



# UNDERSTANDING THE OLD TESTAMENT

by

Dr. Paul House

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# Lesson 1 ■ Introduction

## INTRODUCTION

Welcome to our course, 'Introduction to the Old Testament.' This will be a fairly basic course. It is for beginning students. It is for people who may know pieces of the Bible but who want to put the whole picture together. It's for people who love the Bible and want to know more about it. I think it is fine for people of different ages. Young readers, old readers. new Christians, old Christians. All need to understand the wholeness of the Bible.

Our first lesson will help us begin our study. It is an introduction to what the Bible is and how we ought to respect it and how we may read it. So first a bit of introduction.

### Unity of the Old Testament

For centuries, Christians and Jews alike considered the Old Testament a unified work. Jewish readers thought the Old Testament, the Hebrew Scriptures, were a thorough account of their own faith and history. Christians treated the Old Testament as the natural introduction into the New Testament. Neither group failed to acknowledge the many types of literature in the books. But both communities of faith found underlying themes and characters that bound the whole work together. But in the last two centuries the diversity of the Old Testament has been stressed. Children are taught that the Bible is not a book but many books. College and seminary students often analyze each biblical book in isolation from other Scriptures. Therefore many people have little sense of how the Bible holds together as a unity. They have little sense of its wholeness. Very few people can fit specific stories into a larger biblical picture. So lacking a grasp of the overall Old Testament story and purpose Bible students can struggle to understand particular passages.

This class attempts to chart some elements that unify the Old Testament. Its purpose is to serve as a companion to Bible reading. Hopefully it will serve as a stimulus to further biblical reading. So in the class we will stress characters, the plot, structure, themes, and historical settings so you can know what is happening in the Old Testament and what it means. Theology and critical studies are not completely absent but they play a secondary role. I'll be referring you to more detailed studies as we go. And you can look those up as you wish. This class wants to help you appreciate the unity of the Old Testament. If you can master the introductory principles in this class I think you will then be prepared to move on to more in-depth study.

## **WHAT IS THE OLD TESTAMENT AND WHY SHOULD WE STUDY IT?**

Let's go over six items that I think are very important.

### **Origins**

First let's talk about the origins of the Old Testament. How did we come to have the Old Testament that we hold in our hands? Well it's very important for us to go to the Bible to try to understand these things. And I'd like for you to consider with me a couple of New Testament passages. You recall that most of the New Testament early Christians were Jewish persons. Jesus' disciples were certainly Jewish persons. And of course chief among those disciples was the apostle Peter. When you turn to 2 Peter 1:19 you will find him writing about the Scriptures. In fact if we go back to verse 16 talking about the faith he shares with his audience he writes, "For we did not follow cleverly devised myths when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. But we were eye witnesses of His majesty. For when He received honor and glory from God the Father and the voice was born to Him by the Majestic Glory saying 'This is My beloved Son with whom I'm well pleased,' we ourselves heard this very voice born from heaven for we were with Him on the Holy Mountain."

And then Peter writes in verse 19, "And we have something more sure the prophetic word to which you would do well to pay attention as to a lamp shining in a dark place until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts. Knowing this first of all that no prophecy of Scripture comes from someone's own interpretation. For no prophecy was ever produced by the will of man but men spoke from God as were carried along by the Holy Spirit." Peter says some interesting things here. He reminds his audience that he and other disciples of Jesus were with Jesus on the Mount of Transfiguration, that they saw Christ change before them, that they heard God say "This is My beloved Son in whom I am well pleased." So Peter had had an extraordinary moment with Christ. And yet he says we have a more sure word, more sure than this experience than I had on the Mount of Transfiguration. We have the prophetic word. We have what we consider the Old Testament Scriptures.

And he says these Scriptures were produced not by the will of the men who wrote down the words. But they spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit. So Peter's testimony is that the Holy Spirit is the true author of Scripture and yet

the Holy Spirit uses men to write down these words. But Scripture begins with God through the Holy Spirit.

The apostle Paul, the apostle to the Gentiles, himself a Jewish believer but one who spent most of his ministry with Gentiles also writes about the Scripture. Look at 2 Timothy 3:14 or listen as I read it. Writing to his associate Timothy, whom he has entrusted with a great ministry in Ephesus encouraging Timothy to stay true to the doctrine that he has been taught, Paul writes in 2 Timothy 3:14, "But as for you, continue in what you have learned and have firmly believed knowing from whom you learned it and how from childhood you have been acquainted with the sacred writings which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction and for training in righteousness that the man of God may be competent, equipped for every good work."

Paul agrees with Peter that Scripture originates with God. He says Scripture, which we would know as the Old Testament, is breathed out by God, it comes from Him. And, as Peter has already said, men born along by the Holy Spirit wrote down that which God wanted to be written down. Jesus Himself, speaking in John's gospel chapter 10 verse 39 says that the Scriptures cannot be broken. He argues for the unity of the Bible in Matthew 5:17-20 when He tells His disciples that not one small letter of the Old Testament will pass away until all is fulfilled. Jesus lived His life obedient to the Father and obedient to the Scriptures. He knew what sort of savior He was supposed to be because He understood what the Bible taught about the Messiah. Clearly, the New Testament writers and Jesus Himself believed that the Old Testament, its original origins, are with God.

What did the Old Testament claim? Well, Psalm 19 gives us one of the clearest statements that I find in the Bible about Scripture. In Psalm 19:1-6 the writer gives God praise for revealing Himself through nature. And then he moves to the written word of God in verse 7, Psalm 19:7, "The law of the Lord is perfect, reviving the soul. The testimony of the Lord is sure, making wise the simple. The precepts of the Lord are right, rejoicing the heart. The commandment of the Lord is pure, enlightening the eyes. The fear of the Lord is clean, enduring forever. The rules of the Lord are true and righteous altogether. More to be desired are they than gold, even much fine gold. Sweeter also than honey and drippings of the honey comb. Moreover by them is Your servant warned in keeping them there is great reward."

Notice how Psalm 19: 7-11 proceeds. In the first half of the verse it says something about God's word, the law of the Lord. In other words the first five books of the Bible, is perfect. The testimonies of the Lord, the historical accounts are sure. The rules of God, the precepts and the commandments are right and they are pure. The fear of the Lord,

which you find in wisdom literature, is clean, and so forth. But in the second half of the verse it gives us the value of the word of God. It revives the soul. It makes wise the simple. It rejoices the heart and so forth. The origins of the Old Testament, according to the testimony of New Testament writers and Old Testament writers alike, is that these words come from God. They are carried to the writers through the Holy Spirit.

## **Authority**

A second point besides the origins of the Old Testament is the authority of the Old Testament. Now we have already seen in the passages we have read some things about the authority of the Old Testament. According to Peter, and according to Jesus, and according to Paul and according to Psalm 19 these words are God's words. Thus they carry the authority that God Himself carries. Let's never forget that God is the King of Kings and the Lord of Lords. He made us. He rules us. He saves us. Whatever He would say to us we are to bound to obey as His creatures and as His people. The Bible has complete authority because it is given to us as the word and the direction of the absolute authority of the universe.

And as we think of this authority and as we have already read about its purity let us remember that this authority is flawless. It is perfect. It is without error. The Bible does not contain error because God Himself does not contain error. He is pure and sinless as we will find in our study. His is true and He is right altogether as we will learn as we look through the books of the Old Testament. Because the Holy Spirit carried the writers along, because He worked with them, because He protected them, this authoritative word, whose origins, are in God is without error.

## **Purpose**

What is the purpose of the Bible, including the Old Testament? Well again we have already seen some of the purpose. According to Psalm 19 it is to revive our souls, to make us wise, to rejoice our hearts, to open our eyes to truth, to give us security and endurance forever. Similarly, Paul says in 2 Timothy 3: 16, 17, which we read just a moment ago, that the Scriptures are profitable for several things. They are profitable for teaching us how we should live, for reproof that is for showing us what is wrong. For correction: how we should change direction according to God's will. And for training: ongoing, preserving, learning, growing and developing in righteousness, that we might be competent, equipped for every good work.

The purpose of Scripture is to help us come to know the Lord. To find out that we are sinners in need of grace. That our hearts need reviving, as Psalm 19 says. That we might come to faith in Christ Jesus, as 2 Timothy 3:15 says. And then we might be trained to

live for Him. As we are going to find out in our study, God's purpose in giving the Scriptures is so that we might be saved from sin, to live for Him, to serve Him in the world, so that others might find Him as well. It is an amazing thing that God has set forth this purpose of blessing us and revealing Himself to us.

The theologian John Murray says the following about how merciful God is in revealing Himself to us. He writes:

It is possible for us to develop a certain kind of familiarity with the Bible so that we fail to appreciate the marvel of God's favor and mercy and wisdom in giving it to us. We need to stop and consider what hopeless, darkness, misery, and confusion would be ours if we did not possess the Bible. We would be without God and without hope in the world, endlessly stumbling over our own vain imaginings with respect to God, with respect to His will for us, and with respect to our own nature, origin and destiny. The Bible is the infallible revelation to us of the truth regarding God Himself, regarding the world in which we live and regarding ourselves. It reveals God's mind and will for us. It declares the way of salvation. It discloses the knowledge that is eternal life: the secrets of God's mind and purpose. Secrets which eye hath not seen nor ear heard have been laid open to us. The things that concern God's glory and our highest interest against all the issues of life and death, of time and eternity.

The purpose of God in giving us the Scripture is that in His mercy we might know Him. We might be saved through Him. We might walk with Him and serve others for Him. This is the purpose of the Scriptures.

So far we have mentioned the origins of Scripture in God himself, the authority of Scripture, and the purpose of Scripture.

