, because, of course, God made it so, he wanted his advisors to not only interpret the dream, which they could easily have done (they could have made up an interpretation after thinking it over for a day), but he wanted to see if they really knew their stuff. So he said, "Do not just give me the interpretation, but tell me what my dream was."

Well the king's advisors' reaction was, "Nobody can do this, O king! There is no way that anybody can do that, no astrologer, no enchanter, no diviner, no magician can ever do such a thing. This is impossible! You are telling us to tell you what the dream was, let alone its interpretation." Well, there was a plan to put to death all the advisors to the king, all the wise men. But Daniel said, "Please give me a chance." He appeared before the king, and acknowledging his total indebtedness to God to do so, he not only told the king what he had dreamed, but also what the interpretation was.

C. The Interpretation.

The interpretation of the dream had to do with the various successive kingdoms that would come upon the earth, the final kingdom being the kingdom of God's people, the saints of the most high. Now, Daniel was firmly established as one who could represent the truth and then gain the favor of King Nebuchadnezzar. So here you have a very tyrannical king, a despot, one who subjugated nations under his wrath, one who would be the conqueror of Judah and Jerusalem. But you also have Daniel, a righteous individual knowing God's will and able to function as God's prophet, in there to help the king understand what the truth would be, but all the more so to help the Israelites, the true people of God (and us many centuries later), understand what God's truth would be, what God's plan was among the nations of the world and among their empires.

IV. Nebuchadnezzar's Pride: Worship My Image (3:1-30).

In the third chapter, King Nebuchadnezzar, in his typical arrogance, sets up a statue of himself, which he wants people to worship. It is only partly of himself, but he is getting this kind of obeisance from the people, and insists that when they hear the music that introduces the worship times, they are to bow down to the statue. Daniel and Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego are not going to do it; and in particular, it is the three advisors who are functioning in this case. Daniel is not prominent in this story. The king finds out that they have not been bowing down to him and has them put to the punishment that he prescribes for it, the heating up of a super furnace, a great big, hot furnace.

Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego are thrown in, but they do not die; indeed, it appears that an angel comes and accompanies them. Some people have mistakenly interpreted the words of Nebuchadnezzar to be describing Christ in that fiery furnace. He says, "one like a son of god." This terminology in Babylonian and Hebrew is for an angel, not necessarily the Son of God. But at any rate, God delivers them miraculously, and they come out with not even the smell of fire on their clothing. This causes Nebuchadnezzar to praise the God of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, and to promote them. So Daniel on the one hand and Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego are beginning to rise up in the civil service. They are becoming administrators, not just local functionaries but now have substantial administrative responsibilities within the empire.

V. Vision and Humbling of Nebuchadnezzar (4:1-37).

In chapter 4, there is a vision of a great tree, which Daniel again interprets for the king. This interpretation allows the king, and those involved, and us, to see again that God will control things in such a way that even Nebuchadnezzar will be subject to God's control. It is a reminder that even the most wicked, despotic, and powerful emperor is fully subject to God and will do only what God allows him to do.

VI. Handwriting on the Wall (5:1-30).

A. Belshazzar Parties.

In chapter 5, there is the famous story of the handwriting on the wall. The time is now just near 540 B.C., when the Babylonians are going to be conquered by the Persians. The Persians have already taken a lot of the Babylonian Empire away and they are marching on Babylon. Irresponsibly, Belshazzar, and thousands of his nobles, are getting drunk and feasting. It is sort of going down into defeat, blotted from any real responsibility for the situation. At the feast, to their horror, they see just a hand without any arm or body attached to it, and that hand is writing something on the wall. The words can be interpreted variously; nobody can figure them out until Daniel is brought in, but he explains that it is the end of the kingdom.

B. Babylon Falls.

That very night, indeed the city of Babylon fell to the Persians, who were round about it; Daniel's words were, in fact, the true ones. His interpretation of that laconic, terse writing on the wall did explain what the future would be. This meant, of course, that now that the Babylonians had been conquered, it was the new empire that was in charge and Daniel would now relate to them.

VII. Daniel Under Darius (6:1-28).

A. Persian Control.

The new empire was that of the Persians. So Daniel had probably been born during the time that the Assyrians were in power. He had lived most of his life under the Babylonians, but now as an older adult he was coming into his own as an advisor to yet another group of people, this time the Persians. We see, in chapter 6, Daniel functioning with King Darius.

Darius had Daniel as his virtual prime minister, very parallel to the situation with Joseph in the book of Genesis again. But Darius got talked into a rather foolish decree. It was the practice of the Medes and the Persians that if they made a law, they could not change it; they had to let that law stand. This was an attempt to have law stability, but it also could make it very difficult if you could never repeal a law. Darius made the law, as he was flattered into doing so, that no one could make any prayer or petition to any god or king except him for a month.

B. Daniel's Loyalty to God.

Daniel's loyalty was always to God. He would do anything he could to help and promote and benefit those who he was working with. He was loyal and faithful and hard working as an advisor and in his responsibilities in the kingdom of Darius, the kingdom of the Persians. But he was not going to compromise on his faith. So that decree he could not keep; and as usual he went to his home and he faced Jerusalem in symbolic significance of his loyalty to the Lord, the God of Israel, and he prayed to Him. When this was found out, people turned him in (this was something that they had wanted to do all along) and said, "Look, he has violated your law."

Now Darius, who liked Daniel and was glad to have him as his prime minister, did not know what to do. But basically, he had no choice except to throw Daniel into the lion pit where the punishment was death, because the lions were fed that way. The next morning, when the king rushed to the lion pit to see if by any chance this man of God with such a reputation, with all these amazing skills, with this dream interpreting ability, and with this faithfulness that he was famous for, might be alive. He found Daniel to be just fine. We know he had not made any law against throwing those who had turned Daniel in, who had plotted against him in the first place, into the den of lions; and when they were thrown in, they were grabbed by the lions before hitting the ground and devoured.

That is the end of the stories about Daniel. They are stories of God's providence and protection, stories of how Daniel and his associates Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego stayed faithful, stayed steady, stayed obedient, loved God, and cared first for His kingdom above any other, even though they came to prominence in the greatest kingdom of that day.

VIII. Daniel's Vision of the Four Beasts (7:1-28).

Then the second part of the bifid structure kicks in, as it were, and here comes the apocalyptic materials in chapters 7-12. Daniel has dreams and visions. There is a dream/vision in chapter 7 about four weird animals, all of them represent kingdoms that give way to God's kingdom.

IX. Vision of Ram and Male Goat (8:1-27).

In chapter 8, he has a vision of a ram and a male goat. But as you read about the vision and study what is in there and how God gives him an understanding of it, we begin to see that this vision tells us that even the kingdom that he was not part of, the kingdom of the Medes and the Persians, would eventually pass away. What kingdom would replace it? Well, indeed, the kingdom of God under the jurisdiction of His Messiah, the saints of God are going to win, they are the ones. It is being revealed in this apocalyptic literature who is going to have the final rule. We know how the New Testament shows us this coming and fulfillment, as the books of the New Testament describe the reign of the people of God along with Christ, in His kingdom.

X. Vision of the Seventy "Sevens" (9:1-27).

Chapter 9 contains some material classic of apocalyptic. There are some numbers involved in a prediction of seventy weeks. Basically, the purpose of this prediction housed in terms of seventy weeks is to describe a desolation that is going to come before the last, great, final victory of God. This is important for us, because that desolation is something that we know goes on in the world. These are not things that are predicted only as if they have no connection with us, but they are ways of talking about the march of history that affects us as well as those in the future. The wonderful thing is that in the final analysis, when the end finally comes and all the desolations have been done away with, then there will be blessing as we have it described for us in the final part of the book, chapters 10-12.

XI. Daniel's Final Vision (10:1-12:13).

A. Israel's Future (10:1-11 :45).

Chapter 10 is especially fascinating because it says that in the third year of Cyrus, who of course was the first of the great Persian kings, Daniel had a special revelation in which he saw a great figure, a very large figure there: a man dressed in linen, with a belt of the finest gold around his waist, his body shining like chrysolite, his face like lightning, his eyes like torches, and so on, a brilliant, bright picture. And the sound when he speaks was like that of a multitude speaking, a tremendous roaring voice as this person speaks. Well, is this a vision of God? No, it does not turn out to be, because as we read on we find that this appears to be the angel Gabriel. And what does Gabriel talk about?

Well, he talks about the fact that God is working out His purposes in and among the nations and empires of the world. He says, "Since the first day that you set your mind to gain understanding and to humble yourself before your God, your words were heard." In other words, "Daniel, your prayers have made a difference. God's been listening to all those prayers." And he says, "I, Gabriel, have come in response to them. But the prince of the Persian kingdom resisted me for twenty-one days. Then Michael, one of the chief princes (that is, the archangel Michael in the Bible), came to help me, because I was detained here with the king of Persia. Now I have come to explain to you what will happen to your people in the future, for the vision concerns a time yet to come."

What is going on here? The answer is that Daniel is being allowed to see that God's angels are at work in the world. They are influencing the king; they are taking care of Cyrus and what his needs are. They are suppressing his bad tendencies; they are keeping him from being worse than he actually is; they are channeling his efforts to the good. They are influencing what Media and Persia do; they are influencing the shape of things for the future. And of course, one of the wonderful things that they did was to influence Cyrus to make that famous decree that we read

about at the end of 2 Chronicles and the beginning of the book of Ezra, the decree that the captured peoples go home and that specifically, the Jews could go back to Judah and could rebuild the temple, and it would even be financed, in part, by money from the Persian treasury.

God was at work among His people. Even though they had been captured, and were exiled, and were under foreign domination, this was not something that God did not know about. It did not represent a defeat for God. He was not limited in His power. We see further in these chapters how God's angels influence, in general, the affairs of men, how they make sure that no nation, no matter how evil, gets too evil. They make sure that the worst sorts of things that people might do on the earth are prevented. Now there are various kings who will come and go; even the part of the story of the kingdom of Greece is described for us. But, in the final analysis, no matter what these kings do, no matter what they think they are able to do, no matter how these empires take shape, they are all subject to God. He is always in charge. Everything that happens, He superintends and sees to and checks properly, as it needs to be checked and overseen.

B. End Times (12:1-13).

These visions are visions of Israel's future and the end times, and there is a wonderful encouragement for all of us in chapter 12, the last chapter of the book. What we see in this prediction from Gabriel is this: "At that time Michael, the great prince who protects your people, will arise. There will be a time of distress such as has not happened from the beginning of nations until then." That distress, of course, was earlier on in the book described as well. "But at that time your people, everyone whose name is found written in the book (what we know as the book of life from the New Testament book of Revelation), will be delivered. Multitudes who sleep in the dust of the earth will awake: some to everlasting life, others to shame and everlasting contempt. Those who are wise will shine like the brightness of the heavens, and those who lead many to righteousness, like the stars for ever and ever." What a hope! What a future from the book of Daniel!

22-Amos Hosea And Michah - God Proclaims Sins Consequences

Daniel-Micah: Studies of Integrity - Good Men in Bad Times - Lesson 2

Amos, Hosea and Micah: God Proclaims Sin's Consequences & Forgiveness' Benefits.

I. Book of Amos.

A. Introduction: Prophet and Setting.

In this segment of our course, we look at three eighth-century prophets: Amos, Hosea, and Micah. Amos and Hosea prophesied in the north among the northern ten tribes, and Micah prophesied in the south. Amos was a southerner who was involved in agribusiness. He describes himself, in chapter 7, as a shepherd and also as a fig pricker, someone who was in the business of providing the little pricks to the figs that caused them to fluff up and become more juicy as they matured. He was a southerner traveling in the north who undoubtedly went to various fields in his business, and also stayed in and around the cities and towns of the region of the north that is called Samaria. While there, he observed much social injustice; and God called him, as well as the other eighth-century prophets, to preach against that social injustice.

What was the nature of it? Well, what had happened in Israel was something that should never have happened. People ignored the covenant law; they ignored the law that God had given His people through Moses. That law provided for equitable distribution of the land and the access of every citizen to a portion of land. It also emphasized the fact that the rich had a responsibility not to take things away from the poor, and provided elaborate regulations to protect poor people from getting even poorer at the hands of those who manipulated them.

But sadly, by the eighth century B.C. in Israel, these laws were no longer considered useful or valuable by most of the people; and as a result, large numbers of people who had been impoverished in the countryside had left their farms and had moved to the cities. There, they were absolutely dependent upon whatever jobs they could get. The rich were buying up the farms that had been abandoned and were adding, as Isaiah says at one place, "field to field and house to house."

As they got richer, they wanted even more, and they developed a class system. They developed not only the nobility and the rest of the citizenry, but the nobility and then the upper classes, and then the middle classes, and then the lower classes. One way people could make money was to sell any sort of product or foodstuff to the poor in the cities at tremendous rates. Those who had the farms in the countryside could get that produce, bring it into the cities, sell it where more and more of the population was concentrated (at greatly inflated prices), make tremendous profits for themselves, but keep the poor even poorer.

B. Pronouncements of Judgment (Am 1:1-2:16).

Amos was inspired by God to speak out against that. In the first two chapters of the book of Amos, we find oracles, that is, prophetic messages of judgment, against Israel's neighbor states. And so Damascus, the capital of Syria, is condemned by God for its several sins. Gaza and other cities of the Philistines are condemned for their several sins, and so for Tyre, the great Phoenician city, and so for the Edomites, and so for the Ammonites, and also for Moab.

Then all of a sudden in Amos 2:4, we find Judah added to the list: "For three sins of Judah, even for four, I will not turn back my wrath. Because they have rejected the law of the Lord and have not kept his decrees, because they have been led astray by false gods", and then extensive

judgment on Israel. It becomes clear, in fact, that these other prophecies against foreign nations were used to lead into a prophecy against Israel as if it, too, were a foreign nation, because in effect that is what it had become. It had become a nation that no longer trusted, believed in, or obeyed the laws of its Lord.

So we find, "For three sins of Israel, even for four, I will not turn back my wrath. They sell the righteous for silver, and the needy for a pair of sandals (the practice of taking those people who are so poor that they no longer could even have food to eat because they could not buy it, and getting money for them by selling them into slavery). They trample on the heads of the poor as upon the dust of the ground, and deny justice to the oppressed. Father and son use the same girl and so profane my holy name." There are instances not only of the denial of justice to people who are oppressed, but also the practice of cultic prostitution, father and son "using the same girl."

"They lie down beside every altar on garments taken in pledge. In the house of their god", in other words, "not Me, but their god, they drink wine taken as fines," says the Lord. So these people getting rich off the poor were then engaging in the debauched excessive practices of idolatrous religion. And so God says that because of all of this kind of thing, "I will crush you as a cart crushes when loaded with grain. The swift will not escape, the strong will not muster their strength, and the warrior will not save his life. The archer will not stand his ground, the fleet-footed soldier will not get away, and the horseman will not save his life. Even the bravest warriors will flee naked on that day," declares the Lord."

In other words, "Judgment is coming against you in the form of war, Israel. You are going to be beaten in war; you are going to be conquered." And that was Amos' message to northern Israel. Now Amos also included, from time to time, words against Judah in his prophecies, so he was not simply addressing only the northern ten tribes. As he began to preach around 760 B.C., we believe, he was in fact announcing what would be accelerated by the coming of the Assyrian Empire. When Amos preached, the Assyrians were dormant; they were not much of a power. But by the time he concluded his prophecies, just distantly on the scene was the possibility of a resurgence of the long-dormant Assyrian Empire.

In fact, a few years after the time that Amos completed his preaching (that is, sometime around 745 B.C.), under the great Assyrian king Tiglath-Pileser III the Assyrians did begin to build an empire that began stretching closer and closer to Israel. By 722 B.C., long after Amos had finished his preaching, but within decades of the way his words rung in the ears of the Israelites and often stung as their reactions to him indicate, the whole territory of the northern ten tribes had fallen to Assyria and was no more a nation.

C. Judgments Against Israel and Judah (Am 3:1-6:14).

After chapters 1-2, there are four chapters (chapters 3-6) about judgments against Israel of various sorts. The prophet preached again and again, in this way and that, about the need for judgment upon the people of God. He included, from time to time, Judah in those announcements of doom. Listen to this example from chapter 6: "Woe to you who are complacent in Zion, and to you who feel secure on Mount Samaria", things were going well; it was relatively prosperous for the upper classes; they did not think the Assyrians would ever reach them, "you notable men of the foremost nation, to whom the people of Israel come! Go to Calneh and look at it; go from there to great Hamath, and then go down to Gath in Philistia." These were all destroyed places by the time Amos preached. "Are they better off than your two

kingdoms? Is their land larger than yours? You put off the evil day and bring near a reign of terror. You lie on beds inlaid with ivory and lounge on your couches. You dine on choice lambs and fattened calves. You strum away on your harps like David You drink wine by the bowlful . . . but you do not grieve over the ruin of Joseph. Therefore you will be among the first to go into exile; your feasting and lounging will end."

D. Visions and Restoration Promise (Am 7:1-9:15).

In chapters 7-9, there are five visions. Amos was a visionary; he saw pictures of what might happen. All of those pictures were of destruction, of doom, of God's judgment against His people. The book ends, however, with just a small section of hope and restoration for Israel. Chapter 9:11 -15 is the only part of the book that is really hopeful or positive, as we might say it. Even though Amos was called to warn the people that their sins were finding them out, and that they would go into exile, would be destroyed as a people and as an independent nation, he wants them to know that God's faithfulness will one day visit them again. Long after many in his audience were dead, God would indeed restore the people of Israel to Himself.

He says these words in contrast to the great bulk of his preaching of woe: "'The days are coming,' declares the Lord, 'when the reaper will be overtaken by the plowman and the planter by the one treading grapes. New wine will drip from the mountains and flow from all the hills. I will bring back my exiled people Israel.'" So there is hope, always hope, because a faithful God, faithful to His promises to punish when His covenant is violated is also faithful to His promise never to utterly destroy His people, but always to provide for a remnant through whom His Word will work, through whom His Spirit will be manifest, and who will know the blessings of the Messiah in the coming age.

II. Book of Hosea.

A. Overview.

With the book of Hosea, we encounter another northern prophet, but this one is a native northern prophet of the eighth century B.C. Hosea was a virtual contemporary of Amos, probably beginning to preach around 753 B.C. or so, just a few years after Amos had begun to preach (around 760 B.C.). Hosea was called by God to announce or presage the events to take place in his lifetime by the way that he named his children. He is told to marry a "woman of prostitution," which does not mean a prostitute because it goes on to say, "have children of prostitution", because the whole land is involved in prostitution in departing from the Lord.

This is a characteristic use of the concept of prostitution as we find it in many places in the Old Testament, especially in Hosea and also Ezekiel. It is used metaphorically. The idea behind it is this: A prostitute is kind of all the time unfaithful, repeatedly unfaithful, professionally unfaithful, and unfaithful sexually because of the gain involved. God's people are often described as engaging in "prostitution", that is, for the advantages that they perceive elsewhere, for what they think they can get from the gods and goddesses they believe in, they abandoned the Lord and His covenant and His Word.

So it is not that, in fact, Hosea married a woman of ill-repute, but rather that the whole north was so involved in idolatry and in the other cult practices associated with it, including syncretism, the melding together of beliefs and a materialistic life-style that idolatry encourages, and so on, that anybody he married and any children he had would be tainted by that powerful system so rife in the entire culture. His children get names that symbolize the judgment that is coming: Jezreel, the famous battles of Jezreel of the past made Jezreel a name something like Pearl Harbor, in

other words a place where awful destruction and disaster would come; or the name for one of his children, Lo-Ruhamah, "no mercy"; or the name for his final child, Lo-Ammi, "not my people," because God predicts the fulfillment of the covenant promise of judgment in the form of rejection in these words, "Call him Lo-Ammi, for you are not my people, and I am not your God." Here the rejection of the people is predicted, as God plans to have them conquered and exiled to have their land lie waste for a long time.

B. Israel and God (Hos 1:1-3:5).

Chapters 1-3 in the book of Hosea mention in some way or another family relationships. Chapter 2 contains a lengthy and powerful allegory of God's relationship to Israel in which Israel is described as always running away from Him, always unfaithful, always going after her lovers, that is, the gods and goddesses that she thought were giving her agricultural abundance. In the system of idolatry the concept was that if you fed the gods by your food offerings they would in turn exercise their power to give you abundance agriculturally. That was the quid pro quo; that was the deal of the concept of idolatry; in chapter 2 Hosea describes this, as he is inspired to do so in poetic fashion with the idea that Israel thinks her lovers, her false gods, have given her everything.

God predicts various punishments that will come, including "taking away my grain when it ripens and my new wine when it is ready. I will take back my wool and my linen, intended to cover her. I will expose her before the eyes of her lovers; no one will take her out of my hands. I will stop her celebrations." All these are predictions of the time of exile. One might think that the whole poem was going to continue in that vein, but suddenly there is a surprise ending. God says in verse 14, "Therefore I am now going to allure her; I will lead her into the desert and speak tenderly to her. There I will give her back her vineyards . . . There she will sing as in the days of her youth, as in the days she came up out of Egypt. In that day, you will call me 'my husband'; you will no longer call 'my baal,'" "my Lord," or "master" referring to the name of the false gods, the Baals. In other words, after His punishment God will show mercy once again to His people.

Chapter 3 describes a marriage to another woman, a second wife. It describes the way in which he does not even consummate that marriage, as a symbol of the way that the Israelites will be far from those things they love and their God that they love when they are placed into exile.

C. Oracles of Judgment (Hos 4:1-8:14).

In chapters 4-8, there are many oracles of judgment, judgment for pride, judgment for idolatry, judgment for corruption; and in various ways Hosea is inspired to bring the changes on this unrepentant people who have sowed the wind and are going to reap the whirlwind.

D. Retribution Upon Israel (Hos 9:1-13 :16).

In chapters 9-13, there are more prophecies of doom, especially emphasizing the certainty of divine judgment; and in particular, these often have a retrospective angle to them. Hosea is inspired to look back wistfully on the days when Israel was closer to God, the days closer to the time of the covenant of Moses when the people did tend to have a desire to depend upon the Lord, and to be faithful to Him, and to keep His law, to be eager to know His Word, and to obey it. But sadly, the people have increasingly corrupted themselves so that the nation of Israel deserves doom; Hosea's prophecies appear to go from the 750s all the way down to the 720s when, in fact, the Assyrians did completely wipe out Israel as a nation from the face of the earth,

leaving only little Judah as one tribal territory exempt from being forced into their huge and powerful empire.

