

**Old Testament Prophets
AMO® Teacher Guide**

Book of Readings

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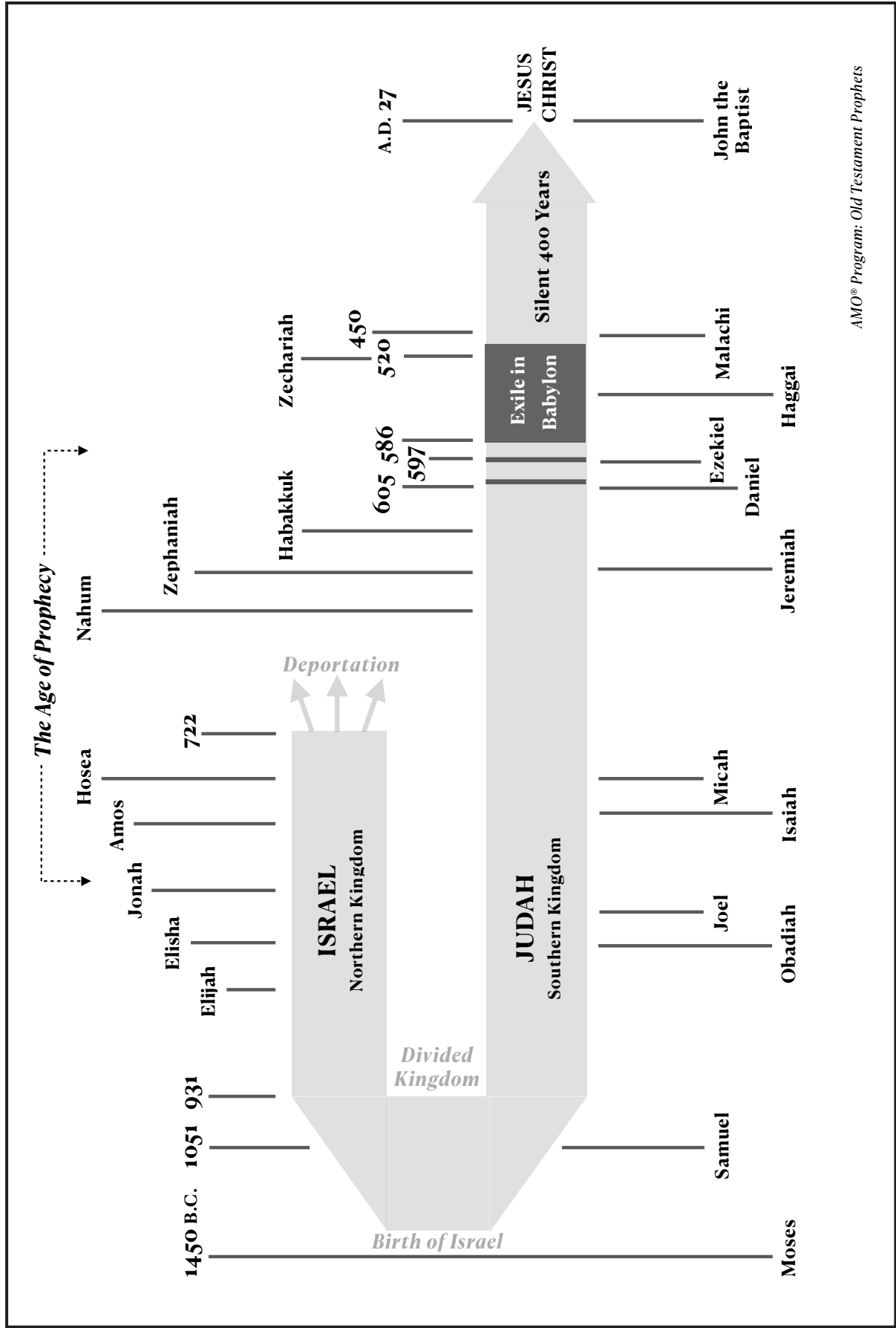
OLD TESTAMENT PROPHETS

BOOK OF READINGS

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Timeline of Israel's Prophets



Introduction to the Old Testament Prophets

Reading Nº 1

*"Surely the sovereign LORD does nothing without revealing
His plan to His servants the prophets." (Amos 3:7, NIV)*

This AMO® Program guide is a combined Christian history and Bible reading for reasoning unit that surveys the Old Testament prophets. History is God's story. When looking through the eye of history, we have learned that nothing happens by chance. Creator God is sovereign, and His overruling hand directs the course of history for His Gospel purposes. He governs in the affairs of men and nations and times all events for His eternal plan for mankind.¹ God is omniscient and proclaimed the following about Himself,

*"I am God, and there is no other; I am God,
and there is none like me, declaring the end from
the beginning and from ancient times things not
yet done."²*

This has been true from the beginning of time, when God created Adam and Eve and placed them in the beautiful garden of Eden. Here God walked with them and talked with them and instructed them on how to extend His beauty, truth, and moral goodness over all the earth. God loved Adam and Eve, and they enjoyed a close relationship with Him until the day they disobeyed His command to not eat the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. Once they disobeyed God's command and ate the fruit of this tree, sin and death entered the world and corrupted the basic nature of all mankind. Because God is holy and pure, sin separated Adam and Eve from Him. Filled with shame and guilt, they no longer enjoyed fellowship with Him. God removed them from the beautiful garden and promised that one day He would send a Redeemer who would provide a way for man to have a personal relationship with Him again.³ It would take thousands of years before God fully unveiled His plan, and His

prophets would play a most important role as His appointed spokesmen.

The First Prophet in the Bible

During His confrontation with some religious leaders of His day, Jesus Christ called Abel a prophet.⁴ Abel was the righteous son of Adam and Eve. He was a shepherd and was killed by his wicked brother Cain, a farmer. God had accepted Abel's sacrifice and not Cain's.⁵ Out of a heart of adoration, Abel had given his very best to God as an act of worship. God used Abel's righteous deeds and character to speak to those around him to repent of their sins. Presumably, Cain was so convicted by Abel's walk with God, that he became jealous and took his brother's life! Abel was a man of true faith,⁶ whose character and conduct were his prophetic ministry. The book of Hebrews states that "through faith, though Abel is dead, he still speaks!"⁷ So, the first prophet is found in the first family on the earth.

Many generations later, God chose a man from the promised-seed lineage of Adam and Eve⁸ whose name was Abraham. God made a covenant that in Abraham He would establish a special nation, through which He would send forth His Messiah to bless all nations on earth!⁹ Abraham's family grew quite large, and by the third generation there were twelve families. God spoke directly with the fathers of each family, for these were His chosen leaders. These patriarchs received revelation from the Lord, as He appeared to them in dreams, visions, and personal appearances called theophanies.¹⁰ This is how

¹ Ephesians 1:11.

² Isaiah 46:9-10.

³ Genesis, chapter 3.

⁴ Luke 11:49-51.

⁵ Genesis 4:1-8.

⁶ 1 John 3:11-12.

⁷ Hebrews 11:4.

⁸ Descendant of Adam and Eve's son, Seth (Genesis 3:15).

⁹ Genesis 12:3.

¹⁰ Robertson, O. Palmer. (2008). *The Christ of the Prophets*. Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing Company, 9.

God revealed His council and divine judgments and blessings to Abraham's family.

It is worth noting that the first use of the word "prophet" in Scripture refers to Abraham and his prayer for a Philistine king. This prayer was the key to God's blessing all the nations of the world. In Genesis we read, "Now therefore, restore Abraham's wife, for he is a prophet, and he will pray for you [King Abimelech] and you will live."¹

What Is a Prophet?

The word "prophet" comes from two Greek root words: *pro*, which means "in place of," as in the word pronoun, and the word *phemi*, which means "to speak." So, the word "prophet" means "to speak in place of." A prophet is one who speaks in place of God by divine inspiration. He is the authorized mouthpiece of God. The divine revelation travels directly from God into the mouth of the prophet.² Listen to the word of God to Moses,

*"I will raise up a prophet from among their countrymen like you, and I will put My words in his mouth, and he shall speak to them all that I command him."*³

A prophet was not to speak apart from God, but to wait upon the Lord. He was to declare God's will as it was revealed to him. "Thus, says the Lord" was generally the opening phrase for all his declarations. Whether he was sharing a message about current conditions or revealing events in the future, the prophet was to communicate God's revelation. He prophesied out of a spirit of love and compassion, for he deeply cared for God's covenant people and was willing to convey the most difficult messages and judgments.

The Divine Office of Prophet

After God delivered millions of His chosen people from 400 years of slavery in Egypt, He empowered one voice to speak for Him—it was the voice of Moses. Moses had a very long and close relationship with God, who spoke with him and advised him how to guide and provide for the Hebrews, as they wandered toward the Promised Land for 40 years. The Bible tells us that,

¹ Genesis 20:7.

² Exodus 4:15-16.

³ Deuteronomy 18:18.

*"By a prophet the Lord brought Israel out of Egypt, and by a prophet Israel was preserved."*⁴

In fact, the office of prophet was formally established by God when Moses received the Ten Commandments on top of Mount Sinai. There, God Himself appeared in all His majestic glory. The sound of His trumpet-like voice, the sight of the fiery mountain top amidst a cloud of thick smoke, and the flashes of lightning all terrified the Hebrews below. They begged Moses to be their mediator and to meet alone with God on their behalf.⁵ They said,

*"Now then why should we die? For this great fire will consume us; if we hear the voice of the Lord our God any longer, then we will die. For who is there of all flesh who has heard the voice of the living God speaking from the midst of the fire, as we have, and lived? Go near and hear all that the Lord our God says; then speak to us all that the Lord our God speaks to you, and we will hear and do it."*⁶

As a result, the prophet in the Old Testament took on the role of gracious mediator. He stood between God and the people to deliver the word of the Lord. One single voice of a prophet replaced all the fearsome signs of the very presence of the living God in order for God's people to receive His messages. The prophetic revelation that came through Moses at Sinai laid the foundation for the birth of Israel as a nation.

Only the leading of God brought forth a prophecy. The words of the prophet are the very words of God. The Lord brought the prophet into His secret council,⁷ so he could declare with authority both God's moral will and His plan of redemption through blessings and curses that matched the behavior of the people. The Bible teaches us that,

*"No prophecy of Scripture comes from one's own interpretation, for no prophecy was ever made by an act of human will, but men moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God."*⁸

Prophecy is instruction and the prophet is a teacher. Their words went forth with history-shaping power and conviction. "Once the words had been spoken, nothing could stop their fulfillment for their declarations were identical with the determining word of God Himself!"⁹

⁴ Hosea 12:13 (NKJV).

⁵ Exodus 20:18-21.

⁶ Deuteronomy 5:25-27.

⁷ Job 15:8; Jeremiah 23:18, 21-22.

⁸ 2 Peter 1:20-21 (AMP).

⁹ Robertson, O. Palmer (2008). *The Christ of the Prophets*. Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing Company, 48.

There are many false prophets. The Bible describes them as adulterous, treacherous, wicked, liars, and associated with witchcraft and divination and provides foolproof tests for recognizing a false prophet.¹ The ultimate key to knowing a true prophet is,

You may say in your heart, "How shall we know the word which the Lord has not spoken?" When a prophet speaks in the name of the Lord, if the thing does not come about or come true, that is the thing that the Lord has not spoken. The prophet has spoken it presumptuously.²

The office of prophet was a direct call and commission from God Himself. It was not a chosen profession or passed from father to son, but by the will and calling of God alone. Prophets were the moral conscience of the people and, as such, suffered ridicule, rejection, persecution, imprisonment, and even murder by the people.³ Stephen, the first martyr of the New Covenant, pointedly asked the Jewish religious leaders of his day,

"Was there ever a prophet your ancestors did not persecute?"⁴

Moses stands out as the preeminent prophet of the Old Testament. He understood that the Spirit who empowered him to prophesy was not his own to control, but a gift from God.⁵ It is written of Moses that,

"No prophet has risen in Israel like Moses, whom the Lord knew face to face. . . . For no one has ever shown the mighty power or performed the awesome deeds that Moses did in the sight of all Israel."⁶

"My servant Moses is faithful in all My household; with him I speak mouth to mouth."⁷

Not all the prophets in the Bible were men. There are six women named in the Old Testament who were prophetesses, not the least of whom is Miriam, Moses' sister.

Overview of the Old Testament Prophets

There are three categories of prophets in the Bible, which we will be studying: the early prophets, the writing prophets, and the transitional prophet.

1. The Early Prophets

Many notable prophets followed Moses, such as Samuel, Elijah, and Elisha. We will study their lives and remarkable deeds, which we learn from reading the prophetic history books of Joshua, Judges, 1 & 2 Samuel, and 1 & 2 Kings.

These early prophets lived during the period of time when the young nation of Israel was first ruled by God Himself through the Mosaic covenant and the law. But, it wasn't long before Israel fell into sin and cried out to be like the pagan nations that had an earthly king to rule over them. So, God instituted the divine right of kings⁸ when Samuel anointed Saul king.

Soon, God's prophets became royal advisors to Israel's kings. They delivered divine guidance, encouragement, and words of warning. Many of the kings were idolaters and disobeyed God's laws. The prophets were sent to the kings to call them back to covenant fidelity! This made them very unpopular. When King Saul disobeyed God's words, the Lord rejected Saul from being king and guided Samuel to anoint David king of Israel, "a man after God's own heart."⁹ When King David died, his son Solomon ascended to the throne. Although Solomon began his reign of Israel as a wise and honored king, he did not walk in God's ways at the end of his life and worshipped idols. This caused the monarchy to divide into two kingdoms: Israel, the ten northern tribes, and Judah, the two southern tribes.

It was at this time in Israel's history that we meet the prophets Elijah and Elisha in the northern kingdom. Most prophets did not record their prophecies at this time, so we know more about what they *did* rather than what they *said* by reading the Bible's history books.

¹ Jeremiah 14:14; 23:11, 14; Ezekiel 22:28; Zephaniah 3:4; Isaiah 28:7; Acts 13:6; 2 Peter 1:10, 19-21; 1 John 4:1.

² Deuteronomy 18:21-22. Also: Jeremiah 23:13-14; 28:8-9; Ezekiel 13:17-23; Matthew 7:15-20; 2 Peter 1:20-21; Revelation 22:18-19.

³ 2 Chronicles 36:16; Jeremiah 11:21; 18:18; 20:2, 7-10; Luke 11:49-51.

⁴ Acts 7:52.

⁵ Numbers 11:29.

⁶ Deuteronomy 34:10,12.

⁷ Numbers 12:7,8; NASB translation states "mouth to mouth."

⁸ The concept that the right to rule derives from God, and that kings are answerable for their actions to God alone.

⁹ 1 Samuel 13:14; Acts 13:22 (NKJV).

2. The Writing Prophets

When we come to study the Bible's prophetic books, we hear what the prophets *said* because their prophecies were recorded. However, very little is written about the prophets themselves and their place in Israel's history. In addition, they often did not record their prophecies in chronological order, which provides no clues as to where one prophecy ends and another begins. This often makes it difficult for the reader to fully understand these books.

There are seventeen books of prophecy written by sixteen prophets.¹ These include four major prophets and twelve minor prophets, based on the length of the books.

The writing prophets were called and commissioned by God to explain Israel's exile into Babylon and her future as a nation. Their primary message to the people was to stop worshipping idols and return to God and to their covenant relationship with Him. The prophets confronted Israel's sin and exhorted them to repent. If they did not, God's judgment would surely fall upon them. They also spoke God's words of love, encouragement, and hope for redemption and restoration. God was relentless in His pursuit of His chosen ones and used the prophets as His mouthpiece. Listen to the Word of God,

The LORD, the God of their fathers, sent word to them again and again by His messengers, because He had compassion on His people and on His dwelling place; but they continually mocked the messengers of God, despised His words and scoffed at His prophets, until the wrath of the LORD arose against His people, and there was no remedy.²

3. The Transitional Prophet

John the Baptist, the prophet who baptized Jesus Christ in the Jordan River, is considered the last of the "Old Testament prophets." He is the bridge between the Old and the New Covenants. John was

Jesus' cousin, as well as the forerunner of Jesus' earthly ministry. His message was simple: "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand."³ This brief message was two-fold for Israel: 1) "Repent"—both a warning and instruction, or forthtelling; and 2) "the kingdom of heaven is at hand"—a prediction of something yet to happen, or foretelling. Those who had an ear to hear what the Spirit was saying prepared their hearts.

Jesus Christ Fulfilled the Office of Prophet

The main purpose of God's covenant was to restore intimate fellowship with His chosen people. In the fullness of time, God sent His only Son Jesus to earth, who is the eternal, living Word of God.⁴ He was called "**THE** prophet" during His earthly ministry.⁵ In fact, Jesus fulfilled the following prophecy of Moses,

I will raise up a prophet from among their countrymen like you, and I will put My words in his mouth, and he shall speak to them all that I command him.⁶

In contrast to the Old Testament prophets, who introduced their prophetic messages with, "thus says the Lord," when Jesus opened His mouth to teach or prophesy, He began by saying, "Truly, truly I say unto you." The authority with which Jesus spoke came from Himself as the Son of God. He paid the price for our sin with His shed blood on the cross. He was resurrected from the dead and then sent His Holy Spirit to live within each believer. As a result, those who believe in Him no longer need a mediator and are able to hear His voice. God has made a way for us to have a personal relationship with Jesus through His Holy Spirit who dwells within our hearts. Jesus fulfilled the office of prophet. The long line of abuse of prophets that originated with Abel found its consummation in Jesus Christ. As a consequence, all the blessings intended in God's covenant flow through Him!⁷

The Language of the Prophets

In order to understand the Old Testament prophetic books, we must understand the nature of the

¹ Jeremiah wrote two books of prophecy: Jeremiah and Lamentations.

² 2 Chronicles 36:15-16.

³ Matthew 3:2.

⁴ John 1:1-2,14.

⁵ John 6:14; 7:40.

⁶ Deuteronomy 18:17-18.

⁷ Robertson, O. Palmer (2008). *The Christ of the Prophets*. Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing Company, 37

language that the prophets used. Although other types of literature appear, the most common form is the oracle, which uses poetry rather than prose. The language of Hebrew poetry is imagery. It is designed to stir the emotions and create vivid mental pictures, which make it easier to remember the message. It uses similes and metaphors such as, “the teaching of the wise is a fountain of life.” Figures of speech were common such as, “the mountains will sing” or “the trees will clap their hands.” Once we understand that the biblical prophets made extensive use of poetic language, then we realize that we cannot interpret their writings in the same way that we interpret prose.

It is also important to know that the foundation of all the prophets’ messages was their understanding of the Mosaic law and covenant.¹ It was the blessings and the curses of the Mosaic covenant that served as the base for their oracles of judgment and restoration. The promise of future salvation and redemption is one of the most distinctive features of the prophets’ messages. More than anything else, this promise served to bind the Old Testament Scriptures with the New Testament writings into one single book of Holy Scriptures.²

¹ Deuteronomy, chapter 28. Different than other Old Testament covenants, the Mosaic covenant was conditional in that the blessings that God promised were directly related to Israel’s obedience to the Mosaic law. If obedient, God blessed them. If they disobeyed, He punished them. This is the covenant that set Israel apart as God’s chosen people from all other nations. Israel was to be God’s light to the dark world around them because they worshiped Yahweh, the covenant-keeping God.

² Mathison, Keith (2012). “Understanding the Prophets: The Unfolding of Biblical Eschatology.” [https:// Ligonier.org](https://Ligonier.org).

Conclusion

The contents of the Old Testament prophetic books center on two events of enormous importance in Israel’s history: 1) their exile from the Promised Land and 2) their restoration. It was during the period when Israel was divided into two kingdoms that the prophets began to record their oracles. When finished, they had produced a body of literature unlike any other in human history, because the content was spoken by the voice of God through the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. Nothing before or since equals this unique collection of writings.

It was the event of Israel’s exile into Babylonian captivity and its future, that the literary prophets of Israel were called to explain.³ They were called not only to speak but to write, so that a flame of hope could be fanned across the generations—the hope of restoration more glorious than the days before the exile.

The books of the prophets speak just as clearly today as they spoke to ancient Israel.⁴ They have much to teach us that we can apply to our own lives and culture. Let us read their oracles with fresh eyes and consider and ponder our response to God’s voice.

³ Robertson, O. Palmer. (2008). *The Christ of the Prophets*. Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing Company, 1.

⁴ Romans 15:4.



The Prophet Moses

His name means “to draw out.”

Moses wrote the first five books of the Bible.

*“By a prophet the LORD brought Israel out of Egypt,
and by a prophet Israel was preserved.”*

Hosea 12:13



Setting

1450–1410 B.C.

Arabian desert wilderness

Background

Moses had a very long and intimate relationship with God that began in the desert at the age of 40 and lasted 80 years. God called him to lead the Hebrews out of slavery in Egypt and empowered him to be His voice among His chosen people.

The office of prophet was formally established when Moses received the Ten Commandments on top of Mount Sinai. There, God Himself appeared in all His majestic glory. The sound of His trumpet-like voice and the sight of the fiery mountain top, amidst a cloud of smoke and lightning flashes, terrified the Hebrews below. They begged Moses to be their mediator and to meet alone with God on their behalf. As a result, the office of prophet became that of gracious mediator between God and man (Exodus 20:18–21). The prophet stood between God and the people to deliver the word of the Lord.

Prophecy is instruction, and the prophet is a teacher. His words go forth with history-shaping power and conviction. Once the words are spoken, nothing can stop their fulfillment, for they are the words of God Himself! So it was with Moses, who served as God’s mouthpiece for 40 years. He prophesied of many things and taught the consequences of both obedience and disobedience to God’s laws—blessings for those who obeyed and adverse consequences for those who disobeyed (Deuteronomy 28).

Individuality

- ✦ Had great courage and resolve
- ✦ Knew God face-to-face
- ✦ Was a “type” of Jesus Christ

The Prophet Samuel

Prophet, Priest, and Judge of Israel

Reading Nº 2

"Now the boy Samuel was growing in stature and in favor both with the LORD and with men." (1 Samuel 2:26)

Type of Literature

The books of Samuel are historical narrative. Originally, they were one book but were separated by the translators of the Septuagint. Samuel is credited with writing a book in 1 Samuel 10:25, which is recorded in 1 Samuel 25. Prophets Nathan and Gad are also credited with writing about the events in Samuel.¹

Settings

c. 1100–1000 B.C.

Ramah, Israel

Ramah was the birthplace of Samuel. It was a city in ancient Judah allocated to the tribe of Benjamin. It was located five miles north of Jerusalem and the place where Samuel judged Israel and built an altar to the Lord.² After the destruction of Shiloh, it was also the city he returned to live and the site of his burial ground.

Shiloh, Israel

Shiloh was an ancient city located 20 miles north of Jerusalem. From the time of Joshua, it was one of the major spiritual centers of the nation and the location of the tabernacle that housed the ark of the covenant. During Samuel's lifetime, the city of Shiloh was destroyed by the Philistines, who stole the ark of the covenant.

Samuel the Prophet

Samuel was born in Ramah, Israel, 1,000 years before the birth of Christ.

His life spanned the time from when Israel was still a theocracy, under the rule of God and His appointed judges, to when Israel became a monarchy, under the rule of kings. He was the last judge in Israel's 350 years of being ruled by judges. He was also the king-maker of the first two kings of the monarchy, Saul and David.