## **Sufficiency**

Now a fourth item. I want to stress in our study the sufficiency of Scripture. By that I mean that the Scriptures are enough for us to understand how to be saved, how to live for God, and how to walk for Him. Notice the scope that 2 Timothy 3:16 gives us, "All Scripture is breathed out by God and is profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness, that we might be competent, equipped for every good work."

We have lots of examples in the Scriptures that God gives us a sufficient word. He gives us a sufficient word to know how to be saved in multiple places but perhaps most clearly in Romans 1–8. He gives us a sufficient word of how to trust in Him in Genesis 12–17. He gives us an understanding of how to live with others in the book of Proverbs. He gives us an understanding in how to praise Him in the books of Psalms. He shows

us what it means to love Him with all our heart, soul, mind and strength in the book of Deuteronomy. He shows us how to live in family in Genesis 25 through 50. The list is nearly endless but I hope I have made my point: God's word is sufficient. We need to find out what the Bible says and conform our lives to that word.

Often times people speak of applying the Bible to life. A few years ago I heard a sermon by Christopher Wright. He is also a great missionary spokesperson and a great author. And in this Chris Wright asserted we need to flip flop our thinking. We need to stop saying "Does the Bible apply to my life?" We need to ask, rather, "Does my life conform to the Bible?" My life is not the horizon of reality. The Bible is. We need to see that as we conform our lives to the Bible it is sufficient to teach us how to become a Christian, how to walk with God, how to live for Him, how to serve others. We don't need to construct some worldview and then fit the Bible into it. The Bible declares what reality is and we need to conform to that reality. The Bible is sufficient for all of our needs.

## Structure

Next, I want to say a few words about the structure of the Old Testament so we might understand how this course will proceed. There are, of course, a lot of different ways you can structure a course like ours. Every Old Testament survey course has to choose a way to approach its subject. So some teachers stress the theological contents of the books and we will do some of that. Others describe in detail the historical background of the Old Testament and we will do some of that. Beyond these concerns many classes explain the books according to the order in which they appear in the English Bible. Still others assemble the text in historical order and study them that way.

It seems to me logical to study the Old Testament, the Hebrew Bible, the way the New Testament writers did. Now recall that their only Scripture was the Old Testament. Remember they were in the process of writing the New Testament. And remember that they believed the Old Testament was breathed out by God and was their guide for faith and action. The first Christians, who again were Jewish, the first Bible they inherited had three specific parts. These parts are the Law, which are the books of Moses, the Prophets, which begin with Joshua and end with Malachi, and the Writings begin with Psalms and end with First and Second Chronicles - the Law, the Prophets and the Writings.

This order is reflected in a couple of places in the New Testament. You recall in Luke 24:44 Jesus had met with some disciples on the road to Emmaus and He taught them the things that were about Him in the law, the prophets and the psalms. This passage reflects the three fold pattern of law, prophets and writings. Also, in Matthew's gospel in chapter 23, Jesus is describing the failures of the people of His day, and He says that unbelievers have always murdered the prophets and the followers of the Lord. And He

mentions two murders: the murder of Able by Cain and then the murder of a man named Zechariah in Matthew 23:35. Of course, the murder of Abel occurs in the book of Genesis. The murder of Zechariah occurs in Second Chronicles. In the Bible Jesus knew of law, prophets and writings, the first murder occurred in Genesis, the first book of His Bible and the last murder occurred in Second Chronicles, the last book of Jesus' Bible. So Matthew 23 gives us another example of how New Testament characters conceived of the Old Testament as Law, Prophets, and Writings.

It is certainly fine to study the Old Testament in other ways. It is fine to divide the Old Testament into its historical order and study it that way. It is fine to pick particular themes and to divide the Old Testament and to study it that way. There are lots of good ways to study the Old Testament. But we are going to divide our study into these three parts: Law, Prophets, and Writings. For this is how the early church conceived of the Bible.

Let me give you an idea of the contents. The Law is pretty much what you would expect from your English Bible. That is: it contains Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy. As we will be speaking about in a moment, the word 'law' means 'instruction.' This is God's instruction, His loving and kind instruction to all of us today.

The second section is the Prophets. This is interesting because the prophetic section of the Old Testament includes the following books: Joshua, Judges, First and Second Samuel, and First and Second Kings. We consider those historical books and they are, but the early Christians would have seen the strong prophetic influence of people like Samuel and Elisha and Elijah. The next books after First and Second Kings: Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and the twelve Minor Prophets or as Jewish tradition calls them 'The Book of the Twelve.' Interestingly enough, they treat those twelve books as one prophetic book.

The third section is the Writings. And here is the order: Psalms, Job, Proverbs, Ruth, Song of Solomon, Ecclesiastes, Lamentations, Esther, Daniel, Ezra, Nehemiah, and First and Second Chronicles. Now most of you probably realize that all the books of the Old Testament that you are used to are included. But they are in a bit different order after Judges. You are used to finding Ruth after Judges, and yet Ruth is in the Writings after Proverbs and before Song of Solomon. You are used to having First and Second Chronicles follow First and Second Kings. And yet First and Second Chronicles are at the end of the list of the books.

What is some of the logic of this ordering? Well we are not certain exactly what the logic of those who collected the books this way was. But we can see some of the following: if you will study the Law and the first four books of the prophets, that is Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy, Joshua Judges, Samuel, and Kings you will know

virtually all of what happened in the history of Israel. You will study from creation through the destruction of Jerusalem in 587 B.C. and a few years beyond.

And then in Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and the Minor Prophets you find out why these things happened. Having been told what happened, you now learn why they happened. Why it was that God worked with the people for so long. Why it is that the Lord allowed them to be conquered. Why it is the Lord is sending a Messiah. Why it is that the Lord will judge the heavens and earth at the end of time. So having been told what happens and why it happens when we get to the writings we find out how people lived in the midst of all this history.

In Psalms we find out how they worshipped. And in Job, how they endured terrible suffering. And in Proverbs, how they lived wisely. And following Proverbs 31, which is about a wise woman, you have the book of Ruth, certainly an example of a wise woman. And Ruth ends with a marriage and a love story. And then follows into Song of Solomon, one of the great love songs of all time. But then the writings move from how to love into Ecclesiastes, to how to find meaning. To Lamentations: how to endure terrible national tragedy. And Esther and Daniel. Esther, a woman, living outside her homeland in exile, in Persia. And Daniel, a man, living outside his homeland in exile, in Babylon.

And then how to rebuild the nation. Ezra-Nehemiah talk about people who long after the destruction of Jerusalem, long after the nation fell, the Lord allowed some to return to rebuild the temple, to rebuild the land. And finally, First and Second Chronicles gives us a panoramic scope of history beginning with genealogies from Genesis and ending with 539 B.C. in the rebuilding of the temple. So this ordering of the books tells us what happened, tells us why it happened, and it tells us how people lived. This is the structure of the Old Testament. And this will provide structure for our study.

## Unity

So far the origins of the Old Testament, the authority of the Old Testament, the purpose of the Old Testament, the sufficiency of the Old Testament, and the structure Old Testament have been introduced. Finally, a sixth point of introduction. That is the unity of the Old Testament.

As I stated in the beginning, we are prone to think that the Old Testament is a collection of books and it is that. But it is a unified collection with a single purpose: that is to show how God saves human beings from sin for His glory, for His service. And this unity unfolds over hundreds of years of history. But throughout the Scriptures, the writers of the Bible see this as a unified story. For example, in Deuteronomy 1–4, Moses tells his people the one story of how God has redeemed them and brought them to Himself. His

associate Joshua at the end of his career, in Joshua 23 and 24, tells the same story and then adds his lifetime to it.

In 1 Samuel 8, Samuel, living decades and decades after Joshua, does the same. He tells what God has done for the people. How He has redeemed them to be a blessing to the world. And has brought them to the land and how He has been dealing with them since the time of Joshua. Just a few other examples: read Psalm 78, Psalm 89, Psalms 104 to 106 and you see the same pattern. The Scriptures talk about how God created the world. The world fell into sin. God chose Abraham's family to be a blessing to the nations. God made promises to David. God continues His work. And He will redeem persons from all nations.

Acts 7, where Steven gives his account of what God's been doing in history, in Acts 13, where Paul gives an account of what he says God has been doing in history, are very much like these Old Testament passages I just cited. All these passages show God has created the world. God will redeem people from sin. God will teach them how to serve Him. God will send them on mission to the ends of the earth. And God will redeem people from all nations.

There is a great unity to these Scriptures. I want to read you a quotation from a great Christian John Newton. He is best known as the author of the treasured hymn 'Amazing Grace.' He was also a great pastor and a great writer and he said the following in a letter to a friend about the unity of the Bible, "The doctrines, histories, prophecies, promises, precepts, exhortations, examples and warnings contained in the Bible form a perfect whole. A complete summary of the will of God concerning us in which nothing is wanting, nothing is superfluous." The Bible is a unified story about a God who is one, about a God who is true, about a God who in His mercy revealed Himself to us so that we might know Him.

There are many other things we can say by way of introduction. But I hope these things will help you understand where I'll be coming from as I teach. For I believe the origins of the Old Testament are in God Himself. I believe the authority of the Old Testament is the same as God speaking to us audibly today. His word carries His authority and I believe the purpose of the Old Testament is the same as the purpose of the New Testament, which is to teach us to know God, to have our sins forgiven, and how to live for Him. I believe the sufficiency of the Old Testament is the same as the sufficiency of the New. The Old Testament teaches us what we need to know to live for God in this world. I believe the structure of the Old Testament is best explained by studying the Law, the Prophets and the Writings. This order will tell us what happened, why it happened and how God's people lived through the centuries.

And I will teach that the Bible is a unity and the Old Testament is part of that unity. It is part of a whole story that as William J. Dumbrell says "takes us from creation to new

creation." From the words "God created the heavens and the earth" to the end of the Bible in Revelation 21 which says, "I saw a new heaven and a new earth." So as we study together let us keep some of these introductory things in mind and let us go forth to study the Bible as law, prophets, and writings given by Almighty God for our good for everything that we need.