E. Future Blessing (Hos 14:1-9).

Chapter 14 describes hope again. It is often the case that prophetic books will have some woe followed by some weal in a pattern. Sometimes there is a lot of woe at the beginning and then weal (the good things to come thereafter), because the prophets are looking at the sweep of history. The immediate future is not bright, but the long-term future in God is always bright. Chapter 14 invites the people to return to Him in fulfillment of what we read about in Deuteronomy chapter 30, the predictions of the return of the Israelites to the Lord after the exile. "Return O Israel, to the Lord your God. Your sins have been your downfall! Take words with you", in other words, words of confession and appeal for forgiveness and repentance, "and return to the Lord. Say to him: 'Forgive all our sins and receive us graciously, that we may offer the fruit of our lips.'" In other words, it is not going to be the sacrifices at the temple that will save them. It will be the words that they ask God with to help them, the appeal for forgiveness. This, of course, is what we have in Christ: our confession of sins, our calling upon the name of the Lord, our expression of desire to be repentant and to follow His ways. That is what Hosea anticipates when he predicts the repentance of the people in the future age.

III. Book of Micah.

A. Prediction of Judgment (Mic 1:1-3:12).

The prophet Micah follows along on the concepts that one finds in Amos and Hosea. In the prophet Micah, there are three progressions of woe, and then weal. In chapters 1-2, there are descriptions: in chapter 1, of the punishment of Samaria and Judah, and part of chapter 2, punishment on an oppressive nation. Then the bulk of the ending of chapter 2 is about reunification and an increase under the Lord's blessing. So it is woe, then followed by weal; it is the bad news first and the good news, the eventual restoration blessings, thereafter. In chapters 3-5 of this relatively short book, chapter 3 starts with woe. There is the prediction of the fall of the corrupt nation. Micah is preaching to Judeans; he does not preach in the north, and he is limiting most of his comments, not all but most, to Judah and Jerusalem, to the southern territory. His condemnation of corrupt leaders and of a corrupt capital city, Jerusalem, is very powerful in chapter 3.

B. Prediction of Restoration (Mic 4:1-5:15).

Then in chapters 4-5, we have predictions of the restoration, the eventual restoration, of Zion, and of the peace that will accompany that, of God's protection for Zion that increasingly is symbolizing the presence of God among His people and the benefits that His people can enjoy: what we would term as "life in Christ." There is the Messiah's birth, that wonderful passage in chapter 5 that tells us it will happen in Bethlehem, in Judea. Then there is the prediction of purification from idolatry at the end of chapter 5, then a final section of woe and weal in 6 and 7.

C. Plea for Repentance (Mic 6:1-7:20).

There is a kind of covenant lawsuit against Israel in chapter 6, in which the prophet imagines that God is like a prosecuting attorney and has called Israel into court. And He is laying out the case against Israel for all its violations of the covenant, all its law breaking, and declaring the nation guilty, and pronouncing a judgement sentence against them as if God had shifted from being the prosecutor now to the judge. With chapter 7 comes again the good news, the weal part of the woe/weal cycle. A lament is the form of that chapter. The lament does not just linger with the complaint and suffering and misery part of things; but it goes on to talk about, with great

emphasis, God's deliverance, the trust, the assurance that God's people will in the future have in Him; and, indeed, their praise of Him as a people who will enjoy His benefits and blessings forever.

23-Ecclesiastes And Song Of Songs - Gods Wisdom Applied To Lifes Daily Realities

Ecclesiastes-Isaiah: God Guides His People Through Poets and Prophets - Lesson 1

Ecclesiastes and Song of Songs: God's Wisdom Applied to Life's Daily Realities.

I. Introduction to Ecclesiastes.

Ecclesiastes is an unusual book. In fact, there have been quite disparate ways of interpreting this book. What kind of a book of the Bible starts out this way: "Meaningless! Meaningless!" says the teacher. "Utterly meaningless! Everything is meaningless"? Well, Ecclesiastes does. What are we to make of this? What is God's purpose in inspiring a book that seems to have so many negative or dour or critical kinds of things to say about life?

II. Overview of Ecclesiastes.

A. Meaninglessness of Life (Ecc 1:1-4:16).

If we take a very quick run through the book, just to give the impression of what is there, we note that in the first chapter we have mention made that seems to say history is merely cynical and that death makes life absurd. Once you die, there is no memory of you. You are not conscious, and you cannot say, "Hey, that was a good life I lived, wasn't it?" You cannot say anything; you cannot even think, you are dead. So in a sense, whether you lived a good or bad life, it does not matter. Once you are dead, you are not there to evaluate it. You are gone; you are dead. Wisdom yields only disappointment. It is even said in this book, "For with much wisdom comes much sorrow; the more knowledge, the more grief."

Chapter 2 of the book seems to be going along that same negative route. Pleasures and projects are meaningless; wisdom and folly, basic categories that are terribly important, are themselves meaningless. Death makes life and work meaningless for the wise and foolish alike. When we come to chapter 3, we get some fatalism, there is a time for this and a time for that; and a time when this happens, a time when that happens; and a time to love and a time to hate; a time for war and a time for peace. That is saying, "You do not control your life. It just sort of happens. These things come as their time comes for you." Or in chapter 4, there is more about how meaningless things are. The writer says that in topics like oppression or envy or materialism or success or career, you just find it is meaningless; it is a chasing after the wind.

B. Exhortations (Ecc 5:1-10:20).

In chapter 5, there is some advice about guarding your steps when you go to the house of God, so certainly worship is not meaningless. "Go near to listen rather than to offer the sacrifice of fools." That sounds perfectly fine, but then when you move on from there, you find that in the latter part of chapter 5 such things as political power or wealth are just meaningless. They have no ultimate meaning. They are empty; if you seek after them, you do not get anything.

Chapter 6 talks about the futility even of God's blessing; the futility of wealth; the futility of long life; the futility of both proverbial wisdom, the kind we find in the book of Proverbs, and also a speculative wisdom, the kind we find discussed in a book like Job. In chapter 7, the small benefits and large limits of wisdom are eloquently described by this obviously rather cynical author. In chapter 9, death is universal and final, so you can try to live authentically, but even one's talent is meaningless, even something as nice and pleasant as the various abilities we possess. In chapter 10, since the future is unknown, all you can do is live in the present the best you can.

C. Fear God (Ecc 11 :1-12 :14).

In chapter 11 , you live in the present if you are young, because when you get old it is hard to enjoy anything or appreciate anything. That is the way it is, says the book. Then all of a sudden, we get this kind of statement: "Now all has been heard; here is the conclusion of the matter: Fear God and keep his commandments, for this is the whole duty of man. For God will bring every deed into judgment, including every hidden thing, whether it is good or evil." That last statement, those last couple of verses, are very important to appreciate the book.

III. Interpretation.

The approach I take is that of some interpreters, though the book is differently interpreted by various people. It is my suggestion that God has inspired Solomon or some other king (we do not know exactly who the author is; he just describes himself as a son of David or a descendant of David) to write for us a picture of what life would look like for a truly thoughtful person if there were no life after death and if there was no judgment. The end of the book says, "Do not miss the point: there is a life after death; there is a judgment; we must live our lives consistent with that awesome and important fact." That is what gives meaning, God's judgment gives meaning to our lives. God is the one who says this is right and that is wrong, these are valuable and those are not.

A. Death.

But if we did not have a God, if we did not have a life after death, if we did not have a judgment, or if we only had a God who had created the earth and got it going and then sort of stood back from it and said, "I will just let people live and when they die, they die." If that were the way things were, then many people might say (as many people have in history, in addition to the writer of Ecclesiastes speaking kind of tongue and cheek in these earlier chapters) life is meaningless. That is what the existentialists have done. Most existentialists have argued that because of death, life, to one degree or another, is absurd. What do they mean by that? How can it be that Nietzsche could say God is dead? What was the point he was trying to make? How could an existentialist say that because of death, life is ultimately meaningless? How can existentialists say, "You just try to live an authentic life; that is all you can hope to live, to live life with passion, to live life with enthusiasm, but you cannot say your life has meaning in any ultimate, firm, and permanent sense"?

Well, they say it because there is truly a despair to life if it is not a life that looks forward to eternal life. One of the realities of Scripture is that we are taught, in all kinds of ways, that this life is a preparation for the next. This life is not an end in itself. That is why it is so dangerous to love this world, because this world is passing away. The place where we belong, the place we are created to be is not this world, but the next. This is where we start our life, but it continues forever in another place. It is terribly important to appreciate that if this life were all there was, it would not be much. Now some people might say, "Okay, I get the idea that if you do not have anything after life, you could say that once you die there is no meaning for you, because you are not alive to think of meaning or to consider meaning or to reflect on meaning. But, does not your impact live on?"

Well, what many people have answered in response to that is, "Yes, but only for a little while. Sure, there are some people who outlive you and who remember you, and your memory has some impact on them or maybe some of the things you have done had a slight impact, but eventually they die too. After enough time has gone by, you are nothing but a name. Nobody knows you personally; you are just one of those old names on a list somewhere. That is not

meaningful. It is certainly not meaningful for you, because you are not around to enjoy the meaning."

That is what I believe is going on in Ecclesiastes. We have the kind of thing that forces us to take a good look at what the value of life would actually be without life after death, without a judgment. What if this were all there was? What if we, like an ant or a chicken, would live for a while and then die? How could we speak of the meaning of life? Would becoming wealthy be meaningful? It certainly might be pleasurable for a time, and the writer of Ecclesiastes does not deny there can be pleasure in a life without an afterlife, but would it be meaningful? Would it be meaningful to be poor? Would it be meaningful to be smart? Would it be meaningful to be undereducated?

B. Life after Death.

In asking this question, the writer forces us to examine how terribly important it is that we have a life after death and a judgment, which does put this life in perspective. It is what God has created that actually makes the approbation for this life good or bad. It is a little bit like, though not exactly like, the situation of the course that ends before turning in the paper, before turning in the final exam, before getting a grade. Sure there is some value to it, but you cannot necessarily tell how well you have done. You want the professor to tell you, "this is how it went." Or, the game gets called off because of rain before enough innings have been played, and there is not a resolution to it. The end of this book is really central to the theme of the whole.

IV. Conclusion to Ecclesiastes.

What good then does Ecclesiastes do us? Well, it does us good in many ways. It really forces us to look at what life is all about, what is important. Where are you getting your values? Are you aware that this life is a preparation for the next and not an end in itself? Often people in settings where intellectuals are involved in considering the Christian life have used Ecclesiastes as an evangelistic tool. They have placed it in people's hands and said, "since you do not believe in a life after death, since you do not believe in a judgment, since you do not believe in a God who will examine your life and decide whether you have done right in His eyes, read the first part of this book and see if it does not, in fact, lay before you in the barest, starkest terms how little you have to look forward to, living only for yourself and only for the present." That is the great danger. There is meaninglessness in that ultimately.

But thanks be to God it is resolved, because there is a life after death; there is a judgment; there is an eternal God. We belong to Him. This life, in this place, on this planet, at this time, is not all there is. So the conclusion answers the question, "Is life meaningless?" And the answer is, "Not for us who know Christ as Lord and Savior. It is full of meaning and always will be."

V. Introduction to the Song of Songs.

The book of Song of Solomon (also often called Song of Songs because that is actually the way it is titled in the Hebrew) is a love poem. Or one might say it is a kind of compound, complex love poem made up of quite a number of individual poems, woven very carefully together. Some scholars used to think that a book like Song of Songs was, in fact, a disparate bunch of poems kind of crammed together. But more recently, scholars have been able to demonstrate the tremendous level of consistency and vocabulary and theme and poetic style and so on.

So you might ask the question, "Why did God put a love poem in the Bible, a big, long, eight-chapter love poem in the Bible, what was His motive here?" We believe that the Scripture is from God for our benefit; these are things He wants us to know. So what is it that we find when we come to the Song of Songs? What kind of benefit is there for us to read about someone

describing the person he loves, and she describing him whom she also loves, and then some other group of friends or acquaintances, who form a kind of a chorus, comment about the two of them or one or another of them?

Well, the answer is first to be found or approached in the fact that God has caused all of us to have a lot of brain cells devoted to sex. This is not the sex act per se, but what we broadly call sex; that is, the whole area of attraction and romance and love and marriage in life. This is a big area for everybody; Proverbs says it is important. Jesus also taught about marriage and about the significance of fidelity in it. It occupies parts of a number of Old Testament and New Testament books. The prophets frequently compare Israel's unfaithfulness to God to the unfaithfulness of a woman to her husband. It is a big issue, and we see in the book of Song of Songs how God has laid this issue before us in a lyrical way; that is, in a musical poem.

VI. A Love Song.

This is what many cultures do. In our own culture, think of what popular music has as its primary theme. Is it not love? Love songs are 99 percent, it seems, of the most popular music. They may not be very brilliant poems. They may be, indeed, what most of us would call doggerel, poor quality, very simplistic poetry, but most songs that are popular are songs about love in some way.

Now that is what people do; it is one of the things on their minds. Love is one of the most powerful impressions; it is one of the factors that cause them to think and act the way that they do. God has advice for us about romance and marriage. God has advice for you about the right way to love somebody.

A. A Wrong Way.

Now let's start from the reverse and ask, "What is the wrong way?" Well, the wrong way is to look at the other person as essentially someone who can give you physical pleasure. That is the way that many people do it. All kinds of people today in our promiscuous age are looking for satisfaction, are looking for pleasure, are looking for delight, are looking even for meaning in sexual liaisons. That is where they think they will find it. There are all kinds of people working for the weekend, and on the weekend going out and looking for somebody to link up with, somebody to have a romance with, somebody to perhaps go to bed with. That is the way they see life; that is the way they see their week.

Newspapers, often advertising magazines, and the Internet have large sections frequently devoted to people trying to find a mate. So you get all these ads: "Divorced white male, age such and such, seeks single, white female, for purposes of whatever." There is a lot of this in our society. It is a good thing that God made us with romantic and sexual attractions, but it is a bad thing if we do not use them in the way that God intended. It is just like fire: you can use it for good purposes to keep warm, or you can use it to burn somebody's house down. And so it is with romance and sexual attraction.

B. A Right Way.

In the song, there are three basic characters: there is a woman and a man and a group that sometimes speaks. What we observe happening is that the woman and the man like each other. Never in this song do they actually consummate their love in sex, not because they will not and not because it is not intended to lead toward a godly marriage, but because this song is not about sexual technique. The Song of Songs assumes that any two people can have sex. That is not

some great accomplishment. What the real accomplishment is: Can two people who love each other do all the things that love requires? And secondly, can they stay in love? That is what this song is about.

It is about doing the proper things that love requires, the godly kind of romance that a couple can have and secondly about continuing that romance. As a pastor, I often do marriage counseling, and one of the common statements I hear when a couple comes to me is worded something like this: "The romance has gone out of our marriage." I have heard it many, many times. So often people get married in a kind of intensity of physical attraction, and then after some time has gone by during their marriage that physical attraction diminishes in some way, and they no longer feel an affinity for one another.

In other words, the act of sex was not enough to maintain the real bond of love, tender, true and powerful, love for one another. So Song of Songs tries to illustrate for us the way it should be. Having sex is not the issue. It is something you can do and must do, only after marriage and only within marriage. But what is important in this book is that two people love each other and show it. This book is about the way you love somebody else and show it to him or her. There are various ways it is portrayed. Sometimes they tell each other how much they like each other. It is very simple, and you can even get some funny descriptions from our point of view.

He tells her that her nose is like the tower of Lebanon, but this is not actually a physical description. What he is saying to her, "When I see your nose upon the face of the one I love so much, it is as impressive to me as seeing the tower of Lebanon from a distance." Sometimes the descriptions we have in the book are of ethereal dream sequences. There is one description in which she is in bed and asleep and dreams that he comes to the door and knocks. She cannot get herself to move fast enough, like those kinds of dreams most of us have where somehow we move very slowly in the dream; we are trying to do something or get out of harm's way and just cannot make it. By the time she finally gets to the door to open it to welcome him in, he is gone. How sad she is he is gone, a way of demonstrating that she really loves him.

VII. Conclusion to Song of Songs.

Some scholars think that this book progresses in such a way that in the middle of the book they actually get married, and then the remainder of the book is talking about their life together as a couple. That may be, but I do not think it is necessary to assume that. The thing to look for in this book is God's lyric illustration for you of how people should be tender to one another, how they should be concerned for one another, how they should do acts of kindness for the one they love, how they should love that person exclusively and never consider being tempted away by others. It is very important, fidelity in love and marriage. Even Solomon in all his splendor does not attract away the young woman from that shepherd boy that she really loves in this beautiful poem. The poem has in it emphases that also come from the words of the so-called friends, the kind of chorus. They look at the man and the woman, and they say things of advice that are encouraging or perhaps questioning.

"Where has your lover gone," the friends say at the beginning of chapter 6, "most beautiful of women? Which way did your lover turn, that we may look for him with you?" This is a way of saying, "This guy is important in your life. If you guys love one another and if you are heading toward marriage as the book assumes, then you ought to think of yourselves as one flesh. You are really going to be a unit; you are going to be together; you are going to be psychologically together and romantically together and physically together. When you get married a new family

will form, and you will separate from your old families respectively. And so, we are concerned with you where your lover is; we do not want you to be apart."

As the book goes on, there is essentially a resolution in which they really come together. And so, at the very end of the book: "Come away, my lover, and be like a gazelle or like a young stag on the spice-laden mountains." "We are off; we are separate; we are like something distant. We do not want not to live in our society, but we want to be closer to each other than we are to any other human being." So we have a love story in the Bible, a lyric poem, and a musical coverage of the theme of proper romance, of real care and exclusive concern for one another. This love is not just a product of sex but is the kind of thing that a marriage ought to start with and ought also to sustain throughout.

24-Isaiah - A Case Study Of Gods Prophetic Voice

Ecclesiastes-Isaiah: God Guides His People Through Poets and Prophets - Lesson 2

Isaiah: A Case Study of God's Prophetic Voice

I. Introduction to Prophetic Literature

A. The Prophets.

With the book of Isaiah, we come to that wonderful and very large block of material in the Old Testament that we call "the Prophets", sixteen books: a group of prophets called the Major Prophets, of which Isaiah is one example. They are called major simply because they are bigger, derived from the Old Latin word *maior* ("major"). Then twelve Minor Prophets are called minor simply because they are shorter, "minor" in the sense of smaller or shorter.

The Prophets have a knowledge of, a sense of, and a deep concern for the sweep of history. Again and again and again when you are reading the Prophets, you have got to be something of a historian. Indeed, it might happen that your study of the Prophets would help you learn to like history and to benefit from it, if it has not been something that you have been inclined toward in the past. The Prophets are not commenting generally on things in some abstract way; they are commenting as God inspires them to do so and gives them the very words to say on the way things are going in this world. They are talking about their world, the world that came before them, the world that is coming after them, the world of the future, and even the time when this world is done away with and the new world will come into being, which we will have if we know Christ as Savior and Lord.

The Prophets recognize, as many other parts of the Bible do, that there really are epochs of history; there are broad times in which God works with people. There was the Creation and the pre-history, the time before God destroyed most humans in the Flood (Genesis 1-11). There was the time of the patriarchs, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and his sons, in Genesis 12-50, in which God worked through His covenant with them. There was the time of the covenant of Moses, made at Mount Sinai and renewed in the book of Deuteronomy, that carried the Israelites all the way through to the time of the exile. Then there was that epoch of destruction and death and deportation. After God's judgment was complete, there was the time of restoration where God's blessings were underway for the new age. Now the prophets also looked forward to the age that we are in. It is what they, and indeed the New Testament writers also, called the latter days or the last days. And the prophets can look forward to eternal life.

B. Prophetic Patterns.

When we study the Prophets, we need to appreciate the fact that they have got the big picture in mind. Particularly, this becomes important because the Prophets sometimes speak of blessing as past and sometimes of blessing as future. They also will typically speak of punishment and distress and hardship as future or past, depending on when the prophet was inspired by God to write. It can be confusing. You may wonder if this prophet is talking about blessing, is this a past blessing or a future blessing? This prophet seems to be saying wrath and destruction is coming in this chapter, but seems to be saying in the chapter that follows it that all kinds of good things are coming. Well, what is going on is simply that the prophet in one chapter or a portion of a chapter is speaking about one of these epochs, and in another place is speaking of another. Knowing the big picture, knowing that the Prophets are looking now at this aspect of history and now at this other aspect of history, will at least alert you to the fact that you have to know which is which. A good commentary, a good Bible aid, will often clue you in as to which is which.

Appreciate, then, the pattern that generally dominates in the Prophets, that of blessing-curse-blessing. The blessing is from the creation of Israel as a people at Mount Sinai right up to 586 B.C. when Israel ceases to be a nation. The era of curse is from 586 to 516 B.C.: from the destruction of the temple Solomon had built to the rebuilding of the new temple, the second temple, and the exile that is covered in that period. The period of blessing that comes afterwards is the period of restoration blessing, which includes our own day; and of course, Jesus of Nazareth is the focal point and the Creator, the one around whose death and resurrection that period of restoration blessing revolves.

II. Isaiah the Prophet.

Isaiah preached in the eighth century and the very early years of the seventh century B.C.; in other words, from the late 700s down to the early 600s B.C. He is one of the earliest prophets, but not the earliest. Hosea is presumably the earliest, or maybe Amos (one of those two), but Isaiah is one of the earliest and his book is certainly massive, 66 chapters. It looks at the period before the exile, the period of original blessing. It looks at the exile and it also looks at the period of the beginning part of the restoration lessons. Then it looks further into the era that we are in, our New Testament era, the idea of the newly created people, the new creation that the New Testament refers to relatively often. So, Isaiah certainly has a lot to say about these various epochs of history.

As a preacher of God's Word, Isaiah is going to be speaking of either "weal" or "woe" most of the time. These two words that begin with "w" are just convenient ways for us to understand the prophetic books. "Weal" is that which is good, things that are nice, things that are positive, things that are happy, things that we will all rejoice in and be comforted by. "Woe," of course, refers to those things that are difficult, hard, negative, disastrous, and so on. Isaiah has a lot of "woe" and a lot of "weal." There is some of each all throughout the material that we have in the sixty-six chapters of his great book.