Samuel was the miracle child of Hannah and Elkanah, who were devout followers of the true and living God, and a descendant of the priestly tribe of Levi. His mother, Hannah, had been childless. She had cried out to God for many years to bless her with a son, whom she vowed to dedicate to God for His service as a Nazirite. Eventually, the Lord answered Hannah's prayer, and she named her precious baby boy "Samuel," which means "heard of God" in Hebrew. She was so delighted that God had given her the desire of her heart, that she composed a beautiful song of triumph to praise and glorify Him.

When Samuel was just three or four years old, his mother took him to Eli, Israel's high priest. Eli lived in the city of Shiloh, which was Israel's spiritual center at this time in history.

It was in Shiloh where the tabernacle was located, the same tabernacle that Moses had constructed in the wilderness before the Hebrews entered the Promised Land. The tabernacle was God's earthly dwelling place among His people, the pattern of His throne room.³ It contained the ark of the covenant, which was housed in the room called the holy of holies, where no one but the high priest could enter. It was here that God's presence rested above the golden mercy seat between two golden angels.

Young Samuel lived with Eli, the high priest, and his duties were to help Eli minister to the Lord in the

¹ 1 Chronicles 29:29.

² 1 Samuel 7:17.

³ Exodus 25:8-9.

tabernacle and to study God's law with Eli. The people of Israel had fallen far away from God. They worshipped idols and followed many pagan customs. God was silent and prophecy was scarce at this time in Israel. So it happened, that while still a young boy, the Lord appeared to Samuel and gave him an "ear-tingling" prophecy to deliver to Eli.¹ The next day, Samuel delivered his first prophecy, which pertained to God's severe judgment of Eli's house and the coming death of his two evil sons.

From the time Samuel was a young child, he heard and obeyed the word of the Lord. As a result, he received God's blessings and grew in favor with God and man. All Israel knew he was a prophet of the living God, because all his prophecies came to pass.²

Like Moses, Samuel grew to become a highly respected spiritual leader and national reformer of Israel. He served God as priest, judge, prophet, educator, kingmaker, and royal advisor. He turned the people back from idolatry to worshipping the living God! And his great power as an intercessor is noted by the psalmist who wrote,

*Moses and Aaron were among God's priests, and Samuel was among those who called on His name; They called upon the LORD, and He answered them.*³

Samuel then founded the schools of the prophets⁴ to educate young men of Israel for national leadership and prophetic service. When the Philistines stole the ark of the covenant from the tabernacle in Shiloh, Samuel restored it to its rightful place in the tabernacle. He also anointed the first two kings of Israel, Saul and David, and served as their royal advisor. From 1 Samuel 16, verse 13,

*Then Samuel took the horn of oil and anointed him in the midst of his brothers; and the Spirit of the LORD came mightily upon David from that day forward.*⁵

Samuel lived to be 96 years old. He died of old age and all Israel mourned his loss. He was buried at his house in Ramah according to the Scriptures.⁶

Through King David came God's covenant, which promised Israel that their Messiah would descend from David's royal lineage. In the New Testament, the Apostle Peter referred to Samuel and his successors, who announced the fulfillment of the

prophecies of a coming Prophet and a Messiah. The Jews expected two distinct persons, but the New Testament Christians understood them to be one person—Jesus Christ.⁷

Samuel's Schools of the Prophets

Samuel, the child dedicated by his mother to education under the nurture of the high priest, knew firsthand the tragedy of the omission of biblical education in a nation! He witnessed its effect in the moral degradation of Israel's people, who "did what was right in their own eyes." His solution was to establish schools for the prophets in order to restore the knowledge of God in all areas of life through teaching basic literacy skills, God's law, literature, providential history, music, and the arts.⁸ In only 20 years, Samuel's implementation of biblical education turned his nation back to God and established its character and identity as a God-chosen people, one called to be a light unto the world.

Samuel was a reformer. He understood the value of planting schools in strategic regions throughout Israel: Ramah, Bethel, Jericho, Mount Carmel, Gilgal, and Samaria. They were centers of study, worship, and intercession during a time when there was great apostasy and few prophetic messages. The Bible names three of their teachers as Samuel, Elijah, and Elisha.⁹

The schools' purpose was not to teach men how to prophesy, but to provide young men an education based on God's Word and His providence in the history of Israel. He taught them the true ideas of the divine nature of God. Samuel understood that how one thinks in his heart affects his character and moral judgment.¹⁰ To have a band of prophets that served the nation erected a barrier against corruption and provided leaders and counselors who feared God and called the people to obedience. Music instruction played a large part in the curriculum, because the prophets understood the spiritual power of praise. The sons of the prophets learned to play various instruments and to sing unto the Lord. It is believed that many psalms in the Bible were composed at this time.

If Israel was to be a light among the Gentile nations, she needed men trained for educational

¹ 1 Samuel 3:11.

² 1 Samuel 3:19–20.

³ Psalm 99:6.

⁴ 1 Samuel 10:2–5.

⁵ 1 Samuel 16:13.

⁶ 1 Samuel 25:1.

⁷ Acts 3:22–26.

⁸ 1 Samuel 10:5; 1 Chronicles 25:1–7.

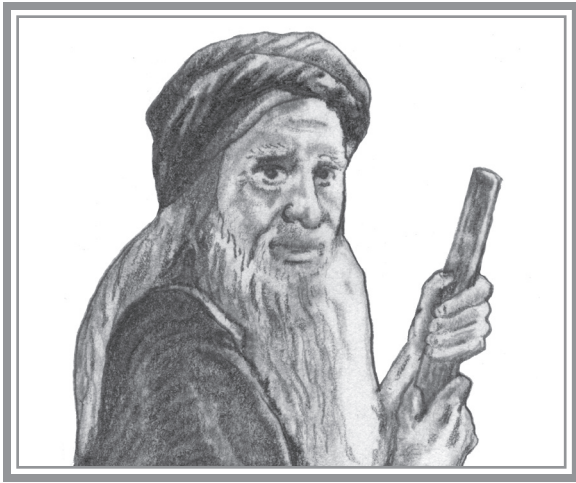
⁹ 1 Samuel 19:20; 2 Kings 2:1–6, 15.

¹⁰ Proverbs 23:7.

leadership and a national system of education for future generations! Many Bible scholars believe that King David, as well as many of his leaders, his son, King Solomon, and the prophet Habakkuk, attended one of these schools of the prophets. Sadly, Samuel's sons ended up much like Eli's sons. The Scriptures indicate that when Samuel grew old, his sons decided to lead Israel morally astray. Their lack of godly character was one of the reasons Israel asked for an earthly king. They did not want ungodly leaders. The other reason was they wanted to be like all

the other pagan nations with an earthly king who could wield the sword in battle for them.

Samuel's schools provide an educational model for our nations today. We, too, live in a time when many have rejected God and worship idols. Teaching the next generation subjects from a biblical, Christian perspective and how to think and reason with the truth of God's Word provide the nations with young adults who hear and obey God's voice and walk in His ways. This is a powerful step toward personal and national reform.



The Prophet Samuel

His name means “heard of God” in Hebrew.

Samuel wrote a portion of 1 Samuel.

*“Now the boy Samuel was growing in stature
and in favor both with the LORD and with men.”*

1 Samuel 2:26



Setting

c. 1100–1000 B.C.

Israel

Background

Samuel was a Nazarite, dedicated to God by his mother Hannah. He grew up under the nurture of Israel’s high priest, Eli, who taught him God’s word and ways. Samuel’s life spanned the time when Israel was a theocracy ruled by judges and then as a monarchy ruled by kings.

God called Samuel to prophesy while still a young child. He grew to become a highly respected, spiritual leader and served God as Israel’s judge, priest, intercessor, prophet, educational reformer, kingmaker, and royal advisor. In his farewell address, he summarized God’s basic message to Israel, “Fear the Lord and serve Him in truth with all your heart; for consider what great things He has done for you. But if you still do wickedly, both you and your king will be swept away” (1 Samuel 12:24–25).

Individuality

- ✦ Was obedient to God’s voice while still a young child
- ✦ Became an uncompromising leader
- ✦ Walked in favor with God and man
- ✦ Founded the schools of the prophets which turned Israel back to God in 20 years

Idolatry and Its Destructive Power

Reading Nº 3

*"I am the LORD, that is My name; I will not give My glory to another,
nor My praise to graven images." (Isaiah 42:8)*

God Established the Nation Israel for His Gospel Purpose

The history of Israel as a special nation was part of God's Gospel plan from the beginning of time. God set His plan in motion through His covenant with Abraham, in which He promised both to make Abraham's family a great nation and to bless all nations through it.¹ God raised up Israel to be His special channel of love and blessings for all mankind. We know this historically, because God sent His only Son, Jesus Christ, to earth through the virgin birth of Mary, who lived in Israel.² Out of Israel came our Savior and Redeemer, Jesus Christ, whose shed blood on the cross purchased salvation for all peoples.

In three generations, Abraham's family grew large. During a long famine in their land, his family moved to Egypt where food was available. God preserved them, and for a long time they prospered in Egypt. They had increased greatly in number and had become exceedingly mighty. This frightened the new pharaoh who came to the throne, so he forced God's people into hard labor. They remained enslaved for nearly 400 years, until God raised up Moses to deliver them from captivity and to lead them to the Promised Land.

After their miraculous Exodus and before they entered the Promised Land, God made another covenant at Mount Sinai. He wanted to give His chosen people new rules for holy living. God consecrated them and gave them His law, the Ten Commandments. He had set them apart from other nations to be a light of His love and virtuous ways. It was during this time that God laid the foundation for His chosen people to become a nation, which He named "Israel."

Israel, a Theocracy

God established Israel as a theocracy, which meant that the living God was their king. Judges were raised up to help God rule the people. So, for nearly 200 years, Israel remained a theocracy under the rulership of judges. Although God's rules and laws were perfect, His people were not. They wanted to obey the laws, but they often made poor choices. They fell away from worshipping the one, true God and "did what was right in their own eyes."³

Israel, a Monarchy

Israel's last judge was Samuel, whom you have already met. He was a godly leader who also served Israel as a prophet and priest. It was during his lifetime that the people rejected God as their king and asked Samuel to appoint an earthly king to rule Israel. They desired to be like all the other nations in the world!⁴ They wanted a king they could see and with whom they could speak. And so, after seeking God's counsel, Samuel anointed Saul to be Israel's first earthly king.

Years later, when Saul disobeyed and rejected God's word, God removed His anointing from him as king.⁵ He then instructed Samuel to anoint young David to be Israel's second king. King David was known as the young shepherd boy who slew the giant with his slingshot. He was "a man after God's own heart."⁶ He grew to become a mighty warrior and a poet, and ruled Israel for 40 years. At the end of his life, David did not choose his firstborn son to ascend to the throne. His choice was Solomon,

¹ Genesis 12:1-3; 18:18.

² Isaiah 7:14, 49:6; Matthew chapter 1.

³ Judges 17:6

⁴ 1 Samuel 8:1-8.

⁵ 1 Samuel 15:22-23.

⁶ 1 Samuel 13:14.

his youngest son, who came to rule Israel as an adolescent.¹ Solomon would be the last king of a united Israel!

When King Solomon was 20 years old, the Lord appeared to him in a dream and said, “Ask what you wish Me to give you.”² Solomon did not ask God for riches, land, or pleasurable items. He asked for wisdom. Not only did God give Solomon a wise and discerning heart, but He also honored him with riches and favor among the nations. Solomon grew to become the wisest and richest king of the ancient world.³ He loved and served the living God and built Him a beautiful temple in Jerusalem . . . BUT, Solomon also built temples in Israel to false gods.

To keep peace on Israel’s borders, Solomon married many princesses from the royal houses of neighboring countries. These women, as well as many of his 700 wives, were idol worshippers. They believed that the living God of Israel was only one of many gods.⁴ Over time, their idolatrous ways influenced Solomon so much that we read in the Bible that,

It came to pass, when Solomon was old, that his wives turned his heart after other gods: and his heart was not perfect with the Lord his God.⁵

In other words, Solomon spent so much time with idol worshippers, that his heart turned away from the living God and His commandments. As gifts for his pagan wives, he built temples to idols on the high places in Israel. God spoke to Solomon and said,

Since you have not kept My covenant and My statutes, which I have commanded you, I will certainly tear the kingdom away from you, and will give it to your servant.⁶

The Monarchy Splits into Two Kingdoms

Solomon did not repent. Unfortunately, his sins and unrepentant heart not only affected him, but the whole nation of Israel and all who lived in it! God removed His blessings from Israel and visited the consequences of Solomon’s deeds upon his children!

In the natural course of Israel’s affairs, near the end of Solomon’s reign, the people wanted him and his son, Rehoboam, to reduce the heavy tax burden that they had imposed on them. When this did not happen, the people revolted and eleven of the twelve tribes departed⁷ after Solomon’s death.⁸ The only tribe that did not leave was Judah. The northern kingdom retained the ancient name Israel. The smaller, southern kingdom was named Judah and was ruled from the capital city of Jerusalem by kings who descended from David’s lineage. **Ultimately, the idolatrous practices of King Solomon led to Israel being split into two kingdoms.**

Jeroboam, a very popular servant of King Solomon, led this revolt, and the people chose him as their king. He was not a descendent of David’s lineage. **He set up his own system of worship for the eleven tribes based on the pagan cult of Baal.** Jeroboam introduced bull worship:

He made two golden calves, and he said to them, “It is too much for you to go up to Jerusalem; behold your gods, O Israel, that brought you up from the land of Egypt.” And he set one in Bethel, and the other he put in Dan.⁹

Amazingly, the people readily accepted Jeroboam’s new religion. Their sinful behavior demonstrates how easily God’s people can be deceived and led astray by their leaders, especially if they do not know and live by God’s Word. This is why we must know the Word of God and reason from it for ourselves, because leaders can be deceived and go astray.¹⁰

This counterfeit system of pagan worship caused the tribe of Benjamin to also break away from the northern kingdom and join Judah. Soon afterwards, the tribe of Levi, who served as Israel’s priests and religious teachers, joined the southern kingdom.¹¹ Israel’s idolatry provoked God to anger and, within 20 years, Jeroboam and his whole family were brutally killed. Rehoboam, the foolish, disrespectful son of Solomon, ascended to Judah’s throne as king and ruled the southern kingdom.¹² Sadly, he too was evil in the sight of God.

¹ 968-928 B.C.

² 1 Kings 3:5.

³ 2 Chronicles 9:22.

⁴ 1 Kings 11:3. The hundreds of women included Pharaoh’s daughter and women of Moabite, Edomite, Sidonian, and Hittite origins.

⁵ 1 Kings 11:4.

⁶ 1 Kings 11:11.

⁷ 1 Kings 12:16, 20.

⁸ 1 Kings, chapters 11–12.

⁹ 1 Kings 12:28–29.

¹⁰ 2 Timothy 3:13–17.

¹¹ 2 Chronicles 11:13–15.

¹² 1 Kings 14:21.

Why the Israelites Fell into Idol Worship

There are a number of reasons why the Israelites fell into idolatry:

1. The first is true for all of us: everyone is born with the sinful nature of our father, Adam, and is easily led astray without a relationship with Jesus and the knowledge of God's Word.
2. Specifically, the Israelites had lived 400 years in Egypt as slaves before God delivered them. Their mindset had been greatly influenced by the pagan, Egyptian culture and religious practices. They had no written word of God to teach and guide them. God sent Moses to deliver them from the evil pharaoh and to guide them to the Promised Land. Only 40 days after their Exodus from Egypt, Moses left them in the wilderness to meet alone with God on Mount Sinai. While he was gone, the people demanded that Moses' brother, Aaron, make a god for them to worship. They built a large altar and melted the gold jewelry that the Egyptians had given them. They made a golden idol in the image of a bull,¹ which was one of the gods the Egyptians worshipped at that time. When Moses returned, he found them singing and dancing around this golden calf, which he angrily destroyed. It seems the Israelites had forgotten the living God and adopted the pagan, religious practices they had learned in Egypt.
3. Another reason the Israelites fell into idol worship is that, before arriving in the Promised Land, God had commanded the Israelites to rid the land of all pagan Canaanites. The people disobeyed God and permitted many Canaanites to remain.² Soon after, the Israelites began to marry the pagans, who highly influenced them with their idolatrous customs, just as King Solomon's wives had influenced him.
4. A fourth reason is that the land of Israel was surrounded by pagan nations, whose people believed that worshipping several gods was better than worshipping one God. They believed that more is better. God's people intermarried with these pagans and imitated their evil, religious practices and lifestyles, rather than obey God's command to keep morally and spiritually pure.
5. A fifth reason is that the false gods of the pagans did not require the kind of obedience and moral purity that the living God demanded of His chosen people. It was easier to serve the false gods.
6. Another very important reason is that the worship of Baal caused the Israelites to forget the name of Yahweh. Baal was the name of the supreme god worshipped in the ancient lands of Canaan and Phoenicia. He was known as the "rider of the clouds" and became a counterfeit "Yahweh." The people believed that Baal provided all that was needed to be a successful farmer and forgot God's severe warning:
*"It shall come about if you ever forget the Lord your God and go after other gods and serve them and worship them, I testify against you today that you will surely perish."*³
7. The last and important reason why the Israelites became idol worshippers is that the majority of Israel's kings worshipped false gods. In fact, all the kings in the northern kingdom were idolaters and several of them married pagan women. When northern Israel split from southern Judah, King Jeroboam introduced bull worship and set up two large idols in the land. Sadly, the majority of the kings in the southern kingdom were idol worshippers, as well.

Conclusion

Israel's ancient history, as recorded in the Bible, is one continuous cycle of God blessing Israel's obedience and punishing their disobedience to His law. Throughout times of victory and defeat, judges and kings, priests and prophets, restoration and exile, God blessed the Israelites when they obeyed. When they forgot His law and fell into idolatry, God sent an enemy to punish them.

Israel, the northern kingdom, ceased to exist after the Assyrian army captured and deported the Israelites in 722 B.C. Seven hundred years later, after the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, the southern kingdom Judah ceased to exist when the Roman army destroyed Jerusalem and the Jews scattered throughout the world. This diaspora lasted for nearly 2,000 years, when in 1948 Israel became a sovereign

¹ Exodus 32:1-10.

² Judges 1:28-35.

³ Deuteronomy 8:19.

nation once again on the ancient land of promise.
Listen to the prophecies of Isaiah,

*Who has heard such a thing? Who has seen
such things?
Shall a land be born in one day?
Shall a nation be brought forth in one moment?
For as soon as Zion was in labor
she brought forth her children.¹*

*Then it will happen on that day that the Lord
Will again recover the second time with His hand
The remnant of His people, who will remain,*

¹ Isaiah 66:8. In just one day, May 14, 1948, the modern nation of Israel was birthed.

*From Assyria, Egypt, Pathros, Cush, Elam, Shinar,
Hamath,
And from the islands of the sea.
And He will lift up a standard for the nations
And assemble the banished ones of Israel,
And will gather the dispersed of Judah
From the four corners of the earth.²*

Our generation is a witness to this fulfillment of prophecy with respect to God's divine promises. There are certainly many lessons that we need to learn from this period of Israel's history in order to lead a righteous life filled with God's blessings.

² Isaiah 11:11–12.

The Prophet Elijah

Prophet of Action and Miracles

Reading Nº 4

"Elijah was a man with a nature like ours, and he prayed earnestly that it would not rain, and it did not rain on the earth for three years and six months. Then he prayed again, and the sky poured rain, and the earth produced its fruit." (James 5:17–18)

Type of Literature

Elijah is one of the early Old Testament prophets, whose prophecies were not recorded. His account is found in 1 Kings 17–19 and 2 Kings 1–2. The books of Kings are historical narrative.

Setting

900–849 B.C.

The northern kingdom of Israel during the reign of two wicked kings—Ahab and Ahaziah

The Northern Kingdom Israel

You will remember from our last lesson that Jeroboam was the popular servant of King Solomon and not a descendant of the royal lineage of King David. Jeroboam was the man who led the revolt against King Solomon because of Solomon's excessive taxation on the people. This revolt split the nation into two kingdoms—Israel in the north and Judah in the south. The people of the north crowned Jeroboam their king, and in his new role of leadership, he established a new religion in Israel.

In the northern kingdom, a series of evil kings followed the reign of King Jeroboam. These kings were even more wicked than Jeroboam! They no longer loved God, and they did not listen to Him or follow His law. In 880 B.C., wicked King Ahab came to the throne. He was the seventh evil king of Israel. Here is what the Bible says about Ahab:

Ahab erected an altar for Baal in the house of Baal, which he built in Samaria. And Ahab also made the Asherah. Thus Ahab did more to provoke the Lord God of Israel than all the kings of Israel who were before him.¹

Surely there was no one like Ahab who sold himself to do evil in the sight of the LORD, because Jezebel his wife incited him. He acted very abominably in following idols, according to all that the Amorites had done, whom the LORD cast out before the sons of Israel.²

King Ahab and Queen Jezebel, Wicked Rulers

King Ahab was dominated by his evil, pagan wife, Jezebel. She was a glamorous and very ambitious pagan Phoenician. She was also a religious fanatic and stopped at nothing to accomplish her diabolical plans. Queen Jezebel was so evil that she has come to symbolize revengeful, immoral, cruel, and controlling women throughout history. She and Ahab's rule of 22 years produced Israel's greatest apostasy, and in no time in Israel's history was there a greater contest between good and evil! Their reign of terror also spread to the southern kingdom of Judah through their daughter Athaliah, who married King Jehoshaphat.

Elijah, the Courageous Prophet

It was into this dark state of affairs in Israel that the Lord sent His prophet Elijah, whose name means "Yahweh is God." Elijah was from the desert town of Tishbe, Gilead. Most likely a tent-dweller, he was a wild-looking, hairy man who wore a leather belt.³ Elijah was the voice of God's goodness and truth and became a significant figure in the history of Israel. He trusted God in all things and became known as a prophet of action and of miracles.

¹ 1 Kings 16:32–33.

² 1 Kings 21:25–26.

³ 2 Kings 1:8.

Most of us know Elijah as the prophet who called down fire from heaven on Mount Carmel,¹ departed the earth in a chariot of fire, and appeared with Jesus and Moses on the Mount of Transfiguration.² In fact, King Ahab labeled Elijah “the troublemaker of Israel”³ and wanted to kill him. But God kept Elijah safe through many trials and tribulations.

Elijah’s passion for Israel’s repentance prompted a showdown with King Ahab and his prophets of Baal. It was the boldest confrontation by any prophet since Moses challenged Egypt’s pharaoh. It began when Elijah foretold a drought lasting many years in Israel that would result in famine and death.

Elijah . . . said to Ahab, “As the LORD God of Israel lives, before whom I stand, there shall be neither dew nor rain these years, except by my word.”⁴

As for the Canaanites, who believed their false god, Baal, controlled the rain, Elijah’s prophecy declared war against their supreme god.

God sent Elijah far away to the Kerith Ravine on the border of Israel to live in secret during the drought. It was there that Elijah camped for a long time. God cared for him by sending ravens with bread and meat every morning and evening for Elijah to eat. When the brook dried up and Elijah had no water to drink, the Lord sent him to the city of Sidon, where he met a woman gathering sticks. When he asked her for something to eat, she said she only had a handful of flour and a few drops of oil to feed herself and her son one more meal. Elijah directed her to go to her house, and told her that her small amount of flour and oil would last until the rain returned to water the earth. And it happened just as the prophet said. There was food every day for the woman, her son, and for Elijah.

Elijah labored mightily to prevent the decline of Israel’s moral and spiritual character. His strong faith, courage, and obedience to the voice of God produced essential character qualities for God’s calling on his life. All Elijah’s prophecies were fulfilled during his lifetime, as well as those of his apprentice Elisha.