## Lesson 2 ■ Genesis

In lesson two we are going to start our study of the Old Testament itself. And as I said in lesson one, we will begin by treating the books of Moses, the law, that is: Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy. And as we start our study of the law, of God's instruction to us, there are a few introductory matters I would like you to consider.

### INTRODUCTION TO THE LAW

I want you to know that practically every important Old Testament idea is introduced somewhere in the first five books of the Bible. These books are called the 'Torah.' Torah being the Hebrew word for 'instruction' in the Jewish tradition. Often times in the Christian tradition they are called the Pentateuch after the Greek words *penta* which means 'five' and *teuchas* which means 'book.' These five books certainly contain God's law. But I want to caution you about something. To most current readers the word 'law' means rules, regulations, and restrictions. Now, certainly the Pentateuch has such material. The law has such material. But Torah, remember, also means 'instruction.' These books are trying to help us know how to live.

There are at least two types of actual laws found in these five books. The first is a command, such as those that occur in the Ten Commandments in Exodus 20:1-17. The second category of law is the case law such as you will find in Exodus 21:1-11. Case laws tell the people what punishment fits specific crime. And case laws are built on commands. But before we ever reach Exodus 20, the first five books of the Bible offer us a different kind of instruction. These books tell us how the world came into existence. How sin began. How the Jewish nation was born. How Israel went to Egypt and how Moses led Israel to freedom. These chapters tell us that after creation the world fell into sin. And that God called out a single family to bless all nations. And He made them a kingdom of priests to proclaim His glory to all nations so that all the world might know Him. These books tell us about the fore fathers, the patriarchs, and of the first mothers, the matriarchs of Israel. And these books tell us that God is the creator, the covenant maker, the sustainer and the deliverer of His people. So these five books offer lots of different types of instruction.

It's important to know who wrote the Pentateuch, who wrote the law, these first five books of the Bible. Biblical scholars have debated this question for hundreds of years. Many experts believe that Moses wrote all but a few verses of the books. While others say the material was written by many people over a long period of time. These books themselves say that Moses was writing them. See Exodus 24:4, Exodus 34:27, and so

forth. The book of Leviticus, in particular, states that God gave these words to Moses. The book of Deuteronomy states that Moses is speaking out these words. And the New Testament and the rest of the Old Testament certainly consider the first five books of the Bible, the Torah, the Pentateuch, the words of Moses.

Of course Moses may have had scribes help him write his words. They may have taken words down at his dictation, at his command. But the Bible is clear that the books that we have before us have their origin in Moses. Most likely Moses lived about 1,450 years before Christ. It is possible he lived a little bit later, but most likely 1,450 to 1,400 would be the time period in which he ministered to Israel and he gave the materials we are about to study.

So the audience of the first five books of the Bible were originally people who had recently been slaves. People who needed to find their way in the world. People who were developing a new nation. People who had come out of a land that worshipped many gods so that they might worship the one, true and living God. But like us they were people confused by the cultures around them. They were tempted by money, sex, and power. They had many failings. And many of these failings are noted in the first five books of the Bible. But never forget that there are great heroes and heroines of faith in the first five books of the Bible. We see there Abraham and Sarah, we see Isaac and Rebecca, Jacob and Rachel and Leah. We find Moses and Aaron and Miriam. We find Joshua and Caleb and others. So there are great examples of faithful people in these books. And we would do well to learn from their example just as Hebrews 11 says that we should.

## **GENESIS**

Let's look together at the book of Genesis. Genesis emphasizes that God creates, God judges sin, and God redeems His people. Again God creates, God judges sin, and God redeems. Let me give you an outline for the whole book that helps us see this overview and then we will come back to details.

### **Genesis 1:1–11:9**

The first section of the book is Genesis 1:1 through 11:9. And in these chapters we see God creating the heavens and the earth and human beings and sustaining the heavens, the earth, and the human beings. But we then see the human beings chose to sin against God. And suffer the effects of that sin. And we see God doing His utmost to redeem human beings from their sin. And we see God developing a plan by which people may be redeemed from those sins.

## Genesis 11:10 – 25:18

Next Genesis 11:10 to Genesis 25:18 we see God calling out a people who will take His message to the nations. He calls the family of Abraham. Abraham becomes God's special friend. Abraham is a man of faith. A flawed man, but a man of faith, who becomes the father of the people of Israel.

## Genesis 25:19 – 36:43

Then, in Genesis 25:19 through Genesis 36:43 we see God protecting Abraham's family in these chapters. Abraham passes from the scene but his son Isaac carries on the tradition of faith. And then Isaac's son Jacob, a quite imperfect man, carries on the faith in his day. Abraham only has the one son, Isaac, who is the child of the promise, though he does have another son Esau. But Isaac is the son of promise who carries on the faith. Isaac has a son named Jacob and a son named Esau. Jacob becomes the carrier of faith and he has 12 sons who become the 12 tribes of Israel. And God has to protect Isaac from many enemies. He has to protect Jacob from all sorts of enemies and difficulties and troubles. But God does this in 25:19 through 36:43.

## Genesis 37–50

And finally in Genesis chapters 37 through 50, we have God preserving His people through His servant Joseph. Joseph is one of the sons of Jacob. His brothers are jealous of him and they sell him into slavery. He is taken down into Egypt where he becomes the means that God will use to preserve the family so they might become a blessing to all nations.

Let me recap those: Genesis 1:1 to 11:9: God creates the heavens and the earth, judges the sin of mankind. Genesis 11:10 to 25:18: God calls out the family to bless the nations. Abraham is the father of that family. Genesis 25:19 to 36:43: God protects that family through many trials and troubles and that family grows into a large number as Jacob has twelve sons who become the tribes of Israel. And then chapters 37 to 50 God preserves the people through His servant Joseph.

# **CONTENTS OF GENESIS**

Now let's take a look at the contents of the book of Genesis together. We won't be able to go through every verse in detail, but hopefully we will be able to hit some high points that will help us understand what follows in the Bible.

## Creation (1–2)

Of course we begin with creation, in Genesis 1 and 2. The text begins with an astounding statement in the Ancient Near Eastern context. It says “In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.” What is astounding is here is that there is only one God acting here. And as the Bible proceeds we will find that it teaches that there is only one God. And that God rules all things, all people, and all history. This was an astounding claim in the ancient world and it is an astounding claim today. In the ancient world there was a general belief there were many, many gods. That belief is called polytheism. They believed there were gods who ruled different places, gods who were in charge of different functions, and gods who had chosen specific peoples to rule over. But the Bible was against that basic belief, teaches that there is only one God. That God has created the heavens and the earth.

And in our world today there is a major belief in many gods. One only has to consider the nation India, that great nation with over a billion people. One of its major religions is Hinduism. And Hinduism, of course, believes that there are many hundreds, if not thousands and millions, of gods. And that each one of these gods has power and each one of these gods has a roll in the universe. But the Christian witness, the witness of the Scriptures, the witness of the Old Testament, is there is only one God, and that He is the creator.

The text goes on to tell us that God creates the heavens and the earth. That the heavens and the earth were without form and void and darkness was over the face of the deep. But the Spirit of God was hovering over the face of the waters. God was working to bring order out of all of this chaos. And as the text unfolds in 1:1 through 2:4, the text tells us that God creates the following: day one, light; day two, skies above the earth; day three, dry land, seas and vegetation; day four, sun, moon, and stars; day five, water animals, and birds; day six, cattle, land, animals, and human beings; and day seven, God creates rest.

We can see right away that this is a very orderly account of creation. It moves from the creation of light, to vegetation, to cattle, to human beings on the land. We can see it's not as detailed as we might like. In thirty five short verses we move from chaos and nothingness to a full earth that is thriving. The Bible doesn't tell us how bright the light was on day one. It does not tell us how many species of animals were created by day six. But it does tell us that God Himself has created this. It is not here by chance. It tells us that the world is an orderly place; it is no longer in chaos. And it tells us in Genesis 1:26-31 that human beings have a special role in creation.

Genesis 1:26 says “Then God said let Us make man in Our own image, after Our likeness. And let them have dominion over the fish in the sea and over the birds in the

heavens and over the livestock and over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth. So God created man in His own image. In the image of God He created them. Male and female He created them. And God blessed them and said to them: be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth. And subdue it and have dominion over the fish in the sea and over the birds in the heavens and over every living thing that moves on the earth." Human beings are given special responsibilities. In fact, they are a bit of a sub regent. That is they are assigned a role as rulers over the earth under the authority of God.

And human beings are to take care of the earth, to manage it, to use its resources wisely and to fill the earth in an effective way. They are not to abuse the earth. They are not to act as if they own the earth. They are to use it in appropriate, helpful ways. The human beings are the crowning glory of God's creation. The world is made for us but we are made responsible for this creation. And then on day seven God rested. He gave an example to us that work is not to consume us. That doing is not all there is to living but rather He gave us an example of resting. Not because He was tired but because we needed to know that our resources, our physical resources, our financial resources are not endless. We need rest. And the word simply means ceasing. And leaves it up to our wisdom to help us know how best we should rest.

Once God created the heavens and the earth He placed mankind on the earth. And in Genesis 2 it tells us that God gave the man work to do. He was indeed a keeper of the ground. And he was a keeper of animals. And a namer of animals. And then God created for the man a helper suitable for him. A mate, He created woman. And the first man and woman were naked and they were not ashamed. They were walking with God and having a relationship with Him. They were in perfect harmony with one another. And of this relationship, 2:23 says, "The man says of this at last is bone of my bone and flesh of my flesh. She shall be called woman because she was taken out of man. Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and hold fast to his wife and they shall now become one flesh. And the man and his wife were both naked and they were not ashamed."