III. Prophecies of Condemnation (1:1-35:10).

A. Introduction and Early Prophecies (1:1-5:30).

At the beginning, there is a little more woe than weal. Isaiah does have, after the introductory section in which he prophesied against external worship (just going through the forms rather than really loving God and worshiping Him in a heartfelt manner) in chapter 1, a section of what is sometimes called early prophecies. These are in chapters 2-5. These early prophecies contain mention of God's kingdom, the theme of the Day of the Lord, a day in which God intervenes to set things right. So that means if you are not on His side, even if you are Israel and you are not on His side, you are in big trouble. But if you are on His side, He rescues and delivers you. He also preaches in those chapters against haughty women in Jerusalem. An awful lot of the prophecies may seem directed against various male leaders, but there were plenty of influential women who also needed to be brought up short and made right with God.

In chapter 5, we come to a rather famous portion of the book. It is rather famous because it captures in a musical poem some of the essence of what Isaiah says, also very brilliantly in many other places. I want to read just a little part of that to capture some of the flavor. He is speaking for God and he says this, "I will sing for the one I love a song about his vineyard: My loved one had a vineyard on a fertile hillside. He dug it up and cleared it of stones and planted it with the choicest vines. . . . Then he looked for a crop of good grapes, but it yielded only bad fruit. 'Now you dwellers in Jerusalem and men of Judah, judge between my vineyard and me. What more

could have been done for my vineyard than I have done for it? When I looked for good grapes, why did it yield only bad? Now I will tell you what I am going to do to my vineyard: I will take away its hedge, and it will be destroyed; I will break down its wall, and it will be trampled. I will make it a wasteland, neither pruned nor cultivated, and briars and thorns will grow there. I will command the clouds not to rain on it." And then this explanation: "The vineyard of the Lord Almighty is the house of Israel, and the men of Judah are the garden of his delight. And he looked for justice, but saw bloodshed; for righteousness, but heard cries of distress."

So here we have in this poetic format, this musical poem, a song that tells a story. God gave His people all kinds of benefits. He cared for them, he cultivated them as it were, but what did they do? Soon enough, and in various ways for a long time, they turned against His covenant, and they broke His laws. They produced a kind of injustice socially and a wickedness personally that disobedience to God's covenant does lead people to produce. It will be His plan now to get rid of it. He will make that beautiful vineyard into a wasteland. It is the story of Israel. God gave them everything and He looked for them to respond, but instead they broke His covenant. And so now, He is going to send them into exile. He is going to turn their land into a burned-out wasteland, as was indeed the case in Judah when the Babylonians finally did conquer it.

He looked for justice, but He saw bloodshed for righteousness, but He heard cries of distress. If you are a person with a passion for social justice, you will see that Isaiah is too, not because he made it up, but because he is stating the concern for social justice that God Himself has and had at that time. If on the other hand, you are a person with a concern, as you should also have, for personal righteousness, you will see that that is in here, too. If you have a concern for proper worship, you will see this is a big theme in this book. If you have a concern for what God will do in the future to make things right, that is here.

If you have a concern for how God will rescue this world from sin and how He will make provision for people to be able to live righteously, that is here as well in the wonderful predictions of the Messiah. There are just all kinds of things that the book addresses. Isaiah is a person who God allowed to see many, many things.

B. Inaugural Vision (6:1-13).

In chapter 6 comes- his inaugural vision, his commissioning vision. This is where he sees a vision of God in the temple and he hears the sound, "Holy, holy, holy is the Lord Almighty; the whole earth is full of his glory." God calls him to be His preacher, to preach His Word as a prophet. And he says, "Woe to me! I am ruined! For I am a man of unclean lips, and I live among a people of unclean lips, and my eyes have seen the King, the Lord Almighty." Well, God reassures him with a symbolic burning to clean up his lips and sends him out to speak to the Israelites and He says this, "'Be ever hearing, but never understanding.' That is your message that you give to them, Isaiah. 'Ever hearing, but never understanding; ever seeing, but never perceiving.' Make the heart of this people calloused; make their ears dull, close their eyes. Otherwise they might see with their eyes, hear with their ears, understand with their hearts, and turn and be healed."

What is God saying there? Is this some kind of negative thing that Isaiah's supposed to give, an obscure message that will not help anybody to hear the truth or to see it or understand it? No, just the opposite. What God is saying is that the Israelites have become like the idols that they have worshiped. The idols have eyes, but they cannot see anything. The idols have ears, but they do not really hear anything. And the idols have mouths, but they cannot say anything. They have got

all the organs, as it were, of the head, that are supposed to be related to perception; but they really cannot perceive. And God's people have become like that; they have become like their idols. And so God is saying to Isaiah, "You are going to preach My Word. I am calling you to do it, but it is not going to be easy. You have got a very big challenge ahead of you."

C. Present World Empires and Coming Kingdom of God (7:1-12:6).

In chapters 7-12, Isaiah preaches God's Word regarding the present world empires of his day and the coming kingdom of God. In those chapters, we have the wonderful prediction of the coming of Immanuel in chapter 7 for example, Immanuel meaning "God with us," God in our very midst, God helping us, all those overtones. In chapter 9, there is the wonderful prediction of the Messiah's birth. The nation of Israel in Isaiah's time was shrinking. The Assyrians, the great superpower of that day, were constantly pushing and encroaching on its borders and were dropping it down to a smaller and smaller size. In much of the time that Isaiah ministered, northern Israel had been reduced down to just the tribal district of Ephraim and its capital city, Samaria. There was not a lot left; most of the nation had been incorporated into the Assyrian Empire and was under full and complete Assyrian domination.

Yet, in that very context, Isaiah can speak God's words of comfort, saying there will be no more gloom for those in distress. In the past, He humbled the land of Zebulun and Naphtali (those were parts of northern Israel now crushed and controlled by the Assyrians). And yet, He is coming in the future to honor Galilee of the Gentiles, as part of Israel had then come to be called. Then, he talks about the great light that people will see. He talks about people rejoicing at this. He talks about the defeat of the enemy. He talks about the fact that this will not happen by military means at all. "For to us a child is born, to us a son is given, and the government will be on His shoulders. And he will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. Of the increase of his government and peace there will be no end. He will reign on David's throne", a son of David, in fulfillment of the Davidic covenant promise in 2 Samuel 7. And He will reign forever. "The zeal of the Lord will accomplish this."

In the midst of times of great gloom and trial and distress, some of which Isaiah announced and talked about and dealt with and explained to the people, there was also this constant holding before the people the restoration lesson. Yes, the current blessings are coming to an end. Yes, the nation is headed inexorably, because of its sins, for a time of curse. But God will never forget them. They are His people and He has plans for them in the future that are so wonderful; they are far beyond anything that they have conceived of at present. Think of it, a Messiah coming whose reign will never end, who will be the true descendant of David, who will establish and uphold justice and righteousness always. What a great prospect!

D. Oracles Against Foreign Nations (13 :1-23:18).

In chapters 13 -23, there are placed together a great many of the oracles against foreign nations that the prophet spoke. What is the purpose of these oracles? Does God just kind of hate foreign countries and cause His prophet to attack them in various ways? No, God loves all countries of the world, but those that have opposed Israel, those that have sought to oppress His people, must be punished for that. He is punishing His own people, after all, for their sins. Oppressor nations must be gotten off the back of the Israelites; they must be suppressed. They must be lowered in their influence, so that God's people can be elevated to the position of grace and glory that He has in mind for them, a glory shared with Him as He manifests His presence among them.

E. Isaiah's "Little Apocalypse" (24:1-27:13).

In chapters 24-27, we have something that is often called the Isaianic Apocalypse. Apocalyptic literature, about which we will talk further in this course in another segment, is the kind of literature that gives a sense of the sweep of history and the outcome of history by many sorts of symbols. One sees Isaiah, at God's behest, encouraging the people with these apocalyptic sorts of prophetic oracles or messages.

IV. Historical Parenthesis (36:1-39:8).

Chapters 36-39 of the book are historical. They are shared with the book of 2 Kings. In these chapters, one sees Isaiah having interaction especially with King Hezekiah, encouraging him, supporting him during the invasion of a very powerful Assyrian king, Sennacherib. You know, though the Assyrians captured virtually everything in the whole Fertile Crescent, there was a little ring around Jerusalem that they couldn't get. Little Judah, tiny and insignificant relative to most of the world of that day, did remain independent when the juggernaut of the Assyrian army rolled over everybody else.

V. Prophecies of Comfort (40:1-66:24).

A. New Exodus (40:1-31).

There is a sense in which the book takes on a new focus with chapter 40. That focus is not a new theological focus, and it is not a different aspect of the basic sense of how God works with His people, but with chapter 40 an awful lot concentrates on the return from exile. God caused Isaiah, or some disciple, to gather those prophecies Isaiah had made that related to the time after the Babylonian exile and put them together starting with chapter 40. So chapter 40 opens with these very lovely words, "Comfort, comfort my people, says your God. Speak tenderly to Jerusalem, and proclaim to her that her hard service has been completed, that her sin has been paid for, that she has received from the Lord's hand double for all her sins." In other words, she is fully and completely past the period of curse.

Well, what is supposed to happen now? Isaiah is looking forward to the day when the Israelites will no longer be kept in bondage in exile. Well, what they are supposed to do is return; they are supposed to return to the Lord, return to His favor. Physically they can return to Judah and Jerusalem and rebuild it, and Isaiah has a lot of prophecies anticipating that. These were prophecies we believe encouraged the returning exiles, as they had the opportunity under the Persians, who took over from the Babylonians, who had taken over from the Assyrians to return. Under the more loose policies of the Persians, the Israelites were able to go back to their homeland; and, following the encouragement of the Word of God in Isaiah 40 and following, people did that in waves.

B. Servant Songs (42:1-9; 49:1-13 ; 50:4-11 ; 52:13 -53:12).

In chapters 42, 49, 50 and 52, we encounter something that is dear to most of us who know Christ, and that is four lovely poems called "servant songs." Perhaps the most famous of these is Isaiah 53, in which we read this kind of thing: "Surely he took up our infirmities and carried our sorrows, yet we considered him stricken by God, smitten by him, and afflicted. But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was upon him, and by his wounds we are healed. We all, like sheep have gone astray, each of his has turned to his own way; and the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all."

Who is this figure? Well, we know that it is Jesus Christ, if we know the New Testament. So many quotations there tell us that. But an ancient Israelite who was thoughtful could figure it out too. One could see that in these servant songs many of the same kinds of vocabulary words and

themes related to Moses as the suffering servant of Israel are turned around, transformed into predictions of a new leader of the people, one who will give a new exodus to them, one who will be part of a new creation of a people that God will bless and stay with and love forever. That is what Isaiah is talking about.

C. Zion's Glory and Shame (56:1-66:24).

In the final chapters of the book, chapters 56-66, Isaiah concentrates on Zion. Zion is a theme of heaven. And Isaiah brings this theme to special heights with his speeches about, sometimes, Zion's glory, but also, sadly, sometimes Zion's shame. If the people of God will honor Him and do what is right, keep His covenant, look forward to his Messiah and the salvation He will bring, all kinds of blessings will be theirs and Zion's glory will shine. But if they will not, if they will refuse to repent, if they will stay in their sins, if they will follow hollow ritual as opposed to heartfelt worship, then they will bring shame on Zion. So the book ends with a challenge: Which will it be? Will it be the glory of Zion, or will it be its shame?

25-Jeremiah - The Faithful God Rebukes And Preserves His Faithless People

Jeremiah-Ezekiel: Human Failure and Divine Success - A Study in Contrast - Lesson 1

Jeremiah: The Faithful God Rebukes and Preserves His Faithless People.

I. Call of Jeremiah (1:1-19).

A. Prophet to the Nations.

Jeremiah is often called the prophet to the nations based on the first words of his call from God. We read this in Jeremiah 1: "The Word of the Lord came to me, saying, 'Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, before you were born I set you apart; I appointed you as a prophet to the nations.'" What's going on? Why this emphasis on the nations? Jeremiah lived in a time, the last few decades of the 600s or the seventh century B.C., when there were many things happening that were truly cataclysmic. It was the end of the time of the Assyrian Empire. The Assyrians had been the great superpower for a couple of centuries, but their time was drawing to a close. Replacing them would be the Babylonians. Jeremiah saw that during his lifetime, and the things he says in the book at certain places reflect that changeover from one great empire to another. The Babylonians increased in power and eventually challenged the Assyrians, took over their empire, and indeed extended it further. But Jeremiah also knew that God had in mind for other empires to come, and even to go, for that matter. Part of what we see in the book of Jeremiah is the confidence that there will come a time when even the Babylonian nation, a vast superpower, would be displaced and overtaken by yet other kingdoms that are unnamed in the book (which we know in retrospect to be, for example, the Medes and the Persians).

B. Jeremiah's Reluctance

Jeremiah's call also contains this response from the prophet to his call to be a prophet to the nations: He says, "Ah, Sovereign Lord, I do not know how to speak; I am only a child." Jeremiah was a young man but his words are the classical words of a prophet who receives a call; it is appropriate in that culture not to look too eager, not to indicate that you are overconfident. There is a tendency to say: "Really, me? Oh you do not want me; I am not able to do the job." Jeremiah was, in fact, very eloquent; he was perfectly able to speak and he did so wonderfully and powerfully in the 52 chapters that constitute his book.

II. Prophecies Against Judah and Jerusalem (2:1-25:38)

As a prophet to the nations, he prophesied also about Judah and Jerusalem. The first big section of material in this book, chapters 1-25, are prophecies of Jeremiah, mostly in poetry, about Judah and Jerusalem, about the part of Israel that was left in his day. Already in 722 B.C., the Assyrians had conquered all of the northern part of Israel, the so-called Ten Tribes; and the city of Samaria, the capital of the north, had fallen to them at that time. So Jeremiah was a preacher to the south, to Judah and to its capital, Jerusalem. It was a nation, too. It was a kingdom, after all; and so his words to it, on God's behalf, dealt with it as one of the nations of the world.

A. Entreaty, Warning, Coming Disaster (2:1-4:31)

Now from our point of view, Judah was a very small place, not big, not impressive, a tiny population compared to the rest of the world and to big powers like the Egyptians or the Assyrians or the Babylonians. But it was God's people, God's chosen people. It was the people on the earth to whom God had entrusted His covenant, in whose hearts and minds, those who were receptive, He had placed His law, His Word of guidance. And Jeremiah spoke freely, frequently, constantly to these people. However, he was speaking at a time when a lot of what he wanted to say was not well received. For example, in chapters 2-3, he preached about how God had become angry with Israel because they had forsaken Him and how they continued to forsake

Him, how His Word was not being honored and how that inevitably had to lead to destruction. And people did not necessarily want to hear it.

They did not want to be told that their nation was going down the drain. They did not want to hear that there was no further hope for them. They did not want to hear that inevitably they were going to go into exile. One of the things we observe in the book, progressively building in the early chapters, but obvious throughout, is the fact that Jeremiah was not entirely popular as a prophet. An additional factor was that there were many, many other prophets operating who were not in fact speaking God's truth. Jeremiah regularly has contact with them and is in disagreement with them.

They had the ear of this king, of that king, and these officials, and the people in the marketplace, and the priests, and the various business leaders. And by the dozen they were preaching that the Lord would never abandon His people, that the Assyrians or the Babylonians or whatever group would be defeated by the Lord, would be taken off, and would be kept away from ever destroying Judah and Jerusalem. There was a real complacency at that time. This complacency derived in part from the miraculous way that God had delivered Judah and Jerusalem for all these years, when so many other nations and city-states had fallen in the Assyrian conquest and were now part of the Assyrian Empire.

B. Reasons for Judgment (5:1-31)

Judah's unusual and exceptional independence tended to cause people to think that they were pretty well off, and that maybe Yahweh, as the Hebrew name has it, the Lord, the God of Israel, was pretty much able to take care of them as their national God. Now, they were worshiping any number of gods and goddesses as personal gods and family gods and as local deities, and so on. But, when it came to national events, many of them thought that the Lord was doing a pretty good job and would be able to preserve His people in spite of the various threats that were on the horizon as result of the international politics and pressures and rivalries between potential empires. Jeremiah had the unenviable task of both inviting the people to return to the Lord, as he does for example in chapter 4, and also telling them, as he does in chapter 5, that he could not find anybody who was upright and righteous. In other words, he stood over against his whole culture, everybody in that chosen nation, and he said, "You have all gone the wrong way; this is what the Lord is saying through me."

C. Jerusalem Will Fall (6:1-10:25).

The other prophets were saying just the opposite: the Lord likes His people, the Lord favors His people, and the Lord would never abandon His people. In chapter 6, Jeremiah predicts the siege of Jerusalem; he predicts that a time is coming when enemy soldiers will surround the city and will starve out its inhabitants, with children crying and dying in the streets, people not having enough food to eat and gradually getting sicker and sicker, and so on. That is not what people wanted to hear. People never like to hear the negative, even if it is true. They love to hear things that make them feel good, things that reassure them, that give them a sense of hope, that are not too demanding upon their moral lifestyle. And so, this kind of thing was difficult. He stood essentially as a lone prophet without many friends or supporters.

In chapter 7, he talks against the false cult worship that the people were engaged in. They worshiped all right, but it was hollow, phony, going through the rituals; and it was not accompanied by obedience to the covenant law that God had revealed through Moses and that every Israelite was supposed to be keeping assiduously. In chapters 8-10, he concentrates on the coming destruction of Judah. He says from the least to the greatest, prophets and priests alike, that they are all greedy for gain; they all practice deceit. And he speaks of the snorting of the

enemy's horses heard from north to south; they have come to devour the land and everything in it, the city and all who live there.

D. Discouragement, Warnings, and Laments (11 :1-17:27)

This kind of preaching was at a time when people were nervous about what might be coming in the future, when people did not want to hear the negative, when his kind of wording and his constancy in pronouncing it was not very favored. It was not nice in the minds of everybody from the monarchy down to the common people, and eventually produced a plot against Jeremiah. The people wanted to kill the guy or at least somehow get him out of the way. He brought these concerns to the Lord, but it was a difficult time. It was for him a time of challenge, a time of discouragement, a time when it seemed like he was virtually friendless. Later those plots increased and were redoubled. We find even the official government policy to be to suppress the preaching of this faithful and honest and straight prophet.

Chapter 12 has a lament over Israel for its sad coming destruction on the basis of its sad present behavior. Chapters 13-17 are filled with parables and warnings and laments of various kinds, in which Jeremiah eloquently portrays the degeneration of the people he loves so much, God's precious people.

E. Sign of the Potter's House (18:1-20:18).

Chapter 18 is interesting because it contains a rather well-known passage in the book, Jeremiah goes to a potter's house, and there is kind of a symbolic or allegorical value to his experience there. He visits the potter and he sees that the potter can make out of a piece of clay. He can shape it the way he wants, and then if he likes it he can keep it. But if it is not what he wants, if it is not the shape he wants, if it is not as even as he wants it to be, he can just smash it down again and make something else out of it. From this observation that God caused Jeremiah to have, God then used that object lesson to explain that He, too, could do the same thing to Israel. "This is what the Lord says: 'Look! I am preparing a disaster for you and devising a plan against you. So turn from your evil ways, each one of you, and reform your ways and your actions.'" But God says they will reply, "It is no use. We will continue with our own plans; each of us will follow the stubbornness of his evil heart." So in effect, God would have to smash that pot and make a new one.

In chapters 19-20, there are more predictions of defeat and also a story of Jeremiah's imprisonment. The priests were very much against Jeremiah; he was stirring up the people to be worried, and they wanted a peaceful situation. They wanted people comfortable with their lives, secure, bringing in plenty of offerings and sacrifices, which of course were the essential means by which the priests were paid and supported. The prophets were furious at Jeremiah. Here, they were purporting to speak for God, and he was saying the very opposite. They were saying "peace," and he was saying "no peace." They were saying, "We will take care of the problems"; and he was saying, "There is no way you can." They were saying God loves us and would never punish us, and he was saying, "God's going to punish you severely, indeed bring to an end your time of blessing and place you into the curse of exile." The prophet ends up for a time even in prison.

F. Warnings, False Prophets, and More Warnings (21 :1-25:38)

In chapters 21 -23, he gives oracles, that is prophetic speeches, against Judah, and as well, against some of the false prophets that he encountered. This was a difficult row to hoe; here he was, one person attacking the majority. But you know, he had a wonderful message in the prediction of the righteous Branch in chapter 23: "The days are coming," declares the Lord, "when I will raise up to David a righteous Branch, a King who will reign wisely and do what is just and right in the land. In his days Judah will be saved and Israel will live in safety. This is the name by which he will be called: The Lord Our Righteousness." That, of course, is a prediction

of Jesus Christ. It is a prediction of the one true son of David, the real King, the worthy inheritor of the throne. It is a great word of comfort; but you know, along with Jeremiah's prophecies of immediate doom, it does not seem to have won him too many fans.

In fact, in chapters 24-25 he gives other warnings for Judah and Jerusalem. He predicts in chapter 25 that they would go into captivity and be there for a lifetime, seventy years. Many of his contemporaries at that time may have thought that when he predicted a captivity for the people of Israel of seventy years, he was speaking roughly and roundly, generally seven decades, generally a life span. But, in fact, it turned out that to the very year his words were precise and accurate, because the Jerusalem temple was destroyed in 586 B.C. and was not rebuilt finally, formally ending the exile, until 516 B.C., exactly seventy years.

III. Biographical Account (26:1-45:5)

After that point, a new section of the book begins: it is chapter 26 through chapter 45, where one finds the biographical section of the book. This does not mean that it is only about Jeremiah's personal life, but rather the prophecies of various kinds are interwoven with accounts about his own experiences, the kinds of things that happened to him.

A. Conflicts with Religious Leaders (26:1-29:32)

Conflicts with other religious leaders are described in detail in chapters 26-29, and many of those religious leaders wanted him put to death. As a legitimate Israelite prophet, he was supposed to enjoy a kind of diplomatic immunity; a true prophet was regarded as an ambassador from heaven. And in the same way that we give ambassadors to our country diplomatic immunity, we do not convict them of crimes. The most we can do is deport them; they are not subject to our laws in the same way citizens are. Jeremiah should have been treated that way; that was the general prevailing attitude.

Unfortunately, even basic cultural assumptions, like the prophetic immunity idea, were breaking down in his day. And so, there were plenty of people who were considering ways to get rid of him at this stage as well, and among the options was simply to kill him. Other options included imprisonment, which did indeed eventually happen to him.

But in the midst of it all, he was a preacher of good news, because good news was to follow the exile. Jeremiah was inspired to give his audience not only a picture of the immediate future that did include doom and gloom, the proper kinds of punishments for the disobedient nation of Israel, but also in the long run to speak of the days coming of the new covenant. After that time of curse from the covenant had been completed, God would institute great times of rejoicing and blessing and fulfillment of the most wonderful hopes of His people.