In the New Testament book of James, Elijah is portrayed as a man much like us, whom God used to denounce wicked King Ahab and to expose the apostasy of Israel. It was certainly a time that called for courage and miracles in order to awaken immoral Israel to return to the Lord. Listen to what James wrote about Elijah:

Elijah was a man with a nature like ours, and he prayed earnestly that it would not rain, and it did not rain on the earth for three years and six months. Then he prayed again, and the sky poured rain, and the earth produced its fruit.⁵

As Elijah neared the end of his life, God told him to commission a man named Elisha to take his place. When he found Elisha plowing a field, he placed his cloak over his shoulders. Elisha left his family to apprentice with Elijah, who taught him many things about serving the Lord. When God was ready to translate Elijah to heaven, He sent a fiery chariot drawn by horses of fire to carry him to heaven.⁶ It is believed that Elijah never experienced death and is expected to return to the world at the end of this age.⁷ Both Isaiah and Malachi prophesied about Elijah. In fact, the last two verses of the Old Testament prophesy of Elijah’s return to earth:

Behold I am going to send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and terrible day of the LORD. And he will restore the hearts of the fathers to their children, and the hearts of the children to their fathers, lest I come and smite the land with a curse.⁸

Malachi’s prophecy foretold that the spirit of Elijah would return as the forerunner of Jesus Christ, John the Baptist, for the purpose of reconciliation. As Jesus taught His disciples,

All the prophets and the Law prophesied until John [the Baptist]. And if you are willing to accept it, John himself is Elijah who was to come.⁹

In Jesus’ teaching, after Moses and Elijah appeared with Him at His transfiguration on the mountain, He said,

“Tell the vision to no one until the Son of Man has risen from the dead.” And His disciples asked Him, saying, “Why then do the scribes say that Elijah must come first?” And He answered and said, “Elijah is coming and will restore all things; but I say to you, that Elijah already came, and they did not recognize him, but did to him whatever they wished. So also the Son of Man is going to suffer at their hands.”¹⁰

This is significant for us today, as we look forward to the time when Elijah reappears on the earth. In Revelation 11:3–6, Elijah is one of the two

¹ 1 Kings 18:36-38.

² 1 Kings, chapter 18; 2 Kings 2:11-12; Matthew 17:1-9.

³ 1 Kings 18:17.

⁴ 1 Kings 17:1.

⁵ James 5:17-18.

⁶ 2 Kings 2:11.

⁷ Revelation 11:3-6.

⁸ Malachi 4:5-6.

⁹ Matthew 11:13-14.

¹⁰ Matthew 17:9-13.

“witnesses” that will come to earth just before the end of the present world-system and the return of Jesus Christ. Scripture teaches us that Elijah’s appearance will signal that the Lord’s appearance on the earth is at hand!

Elijah and Elisha were prophets who spoke for God to the people of the northern kingdom of Israel.

The Israelites would not listen to them, which angered God. They forgot all that God had done for them and continued to worship the Canaanite idols. God did not give up, however, because He loves His chosen people. He would continue to send more prophets to declare His messages and to ask the people to return to Him.



The Prophet Elijah

His name means “Yahweh is God” in Hebrew.

Elijah was a non-writing prophet.

“Elijah was a man with a nature like ours, and he prayed fervently that it might not rain, and for three years and six months it did not rain on the earth.”

James 5:17



Setting

900–849 B.C.

The northern kingdom of Israel

Background

Elijah was an early prophet in the northern kingdom of Israel, whose kings were all evil. God used him to denounce wicked King Ahab and Queen Jezebel and to expose the apostasy of Israel. During this time of great terror in Israel, Elijah called God’s people to repentance for their idolatry and wicked deeds. The victory of his ministry lies in his reliance on the power of the Holy Spirit, which gave him boldness of speech in the midst of pagan worshipers and evil plots to kill him. He was a prophet of action and of miracles. He called down fire on Mount Carmel to defeat the prophets of Baal, was translated to heaven in a fiery chariot, and appeared with Jesus and Moses on the Mount of Transfiguration 900 years later! He will be one of the two witnesses before Christ appears at His second coming (Revelation 11:3–6). Elijah is a significant figure in Israel’s history. God commissioned Elisha the prophet, who performed more recorded miracles than anyone other than Jesus Christ.

Individuality

- ♦ Obeyed the voice of God
- ♦ Exhibited great faith and courage in the face of difficult challenges
- ♦ Worked many miracles
- ♦ Had boldness of speech in light of the threats of his life
- ♦ One of several biblical characters who was translated to heaven
- ♦ Appeared with Christ and Moses on the Mount of Transfiguration

The Prophet Joel

The Prophet of Pentecost

Reading N° 5

*"It will come about after this that I will pour out My Spirit on all mankind;
And your sons and daughters will prophesy, your old men will dream dreams,
Your young men will see visions." (Joel 2:28)*

Type of Literature

The book of Joel is half Hebrew poetry and half prose. His style was rhythmical and passionate, through which he used depictions of nature such as locusts, plants, and trees.

Joel saw the events of his day as a foreshadowing of future events. Joel's use of color and animals is also characteristic of Old Testament end-time prophecy. His end-time imagery is expressed in the apocalyptic term, "the day of the Lord."¹ The Apostle Peter quoted from Joel's prophecy² on the day of Pentecost.

Setting

c. 835 B.C.

There is no way to exactly date the book of Joel. Some scholars believe it was written before the exile of Judah and others believe it was written after the return of the Jews to Judah. Sixteenth-century reformer, John Calvin, wrote:

As there is no certainty it is better to leave the time in which Joel taught undecided; and as we shall see this is of no great importance. For readers not to know the time of Hosea would be a great loss, for there are many parts which could not be explained without a knowledge of history; but as to Joel there is less need of this, for the importance of his doctrine is evident, though his time be obscure and uncertain.³

We have placed Joel in the pre-exilic period of Judah's history for our unit study.

Joel the Prophet

Joel's name means "the Lord is God." The Scriptures do not tell us much about Joel other than his name and that of his father.⁴ Tradition places him in the tribe of Reuben and most likely from the southern kingdom of Judah, based on his knowledge of the routines of the temple priests. Descriptions in the Scriptures indicate that Joel lived in or near Jerusalem. He was a spiritual watchman on Jerusalem's wall, warning of God's judgment, calling the Jews to repentance, and declaring restoration to all who turned to the Lord.

The Book of Joel

Joel was part of a scroll called "the Twelve." The Twelve are known today as the minor prophets because of the brief length of their writings. The book of Joel records the threefold vision that he received from God, in which he acknowledged "the day of the Lord":

1. Joel used a devastating locust plague (1:6) that occurred during his lifetime to describe the desolation that occurred in Judah (1:1–12). Moses had earlier prophesied that God would use locusts to judge His people if they disobeyed Him.⁵
2. Joel then used locusts to illustrate a more serious judgment against Judah. In this case, the locusts represented an imminent invading army.⁶ This would be the historical 586 B.C. invasion of Nebuchadnezzar's army in Judah.

¹ Acts 2:20.

² Joel 2:28–32.

³ Bible.org. Introduction to Joel. <https://bible.org/seriespage/introduction-joel>.

⁴ Joel 1:1.

⁵ Deuteronomy 28:38, 42.

⁶ Joel 2:1–17.

3. Joel also used locusts to portray events far beyond his own generation for the ushering in of “the great and awesome day of the Lord” or the end of the age.

Joel’s prophecy is a revelation of God’s plan throughout the ages and illustrates God’s divine sovereignty in governing all nations for His Gospel purposes.

Joel is also the prophet of Pentecost. He prophesied that God “would pour out His Spirit upon **ALL** mankind,”¹ not just the Jews. The Apostle Peter applied Joel’s Scripture to the outpouring of the Holy Spirit that occurred during the Feast of Pentecost, the day the Church was birthed, quoting,

This is what was spoken of through the prophet Joel: “And it shall be in the last days,” God says, “that I shall pour forth of My Spirit upon all mankind, and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, and your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams . . .”²

This occurred in Jerusalem 500 years after the death of Joel. In addition, Joel spoke of God’s love and grace throughout the book, as he prophesied about Judah’s restoration:

Return to the LORD your God, for He is gracious and compassionate, slow to anger, abounding in loving-kindness, and relenting of evil.³

It will come about that whoever calls on the name of the LORD will be delivered; for on Mount Zion and in Jerusalem there will be those who escape, as the LORD has said, even among the survivors whom the LORD calls.⁴

Joel then proceeded to prophesy of God’s divine plan beyond the age of the Holy Spirit when,

God will display wonders in the sky and on the earth, blood, fire, and columns of smoke. The sun will be turned into darkness, and the moon into blood, before the great and awesome day of the Lord comes.⁵

These signs indicate the end of an age and the beginning of a new one, which commences with the words, “that great and awesome day of the Lord.” The phrase “day of the Lord” usually identifies

events that take place at the end of history and is often closely associated with the phrase “that day.”⁶ One key to understanding these phrases is to note that they always identify a period of time during which God personally intervenes in history, directly or indirectly, to accomplish a specific aspect of His will and purpose for mankind. Some scholars believe that the day of the Lord will be a longer period of time than a single day—a period of time when Christ will reign throughout the world before He prepares for the eternal state of all mankind. Other scholars believe the day of the Lord will be an instantaneous event when Christ returns to earth to redeem His faithful believers and send unbelievers to eternal damnation.

Beyond the outpouring of God’s Spirit or the age of the Church, Joel’s vision was clearer as he described what would happen:

1. Judah and Jerusalem will be delivered from captivity and from the scattering among the nations.⁷
2. God will judge the nations based on their attitude toward Israel.⁸
3. Israel will be restored to power and privilege.⁹
4. The supremacy of Judah will be established in the midst of the restoration.¹⁰

Comment

Looking back in history, we can attest to the fulfillment of the majority of Joel’s prophecy. We await “the great and awesome day of the Lord,” which Joel described so vividly. From Joel’s prophecy we learn that the “the day of the Lord” is always present and always coming. Almighty God sits upon His throne and sovereignly governs in the affairs of nations and of individuals for His eternal Gospel plan. Surely, the end of the Church Age will be in God’s timing just as Joel foretold. Maranatha!

¹ Joel 2:28, emphasis added.

² Acts 2:14–20.

³ Joel 2:13.

⁴ Joel 2:32.

⁵ Joel 2:30–31.

⁶ Isaiah 2:12; 13:6, 9; Ezekiel 13:5, 30:3; Joel 1:15, 2:1, 11, 31; 3:14; Amos 5:8, 20; Obadiah 1:15; Zephaniah 1:7, 14; Zechariah 14:1; Malachi 4:5; Acts 2:20; 1 Corinthians 5:5; 2 Corinthians 1:14; 1 Thessalonians 5:2; 2 Thessalonians 2:2; 2 Peter 3:10; Revelation 6:17; 16:14.

⁷ Joel 2:32.

⁸ Joel 3:2–8.

⁹ Joel 3:6–17.

¹⁰ Joel 3:20–21.



The Prophet Joel

His name means “The Lord is God” in Hebrew.
The book of Joel is half poetry and half prose.

*“Return to the LORD your God, for He is gracious
and compassionate, slow to anger,
abounding in lovingkindness, and relenting of evil.”*
Joel 2:13



Setting

c. 835 B.C.

Jerusalem, the capital city of Judah, the southern kingdom

Background

Joel was a spiritual watchman on the walls of Jerusalem. He warned of God’s judgment, called the Jews to repentance, and declared restoration to all who turned to the Lord. He is known for his threefold vision in which he acknowledged “the day of the Lord,” or the day of Jesus’ second coming to earth. Joel’s prophecy is a revelation of God’s plan throughout the ages and illustrates God’s divine sovereignty in governing all nations for His Gospel purposes.

Joel is also the prophet of Pentecost. He prophesied that God “would pour out His Spirit upon ALL mankind,” not just upon the Jews. Five hundred years later, the Apostle Peter applied Joel’s prophecy to the outpouring of the Holy Spirit that occurred during the Feast of Pentecost, the day the Church was birthed.

Individuality

- ✦ Called the Jews to prayer and repentance
- ✦ Foretold the birth of the Church age
- ✦ Announced “the day of the Lord”
- ✦ Had boldness

The Prophet Jonah

The Reluctant Prophet

Reading Nº 6

*"Just as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of the sea monster,
so will the Son of Man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth."*

(Matthew 12:40)

Type of Literature

The book of Jonah differs from other Old Testament books of prophecy in that it is historical narrative, which describes an event in the life of the prophet. Jonah is the author and wrote primarily in prose. Most other writing prophets wrote in poetic language. Some scholars regard the book of Jonah as an allegory or a parable, but Jesus treated Jonah's experience in the belly of the fish as factual and historic.¹

Setting

760 B.C.

Nineveh, the capital city of Assyria

Sea of the Arabah (Mediterranean Sea)

Assyria was a neighboring country to the north of Israel. Its homeland was in the northeast corner of the Fertile Crescent where the Tigris River flows. It became one of the great pagan empires of the ancient Middle East. Its people were artistic, talented builders, daring adventurers, and ruthless warriors known for their cruelty in warfare. They were feared as terrorists because, when they conquered a nation, they brutally killed many people and deported the remaining people, whom they replaced with Assyrians. So, in essence, they destroyed the culture and replaced it with their Assyrian false gods and pagan ways.

Nineveh was the capital of Assyria and its largest city. It was built by "the mighty hunter," Nimrod.² Nimrod was the great-grandson of Noah; however, he lacked Noah's virtues and godly standard. Nimrod was also the founder of Babel³ and its infamous

tower. The tower was built in the spirit of rebellion, because Nimrod and his followers wanted to "make a name for themselves!" God defeated Nimrod when He confused the language of the people. This made it impossible for them to communicate effectively with each other. They were unable to finish the construction of the tower, and so they scattered throughout the earth.⁴ Nimrod then moved to a new location and built the city of Nineveh. Nineveh was so large in Jonah's day that it took him three days to walk through the city to deliver God's message.

The Assyrians were known for their military power and unequaled brutality. Inscriptions on ancient monuments confirm the terrifying cruelty they visited on those they conquered. In the Bible, 2 Kings chapters 15–19 recount the various Assyrian assaults on Israel and Judah. Some of the kings of Israel paid tribute money to appease their terror. At other times, the Assyrians deported the Israelites and filled their land with pagan peoples. When Assyria's General Sennacherib attacked the cities of Judah and sought to besiege Jerusalem, God struck his army and they fled. This is because King Hezekiah of Judah honored God, prayed to Him, and followed the words of His prophet, Isaiah.

Jonah the Prophet

Jonah is one of the few prophets who came from Israel. He is the central figure in the book of Jonah. His name means "dove" in Hebrew. He lived near Nazareth in the mid-eighth century B.C. during the reign of King Jeroboam II. This was a period of unparalleled peace and prosperity in the northern kingdom of Israel.

¹ Matthew 12:39–41.

² Genesis 10:11.

³ Genesis 10:10.

⁴ Genesis 11:1–9.

Jonah is also recognized twice in the New Testament: 1) Jesus actually identified Himself with Jonah's three days in the great fish, as it foreshadowed His own death and resurrection; and 2) Jesus also contrasted the readiness of His hearers to repent with the account of the Ninevites' total repentance. In fact, Jonah is one of only four writing prophets that Jesus mentioned by name during His earthly ministry (Isaiah, Daniel, Zechariah, and Jonah).

Jonah and the people of Israel at this time in history failed to remember God's word to them to "tell

of His glory among the nations and of His wondrous deeds among all the people."¹ Jonah was the most reluctant of prophets; yet, he of all the prophets experienced the most astonishing results. Everyone in Nineveh repented. Even the animals were covered with sackcloth and fasted! Jonah, however, was deeply upset at the success of his proclamation of God's Word, so much so, that he wished for death.

¹ 1 Chronicles 16:24.



The Prophet Jonah

His name means “dove” in Hebrew.

Jonah wrote primarily in prose.

*“I know that You are a gracious and merciful God,
slow to anger and abundant in lovingkindness.”*

Jonah 4:2



Setting

760 B.C.

Nineveh, the capital city of Assyria

Assyria was a neighboring country to north of Israel and became one of the great pagan empires of the ancient Middle East, whom God used to destroy and exile Israel in 722 B.C.

Sea of the Arabah (Mediterranean Sea)

Background

The Assyrians were enemies of both Israel and Judah and known for their military power and brutality in war. God asked Jonah to travel to Nineveh to proclaim His approaching judgment. Jonah did not want to warn them, so he ran away from God. The book of Jonah describes how God dealt supernaturally with Jonah. It testifies that God is the Author of human history and that His supernatural power rules over nature to perform what is humanly impossible. It also reveals God’s heart of mercy for the Gentile nations. God is sovereign to bestow mercy on whomever He chooses, even the most undeserving (Jonah 4:11).

Individuality

- ✦ Was very self-concerned
- ✦ Was rebellious
- ✦ Disobeyed God’s direct word to him as a prophet
- ✦ Filled with self-pity
- ✦ Eventually repented and obeyed God
- ✦ Concluded his mission angry and ungrateful

The Prophet Isaiah

The Herald of the Messiah and His Kingdom

Reading N° 7

*"I am God and there is no one like Me, declaring the end from the beginning,
and from ancient times things which have not yet been done, saying:
My purpose will be established, and I will accomplish all My good pleasure."
(Isaiah 46:9–10)*

Introduction to the Book of Isaiah, "a Miniature Bible"

The book of Isaiah is the first of the major prophets in the Bible, who are Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and Daniel. The most obvious features of the book are its impressive size and its many literary genres and themes. It contains 66 chapters and is often called "a miniature Bible" or "a Bible within the Bible."¹ It is interesting to note that the Bible contains 66 books, of which the first 39 books contain the Old Testament and the remaining 27 books contain the New Testament. The first 39 chapters of Isaiah contain the theme of judgment, and the last 27 chapters contain the themes of comfort and salvation.

Isaiah is quoted more often in the New Testament than any other prophet.² It is also the first book to use the biblical term, "the day of the Lord,"³ a reference to the end of the age. This term is found in many later Old Testament prophets' writings and in several New Testament books.

Biblical prophecy reached its inspired height in the book of Isaiah. What makes Isaiah such an important book in the Bible is that it provides the most complete prophetic picture of Jesus Christ in the Old Testament. Almost one-third of the book contains prophecies about the first or second coming of the Lord, which include:

1. The announcement of His coming (Isaiah 40:3–5);
2. His virgin birth (7:14);
3. His sacrificial death (52:13–53:12);

4. His return as the victorious King of kings to claim His bride (60:2–3).

The following is a glorious testimony of the pre-incarnate Jesus Christ, whom Isaiah had seen in a vision. Preincarnate⁴ means "the eternal existence of Jesus in splendor and majesty before His earthly birth." This is Jesus Christ, the Son of God, the eternal Word,⁵ the second person of the triune Godhead:

*Come near to Me, listen to this:
From the first I have not spoken in secret,
From the time it took place, I was there.
And now **the LORD GOD** [Father] has sent **Me**
[Jesus], and **His Spirit** [Holy Spirit].⁶*

Unsurpassed in beauty, Isaiah's writing also reveals more of God's saving purpose than almost anywhere else in Scripture. It is sometimes called "the Fifth Gospel" and "the Book of Salvation." The book of Isaiah played a very important role in the history of Israel and revealed much about God's redemptive plan for mankind, some of which is still to come.

Despite the fact that God's people turned away from Him to worship false gods and treated others unjustly, God graciously offered hope to His unrepentant children in Isaiah's prophecies. He extended His divine love and mercy by offering the cleansing of sin and the blessings that come with obedience and faith in His promises.

Type of Literature

The genre of the book of Isaiah is prophetic oracle or Hebrew poetry, with some historical narrative portions. Four "Servant Songs" have been identified in

¹ Ryken L. & Ryken, P. G. (2007). *The Literary Study Bible, English Standard Version*. Wheaton, IL: Good News Publishers, 1005.

² 411 times.

³ Isaiah 2:12.

⁴ Latin roots: pre: before; in: in; caro: flesh; "before being clothed with flesh."

⁵ John 1:1–3, 14.

⁶ Isaiah 48:16, emphasis added.

Isaiah's poetry that describe the service, suffering, and exaltation of the Servant of the Lord, Jesus the Messiah. Isaiah's writing style reveals a well-educated background and marks the climax of Hebrew literary art. The use of epigrams, metaphors, interrogation, dialogue, hyperbole and parables "characterize Isaiah's book as the great masterpiece of Hebrew literature."¹

Setting of the Book

738–681 B.C.

"The Age of Prophecy"

Jerusalem, capital city of Judah

The mid-eighth through the mid-sixth century B.C. is often called "the Age of Prophecy" by biblical historians. It began when the prophet Amos stood in Samaria, the capital of the northern kingdom of Israel, and condemned Israel's apostasy and social injustice. Soon after, the prophet Micah was preaching a similar message in the southern kingdom of Judah.

The greatest prophet of this era was Isaiah, who was an advisor to kings and a man with knowledge of international affairs. Internally, he faced Judah's moral decline and ungodly behavior through idolatry. Externally, his focus was on tiny Judah's threat of being geographically situated between the rising power of Assyria and the strength of Egypt, nations which he said were both God's tools of justice and ultimately the objects of His fierce anger.

It is the period in Israel's history when it went into captivity and lost its independence as a nation at the hands of the Assyrians. Many wondered how this could have happened to the nation that was established by the living God and belonged to Him. This was the nation that received God's law written by His finger on stone tablets. This was the nation that was once ruled by King David, who had been promised that his royal throne would be established forever.² God raised up prophets to warn and to further explain what would happen if Israel did not repent and turn back to God.

Isaiah ben Amoz, the Messianic Prophet

Isaiah is known as one of the greatest prophets in the Bible! His name means "the Lord is my

salvation." He was born and resided in Jerusalem, the capital of Judah, the southern kingdom. He had many visions during the reigns of four kings of Judah—Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah.³ However, very little is known about the person, Isaiah. There is enough evidence to suggest that he was probably a member of a privileged, noble family and was an ambassador in the royal court. The lyrical beauty of the language in which he wrote indicates that he was well educated. He married a prophetess, who bore him at least two sons.⁴

Isaiah's call to the prophetic ministry came through an extraordinary vision of God. He was taken into the Lord's heavenly temple where he saw the Lord seated on His throne. The vision captured God's majesty, purity, and glory, and His holiness convicted Isaiah of his own unclean lips. After the seraphim cleansed his mouth, Isaiah heard the voice of the Lord saying, "Whom shall I send, and who will go for Us?" Isaiah answered, "Here am I. Send me!" God revealed Himself to Isaiah in a manner few have experienced. The Apostle John commented that Jesus' ministry fulfilled Isaiah's vision, and that the prophet had actually seen the preincarnate Jesus Christ in his vision. Isaiah met the second person of the Trinity, the Son of God Himself! Here is Apostle John's account of Jesus, who spoke of Isaiah:

*When Jesus had said these things, He departed and hid Himself from them. Though He had done so many signs before them, they still did not believe in Him, so that the word spoken by the prophet Isaiah might be fulfilled: "Lord, who has believed what he heard from us, and to whom has the arm of the Lord been revealed?" Therefore, they could not believe. For again Isaiah said, "God has blinded their eyes and hardened their heart, lest they see with their eyes, and understand with their heart, and turn, and I would heal them." Isaiah said these things because he saw His glory and spoke of Him.*⁵

Isaiah's inspired writings and prophecies have been preserved in the Bible for generations and are most important for us in the 21st century. His prophecies are still "signs and wonders" for us today.

*Behold, I and the children whom the LORD has given me are for signs and wonders in Israel from the LORD of hosts, who dwells on Mount Zion.*⁶

¹ Bromiley, G.W. (Ed) (1995). *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*. "Isaiah," vol. II. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing Co., 885.