Genesis 1:2 shows us that God created a beautiful world. A world in which there is no sin, no suffering, no sorrow, nor any death. And over and over in Genesis 1 God says "and it is good" "and it is good" "and it is good." He created the world and human beings: good and able and true.

### **The Fall into Sin (3)**

But in Genesis 3 we find that the good creation has become marred by sin. Genesis 3 tells us without any introduction that there was a serpent who was more crafty than any other beast of the field that the Lord God had made. And the serpent said to the

woman: "Did God actually say you shall not eat of any tree of the garden?" You recall in Genesis 2 that God had said to them you may live in this garden; you may continue this wonderful life you have together. But there are only two rules: you must not eat of these trees. The serpent reminds her of this: "Did God say you should not eat of any tree of the garden?" So he makes God's command look even worse. He has expanded it; it's not just that she could not eat of two trees. He says did God say you can't have anything.

But the woman says "We may eat of the fruits of the trees of the garden. But God said you shall not eat of the fruit of the tree in the midst of the garden, neither shall you touch it lest you die. God had indeed said to them in Genesis 2 that if they sinned against His word, if they broke His simple law of not eating of these two trees death would be the result. The woman understands what God has said. But the serpent says to the woman, "You shall not surely die" in other words the serpent denied God's word. He goes on to defame God's character. He says in verse 5, "for God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened and you will be like God knowing good and evil." He denies God's word, he defames God's character. Now of course the woman should know better. She knows God. She knows He has created the world. She knows that He has given them a wonderful place to live. She knows that He has only given them a couple of standards they must keep.

Nonetheless, verse 6 says, "So when the woman saw the tree was good for food and that it was a delight to the eyes. That the tree was to be desired to make one wise she took of its fruit and ate. And she also gave some to her husband who was with her and he ate. Both of them break the standard that the God who made them, the God who walked with them, the God who provided for them, the God they knew, they broke His word. Verse 7 "In the eyes of both were open and they knew that they were naked and they sewed fig leaves together. And they made themselves loincloths. They were ashamed now that they were naked. They couldn't look at one another." Not only that, in 3:8 on through verse 13 the text tells us that God comes to speak with them as He has before. Remember they have a relationship with one another. And yet the people have sinned against this relationship. And they are afraid to see God for they know they have sinned. The man blames the woman for the sin. The woman blames the serpent.

Sin always carries consequences. And here are the consequences for the very first sin: 3:14 the Lord God said to the serpent, "Because you have done this, cursed are you above all livestock, and above all beast of the field. On your belly you shall go and dust you shall eat all the days of your life. I will put enmity between you and the woman and between your offspring and her offspring. He shall bruise your head and you shall bruise His heel." The first consequence of what has happened comes to the serpent. God tells him that he will not prevail. There will come a child from the woman who will

crush the serpents head. Yes, the serpent will bruise His heel, but the serpent will be destroyed. He will have the worse of this encounter.

As the Bible unfolds we learn that this is the first promise of grace. When mankind began to sin God immediately showed His grace. And He made a promise that there is coming One who would defeat the serpent. A promise that is fulfilled as the Scriptures unfold is fulfilled through Jesus. As the Old Testament unfolds it gives us more details about what this Person who will defeat the serpent will be like. We don't have all the information in this first passage, it is but the beginning. But we do see God's grace at work immediately. And the promise is that Someone will come through the woman who will defeat the serpent.

But what about the people? What is the consequence for them? Verse 16 the text tells, "To the woman I said I will multiply your pain in childbearing, in pain you shall bring forth children. Your desire shall be for your husband and he shall rule over you." Scholars have long debated what this means but I think the gist of it is this: the woman has found out that her relationship with her husband will be changed now. It will not be the perfect relationship they had. She will desire one thing at times and get another. There will be pain between the two of them. And there will be pain in her child bearing and in her child rearing. What once would not have been a difficult experience now will be. And as the Scriptures unfold we see all sorts of pain between mothers and their children. We see all sorts of pain between husbands and wives. We see many wonderful things as well. It is not all gloom and doom and pain and sorrow. But no longer is the relationship perfect by nature.

What about the man? In verse 17 to Adam He said, "Because you have listened to the voice of your wife and eaten of the tree of which I have commanded of which you shall not eat of it, cursed is the ground because of you. In pain you shall eat of it all the days of your life. Thorns and thistles it shall bring forth for you and you shall eat the plants of the field. By the sweat of your face you shall eat bread until you shall return to the ground for out of it you were taken. For you are dust and to dust you shall return." Adam finds out that he will continue to work. And he will continue to do what God has made him to do: take care of the animals, to take care of the ground. But now he will work at things and things won't always work out. He will plant and yes the ground will give forth what it should give forth but it will also give forth thorns and thistles. He will have to struggle now with an imperfect world. The animals that once were at peace with him some of them will become his enemies. Things will not be as they were. As the Bible unfolds we see men and women struggling to do their work. We see them achieve great things but we also see that sin mars what they do. That no longer can we expect our work to always to be blessed as it was before.

## **Effects of Sin on the Human Race (4–6)**

From this point on in the Bible we see the effects of sin and the sorry and the pain and the death that comes with it. We have early examples in chapters 4, 5, and 6. We see that Adam and Eve's children, Cain and Abel, are unable to get along and Cain kills his brother. We go on in the text and we see the human race do great things in chapter 4 verse 17 and following. We see them learning to play musical instruments. We see them learning to make bronze and iron implements. But we also see in 4:23 to 24 a man named Lamech who is brutal and ruthless and vengeful. We see corruption in the earth in chapter 6 to the extent that when we get to verse 5: "The Lord saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth and that every intention of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually." Sin accelerates at a tremendous rate, so that the world is filled with corruption, with wickedness and with violence. From the original sin in chapter 3 to this point, we see sin taking over the good world that God had created.

## **New Beginning with Noah and His Family (6–9)**

But God is not left without a plan or without power. He is not helpless. Chapter 6 and verse 6 says "And the Lord was sorry that He had made man on earth and it grieved Him to His heart. So the Lord said I will blot out man whom I have created from the face of the land, man and animals, and creeping things and birds of the heavens for I am sorry that I have made them." In other words, sin will be punished. God said I will remove it all from My earth. But then in verse 8, chapter 6 "but Noah found favor in the eyes of God." God had not left Himself without any followers on earth. There was Noah and his family. And God's grace extended to Noah. And as you probably know from the famous story God asks Noah to make an ark, a boat. Why? Because God has decided to destroy all the wicked people on the earth and to begin afresh with Noah and his family. The Bible tells us that God uses a great flood to destroy the wicked on the earth. And that Noah and his family and the animals that he has gathered survive this flood. And God begins again with Noah and his family. In chapter 8 verse 20 as Noah and his family and the animals they have with them come from their boat, Noah builds an altar as a place of worship to the Lord. And Noah took some of every clean animal and some of every clean bird and offered burnt offering on the altar. That is, Noah did what ancient men knew to do: he offered a sacrifice to God. A sacrifice had many purposes. It could be for sin. It could be out of joy that God had done something wonderful. It could be offered to help priest be sustained. We will see all these things later in our story. But for now Noah is giving a burnt offering, he has killed an animal, and will burn it up completely on an altar to give thanks to God that he has been delivered through this flood. And in 8:21, "The Lord smelled the aroma and said, 'I will never again curse the ground because of man for the intention of man's heart is evil from his youth. Neither

will I ever again strike down every living creature as I have done. While the earth remains, seed time and harvest, cold and heat, summer and winter, day and night shall not cease.” God had decided that this one punishment, that this one great catastrophe because of sin will be enough. He will not judge sin again in this manner again. This is His grace to the world. Then in 9:1, “And God blessed Noah and his sons and said, ‘Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth.’” In other words He gives them the same command that He originally gave Adam and Eve. Verse 2, “The fear of you and the dread of you shall be upon every beast of the earth, and upon every bird of the heavens, upon everything that creeps on the ground, and on all the fish of the sea into your hand they are delivered. Every moving thing that lives shall be food for you and as I gave you the green plants, I give you everything.” And so as in Genesis 1:26-31 God gives Noah and his family the responsibility and the power over the earth.

Verse 4, “But you shall not eat flesh with its life, that is, its blood. And for your lifeblood I’ll require a reckoning. From every beast, I will require it of man. For his fellow man I’ll require a reckoning for the life of man. Whoever sheds the blood of man, by man shall his blood be shed. For God made man in His image. But you be fruitful and multiply, teaming on the earth and multiply in it.” Then God said to Noah and his sons with him “Behold I establish My covenant with you and your offspring after you and with every living creature that is with you, the birds, the livestock and every beast of the earth with you. As many as came out of the ark. It is for every beast of the earth, I establish My covenant with you that never again shall all flesh be cut off by the waters of the flood. And never again shall there be a flood to destroy the earth. And God said this is the sign of the covenant that I make with Me and you and every living creature that is with you for all future generations. I have set My bow in the clouds, it shall be a sign of the covenant between Me and the earth.”

There are several things we need to unpack here. Let’s remind ourselves in Genesis 1 and 2 God has created the heavens and the earth. And He has put human beings in charge of it. And all is good. But in Genesis 3 to 6 human beings have so sinned against God and so defiled the earth that God has decided to judge the earth with a great flood. This great flood comes and in chapter 8 it ends and Noah comes out of the ark and offers a sacrifice of praise to God. In response, God does certain things. First, God begins again with Noah. He tells him to fill the earth. And he and his family do that. He is told to rule over the earth, to take care of it. And he begins the process of doing that. And then God says that the whole human race shall be careful not to shed blood that is chapter 9 verse 6. In particular they are not to do violence to one another. God will hold the whole earth accountable for this command. And as the Old Testament unfolds we see that God will hold nations accountable who shed innocent blood. He holds individuals accountable for shedding innocent blood.