B. Consolation and a New Covenant (30:1-31:40)

In chapters 30-31, we read about the new covenant coming. We read about how that new covenant would not simply be engraved in tablets of stone as the Ten Commandments were, but would be written on the hearts of the people. The people would not have to teach somebody else this long list of rules and say, "Here are the guidelines that keep you in place." The people would know God personally, from the least to the greatest. Jeremiah is speaking of our age, the age in which the Spirit of God comes into a person who accepts Christ as Savior and transforms the person and gives that person an inner direction, an inner guidance, that is far more valuable and helpful than any number of rules and regulations under the old covenant.

C. Buying a Field (32:1-44)

Chapter 32 describes Jeremiah's buying a field. Why does he buy a field? Here it is very close to the time when the Babylonians are about to conquer the city of Jerusalem, most of Judah is already in their hands. They are surrounding the city. And this guy buys a field! It is a field you

cannot even get to farm at the moment because of the siege. But he buys it as a symbol of the fact that the exile will not last forever. There is a good future for God's people, and one day they will return from exile. When they do, they will be able to farm again. But much more than that, they will be a people who have learned their lesson and will be by God's great mercy restored to Him and will be in on the blessings that the new age, the new covenant, will bring for them eventually. So Jeremiah is a prophet of doom, a prophet of woe; but he is also a prophet of good times to come, that is, of restoration and of weal. It is just that the one has to precede the other, and he has to tell it like it is.

D. Restoration and Warning (33-34:22)

In chapter 33, he predicts more of the restoration, but gives warnings in chapter 34 about how King Zedekiah, the last king of Judah, was certainly far from the Lord and was going to experience danger in his own life. Indeed, this happened to King Zedekiah when Jerusalem was finally captured, the walls broken through in the siege ended by the Babylonians. He was taken out with his sons to a place outside the city and his sons were put to death before him, and then he was blinded so that the last thing he would have seen in his life would be the death of his children. That is the kind of people that the Israelites had brought into their country by their disobedience to the Word of God.

E. Good Example / Bad Example (35:1-36:32)

Chapter 35 is an interesting little interlude where Jeremiah goes and observes a group of people called the Recabites. And these Recabites, though country people, kind of semi-nomadic, were people who were keeping the covenant of God. They were an example of people taking seriously the Word of God; if only the nation as a whole had done it. With chapter 36 comes a bit of a flashback. It is the story of how Jeremiah was preaching the Word of God and had preached it so much that he knew it by heart. When he could not preach publicly because he was jailed, he wrote it down on a scroll.

A friend of his named Baruch, who was in the government, was one of his few supporters; but he was an avid and enthusiastic supporter and helped Jeremiah with many things, including the production of that scroll. As it was read before King Jehoiakim, however, the king just had sections of it cut, threw them in the fire, and just kept himself warm with the Word of God as he gradually burned it, showing his disdain for the truth.

F. Prison, Fall of Jerusalem, Aftermath (37:1-45:5)

In chapters 37-40, Jeremiah is in prison again, this time under Zedekiah, the last king. The siege and fall are described; and then interestingly in chapters 40-45, we read about the aftermath. What happened was that not everybody was taken into exile, though many, many people were, by the thousands and thousands. Jeremiah went with a group that got themselves in trouble by an assassination and fled to Egypt. Here he lived during the empire of the Assyrians, and then also the Babylonians. Now, he was going to the third superpower of the day, Egypt; and he went there still preaching and teaching the Word of God.

IV. Prophecies Against Foreign Nations and Fall of Jerusalem (46:1-52:34).

His oracles against the various foreign nations are collected in chapters 46-51, and then the book ends in chapter 52 with a little description of the fall of Jerusalem. This that Jeremiah had said would happen, did happen. This terrible, tragic event that he had faithfully predicted did, in fact, take place. This thing that all the other prophets had said would not take place, was just a myth God would never allow, in fact had occurred. The book ends in the same way that 2 Kings ends: with stories of how so many people went into exile, and how there was a loss of the independence and of the happiness and prosperity that once characterized Judah and Jerusalem.

Now the city lay in ruins, the countryside devastated, now just incorporated into the Babylonian Empire. But you know, even then, there was hope. So, the final little bit that we have in the book of Jeremiah is about the release of King Jehoiachin, an earlier king who had been taken into exile in 598 B.C. by the Babylonians. He is released from prison and is shown great favor, probably by reason of the influence of Daniel on the Babylonian kings of the time. Even in exile, there are little tastes of hope, little predictions of the way that God will again visit His people for good.

26-Ezekiel - How God Gives Hope When Hope Is Gone

Jeremiah-Ezekiel: Human Failure and Divine Success - A Study in Contrast - Lesson 2.

Ezekiel: How God Gives Hope When Hope is Gone.

I. Old Testament Apocalyptic Literature.

A. Introduction.

With the prophet Ezekiel, we get a great deal of a certain type of literature that is rather new to the Old Testament prophets as of his day, and that is the category of apocalyptic. There is a small amount of apocalyptic writing in the book of Isaiah, but there is a lot of it in Ezekiel, Daniel, and Zechariah. What is apocalyptic? Apocalyptic is a type of literature in which hidden truth is revealed. As a prophet who is apocalyptically portraying it, God has a plan for the future, indeed a whole sense of the sweep of history and how everything will turn out, that He reveals to His prophet. The prophet, in turn, can pass that on to the people to whom God is speaking; and if it all turns out well, if God's victory is final, those who really do trust in God will be encouraged. So, it is the revealing of hidden truth that apocalyptic in particular refers to.

B. Symbolic in Nature.

Symbols are used a lot in apocalyptic literature. Sometimes those symbols will be related to numbers. The prophet will predict seventy-nine or sixty-nine or fifty-nine somethings, or maybe will predict four or five somethings, or maybe there will be four horns in a vision, or maybe there will be several parts to a statue. The symbolism also comes in ways of plans and symbolic images. For example, one may see structures, like statues or trees or lampstands or strange animals, and these will stand for empires or periods of time in history.

C. Provides Encouragement.

A purpose of the apocalyptic is encouragement: the Word of God that comes in this manner really tries to encourage people who may well be discouraged. In Ezekiel's day, Israel had been taken into exile. Ezekiel was a prophet of that exile. He preached during the time that the Jews were in Babylonian captivity. Any form of encouragement was welcome and needed. These were people who no longer needed to be told they were bad. They now needed to be told that God had a good plan for them, that He would not forget them, indeed that He would be completely and ultimately victorious. Apocalyptic literature also covers much time and space. It gives the big picture, and it tells you the very end of things, and sometimes even the very beginning, so it is also futuristic. There is a lot about what is going to happen and scenes of the future portrayed in one way or another in apocalyptic literature.

D. Visionary.

Apocalyptic literature is almost always visionary; prophets are perhaps dreaming or just sent by God into a visionary state. Sometimes they are just outside somewhere and lift their eyes up and see something in the sky. The importance of these visions is almost never in the picture; the pictures are just kind of mnemonic devices or visual aids to the words, it is always the wording that is important. In the wording, comes the real essence of the truth that God has to reveal. Sometimes prophets even travel in the Spirit to one place or another. Ezekiel does that in the famous prophecy in chapter 37, where God takes him in the Spirit to the valley of dry bones, and where he sees in the way that they come together, a prediction of the resurrection of the people of God. Defeated and discouraged and beaten and exiled as a people, they have a great future, nevertheless, as the coming together of the bones indicates.

E. Angelic Interpretation.

Sometimes apocalyptic literature can involve explanations by an interpreting angel. A prophet may see something and then ask an angel whom God has provided to interpret: "What does that mean? What is that I see? What does it stand for?" Then the angel will interpret that for him. This happened several times with Daniel and a lot in the book of Zechariah. In the case of Ezekiel, it is God Himself who sometimes explains to Ezekiel what the significance is of what he is seeing. Not everything in the book of Ezekiel is apocalyptic, but it is important to appreciate that much of it is, and we need to be prepared for it as we look through the contents of this great book.

II. Major Themes.

A. Give up False Hope.

Among the major themes in the book of Ezekiel is the need to give up false hope. Why so? Ezekiel was in exile, but the exile he went into was really a predecessor of the great exile of 586 B.C. and thereafter. Because Ezekiel was taken into exile in 598 B.C., he was taken into a smaller exile, one that involved many fewer people, but was still substantial. It was an exile that followed the brief three-month siege of Jerusalem, when a person named Jehoiachin was king. Jehoiachin quickly gave up to the Babylonians, realizing that the siege would eventually defeat him and his people, and he accepted the Babylonian exile. He and many of the leaders of the nation were taken into exile. And Ezekiel, a member of a prominent family of priests, was taken with them. Ezekiel actually begins to preach in exile before the big exile starts.

The exile of 586 B.C. involved many more thousands of people than the one he had participated in. We see Ezekiel in Babylon, in captivity preaching before the rest of Judah and Jerusalem which have gone into captivity. What does he preach? Well, for 24 chapters he preaches that Jerusalem will fall and Judah will be captured. His friends and associates in exile kept trying to hold out the false hope that maybe it would not happen; maybe something would come along to weaken the Babylonians; maybe they would just not attack Jerusalem again; and maybe this time the city would be better prepared and could hold out as many years as necessary under siege, until perhaps the Egyptians would come to help them or some kind of coalition could be formed to beat off the Babylonians. But that was not God's plan, and Ezekiel, a true prophet, knew it, as God revealed it to him. He spoke again and again God's words that it was not possible to have that hope. The hope that Jerusalem was going to thrive and succeed and be prevented from the terrible miseries of siege and conquest and exile was a false hope.

B. Advisor to Community in Exile.

We also see the prophet Ezekiel functioning as an advisor to a community. He lived in a place called Tel Aviv, after which the modern Tel Aviv is named. And there in that Tel Aviv, in Babylon, he was consulted often by people: "What does the future hold? What should we do now? What should we hope for? We have heard such and such about the Babylonians, what does the Lord have to say?" And frequently people would come to him with questions, and he would then consult the Lord. He would pray, or he would wait for the Lord to give him a revelation, and God would respond that way. We also note that he frequently addresses oracles against foreign nations, just as virtually all the prophets do. In one way or another, they all have something to say about the international scene and about what God is doing in it.

C. Universal Divine Sovereignty.

Another theme that is strong in Ezekiel is the theme of universal divine sovereignty. Many of the Israelites tended to believe what most ancient people believed: that gods were somewhat limited

by locality, that a god was kind of regional. A god might be quite powerful in this part of the world, but if you go far away from that place to another, where that god or goddess is not worshiped much, that god or goddess wouldn't have much influence or power. But no, this is not so. God is universal. He is everywhere; everything that happens is under His domain. He preached for 24 chapters doom and gloom for Jerusalem and Judah, but once you come to chapter 25, the second half of the book is just the reverse. There, are all his positive prophecies, his prophecies of hope and reconciliation, because it was God's plan to punish His people but not to extend that punishment endlessly. Once it was over, God had great things in mind.

D. Individual Responsibility.

Another theme in the book is individual responsibility. People can sometimes hide behind what is happening corporately, and a lot of Israelites did that. They identified with the nation, and whichever way the nation went, that was their identification. But Ezekiel was used by God to emphasize that each individual was responsible to God, regardless of whether the society he or she lived in was good or bad.

E. Prophet of Unification.

He also was a prophet of unification. Like all the other prophets, but even more commonly and in some ways more dramatically, Ezekiel predicted the days when north and south, Israel and Judah, would once again be reunited. This was not an end in itself, but rather a kind of a symbol of the real unity of God's people in the age of the Spirit, the age we now live in, where all Christians are one regardless of denomination or of location or any other thing. All true believers are part of one single people. This hope was something that God stressed often through His prophet Ezekiel. He speaks often of the Spirit of God and the power of that Spirit. We can think of God's Spirit as something subtle that is kind of individualistic. But, in fact, the Spirit of God is the power of God in the world today, working to accomplish anything God wants accomplished. So it was in Bible times, of course.

F. Fulfillment of God's Word and Transformations.

Another theme is the certainty of the fulfillment of God's Word. When you study Ezekiel, you study a prophet who knows it is going to happen and who, regardless of what anybody else says, emphasizes the absolute, definite certainty that God's Word will come true. He also emphasizes that people need to be transformed. The good things that are coming in the future are not going to come to people who continue to be rebellious against God's covenant, and so Ezekiel looks forward to the time when God's people are purified, when they all turn to Him, when they are characterized by obedience to His law and love for Him as their God and in enjoyment of their wonderful position as His people.

Toward the end of the book, he speaks of transformations. The city of Jerusalem begins to look entirely different, like nothing that it actually had in appearance in its true, regular, worldly, geographical features. It becomes a whole different place. Judah looks entirely different. Indeed the whole land of Israel changes in scope and size, and even the location of the tribes are different. And the temple is vastly different. Clearly, this prophet is not talking about the historical nation and people and city and temple that they experienced; however, he is talking about the new age in terms of the institutions of the old.

What he especially emphasizes is the presence of God. In chapter 10, Ezekiel has a vision of the glory of God leaving Jerusalem, leaving the temple. That is a terrible thing because the glory of God is what indicates His presence. It is the awesomeness that people can sense when they are at

the temple that shows God has manifested Himself there in a special way. For that to depart means God's judgment is coming. But then you know, it comes back: at the end of the book, the glory of God comes back and inhabits the new temple. It is a description of the way Christ ushers in a whole new age, an age which is different from the old, an age in which people really can have a relationship with God that is so close. His people can know His presence so truly that He is, in fact, within them, that He can dwell in us by His Spirit.

G. Presence of God.

Another great theme in the book is the theme of the presence of God. In chapter 10, Ezekiel sees that presence leaving the people of God. He sees it in the form of the glory of God departing the temple and going away. This is an awful thing. This is God abandoning His people, which, in effect, He did. Of course, He did not do it forever, and He did not do it in a way that left them with no hope. When that glory does return after the exile, as Ezekiel describes it in chapter 43, he sees the glory of God return to the temple, symbolizing God's presence in a newer and more wonderful way than ever before. And that is the age we live in, where the presence of God is with us in a way that no one in the Old Testament ever experienced. We have it now, every one of us who knows Christ. We have God living in us, present with us by His Spirit.

III. Structure of the Book.

Ezekiel is organized into four very easy to describe blocks of material.

A. Judgment on Jerusalem and Judah (1:1-24:27)

In the first half of the book, chapters 1-24, there are many, many ways that Ezekiel describes how Jerusalem and Judah must fall to the Babylonians. Those chapters are from the period of time prior to 586 B.C., when the city did fall.

B. Oracles Against Foreign Nations (25:1-32:32).

Then come a series of prophecies in chapters 25-32 that are oracles against foreign nations. Like other prophets, Ezekiel is inspired to speak of the plan of God to take good care of all those nations over time that have opposed the people of Israel in the process of establishing for Himself a people who will, in fact, reign on the earth with Christ. The oracles against foreign nations are part and parcel of typical prophetic activity, and in Ezekiel 25-32 we find many of them, God's people delivered by the removal from the scene of those nations that have oppressed them.

C. Hope Offered (33:1-39:29).

In chapters 33-39, hope is offered; and this is hope after the fall, as it were, hope after the fall of Jerusalem and the exile. In various ways, God's good purposes and plans for His people are described in those chapters.

D. Visions of the Future (40:1-48:35).

The most visionary and futuristic part of the book, chapters 40-48, contain visions of the future, including especially the new Jerusalem, the new Judah, and the new temple. In other words, "You ain't seen nothin' yet!" The age to come is going to be very, very different from anything anybody has experienced, and that symbolizes the life in Christ, and even heavenly existence that is still in the future for all of us. Ezekiel understood something that all the prophets understood and that was that history has its turning points, a God of history makes changes.

IV. Major Topics.

A. Continuity of History.

Ezekiel understands also that Israel is a continuum. As those changes come and go, we are not seeing God abandoning Israel and choosing some other people. We are seeing God abandoning Israel, teaching them a lesson, forcing them into exile and all the miseries thereof, but also coming back to that same people, even though, of course, it is perhaps children or grandchildren or great grandchildren. The people are a continuum. So they are always you; they are always that same nation. This follows what Moses did. Moses when he preached to the Israelites could say things like: "You are here now, just as you were here when we came out of Egypt, just as you were in Egypt for hundreds of years in bondage. But you will live in this land a long time, and then you will be taken into exile. Then when you finally come to your senses and turn to the Lord, you will be able to return and enjoy God's blessing again."

In other words, the audience he was speaking to, in some sense, embodied the whole continuity of the history of the nation of Israel; and the whole nation is a unity that embodies and experiences whatever happens at any point. God treats His people as a continuum. Ezekiel often reflects that, so he can have predictions of things way into the future and encourage that group, his listeners who otherwise would be sort of beaten down and defeated and discouraged, by those words and predictions of things that would not happen in their lifetimes but were surely going to come, and in which they could rejoice as long as they love God and sensed themselves as part of His people.

B. Prophetic Lament Form.

One of the interesting things about Ezekiel is that he uses the prophetic lament form frequently. Chapters 19, 27, 30, and 32 have such laments. Let me read from Ezekiel 19 to demonstrate how this works. The lament form that is used by many, many of the prophets, but particularly well by Ezekiel, is a form in which the prophet imagines that he is having to deliver the funeral oration for someone who has died. God gives him the words to speak at that funeral, and so we call these also funerary laments to distinguish them from the kind of lament in the book of Lamentations or a lament psalm, which are appeals for help in times of distress.

These are funerary laments in which the prophet is kind of singing a song that sadly looks back at what happened to someone. Now, "the someone" is never an individual; "the someone" is in fact a nation. In chapter 19, "the someone" is actually "someones." It is Israel's population as manifested in Israel; and Judah and various kings are spoken of as lions and the nation as a lioness, and so we read this: "What a lioness was your mother among the lions! She lay down among the young lions and reared her cubs. She brought up one of her cubs, and he became a strong lion. He learned to tear the prey and he devoured men. The nations heard about him; he was trapped in their pit. They led him with hooks to the land of Egypt." That is referring to the captivity, of a small one that was perpetrated on Judah by the Egyptians in 605 B.C.

They, in a kind of a very brief encounter in warfare in Judah, took the king and some of the nobility captive into Egypt. So he says, "When she saw her hope unfulfilled", that was not going anywhere, that was an end of things, "her expectation is gone, she took another of her cubs and made him a strong lion. He prowled among the lions, for he was now a strong lion. He learned to tear the prey and he devoured men. He broke down their strongholds and devastated their towns. The land and all in it were in it were terrified of his roaring. Then the nations came against him, those from regions around about. They spread their net for him, and he was trapped in their pit. With hooks they pulled him into a cage and brought him to the king of Babylon. They put him in prison . . ." That is Jehoiachin, the last legitimate king of the Judeans, who was captured by the forces of Nebuchadnezzar and taken into exile along with Ezekiel.

Then he goes on to say, "Your mother was like a vine in your vineyard", he is speaking like giving the eulogy, telling about great things in the past and how they are now gone, "planted by the water; it was fruitful and full of branches because of abundant water. Its branches were strong, fit for a ruler's scepter. It towered high above the thick foliage, conspicuous for its height and its many branches. But it was uprooted in fury and thrown to the ground. The east wind made it shrivel. Stripped of its fruit, its strong branches withered, and fire consumed them. Now it is planted in the desert, in a dry and thirsty land. Fire spread from one of its main branches and consumed its fruit. No strong branch is left on it fit for a ruler's scepter."

There we see the lament speaking of Israel in terms of two kings and how they are taken away. And then Israel is spoken of in terms of a beautiful vine that had abundance, but that was all taken away. And it was removed and planted in the desert where, of course, a vine cannot grow very well, thus symbolizing the exile of Israel. These laments should have, and we hope did at least in a few cases, moved the people to want to repent. The purpose was to move people to seek God, to say, "Yes, we have died as a people. Yes, things have gone wrong for us."

C. Valley of the Dry Bones.

Ezekiel 37, perhaps the most famous passage in the book, has the same concept behind it. God's Spirit brings Ezekiel to a valley where there are all kinds of bones, representing an army that was killed in battle and now has been long dead, and there are just bones everywhere in this valley where the battle took place. As Ezekiel prophesies the Word of God to them and as the Spirit of God inhabits them (you have the Word of God and God's Spirit working) these bones come to life. Skeletons are put back together, and sinews come on them, and flesh covers them and they stand up, and they are the whole army of Israel, a great army. They say, according to this passage, "We are long dead; all hope is gone for us." But God says, "This is symbolizing the fact that I'm going to open your graves and bring you up from them. I am going to bring you back to the land of Israel. Then you, my people, will know that I am the Lord." That is the hope of the book of Ezekiel, that Israel will once again know their Lord.

27-Ezekiel - God Preserves His Divine Record The OT Canon

Jeremiah-Ezekiel: Human Failure and Divine Success - A Study in Contrast - Lesson 3

Supplement Five.

God Preserves His Divine Record: The Old Testament Canon.

I. Introduction to Canon, Canonicity, and the Dead Sea Scrolls.

In this lesson we will examine more closely canon, canonicity, and the Dead Sea Scrolls as they relate to the Old Testament Scriptures.

II. Canon

The word "canon" came into the English language from the Greek word *kanon*, which in turn is derived from a Semitic root (Assyrian *qanu*, Hebrew *qanech*, Ugaritic *qn*) borrowed from the Sumerian *gi-na*, "reed." From this came the idea of a measuring rod, later a rule or norm of faith, and eventually a catalog or list. The word "canon" was first used as a theological expression in reference to the Holy Scriptures by Athanasius, bishop of Alexandria, in his Easter letter to the churches in which he outlined the contents of the New Testament (c. A.D. 367). Thus, the "canon of Scripture" refers to the collection of biblical books that Christians accept as uniquely authoritative.

A. Formation of the Old Testament Canon.

The idea of a norm or rule for life reaches far back into Hebrew history. Specific commandments from God, which constituted guides for holy living, were given to Adam, Noah, and Abraham. These instructions were enshrined in written form at an early period, and preserved in the family histories that comprise much of the book of Genesis. During the second millennium B.C., collections of legislative material were promulgated by Moses, including the Book of the Covenant (Ex 24:4-8) and the essentials of Deuteronomy (Dt 31:9-13).

Much effort has been expended to discover what it was that led to the establishment of the Old Testament canon. The fact that the Old Testament does not speak of acts of canonization or of motives for canonization has prompted many writers to try to fill in the gaps. The answers scholars have come up with have been varied and no theory is considered totally satisfactory, perhaps because most of the search has been made by those who reject the biblical concept of revelation.