² 2 Samuel 7:16; Isaiah 9:7.

³ Isaiah 1:1.

⁴ Isaiah 7:3; 8:3.

⁵ John 12:36-41.

⁶ Isaiah 8:18.

Isaiah witnessed the traumatic devastation of Israel, the northern kingdom, and the deportation and dispersion of the majority of the Israelites in 722 B.C. at the hands of the superpower, Assyria. This was, indeed, one of the greatest times of crisis in Israel's history. Isaiah understood that without God's supernatural intervention, the Assyrians were positioned to destroy Jerusalem, as well, which he had predicted by divine revelation!¹ God spared Judah in 701 B.C., but Isaiah prophesied of a time when it, too, would be devastated and its people carried off into exile by Nebuchadnezzar's Babylonian army.²

Isaiah also recorded God's message to King Cyrus of Persia 150 years before Persia became a great power and Cyrus was crowned king.³ It was King Cyrus who freed the Jews of the southern kingdom from captivity in Babylon. He encouraged them to return to their homeland after Persia conquered Babylon. Many believe Cyrus did this because the Jews had shown him his name in their Isaiah scroll, and he was overcome with fear!

Isaiah's prophecy in the Old Testament is a prophecy of judgment against Judah, against Jerusalem, and against an unrepentant people. His focus on mankind's sinfulness was tempered with details about God's promise of a future restoration through a remnant who would be redeemed. He wrote of a Messiah and the future reign of Jesus. God revealed through Isaiah that Jesus would come to earth first as a human being to deal with mankind's sin and then again in His glorified state after being resurrected from the grave to establish the kingdom of God.⁴ He foretold the sacrifice of Christ, the suffering Servant, and His victory over the power of sin and death.⁵

Many prophecies pertained to his own people. He exhorted Judah for its idolatry, immorality, and callous negligence for the poor and powerless and called them to repentance. Isaiah was "God's voice to Israel, the conscience of the nation, and the herald of the Messiah and His kingdom."⁶ The fulfillment of his messianic prophecies came when Jesus began His earthly ministry by reading the scroll of Isaiah in a Nazareth synagogue. When He finished

reading, He publicly declared, "Today this Scripture is fulfilled in your hearing."⁷ Listen to what He read from the scroll,

*The Spirit of the Lord God is upon me, because the Lord has anointed me to bring good news to the afflicted; He has sent Me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to captives, and freedom to prisoners; to proclaim the favorable year of the Lord.*⁸

Christian tradition relates that Isaiah was martyred. He met a cruel and gruesome death by being sawn in two by evil King Manasseh, the son of King Hezekiah.⁹ The biblical record cites that Manasseh of Judah was a ruler who "seduced" his subjects "to do more evil than the nations whom the Lord had destroyed before the children of Israel." Manasseh was a monarch who "shed very much innocent blood, till he had filled Jerusalem from one end to another."¹⁰

Isaiah's Message

Isaiah is called the "Herald of the Messiah." His writing is heavily messianic in its prophetic orientation. He had much to say about the person, the character, and the work of the future Messiah, Jesus. He wrote of God's wonderful promises of the suffering Messiah, who was to come in the flesh and pay the penalty for man's sin with His shed blood. He also wrote of the Messiah's victorious second coming at the end of the age and the future of God's restored people.

The overarching theme of the book of Isaiah is the abiding throne of God and the principles of His sovereign rule in the affairs of men and nations. It began with Isaiah's commissioning, which brought Isaiah into the presence of God's heavenly throne. Then later it revealed the suffering of God's Servant to whom the authority of the Throne was entrusted.¹¹ The unveiled Throne has at its center the Lamb, slain from the foundation of the world. It is lofty and exalted. It lifted Isaiah's ministry to a higher level through which God imparted the revelation of His divine government and grace.

Isaiah's message is that submission to the government of God is the one condition for the fulfillment of all of life.¹² Jesus Christ is Lord of all! It teaches us

¹ Isaiah 13:1; 36:15; 37:21-28.

² Isaiah 6:11-12; 39:6.

³ Isaiah 44:28, 45:1-6.

⁴ Hebrews 9:28.

⁵ Isaiah 53.

⁶ Buksbazen, V. (1971). *The Prophet Isaiah*. Bellmawr, NJ: The Friends of Israel Gospel Ministry, Inc., 78.

⁷ Luke 4:21.

⁸ Isaiah 61:1-2.

⁹ Hebrews 11:37.

¹⁰ 2 Kings 21:9, 16.

¹¹ Matthew 28:18.

¹² Morgan, G. C. (1912). *Living Messages of the Books of the Bible*. New York, NY: Fleming H. Revell Co., 105.

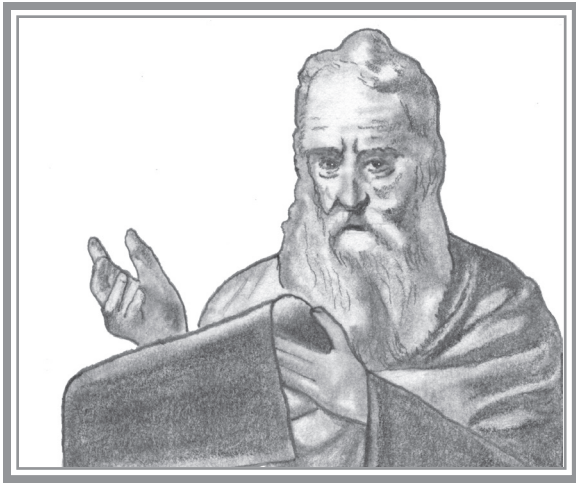
that the only hope for the transformation of sinful man is centered in the grace of God! Salvation is the undeserved gift of a loving God for those who repent and seek His forgiveness. Government and grace are interrelated. In order to receive the blessings of grace, each of us must submit to the Lordship of the Messiah, Jesus. The Presence occupying the eternal Throne cannot adequately be defined with words,

but in the midst of the throne room is a Lamb that was slain from the foundation of the world.¹

To Him who sits on the throne and to the Lamb, be blessing and honor and glory and dominion forever and ever.²

¹ Revelation 13:8.

² Revelation 5:13.



The Prophet Isaiah

His name means “God is salvation” in Hebrew.

The book of Isaiah is written in Hebrew poetry.

*“So shall My word be which goes forth from My mouth;
it shall not return to Me empty, without accomplishing
what I desire, and without succeeding
in the matter for which I sent it.”*

Isaiah 55:11



Setting

740–680 B.C.

Jerusalem, the capital city of Judah, the southern kingdom

Background

Isaiah was one of the greatest prophets in the Bible. He was an advisor to kings and had knowledge of international affairs. He faced Judah’s moral decline and ungodly behavior through idolatry. He watched as the northern kingdom, Israel, was destroyed by Assyria, and its people were deported and scattered. He was concerned that Judah would be crushed between the two superpowers of Egypt and Assyria. His prophecies of judgment were against Judah and Jerusalem, as he cried out for them to repent and turn back to the God of love who promised forgiveness and restoration.

Isaiah was also the “Herald of the Messiah.” The book of Isaiah is such an important book in the Bible because it provides the most complete prophetic picture of Jesus Christ in the Old Testament. Nearly one-third of Isaiah contains prophecies of both the first and second coming of Jesus to earth.

Individuality

- ✦ Was the voice of God to his people
- ✦ Was the conscience of the nation
- ✦ Was the herald of the Messiah
- ✦ Remained a courageous and faithful prophet

The Meaning of Christ's Sacrifice on the Cross

Reading Nº 8

"Christ, our Passover lamb, has been sacrificed." (1 Corinthians 5:7)

Almighty God is holy. By nature, He is righteous, pure, and perfect and cannot look upon sin.¹ His justice and wrath require judgment for sin, and the penalty for sin is spiritual death.² Therefore, blood has become a symbol of atonement for the sins of mankind.³

In God's eternal plan, Jesus Christ, the Lamb of God, is slain from the foundation of the world⁴ and becomes the focal point of all human history. Using the blood of a slain animal to foreshadow⁵ Jesus' sacrifice on the cross occurred at the beginning of time. God required animal sacrifices to provide a temporary covering of man's sins and to foreshadow the perfect and final sacrifice of Jesus Christ.⁶ This began when Adam and Eve sinned against God in the garden of Eden when they disobeyed His command. They covered their guilt and nakedness with fig leaves. Scripture relates that God replaced their fig leaves with garments that He made from the skins of a slain animal.⁷ This foreshadowed the covering of man's sins by the shed blood of an innocent animal. Scripture teaches us that life is found in the blood.⁸ God established that without the shedding of blood, there is no forgiveness of sin.⁹ Therefore, in order for man's sin to be covered, God requires the shedding of blood.

The next biblical event that foreshadowed Jesus' sacrifice on the cross occurred when God delivered His chosen people from slavery in Egypt. The last plague that God sent to Egypt was the death of the firstborn. In order to protect God's chosen people who lived there, He instructed them to sacrifice a

spotless lamb and paint its blood over the doorposts of their houses. When the angel of death visited Egypt, he passed over the houses that were covered with blood. The blood of the sacrificed lambs protected God's people from His wrath.¹⁰ This lamb is called the Passover lamb in the Old Testament, and the Jews have continuously celebrated the Feast of Passover every year since to remember what God did for them thousands of years ago.

Soon, God raised up Israel as a nation and established a sacrificial system to restore the broken relationship between Himself and His sinful people. In the Old Covenant, the high priest was instructed to sprinkle the blood of a slain goat on the mercy seat of the ark of the covenant. This occurred once a year to atone for the sins of the whole nation. The animal served as the substitute for man, and its blood served as the covering of man's sins. This highlighted the holiness of God's nature and the seriousness of sin. Today, it is called the Day of Atonement and is a somber day of fasting in the Jewish calendar.

The Old Covenant sacrificial system was temporary. It pointed to the New Covenant. The blood of sacrificed animals was incomplete and was just a shadow pointing to the reality of what God used to seal His New Covenant with mankind. In God's perfect timing, He sent forth His only Son to earth with a mission.¹¹ He would pay the ultimate price required by sin by giving His own life and shedding His own blood on the cross. This was the ultimate atonement and sealed the New Covenant. Jesus paid the penalty for mankind's sin once and for all. He redeemed mankind from the wages of sin, which is eternal death.

Jesus' crucifixion and death occurred during the Jewish Feast of Passover, when the Jews traveled to Jerusalem for the annual celebration. The day Jesus was crucified was the same day the Jews were sacrificing their lambs for their Passover meal. As Jesus

¹ Habakkuk 1:13.

² Romans 6:23.

³ atone (v.) To cover or pardon an offense and reconcile or restore to wholeness.

⁴ Hebrews 4:3; Revelation 13:8.

⁵ foreshadow (v.) To prefigure; to show, represent, or typify beforehand.

⁶ Leviticus 4:34; 5:10.

⁷ Genesis 3:7, 21.

⁸ Leviticus 17:11.

⁹ Hebrews 9:22.

¹⁰ Exodus 12:21–24.

¹¹ Galatians 4:4–5; John 3:16.

uttered the words on the cross, "It is finished," He yielded up His spirit.¹ Jesus was not directly killed by anyone nor was He overcome by natural processes. He released His spirit,² and immediately, an earthquake shook the land! Inside Jerusalem's temple, the veil covering the ark of the covenant was supernaturally torn in half from top to bottom. This signified that a new and living way is now open into the presence of God.³

We meet the slain Lamb of God in John's apocalyptic vision in the book of Revelation. Listen to these verses,

And I saw between the throne (with the four living creatures) and the elders a Lamb standing, as if slain. (5:6)

Then I looked, and I heard the voice of many angels . . . saying with a loud voice, "Worthy is the Lamb that was slain to receive power and riches and wisdom and might and honor and glory and blessing." (5:11–12)

After these things I looked, and behold, a great multitude which no one could count, from every nation and all tribes and peoples and tongues, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed in white robes, and palm branches were in their hands; and they cry out with a loud voice, saying, "Salvation to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb." (7:9–10)

Jesus is the true and perfect Lamb of God! Mankind is the sinner, because all have sinned and fallen short of God's glory.⁴ God's justice and wrath require judgment for sin, and the sentence is death. In God's incredible mercy and love, He sent His only Son to serve as our substitute and to take our punishment of death.⁵ Consequently, the blood that Jesus shed on the cross atoned for the sins of the world, not just the sins of Israel—for your sins and mine!⁶ Only those who believe in the name of Jesus and confess Him as Savior and Lord receive forgiveness. We are adopted as His sons and daughters and are eternally reconciled with God.⁷

¹ Matthew 27:50.

² John 10:18.

³ Hebrews 10:20.

⁴ Romans 3:23.

⁵ John 1:29.

⁶ John 1:29; Ephesians 1:7; 1 John 2:2.

⁷ John 3:36; Romans 10:9.

The Names of God in the Book of Isaiah



*"Give thanks to the LORD, call on His name.
Make known His deeds among the peoples;
Make them remember that His name is exalted." (Isaiah 12:4)*

1. Holy One of Israel (1:4)
2. The Branch (4:2)
3. The King (6:5)
4. Lord of Hosts (6:5)
5. Immanuel (7:14)
6. Wonderful (9:6)
7. Counselor (9:6)
8. Mighty God (9:6)
9. Eternal Father (9:6)
10. Prince of Peace (9:6)
11. Our Strength and Song (12:2)
12. Our Salvation (12:2)
13. Everlasting Rock (26:4)
14. Our Judge, Lawgiver, and King (33:22)
15. Our Shepherd (40:11)
16. Arm of the Lord (51:9)
17. Righteous Mediator (53:11)
18. My Servant (53:11)
19. God of all the earth (54:5)
20. Savior (63:8)
21. Redeemer (63:16)

The Prophet Habakkuk

The Musical Prophet

Reading Nº 9

*"The LORD God is my strength, and He has made my feet like hinds' feet,
and makes me walk on my high places." (Habakkuk 3:19)*

Type of Literature

The short book of Habakkuk includes an oracle of woe, a complaint, and a prayer-song.

Setting

609–early 500s B.C.

The Book of Habakkuk

Habakkuk is unique among the prophetic books. It is the only Old Testament book that consists entirely of a conversation between God and man. All other prophetic books are mainly records of the prophets' messages. In Habakkuk, the prophet asks God questions and records His answers. It opens with the prophet in despair and complaining against God. It closes in song with his understanding that the righteous must live by their faith and trust sovereign God, who disposes all events for His Gospel purposes in His timing.

After God sent Israel and Judah many warnings through His prophets over hundreds of years, His judgment finally fell on the northern kingdom of Israel in 722 B.C. God had tried everything to get His people to listen and to be sorry for the things they had done wrong. He loved them and wanted them to return to loving Him. But everything had failed, and He could no longer bless them while they disobeyed Him.

God used the powerful army of Assyria to invade Israel and defeat it. Most of the Israelites were carried into captivity and scattered among the pagan nations. This left only the tiny southern kingdom of Judah in the Promised Land.

One hundred years later, in 621 B.C., Judah's King Josiah initiated a temple restoration project, during which time the lost Torah was found. The restoration of God's Law birthed a brief revival in

the southern kingdom. However, even though God's written Word was now available, the people continued in their idolatry and worshipped other gods and false idols.

Then, in 612 B.C. the Assyrian Empire was conquered by the mighty Babylonian Empire, which became the new superpower of the ancient Near East. This was the time that God commissioned Habakkuk to announce His intention to judge Judah by exile and deportation. Habakkuk's prophecy likely occurred just after this event between 609, the year King Josiah died, and 598 B.C.

This was a very low period spiritually in the history of Judah, because its wicked King Jehoiakim had led the people deeper into evil. The covenant was broken and could not be repaired. God had to punish His people. So, after many warnings from God's prophets and witnessing the fall and exile of the northern kingdom, rebellious Judah and its capital, Jerusalem, were invaded by Babylonian King Nebuchadnezzar and his fierce army in 605 B.C. It was just as the prophet Isaiah had warned! Ezekiel, Daniel, and many other young sons of royalty were captured and marched to Babylon.

Habakkuk the Prophet

Habakkuk was one of the last prophets before Judah's exile. His name means "embracer" in Hebrew because of his love for God. The only thing that is known of Habakkuk's personal life is that he was of the tribe of Levi.¹ The Levites were priests, musicians, and teachers of the law. He may have been a priest involved in the worship of God in the temple, because he was known as a musician. Habakkuk chapter 3 is a beautiful psalm addressed, "For the choir director, on my

¹ From Rabbinical writers. *The New Analytical Bible and Dictionary of the Bible, KJV*. (1931, 1973). Iowa Falls, IA: World Bible Publishers, 1052.

stringed instruments.”¹ He identified himself as “Habakkuk the prophet,”² a term that indicates that he was likely a professional prophet.

The dialogue with God began with Habakkuk’s honest questions about why the Lord had allowed injustice and wrongdoing to continue in Judah. Why was God not answering his prayers for evil and destruction to subside and for good to reign? If God is sovereign and good, why did He permit such evil to continue? The Lord answered Habakkuk’s complaint by announcing the coming devastation of Judah at the hands of the brutal Babylonians. That gave Habakkuk more distress, because he could not understand why God would ordain the pagan Babylonians a victory over God’s chosen people. Weren’t the pagan Babylonians more wicked than the Jews? And so, he challenged Almighty God’s plan and purpose!

God’s answer to Habakkuk was totally unexpected. In fact, it was so significant, that God told him to chisel it on stone tablets like the Ten Commandments. The message was to endure until the end and not prove false! Habakkuk then came to understand what Isaiah had already recorded—that God’s ways are not man’s ways. That God’s ways are higher than man’s ways.³ Although God is silent, He is not asleep! He is continuously working out His Gospel plan for redemption and justice.

The Lord’s message to Habakkuk was that the righteous shall live by his faith and trust in God! God told Habakkuk that mighty kingdoms would rise and fall, but the person who walks by faith and puts his trust in the living God will endure forever! The principle of faith IS the principle of life for the believer!

Habakkuk responded both in fear and in faith. He had urged God to begin His judgment; but after recalling all that happens when God judges, he trembled with fear.⁴ When he finally understood, he could then respond in praise and thanksgiving. He trusted that God would see those who walked by faith during the coming Babylonian invasion and exile and would care for them.

*For the vision is yet for the appointed time;
It hastens toward the goal and it will not fail.
Though it tarries, wait for it;
For it will certainly come, it will not delay.
Behold, as for the proud one,
His soul is not right within him;
But the righteous will live by his faith.⁵*

Like his contemporary Isaiah, Habakkuk had one of the most extraordinary visions of God’s glory,⁶ called a theophany. In response he wrote a song, which is recorded in Habakkuk chapter 3:

1. In stanza one, he described God’s glory:
The Lord is a mighty, radiant warrior coming in righteousness as the sovereign Ruler of nations. He likened God’s glory to the brilliance of light rays emanating from the sun—a reminder of the glory and majesty of the only true God.⁷
2. In stanza two, he described how God delivered His people by His mighty power: He recalled God’s mighty acts throughout Israel’s history and how fearsome they were to behold at the Exodus, in the wilderness, at the Jordan River, and during the days of Joshua’s leadership into the Promised Land.⁸
3. In the third stanza, he described God’s judgment: Just as God delivered His people from the Red Sea, so He would deliver them from the flood of the Babylonians.⁹

God’s revelation to Habakkuk is a most important one for us to ponder today. Despite what the signs of the time display, there remains a remnant of believers identified as a people of faith, who have put their trust in the Lord Jesus Christ and His Gospel message. It is the same Gospel that compels believers to persevere until He returns once again in all His glory as the victorious King of kings and Lord of lords!

¹ Habakkuk 3:19.

² Habakkuk 1:1; 3:1.

³ Isaiah 55:8–9.

⁴ Habakkuk 3:16.

⁵ Habakkuk 2:3–4.

⁶ Habakkuk 3:3–15.

⁷ Habakkuk 3:3–4.

⁸ Habakkuk 3:5–11.

⁹ Habakkuk 3:12–15.



The Prophet Habakkuk

His name means “embracer” in Hebrew.

The book of Habakkuk is written in Hebrew poetry.

“Record the vision and inscribe it on tablets . . .

For the vision is yet for the appointed time; . . .

*Though it tarries, wait for it; For it will certainly come,
it will not delay. . . . For the righteous will live by his faith.”*

Habakkuk 2:2–3



Setting

1450–1410 B.C.

Arabian desert wilderness

Background

Habakkuk was a priest and temple musician who lived and prophesied just before Babylonian King Nebuchadnezzar and his army first invaded Judah and took Daniel and other royal sons as captives to Babylon. God had commissioned Habakkuk to announce the Lord’s intention to punish Judah by this coming deportation into Babylon. Although Habakkuk trusted God, he remained perplexed as to how a holy God could justify using the Babylonians, a pagan people more wicked than the Jews, to punish them.

The book of Habakkuk is very short and contains the two questions Habakkuk asked God and how God responded. God’s answer was so unexpected that He told him to chisel it on stone tablets so it would endure until the end and not prove false. Habakkuk then came to understand what God had already told Isaiah, that “God’s ways are higher than man’s ways” (Isaiah 55:8–9).

Although God is silent, He is not asleep. He is continuously working out His Gospel plan for redemption and justice for His people. The message to Habakkuk was that the righteous shall live by his faith and trust in God! When Habakkuk finally understood, he responded in praise and songs of thanksgiving.

Individuality

- ✦ Was righteous and honest
- ✦ Asked God the hard questions
- ✦ Chose to trust God in all things

The Prophet Jeremiah

The Weeping Prophet

Reading Nº 10

“For I know the plans I have for you,” declares the LORD,
“plans for welfare and not for calamity to give you a future and a hope.” (Jeremiah 29:11)

Type of Literature

Hebrew poetry (Jeremiah’s oracles), Hebrew prose, and summaries of Jeremiah’s sermons

Jeremiah’s poetry is more rustic than the poetry of Isaiah and other prophets, but is equal in thought.¹ Jeremiah’s scribe, Baruch, wrote biographical prose about Jeremiah.

Setting

627–586 B.C.

Jerusalem, the capital city of Judah

The Book of Jeremiah

The book of Jeremiah is the most complex of all the prophetic books in the Old Testament. His prophecies were recorded by his scribe, Baruch² and collected by an unknown compiler. Baruch noted that Jeremiah’s actual writings end with chapter 51. Chapter 52 is a synopsis of all Jeremiah’s prophecies and reads almost exactly like 2 Kings 24:18–25:30. It may have been added by one of Jeremiah’s disciples.³

The book of Jeremiah is also the longest book in the Old Testament. The arrangement of the prophecies is not in chronological order, but by seven different themes. Jeremiah prophesied both destruction and blessings for Judah, such as warnings against sin and God’s impending judgment as well as messages of hope and restoration.

The central message of the book of Jeremiah is that of hope. This is very different from other prophetic books in which the central message is a call

to repentance. Jeremiah’s prophecies make clear that God did not fail to protect Judah, but rather Judah failed to obey God and His numerous warnings. The people of Judah had even witnessed the Assyrian invasion of the northern kingdom and still chose to ignore God.

Jeremiah, the Weeping Prophet

Jeremiah was born in Anathoth, a small Levite town near Jerusalem in the hill country of Benjamin. His name means “my uplift is God” in Hebrew. He came from a family of priests, and his father was a prophet and a priest named Hilkiah.⁴ As the Levites were the teachers of the law at that time, Jeremiah was well educated and knew God’s Word. His ability to hire a personal scribe also suggests that he had some personal wealth. Baruch, his scribe, was his close friend and copied his dictated prophecies and messages. They walked together through the last 18 difficult years of the kingdom of Judah. It was during the horrible destruction of Jerusalem by the Babylonians in 607 B.C., the ensuing exile into Babylon, and Jeremiah’s settlement and death in Egypt.