## **Covenant (9:11)**

Now there is a very important word that God uses in 9:11. It is the word 'covenant.' And it is an extremely important concept for the rest of the Bible. In fact, it is hard to over emphasize how very important it is. The word 'covenant' means a binding agreement that reflects a relationship between two parties. A covenant is always made between persons or nations who have a relationship already. God had a relationship with Noah and with his family. God had a relationship with the human race then. And a covenant reflects that relationship by setting standards for the relationship. And God says in this case the covenant requires that you not shed innocent blood, that you take command of the creatures and that you rule the earth appropriately. "And I will give you a sign that I am blessing this covenant. I will give you the sign of the bow in the clouds."

So any time we see a rainbow we need to be reminded not just of the beauty of the earth. But we need to be reminded God has made a covenant with the human race by making a covenant with Noah. He will hold us accountable for how we live before Him particularly in the area of violence, and oppression and abuse. That He promises to not to destroy the earth by flood again. That He has given us His bow. Again let me emphasize the importance of seeing this covenant and understanding the concept. A covenant reflects a relationship. It does not create it. The standards of the covenant reflect the relationship. And always the standards as they are kept bring a blessing to the faithful person. But when a covenant is broken there will always be consequences.

Covenants are always made between a greater person and a lesser person. God is the greater person, Noah is the lesser person. The lesser person must obey the greater or suffer the consequences. As the Bible proceeds we will see individuals making covenants. But we will also see God make different covenants with different people for different purposes. We will also see that nations make covenants with one another. But the covenants always have these elements: they reflect a relationship that already exists, they give structure and standards for how the relationship will unfold, they give blessings for obedience, and they give consequences for disobedience. And this first covenant that God makes with Noah is one that is made with the whole human race, for the whole human races' benefit, so the whole human race may avoid the sins that have already degraded the human race so greatly.

## **Rebellion at the Tower of Babel (11:1-9)**

So the world has a new start through Noah. And in chapter 10 the Bible tells us that the family of Noah expands and the world is filled with people. But chapter 11, verses 1 to 9 tell us sadly the world has not learned its lesson. It builds a great tower out of

disobedience to God, desires to exalt itself above God. And God has to scatter the people throughout the world, scattering them with different languages. They no longer can have the unity that they had before because when human beings have unity, unfortunately, they often try use it to sin against God and to exalt themselves above God. So when we come to the end of the first section of Genesis we see that God has created a good world, He has created human beings to lead this world but that we have a terrible, terrible problem. And this problem is sin. And it is pervasive; it is throughout the world. It is in every human being.

## **The Call of Abraham (11:10 – 12:9)**

What will God do about this sin? What will God do about this world wide problem? We find out in the second section of Genesis, chapter 11, verse 10 through chapter 25:18 that God will deal with this problem by calling a man and his family to be His special people. This man's name is Abram. And toward the end of his life God changes his name to Abraham. We are told of the existence of Abram in 11:10-32. That he is a man from Ur in the land of the Chaldeans.

When we get to the time of Abraham we begin to be able to date events with some accuracy. Abram lived about 2,000 years before Christ. At this stage of history we do well to get within one or two centuries of the right time frame. We simply do not have enough evidence outside of what we have in the Bible to be able to fix the dates any better than that. There are other ancient records from the time of Abraham that help us understand that the Bible gives an accurate portrait of what life was like in those days. Abram is from the city of Ur. That is about 186 miles southeast of modern day Bagdad. And Ur was founded near the Euphrates River. So when we think about Abram we need to think that he was from what we know today basically as the land of Iraq.

During this time period there were many people moving about in the ancient world and Abram was one of them, 12:1, "Now the Lord said to Abram go from your country and your kindred from your father's house to the land I will show you. And I will make of you a great nation. And I will bless you and make your name great so that you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you and him who dishonors you I will curse. And in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed." This is an extraordinarily important passage. The great sin problem that has been set up in Genesis 1 through 11 will be dealt with through Abraham. Just as all nations have sinned, so all nations will be blessed through Abram.

And God makes promises to Abram. He tells him, "Go from your county and I will make you a great nation." And as the Bible unfolds we see he is the father not only of the nation of Israel through his son Isaac, but also the father of many other nations through his son Ishmael. God blesses him with much wealth and God gives him a great

name, makes him quite famous to this very day. As we are going to see, promises that all nations are will be blessed through him.

Remember in Genesis 3:15 God said that the serpent would not always triumph over men and women, but that the women would eventually produce a child who would defeat the serpent. We don't know in the Bible at this stage who that child will be but we can see whose family he will come from. All nations will be blessed through Abraham's family so we begin to think that the serpent will also be defeated through Abraham's family. Turn to Genesis 12, "Having heard these promises Abram went as the Lord had told him and Lot went with him. Abram was 75 years old when he departed from Haran." That is verse 4. Now verse 5, "And Abram took Sarai his wife and Lot his brother's son and all their possessions that they had gathered and the people they had acquired in Haran and they set out to go to the land of Canaan."

This was a great journey from the land of what we know as Iraq to the land we know as Israel. Verse 6, "Abram passed through the land to the place at Shechem to the oak at Moreh and at that time the Canaanites were in the land." These were the original inhabitants of what we know as Palestine, Israel, Gaza Strip, Northern Egypt. Verse 7, "The Lord appeared to Abram and said to your offspring I will give this land. So they built there an altar to the Lord who appeared to him. From there he moved to the hill country to the east of Bethel and pitched his tent with Bethel on the west and Ai on the east. And there he built an altar to the Lord and called upon the name of the Lord and Abram journeyed on still going toward the Negev that is to the Sinai desert." He was heading south toward Egypt.

God not only promised him he would have a great name. And that he would be blessed and he would be a blessing to all nations. God said He would give him the land of Canaan, the land we know as the Holy Land. Now we need to understand that God promised to give him this land so that he could be a blessing to all nations. This land was not given to him or to anyone else so that they may fulfill their own plans, their own wishes and carry out their own agenda. That land was there to be a blessing to all people. That they might come to know God the Creator. They might come to know God the one who promises to defeat the serpent. That they may come to know God who made promises to Noah. And they would come to know God who called Abram out of the land of Ur to the land of Canaan.

### **Abraham's Struggle for Faith (12:10 – 25:18)**

During his lifetime, Abram shows himself faithful in a number of ways but also a quite frail human being in a number of others. He has the faith to follow God's commands and go to a land he had never seen before. Yet when he gets there according to chapter 12:10-20 he doesn't always trust God, fears for his life and tells lies about his wife. Yet

God delivers him. In chapters 13 and 14, he is threatened by war and by loss yet he is a faithful man and God delivers him.

Several years pass and we come to chapter 15. You remember that God has promised to make Abraham a great nation. Yet Abram and Sarah have no child. There is no way that they can become a great nation without a child. In 15:1, "After these things the word of the Lord came to Abram in a vision, 'Fear not Abram, I am your shield, your reward shall be very great.' But Abram said, 'O Lord God, what will you give me for I am childless and the heir of my house is Eliezer of Damascus.' And Abram said, 'Behold you have given me no offspring and a member of my household will be my heir.'" You can see he is quiet discouraged by his lack of a child. God has been good to him. God has forgiven him of his sins. God has protected him and blessed him everywhere he has gone and yet there is no son, there is no child.

Genesis 15:4, "Behold the word of the Lord came to him, 'This man will not be your heir. Your very own son shall be your heir.' And He brought him outside and said look toward heaven and number of stars if you are able to number them. And He said to him, 'So shall your offspring be.' And he [that is Abraham] believed the Lord and the Lord counted it to him as righteousness." God makes a promise to Abraham that though there has been no child there will be a child and the descendants that will come from that child will be as numerous as the stars.

Abram believes God. The One who has called him. The One who has blessed him. The One who has made promises to him. He believes God and God's promises and God counts that as righteousness, counts his believe as if he has done the right thing. Counts it as if it is real, because it is. This chapter is cited many times in the Bible but it begins our understanding, a clear understanding, that our relationship with God is based on faith. God has made a covenant with us because of who He is. He reaches out to Abram, He reaches out to Noah, and He reaches out to us today saying, "I am the Creator. I am the One who sustains you. I am the One who loves you. I am the one who forgives you and leads you wherever you go." And by faith we put our trust in Him and we live according to His standards. Genesis 15:6 is a formative verse to biblical writers. We will see it again in Habakkuk 2:4. We will see it again in Romans 4.

We see that those who put their trust in God are right with Him and they walk with Him and they love Him and He saves them. Salvation comes by faith, not by our works. Our works are the result of our relationship with God and our faith in Him, they are not the cause of them. From cover to cover the Bible teaches that it is faith in God and in His word and in His promises and in His provisions for salvation that make us right with Him. So Abraham is a man of faith even though he is an imperfect man. We see in chapter 16 he doesn't wait on God's promise he has a son named Ishmael through a woman named Hagar, a surrogate mother provided by his wife Sarai.

Nevertheless, God continues with him. God, in chapter 17, establishes circumcision as the sign of the covenant with Abraham. Tells Abraham that all his children shall be circumcised. All his people throughout the years will be known as the people of circumcision. That the males shall be circumcised as a sign of God's covenant with Abram. And it is in chapter 17 that God changes the name of Abram to Abraham. The name Abraham means father of a multitude of nations. Whereas Abram had meant exalted father. I want to apologize to you for all the times in this tape I've already said Abraham when I should have been saying Abram. It is just a habit of mine. But it is not until chapter 17 that as God establishes circumcision as a sign of the covenant that He changes the name from Abram to Abraham. And from this time forth, circumcision becomes the sign of the covenant.