One view about the process of canonization is that the law was the model by which the Israelites decided what was to be regarded as canonical. Josiah's reverence for the Book of the Law (2Ki 22) and Ezra's similar high regard for the Law (Ne 8-9) are held up as examples of this testing procedure in action. Others have pointed back to the claim in the eighteenth century B.C. Babylonian Code of Hammurabi to divine sanction for the law given to the king and then passed on to his subjects. Others are not especially impressed by this view, because the Pentateuch is by no means all law; there are many narratives in its content. The historical books have little law, and the same could be said for the Prophets and for the wisdom literature.

A more popular view has to do with the presence of inspiration, or a belief that inspiration was involved, was the standard that determined which books were considered worthy of canonization (2Ti 3:16; 2Pe 1:21). This may be paired with a belief that authority accompanies inspiration.

Yet another view has been proposed by G. Osborn, who thinks the real standard for canonicity is in the contents of the biblical materials, and the contents were rooted in the cult, for it was recited at its feasts and in its services, whether temple or synagogue. He claims that the underlying cause is a belief in Yahweh's activity in history in relation to central individuals and the nation of Israel. The motif is struggle or distress and God's victory, which brings a new order of peace and goodness. This motif started as a cultic story and expanded to include narrative, hymns, laws, and words of wisdom. All historical, prophetic, and wisdom literature were then appended to the core and must meet the standard of portraying divine activity.

The above theories all have valid points, but unfortunately at the present time there is no way of knowing for sure why certain books were included in the Old Testament canon and others were not.

B. Close of the Canon

We do know, however, that the Hebrew canon was established or fixed by the religious leadership of the Hebrew community. Later rabbinic and church councils did not determine canon, but merely affirmed or stamped their approval on the collection of divinely inspired and authoritative books already acknowledged as the "Word of the Lord" in the Hebrew covenant community.

III. Development of the Old Testament Canon

Although we do not know all the specifics of the formation of the Old Testament canon, we can trace a bit of its history and the subsequent order of the books within the canon.

A. History.

An understanding of the Hebrew Scriptures as the "Old Testament" or "Old Covenant" is distinctly a Christian concept, stemming from Jeremiah's reference to a "new covenant" (Jer 31:31-36) and the comparison made between the "first" and "new" covenant described in the New Testament book of Hebrews (Heb 9:15-28). In Judaism today, the Hebrew Scriptures are known as the Tanak, an acronym reflecting the threefold division of the Hebrew Scriptures: "T" for Torah or Law, "N" for Nebi'im or Prophets, and "K" for Kethubim or Writings.

B. Order.

The order of the books in the Hebrew Scriptures is often called the Palestinian canon and is associated with the Tiberian school of the Masoretes. Before the adoption of the codex (the book form) by the Jews, the Hebrew Bible was written on many scrolls, and because each scroll was independent of the others there was no order per se.

When the codex form became popular, it was necessary to place the books in a sequence, and it is believed the order of books in the early codices probably reflects an earlier tradition. One indication of this tradition is a reference to the books of the Old Testament made by Josephus of the first century A.D. He held that there were twenty-two books, but seems to have appended Ruth to Judges and Lamentations to Jeremiah.

C. Divisions: Torah, Nebi'im, and Kethubim.

The tripartite division of the Hebrew Scriptures is attested as early as the second century B.C. in the prologue of Ben Sirach, and later on by Jesus in Luke 24:44. But it is also affirmed in the Babylonian Talmud (Baba Bathra 14b-15a) and by a series of Jewish and Christian writers

during the first four centuries after Christ (e.g., Philo, Josephus, Melito, Tertullian, Origen, Eusebius, Jerome, and Augustine).

The earliest codices of the Middle Ages (Codex Leningradensis is the oldest complete Old Testament and is dated A.D. 1008) have twenty-four books. The order of the contents is: (1) the Torah, which is comprised of the five books of the Pentateuch (Ge, Ex, Lev, Nu, Dt); (2) the Prophets (Nebi'im), which is divided into two sections, the Former Prophets comprised of Joshua, Judges, Samuel, and Kings; and the Latter Prophets, made up of Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and the Twelve (Minor Prophets); and (3) the Writings (Kethubim) or Hagiographa. This has three subdivisions, which are the poetical, Psalms, Proverbs, and Job; the five scrolls or Megilloth, Song of Solomon, Ruth, Lamentations, Ecclesiastes, and Esther; and the historical, Daniel, Ezra-Nehemiah, and Chronicles.

Later in the Middle Ages, Jews began to divide Samuel, Kings, and Chronicles into two books each, as they are printed in the Hebrew Scriptures today. The names or titles for the books of the Hebrew Bible were usually taken from the first line or verse of the text, whereas the English titles were derived from the book headings in the later Greek and Latin versions of the Old Testament.

D. Witness of Christ and the Early Church.

How Jesus and the apostles understood the extent of the Old Testament in the first century is uncertain. On the one hand, Jesus spoke of the Law and the Prophets (Mt 5:17; Lk 16:16) as though there were only two sections of the Old Testament, but then He spoke of the Law and the Prophets and the Psalms (the first book of the Writings) in Luke 24:44, which may indicate three sections.

In Matthew 23:35 and Luke 11:51, Jesus mentions the death of Abel and Zechariah in a way that may allude to an understanding of Chronicles as the last book of the Old Testament. Again this would suggest a threefold division of the later Hebrew manuscripts. The apostles quoted from all sections of the Old Testament; but other noncanonical literature is never cited by name, though there are statements in the New Testament that point to that body of writings (Jude 14-15).

IV. Canonicity.

When we speak of "canonicity" we mean the acceptance by religious communities (Jewish or Christian) of certain authoritative documents cardinal to the shaping of their faith, practice, and doctrine. The reason for this acceptance was the widespread conviction that such literature was divinely inspired, and not just inspirational. Many religious compositions may fall into the second category without falling into the first category, but no composition can fall into the first category without simultaneously falling into the second category.

The question of how we came to have the thirty-nine books known as the Old Testament Scripture is an historical investigation. The question involves who wrote the books, who compiled them into a collection; their origin or contents, their history; God's part, and man's. Our goal then is to trace the process by which these various writings came together as Holy Scripture.

How the ancient Hebrews expressed the concept of canonicity is not known; but it is safe to say that the idea existed long before there was any special phrase invented to express it. In the New Testament, the word "Scriptures" conveys unquestionably the notion of sacredness (Mt 21:42; Jn 5:39; Ac 18:24). From the first century A.D. and following, according to the Talmud, the Jews

employed the phrase "defile the hands." Writings that were suitable to be read in the synagogue were designated as books that "defile the hands."

What this very peculiar oriental expression may have originally meant no one can definitely say, but probably Leviticus 16:23-24 gives the best hint of its correct interpretation. According to this passage on the Day of Atonement, the high priest washed not only when he put on the holy garments of his office, but also when he took them off. Quite possibly, therefore, the expression "defile the hands" signified that the hand that had touched the sacred writings must first be washed before touching anything else, in order that conditions of ceremonial purity would be maintained.

Another aspect of canonization was acceptance by the people. This was a ratification of the covenant, but not a human conferral of authority upon the books. Authority was already intrinsic to them. The content of the books correlated with genuine religious experience, but human experience itself did not and does not stamp canonicity upon the books. Overshadowing all human experience is the presence and guidance of the Holy Spirit.

Canonicity affirms that, guided by the Holy Spirit through various historical processes over a span of several centuries, the church separated out and accepted certain books, including the Old Testament canon which had been confirmed by the church's Jewish predecessors. These books that compromised the Old and New Testament canons mark the boundaries of what we Christians consider to be God's written revelation to us. Prior to the discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls, witnesses to the Old Testament text and canon were principally the Masoretic text of the Hebrew Bible, the Septuagint, and Jerome's Vulgate.

V. Noncanonical Books.

The noncanonical books of the Protestant Old Testament include the Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha. We will now examine each of these two groups of literary works individually.

A. Old Testament Apocrypha.

Of prime interest related to questions about the extent of the Old Testament canon is a group of books called the Apocrypha. This title comes from the Greek word meaning "hidden" or "concealed," and seems to have had its source in the Apocalypse of Ezra (also known as 2 Esdras or 4 Esdras, or Ezra) 12:37-39; 14:45-47. This book was possibly written in Aramaic during the latter part of the first century A.D. in Jerusalem. Whether it was written by Jews or by Jewish Christians is not known.

Jewish rabbis referred to these extracanonical books as "outside books." Jerome used the term Apocrypha in this sense and so did the Reformers Martin Luther, Carlstadt, and Miles Coverdale. Roman Catholics call these books the Deuterocanon. The Apocrypha is listed as containing writings in five main divisions: (1) didactic or wisdom books, Wisdom of Solomon, dated about 125 B.C., and Ecclesiasticus of Ben Sira, dated about 180 B.C.; (2) historical books, 1 Esdras, dated about 135 B.C., 1 Maccabees, and 2 Maccabees; (3) romantic stories, Tobit and Judith; (4) prophetic literature, Baruch, the Epistle of Jeremiah, and the Apocalypse of Esdras; and (5) legendary additions, The Prayer of Manasseh, Additions to Esther, The Prayer of Azariah and the Hymn of the Three Men, Susanna, and Bel and the Dragon. The last three were added to Daniel.

During the early centuries of Christianity, there were conflicting opinions as to the canonicity of the Apocryphal books. For example, Greek and Latin church fathers such as Irenaeus, Tertullian,

and Clement of Alexandria quoted the Apocrypha in their writings as "Scripture," and the Synod of Hippo (A.D. 393) authorized the use of the Apocrypha as canon. Yet others like Eusebius and Athanasius distinguished Apocrypha from the Hebrew Scriptures. The issue of Apocrypha as Old Testament canon was heightened with the publication of Jerome's Latin Vulgate (A.D. 405). Jerome opposed the recognition of the Apocrypha as Old Testament canon and made careful notations in his Vulgate to that effect. But later recensions failed to retain these clear distinctions, and soon most Latin readers understood no difference between the Old Testament and the Apocrypha.

The Reformation again brought the issue of Apocrypha as canon to the forefront of church discussion. As the Reformers translated the Old Testament into the languages of their constituencies, they discovered that the Hebrew Bible contained no books of the Apocrypha. Thus, in their view these "lesser books" were either excluded from the Old Testament canon or appended as a separate and inferior collection. The Puritans are credited with the removal of the Apocrypha altogether from the covers of the English Bible. Although not widely appreciated or observed today, Martin Luther's assessment of the Apocrypha still has merit. He held that the books of the Apocrypha are not equal to the Holy Scriptures, but are profitable to read and valuable for personal edification.

The Roman Catholic Church responded to the Reformers at the Council of Trent (1545-1564). There the fathers reaffirmed the Vulgate as the Bible of the true church and pronounced the Apocrypha equivalent to canonical material. Today this collection is usually called the Deuterocanon, and was substantiated as such by the Vatican Council of 1870.

B. Old Testament Pseudepigrapha.

Intertestamental Judaism produced a second body of extracanonical literature distinct from the Apocrypha and known as the Old Testament Pseudepigrapha (or "books written under a pen name"). The writings that make up this corpus are listed as follows: (1) primitive history, Jubilees, dated about 50 B.C.; (2) apocalyptic writings, 1 Enoch, dated about 95 B.C., Apocalypse of Baruch, Assumption of Moses, Martyrdom of Isaiah, Lives of the Prophets, and Sibylline Oracles, dated about A.D. 138; (3) legendary books, Letter of Aristeas, The Book of Adam and Eve, The Testament of the Twelve Patriarchs, and the Testament of Job; (4) Poetical, Psalms of Solomon; (5) didactic discourses, magical books of Moses, story of Achiarcharus, and Pirke Aboth; and (6) unclassified, 3 Maccabees and 4 Maccabees.

VI. Dead Sea Scrolls.

The discoveries made at Qumran, northwest of the Dead Sea, in the years following 1947 have greatly increased our knowledge of the history of the Hebrew Scriptures during the two centuries or more preceding A.D. 70. They provided manuscripts of the Old Testament that were 1,000 years older than any previously available. They not only increased the creditability of the Masoretic manuscripts that had been the basis of all current English translations, but also provided important information for understanding the transmission of the text of the Old Testament. The manuscripts discovered appear to represent about 800 separate documents, about 240 of which are copies of books of the Hebrew Bible. A few of these scrolls, about ten or so, are substantially complete, but most consist of a lot of tiny fragments. All the books of the Hebrew Bible are represented among them, with the exception of Esther.

A. Background.

The happenstance discovery in the spring of 1946 of seven ancient scrolls in a cave in the Desert of Judah was followed by similar finds in another ten out of some eighty caves that scholars investigated during the ensuing decade. All eleven caves are situated near a site known by the modern Arabic name Qumran, which is located some ten miles to the south of Jericho and just over one mile to the west of the shores of the Dead Sea. After a decade of no new discoveries, Yigael Yadin retrieved from the cellars of an antique dealer in Bethlehem the Temple Scroll, the largest scroll of all.

The seven scrolls recovered from the first cave had been stored in two large earthenware jars of a type not previously found in excavations in Palestine, covered with lids, and made airtight by the application of a layer of bitumen to the gap between the lid and the receptacle. It appears that the vessels had been especially manufactured in two standard sizes to accommodate groups of three or four scrolls of commensurable height. In addition, the cave contained sherds of more jars, which had been broken in antiquity or else were fractured by the bedouins who made the modern discovery. In contrast to the other caves, the partial scrolls and fragments were found lying on the ground.

B. Classification of the Scrolls.

By content and literary genre, the scrolls can be divided into four major divisions as follows:

1. Hebrew Bible. Copies of books of the Hebrew Bible make up about thirty percent of the find. With the exception of the book of Esther, all books contained in the Hebrew Scriptures are represented at Qumran.
2. Apocryphal Books. Hebrew and Aramaic manuscripts of apocryphal books, such as The Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs, Tobit, Jubilees and 1 Enoch as well as hitherto unknown compositions of a similar character, such as the Genesis Apocryphon, the Psalms of Joshua, and others, amount to about twenty-five percent of the find.
3. Previously Unknown Compositions. Another twenty-five percent of the find are copies of previously unknown compositions: wisdom writings, prayers and prayer compilations, etc. They presumably derive from what may be considered the common literary position of Judaism in the late Second Temple Period.
4. Literature of the Community of the Renewed Covenant. Approximately a fifth part of the manuscript assemblage consists of Hebrew compositions of various literary genres that evidently constituted the particular literature of the "community of the renewed covenant." These works are of special interest because they enlighten us as to the Covenanters' conceptual universe and the socio-religious structure of their community. The primary documents include: (a) The Zadokite Documents, or the Damascus Rule, which combines a compressed survey of the history of the community with a selection of legal matters; (b) the Community Rule or Manual of Discipline, which lists precepts that pertain predominantly to the Qumran community; (c) the Messianic Rule, which offers a description of the envisioned "messianic banquet," modeled on the Covenanters' common meals in historical reality; (d) the War Rule, which presents legal and descriptive details of the cataclysmic encounter in which the "sons of light," i.e., the Covenanters, will finally overcome all of the "sons of darkness"; (e) the Temple Scroll, which enlarges on matters pertaining to the future political role of the community and its ritual center, the temple; (f) Pesharim and other works provide information on some aspects of the

Covenanters' history through an actualizing interpretation of non-historical parts of the Hebrew Bible; and (g) additional supplementary information.

C. Languages and Material Aspects.

The great majority of the Qumran scrolls were written in Hebrew. A smaller number were couched in Aramaic. Several items were written in Greek. Hebrew and Aramaic manuscripts were commonly penned in the square script, which was common at the turn of the era and is still in use to this day. With the exception of a small quantity of papyri, the scrolls were made from animal hides of which the hair had been shaved off. The lettering is on the porous side. This technique facilitated the penetration of the ink into the leather, and thus made for a better preservation of the writing.

D. Dating the Scrolls.

Personal names mentioned in some fragments designate exclusively historical figures of the Hasmonean period (135-63 B.C.). Paleographical analyses indicate that the documents were mostly penned in the last two centuries B.C., with some stemming from the first century A.D. It follows that the Qumran scrolls, and the community whose members deposited them in the caves, must be dated to the turn of the era, approximately between 200 B.C. and A.D. 100. We should bear in mind, however, that dating the scrolls does not establish the time of the authoring of the works preserved in them.

E. Who Were the Covenanters?

The Covenanters are known only from the Qumran writings, and are never explicitly mentioned in any other ancient source. This silence caused a great deal of surprise among the academic community. Scholars have considered it improbable that classical authors who gave attention to the internal diversity of Judaism at the end of the Second Temple period should have left unrecorded such a seemingly substantial community. As a result, attempts have been made to identify the Covenanters with practically all of the known Jewish sects of the Second Temple period. A widely accepted hypothesis equates the Covenanters with the Essenes, but not all scholars agree with this proposal.

VII. Conclusion.

According to Francis Watson in *Text, Church and World*, "If the Old Testament interpretation is to be undertaken on the presupposition of the Lucan Jesus, 'Everything must be fulfilled that is written in the Law of Moses, the Prophets, and the Psalms' (Lk 24:44), then this statement must be understood in a sense broad enough to accommodate the Matthean assertion that the Law and the Prophets are fulfilled in the command, 'So in everything, do to others what you would have them do to you' (Mt 7:12). To see Jesus Christ as the center of a single Christian canon, comprising an Old and New Testament, is not necessarily to impose an artificial unity on an irreducibly heterogeneous body of writings. It is to refuse the insidious Marcionite temptation to think of the Law, the Prophets, and the Writings as the Holy Scripture of the Jewish community alone" (p. 279).

28-Jonah And Nahum - God Is Concerned For All His Creation

Jonah-Habakkuk: The God of Israel and the God of the Nations - Lesson 1

Jonah and Nahum: God is Concerned For All His Creation.

I. Introduction to the Books of Jonah and Nahum.

As we think about the content of the prophetic books, we often have to remember that it is influenced by historical events. God uses His prophets to comment on history and to place His plans within history before His people. The development of the superpower empires is a very big part of that plan. The books of Jonah and Nahum are written in reference to one of the great superpower empires that affected God's people during the days of the prophets; that is, the empire of Assyria.

II. Book of Jonah.

A. Jonah's Flight from God (Jnh 1:1-16).

The prophet Jonah was called to serve God in reference to the empire of Assyria and in particular to go to its capital city, its largest, most prominent city, Nineveh, to preach there. Now the way most of our translations of the opening words of the book of Jonah make it sound, it is not unusual. The prophets preached against foreign nations on many, many occasions and many prophetic books have whole groups of chapters devoted to collections of their sermons against the foreign powers that had been oppressors of the people of Israel. Reading these words, we can imagine how Jonah heard them as something he would be used to doing: "Go to the great city of Nineveh and preach against it, because its wickedness has come up before me." But Jonah fled and refused to do that. He ran from God; he took a boat to go out onto the Mediterranean to try to get as far away as he could from this commission from God. Why?

We know that Jonah was an ardent nationalist. We know that he preached, as 2 Kings 14:25 tells us, against other nations that were oppressors of Israel. We know that he was eager to see northern Israel, where he lived, grow and increase and be a bigger and more powerful place. Why then would he resist the opportunity to preach against Assyria, a nation that was powerful, that was quite possibly at this time increasingly threatening Israel? We do not know all of the details of the interrelationships between the Assyrians and the Israelites in Jonah's time, somewhere around 770 B.C.

The answer lies in the fact that we must actually, as a number of scholars have suggested, translate a couple of key words in Jonah 1:2 slightly differently. In fact, the verse should read this way: "Go to the great city of Nineveh and preach to it, because its troubles have come before me." That is the way Jonah, in fact, heard it. The word that can be translated "wickedness" or "evil" in Hebrew can also be translated "trouble" or "difficulty", it has that range of meaning. The term translated "preach against" can also be translated "preach to." In other words, what Jonah heard was God's call to him to go to give the people of Nineveh a chance, that is what he heard. He understood that is what he was called to do, and he hated the idea. He hated the Assyrians; he hated their largest most impressive capital city, Nineveh; he hated the whole thought of giving them any opportunity to repent. He knew as a prophet that if God was talking about concern for the troubles of a people, the preaching he gave might be an opening for God to bless those people.

Going to Joppa, a city in those days that was in Canaanite hands, he took an ocean-going boat, which was a ship of Tarshish. (Tarshish is a word that can mean "open ocean" in Hebrew.) He

headed out to sea. Where he thought and how long he thought he could stay, we do not exactly know. But we know that Jonah probably was reflecting in his imperfect theology: the tendency of many people in those days, and sadly even some Israelites like himself, to think of gods as localized in their power. Apparently, he was at least hoping (in his discouragement over the thought of God blessing the people of Assyria) to get far enough away from where the Lord, the true God, was worshiped. Maybe the Lord's influence on him would be minimal and he could, in fact, escape this call. Was God localized? Was He able to handle His affairs only within certain reasonable and restricted territories?

Not at all. Of course He is the only God in the world. So out on the Mediterranean Sea, Jonah and his shipmates are caught in a storm. The storm is horrible. It is clear to those who are rowing that the problem is terrible. They have taken down their sails; they are trying to row for shore; it is a fairly hopeless enterprise. But of course, they are desperate and try whatever they can. They know that this sudden storm with such intensity is not just an accident of nature; some god has caused this, and so they ask everyone to pray to his god, thinking in their usual polytheistic fashion. Jonah is awakened (he has been sleeping) and is invited to pray to his God. Eventually Jonah confesses, "I am the cause of this storm; my God is powerful here and He is trying to send me a message. Throw me overboard and the storm will stop." They do not want to, and they try not to. But eventually they feel it is their only solution, so the captain orders his men to throw Jonah overboard. As soon as Jonah hits the water, the storm stops. A kind of sequel to the first chapter, we read at the end of it that those sailors came and offered sacrifices to the Lord, the God of Jonah. They may not have believed in Him previously, but they sure were impressed by what they saw that day out on the Mediterranean.

B. Thanksgiving Inside the Great Fish (Jnh 1:17-2:10).

Meanwhile, Jonah is going down, down, down into the sea; he is drowning. He is going to die. He had said, "I deserve to die for my sins; I disobeyed God. Here I am a prophet, a spokesperson for God, and I have disobeyed Him." Suddenly, gulp, he is swallowed by something! He is alive; he is not dead. And as time goes by, he remains alive. God had prepared a great fish to swallow him. The question sometimes is asked, "What could this be?"