Jeremiah shared more about his personal life than any other prophet in the Bible. Long before he was born, God had chosen Jeremiah to be a prophet to the nations. From chapter one:

*Now the word of the LORD came to me saying,
“Before I formed you in the womb I knew you,
And before you were born I consecrated you;
I have appointed you a prophet to the nations.”⁵*

Jeremiah was very young when the spirit of prophecy came upon him. He was afraid to accept such a serious responsibility, declaring,

¹ From Jerome’s Vulgate Bible (A.D. 382–405): Introduction to Jeremiah, ABD. vol. 3, 690.

² Jeremiah 36:4, 32.

³ https://www.blueletterbible.org/comm/guzik_david/study-guide/jeremiah/jeremiah-52.cfm.

⁴ This was not the high priest Hilkiah of 2 Kings 22, who discovered the lost book of Law during King Josiah’s reign.

⁵ Jeremiah 1:5.

*"Alas, Lord God!
Behold, I do not know how to speak,
because I am a youth."
But the LORD said to me,
"Do not say, 'I am a youth,'
Because everywhere I send you, you shall go,
And all that I command you, you shall speak."*¹

For this reason, Jeremiah is referred to as "**the reluctant prophet**." His objection was overruled by God, in whom the authority for his messages resided. Jeremiah is also known as "**the prophet of loneliness**," because God commanded him not to marry.² Jeremiah was a shy, peace-loving man with a sensitive, compassionate nature. Most people call him "**the weeping prophet**," as he mourned continually for his people and his homeland. He witnessed the invasion of Judah by Nebuchadnezzar's army in 597 B.C., and later he was the only prophet to record an eyewitness account of Jerusalem's destruction in 586.³ His book of Lamentations is a series of five poems that describe this event. Here is a small portion:

*Oh that my head were waters
And my eyes a fountain of tears,
That I might weep day and night
For the slain of the daughter of my people!⁴
Listen and give heed, do not be haughty,
For the LORD has spoken . . .
But if you will not listen to it,
My soul will sob in secret for such pride;
And my eyes will bitterly weep
And flow down with tears,
Because the flock of the LORD
has been taken captive.⁵*

Jeremiah was God's primary spokesman during Judah's darkest days. He was the most persecuted of all the Old Testament prophets.⁶ He was also called "**the prophet of doom**" and therefore had few friends and many enemies. For more than 40 years, he faithfully proclaimed God's judgment on apostate Judah, all the while enduring threats of execution, beatings, opposition, and imprisonment.

His 40-year prophetic ministry began when he was around 20 years of age under King Josiah, the

last of the God-fearing kings of Judah. Jeremiah had a friendly relationship with Josiah and supported his reformation program for Judah. Jeremiah ministered under the protection of the king, which gave him great liberty in declaring the word of the Lord. However, after Josiah's death in 608 B.C., Egypt invaded the land, and the spiritual life of the people declined. The Jewish king that the pharaoh placed on the throne disregarded God's written laws. Jeremiah watched with pain as injustices increased and his people were demoralized. He sternly admonished them to no avail. Opposition to Jeremiah increased significantly, as his prophecies fell on deaf ears.

In 605 B.C. the first deportation of Jewish captives to Babylon occurred. The prophet Daniel was in this first deportation. Jeremiah's prophecies were read publicly in hopes King Jehoiakim would heed the prophet's message. This enraged the evil king, and he had them ripped up and thrown into a fire. Jeremiah barely escaped arrest and was forbidden to go to the temple. Later, he also had to faithfully reproduce the prophecies by divine command.

In 597 B.C. Nebuchadnezzar captured Jerusalem and deported the reigning king of Judah, along with the princes, sons of nobility, and the physically strong Jewish youth and men. Nebuchadnezzar put Zedekiah on the throne as a puppet king. But, because over time King Zedekiah entered into negotiations with Egypt, Nebuchadnezzar returned to destroy Jerusalem and the temple in 586 and deported more captives to Babylon.

At this point in time, Jeremiah advised King Zedekiah and the people to submit to King Nebuchadnezzar. When Nebuchadnezzar learned of Jeremiah's counsel, he treated Jeremiah kindly by offering him the choice of going to Babylon or remaining with the remnant. Jeremiah chose to remain in Jerusalem. Later, however, he was forcibly taken to Egypt by Jewish military renegades and eventually killed.⁷ Judah endured one final invasion by Nebuchadnezzar's army in 582 B.C.

"In all Jewish history there is no greater, nobler instance of courage and heroism than was displayed by Jeremiah, who single-handedly fought the forces of evil around him. There he stood in the midst of godless princes, false prophets, and a weak king denouncing sin and predicting disaster, while death stared him in the face. He was accused of treason, charged with favoring the Babylonians, was thrown

¹ Jeremiah 1:6-7.

² Jeremiah 16:1.

³ Jeremiah 39.

⁴ Jeremiah 9:1.

⁵ Jeremiah 13:15, 17.

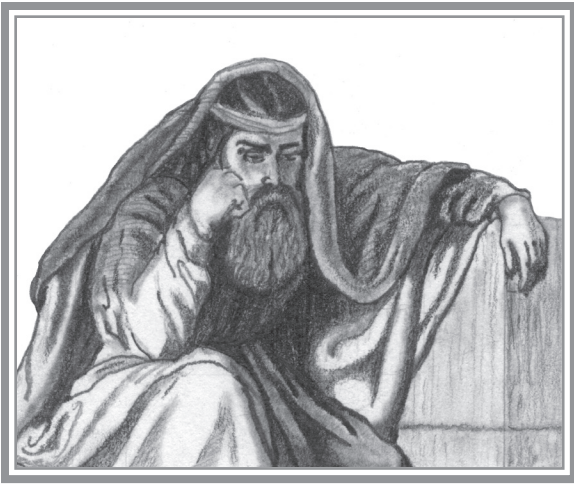
⁶ Wilmington, H.L. (1997.) *Wilmington's Bible Handbook*. Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, Inc., 382.

⁷ Bible.org, Introduction to Jeremiah. <https://bible.org/seriespage/introduction-jeremiah>.

into prison, and always in danger of losing his life. His one ruling passion was absolute fidelity to God in the faithful utterance of His message to his sinful, degenerate nation. His words were spoken with a deep pathos"¹ of one who loved his nation, his people, and his God.

¹ *The New Analytical Bible and Dictionary of the Bible, KJV.* (1931, 1973). Iowa Falls, IA: World Bible Publishers, 919.

No prophet was more like Jesus Christ than Jeremiah. As a man of sorrows, he is considered a type of Christ in the Old Testament. Chosen and known by God before his birth and equipped for the office of prophet by God's touch upon his lips, he was the perfect instrument through whom God was able to speak during one of the darkest and most difficult periods in all Jewish history.



The Prophet Jeremiah

His name means “the Lord exalts” in Hebrew.

Jeremiah is written in Hebrew poetry and prose.

*“For I know the plans I have for you,
declares the Lord, ‘plans for welfare and not
for calamity to give you a future and a hope.’”*

Jeremiah 29:11



Setting

627–586 B.C.

Jerusalem, the capital city of Judah

Background

The Jews in the southern kingdom witnessed the Assyrian captivity and deportation of Israel, the northern kingdom, and still continued in their rebellion to worship idols. After hundreds of years of warning, God’s mercy gave way to judgment. The new superpower, Babylonia, seized Jerusalem and in a few short years burned and destroyed the city and its temple. In three separate deportations, most of the Jews were taken to Babylonia. Jeremiah was permitted to remain in Jerusalem until he was unwillingly taken to Egypt, where he eventually died. No prophet was more like Jesus Christ than Jeremiah. He was a man of sorrows, the perfect individual through whom God was able to speak during one of the darkest and most difficult periods in Jewish history. Throughout all his days of suffering, being ridiculed, and mourning, his central message was that of hope.

Individuality

- ✦ Was shy and sensitive
- ✦ Was gentle and compassionate
- ✦ Exhibited supernatural strength
- ✦ Displayed amazing courage amidst great difficulties
- ✦ Was faithful to prophesy every word God gave him
- ✦ Was a “type” of Jesus Christ
- ✦ Likely died by stoning in Egypt

The Prophet Ezekiel

Watchman to the House of Israel

Reading Nº 11

"I will set My glory among the nations; and all the nations will see My judgment which I have executed and My hand which I have laid on them." (Ezekiel 39:21)

Type of Literature

Oracles, proverbs, laments, riddles, visions, and historical apocalyptic literature, which Ezekiel called parables. These parables both revealed truth and hid it.

Background (for the teacher's edification)

740 B.C. ASSYRIA took Israel into exile and in 722 they laid siege to Samaria, the capital city of the northern kingdom. The Assyrians populated Israel with people from other nations.¹

626 BABYLON defeated the Assyrians and became the new superpower. Judah removed itself from Assyria's control.

609 Judah, the southern kingdom, lost a battle with EGYPT, and Jehoiakim was placed on the throne as a puppet king to Egypt.

605 Babylonian King Nebuchadnezzar defeated the Egyptians, and Judah's King Jehoiakim became a puppet king to Babylon. Jehoiakim died and his young son Jehoiachin became king. Nebuchadnezzar deported many Jews to Babylon, including the prophet Daniel and his three friends.

597 Nebuchadnezzar and his army invaded Jerusalem. They deported the 18-year-old king and his family, young royals, Jewish leaders, craftsmen, and 10,000 Jews to Babylon. They looted the temple and placed Zedekiah on the throne as their vassal king. Ezekiel was taken captive during this deportation and marched to Babylon.

592 Ezekiel's prophetic ministry began as he entered the priesthood at age 30.

586 Judah's King Zedekiah foolishly disregarded Jeremiah's former warnings from God to submit to Babylon. He rebelled under Babylonian rule, so Nebuchadnezzar completely destroyed the city of Jerusalem and Solomon's temple and deported more Jews to Babylon. This was Judah's third and final exile.

539 MEDO-PERSIA defeated the Babylonians, and the Persian Empire arose as a world power in western Asia. Persian King Cyrus was moved by God's Spirit to send the captive Jews home.²

515 The returning Jews completed the rebuilding of the temple in Jerusalem.

Setting

593–562 B.C. (during the exilic period)

Jerusalem, the capital of Judah

Tel-abib, Babylon, beside the Chebar River on Nebuchadnezzar's Grand Canal³

The plain of the Euphrates Valley

The Book of Ezekiel

The book of Ezekiel is one of the major books of prophecy in the Bible. These prophecies contain dates that are more specific than almost any other books in the Old Testament. This makes it possible to match Ezekiel's messages with ancient Babylonian records and date many of his oracles. After hundreds of years of warning, God's judgment fell on the Jews in the southern kingdom of Judah due to their idolatry and rebellion. There were many false prophets

¹ 2 Kings 17:24; a form of ethnic cleansing.

² Isaiah 44:28–45:7.

³ Ezekiel 3:15, Nebuchadnezzar's Royal Canal near modern day Bagdad.

at that time who promised the Jews that the Babylonians would leave Judah soon and things would return to normal. However, the prophets Jeremiah and Ezekiel both received a different message from God, so they were not popular with the people. In fact, as Ezekiel's ministry began, God told him that the people would not listen to his prophecies.

Ezekiel remained loyal to God and confronted the sins of the people. After the third deportation of Jews to Babylon and the fall of the city of Jerusalem, Ezekiel reminded them of why they were in Babylon, but he also offered hope for Jerusalem's future restoration. Many of Ezekiel's visions from God pertained to the return of God's glory in Israel.

Ezekiel received extraordinary manifestations of God's glory and lacked the vocabulary to adequately describe the vivid imagery and symbolism that he saw. So, he used phrases like "as it were," "in the likeness of," or "like the appearance of," because he had no specific reference or earthly experience to describe them. God is Spirit,¹ so what Ezekiel saw was holy God on His mobile, heavenly throne, or what the Bible calls "the glory of God." There are very few people in the Bible who received such heavenly revelation. Moses experienced God's glory on Mount Sinai.² Isaiah saw God high and lifted up at his commissioning,³ while Habakkuk had an awesome vision of God.⁴ The Apostle Paul spoke of being caught up into the third heaven,⁵ and the Apostle John received a supernatural revelation of the presence of God on His throne.⁶

The book of Ezekiel divides naturally into three sections. The first 24 chapters were written before the destruction of Jerusalem and the final exile of the Jews to Babylon. Here Ezekiel boldly declared God's word concerning the departure of God's glory from the temple and the certainty of the fall of Jerusalem. The second section deals with God's judgments against the surrounding nations. And the third section is about Israel's future and vividly describes her restoration after the exile and the return of God's glory. The event on which the book centers is the fall of Jerusalem. The central message of Ezekiel is the departure and future return of God's glory to Jerusalem. Ezekiel prophesied the return of the

Jews to Jerusalem, the rebuilding of the temple, and the coming of the messianic king, King Jesus. His message was clear—though God's people were in exile and their nation was destroyed, God was still on His throne governing the universe. He had humbled the Jews, by removing them from their promised land, in order to bring them to repentance.

Ezekiel, a Watchman to the House of Israel

Ezekiel is one of the four major prophets in the Old Testament. He lived during one of the most tumultuous times in the history of Israel. His Hebrew name means "God strengthens." He was the godly son of Buzi, a priest of the family of Zadok. At the age of 25, Ezekiel was taken captive by the Babylonians into exile. He was marched on foot for four months from Jerusalem to Babylon along with young King Jehoiachin and 10,000 other Jews.⁷ During this period of exile, the Jews did not suffer physically and were not treated as slaves by the Babylonians. They seemed to have been viewed as colonists and were permitted to live in communities in whatever area of the Babylonian Empire to which they were taken.

Ezekiel married and had a house near modern day Bagdad, Iraq, along King Nebuchadnezzar's Royal Canal. There he met and consulted with many leaders. Ezekiel's wife was abruptly taken from him in 587, and he was not permitted to publicly mourn her death.⁸ In his role as priest, Ezekiel was unable to perform most of his priestly duties, as there was no Jewish temple in pagan Babylonia. It was at this time in history that the Jews began to "assemble" in houses of prayer. These Jewish congregations in Babylon could possibly be the origins of the synagogue and where Judaism was birthed.

God's call to Ezekiel to be His prophet to the exiles in Babylon was a very difficult one. His commissioning occurred during the fifth year of his exile, when he was 30 years old, the age when Levitical priests were commissioned into their priestly ministry.⁹ Ezekiel's priestly lineage shines through his prophetic ministry, which spanned at least 22 years (592–70 B.C.) before and after the destruction of Jerusalem. God called Ezekiel to be a watchman, saying,

¹ John 4:24.

² Exodus 3:1–5; 33:18–23.

³ Isaiah 6:1–8.

⁴ Habakkuk 3:3–4.

⁵ 2 Corinthians 12:2–7.

⁶ Revelation 4:1–11.

⁷ 2 Kings 24:10–17.

⁸ Ezekiel 24:15–18.

⁹ Numbers 4:3; Ezekiel 1:1–2.

*I have appointed you a watchman to the house of Israel; whenever you hear a word from My mouth, warn them from Me.*¹

Just as the task of a watchman in the ancient world was to warn the city against impending danger, so the prophets were spiritual watchmen called by God to warn the people to repent from their sins or be judged by God.

Ezekiel was a contemporary of Jeremiah and Daniel. They all lived during the same exilic time period. Jeremiah was a prophet to the captive Jews in Jerusalem until he was unwillingly taken to Egypt. Before the exile, Ezekiel was greatly influenced by the elder prophet Jeremiah. Young Daniel and his three friends received the best Chaldean education after they arrived in Babylon, and Daniel became a statesman and interpreter of dreams for King Nebuchadnezzar. Ezekiel was used by God as a prophet and a priest to the community of captive Jews in Babylon.

After being in Babylon for three years, Ezekiel started receiving visions and messages from the Lord. When God addressed Ezekiel, the Holy Spirit entered him and he heard God speaking.² Ezekiel saw visions that were from God, but he also saw visions of God in all His splendor and glory.³ Ezekiel's writing was God-centered, that is, everything was seen from God's eternal view. The visions that He had of God's glory taught him that God is sovereign over the universe! Ezekiel is also known for his erratic behavior. He ate a scroll, laid on the ground "playing war" to emphasize a point, and lost his ability to speak for a period of time.

Beginning with the very first chapter, the unifying feature in his book of prophecies is the glory of God. Ezekiel's first recorded prophecy begins with the vision of the visible presence of God on His throne. Ezekiel continued to place God in the center of his unfolding drama throughout the book. But because of the Jews' continued sinful practices and rebellion toward God, God's severe judgment fell on Jerusalem. God used the Babylonians to destroy their capital city. They burned the city walls, Solomon's temple, and the remainder of Jerusalem. The kingdom of Judah was abolished and became a Babylonian province. Ezekiel lived into his fifties, but sadly never witnessed the return of the Jews to Jerusalem from captivity under the rule of Persia.

The Glory of God

As previously mentioned, the central message of the book of Ezekiel is the prediction of the departure and eventual return of God's glory to Jerusalem. A review of the visibility of God's glory in the Bible is as follows: It was present in the garden of Eden; however, when Adam and Eve sinned, God removed them permanently. After leading God's people out of Egypt, Moses prayed that God would show him His glory. God had him stand in a cleft of a large rock and passed by him. Soon, God instructed Moses to build a tabernacle in the wilderness.⁴ God desired a place of worship to be in their midst, so He could dwell among His chosen people. At its completion, His divine glory descended and came to rest on the ark of the covenant inside the tabernacle in the holy of holies room. His glorious presence was seen daily in the pillar of cloud by day and the pillar of fire at night.⁵

This divine glory is identified by the Jewish term "Shekhinah" which means "indwelling." This supernatural radiance of God's eternal glory revealed His presence among His people. After Solomon completed building the temple in Jerusalem, God's glory came to dwell over the ark of the covenant⁶ and remained for centuries. However, God withdrew His glory just before the Babylonians destroyed the temple in 586 B.C., and it has never permanently returned.

Throughout the book of Ezekiel, the glory of the Lord moved first from the holy of holies in the Jerusalem temple to the entryway of the temple, and then rested over the living cherubim, who carried the mobile throne back to heaven. From outside the temple, God's glory moved through the east gate and came to stand over the Mount of Olives.⁷ From there it ascended into heaven. This movement of God's glory indicated the departure of His blessing and protection of Jerusalem.

Seventy years later, after the Jews returned to Jerusalem from their Babylonian captivity, a modest "**second temple**" was completed by Zerubbabel in 515 B.C. But the visible presence of God in the Shekhinah cloud of glory never returned to the holy of holies! This is because the ark of the covenant had

¹ Ezekiel 3:17.

² Ezekiel 2:1–2.

³ Ezekiel 1:1.

⁴ Exodus 25:8.

⁵ Exodus 13:21–22.

⁶ Exodus 40:34–37.

⁷ Ezekiel 10:18; 11:23.

disappeared prior to the Babylonian siege. Not until baby Jesus was dedicated in the temple did the glory of God temporarily reenter the Jerusalem temple.¹

It is interesting to note that prophecy tells us that in the future, when Jesus Christ returns to earth in His power and glory, He will follow the same path in reverse in which God's glory departed. He will descend from heaven on the Mount of Olives and enter Jerusalem through the east gate accompanied by the glory of God.²

In Isaiah's prophecy about the birth of the Messiah, His name was given as Immanuel,³ "God with us." In the New Covenant, God dwells within each believer. "Christ in you, Christ in me, our hope of glory."⁴ If you have received Jesus Christ into your heart as Savior, then His glory lives within you. His

glorious presence is forever with you! And your purpose is to glorify God in everything you do.

By grace you have been saved, and raised up with Him, and seated with Him in heavenly places, in Christ Jesus.⁵

Do you not know that you are a temple of God and that the Spirit of God dwells in you?⁶

John, the Revelator, gave us a glimpse into the future heaven on earth called the New Jerusalem,

And he carried me away in the Spirit to a great and high mountain, and showed me the holy city, Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, having the glory of God. . . . I saw no temple in it, for the Lord God the Almighty and the Lamb are its temple. And the city has no need of the sun or of the moon to shine on it, for the glory of God has illumined it, and its lamp is the Lamb.⁷

¹ Luke 2:29–32.

² Ezekiel 43:1–5; Zechariah 14:4; Acts 1:9–12; Matthew 24:27.

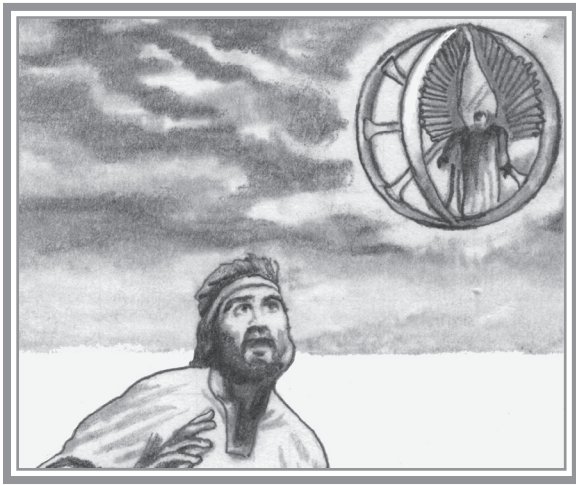
³ Isaiah 7:14.

⁴ Colossians 1:27.

⁵ Ephesians 2:5–6.

⁶ 1 Corinthians 3:16.

⁷ Revelation 21:10–11, 22–23.



The Prophet Ezekiel

His name means “God strengthens” in Hebrew.
Ezekiel contains oracles, narrative, and visions.