Chapter 17 and 18 we also have the great news that God finally gives Abraham a son, will give him a son. And in chapter 21, a son is born. His name is Isaac. And it is through Isaac that God will keep the promise to bless all nations through Abraham. Abraham's son Ishmael is greatly blessed of the Lord. He becomes the father of nations himself and God gives him great gifts, wealth, and honor. But it is through Isaac that the focus of God's promises come.

In chapter 22 God tests Abraham's faith. He tells him to take his son Isaac, the son of promise and to make him a human sacrifice. Abraham obeys without question. He is ready to do what God asks him to do. He is ready to sacrifice the only son he has and according to the New Testament it is because he knows God can raise him from the dead. But at the last second, God stays his hand and tells him not to sacrifice the boy and provides a lamb. He says these words in 22:12, God says, "Do not lay your hand on the boy or do anything to him for now I know you fear God seeing that you have not withheld your son, your only son from Me." Abraham proves himself to be a man of faith. He trusts God, he trust God's word. He will do whatever God asks. And God gives him his son back and they continue on in their lives.

God provides a wife for Isaac named Rebecca and then in 25:1-18 the Bible tells us Abraham dies. Just to give a brief summary 11:10-25:18, remember that the world is in a terrible predicament, filled with sin and yet God has a plan that through Abraham all nations will be blessed. And He gives Abraham a son named Isaac through whom the promises continue. This son believes in the one, true, living God the way Abraham did. This son is also a man of faith. But God is showing us all nations will be blessed, the sin problem will be resolved, it will be resolved by God's promises, by our faith in Him through His covenant with Abraham and with Noah.

This is a very brief course so I will have to pick up some speed here. I hope you will see that I tried to spend a little extra time in Genesis so we can lay the foundation for what follows.

## **Isaac: The Promise Continues (25:19–26:35)**

I will just note a few things: Genesis 25:19–36:43, God does protect Isaac and Jacob. And He makes certain that Jacob has twelve sons who will become the twelve tribes of Israel. They are the fathers of all the future Israelite clans. Isaac is a quiet man. A man who journeys quite a bit in his life. Who endures a great deal of opposition from the people of the land. Like his father he lives in Canaan. Like his father he is promised that this land will eventually belong to his descendants. But like his father is greatly in the minority and the land is not his yet.

He is also an imperfect man. He favors his son Esau over his other son Jacob. He and his wife don't have a great open and honest relationship. Yet Isaac trusts in the God who created the heavens and the earth. The God who made a covenant with Noah. The God who made promises to Abram. He serves no other God. His faith is intact.

His son Jacob is also an imperfect man. Jacob tricks his brother Esau at many points. The first time he tricks and bests his brother is in the issue of their birthright, the future leadership of the clan. One day Esau comes back from hunting and he is very hungry. He sees his brother cooking some stew and asks for some food. Jacob asks that he give over his birthright which usually went to the older son in exchange for the stew. Oddly Esau makes the bargain. The text says he despises his birthright. He doesn't care anything about leading the clan. He gives it over for just a little bit of food.

I once heard a sermon years ago that said Esau sold his birthright for a bowl of chili and I think that's about right. He was not about to starve to death, the family was rich, he just thought so little of being the leader of his family that he sold that right to his brother for a little bit to eat, for a snack. Later on however there is the issue of the blessing. The blessing was the spiritual leadership and the financial leadership of the family. And Isaac was ready to give that blessing to Esau. Jacob outmaneuvered his brother again.

## **Jacob: The Reluctant Heir of Faith (27–36)**

Chapter 27 tells us Isaac has grown old and his eyesight has failed. He doesn't know how long he will live so he prepares to die. He tells Esau to go get him some food to cook him a meal and he will give him the blessing. Isaac's wife Rebecca, who favors her younger son Jacob over her older son Esau, cooks up a plan of her own. She has Jacob dress up like Esau and go in to deceive his father into blessing him. And the deception works. Isaac blesses Jacob.

It is Jacob who has the leadership in the family. It is Jacob who is the spiritual head of the family. It is Jacob who has the financial leadership of the clan. And when Esau hears

this he is enraged and threatens to kill his brother. So Jacob is sent far away. And his mother who works so hard to help him get ahead of his brother never sees him again.

But God protects Jacob while he is away and He brings him back to the land, and reconciles him with his brother. God protects the family. God protects the family even from its own sins and its own divisions and its own failures. And God protects the family so that there are plenty of children to build the nation promised to Abraham. By the end of chapter 36, Jacob has 12 sons and a daughter. His family is beginning to multiply. God is keeping His promise.

### **Joseph: The Completion of the Promise (37–50)**

In chapters 37 through 50, we see that the divisions in Jacob's family have an ugly result. Jacob favors his younger son Joseph over all the others and puts him in charge of the brothers. Out of jealousy, they sell him as a slave and Joseph goes down to Egypt. Joseph spends a great deal of time in prison. He endures much trouble and persecution and sorrow.

But he is able to interpret dreams and the day comes when Egypt's leader Pharaoh has a dream that no one can interpret but Joseph. He interprets the dream as follows: there will be years of plenty followed by terrible years of famine. Egypt should prepare for the famine. It should lay up lots of food against coming hard times. And Egypt should do so now. Pharaoh makes Joseph, who has been a prisoner till now, prime minister of Egypt. He puts him in charge of laying up the food against the time of famine.

Meanwhile, the famine does begin. Back home Jacob and his remaining sons are about to run out of food. So the sons come to Egypt to buy food. And unknown to them they are standing before Joseph, their brother, the prime minister of Egypt, asking for food. Joseph has a dilemma. He could seek revenge; he could do to his brothers what they have done to him. But he decides to take a different course. He forgives them. He tells them that worse times are ahead, that God has sent him ahead of them to preserve life. The brothers and their families come to Joseph in Egypt. He provides for them food and work and homes. And they settle in the land of Egypt.

Their father Jacob comes to Egypt and he rejoices to see his lost son. Jacob dies in Egypt but he makes his sons promise that when he dies they will take him back and bury him in the land of promise, back in Canaan, where Isaac is buried. Back in Canaan where Abraham is buried. This burial will be a down payment on the promise that God will give them the land. It is an act of faith that the land that God promises will be theirs someday. So that that their family might bless all nations by living for God in that land.

By the end of Genesis, God has kept His promises to Abram in the following way: He blessed and protected Abraham. He gave Abraham a son. That son had a son who had

12 sons. And from those 12 sons grows a great nation. God kept His promise to give Abraham descendants and to make him a great nation.

But what of the promise to bless all nations through them? And what of the promise that they will have the land of Canaan? Abraham, Isaac, Jacob are buried there but the people are not there. They are in Egypt. They are becoming a great nation but they have no homeland. They have blessed other nations, particularly Egypt by their presence but they are yet to become a blessing to all nations. So when the book of Genesis ends we see quite clearly that God creates the heavens and the earth. And He judges sin through the flood, through the scattering of the people, through the muddling of their languages and yet that He has a plan of redemption for all the nations that will come through Abraham. And that Abraham's descendants will be a great nation in a great land with a great purpose. What we need to see next is how all of this unfolds.

## **Lesson 3 ■ Exodus**

The next portion of our study is devoted to the book of Exodus and the book of Leviticus. You recall that as we ended the book of Genesis, God has been keeping His promises to Abraham. He has given Abraham descendants who are becoming a great nation. He is giving Abraham a special relationship with Himself, and He is giving Abraham the opportunity to grow in a new place. However we note that God has promised Abraham the land of Canaan and his people reside currently in Egypt.

We also know that God has promised Abraham that his people will be a blessing to all nations. This promise is made so that God can deal decisively with the problem of sin in the world. But we have yet to see these promises come to fulfillment. Exodus and Leviticus take us farther down the road to God keeping His promises to Abraham. In Exodus and Leviticus God gives His covenant to Israel. He's already given His covenant with Abraham and He has already made His covenant to Noah. Now He will make a special covenant with Abraham's descendants, the Israelites.

### **INTRODUCTION**

So let's take a look at Exodus and note a few things about an introduction to Exodus. So a few words of introduction to the book of Exodus. Let's remind ourselves again of the setting. Exodus begins with Israel living securely in Egypt. They are guests of the Pharaoh who protects them because of Joseph's service to Egypt. Yet by the end of the book Israel resides outside of Egypt. They have escaped slavery in Egypt and they have moved toward the land God promised Abraham. Moses has become their leader so much happens between the beginning of the book and the end of the book. The setting is when we begin Israel is in Egypt.

What about the time period? As you recall, Abraham lived about 2,000 B.C. When we get to chapters 1 and 2 of Exodus we meet the character Moses. And as we find out through comparing biblical texts to texts written by other nations, by archeological excavation, we find that Moses probably lived about 1,450 years before Christ. So Moses lives more than 500 years after Abraham. The Exodus, that is, Israel's leaving of Egypt, takes place in about 1446 B.C. We know this because in 1 Kings 6:1 says that King Solomon, the third king of Israel built a temple 480 years after Israel left Egypt. Because of what we know from the Bible and because of what we know from other ancient texts and because of what we know about archeology, we know that Solomon completed the temple about 966 or 960 B.C. So if we add the 480 years we get about 1446 to 1440 B.C. for the Exodus.

During this time period Egypt was a very strong nation. They had gone through a period of weakness right before this era, but at the time of the Exodus, Egypt was undergoing a flowering of culture, their writing was impressive, their science, technology was growing, their religious scope was expanding and their military might exceeded the past. So it was a great time in their history. And in the British Museum in London you can still find artwork from that period that shows the Pharaoh of the time and the people of the time being great and powerful.

So when God chooses to deliver the Israelites from Egypt during this time period, we see that God does not deliver them when Egypt is weak but when Egypt is strong. So God is showing that He is more powerful than a great, powerful nation of the day. So to summarize, these events happen about 1,440 years before Christ, they happen during a time in which Egypt is a very strong nation. And they happen because God has made promises to Abraham to bless his people, to make them numerous, to give them a homeland and to make them a blessing to the nations.