We know that there are numbers of stories of whales actually swallowing humans and humans living for hours or days inside whales, because there is a certain amount of air intake that keeps coming inside.

We also know that cold water causes the human brain to concentrate oxygen within it, and people can live a very long time at the colder temperatures down in the ocean. We also know that basking sharks sometimes have swallowed people without doing harm to them bodily.

Whatever the fish was and however God miraculously employed it, Jonah was preserved. So in chapter 2, we hear him praying an eloquent prayer of thanksgiving. He says, "I was dying. I was going into the depths of the sea, but you rescued me O Lord. When my life was ebbing away, my prayer rose to you." And so he says, "I, with a song of thanksgiving, will sacrifice to you. What I vowed I will make good. Salvation comes from the Lord."

He is thrilled. He had sinned against God and deserved to die, and yet God's mercy was so great that God had rescued him from death. He preserved his life, and enabled him to sing this prayer of thanksgiving, this musical prayer of joy at God's mercy, as we have it in chapter 2. So he who deserved to die is grateful, eloquently grateful, for God's mercy on him as of the midpoint of the book.

C. Repentance of the Ninevites (Jnh 3:1-10).

With chapter 3, we read that the big fish, having spit him up on the dry ground, had, in effect, headed him in the direction of Nineveh. And he did then spend the days and weeks it took to travel to Nineveh and began to preach there. Now we are told that Nineveh was a great city, which required "a three-day visit." This is a better translation than some of the older translations of "a three-day's journey," suggesting it would take three days to get there or three days to walk across it or something. But rather, again there is a translation issue, and the word that can mean "journey" in Hebrew often means "visit."

It was the practice in ancient times when someone visited a city to arrive the first day, let people know you were there (you could not call or write ahead), and then the second day you would do your business. You have your meetings with those who had arranged their schedules to receive you, and then the third day there would be a formal send-off. Anything in diplomacy, anything official, anything that represented the kind of visit one would pay to a major city, could be termed a three-day visit. We have numbers of examples of this in the literature of the ancient Assyrians and Babylonians.

In the case of Jonah, it was only on the first day that he got there that things broke loose. He just started going through the city telling his message. And by wildfire, it seems, people began saying, "This is right; this is a message from God; and we have got to do this." Word reached the king, and the king joined in and encouraged by proclamation that everybody should repent before "God." Now, this does not mean that the people of the city of Nineveh necessarily turned to the true Lord, the only God, and believed in Him as an orthodox Israelite would; none of that is ever said. What is said is that they believed that God, using the most general term "god," had spoken to them and that they had displeased Him and needed to repent.

There is good evidence that the events in the book of Jonah take place during the reign of a certain Assyrian king called Ashur-dan III. Ashur-dan reigned from 773 to 756 B.C. We have a lot of records about his reign. We know that there were some very difficult wars for the Assyrians during this time that made them jumpy. They were threatened by outsiders when militarily weak. We know that there had been a total eclipse of the sun in his time, the Assyrians were highly superstitious and scared of such omens. We also know that there had been other astrological signs and indicators, that there had been earthquakes, that there had been riots, that there was civil unrest. And we can imagine this king eager to join with his people in something. As kind of getting on the bandwagon, as we might say, he was only too happy to proclaim a fast and that everyone including the animals, as the Assyrians often did, would wear sackcloth as a sign of their mourning before the Lord. In chapter 1, we saw Jonah flee from God somewhat defiantly. We see in chapter 3 the Assyrians repenting before God relatively humbly.

D. No Thanksgiving Outside Nineveh (Jnh 4:1-4:11).

In chapter 4, Jonah goes outside the city to see what will happen. Now much of chapter 4 is, in effect, a flashback. It does not presuppose the repentance of the people quite yet. Jonah builds a shelter for himself. Assyria was in an area that had long been deforested, and there was nothing but scrub trees around for firewood; almost anything by way of lumber had to be imported from a great distance away. So Jonah would have built his little hut probably out of stones and it would have been a three-sided structure. But the hot sun above would certainly be difficult to endure.

God causes a special leafy plant to grow, a leafy gourd of some kind. It grows quickly and it provides a roof over his shelter. He learns to love that plant, and he appreciates it. "This is great! I could not build a roof myself, but I have got this lovely plant to sit under to shade me." Then God causes the plant to die, and Jonah becomes angry, furious. "My plant is gone! I am sitting out here in the heat." He gets hotter and hotter, because God causes the wind to get hotter and hotter. With the hot, viscously brutal wind and the sun beating down, Jonah is almost delirious and in pain with this situation. He does not want to go inside the city that he hates and wait there under shelter. What he wants is for God to destroy that city. As he preached, he told them that they would be destroyed if they did not repent, and so he is hoping they will not repent.

God speaks to him and says, "Have you a right to be angry?" Jonah says, "I am so angry I could die!" And He says, "Did you care about your plant?" Jonah says, "I loved my plant!" God says, "Well, if you cared about a plant, should not I care about people and animals in the city of Nineveh?" Almost all of us in all cultures think of humans as more worthy than animals, and animals as more worthy than plants; every society has done this. So God says, "You are caring about something on the bottom level of a plant. Shouldn't I care about the people and the animals?"

Jonah, eloquently grateful for his own rescue from sin, is furious at the rescue of the city of Nineveh from sin. The hypocrisy of Jonah's actions and words is really pretty obvious to us, and thus in the book there is the further message that God is a God of all people, even the enemies of the Israelites. God loves everybody; His plan is to redeem the world, not just any particular ethnic group. Jonah, who so allied himself intellectually and spiritually with just the purposes and values of one ethnic group, needed to learn an important lesson about the compassion of God. That is where the book ends.

III. Book of Nahum.

With Nahum, we also have a book that concentrates on Assyria, and in particular on its great capital city, Nineveh. The book of Nahum really is a prophecy against Nineveh or a group of prophecies against Nineveh, united into a whole.

A. Acrostic Poem: God's Majesty and Judgment (Na 1:1-15).

Nahum begins with an acrostic poem. Chapter 1 of the book of Nahum is written in that style that we call acrostic, in which the various letters of the alphabet are employed to start each successive verse. So you start with the "A" about Nineveh, and the "B," and the "C," and so on. It is a way of systematically going through, in a kind of thorough fashion, a description of God's judgment against the people of Nineveh. Now the particular emphasis of that acrostic poem is on God's majesty in judgment.

It is not just that God is going to punish the people of Nineveh, which certainly is true. The book starts out, after all, saying, "The Lord is a jealous and avenging God; the Lord takes vengeance and is filled with wrath. The Lord takes vengeance on His foes and maintains His wrath against His enemies." But there is also the majesty of God; there is this aspect that God's character is not just vindictive. So we read these words, "The Lord is slow to anger and great in power." And we read, "The Lord is good, a refuge in time of trouble. He cares for those who trust in him, but with an overwhelming flood, he will make an end of Nineveh; he will pursue his foes into darkness."

What is going on here? Why this kind of language? It is yet another instance of an oracle against a foreign nation. One way to reassure God's people that they will be blessed and protected and

elevated from their lowly position of subjugation to the people of Nineveh (as was the case, in the middle or toward the end, we are not exactly sure, seventh century or maybe sometime between 650 and 620 B.C. when Nahum preached this) was to reassure people in those conditions that their future will be bright, partly because the future of those enemy nations that suppressed them will, in fact, be reduced in scope. The oppressors have to be brought down. Their power to oppress has to be restricted in order that God's people can be elevated, as is God's plan.

God is described as one ready and able and concerned and willing and determined to take care of what, for the people of Israel, was the oppressive nation, that is, Nineveh, in the middle and end of the seventh century B.C. We read these words: "From you, O Nineveh, has one come forth who plots evil against the Lord and counsels wickedness." So what has got to happen to that kind of nation? "Although they have allies and are numerous, they will be cut off and will pass away." Then to Judah (the remainder of Israel in those days, the last part of the nation that was not already in the Assyrian Empire):

"Although I have afflicted you, O Judah, I will afflict you no more. Now I will break their yoke from your neck and tear your shackles away."

B. Siege and Sack of Nineveh (Na 2:1-13).

In chapter 2, we read about a description of the siege and sack of Nineveh. Nahum has been inspired to paint a picture, it is a futuristic picture, a description of what will take place: "An attacker advances against you, Nineveh. Guard the fortress, watch the road, brace yourselves, martial all your strength! The Lord will restore the splendor of Jacob like the splendor of Israel, though destroyers have laid them waste and have ruined their vines." He is doing this, in other words, on behalf of His people. These are stories about the way that God will take care of His people. "The shields of his soldiers are red; the warriors are clad in scarlet (this is the attacker). The metal on the chariots flashes on the day they are made ready; the spears of pine are brandished. The chariots storm through the streets, rushing back and forth through the squares. They look like flaming torches; they dart about like lightening. He summons His picked troops," etc. Whoever ends up attacking Nineveh and destroying it, and we know that in fact it was the Babylonians, will be functioning as God's army. This is exactly what the prophet Habakkuk says. Why are the people of Babylon so evil, yet so successful? God says, "Because I am using them for my purposes." That is what is going on here.

C. Description of Nineveh (Na 3:1-19).

In chapter 3, we have a description of Nineveh as compared to Egypt. After predicting that it will come to defeat for several verses, in 3:8 we read these words: "Are you better than Thebes, situated on the Nile, with water around her? The river was her defense, the waters her wall. Cush and Egypt were her boundless strength; Put and Libya were among her allies. Yet she was taken captive and went into exile." Who took Thebes, the capital of Egypt, into exile? It was the Assyrians, in 663 B.C. Now, through Nahum, God is turning the tables on Nineveh and saying, "Are you better than Thebes, that city you destroyed and took into exile? No, since you are not better, since you do not deserve to live when I allowed you to destroy them for their sins, I am also going to cause you to be destroyed for your sins."

So the book ends with certainty of justice against Assyria and its capital Nineveh. "O king of Assyria, your shepherds slumber; your nobles lie down to rest. Your people are scattered on the mountains with no one to gather them. Nothing can heal your wound; your injury is fatal.

Everyone who hears the news about you claps his hands at your fall (applause for the destruction of Nineveh), for who has not felt your endless cruelty?" Does God hate Assyria? No, that is not it. But is God determined ultimately to bring justice and judgment so that wrongs will be righted everywhere for all time? The answer is "yes," and Nineveh deserves it, and will get it; and Nahum is a prophet through whom God gets that message across to His people.

29-Joel Zephaniah And Habakkuk - God Enduring Patience

Jonah-Habakkuk: The God of Israel and the God of the Nations - Lesson 2

Joel, Zephaniah & Habakkuk: God's Enduring Patience.

I. Introduction to Joel, Zephaniah, and Habakkuk.

In this segment, we look at Joel and Zephaniah and Habakkuk, three Judean prophets toward the end of the time that Judah was an independent nation. In other words, all these prophets are within the last few decades of the history of Judah prior to its final destruction and captivity by the Babylonians in 586 B.C.

II. Book of Joel.

We do not know for sure the date of any of them, but we can fairly well guess that Joel might have prophesied rather close to 586 B.C., as the Babylonians were more and more powerful, more and more successful, and had more and more influence in and around Judah. It could even be that Joel is making reference in a metaphorical way, with his talk of the invasion of locusts to the first great invasion of the Babylonians that affected Judah and Jerusalem in 598 B.C.

A. Locust Invasion (Joel 1:1-2:11).

Chapters 1-2 of Joel talk about locusts. The question is: Is the prophet actually speaking of a locust plague when he talks about all the doom and hardship that it caused? He implies that it is a kind of army invading on God's behalf and giving a wake-up call to Israel (that is, Judah, the part of Israel that is left now). Or is he portraying the Babylonians like locusts? It is difficult to tell. I am inclined to think it is the latter: that he is, in fact, responding to the way that the Babylonian armies are simply overwhelmed. They just out-number anything the people of Judah could ever put on the field. Like a monstrous army of locusts, like the millions and millions of these special grasshoppers that grow under certain conditions and fly together on the wind as locusts do and are so totally destructive and leave the land devastated, the Babylonians, in fact, fought that way.

Joel can speak of these invaders as an army, and does so, but then also he can speak of God as driving them away. Generally speaking, we know that the prophets told the people of Judah that the Babylonians were functioning as God's army to bring about His judgment against the people of Judah. Jeremiah says that in many different ways, in many of the chapters of his prophecy. Habakkuk says exactly that, and it would be reasonable for us to think that Joel is, as well, indicating that sort of thing.

When God talks about these locusts as "my great army," we have to presume that it makes sense to think that in fact He, too, is referring to the Babylonians. Here is the situation: Judah is invaded; it is invaded by an overwhelming force that seems unstoppable in the way that a farmer cannot really stop locusts. You can hardly go out there in Bible times with rocks or stones or sticks and do much to them. You can step on a few of them and crush a few of them in your hand, but they come in such overwhelming numbers that you can hardly end up with any kind of successful resistance. In each case, what Joel is doing (in chapter 1 where he first describes the invasion, and in chapter 2 where the invasion continues and is further described), what Joel is inspired to do is call the people to lamentation and repentance.

B. Deliverance Promised if Israel Repents (Joel 2:12-32).

What is Judah supposed to do? When the invader comes and all these problems are before them, what do they do? The answer is: You turn to the Lord. You bring your lament before the Lord.

You bring your call to Him for deliverance. You describe to Him why you are suffering. You tell Him you trust in Him and that you have assurance in Him; and you praise Him. And you place in His hands your burden and ask Him to help you. And you certainly have got to repent. That is what the people needed to do.

This invasion was not the result of happenstance, it was a call from God to His people; it was a message to them. The message of the Scripture always is: If your sins have found you out, repent, turn yourselves over to God. Appeal to Him, and confess your sin, for He is faithful and just to forgive you. But there is a real turn that takes place also in the book of Joel. Joel is one of these prophetic books that is kind of bifid in structure; that is, it has all the materials of one kind at the first half and then turns to another kind of emphasis in the second half. Many prophetic books are organized in such a manner, Joel is.

There is a real turning point with 2:18. After all these descriptions of invasion, and the destruction, and the need for repentance, and so on, then we get these suddenly happy predictions, wonderful and glorious predictions. God wants His people to see that, even though in the short run, in the decades immediately ahead, they will be conquered and exiled by the Babylonians. The time is coming when He will restore them to things more wonderful than ever could have been imagined. In other words, the time of the new covenant is coming and all the blessings that Christ gives His people will be theirs.

We read about this in connection with the coming of the Spirit, 2:18: "Then the Lord will be jealous for his land and take pity on His people. The Lord will reply to them: 'I am sending you grain, new wine and oil, enough to satisfy you fully; never again will I make you an object of scorn to the nations. I will drive the northern army from you, pushing it into a parched and barren land, with its front columns going into the eastern sea and those in the rear into the western sea (that is, from the Persian Gulf to the Mediterranean, which was in fact a description of the distance that the armies of the Babylonians covered).' Surely he has done great things. Be not afraid, O land; be glad and rejoice. Surely the Lord has done great things. . . . Be glad, O people of Zion, rejoice in the Lord your God, for he has given you the autumn rains in righteousness. He sends you abundant showers, both autumn and spring rains, as before. The threshing floors will be filled with grain; the vats will overflow with new wine and oil."

So often, the prophets express in the common language of agricultural bounty the spiritual blessings of the Lord. "I will repay you for the years the locusts have eaten . . . my great army that I sent among you. You will have plenty to eat, until you are full, and you will praise the name of the Lord your God . . . Then you will know that I am in Israel, that I am the Lord your God, and that there is no other; never again will my people be shamed. And afterward, I will pour out my Spirit on all people." This is a prediction of the democratization of the Holy Spirit, the spreading of the Spirit of God, not just on one person or another, not just on Moses and Aaron or Joshua, or not just on the prophets, but now everybody will have God's Spirit.

This, of course, is one of the great features of the new covenant age: the fact that we all have, who know Christ our Savior and Lord, the indwelling of His Spirit. We may not use the Spirit; we may resist the Spirit. We may be like people still walking a great distance to work, with a Mercedes in the garage. But we have the Spirit; and if we have the Spirit, we have God within us. So it is a wonderful prediction: "I will pour out my Spirit on all people. Your sons and daughters will prophesy, old men will dream dreams, your young men will see visions." In other words, every believer will be as close to God as the prophets once were.

"Even on my servants, both men and women, I will pour out my Spirit in those days. I will show wonders in the heavens and on the earth, blood and fire and billows of smoke." It will not be limited just to some. It will be for everybody, young and old, male and female, upper and lower classes, with no distinction. "And everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved; for on Mount Zion and in Jerusalem there will be deliverance, as the Lord has said, among the survivors whom the Lord calls." Of course, Christ bought that deliverance on that very Mount Zion, where he gave His life.

C. Judgment on the Nations and Israel's Restoration (Joel 3:1-21).

In chapter 3, there is in the book an emphasis on the judgment on the nations. Again, it is the other nations, those who are suppressing Israel, nations like Tyre and Sidon, or the Philistines, or other groups, are eliminated, their power restricted and diminished. It will be possible for the people of God to be elevated, which is always a theme in the Prophets. "Do not worry about history. Do not worry about what the nations are doing, I will take care of all that," says the Lord. "I am doing wonderful things; I am going to bring on the scene a whole new kind of international reality, where what you have known to be the pattern will be done away with."

Then there is a call to judgment of those nations, where God will judge them, as of course we know the final judgment will take place at the throne of Christ. "Proclaim this among the nations: Prepare for war! Rouse the warriors! Let all the fighting men draw near and attack. Beat your plowshares into swords and your pruning hooks into spears," the opposite of what Isaiah and Micah have said in predicting peace. This is now a prediction of war against those nations to eliminate them in terms of their political and military power, so that their people can be freed from the oppression of a structure that looks only for world domination and empire. "Then you will know that I, the Lord your God, dwell in Zion, my holy hill. Jerusalem will be holy; never again will foreigners invade her."

This is the Jerusalem of the book of Revelation, a Jerusalem full of people of faith, belonging to God, symbolizing heaven. "In that day the mountains will drip new wine, and the hills will flow with milk . . . Judah will be inhabited forever and Jerusalem through all generations. . . . The Lord dwells in Zion!" Good news for a people who were oppressed and suppressed, encouragement for a people who were about to go through a horrible time of conquest, exile, decimation, suffering for many years as slaves in a foreign land.

III. Book of Zephaniah.

Zephaniah, a contemporary of Joel and Habakkuk, preached "the Day of the Lord." This theme is found in many of the prophetic books, but it is something that Zephaniah starts with.

A. The Day of the Lord (Zep 1:1-2:3).

Listen to these words from a prophet preaching sometime within the last two or three decades prior to the destruction of Judah in 586 B.C. "I will sweep away everything from the face of the earth," declares the Lord. "I will sweep away both men and animals; I will sweep away the birds of the air and the fish of the sea. The wicked will have only heaps of rubble when I cut off man from the face of the earth," declares the Lord."

Wow! That sounds like an elimination of humanity, but it is part of the way that God, through this prophet, describes something akin to the extreme action of eliminating wickedness that took place during the days of the Flood, when only Noah and his family were rescued. So using that

same kind of language, the prophet Zephaniah says major, sweeping changes are going to take place. It is as if everybody will be gone and there will be a whole new people. Now, of course, that is God's plan. God's ultimate plan is to destroy all evil in the universe; all evil will be eliminated, and, therefore, people who continue to be evil have to be eliminated as well. Only righteousness will prevail and only righteous people will continue to live forever. That is the plan of God; that is the biblical story; that is how redemption will work, in fact, with regard to the wicked and the righteous.

Zephaniah has prophecies against the Judeans and what will happen to them, the dangers of their own wickedness, the way that they have been unfaithful to God. He says, speaking for the Lord: "At that time I will search Jerusalem with lamps and punish those who are complacent, who are like wine left on its dregs, who think, 'The Lord will do nothing, either good or bad.' Their wealth will be plundered, their houses demolished. They will build houses but not live in them; they will plant vineyards but not drink the wine. The great day of the Lord is near. Listen! The cry on the day of the Lord will be bitter That will be a day of wrath, a day of distress and anguish, a day of trouble and ruin"

There had been a belief among many Israelites (we know it especially from Isaiah and other prophets) that when God intervened on His day, when He came on that day, He really entered into setting things right. He would totally rescue His people, Judah. But what Zephaniah and other prophets were inspired to make very clear was that that day was not going to be good for them, because they, too, were among God's enemies. Many of the prophets, Zephaniah prominent among them, used "Day of the Lord" language ironically. "This is a day of rescue for the good people; but do not step forward too fast, Judah, because your sins are so great that you who think you are okay are not. So woe to you who are complacent, who think the Lord will do nothing, you have got another thing coming. God has, in fact, in mind to punish you for what you have done."

The possibility of repentance however is always held out. In the long run, God knows His people will have to turn to Him again; He is the only Savior. We read these words, "Gather together, O shameful nation, before the appointed time arrives and that day sweeps on like chaff, before the fierce anger of the Lord comes on you, before the day of the Lord's wrath comes upon you. Seek the Lord, all you humble of the land, you who do what he commands. Seek righteousness, seek humility; perhaps you will be sheltered on the day of the Lord's anger." See, that is what should be the response of everyone who trusts in God. They should say, "Even if everybody else is going down to defeat by opposing God, even if God's wrath is coming on my society, on my nation, I am going to do what is right." And that is what people are invited to do, as individuals or families or small groups, even though the predominant future is, in fact, a future of wrath.

B. Oracles against Foreign Nations (Zep 2:4-15).

There are a number of oracles against those nations that oppressed Israel, the Philistines, the Moabites, the Ammonites, the Assyrians and so on; but then there's also a prediction of disaster on Judah itself and particularly its capital city, Jerusalem.

C. Moral State of Israel (Zep 3:1-20).

Chapter 3: "Woe to the city of oppressors, rebellious and defiled!" That sounds like the language that Nahum used against Nineveh, but now here is Zephaniah using it against Jerusalem. "She does not trust in the Lord, she does not draw near to her God. Her officials are roaring lions, her rulers are evening wolves, who leave nothing for the morning. Her prophets are arrogant; they

are treacherous men. Her priests profane the sanctuary and do violence to the law." We see various leaders of the society. We see people in all kinds of positions of influence, and they are all in complicity to violate the law of God, to live selfishly, not to care about His purposes, to ignore what His prophets that are true prophets are saying, and so on.