*“Son of man, I have appointed you a watchman
to the house of Israel; whenever you hear a word
from My mouth, warn them from Me.”*

Ezekiel 3:17



Setting

593–562 B.C. in exile

Jerusalem, the capital city of Judah

Tel-abib, Babylonia, beside the Chebar River on Nebuchadnezzar’s Grand Canal

Background

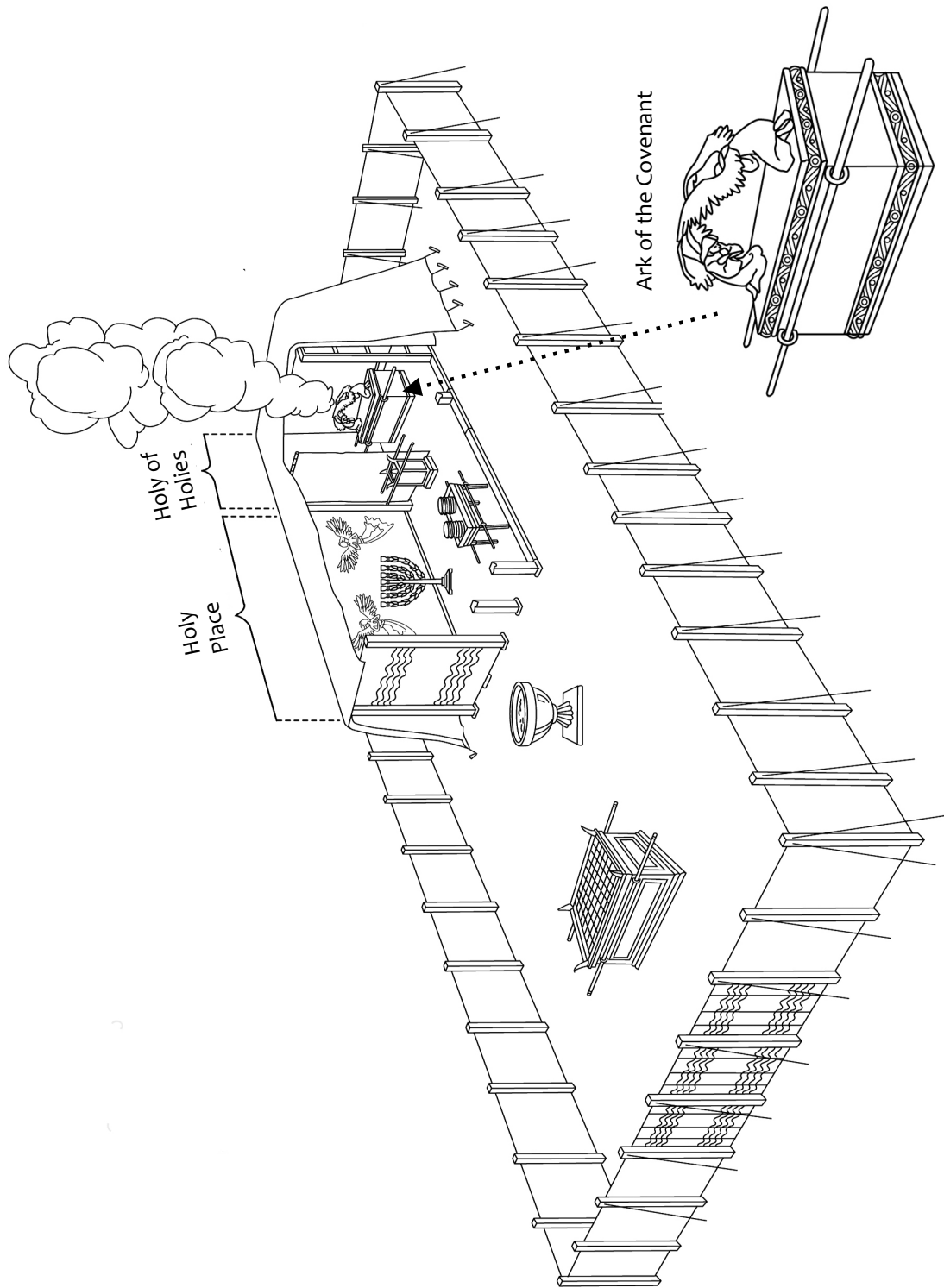
The Babylonians rose to world power, defeating the Assyrians and Egyptians. They soon invaded Jerusalem in the southern kingdom. The Babylonians were used by God to destroy Jerusalem in 605, 597, and 586 B.C. Over the next 22 years, they judged Judah for her idolatry and lack of repentance. They deported the majority of Jews to Babylonia, as their army burned and destroyed Jerusalem and Solomon’s temple. Ezekiel, the young priest, was called by God to be a prophet to the exiled Jews in Babylonia. However, they did not listen to his warnings. Ezekiel remained loyal to God, and God revealed Himself in all His splendor and glory to Ezekiel in wondrous visions. The book of Ezekiel describes the Shekhinah glory of God in the midst of the temple, the departure of God’s glory from the temple, and its future return and restoration (Ezekiel 1:7–8; 10; 43:1–12).

Individuality

- ♦ Loved God and was obedient in his calling
- ♦ Had an unshakable faith in God
- ♦ Knew the Lord was his strength
- ♦ Received extraordinary manifestations of God’s glory
- ♦ Had a great capacity for interpreting complex visual images
- ♦ Was called to unusual events
- ♦ Remained steadfast in his difficult ministry
- ♦ Proclaimed God’s messages and performed symbolic actions

The Tabernacle

God's Dwelling Place



The Prophet Daniel

Model of Wisdom and Faith

Reading Nº 12

"The people who know their God will be strong and do exploits.

And those who understand among the people shall instruct many." (Daniel 11:32–33)

Type of Literature

Historical apocalypse, a literary genre that foretells inspired, cataclysmic events that will occur at the end of the world and is meant to both reveal and hide truth.

Background (for the teacher's edification)

- 605** Babylonian King Nebuchadnezzar defeated the Egyptians. Judah's King Jehoiakim died and his young son Jehoiachin then became a puppet king to **BABYLONIA**. Nebuchadnezzar deported to Babylonia many Jews from Judah, including young Daniel and his three friends. Daniel and his friends received the best Chaldean education in the court of Nebuchadnezzar, and Daniel entered the king's personal service in Babylon.
- 597** Nebuchadnezzar and his army invaded Jerusalem. They deported the 18-year-old king and his family, young royals, Jewish leaders, craftsmen, and 10,000 Jews to Babylon.
- 586** Nebuchadnezzar completely destroyed the city of Jerusalem and Solomon's temple and deported more Jews to Babylonia. This was Judah's third and final exile.
- 539** The **MEDO-PERSIAN EMPIRE** defeated the Babylonians and arose as the world power in Asia. Persian King Cyrus was moved by God's Spirit to send the captive Jews home.¹

Setting

605–536 B.C. (during the exilic period in the Babylonian and Medo-Persian Empires)

Babylon, the capital of Babylonia

The Book of Daniel

The book of Daniel is the last of the major books of prophecy in the Christian Bible, and Daniel is the author. However, in the Jewish Bible, Daniel is included in the Writings rather than the Prophets because Daniel's position was that of statesman, not prophet. The Jews called him a wise man or a seer not a prophet. In the New Testament, Christ spoke of Daniel's *function* as prophetic,² however his *position* was that of a Babylonian government official. The Jews did not regard his writing as less inspired, but different in character. Daniel's attitude and manner of speech was unlike that of the other biblical prophets. All communicated with rulers, religious leaders, and the people. The prophets often used confrontational language in order to incite action and repentance; however, Daniel's language was that of diplomacy, which he employed to produce peaceful negotiations.

Little is mentioned in the book of Daniel about the personal life and character of the Jewish captives in Babylonia. Daniel lived during the height of the Babylonian Empire and its fall to the Medo-Persian Empire. He served as advisor to the kings of Babylonia, Media, and Persia. Like the book of Esther, the book of Daniel reveals God's continuing providence and superintendence of His people, and more importantly, the future times of the Gentile nations. Daniel's prophetic revelation is also the key to understanding Jesus' end-time predictions on the Mount of Olives,³ as well as the book of Revelation.

Daniel, Scholar-Statesman

Daniel's name in Hebrew means "God is my judge." Like the prophets Ezekiel and Jeremiah, he lived during the exilic period after Judah was besieged by

¹ Isaiah 45:1-7.

² Matthew 24:15.

³ Matthew 24, 25.

the Babylonian army. Young Daniel was taken captive during the first of Nebuchadnezzar's deportations from Judah and marched through the desert wilderness for four months to Babylon. In fact, Daniel lived throughout the entire 70-year captivity under the rule of three superpowers in the Near East—Babylonia, Media, and Persia. He was the longest-held prisoner of war in the Bible.

When taken captive, Daniel was a member of Jewish royalty in Jerusalem, most likely a relative of King Zedekiah. He was among those young, healthy adolescents of noble and royal birth that were hand-picked by Ashpenaz, Nebuchadnezzar's chief official, to be trained for service as wise men in the court of the king.¹ Daniel and his three friends, Hananiah, Mishael and Azariah, were described as,

Youths in whom was no defect,² who were good-looking, showing intelligence in every branch of wisdom, endowed with understanding and discerning knowledge, and who had ability for serving in the king's court.³

In order to make them more Babylonian, the first thing the four youths received was a Babylonian name: to Daniel was given the name Belteshazzar, to Hananiah, Shadrach, to Mishael, Meshach, and to Azariah, Abed-nego. In each Hebrew name, the name for the living God was found (either *el* or *iah*); whereas, each Babylonian name contained the name of a pagan god. It is known that, during this period of history in the Middle East, youths with ability were trained in either temple schools to become priests or in the wisdom tradition to serve in the royal courts of kings as government officials and advisors.⁴ When young Daniel and his friends were tested by Ashpenaz and found to be well versed in wisdom, they were placed in the elite, Chaldean "advanced leadership course" to become highly skilled in worldly wisdom and diplomacy. We would say they were enrolled in an exclusive, three-year, post-university course to become international diplomats.

Who were the Chaldeans? They were an influential and highly educated tribe of people from southern Mesopotamia, who were part of the Babylonian Empire at the time of Daniel. The Chaldeans were well known as wise men and astrologers, which elevated Babylon as the intellectual center of western

Asia.⁵ Four hundred years later, it may well have been from there that the three wise men from the east followed the bright star in the heavens that led them to baby Jesus, King of the Jews.⁶

What did these Jewish adolescents study in their advanced Chaldean course? They would have first been immersed in Chaldean literature, culture, and the occult. In addition, they would have studied foreign languages, astronomy, and military history, as well as the principles of statesmanship and government administration. Private tutors would have been assigned to prepare them for high positions of responsibility and power in the Babylonian Empire.⁷

At the very beginning of his new life in the king's court, Daniel's godly education in the law of Moses revealed itself. He chose not to defile himself with the king's food, which was unclean to a Jew according to the Torah, and requested a vegetable diet. He applied biblical wisdom to his personal life and daily choices and took dominion over the king's decree based on his knowledge of the Torah's dietary laws. When he and his three friends graduated, Daniel states,

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.⁸

This is what set Daniel and his friends apart from all the other wise men in Babylon. They had a knowledge of God's living Word and had been taught how to think and reason with truth from their early childhood. Their knowledge of God's law renewed their minds and molded their lifetime habits. They had been trained to seek the wisdom of God for governing their daily choices, which in turn formed their character. Strengthened by their inner convictions and God's Word, rather than worldly wisdom and royal power, they were able to boldly challenge the pagan king's edicts that violated their consciences and to face the consequences of the fiery furnace and lions' den.

In years to come, the Babylonian Empire fell to the mighty Medo-Persian Empire, and Darius the Mede was crowned king. The book of Daniel records,

It pleased Darius to appoint 120 satraps to rule throughout the kingdom, with three administrators over them, one of whom was Daniel. The satraps were made accountable to them so that the king

¹ 2 Chronicles 36:20–21.

² "defect" in Hebrew, "great potential."

³ Daniel 1:4.

⁴ Strohmmer, C. (2014.) Daniel's Wisdom Education in Jerusalem & Babylon. <https://wagingwisdom.com>

⁵ Who Were the Chaldeans in the Bible? Got Questions: <https://www.gotquestions.org/Chaldeans.html>.

⁶ Matthew 2:1–2.

⁷ Strohmmer, C. (2014).

⁸ Daniel 1:20.

might not suffer loss. Now Daniel so distinguished himself among the administrators and the satraps by his exceptional qualities that the king planned to set him over the whole kingdom. At this, the administrators and the satraps tried to find grounds for charges against Daniel in his conduct of government affairs, but they were unable to do so. They could find no corruption in him, because he was trustworthy and neither corrupt nor negligent. Finally these men said, "We will never find any basis for charges against this man Daniel unless it has something to do with the law of his God."¹

And so they plotted to have Darius sign a new law that would punish anyone who prayed to any other god or man than King Darius. The evil leaders found Daniel praying to the living God, as he always did in his home three times a day, and had him arrested.

Even though Daniel was a scholar-statesman, who had been trained in the world's greatest school of wisdom and tutored by the world's wisest men, he governed his life by the godly principles he had learned from God's Word as a boy in Jerusalem. He applied godly wisdom, not worldly wisdom, to his daily choices. God performed miraculous deeds on his behalf and protected him against the evil plots of jealous, pagan leaders. God even gave Daniel great favor as a diplomat and trusted counselor with kings of mighty empires! Daniel led both King Nebuchadnezzar and King Darius to a saving knowledge of the living God. He also witnessed Darius' declaration of a new law that in every part of his kingdom people must worship the God of Daniel. For this reason, Daniel has the distinction of being considered by God as a model of wisdom.²

Daniel, Interpreter of Dreams and Visions

Daniel also became known for his understanding and interpretation of visions and dreams, which God sometimes used to reveal truth to His people and the future of world history. This was the case of Daniel. His interpretation of the visions God gave him enables believers to see the hand of God in history, rather than the ancient, secular historians' focus on political mysteries. History, when viewed through the eternal lens of what God is doing, provides us a moral and spiritual viewpoint. Daniel's prophetic vision in chapter 7 provides the most comprehensive and detailed overview of future events in world history that can be found anywhere in the Old Testament. In this vision Daniel traces the course of four great world empires. It concludes with the second coming of Jesus Christ and the eternal kingdom to earth, which is represented as the fifth and final kingdom from heaven!

What set Daniel and his three friends apart from all the other students in the Chaldean school of wisdom and all the other wise men in the empire? It is the impact of their early education in the Word of God and their obedience to apply godly wisdom to their choices throughout life under the most stressful circumstances and challenges. As recorded in Daniel's last prophecy concerning those living in the end time,³

Those who have insight will shine brightly like the brightness of the expanse of heaven, and those who lead the many to righteousness, like the stars forever and ever.⁴

Will you choose to follow the path of Daniel and his three friends, who were models of godly wisdom and faith? Will you choose to diligently study God's Word?

¹ Daniel 6:1–5, NIV.

² Ezekiel 28:3.

³ Daniel 12:9–10.

⁴ Daniel 12:3.



The Prophet Daniel

His name means “God is my judge” in Hebrew.

Daniel contains oracles, narrative, and visions.

*“The people who know their God
will be strong and do exploits.
And they that understand shall instruct many.”
Daniel 11:32–33*



Setting

605–536 B.C. in exile

Babylon

Background

The Babylonians invaded Jerusalem for the first time. They deported many of the young, healthy, and intelligent sons of royalty and nobility and marched them to Babylon, a challenging four-month journey through the desert wilderness. Daniel and his three young friends were among this group. They were chosen to attend King Nebuchadnezzar’s elite Chaldean school of wisdom and diplomacy to prepare them for service in the royal court. God gave them wisdom and intelligence, and Daniel understood all kinds of visions and dreams. Upon graduation, Daniel and his friends excelled all the king’s wise men and were soon placed in prestigious government positions. The jealousy of other leaders incurred persecution and death sentences. God supernaturally delivered them, which brought glory to His name among the pagans. Daniel interpreted many visions and dreams during his 70-year exile in Babylon. He prophesied the future events of world history in great detail and foretold of the second coming of Jesus Christ and His eternal kingdom. What set Daniel and his three friends apart is the impact of their early education in the Word of God and their obedience to apply godly wisdom to their daily choices and decisions amidst severe challenges and trials.

Individuality

- ✦ Showed intelligence in every branch of literature
- ✦ Was endowed with wisdom
- ✦ Tested 10 times better than all the wise men in the realm
- ✦ Purposed not to defile himself
- ✦ Applied discernment in decisions
- ✦ Understood all kinds of visions and dreams

The Prophet Zechariah

Prophet of Hope

Reading N° 13

"Not by might, nor by power, but by My Spirit, saith the Lord." (Zechariah 4:6)

Type of Literature

Oracles and historical apocalypse like Ezekiel, Daniel, and Revelation, which is meant to both reveal and hide truth. It is characterized by symbolic visions, animal symbolism, symbolic numbers, and a blend of imagery and history.

Background (for the teacher's edification)

- 605** Babylonian King Nebuchadnezzar defeated the Egyptians. Judah's King Jehoiakim died and his young son Jehoiachin then became a puppet king to **BABYLONIA**. Nebuchadnezzar deported many Jews from Judah to Babylon, including young Daniel and his three friends.
- 586** Nebuchadnezzar completely destroyed the city of Jerusalem and Solomon's temple and deported more Jews to Babylon.
- 539** The **MEDO-PERSIAN EMPIRE** defeated the Babylonians and arose as the world's superpower.
- 538** Persian conqueror, King Cyrus, was moved to send all the exiles back to their homelands. During his reign, 50,000 Jews returned to Judah.¹
- Zechariah** and Haggai were in this first return to Jerusalem led by Zerubbabel and Iddo, the high priest.
- 536** The first exiles laid the foundation for rebuilding the temple. This effort was assaulted for 15 years.
- 520** Zechariah's prophetic ministry began when he and Haggai urged the renewing of efforts to rebuild the temple.²

Setting

520–518 B.C., Post-exilic period in Jerusalem

The Book of Zechariah

The book of Zechariah is the next to the last book in the Old Testament. Zechariah is the author. The history of this book is the fulfillment of Jeremiah's prophecy concerning the return of the Jews out of Babylon at the end of 70 years of captivity.³ Zechariah's prophecies were given during the post-exilic period of Jewish history. This was when Persian King Cyrus decreed that the Jewish exiles in Babylon were free to return to their homeland. He even provided them funds and resources from his royal treasury to rebuild their temple in Jerusalem.⁴ Unfortunately, very few Jews desired to return to a war-torn wasteland left in burnt rubble by the conquering armies of Babylonia and Medo-Persia. They had come to appreciate their comfortable lifestyle as merchants in Babylon, which is known as "the Hollywood of the ancient empires."

When the first of the exiles returned to rebuild the temple under the leadership of Zerubbabel,⁵ the local remnant living in Judah were hostile to the returnees. They harassed and deterred their work for 15 years! As Zechariah, who was the grandson of the high priest Iddo, had been one of the priests who returned, God called him to prophesy encouragement to Zerubbabel and the builders. So much so, that Zechariah and Haggai's prophecies are credited with the successful completion of the rebuilding project in four years' time. The dry bones had come to life! From the writings of High Priest Ezra,

The elders of the Jews were successful in building through the prophesying of Haggai the prophet and

¹ Isaiah 45:1–7.

² Ezra 5:1–6:15.

³ Ezra chapter 1.

⁴ Ezra 6:1–12.

⁵ Babylonian-born, Persian-appointed governor of Judah, who is in the lineage of Jesus' adoptive father, Joseph.

*Zechariah the [grand]son of Iddo. And they finished building according to the command of the God of Israel and the decrees of Cyrus, Darius, and Artaxerxes kings of Persia.*¹

Zechariah began his ministry preaching repentance, saying,

*Thus says the Lord of hosts, "Return to Me," declares the Lord of hosts, "that I may return to you. . . . Return from your evil ways and from your evil deeds."*²

The prophecies in the book cover a two-year time period in which the Lord spoke in eight night visions that were rich in symbolism. They promised the restoration of the city of Jerusalem and the temple, the overthrow of hostile nations, the removal of wickedness, and God's return to the people with a king from the lineage of David.³ Following the visions, the book of Zechariah contains two oracles (chapters 9–14) that dramatically portray God's return to His people and the establishment of His kingdom. These oracles depict the first coming of Jesus the Messiah to purchase our salvation, as well as a future battle at Jerusalem, and the second coming of Jesus to set up His Kingdom here on earth.

Of all the minor prophets, Zechariah reveals the clearest and the largest number of passages about the Messiah, many of which have already been fulfilled.⁴ He prophesied that the Messiah would ride on a donkey into Jerusalem as a humble, victorious King.⁵ He also revealed that the Messiah would come again as Savior, Judge, and righteous King of kings and Lord of lords and rule His people from Jerusalem.⁶ He prophesied that in the last days, when the Messiah returns to His people, they will finally recognize Him, realize that they have "missed it," and react with a spirit of mourning. The Messiah will finally be recognized by the Jewish people.

*I will pour out on the house of David and on the inhabitants of Jerusalem, the Spirit of grace and of supplication, so that they will look on Me whom they have pierced; and they will mourn for Him, as one mourns for an only son, and they will weep bitterly over Him like the bitter weeping over a firstborn.*⁷

The primary message of Zechariah is that God remembers His covenant and will eventually fulfill all His covenant promises. This was a message of hope for the post-exilic Jews and for us believers today.

Zechariah, Post-exilic Prophet

Zechariah was a Levitical priest who was born in Babylon, but lived his life during the time of Judah's restoration when the temple was rebuilt.⁸ His name in Hebrew means "the Lord remembers." He was the son of Berechiah and the grandson of the high priest, Iddo. He is mentioned in the book of Nehemiah as the head of the priestly family of Iddo.⁹ His grandfather accompanied Zerubbabel from exile in Babylon to assist in rebuilding the temple in Jerusalem.

Zechariah was most likely called to prophesy in the second year of the reign of King Darius the Great. Along with the prophet Haggai, he communicated God's word to the people, who had returned from Babylonian exile to resettle the land of Judah. Earlier prophets had promised a glorious restoration of the nation.¹⁰ However, the reality for those who returned fell far short of these expectations. Their efforts to rebuild the temple, the city of Jerusalem, and their former Jewish community life met many difficult challenges. It was into this frustrating situation that Zechariah called on the people to repent of their evil ways and to return to God so that God would return to them.

It was about 16 years after the first group of Jews returned to Judah when Persian King Cyrus issued his edict for the reconstruction of Jerusalem's temple. Zechariah is believed to have been the motivating force in the completion of the temple. His constant prophecies of encouragement, along with Haggai's, are credited with the rapid rebuilding of the second temple after a 15-year pause in the project. Zechariah's prophecies were also instrumental in the reestablishment of the temple priesthood. He guarded against the establishment of pagan cults. He taught repentance and submission to the Lord as the basis for redemption from sin, the restoration of God's blessings in their lives, and the outpouring of the Holy Spirit.

¹ Ezra 6:14.

² Zechariah 1:3–4.

³ A reference to Jesus Christ; Matthew chapter 1.

⁴ *Introduction to Zechariah, The Ryrie Study Bible*. NASB. (1978). Chicago, IL: Moody Press, 1414.

⁵ Zechariah 9:9; Matthew 21:1–11.

⁶ Zechariah 14:1, 9.

⁷ Zechariah 12:10.

⁸ Nehemiah 12:1, 16.

⁹ Nehemiah 12:4; Ezra 5:1; 6:14 as the descendant of Iddo.

¹⁰ Zephaniah 3:20.

Zechariah's primary message is tied to the meaning of his name: God remembers His covenants and will eventually fulfill all the promises of His covenants. This was a message of great hope to the post-exilic Jews. Although Zechariah addressed the issues of his day, his prophecies reached into the days when Jesus walked on the earth, and to a large extent, into the end times in which we are living! We can trust God's covenant promises to be fulfilled in His perfect timing.

The Old Testament does not explain how Zechariah died. However, he most likely is the "Zechariah" mentioned by Jesus Christ in the New Testament Gospels of Matthew and Luke, when He condemned the first-century Jewish religious leaders, saying,

*Woe to you scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! . . .
I am sending you prophets and wise men and scribes;
some of them you will kill and crucify, and some of them
you will scourge in your synagogues, and persecute from city to city,
that upon you may*

*fall the guilt of all the righteous blood shed on earth,
from the blood of Abel to the blood of Zechariah, the son of Berechiah,
whom you murdered between the temple and the altar.¹*

Indeed, like many other prophets before him, Zechariah was martyred. He suffered a violent death at the hands of the Jewish religious leaders. In fact, according to Jesus' reference, Abel and Zechariah were the first and last martyrs in the Old Testament period. Zechariah, Haggai, and Malachi are the last of the prophets of Israel before God goes silent for 400 years. As far as we know, God did not speak and no Scripture was written from the time of Malachi until,

*The fullness of the time came, and God sent forth His Son,
born of a woman, born under the Law, so that He might redeem those
who were under the Law, that we might receive the adoption as sons.²*

¹ Matthew 23:29, 34–35; Luke 11:51.

² Galatians 4:4–5.



The Prophet Zechariah

His name means “the Lord remembers” in Hebrew.
Zechariah contains historical apocalypse and oracles.