So we see a bit about the setting and about the historical background to the book let's now move on to an outline of the book. There are a lot of ways scholars have divided the book of Exodus for studying purposes. But I want to give you an outline that has 5 parts.

## **THE THEME OF EXODUS: GOD DELIVERS HIS PEOPLE**

The theme of the book as a whole is that God delivers His people. He sets them free, He redeems them from physical and spiritual slavery, oppression, and bondage. This message unfolds, as I said, in 5 parts.

The first part is Exodus chapter 1 to chapter 18. And the main emphasis here is God delivering the Israelites through the Exodus from Egypt. So Exodus 1 to 18 God delivers His people through the Exodus.

The second section of the book is Exodus chapter 19 to 24. That section emphasizes that God delivers them so that they may be a holy people, a kingdom of priests, a people for God's special passion.

Next, the third section of the book is Exodus 25 to 31. Having redeemed the people, and given them the 10 commandments, and given them the understanding of being a holy people, He then describes a holy tribe. He describes priests who will serve the people so that they might know God. Again that is Exodus 25 to 31.

The fourth section of the book is Exodus 32 to 34. In some ways it is a very sad episode. It is an interlude between very exciting passages. In Exodus 32 to 34 we have an incident in which Israel worships another god and puts their entire relationship with God at risk. Moses prays for the people, however, and God forgives them. And after forgiving them, God reveals who He is in a very clear way.

And finally the fifth section of the book is Exodus 35 to 40. And this portion of the book describes a holy place. It describes where Israel will worship as they go through their journeys in the desert on their way to the land God has promised Abraham.

So again five sections: Exodus 1 to 18, which talks about God's delivering the people from Egypt. Exodus 19 to 24, that God delivers them so that they may be a holy people, blessing other nations. Exodus 25 to 31, talks about a holy tribe who will be priests for the people. Exodus 32 to 34, which is a sad interlude in which the people sin against God by worshipping another god. He forgives them at the end of this section. And then Exodus 35 to 40, which describes a holy place that the Lord will choose so that the people might worship Him.

## **God Delivers Israel Out of Egypt (1–18)**

Let's look at the different portions of the book and I will try to emphasize just a few important things. First, Exodus 1 to 18. In the first four chapters of Exodus 1 to 18, we see an emphasis on Israel's enslavement and Moses' call to be their leader. We read in chapter one of Exodus that after Jacob and Joseph die Abraham's heirs multiply in Egypt. In fact they become so numerous that it seems to the Egyptians that the land is filled with them. Their growth makes Egypt nervous so according to 1:8-11 Pharaoh the leader of Egypt decides to enslave the descendants of Abraham. Israel is forced to build store cities for Pharaoh. They no longer have freedom that they had as honored guests during the time of Joseph. They still increase in number despite their horrible situation according to chapter 1:12-14. In other words despite the suffering they are undergoing, God keeps His promise to Abraham to give him descendants.

Feeling threatened however, Pharaoh attempts to kill all the Jewish male babies. But God defeats this plan as well. Abraham will have the descendants he has been promised. But we have to admit that mere survival in Egypt does not fulfill the promise of land. Israel must leave Egypt and return to Canaan. To do this they will need someone to lead them and Exodus 2 introduces this person.

Exodus 2 introduces us to Moses. Frustrated with the continued increase of the Jewish population Pharaoh commands that all Israelite male babies be drowned. Moses' parents hide their son as long as they can but they eventually give up hope. His mother takes a basket, daubs it with tar, puts Moses in this crude little boat and leaves him in

the Nile River according to Exodus 2. Miriam, his sister, stands at a distance to see what will happen. At this point an apparently disastrous thing happens; Pharaoh's own daughter discovers the basket. And of course we expect this woman to kill the baby, but instead she feels sorry for Moses and decides to adopt him. Miriam, who has been watching, is a quick-thinking girl and she offers her mother as a nurse for Moses. When he grows up Moses lives with his adoptive mother according to chapter 2 and verse 10. But this unusual beginning gives us the indication that Moses is marked for greatness.

By the time he is an adult Moses appreciates his heritage. According to chapter 2 verses 11 and 12 he sees an Egyptian beating a Jew and impulsively kills the aggressor. Later on though when he tries to admonish two of his fellow Jews for fighting each other they reject his authority and expose his earlier murder. So afraid for his life, Moses flees to a desert area called Midian, according to Exodus 2:15-7. There he does what most normal people do: he settles down, he has children, he finds work.

But meanwhile Israel remains in slavery and according to 2:23 which I now read "During those many days the king of Egypt died and the people of Israel groaned because of their slavery and cried out for help. Their cry for rescue from slavery came up to God and God heard their groaning and God remembered His covenant with Abraham, with Isaac, and with Jacob. God saw the people of Israel and God knew." God knew their pain, God knew their sorrow and because of His covenant with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, God is about to move on Israel's behalf.

Despite Moses past mistakes God decides to use him to deliver the slaves. According to Exodus 3, Moses is minding his own business, tending sheep in the desert when he notices a bush on fire that does not burn up. When he turns to observe this strange phenomena, God tells him to take off his shoes because the place where he is standing is holy ground, a place where God has appeared. The Lord then informs Moses that Israel's slavery has lasted long enough, Moses must demand that Pharaoh release the Jews. This command seems pretty ridiculous to Moses, he protests and offers reasons why he should not confront Pharaoh.

First he reminds God that he has no qualifications for the job. He asks in 3:11, "How can I bring the Israelites out of Egypt?" In response, in verse 12, God promises to be with him at all times. And even pledges to bring the people to the place where He and Moses is talking. This doesn't satisfy Moses.

Second Moses claims he doesn't know God's name. He asks "Who shall I say has sent you" and God says "I Am what I Am" and then identifies Himself as the covenant God that revealed Himself to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Let me read this passage to you, Exodus 3:13: "Then Moses said to God, 'If I come to the people of Israel and say to them the God of your fathers has sent me and they ask me what is His name, what shall I say to them?' God said to Moses 'I Am who I Am' and He said, 'Say this to the people of

Israel: "I Am has sent me to you." God also said to Moses, 'Say this to the people of Israel, "The Lord, the God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob has sent me to you. This is My name forever and thus I am to be remembered throughout all generations." Go gather the elders of Israel together and say to them, "The Lord, the God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, of Isaac, and of Jacob has appeared to me saying I have observed you and what has been done to you in Egypt and I promise I will bring you up out of the affliction of Egypt to the land of the Canaanites.'"

It's important for us to notice that God says, "This is My name forever 'I Am.'" Scholars of course have discussed what this odd phrase means, but I think it's important for us to realize that at the very least it means God is forever. He has existence in and of Himself. He has no ending. He has no beginning. He is the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. The God who endures through all generations. The God who keeps promises because of His covenant with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. And we know from reading Genesis He is the only God. He is the God who has created the world. He is the God who sustains the world. He is the Person who judges sin. He is the Person who offers redemption. This is the God that Moses is to serve, this is who God is.

Despite this revelation Moses remains unwilling. He has a third excuse or a third question. In 4:1 he asks "What if they don't believe me?" In response God gives him three miracles to perform, here they are: turning a stick into a snake, making his skin leprous, and changing water into blood, according to 4:1-9. Still unconvinced Moses next says he is a poor speaker in 4:10. The Lord tells Moses He will tell him what to say. Finally Moses simply asks God to send someone else in 4:13. At this plea the Lord explodes. God promises that Aaron, Moses' brother, will help him speak. And He angrily sends Moses off to his task.

So a reluctant Moses goes to the elders of Israel. And much to his surprise they believe and are ready to follow his leadership. But God says something very important and very difficult. He says in chapter 4 and verse 21, "When you go back to Egypt see that you do before Pharaoh all the miracles that I will put in your power. But I will harden his heart so he will not let the people go." Moses learns that his task will be a difficult one. That he will have many trials and troubles as he attempts to lead the people. Pharaoh will not willingly let these slaves go.

So at the end of chapter 4 Israel has a leader however uncertain and untested. And they have God's promise that they will be set free, still they lack the means to gain their freedom. God has said Pharaoh will be stubborn. It remains unclear how they will be redeemed. How the Exodus will occur and thus how Abraham's heirs will receive their covenant and secure their land.

In chapters 5 to 18 we find out how God does lead the people out. Things don't start very well. In chapter 5 armed with the peoples support, Moses and Aaron meet Pharaoh. They confront him with the news that Yahweh, their God, commands him to let My people go so they may celebrate a festival to Me in the desert (5:1). Pharaoh's response set the stage for chapters 5 to 15. He asks "Who is Yahweh?"

Let me stop and say Yahweh is the biblical name for God. In the past people have pronounced it 'Jehovah' or some other variation. But I will use the word Yahweh as the name, this is God's personal name, His covenant name when He revealed Himself to Israel.

And Pharaoh says "Who is Yahweh that I should obey His commands to let Israel go?" He has heard of many gods. In fact there are dozens and dozens of gods in Egypt. But he didn't know Yahweh. He has not heard of the Lord. Pharaoh declares in 5:2, "I do not know Yahweh and I most certainly will not let Israel go." This thinly veiled challenge gives Yahweh the chance to introduce Himself to Pharaoh. It also allows the Lord to demonstrate His power and His love for Israel. Soon enough Pharaoh will know all about Yahweh. He will know Yahweh's name. So for now he is free to oppress the Jews even more. So like his predecessor he makes life harder. Prior to this time the Israelites were making bricks and he would give them the straw that they needed to make the bricks. Now he tells them he will not even do that for them, but that they must produce the same number of bricks.