The determination is made that Judah must be destroyed, and its great capital city also must be destroyed and taken into exile. But the time will come when people will call on the Lord. He predicts this also in chapter 3: "From beyond the rivers of Cush (speaking of distant lands) my worshipers, my scattered people, will bring me offerings. On that day you will not be put to shame for all the wrongs you have done to me, because I will remove from this city those who rejoice in their pride. Never again will you be haughty on my holy hill. But I will leave within you the meek and the humble, who trust in the name of the Lord. The remnant of Israel (that is, who are new people, His new covenant and new creation), they will speak no lies, they will do no wrong, nor will deceit be found in their mouths. They will sit down and eat and no one will make them afraid. I will gather you when I bring you home. I will give you honor and praise among the peoples of the earth when I restore your fortunes before your very eyes,' says the Lord." Doom in the short run, but joy and redemption, rescue, and restoration in the long run.

IV. Book of Habakkuk.

The prophet Habakkuk is famous for one particular thing. Most people know only a little bit of Habakkuk, and the part that they know is the part that meant so much to Martin Luther, when he placed great hope and confidence in the words that Paul had quoted from Habakkuk, Habakkuk 2:4: "The just shall live by faith."

That particular sentence out of this book was something that focused Luther's understanding of what the importance of faith really was in the life of the believer, as opposed to the works-righteousness that he had grown up learning about and trying to perfect. There is much more to the book than just that statement. In fact, that statement has to be put into context. Its truth becomes all the richer when one sees the context of what is going on and why Habakkuk 2:4 is said as it is said and where it is said.

A. Habakkuk's First Complaint and God's Reply (Hab 1:1-11).

The book of Habakkuk begins with a complaint. This is very much the situation of the prophet being like the psalmist and saying the complaint in a lament form, saying what the misery is that is bothering him. In this case, he is bothered by the fact there is so much violence, destruction, crime, general evil in the society, both nationally and internationally. The world's going downhill fast; this is a lousy world to live in, and people are not living like human beings ought to live. He says to God, "Why?"

God answers in the latter part of Habakkuk's first chapter by saying, "I am going to do something on a grand scale. I am going to punish our current society here in this part of the world by bringing a great nation, the Babylonians, as my agents of punishment. They are going to basically capture everybody; they are going to put everybody under their control. Every nation will be conquered and punished by me as I use the Babylonians to do that." Well, that has some hard sides to it in and of itself. Habakkuk recognizes that if God's going to use the Babylonians as punishment for all these societies that have become so corrupt and wicked, and all these nations of the earth as He knows them, that means that the Babylonians are going to get away with a lot.

B. Habakkuk's Second Complaint and God's Reply (Hab 1:12-2:20).

His second complaint, that starts further on in 1:12, is asking, "God, how can you let the Babylonians get away with all this? Well, God's reply is, "I will not. Eventually, the Babylonians also will be crushed by yet another power." We know who that power was, that was the Persians. They took over the Babylonian Empire and gave them their comeuppance. So it is interesting: God uses the Babylonians for His purposes of punishing people, and then punishes them in turn by yet another people who will usher in for the Israelites a time of greater hope and a time of prosperity and benefit. This time is known as the beginnings of the restoration of Judah.

In that context, recognizing that the Babylonians will in fact conquer all, we have this statement: "In the midst of stuff you cannot control, in the midst of great international events, in the midst of massive cataclysmic changes, in the midst of things that I, the Lord, am superintending that you, one citizen in little Judah, cannot do much about. Here is what you can do: The just person will live by faith." In other words, no matter what happens in the world on a grand scale, we know our assignment, our assignment is to be faithful to God. We live by our faith, we trust Him, we place our lives in His hand, we obey Him, and we do His will, that is what we are called to do.

C. Habakkuk's Prayer (Hab 3:1-19).

The book ends with the final chapter, chapter 3, portraying a prayer in which the prophet visualizes God's second exodus. It is a march up from Egypt again, through the southern mountains of the Edomites and the Moabites and so on, and God is victorious; He is unstoppable. This is an important consolation for a people living at a time when the Babylonians looked unstoppable, that was who they were having to deal with directly. Habakkuk is reminded by God in this inspired prayer that it is really God who is ultimately unstoppable. In a hard time, in a time in the anticipation of great distress and trial and exile and punishment, Habakkuk can say these words: "Though the fig tree does not bud and there are no grapes on the vines, though the olive crop fails and the fields produce no food, though there are no sheep in the pen and no cattle in the stalls, yet I will rejoice in the Lord, I will be joyful in God my Savior."

30-Supplement Six

Jonah-Habakkuk: The God of Israel and the God of the Nations - Lesson 3

Supplement Six.

Archaeology's Contribution to Old Testament Study.

I. Introduction.

In this section, we will examine the historical significance of the archaeological discoveries that go beyond the specific types of finds discussed previously. These additional discoveries provide valuable information about people, places, and events mentioned in the Bible. We will then look at some of the contributions archaeology has made to biblical studies, but we will also examine several limitations. After these discussions, you will be ready to apply all your newfound insights.

II. More Valuable Insights from Archaeology

Beyond the specific types of discoveries discussed previously, archaeology has provided valuable insights into people, places, and events which are found in the biblical text.

A. People.

Archaeology has given historical credence to many individuals mentioned in the Bible, such as the prophet Balaam (Nu 22-24). Texts found at Deir 'Alla (on the east side of the Jordan) have attested to his existence. Archaeology has shown the importance of historical figures such as Sennacherib, Nebuchadnezzar, and Cyrus. It has also informed our knowledge of the people of the Old Testament by adding facts and perspectives not found in Scripture. A good example is the archaeological evidence related to the reign of the Persian king Xerxes (Hebrew Ahasuerus). He is portrayed with his father on the reliefs at Persepolis, where Darius sits on his throne in his robe of state and behind him stands the crown prince.

Events recorded in Scripture are a part of ancient Israelite history. The central theme of the Bible is the history of that stream of human activity, which found its consummation in the New Testament, the Messiah, and the church. That stream did not flow in an isolated channel but mingled with the other tributaries of universal human history, and is understood to a much greater extent when it is viewed as part of a more complex whole.

Archaeology has opened people's eyes to the distant past in which the biblical events occurred. Ancient Sumer, whose existence was not even guessed at previously, is now recognized as a foundational civilization of the biblical world. Its contributions in terms of technology and thought have been traced into subsequent cultures, Akkadian, Babylonian, Assyrian, Neo-Babylonian, which were intimately connected with the history of ancient Israel. Similar information has been revealed about the ancient Egyptians, Canaanites, and other people groups on the fringe of Israel's existence. The knowledge that has been gleaned about these peoples includes their languages and writings, their literature and art, their institutions, religions, and history, at least in part.

B. Places.

Archaeological excavations can inform us about biblical places in many of the same ways they inform us about people, largely through written records. Sometimes this information involves cities like Jerusalem, Babylon, and Nineveh that figure prominently in the biblical record. Excavations at Nineveh have provided more light on ancient Assyrian history, literature, and culture than any other site. The description of this ancient capital as "a very important city" (Jnh

3:3) is hardly hyperbole. From Nineveh's walls, temples, palaces, inscriptions, and reliefs, silent witness is given to a city that flourished up until the time of its destruction by the Babylonians in 612 B.C. Other cities such as Ur and Hazor play relatively insignificant parts in Scripture, but were important centers and have been excavated to great advantage.

Archaeological research has established the identity of literally hundreds of places, in Mesopotamia, Persia, ancient Canaan, and Egypt, that are mentioned in the Bible. Through the excavation of biblical sites, a great deal has been learned of the nature and development of ancient architecture. The form and content of houses, palaces, temples, stables, and city walls and gates are now quite well known. We have a much clearer picture of what Solomon's temple looked like because of the Canaanite temples that have been excavated, which exhibit the same general plan.

C. Events.

Some events are important to world history, but are passed by without the barest reference in the Bible. The famous battle of Qarqar (853 B.C.) is the best example of this. The monolith inscription of Shalmeneser III gives a record of this famous military engagement, in which a large coalition of western states, including Ahab of Israel, prevented the Assyrian king from exerting his influence in the west and reducing the Israelites to vassal states.

Something of only passing interest to the biblical authors such as the fall of Lachish to Sennacherib in 701 is illuminated in reliefs depicting the event on the walls of Sennacherib's palace in Nineveh. The fall of the city to Nebuchadnezzar's forces more than a century later is the background for the Lachish letters, some military correspondence depicting the critical situation on the eve of the collapse of Judah. Both of these destructions are further supported by data gleaned from ongoing excavations at the site.

The discovery of thousands of historical texts in Egypt and Mesopotamia has enabled scholars to work out the historical chronology of the ancient world in considerable detail. Historical synchronisms have been established for dating the accession of Solomon (c. 970 B.C.), the accession of Jehu, a king in the northern kingdom of Israel (841 B.C.), the fall of Samaria (722 B.C.), and the first capture of Jerusalem (March 15/16, 597 B.C.). These dates in turn provide a framework for the chronology of the kings of Judah and Israel. For those periods in which no synchronism have been discovered, a relative chronology has been worked out in considerable detail based upon pottery dating techniques.

III. Role of Archaeology in Interpretation.

It can certainly be said that archaeology has played an important role in helping readers better understand the Bible. Archaeology has provided much useful information for people desiring to gain a fuller appreciation of Old Testament times, but we must always keep in mind there is much more to be learned. Sound scholarship should never be dependent on the chance find of the archaeologist's spade. One should never forget that the Bible contains two kinds of truth, statements of faith and statements of historical fact. Statements of faith are not susceptible to the same types of inquiry as are the records of historical happenings and persons. Archaeological research has greatly increased our knowledge and understanding of the historical record, but we should be careful to never use it to prove the Bible in terms of statements of faith.

The Bible is a collection of literary and historical documents covering more than twenty centuries. The first essential task of the interpreter is to determine what the writer originally

sought to communicate and to whom he or she first directed his or her communication. That is why all information that provides contemporary comment on social, political, or cultural background, which clarifies literary form and convention, explains language, or throws light on habits of thought and speech is relevant to interpretation.

In the case of the Old Testament, such information is chiefly archaeological. Around the whole sweep of the Fertile Crescent, the remains of peoples, cities, and empires, epigraphical, architectural, artistic, and of every other sort of which archaeology takes widening and increasingly expert notice, have elucidated and illuminated the text of Scripture from Genesis to Malachi.

A. Valuable Information.

Archaeology has provided us with a new open door to the study of ancient civilizations, which in turn has helped us to understand and interpret better our ancient historical records. Every area of biblical research has been illuminated and brought into sharper focus by the knowledge that comes from ancient Near Eastern archaeology. Our understanding of each major period of biblical history has been broadened and deepened by ever-increasing archaeological discoveries.

The apologetic value of archaeology is almost too well-known to need illustration.

Archaeological discoveries have confirmed every period of biblical history, whether the general accuracy of the patriarchal background (evidenced in the Nuzi tablets, Mari tablets, etc.), or specific details such as the confirmation of the existence of the once-doubted Hittites (evidence from Boghaz-koy), or once-mentioned individuals, as Sargon (Isa 20:1), or doubted narrative records, as Sennacherib's recorded failure to capture Jerusalem (2Kings 19:35-36). Although much more could be said about the positive benefits of archaeology, there are some limitations.

B. Limitations of Archaeology.

All the work of archaeological organization, expense, time, and effort invested in excavations are pointless without a detailed interpretation of the data produced and the communication of that data to interested parties. Other limitations of archaeology include the following:

1. A significant limitation of biblical archaeology is the plethora of sites that have not yet been excavated. There are over 5,000 ancient ruins in what are now Israel and Jordan, without counting sites in other areas of the ancient Near East world. Most of the Palestinian sites are tells, and of these only a few hundred have attracted excavators. Of the excavated sites, only about 30 can be considered major excavations; the remainder have consisted of small-scale soundings, emergency clearances, or salvage operations. It is important to keep in mind that even the major sites are only partially uncovered during the course of an excavation. It is apparent, then, that a very high percentage of the major ruins of Palestine remain untouched by any expedition. In other words, in comparison to the minuscule amount that has been recovered, a massive amount of information remains undiscovered, despite nearly a century of excavations.

2. An extenuating factor in biblical archaeology is the problem that many of the major excavations were carried out prior to 1936, before the development of some of the more sophisticated techniques which have become standard practice since the end of World War II. The results of earlier excavations may be suspect, therefore; and in some cases tells that were excavated, when excavation was in its infancy, have become the focus of recent re-excavations. Megiddo, Jericho, Shechem, and Gezer are among the sites that have been re-excavated in order to clarify the work of earlier excavators.

3. Another problem in archaeological research is the fact that, unlike chemistry or biology, the experiment cannot be repeated. Each archaeological site is unique; and once a part of the tell is disturbed, that part, that experiment, cannot be duplicated. Each site is unique even though there are some basic similarities in Palestinian tells in the same region. The condition of the layers of debris will depend upon whether they were laid down in peace or in war, and on whether they have been disturbed by subsequent inhabitants who dug pits, foundation trenches, silos, or reservoirs. Thus the condition of the occupational layers will determine whether the process of stratigraphic excavation will be simple or complex.

4. A final limitation is that too often too much has been expected from biblical archaeology, a relatively new discipline. By the very nature of the enterprise, data extracted from excavations can often be interpreted in a number of different ways and can be dated only within relative degrees of certainty. In spite of the progress made in excavation methods, archaeology still remains an inexact science. It may enlighten us, excite us, challenge us, even disturb us; but rarely, if ever, does it provide us with all the answers. Archaeology is simply one of the building blocks to be used in our quest for a more complete biblical understanding.

31-haggai And Zecariah - Encouragement To Excellence

Haggai-Malachi: No Substitute for Obedience - Lesson 1

Haggai and Zechariah: Encouragement to Excellence.

I. Introduction.

In this segment, we talk about two contemporaneous prophets: Haggai and Zechariah. We know from the book of Ezra that Haggai and Zechariah preached together and even worked together. They are mentioned as encouraging the people of God to work on the temple at Jerusalem. Here is the situation: As of 520 B.C. the returning exiles from Babylon to Judah had managed in eighteen years to build only the foundation of the temple. Jerusalem lay in ruins. The great flat rock area at the top of Mount Zion, where the temple had been, was nothing but bedrock since the first temple had been destroyed and removed entirely by the Babylonians, including its foundation. The progress made in getting the temple rebuilt had been limited in almost two decades to nothing but the foundation stones.

This presented a kind of a scary picture. The prophet Jeremiah had said the exile would last seventy years. That exile is measured from the time of the destruction of the first temple, the one Solomon had built, in 586 B.C., obviously to the point seventy years later, which would be 516 B.C. Yet in 520 B.C., for various reasons, namely fear, fear of what others would do, fear of attack from outsiders, fear of the opposition of enemy nations, the people of Judah had allowed the temple to get no further than just its foundation. There were four years to go to get that great massive structure, the biggest thing anywhere around, built.

But there was a new political situation: a king named Darius had come to power in Persia. He was the new emperor. After a substantial period of several years of instability, he subdued all rebellion against the central authority in Persia. This meant that the empire was stable. God had, of course, brought it about and now it was time in that situation of stability for His people to get to work and build that temple. So Haggai and Zechariah were moved by God as prophets to begin preaching to the people words of encouragement.

II. Book of Haggai.

Haggai's prophecies are as limited in time scope as any we know of. In this short book, the four prophecies that we read about were all given within a three-month period in the year 520 B.C., the second year of the reign of Darius, king of Persia. Indeed, Haggai's last two prophecies are delivered on the very same day, the twenty-fourth day of the ninth month of that year.

A. First Message: Complete the Second Temple (Hag 1:1-15).

He begins with these kinds of words, "the word of the Lord came . . . This is what the Lord Almighty says, 'Give careful thought to your ways. You have planted much, but you have harvested little. You eat, but never have enough. You drink, but never have your fill. You put on clothes, but are not warm. You earn wages, only to put them in a purse with holes in it.' " In other words, "You are having a terrible time. You are barely holding on financially here in 520 B.C. Why?" Well, the answer is "You have not been doing what you are supposed to have been doing. You have not been dedicating yourself to the first responsibility of every believer, and that is to worship Me." So He says, "' Give careful thought to your ways. Go up into the mountains and bring down timber and build the house, so that I may take pleasure in it and be honored,' says the Lord." That is what God wants done. "Why are these things happening to you? What have you brought home? Why has it gone awry? Why?" says the Lord. "Because of my house, which

remains a ruin, while each of you is busy with your own house." You preoccupied yourselves with what you thought were necessities, but your real necessity was to pursue My kingdom.

It is just like Jesus' words, "Seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all the other things will come in line, all these others will be added to you." That is what the people of 520 B.C. in Judah were not getting. So God, as He says in chapter 1 of the book of Haggai, had given them drought so that the fields were dry; and, of course, there was little productivity to any of the crops, and a certain degree of misery was being experienced by the people. What they needed to know is that God wanted first things first. Now He encourages His people; He does not want them just to be afraid of Him, and just to feel misery. He says, "'I am with you' (in chapter 1), declares the Lord." That is an important statement. You read often in Genesis, "God was with Joseph," bringing him out of the bondage. He found himself as a jailed person for charges against him that were not really true and elevating him steadily up through the civil service, until he becomes the prime minister of Egypt. "God was with Joseph," we read. Or, the prophecy of Isaiah states that Immanuel will come, meaning, "God with us."

B. Second Message: Encouragement (Hag 2:1-9).

For God to say to His people, "I am with you," is to say, "I have got great things in store for you. It is not just "I am hanging around watching," but rather, "I am supporting you, encouraging you; I am behind you, and I will do the things for you that you cannot do for yourself. Build that house. Get the temple done." Is God petty? Does He have to have a temple to look good? No, not at all. With the temple built, the people could properly worship; they could honor God, and they could place Him first in their lives at the center, which they desperately needed to do. This was a responsibility that they had to undertake; people are not properly organized unless God is at their center. People are skewed and unbalanced, unless they see worship of their Lord as primary to their lives.

C. Third Message: Instruction and Assurance (Hag 2:10-19).

There is an interesting little story in the book of Haggai about something that might be called a priestly ruling question. The prophet goes around to some priests and asks them this question: "If a person carries consecrated meat in the fold of his garment, and that fold touches some bread or stew or wine or oil or other food, does it become consecrated?" The priests answer, "No." It is an interesting question and this is a ruling he is kind of getting from the priests. He is asking them about the way that consecration works. "If you have consecrated some food by offering it to God on the altar, you have that with you, and you touch other things with it, do they catch the consecration? Do they kind of get it by being near it? Does it filter off to them?" The priests say, "No, that is not how it works." You do not consecrate other things by touching them with something that has been consecrated, because the priests knew you had to consecrate each piece of food right at God's altar in His very presence. God's the consecrator. You bring things right to Him and put them directly before Him. You put them close to Him, and they get consecrated.

Haggai is led by God to ask another kind of question of the priests: "If a person defiled by contact with a dead body touches one of these things, does it become defiled?" The priests reply, "Yes, it becomes defiled." In other words, that which is itself unclean, like a dead body, can by contact spread defilement. So consecration cannot be spread automatically but defilement can. What is the message here? "'So it is with this people and this nation in my sight,' declares the Lord. 'Whatever they do, whatever they offer there (at the temple mount without a built temple) is defiled.'" In other words, good obedience to God is not automatic. You do not drift into it. It does not just happen; it is not something you can expect to take place just by waiting for it. That

is not how it works. If God is to be properly honored and worshiped in a temple that is in that day the way that people were supposed to worship Him, it has got to happen. It does not just take place in and of itself; whereas, defilement does happen somewhat automatically. If you do nothing, you are automatically going to fall into defilement.

So the priests themselves, the ones who should have been pushing hardest for that temple to be built, were in fact standing around with everybody else worried about the consequences of building it, whether it would be too much money, too much time, whether it would somehow provoke the wrath of neighboring states. They need to learn the lesson, and teach it to the people, that you have to be proactive to reach God and His blessing. You do not just passively assume that He will find you and save you from your sins; you have to go to God and ask for forgiveness. And you certainly have to actively worship Him if you are supposed to be one of His worshipers.

D. Fourth Message: Great Things to Come (Hag 2:20-23).

The book ends with predictions of great things that can come. In 520 B.C., Zerubbabel was the name of the governor of Judah and Joshua was the high priest. They needed a lot of encouragement, and Zerubbabel in particular needed to be encouraged not to be afraid of the consequence of getting to work on the temple. He was so sensitive to what this might do to the Moabites and Ammonites and Samaritans and others who tended to oppose the Jews that he tended to be overly cautious.

God's Word to him at the end of the book is this, "Tell Zerubbabel governor of Judah that I will shake the heavens and the earth. I will overturn royal thrones and shatter the power of the foreign kingdoms. I will overthrow chariots and their drivers; horses and their riders will fall, each by the sword of his brother", very much like what happened in the days of the Exodus when God overthrew the horse and rider and the chariots of Egypt. "' On that day,' declares the Lord Almighty, 'I will take you, my servant Zerubbabel son of Shealtiel,' declares the Lord, 'and I will make you like my signet ring, for I have chosen you,' declares the Lord Almighty.", encouragement for a chicken governor. A word of hope and a promise to him from God was, "I am in charge. I can keep the other nations from attacking. I can hold them back, and I can do whatever is necessary to suppress them. You go ahead with that project and get the temple built."

III. Book of Zechariah.

The book of Zechariah starts with many of those same themes that we see in Haggai. It is also 520 B.C., and the temple needs to be built. Zerubbabel and Joshua, the high priest, have been overly cautious about going ahead with the work.

A. Visions and Messages of Encouragement (Zec 1:1-8:23).

Zechariah starts with a series of visions. God allows him to see a whole bunch of visions that are described for us in the first several chapters of the book, up through chapter 6. These visions contain all kinds of ways in which God reassures the leadership of Judah, and therefore also its people, that He is in charge that He has stabilized world events, that the chaos and dangers of the past are now limited, and that they can go ahead and truly rebuild His temple, and also rebuild their religious faithfulness to Him.

We have pictures, for example, of horses and riders that go out around the world and come back and report things are stable, God is in control. We have a description of four horns coming at Judah, and as you see it first all you see are those horns in the prediction that comes at the end of

chapter 1. Little by little, you can see that these belong to animals; and then there are four plowmen who are coming. It is translated in some of the versions as "craftsmen," but the better translation is "plowmen." They know how to herd these animals home. These are big oxen with their horns sticking out, and that is what looks scary when you just focus on the horns. But the plowmen are not afraid of them, so they just prod the oxen and chase them back home. God says, "So I will do to the great nations that in the past have suppressed you", in other words, the Egyptians and Babylonians and Assyrians and Persians.