*“Behold, the day of the LORD cometh. . . .
And the LORD shall be king over all the earth.”
Zechariah 14:1, 9*



Setting

520–518 B.C., post-exilic period in Jerusalem

Background

Persian King Cyrus declared freedom to all captives in his enlarged empire after defeating the Babylonian army. He encouraged the Jews to return home from Babylon and to rebuild their temple in Jerusalem. He even provided them funds and resources from his royal treasury for the massive project. However, they met with great resistance and harassment from the local people who were able to stop the work for nearly 15 years. In fact, it was the constant encouragement of the prophets Zechariah and Haggai that is credited with the completion of the building in less than four years!

Zechariah is best known for his large number of prophecies about the Messiah. He foretold that the first coming of Jesus was to purchase our salvation, and His second coming was to set up His kingdom here on earth. Zechariah’s primary message is tied to the meaning of his Hebrew name—that God remembers His covenant and will eventually fulfill all His covenant promises. This was a message of great hope for the post-exilic Jews and for us believers today, as well. Maranatha! Come, Lord Jesus!

Individuality

- ♦ Called his people to repentance and a life of purity
- ♦ Cleaned up the temple priesthood for ministry
- ♦ Faithfully upheld the holiness of God

The Prophet Malachi

Prophet of Reconciliation

Reading Nº 14

*"Behold, I am going to send you Elijah the prophet
before the coming of the great and terrible day of the LORD.
He will turn the hearts of the fathers back to their children
and the hearts of the children to their fathers." (Malachi 4:5-6)*

Type of Literature

Malachi's prophecies were not written in poetry, but in a question-and-answer literary style called diatribe.

Background (for the teacher's edification)

538 Persian conqueror, King Cyrus, was moved to send all the exiles in Babylon back to their homelands. During his reign, 50,000 Jews returned to Judah.¹

Zechariah and **Haggai** were in this first return to Jerusalem led by Zerubbabel.

536 The first exiles laid the foundation for rebuilding the temple. This effort was assaulted for 15 years.

520 Zechariah's prophetic ministry began when he and Haggai urged the renewing of efforts to rebuild the temple.²

515 Temple restoration was completed, but none of its former glory returned.

457 High Priest **Ezra** returned to Judah with 2,000 priests and Levites to restore temple worship.

444 **Nehemiah** returned to Jerusalem to rebuild the walls and to restore God's Word and the Jewish institutions. The royal line of David was not on the throne. Joshua, the high priest, had been crowned king but only symbolically, in a prophetic manner,³ since the former kingdoms were under control of the Persian Empire.

434 Soon after Nehemiah returned to Babylon, the Jews turned their hearts away from God. This was the time of **Malachi's** ministry.

God remained silent until the birth of **Jesus Christ** and the ministry of **John the Baptist**.

Setting

430-400 B.C., Post-exilic period in Jerusalem

The Book of Malachi

The short book of Malachi is the last of the prophetic utterances of the Old Testament. It is the final book of the minor prophets in the "scroll of the Twelve" and contains a message of love, repentance, and reconciliation. It is a fitting conclusion, as well, to the whole prophetic collection beginning with Moses. Its placement, as the last book in the Old Testament, underscores this climax all the more.

Malachi is the author, and his literary style is distinguished by a question-and-answer format. There are no less than 23 questions in the short four chapters. First, God poses a question for the people, and then He answers it for them. Here is an example from the first chapter of Malachi,

"A son honors his father, and a servant his master. Then if I am a father, where is My honor? And if I am a master, where is My respect?" says the LORD of armies to you, the priests who despise My name! But you say, "How have we despised Your name?" You are presenting defiled food upon My altar. But you say, "How have we defiled You?"⁴

¹ Isaiah 45:1-7.

² Ezra 5:1-6:15.

³ Zechariah 6:11-12.

⁴ Malachi 1:6.

The book is the great love song of God. Malachi begins with God stating His infinite and continuing tender love for His people.¹ Based on the charges that Malachi lists, it is evident that His love is wounded. The book, therefore, is a revelation of “the constancy of love, the consciousness of love, and the courage of love.”²

Malachi is also a revelation of human infidelity. With the rebuilding of Jerusalem’s wall and the restoration of God’s Word,³ revival broke out among the people for a brief period of time. However, their 70 years in Babylonian captivity had taken a toll in their thinking and belief system. Many Jews had divorced their Jewish wives and married foreign women, who brought their pagan religious traditions and lifestyle into their homes. Their values slowly became part of everyday Jewish life. A moral and spiritual weakness took root in Jewish thought and daily choices. At one point, Malachi states that the people concluded that it was futile to serve God.⁴ They had become doubting, uncaring infidels and forgotten all that God had done for them. It became a curse to the nation.

It is the same old cycle. Once again, the Jews had strayed far from God. However, this time it was more subtle than before. According to Malachi, the priesthood had become forgetful of its duties and corrupted the covenant. The temple was underfunded because the people did not pay their tithes. They, too, compromised their covenant responsibilities by offering inferior animals for sacrifices. Jewish men divorced their wives to marry pagan women, and all began ignoring the needs of widows and orphans. However, the people imagined that they were perfectly satisfying God’s religious requirements. Wasn’t Jerusalem restored? the temple rebuilt? temple services observed? Weren’t they fasting and observing the feasts and regular seasons of worship? They had no sense that their hearts had grown so cold and hard. Yes, the Jews fulfilled all the external requirements of the law, but they lacked the motivation that comes from a loving heart within. The death of love for God is what caused their

hearts to harden and is the sin that hurt God’s heart the most.

This was the period of Israel’s history when the grandeur of their nation perished. The kings had all passed away. The priests had corrupted the covenant, and the prophetic voices were now silent. When all that was left to the people was this external formality of religion that was devoid of love and power, those from among them who feared the Lord wrote a book of remembrance and extolled His mighty name.⁵ What remained for them was the substance of life—the Name of God! As they spoke to each other about the wealth in God’s name, their fellowship hearkened unto God.

Malachi’s prophecies would be God’s last messages to His people until the fullness of time when God sent His Son to earth. The book of Malachi and the Old Testament end with the word “curse.” It leaves us wondering and searching for resolution. For those of us who have heard the Gospel message, we know that in the sovereign plan of God resolution comes 400 years later, when “God so loved the world that He gave us His only begotten Son,” Jesus the Christ.

Malachi, Prophet of Reconciliation

Malachi in Hebrew means “My messenger.” All that is known about him as a person is contained in his prophecies. He is not mentioned in any other book of the Bible. Malachi was God-sent, and his messages carry the authority of God for the backslidden generation living in Jerusalem during his lifetime. They also carry God’s message and authority for our time, as well. Let us take heed of his warnings and of the Great Commandment.

“Teacher, which is the greatest commandment in the Law?” Jesus replied: “Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: Love your neighbor as yourself. All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments.”⁶

¹ Malachi 1:2.

² Morgan, G. C. (1912.) *Living Messages of the Books of the Bible*. NY: Fleming H. Revell Co., 343.

³ Nehemiah 8.

⁴ Malachi 3:14.

⁵ Malachi 3:16.

⁶ Matthew 22:36–40.



The Prophet Malachi

His name means “My messenger” in Hebrew.
Malachi is written in a question and answer format.

*“Behold, I am going to send you Elijah the prophet
before the coming of the great and terrible day of the LORD.
He will turn the hearts of the fathers back to their children
and the hearts of the children to their fathers.”*

Malachi 4:5–6



Setting

430–400 B.C., post-exilic period in Jerusalem

Background

Malachi’s ministry occurred a number of years after the second temple was built. Nehemiah had returned to Jerusalem to rebuild the walls and to restore God’s Word and the Jewish institutions. Under Nehemiah’s governorship, revival broke out among the people for a brief period of time. However, their 70 years of Babylonian captivity had planted pagan ideals and values in their thinking. Many Jews had married foreign women who brought their pagan religion, traditions, and lifestyle into their homes. Their beliefs were absorbed into everyday Jewish life. After Nehemiah’s departure for Babylon, the Jews once again became a doubting people and forgot all that God had done for them.

It was during this period of time that God sent Malachi with His last messages for His people before going silent for 400 years. Malachi’s message was one of reconciliation for Israel. He called the wayward people to repentance and referenced their outstanding sins beginning with the priesthood, mixed marriages, and their meager tithes and offerings. God wanted them to know that He still loved them, and that His covenant promises were still intact. If they would repent of their wickedness and return to worship Him, He would pour out His covenant blessings upon them.

Malachi also prophesied of that great and terrible day of the Lord, when God’s wrath will consume and burn up the enemy and his work. Doers of wickedness will become like straw and consumed immediately. God’s judgments are righteous and good, because they set things in order and remove evil. They bring God’s family into unity. And then God assured His people that if they are in fellowship with Him, they will transcend His wrath and reconciliation will flow between the generations.

Individuality

- ✦ Called his people to repentance
- ✦ Prophesied of the coming Messiah and the terrible day of the Lord
- ✦ Delivered the message of God’s end time judgment

The Silent 400 Years

Events between the Old and New Testaments

Reading Nº 15

*For God has allowed us to know the secret of His plan
and it is this: He purposed long ago in His sovereign will
that all human history should be consummated in Christ.
(Ephesians 1:9–10, Phillips)*

This AMO® Program unit is a Christian history survey of the Old Testament prophets. All history is God's story. When looking through the eye of history, we have learned that nothing happens by chance, because Creator God is the Author. His great promises and providence, coupled with the response of individuals and nations, are the substance of the events of history. He sovereignly governs in the affairs of individuals and nations, and He times all events for His eternal Gospel plan. Listen to the prophet Daniel,

*Let the name of God be blessed forever and ever,
for wisdom and power belong to Him. It is He who
changes the times and the epochs; He removes kings
and establishes kings; . . . It is He who reveals the
profound and hidden things; He knows what is in
the darkness, and the light dwells with Him.¹*

As Christian history students, we must always remember that no matter what era, event, or individual we are studying, Jesus Christ is the focal point of all history. The ancient world looked forward to the cross, and we look backward. God's story is all about His relationship with mankind. Once Adam's sin broke man's relationship with God, God initiated His eternal plan to restore this relationship through Jesus' shed blood on the cross. As students of history, we are learning that this took thousands of years.

Today's history lesson is about the 400 years in Israel's history when God did not speak to His people and no Scripture was written. It is the 400 years between the end of the Old Testament and the beginning of the New Testament.² It began when the prophet Malachi stopped prophesying, and it ended when Jesus Christ, the perfect prophet, entered His earthly ministry.

(Stop and have the students locate the Silent Years on their Timeline of Israel's Prophets.)

For the Jewish people, it must have seemed that God was doing nothing and perhaps had even forgotten them. But history reveals that God was moving behind the scenes, bringing countless details together in order to send His beloved Son, Jesus Christ, to earth to fulfill His special mission as Savior and Redeemer. The Scriptures teach us that "when the fullness of time had come, God sent forth His Son."³ The "fullness of time" means that everything was in place for God's Gospel plan to be successful. God never launches an event until He has providentially equipped an individual or a people group to carry it out. God waited until everything was prepared on earth to receive His Son, and then He sent Him forth to fulfill His earthly mission.

As we learn about this very important time period in history, it will be like watching a play. The scenery will change with each new act, as rulers and empires rise and disappear, and God's people grow more worldly and corrupt in their ways. It is a time of high drama.

Act 1: The Medo-Persian Era

At the close of the Old Testament, the Jews had returned to their homeland after 70 years of exile in Babylon. They had left as shepherds and farmers and returned as merchants and businessmen. They were no longer an independent nation, however, and would not be free again on their land for another 2,000 years. Israel was now a puppet state called Judea, under the control of the Medo-Persian Empire. They no longer spoke Hebrew, but Aramaic, the

¹ Daniel 2:20-22.

² The Intertestamental period, c. 420 B.C. to A.D. 26.

³ Galatians 4:4, ESV; Mark 1:15.

international language of the Persian Empire. This means there was no Jewish king on the throne and their allegiance was to the superpower, Persia. They had rebuilt Jerusalem's temple, and the high priest had restored worship. However, Babylonian ideas of wisdom, astrology, and magic had made their way into Jewish thinking and religion. The Jews ignored Malachi's warnings and did not honor God. Also, during the 400 years of silence, synagogues, which were new places for worship and social activities, began appearing in every Jewish city. They replaced the temple as the center of Jewish life.

After the days of Malachi, the center of world power began to shift from the Eastern world to the West, just as the prophet Daniel had predicted.¹ From our previous lessons, you will recall that in 626 B.C. the Babylonians conquered the mighty Assyrians and became a super world power. Then, in less than 100 years, Babylon was captured by the Medo-Persian Empire.² At the height of Persia's world dominance, a king named Philip from Macedon came to power. He united all the Greek city-states and islands in the Aegean and Ionian Seas and annexed them into his kingdom.

Philip built a huge army over time because he wanted to invade and conquer the mighty Persian Empire. However, he was killed before that happened, and his young son, Alexander, came to power at the age of 19.

Act 2: The Hellenistic Age

In 343 B.C., just a few years before his death, King Philip hired Aristotle, the famous Greek philosopher and scientist, to teach his 13-year-old son. Aristotle tutored Alexander for three years in Greek literature, ethics, philosophy, politics, biology, mathematics, and medicine. He also taught him the scientific method for solving problems and passed his love of beauty and nature onto Alexander.³ At the same time, Alexander was learning the art of warfare. So that when Alexander came to power in 337 B.C.,

he hired scientists, naturalists, engineers, and philosophers to accompany him as he invaded and conquered most of the civilized world. It is said that this young warrior slept with his dagger and his copy of the Greek literature classic, *The Iliad*,⁴ under his pillow.⁵

In 330 B.C., a tremendous battle between the Greeks and Persians forever altered the course of history. Twenty-year-old Alexander led the armies of Greece into victory over the Persians and completely destroyed the power of the Medo-Persian Empire. The center of world power now shifted to Greece, and the Greek Empire was born. Another way of saying this is that world power shifted from Asia and the Middle East to Europe. Alexander built Greek cities all over his large empire, seeding Greek ideas, the Greek language, and the Greek way of doing things in all the countries he conquered. He granted freedom of religion and permitted the various cultures to thrive. He opened up the famous Silk Road, which enabled trade between Europe and Asia. He created an empire, the likes of which the world had never seen. This period of history became known as the Hellenistic Age.

By the time this warrior-king mysteriously died at the young age of 32, he was called Alexander the Great. Today he is considered a military genius. He never lost a major battle and is known in history as one of the world's greatest conquerors. At Alexander's death there was no heir, so his kingdom was divided and governed by his top four military generals. One of them, named Ptolemy, took control of Judea and Egypt for many years. He built Hellenistic cities, which meant that anyone doing business in this region had to learn the Greek language and were highly influenced by Greek culture.

God used the Greek language to spread His written Word. During the Hellenistic period, Jews living in Egypt had their Scriptures translated into Greek so they could read the Old Testament. This translation of the Hebrew Scriptures is called the Septuagint and is still a live translation. Then, in the first century after the death of Jesus, the New Testament was written in the common-day, Koine Greek language.

During this time, Grecian influence became strong in Judea. The priesthood became motivated

¹ Daniel 7:2–8.

² 539 B.C.

³ Stedman, R.C. (1966.) *The Four-Hundred Silent Years*. Retrieved from <https://www.raystedman.org/bible-overview/adventuring/the-400-years-between-the-old-and-new-testaments>.

⁴ The epic Greek poem by Homer that tells the story of the Trojan War with its heroes and gods.

⁵ Grant, R. (2020). *The King and the Conqueror*. Retrieved from Smithsonian Magazine: <https://www.smithsonianmag.com/history/philip-macedonia-even-greater-alexander-the-great-180974878/>.

by public affairs of government, and various parties arose among the Jews. First there were the liberal Sadducees, who wanted to bring Grecian culture and thought into the nation and change the strict Jewish laws. Another party was the Pharisees who, with the help of the scribes, were conservative fanatics who wanted to preserve Jewish life according to the laws of Moses. They became stronger and more legalistic as time went by and grew to become religious hypocrites. The priests gained authority as interpreters of the sacred Scriptures,¹ which highly impacted Jewish life and culture. Their religion is now called “Judaism.”

Act 3: The Syrian Invasion of Jerusalem

In 203 B.C. a king named Antiochus the Great in Syria, a country north of Judea, captured Jerusalem from the Egyptians. His son, Antiochus IV Epiphanes, soon came to the throne and emerged as one of the most savage and violent persecutors of the Jews ever known. He initiated a massive course of control against the Jewish religion in 168 B.C. One of the detestable things that he did was to remove the high priest in Jerusalem. This act ended the long priestly line of succession that began with Moses’ brother Aaron. Antiochus sold the priesthood to his son Jason. Jason was tricked by his evil brother Menelaus, who purchased the priesthood and became the high priest. Because of this act, the city of Jerusalem and all the Jewish religious practices fell away under the leadership of this false high priest. Antiochus Epiphanes also led a revolt against Jerusalem and killed 40,000 people. His son desecrated the holy of holies in the temple by destroying the scrolls of Scripture and by sacrificing a pig on the temple altar. You will remember that the Mosaic law teaches that the pig is an unclean animal. To the shock of the Jews, everything in the temple’s sanctuary became defiled.

A man from the Jewish priestly line named Judas Maccabaeus, along with his father and brothers, led a revolt against the Syrian king. Although the Jews were in the minority against the mighty Syrian army, they overthrew the power of the Syrians. They cleansed the temple and rededicated it to the Lord. Today, the Jews still celebrate the Feast of Dedication each year, which is also called Hanukkah. During this time, Judea sought Rome’s protection from

future Syrian attacks and signed a treaty. It was this pact that introduced Rome into the history of Judea.

Act 4: The Greco-Roman World

Indeed, another empire was on the rise. For several hundred years, Alexander’s Greek empire in Asia and the Roman empire in Europe had existed separately. But it would not be long before the Romans engaged the Greeks in war and conquered all their lands. Soon, Greece fell to the Romans in 146 B.C. However, as the two ancient cultures merged together, they flourished. This affected every area of life for those who lived in the vast Roman Empire. It affected the way people thought, the laws they made, and how they governed themselves. For many centuries, it influenced the way they designed their buildings and their style of art. And it promoted a common language that was spoken by all the people. For example, the learned men of Rome spoke and wrote in the Greek language, even though they were Roman citizens. The same was true in Egypt and Judea. In fact, it developed into what is called the Greco-Roman culture and continues to influence our lives today in many ways. This Greco-Roman world was in a wonderful state of preparation for the coming of God’s Son.

Act 5: The Roman Empire Era

There would be one last conquest before Jesus was born in Bethlehem. In 63 B.C., Jerusalem was again overthrown. This time the assault came from a Roman general named Pompey, who had conquered the eastern Mediterranean region. He and his Roman legions captured Jerusalem for Rome. From that time on, Judea was under the authority of the mighty Roman Empire.

Julius Caesar, a powerful Roman official, appointed Antipater, a descendant of Esau, as the administrator of Judea. He in turn appointed his two sons kings of Galilee and Judea. We know this king of Judea by the name of Herod the Great, who ruled during the time Jesus was born in Bethlehem. It was he who was visited by the wise men from the east, who asked, “Where is He who has been born King of the Jews? For we saw His star in the east, and have come to worship Him.”² King Herod searched for the baby, and when he was not found, he had all the male children two years old and under in Bethlehem

¹ Tabor, J. *The Jewish World of Jesus: An Overview*. Excerpted from https://jewishromanworldjesus.com/?page_id=132.

² Matthew 2:2.

killed. His brother, Herod Antipater, ruler of Galilee, was the one who had John the Baptist beheaded!

And so, as the Silent 400 Years came to a close, the voice of the true prophet remained silent. There was no king on Judea's throne from the royal lineage of King David. The king who ruled the Jews was an evil puppet king from the lineage of Esau under the authority of Rome. The priestly lineage of Aaron had disappeared. Those who served as priests were hired as favors for public officials. The current religious leaders were cold, corrupt, and legalistic. And the people no longer spoke Hebrew.

It is fascinating to learn how God uses individuals and events to achieve His Gospel purposes. Almighty God would soon begin speaking once again. The fullness of time had come when He would send forth His Son to earth. Jesus Christ, the living Word,¹

¹ John 1:1, 14: "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. . . . And the Word became flesh, and dwelt among us."

would turn the whole "world upside down"² and many prophecies would be fulfilled.

As we have surveyed the history of the Old Testament prophets and the messages God gave them for His people, we now comprehend that God permitted this deconstruction of Israel. He had been warning His people for nearly a thousand years to turn from their idols and wicked ways, but they would not listen. However, with God's judgment comes hope for the future, because God is love. He had preserved His written Word and had it translated into Greek so that it was available for the whole known world. The world awaiting Jesus Christ was this Greco-Roman world. This had all been God's sovereign preparation for sending forth His Son, our Savior and Redeemer!

² Acts 17:6 ESV.

The Prophet John the Baptist

Prophet of the Most High and Forerunner of Jesus Christ

Reading Nº 16

"It is he who will go as a forerunner before Him in the spirit and power of Elijah, to turn the hearts of the fathers back to the children, and the disobedient to the attitude of the righteous, so as to make ready a people prepared for the Lord." (Luke 1:17)

Type of Literature

There are no writings of John the Baptist in the Bible. The account of his life and death, as well as his prophecies, are found in all four Gospels.

Background (for the teacher's edification)

- 532–330 B.C.** Israel was under the control of the Medo-Persian Empire.
- 330** Alexander the Great defeated Persia, ushering in the Hellenistic Age and Greek rule to the eastern world. He built Hellenistic cities all over his empire, and Greek became the common language of the people. As a result, the Hebrew Old Testament was translated into Greek and called the Septuagint.
- 167** The Maccabees revolted against evil Syrian King Antiochus IV Epiphanes.
- 146** The Romans conquered the Greek Empire.
- 63** General Pompey of Rome conquered Israel, putting all of Judea under the control of the caesars.
- 31** The Roman Republic became the Roman Empire when Octavian rose to power to become the sole leader of Rome and all its provinces. Eventually, Herod was made a puppet king of Judea by the Roman emperor. Roman, Greek, and Hebrew cultures were now intermingled in Judea.
- 27** Octavian assumed the title of Caesar Augustus and became the first emperor of the Roman Empire. He was worshipped as a god. He restored peace and prosperity to the empire, which lasted 200 years.

This period of history is called "Pax Romana" and was the time in which God sent His Son, Jesus, to earth.

- c. 6** Both John the Baptist and Jesus were born in Judea during the reign of wicked King Herod the Great.

- c. A.D. 23** John the Baptist's ministry began during the reign of Herod Antipas of Galilee, son of King Herod the Great.¹

- c. 26** Jesus Christ's earthly ministry began.
- 28** John the Baptist was beheaded by Herod Antipas, tetrarch of Galilee.

Setting

The setting is 4 B.C. in Judea, a Jewish puppet kingdom in the great Roman Empire, during the era of Pax Romana. "Pax Romana" means "the peace of Rome" in Latin. It describes the prosperous and peaceful period of more than 200 years that occurred during the rule of the Roman emperors. The Romans called this geographical region "Palestine." Palestine was a tiny, insignificant Roman province, which included the regions of Galilee, Judea, and Samaria. Although it was inhabited by Jews, the culture was highly influenced by Greek ideas, customs, and language; however, it was dominated by Roman law, the military, and the Romans' love of sports and games.

King Herod the Great was the Jewish puppet king who ruled by the wishes of the Roman officials. Herod had become known as a builder of cities. He built a city on the Mediterranean Sea and named it Caesarea after the Roman emperor, Caesar Augustus.

¹ Herod Antipas, the ruler of Galilee, was the son of wicked King Herod the Great. He was not a king, but a tetrarch. He was involved in the execution of both John the Baptist (Matthew 14:1–13) and Jesus Christ (Luke 23:6–16).

He also built himself a beautiful palace in Jerusalem and expanded Solomon's temple. He Hellenized Jerusalem by building a large gymnasium, a theater, a hippodrome, and an amphitheater, where he held chariot races and brutal gladiator contests. Herod also built fortresses, the most famous of which is Masada. Under Herod's rulership, Judea became a police state in which the people lived in great fear. Against this background of Roman power, most of the Jewish people were suppressed. This is the setting in which both John the Baptist and Jesus Christ were born.

The Life and Ministry of John the Baptist

John the Baptist was the first prophet called by God since Malachi had stopped prophesying some 400 years earlier. John was the Spirit-anointed bridge from the Old Testament prophets to Jesus. He was the last of a long line of prophets who foretold of the coming of the Messiah. His ministry was predicted 700 years before by the prophet Isaiah,

*A voice is calling. "Clear the way for the LORD in the wilderness; make smooth in the desert a highway for our God . . . Then the glory of the LORD will be revealed and all flesh will see it together."*¹

John the Baptist was that voice calling out in the wilderness. He had a unique role to play as a prophet. He was to herald the arrival of the Promised One. Like several other prophets, he was called by God while still in his mother's womb. His birth was truly a miracle, as his parents, Elizabeth and Zacharias, were childless and much too old to have children. But, by the blessing of God, they were granted their deepest desire. Scripture tells us that they were both blameless and righteous in the sight of God.² They lived during the reign of wicked King Herod the Great. Zacharias was a priest that served in the temple in Jerusalem. One day, when it was his duty to burn the incense offering, an angel of the Lord named Gabriel appeared to him and said,

Do not fear, Zacharias, for your petition has been heard, and your wife Elizabeth will bear you a son, and you will give him the name John. You will have joy and gladness, and many will rejoice at his birth. For he will be great in the sight of the Lord, . . . and he will be filled with the Holy Spirit, while yet in his mother's womb. And he will turn back many of

*the sons of Israel to the Lord their God. And it is he who will go as a forerunner before Him [Jesus] in the spirit and power of Elijah, to turn the hearts of the fathers back to the children, and the disobedient to the attitude of the righteous; so as to make ready a people prepared for the Lord.*³

Zacharias doubted the angel's message and asked for a sign. Gabriel answered him saying,

*You shall be silent and unable to speak until the day when these things take place, because you did not believe my words, which shall be fulfilled in their proper time.*⁴

Indeed, Elizabeth was soon with child, and Zacharias remained unable to speak. In a few short months, Elizabeth's young cousin, Mary, was also visited by the angel Gabriel. She was told that she, too, would miraculously bear a son, whom she was to name Jesus. The angel said,

*He will be great, and will be called the Son of the Most High, and the Lord God will give Him the throne of His father David.*⁵

It wasn't long before Mary traveled to visit her cousin Elizabeth for three months. When Mary first greeted her cousin, Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit and her unborn baby, John, leaped for joy in her womb. Elizabeth said to Mary, "How has it happened to me, that the mother of my Lord should come to me?"⁶ The cousins were both miraculously with child at the same time, and John recognized the presence of Jesus, his Lord, while they were both still in their mothers' wombs.

It was now time for Elizabeth to give birth. As was the Jewish custom, the eight-day-old baby was to be circumcised and given his name. They were going to name him Zacharias after his father, but Elizabeth said, "No indeed, he shall be called John." And they made signs to his father as to what he wanted him named. Zacharias asked for a tablet and wrote, "His name is John." At once Zacharias's mouth opened, and he began to praise God out loud. He, too, was filled with the Holy Spirit and began to prophesy,

Blessed be the Lord God of Israel, for He has visited us and accomplished redemption for His people . . . As He spoke by the mouth of His holy prophets from of old—Salvation from our enemies and from the

¹ Isaiah 40:3, 5.

² Luke 1:6.

³ Luke 1:13–17.

⁴ Luke 1:20.

⁵ Luke 1:31–32.

⁶ Luke 1:43.

hand of all who hate us. . . . And you child, will be called the prophet of the Most High; for you will go on before the Lord to prepare His ways.¹

The name “John” means “God is gracious.” Zacharias and Elizabeth moved to the desert wilderness to raise and nurture their son in the Word of God. As John grew older, he became strong in spirit, and wisdom and the grace of God was upon him.² He took the vow of a Nazarite,³ so he did not cut his hair. As an adult, he lived a rugged life in the mountainous area of Judea between the city of Jerusalem and the Dead Sea. He wore clothing made of camel’s hair and a belt at his waist. He lived a simple life and his diet consisted of wild honey and locusts.⁴

John’s ministry attracted large crowds, who came to him from Jerusalem, all Judea, and the Jordan River region. His message was to the point, “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is near!”⁵ John’s faith had made him fearless in the face of opposition. He preached a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. His message had a great impact, as many confessed their sins and were baptized in the Jordan River. People began saying he was the Christ.⁶ When they asked if this was so, he answered that he was not the Christ, but was sent as a forerunner ahead of Him. He said,

As for me, I baptize you with water; but One is coming who is mightier than I, and I am not fit to untie the thong of His sandals; He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire.⁷

So, with many other exhortations, John the Baptist preached the Gospel to the people and baptized them in the Jordan River. It would not be long before Jesus came from Galilee to be baptized by John in the Jordan River. He knew that once Jesus’ earthly ministry began, his work would be finished. It was just as the angel Gabriel had told John’s father,

For he will be great in the sight of the Lord; . . . and he will be filled with the Holy Spirit while yet in his mother’s womb. And he will turn many of the sons of Israel back to the Lord their God. And it is he who will go as a forerunner before Him [Jesus] in the spirit and power of Elijah.”⁸

Jesus said, “The Law and the Prophets were proclaimed until John; since then the Gospel of the kingdom of God is preached.”⁹ Later, Jesus honored John the Baptist with this statement, “Truly I tell you, among those born of women there has not risen anyone greater than John the Baptist.”¹⁰ Jesus was referring to John’s honor of having been chosen to prepare the world for His arrival. John was also the greatest because he preached in the power of the prophet Elijah.¹¹

John the Baptist was imprisoned and died a cruel death at the hands of Herod Antipas, the tetrarch of Galilee and son of wicked King Herod the Great.

¹ Luke 1:68, 70–71, 76.

² Luke 1:80.

³ Numbers 6:3–6. A Nazarite vow required the dedication of one’s whole life to God. The external principle of the vow consisted of three things: 1) Abstain from wine; 2) Do not cut hair; 3) Do not come in contact with a dead body.

⁴ Matthew 3:4.

⁵ Matthew 3:2.

⁶ “Christ” is the Greek word and “Messiah” is the Hebrew word that mean “the anointed One.”

⁷ Luke 3:16.

⁸ Luke 1:15–17.

⁹ Luke 16:16.

¹⁰ Matthew 11:11.

¹¹ Luke 3:7–18.



The Prophet John the Baptist

His name means “God is gracious” in Hebrew.

*“You, child, will be called the prophet of the Most High;
for you will go on before the Lord to prepare His ways;
to give to His people the knowledge of salvation
by the forgiveness of sins.”*

Luke 1:76–78



Setting

c. 4 B.C.–A.D. 29

Judea

Background

John the Baptist was the last of the Old Testament prophets. He was the Spirit-anointed bridge from the Old Testament prophets to Jesus, his cousin. He was called in his mother’s womb to herald the arrival of the long-awaited Promised One. He came to his ministry in the spirit of Elijah (Matthew 11:14). His baptism of water was one of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. He revealed that “One is coming . . . who will baptize with the Holy Spirit and fire” (Luke 3:16). When Jesus came to him to be baptized, John said, “Behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!” (John 1:29). John baptized Jesus in the Jordan River, and the Holy Spirit descended on Jesus in the form of a dove (Luke 3:21, 22). John’s ministry decreased as Jesus entered His earthly ministry. John was soon persecuted, imprisoned, and died a cruel death at the hands of Herod Antipas, the son of wicked King Herod the Great. Jesus said of John, “there has not risen anyone greater than John the Baptist” (Matthew 11:11).

Individuality

- ♦ Was the bridge between the Old Testament prophets and Jesus Christ
- ♦ Preached a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins
- ♦ Baptized Jesus Christ in the Jordan River

Jesus Christ

Prophet, Priest, and King

Reading Nº 17

"God, after He spoke long ago to the fathers in the prophets in many portions and in many ways, in these last days has spoken to us in His Son, whom He appointed heir of all things, through whom also He made the world." (Hebrews 1:1–2)

Setting:

c. 6 B.C.–A.D. 27 in Palestine, a tiny province in the Roman Empire

The world that received Jesus Christ was a Greco-Roman world during Pax Romana.¹ Rome's first emperor, Caesar Augustus, ruled his vast empire during an unusual time of peace and prosperity. God's sovereign preparation throughout time brought all the forces together to launch the greatest event in human history—the birth of the eternal Prince of Peace.² The Gospel of Matthew confirms that all the events surrounding His birth took place "so that what was spoken by the Lord through the prophets might be fulfilled."³

So it was, that in the fullness of time God sent forth His Son to earth, born of a virgin, born under the law.⁴ God named the baby "Yeshua,"⁵ which means "salvation" in Hebrew. The long-awaited Promised One, the One whom the prophets called Messiah, would fulfill all that the nation of Israel had foreshadowed, as well as the promise God had made 2,000 years before with Abraham to bless all nations through his offspring.⁶ Scholars have estimated that over 300 Old Testament prophecies refer to Jesus the Messiah.

In sending His Son into the world, Heavenly Father sent the eternal Word and supernaturally clothed Him with human flesh.⁷ Jesus is the living

Word by whom and for whom all things were created, both in the heavens and on earth.⁸ God tells us in the New Testament that,

In the beginning [of time] was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. . . . And the Word became flesh, and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, glory as of the only begotten from the Father, full of grace and truth.⁹

Almighty God spoke all creation into existence and thousands of years later, He sent His Son, the living Word, into the world. Jesus now and forevermore exists as one person with two natures—divine and human. He is both the Son of God and the Son of Man—fully God and, apart from sin, fully man.

His mission was to restore God's relationship with mankind. God's 400-year silence was broken as He began speaking once again, not just to His people in Palestine, but to all nations, tribes, and tongues throughout the world. With the earthly ministry of Jesus Christ came fresh revelation which, after His crucifixion and resurrection, "turned the whole world upside down."¹⁰ Jesus did not simply speak the Word of God as a mere human prophet, but is Himself the ultimate revelation of the living, eternal God.

Jesus said, "He who has seen Me has seen the Father."¹¹

He [Jesus] is the radiance of God's glory and the exact representation of His nature.¹²

¹ "Roman peace." A 200-year time of peace in the Roman Empire that began with Augustus (27 B.C.–A.D. 13).

² Isaiah 9:6.

³ Matthew 1:22.

⁴ Galatians 4:4.

⁵ In English, Jesus; Matthew 1:21.

⁶ Genesis 12:3.

⁷ Philippians 2:5–8.

⁸ Colossians 1:16; Hebrews 1:3.

⁹ John 1:1, 14; The incarnate Word; Revelation 19:13, ". . . and His name is called The Word of God."

¹⁰ Acts 17:6 ESV.

¹¹ John 14:9.

¹² Hebrews 1:3.

The Office of Prophet

Old Testament prophets were mediators between God and man. They were called by God and tasked with speaking God's Word to His people. Prophets were teachers, preachers, and heralds of the Messiah. They often had to interpret dreams and visions. They were the moral conscience of God's wayward people, who called them to repent and turn their hearts back to God. The prophets offered comfort and encouragement in times of judgment, and some even performed miracles and healings.

Jesus Christ is not simply a prophet, He is THE prophet extraordinaire. He is the focal point of all Old Testament prophetic teaching. When Christ entered His earthly ministry, He fulfilled the office of prophet. Let us survey some of the ways He did this.

A prophet is one who speaks God's message by divine inspiration. The source of the message is God and not the prophet. While in His earthly ministry, Jesus taught a heavenly message, saying, "My teaching is not Mine, but His who sent me."¹ He also said, "I do nothing on My own initiative, but I speak these things as the Father taught Me."² And in His high-priestly prayer the night before His crucifixion, He said, "The words which You gave Me I have given to them; and they received them and truly understood that I came forth from You."³

Clearly Jesus fulfilled the role of prophet as a spokesman for God. However, in contrast to the Old Testament prophets, who introduced their messages with the words, "Thus says the Lord," when Jesus taught or prophesied, He began by saying, "Truly, truly I say unto you." The authority with which He spoke came from Himself as the second person of the Godhead, the Son.

We have learned that there are two types of prophecies, those proclaiming God's truth, called forthtelling, and those predicting His plans for the future, called foretelling.

Forthtelling is speaking the truth of God to encourage, exhort, and comfort.⁴ The message is not for the future but for the time in which it is spoken. The majority of the prophetic messages of the Old Testament prophets were forthtelling. In the same way, Jesus often boldly faced individuals with truth, such as His confrontation with the religious leaders of His day. From Matthew's Gospel,

*Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you are like whitewashed tombs which on the outside appear beautiful, but inside are full of dead men's bones and all uncleanness. So you, too, outwardly appear righteous to men, but inwardly you are full of hypocrisy and lawlessness."*⁵

Foretelling is declaring or predicting something that will happen in the future to edify, exhort, and comfort. Jesus predicted many future events, for example,

*Jesus began to show His disciples that He must go to Jerusalem, and suffer many things from the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and be raised up on the third day."*⁶

Jesus had much to foretell about His second coming, as well. Following are several of His prophecies:

*If anyone says to you, "Behold, here is the Christ," or "There He is," do not believe him. For false Christs and false prophets will arise and will show great signs and wonders, so as to mislead, if possible, even the elect. Behold, I have told you in advance."*⁷

*Then the sign of the Son of Man will appear in the sky, and then all the tribes of the earth will mourn, and they will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of the sky with power and great glory. And He will send forth His angels with a great trumpet and they will gather together His elect from the four winds, from one end of the sky to the other."*⁸

*In My Father's house are many dwelling places; if it were not so, I would have told you; for I go to prepare a place for you. If I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to Myself, that where I am, there you may be also."*⁹

*You too, be ready; for the Son of Man is coming at an hour that you do not expect."*¹⁰

Some of the prophets performed **miracles and healings**. From the beginning of Jesus' ministry on earth, He performed many supernatural signs and wonders. He healed the sick, restored blind eyes, deaf ears, and lame bodies, and He raised the dead. He turned water into wine, commanded the sea to be still, and walked on water. After He had multiplied the lunch of a small boy and fed more than 5,000 people, it was said by those gathered there,

⁵ Matthew 23:27.

⁶ Matthew 16:21.

⁷ Matthew 24:23-25.

⁸ Matthew 24:30-31.

⁹ John 14:1-3.

¹⁰ Luke 12:40.

¹ John 7:16.

² John 8:28

³ John 17:8

⁴ 1 Corinthians 14:3.

“This is, indeed, the Prophet who is to come into the world.”¹

Jesus was called Rabbi, the Hebrew word for “master teacher.” A Jewish rabbi is a teacher of the law. Jesus is the perfect **Master Teacher** who “went around the villages teaching” truth.² He was frequently found teaching thousands of people who would gather around Him, individuals whom He met along the way, as well as His disciples and apostles. From Matthew’s Gospel,

*[Nicodemus] came to Jesus by night and said to Him, “Rabbi, we know that You have come from God as a teacher; for no one can do these signs that You do unless God is with him.”*³

*Nathanael answered Him, “Rabbi, You are the Son of God; You are the King of Israel.”*⁴

With His death and resurrection, Jesus became the **Mediator** of a new covenant. He is the one and only means of access between man and God the Father.

Jesus Christ Fulfilled the Office of Prophet

During His time on earth, many referred to Jesus as a prophet. God had told Moses that one day He would send another prophet to Israel like Moses. He would put His words in His mouth, and He would tell the people everything God had commanded Him.⁵ Jesus **IS** the Prophet who fulfilled that prophecy and hundreds of other Old Testament prophecies. Listen to what several of His contemporaries wrote about Him,

*God spoke by the mouth of His holy prophets from ancient time. Moses said, “The Lord God will raise up for you a prophet like me from your brethren; to Him you shall give heed to everything He says to you. And it will be that every soul that does not heed that prophet shall be utterly destroyed from among the people.” And likewise, all the prophets who have spoken, from Samuel and his successors onward, also announced these days.*⁶

Jesus went to a city called Nain; and His disciples were going along with Him, accompanied by a large crowd. Now as He approached the gate of the city, a

*dead man was being carried out, the only son of his mother, and she was a widow; and a sizeable crowd from the city was with her. . . . And He came up and touched the coffin; and the bearers came to a halt. And He said, “Young man, I say to you, arise!” The dead man sat up and began to speak. And Jesus gave him back to his mother. Fear gripped them all, and they began glorifying God, saying, “A great prophet has arisen among us!” and, “God has visited His people!” This report concerning Him went out all over Judea and in all the surrounding district.*⁷

*You stiff-necked people! Your hearts and ears are still uncircumcised. You are just like your ancestors: You always resist the Holy Spirit! Was there ever a prophet your ancestors did not persecute? They even killed those who predicted the coming of the Righteous One. And now you have betrayed and murdered him.*⁸

Jesus alluded to Himself as a prophet when He said, “A prophet is not without honor except in his hometown and among his *own* relatives and in his *own* household.”⁹

The Jews expected both a Prophet and a Messiah, two distinct persons; but the Christian view united them in the one person of Jesus Christ.¹⁰ This is best understood as Jesus approached the city of Jerusalem during the annual celebration of Passover. He was riding a donkey, and the multitudes lined the road with palm branches saying, “Hosanna to the Son of David. Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord. Hosanna in the highest!” And when He had entered Jerusalem, all the city was stirred, saying, “Who is this?” And the multitudes were saying, “This is the prophet Jesus, from Nazareth in Galilee.”¹¹

The long line of abuse of prophets, beginning with Abel,¹² found its completion in Jesus Christ, who was despised and crucified. As a consequence, all the blessings in God’s covenant flow through Him!¹³ He is the ultimate Prophet in title, word, and deed. He paid the price for our sin with His shed blood on the cross, was resurrected from the dead, and is alive forevermore. God then sent the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of truth, to abide within each

¹ John 6:14.

² Mark 6:6.

³ Matthew 3:2.

⁴ John 1:49.

⁵ Deuteronomy 18:15–18.

⁶ Acts 3:21–24.

⁷ Luke 7:11–17.

⁸ Acts 7:51–52 NIV (Stephen’s sermon).

⁹ Mark 6:4.

¹⁰ Deuteronomy 18:15–18.

¹¹ Matthew 21:9–11.

¹² Luke 11:49–51.

¹³ Robertson, O. Palmer (2008). *The Christ of the Prophets*. (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing Company) 37.

believer. As a result, those who receive Him as Savior are able to hear His gentle voice of guidance, revelation, encouragement, and comfort. God has made a way for us to enjoy a personal relationship with Him through the Holy Spirit, who lives within the heart of each believer.

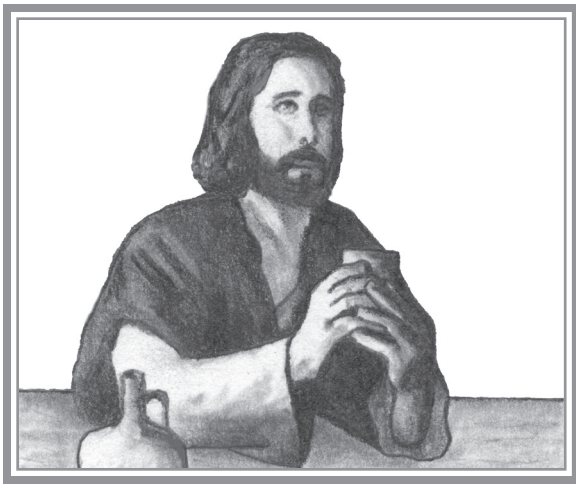
God has also given us His written Word that we may know Him better and apply truth to our daily choices and decisions. We are greatly blessed to be living during this time in history and will one day meet Jesus in all His glory. Listen to the last prophecy in the Bible about the second coming of Jesus. It is from the nineteenth chapter of Revelation,

The testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy. And I saw heaven opened, and behold, a white horse, and He who sat on it is called Faithful and True, and in righteousness He judges and wages war.

His eyes are a flame of fire, and on His head are many diadems; and He has a name written on Him which no one knows except Himself. He is clothed with a robe dipped in blood, and His name is called The Word of God. And the armies which are in heaven, clothed in fine linen, white and clean, were following Him on white horses.

From His mouth comes a sharp sword, so that with it He may strike down the nations, and He will rule them with a rod of iron; and He treads the wine press of the fierce wrath of God, the Almighty. And on His robe and on His thigh He has a name written, "King of kings, and Lord of lords." ¹

¹ Revelation 19:9–16.



The Prophet Jesus Christ

His name means “salvation” in Hebrew.

Jesus is the Word incarnate.

“God, after He spoke long ago to the fathers in the prophets in many portions and in many ways, in these last days has spoken to us in His Son, whom He appointed heir of all things, through whom also He made the world.”

Hebrews 1:1–2



Setting

c. 6 B.C.–A.D. 27

Palestine, a tiny province in the Roman Empire comprised of Judea, Galilee, and Samaria

Profile

The world that received Jesus Christ was a Greco-Roman world. Pax Romana, an extended time of peace, existed as Rome’s first emperor, Caesar Augustus, ruled his vast empire. God’s sovereign preparation throughout time had brought all the forces together to launch the greatest event in human history—the birth of the everlasting Prince of Peace. All the events surrounding His birth took place “so that what was spoken by the Lord through the prophets might be fulfilled” (Matthew 1:22).

So it was, that in the fullness of time God sent forth His Son to earth, born of a virgin, born under the Law. God named the baby “Jesus,” which means “salvation.” The long-awaited Promised One, the One whom the ancient prophets called Messiah, would fulfill all that the nation of Israel had foreshadowed, as well as the promise God had made 2,000 years before with Abraham to bless all nations through his offspring. Bible scholars have estimated that over 300 Old Testament prophecies refer to Jesus.

In sending His Son into the world, Heavenly Father sent the eternal Word and supernaturally clothed Him with human flesh. Jesus is the living Word by whom and for whom all things were created both in the heavens and on earth.

God tells us that “In the beginning [of time] was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. . . . And the Word became flesh, and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, glory as of the only begotten from the Father, full of grace and truth” (John 1:1, 14). Jesus now and forevermore exists as one person with two natures—divine and human. He is both the Son of God and the Son of Man—fully God and, apart from sin, fully man.

With the earthly ministry of Jesus Christ came fresh revelation which, after His crucifixion and resurrection, “turned the whole world upside down” (Acts 17:6). Jesus did not simply speak the Word of God as a mere human prophet, but is Himself the ultimate revelation of the living, eternal God.

The long line of abuse of prophets, beginning with Abel, found its completion in Jesus Christ, who was despised and crucified. As a consequence, all the blessings in God’s covenant flow through Him! God then sent the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of truth, to abide within each believer. Today, those who receive Him as Savior are able to hear His gentle voice of guidance, revelation, encouragement, and comfort. God has made a way for us to enjoy a personal relationship with Him through the Holy Spirit, who lives within the heart of each believer. God has also given us His written Word that we may know Him better and apply truth to our daily choices and decisions. Jesus Christ, the Word incarnate, nobly fulfilled the office of prophet. He is the ultimate Prophet in title, word, and deed.