There is a man with a measuring line measuring Jerusalem. Why? Because it is going to be rebuilt; it is going to be a great city. It is going to be different from what it was in the old days, the actual physical Jerusalem that the prophet Zechariah lived near. It is going to become a fantastic, wonderful place for the people of God to live in. Their God will be in the midst of all His people just as He was, symbolically especially, in the midst of Jerusalem. New garments are produced for the high priest. He can take off his dirty ones, symbolizing his insecurity, his infidelity to the covenant, and his lack of faith. Now he can serve the Lord, and with God's grace and by God's Spirit, do the right kinds of things he should have done all along.

The golden lampstand and the two olive trees were part of the design of that tabernacle and temple lampstand described as symbolizing the governor Zerubbabel and the high priest Jeshua. There the olive trees that will now be precious to God and do His will, another way symbolically in the vision of encouraging these two leaders. He also sees a vision of a woman in a basket. This woman represents sin. She gets stuffed into a huge basket and she gets sent way off to Babylonia. "Let them have the sin," says the Lord. "I am going to forgive you, and I am going to cleanse you, My people. I am going to deal with you as a pure people." A great encouragement at a time when there was a desperate need for people to turn to the Lord and realize His forgiveness. There is a depiction in chapter 6 of the high priest, Jeshua (or Joshua as he is also called), getting a crown. Again, this is encouragement for him; the crown represents God's favor in leading the people. There are many promises in the book, but there are also worries and threats; and the book shifts rather dramatically in chapter 9.

B. Oracles (Zec 9:1-14 :21).

It is again a bifid-structured book, in which chapters 1-8 deal with predictions and encouragement of all kinds to boost the people of Judah and Jerusalem and their leaders in their morale to serve the Lord and to honor Him and to get the things done that needed to be done at the end of the sixth century B.C., as the people were returning from captivity and restoring their relationship with the Lord in the land of their ancestors. But with chapter 9, we hit new material, these are the first oracles against foreign nations. We have a prediction of judgment on them in chapter 9, but that combined with a prediction of the fact that the King of Zion is on His way. The Lord will appear is a promise of that book.

In chapter 10, we have a prediction of God's loving care for Judah and an encouragement to be sure to get out of idolatry. We must remember that not only had the Jews practiced idolatry for most of their long history in Judah, but they had been right in the midst of full-blown involuntary idolatry in Babylonian captivity. That is the kind of thing that got Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego thrown into the fiery furnace in the book of Daniel. So this invitation: "The idols speak deceit, diviners see visions that lie; they tell dreams that are false, they give comfort in vain. Therefore the people wander like sheep oppressed for lack of a shepherd."

Well, what is God's attitude toward this terrible situation, where even the restored community of Judah is getting attracted away from His truth? "My anger burns against the shepherds," says the Lord. "I will punish the leaders. The Lord Almighty will care for his flock, the house of Judah, and make them like proud horses in battle. From Judah will come the cornerstone, from him the tent peg, from him the battle bow, from him every ruler. Together they will be like mighty men trampling the muddy streets in battle. Because the Lord is with them, they will fight and overthrow the horsemen. I will strengthen the house of Judah. I will save the house of Joseph and restore them, because I have compassion on them," declares the Lord. This theme of shepherds is a theme that relates to the problems of leadership that had just plagued Judah.

After Zerubbabel, as far as we can tell, there were not very many noble governors. An exception was the wonderful governor Nehemiah, and you can read about him in the book of Nehemiah, all the good things that he did. But he really was an exception. We simply do not know of any other good ones. The vast majority of the governors appointed by the Persians were apparently very much less than they should have been, apparently very much enamored of playing the political game and of currying favor with the people, of doing as little as possible that was difficult or controversial, of just keeping the cult going, but not really promoting true faith in God and obedience to the Mosaic covenant. As a result, they are often criticized; God speaks against worthless shepherds of one kind or another. He talks about the ways in which He will judge them.

There is a fabulous Messianic prophecy in chapter 12 of the book of Zechariah, well worth reading. We can only just sample from it here, but listen to this kind of language: "I will pour out on the house of David and the inhabitants of Jerusalem a spirit of grace and supplication.

They will look on me, the one they have pierced, and they will mourn for him as one mourns for an only child, and grieve bitterly for Him as one grieves for a firstborn son. On that day the weeping in Jerusalem will be great, like the weeping of Hadad Rimmon in the plain of Megiddo (referring to a ceremony of weeping that used to take place at that part of Israel). The land will mourn, each clan by itself." This is a way of describing in the language and imagery of that day, language and imagery meaningful to Zechariah's audience, that God would put to death His only Son. He would be pierced, and they would look on Him and that would be their means of consolation, if they would really, indeed, weep for their sins.

But they needed to be cleansed from sins, and so we find predictions of that in chapter 13. "On that day a fountain will be opened to the house of David and the inhabitants of Jerusalem to cleanse them from sin and impurity. On that day (meaning the day that I act, not specified yet in Zechariah's time, but we know it as related to the coming of Christ and His death and resurrection), I will banish the names of the idols from the land, and they will be remembered no more. I will remove the false prophets, the spirit of impurity from the land. And if anyone still does that kind of prophesying, his father and mother, to whom he was born, will say to him, 'You must die, because you have told lies in the name of the Lord.' "When he prophesies, his own parents will stab him."

Is this a prediction of something that actually came true literally? No, it is a way of saying that falsehood, false doctrine, the nonsense that characterized so much of Judah's history, turning to the false gods and their prophets and the ones who falsely claimed to speak the word of the Lord, the God of Israel, all that, would be done away with. God would have His Word purely stated before the people. He would give it to them, and they would know it. All of them would know

Him from the least to the greatest. There is also in that same chapter the prediction of the death of Christ, and the shepherd that is struck, and the sheep that are scattered as the Gospels refer to it.

Then, in chapter 14 , there is a wonderful prediction of the coming of the Messiah. It is in the Lord, the one we know as Jesus of Nazareth, the Son of God, that all of history has its consummation. Zechariah reveals that to the people that he' s called to preach to. The Lord takes away all opposition to Him, makes Him finally and utterly powerful, just as Jesus said of Himself: "All power in heaven and earth has been given to Me." That is the picture with which the book of Zechariah ends, and of course it is the fact that we count upon ourselves as we follow Christ in this world in our time.

32-Obadiah And Malachi - Gods Concern For All His People.

Haggai-Malachi: No Substitute for Obedience - Lesson 2.

Obadiah and Malachi: God's Concern For All His People.

I. Introduction to Obadiah and Malachi.

In this segment, we look at two Judean prophets, Obadiah and Malachi. Obadiah was a prophet during the time right after the fall of Jerusalem to the Babylonian conquest in 586 B.C., and Malachi from the time probably around 460 B.C., in other words a century and a third later when the Persian Empire was strong, indeed perhaps at its height, and when one might have assumed there was very little on the horizon by way of good news for the people of Israel.

One theme that links both Obadiah and Malachi is the fact that they have in them oracles against the nation of Edom. Who were the Edomites, and why should God cause these prophets to preach against them? The Edomites were perhaps the most implacable long-term foes of the people of Judah of any nation on the face of the earth. At the time of the Exodus as Moses was leading the people toward the Promised Land, the Edomites were the first to give them grief, the first to oppose them, the first to say, "Stay out of our land!" The Israelites said to them, "All we want to do is go through your land. We do not want to take Edom; we just want to go through it." And the Edomites still opposed them and threatened them and forced them to go around. From that first point, at the time when Israel was just beginning as a nation, until even after the destruction of Judah, the last little part of Israel that remained independent, the Edomites were still giving the Judeans grief. So, in fact, the Prophets give more space to attacking Edom than they do to any other nation, because Edom was so constantly at all times a foe of the Israelites.

II. Book of Obadiah.

What was Obadiah's particular position in all of this? Why did God inspire him to attack the Edomites? What had they done in his day? Obadiah appears to be writing the one-chapter book that we know by his name. He is speaking this prophecy, that he then (or one of his disciples) writes down right after 586 B.C., perhaps, only weeks after the destruction of the walls and the entering of the city by the Babylonians, but perhaps as many as a few years. What he describes is the way that the Edomites took advantage of the Babylonian conquest.

Edom was located to the south of the Dead Sea right next to the southern part of Judah, right next to what is called Negeb of Judah. The Edomites had pretty bad land to farm. They had a very rocky and wilderness kind of region and could farm only on relatively small portions of their total territory. As a result, Edomites were always looking at the possibility of getting land from Judah, of spreading out, of capturing Judean territory, of moving in to where the Judeans were. Some of this was just the pure, selfish desire for economic gain, but some of it went all the way back to a family rivalry.

Remember that the Edomites are descended from Esau. Edom means "reddish," and Esau is described as very reddish, very ruddy in complexion. Esau was Jacob's twin brother, certainly not an identical twin; they looked very different from one another, and they were fraternal twins. Esau had actually been first born, but whom Jacob had cheated him out of his birthright. So one could say that Jacob started the rivalry, but Esau certainly took it up. We read about Jacob and Esau in the book of Genesis. We read about two brothers who hated each other much more than they loved each other, and for whom reconciliation, though it was at least once accomplished, was a very difficult thing. The nations descended from these two brothers, and the nations grew

apart progressively. The Edomites and the Israelites did not get along at any time during their history.

The Babylonian invasion was tailor-made for the Edomites to get their comeuppance against the Judeans. What did the Babylonians do? They invaded Judah in 588 B.C. and they captured town after town and city after city, so that by the thousands people streamed to the one big, strongly fortified place in Judah, that is, Jerusalem. All the leadership and all the population (kind of free from capture by the Babylonians) was inside Jerusalem by 588 B.C with the huge gates bolted shut. This was perfect for the Edomites: all they had to do was simply walk into southern Judah and begin planting their seeds on the farms that had been so carefully built up over the centuries by the Judean farmers. They could take their sheep and goats and graze them on the lush hillsides that had been the grazing grounds of the Judean shepherds.

To make sure that they got back even further at the Judeans, they could do anything to advantage the Babylonians and diminish the likelihood the Judeans would succeed. So among the things that they did was to capture people fleeing from the Babylonians, that is, Judean refugees in 588, 587, and 586 B.C. As refugees would come out of hiding and try to escape to the south to go down to Egypt, the Edomites, now controlling much of the Negeb of Judah, could simply grab them and then either turn them over to the Babylonians or, equally as bad, sell them into slavery. Whatever they could do to hurt Judah, they did. Therefore, it is a small wonder that God should inspire one of His prophets in those days, around 586 B.C., to let the Edomites know, and of course the Judeans as well, that they were not going to get away with it.

A. Judgment Upon Edom (Ob 1-14).

So we read these words: "See, I make you small among the nations; you will be utterly despised. The pride of your heart has deceived you; you who live in the clefts of the rocks and make your home on the heights (describing the terrain there in Edom), you who say to yourself, 'Who can bring me down to the ground?' Though you soar like the eagle and make your nest among the stars, from there I will bring you down," says the Lord. "Oh, what disaster awaits you If grape pickers came to you, would they not leave a few grapes?' Does not everybody have at least a feel for not being totally brutal and totally selfish?

"But how Esau will be ransacked, his hidden treasures pillaged! All your allies will force you to the border; your friends will deceive and overpower you; those who eat your bread will set a trap for you, but you will not detect it." In other words, "You think this has gone well for you, and by ganging up with the Babylonians against the Judeans and by making pacts to sell Judean refugees as slaves to various nations, you think you have gotten away with something. It will all turn against you," says the Lord.

"In that day will I not destroy the wise men of Edom, men of understanding in the mountains of Esau? Your warriors, O Teman, will be terrified (that is referring to capital district), and everyone in Esau's mountains will be cut down in slaughter. Because of the violence against your brother Jacob, you will be covered with shame On the day you stood aloof while strangers carried off his wealth (in other words, applauding the Babylonian rape of the Judean countryside) and foreigners entered his gates and cast lots for Jerusalem, you were like one of them." In other words, you are as bad as the Babylonians. "You should not look down on your brother in the day of his misfortune, nor rejoice over the people of Judah in the day of their destruction, nor boast so much in the day of their trouble. You should not march through the gates of my people in the day of their disaster."

The Edomites had moved right into some of those villages and towns and cities in Judah; they marched right through the gates and took over. The cities were empty because the people had fled and now the Edomites could take advantage of it. You should not have "seized their wealth in the day of their disaster. You should not wait at the crossroads to cut down their fugitives, nor hand over their survivors in the day of trouble."

So how will God handle these Edomites, what will God do? The answer is they will be dispossessed themselves; just as they took over, grabbed, seized, and stole land that belonged to Judah that was part of God's Promised Land for His people, their land will one day be occupied.

B. Restoration of Israel (Ob 15-21).

So God says, "But on Mount Zion will be deliverance; it will be holy, and the house of Jacob will possess its inheritance. The house of Jacob will be a fire and the house of Joseph a flame; the house of Esau will be stubble, and they will set it on fire and consume it. There will be no survivors from the house of Esau,' the Lord has spoken." People from the Negev will occupy the mountains of Esau." The tables will be turned and the Judeans that once lived in the Negev will return and will take over that territory that actually belonged to Esau.

"People from the foothills will possess the land of the Philistines." Now some of the southern Judean territory of the Negev was also adjacent to Philistine territory, so the Judeans will spread out in that direction as well. Moreover, God's people "will occupy the fields of Ephraim and Samaria, and Benjamin will possess Gilead. This company of Israelite exiles who are in Canaan will possess the land as far as Zarephath; the exiles from Jerusalem who are in Sepharad will come back and possess the towns of the Negev once again. Deliverers will go up on Mount Zion to govern the mountains of Esau. And the kingdom will be the Lord's." Now this prediction of greatness is, once again, for Judah and for Israel in general, because some northern territories are mentioned as well, at the expense of the Edomites. It is housed obviously in geographical terms, but is really also emphasized in the days in which God will deliver His people.

Deliverance, we know, comes spiritually much more than it does geographically. Ultimately, we are also a people who know Christ as Savior and Lord, who look forward to a place, our Promised Land of heaven. So we can identify, because of that longing for a place, with the people of Judah who were displaced from their own homes and taken into slavery by the Babylonians or sold into slavery by people like the Edomites, long for a place once again. We can also appreciate the fact that God systematically and definitely and firmly portrays the way that He will not allow such injustices as the Edomites perpetrated to last forever. He will reward His people; He will protect them; He will give them the strength to do all the things that they need to do. That comes as an encouragement to us just as much as it came as an encouragement to people right after 586 B.C., the little remnant that was not brought into exile by the Babylonians.

III. Book of Malachi.

With Malachi, we come to the very last of the books of the Prophets, the way our Old Testament is organized, the last book of the Old Testament itself. Malachi starts just as Obadiah does, with a prophecy against the Edomites.

A. Yahweh's Love (Mal 1:1-5).

One has to be careful as one listens to the language of love and hate. "I have loved you," says the Lord. "But you ask, 'How have you loved us?' Was not Esau Jacob's brother?" the Lord

says. 'Yet I have loved Jacob, but (not Esau) Esau I have hated, and I turned his mountains into a wasteland and left his inheritance to the desert jackals.' Edom may say, 'Though we have been crushed, we will rebuild the ruins.' But this is what the Lord Almighty says: 'They may build, but I will demolish. They will be called the Wicked Land, a people always under the wrath of the Lord. You will see it with your own eyes and say, "Great is the Lord, even beyond the borders of Israel!"'

The language of love and hate is a language that must not be misunderstood. In the ancient world, this was the language of diplomacy. One would speak of one's allies as those one loved. The king would say, "I love king so and so", or "I love all the following kings, but I hate these other kings." He meant, "I am allied with these kings; whereas, I am at enmity with these other kings. We are at war, or we are hostile to one another." So when God says, "I have loved Jacob and hated Esau," He is not talking about some kind of discrimination that is arbitrary. He is talking about the fact that He has allied Himself with the people of Israel, Jacob; that I have set myself over and against and plan to punish the people of Esau.

Now by 460 B.C., the approximate date for the writing of Malachi as closely as we can determine it, the Edomites have, in fact, gotten the comeuppance that Obadiah and many other prophets had predicted for them. They had fallen very low, their territory was no longer able to produce people who went into Judah and threatened it. The Judeans were back on their farmlands and were strongly in control of their territory, and they had driven the Edomites back to a very hardscrabble existence on their small traditional territory south of the Dead Sea. Furthermore, the Persians had not favored the Edomites as they had favored the Judeans. The Edomites did not have a representative in Persia like the Israelites had in the person of Daniel, for example.

So God had favored His people just as He promised He would, and He had, in fact, so diminished the influence of the Edomites that they could say, "We are crushed." In their defiance, they could claim that they are going to rebuild, but in fact historically, it did not happen. And God finally eliminated the Edomites as a people from the face of the earth, never again to have influence, never again to be heard of really in any significant way, and He used a group called the Nabateans to do that. Now there were still some Edomites in history; it is not as if nobody had any sense of Edomite lineage. Indeed, Herod the Great was half Edomite and half Jewish. He played up the Jewish side a lot in trying to curry the favor of the Jews, and some mention is made of that in the New Testament. He played down the Edomite side from which he was descended. The term Idumean in the New Testament refers to Edomite in the Old Testament.

B. Sins Against Yahweh (Mal 1:6-3:15).

Malachi moves on from that prophecy of encouragement to the Jews and proper discouragement to the Edomites and goes into the topic of sacrifices. What was happening in Malachi's day? Sadly, people were not following the Mosaic Law very closely. God says at many points in Exodus and Numbers and Leviticus and Deuteronomy that He was supposed to receive the firstfruits, the best. When one brought a lamb or a goat kid to sacrifice to God, one was not allowed to bring some junk animal that was perhaps lame or crippled or in other ways distorted; you were supposed to bring the best, the finest. But what had happened by 460 B.C. was that priests and worshipers had made a kind of tacit pact. Priests who were supposed to reject any animal that was not perfect were accepting all the animals that the farmers wanted to cull from their herds, because they were not good breeding animals, the imperfect animals that they did not want to keep and breed. They were accepting these, because in most instances they were just as

good eating as any other animal, and the people were bringing these and bringing them in greater abundance to the priests than they otherwise would because they did not want to keep them at any rate.

So the priests were accepting these and saying that they were favored, and offering them to the Lord on the altar. The people were going along with this, people and priests together in a kind of conspiracy to defraud God. They were, in effect, robbing God. They were cheating Him, and they were giving Him less than what He called for. It would be a little like the person who says, "Oh sure, I go to church, every Christmas and every Easter." That is not giving God the worship that He's due, and these people were not as well. Malachi is inspired to describe how displeasing this is to the Lord, and says even this kind of thing, "Oh, that one of you would shut the temple doors, so that you would not light useless fires on my altar!" What they were doing was not right. They were going through the motions of the rituals, but it was not legal, and it was not proper. "I am not pleased with you," says the Lord Almighty, "and I will accept no offering from your hands. My name will be great among the nations, from the rising to the setting of the sun. In every place incense and pure offerings will be brought to my name, because my name is great among the nations," says the Lord. "But you profane it"

Now, the book of Malachi has a lot of questions and answers in it. Indeed, the whole book is kind of organized into what we might call a disputation format. There are six of these disputations that govern the book: that God will say to the people such and such, and they will say, "Really, why? Or, how do you mean it? Why is it that way?" When you read the book for yourself watch for that, because you can see how in the resolution of the questions that God asks or that the people ask in response to God's statements or questions, there comes a real explanation of what is going on, why things are the way they are.

The priests are criticized in chapter 2, which they well deserve. One of the things that the priests are allowing to happen is improper obedience to the covenant. That means they are not even instructing the people in what the words ought to be that the people hear. "True instruction was found in the mouth of Levi," says God. "But the lips of a priest ought to preserve knowledge, and from his mouth people should seek instruction. But you have turned away from the way, by your teaching you have caused many to stumble; you have violated the covenant with Levi. So I have caused you to be despised and humiliated before the people, because you have not followed my ways, but you have shown partiality in matters of the law." The most basic responsibility, to help people to know the law and obey it, was something the priests were neglecting.

God then says further in chapter 2, "Judah has broken faith. A detestable thing has been committed in Israel and Jerusalem." What is happening is that people have been "marrying the daughter of foreign gods. As for the man who does this, whomever he may be, may the Lord cut him off in the tents of Jacob, even though he brings offerings to the Lord Almighty." What does this refer to? Well, it is religious intermarriage. Ethnic intermarriage is never the issue in Scripture, but religious intermarriage, where people bring into the holy nation husbands and wives who are idolaters, is a great threat to God's people. It is a great threat to every family, and so God condemns it.

"Another thing you do: You flood the Lord's altar with tears. You weep and wail because he no longer pays attention to your offerings. You ask, 'why?'" There is the statement and the disputation: Why? The answer is, "the Lord is acting as a witness between you and the wife of your youth, because you have broken faith with her, though she is your partner, the wife of your

marriage covenant." These people were divorcing their first wives, and they were leaving the wives of their youth. In other words, the wife to whom they were engaged and to whom they married at a younger age were forsaken, and they were taking other women as their wives. Why? Simple aversion.

They did not love their wives anymore. Judgment will come from that. In chapter 3, God is robbed when people do not give their full tithe, they do not obey the basic regulations of His law in tithing, giving Him what He is owed.

C. Yahweh's Promises (Mal 3:16-4:6).

In the relatively short chapter 4, the book of Malachi and the Old Testament come to an end with this prediction: The day is coming that "will burn like a furnace. All the arrogant and every evildoer will be stubble. That day that is coming will set them on fire." Again, a prophetic prediction of the way God will cleanse this world. Evil will not be allowed to continue forever, God will purify us, and He will purify all those who belong to Him. He will cause the elimination of evil and evildoers so that what will be left will be a pure existence, a pure universe, and a pure people.

What will be the warning for one of the greatest events in this whole process, the coming of Christ? "See, I will send you the prophet Elijah before that great and dreadful day of the Lord comes. He will turn the hearts of the fathers to their children and the hearts of the children to their fathers." In other words, "He will reconcile people to themselves and to Me, or else I will come and strike the land with a curse." Did God ultimately curse His people? No, He did not, because Christ rescued them from that curse and brought them into the promises of eternal life and the very presence of God Himself. So the curse was forestayed and the hearts were turned one to another and to God. The Old Testament ends on a note of hope.