The Israelites then are angry with Moses and he protests to God at the end of chapter 5. But though things have not gone well so far, God is hardly discouraged. He instructs Moses to tell the people again that they will be set free (6:1-8). The people are so discouraged that they hardly hear Moses. So, since Pharaoh has refused to release Israel and the people are very discouraged, Moses offers further persuasion. God sends him to begin a series of miracles and plagues. These calamities will show Pharaoh, slowly and painfully, that he will learn who Yahweh is and he will do what Yahweh says.

Each plague that follows reveals a little more of God's authority and each one also pushes Pharaoh closer to freeing Israel. But sadly, only death on a large scale will finally convince him to release them. At first Pharaoh's magicians can duplicate Moses' signs. He turns the Nile into blood which kills fish and makes the water impossible to drink. But the magicians can do the same, according to chapter 7. Thus despite the hardship of the water turned to blood, Pharaoh refuses to let Israel go. A week later, according to chapter 8, the Lord causes frogs to cover the land, but the sorcerers can do the same. Next God sends huge swarms of gnats. This time the magicians cannot repeat the sign. They tell Pharaoh in 8:16-19 the plague is from God, but he refuses to listen, so the inflictions intensify. Flies fill the land, except where the Jews live. So through this means

Yahweh shows the disasters are not quirks of nature. He is distinguishing between Israel and their oppressors.

Now Pharaoh agrees to let the peoples go to take a holiday to sacrifice to Yahweh only to break his promise when the plague ends. In chapter 9, Yahweh sends a plague on Egypt's livestock yet keeps Israel's livestock safe. Pharaoh remains stubborn even when God afflicts Egypt with boils and with hail, according to chapter 9. Sensing that he is losing this battle, Pharaoh begins to bargain with Moses when he hears that locusts will eat what the hail did not ruin. He first says that only Israel's men may celebrate the festival (10:10-11).

Moses rejects this compromise so the locusts eat everything in the land. After this, darkness covers Egypt except again where Israel lives. And again Pharaoh says that the Jews can leave but this time says you cannot take your animals. Since Israel wants to offer sacrifices to Yahweh Moses again refuses to agree. Totally frustrated, in chapter 10 verses 27 to 28 Pharaoh warns Moses that he will kill Moses if he ever approaches Pharaoh again. So every compromise has failed and one awful plague remains and it will free Israel.

According to chapter 11, every first born male will die causing Egypt to demand that Israel leave. In one horrible night God will demonstrate His authority over Pharaoh and Pharaoh's magicians and all of Pharaoh's gods. According to chapter 12, Israel's children will be spared death because their parents will sacrifice a lamb and put some of its blood on the front of their home. Because of this blood, God will pass over or spare Israel. And to remember this deliverance forever the nation is commanded to celebrate a Passover ceremony every year as a permanent rule (12:14).

During this annual observance they will eat unleavened bread to remember their hurried departure from Egypt. They will eat bitter herbs to recall how bitter the bondage was that they suffered. Because the Passover begins Israel's national life, its celebration begins each New Year. This observance allows parents to share their faith with their children and to teach them what God has done. So this great holy day is intended to remind Israel of God's love for them and to do so on a year by year, permanent basis.

And the great day of death comes. Egypt's firstborn sons and all their firstborn cattle die. And the nation falls into great grief. Pharaoh orders Israel away. And in chapters 12 and 13 they leave the land. God tells them He will take them along the desert road towards the Red Sea so they won't have to fight any battles so soon after deliverance according to chapter 13. Chapter 14 states Pharaoh chases the people with 600 chariots and traps them at the Red Sea. The Lord commands Moses to stretch out his hands over the waters, see chapter 14 verse 21. When Moses stretches out his hand God parts the

sea and His people go through on dry land. Finally, God allows the Egyptians to pursue Israel and God drowns them as the waters go back to their normal place.

God has delivered His people and they celebrate this deliverance with a song in chapter 15 verses 1 to 21. To just highlight a couple of the verses 15:11 says, "Who is like You O Lord among the gods? Who is like You, majestic in holiness. Awesome in glorious deeds, doing wonders. You stretched out Your right hand, the earth swallowed them. You have led in Your covenant love the people who You have redeemed. You guided them by Your strength to Your holy abode. The peoples have heard, they trembled. There is no one like the Lord. There is no other God. He is the one who has delivered His people."

His people will need to be sustained in the desert, though, because they are living in a very arid place. So in chapter 16 the Bible tells us that God provides bread for them every day through a special means. He gives them manna from heaven that they may eat it every day. In chapter 17 He provides water for the people in a miraculous fashion. They also defeat armies that come out against them. And by the end of chapter 18, the people have gone out into the desert area to the Mount Sinai region which is where God first appeared to Moses. God has kept His promise to Moses. He has brought Moses back to the place where He first called him. He has done everything that He said He would do.

### **God delivers Israel so they can be a holy people (19–24)**

Why has God done these things? What is His purpose in calling the people out? We come to a very important section in chapters 19 to 24, the second major segment of the book. Chapter 19 in verse 1 says that the people have come to the wilderness of Sinai and there the people encamped by the mountain while Moses went up to God. Here are the words of chapter 19 verse 3 and following, "The Lord called him out of the mountain saying thus you shall say to the house of Jacob and tell the people of Israel you yourselves have seen what I did to the Egyptians and how I bore you on eagle's wings and brought you to Myself. Now therefore if you will indeed obey My voice and keep My covenant you shall be My treasured possessions among all people. For all the earth is Mine and you shall be to Me a kingdom of priest and a holy nation. These are the words you shall speak to the people of Israel." These verses are very, very important for understanding the whole Bible.

You recall that God holds the whole world accountable to Himself through the covenant with Noah. You noted through the covenant with Abraham that God has promised to bless all nations through this family. We have already learned that God is the creator in Genesis 1 and 2 and so it shouldn't surprise us in 19:3 that the Lord says to the people "You have seen what I did to the Egyptians. You have seen how I delivered you. You

have seen how I bore you on eagles wings, brought you to Myself. You see the relationship we have. You see all that I have done. Now I am about to give you a covenant. I am about to give you the standards of our relationship. These standards will have blessings for keeping them. There will be consequences for breaking them. But you Israel are supposed to be a kingdom of priests and a holy nation. You are supposed to be a priest for all the other nations. Your land will be in the middle of the earth so that you might minister to the whole earth.”

In the New Testament, in the book of 1 Peter, Peter notes for his own audience over 1,400 years later that Christians have the same responsibility. He writes to his people, a persecuted people redeemed by the blood of the Lamb, Jesus, chapter 2 verse 9, “But you are chosen race. A royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for His own possession.” And Peter goes on then to explain what Israel is always supposed to be, “that you may proclaim the excellencies of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light.” God is calling Israel here to be light to the nations, to be a kingdom of priests.

What are the standards they are to keep? The most famous of these we find in chapter 20. God is making a covenant with them and He gives them some very basic commands. The most famous of these we find in chapter 20 verses 1 to 17, these are the Ten Commandments. The Ten Commandments can be divided into two broad categories. Each of the first four statements governs Israel’s relationship to God. While the last 6 focus on societal issues. Both emphases are vital for the new nation’s survival.

The basis of the covenant also has two parts: the identity of the Lord and His past action on Israel’s behalf. Because Yahweh is the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob He has ended their slavery. So God’s faithfulness and love are foundational to the standards the covenant professes. His relationship with them leads to the standards. The standards do not create the relationship. In other words, they will live for Him by faith they do not come into a relationship with Him through works.

To have a proper relationship with God, Israel must abide by four logical principles. Because the Lord delivered them, they must have no God by Yahweh (20:3). There is only one living God so worshipping anyone or anything else is simply foolish.

Second, God prohibits the making of any image of Himself. No part of creation can be used as a picture of the Lord. Other nations used idols as a way of manipulating their deities. But the living God is too great to be captured by any form or figure. He is too powerful to be manipulated so they shouldn’t even try this.

Third, Yahweh’s name, His reputation must be honored. No misuse of God’s name such as through cursing or false teaching or falsely claimed authority can be tolerated.

Fourth, a special day is set aside for rest and honoring God. This Sabbath, this Shabbat, is a day of ceasing labor. We recall that God established a day of rest in the creation account itself. Now He reminds them to have a day to renew covenant commitments free of daily concerns.

So, if Israel obeys God then they will treat one another with respect. They will respect their parents (20:12). They will respect life, they will not commit murder (20:13). They will respect marriage, so they will avoid adultery (20:14). They will respect property so they will not steal (20:15). They will respect their neighbors and their neighbor's reputation so they will not bear false witness against them (20:16). And finally, they will respect God's rights to rule them, so they will not covet what their neighbor has, they will not covet what God has. A desire to have someone else's spouse, servants or possessions will be avoided. The people will not covet (20:17).

After the Ten Commandments, the Lord then explains to the people several case laws. God prohibits idols to be worshipped in chapter 20. God explains how people may be indentured servants in chapter 21. God explains how stolen and abused property requires restitution by the party wronging others in chapter 22. We can list several others but you can read them at your leisure and see that each of these are connected in some way with the Ten Commandments.

They in some way help the people to see what the Ten Commandments mean in daily living. We come to chapter 24 and the Lord asks the people to decide will they accept His offer of a covenant. Will they accept the principles of fairness to God and fairness to one another? Will they believe in God and follow His word? In 24:3 the people say everything the Lord has said we will do. Moses writes down the commands and the case laws to make a permanent record. So we do see Moses writing as I said in the introduction to the first five books of the Bible. Israel plans to obey God and a covenant is established.

### **Priests that Will Serve God and Lead in Keeping the Covenant (25–31)**

In Exodus 25 to 31, the third major section of the book, the Lord sets apart Aaron, Moses' brother, to be the high priest of Israel. And Aaron's sons are to follow their father in this work. The priests of Israel are to take care of the worship site, they are to teach the people the word of God, they are to help the people with the sacrifices they will make, they are to pray for the people, and in general help the people in their relationship with God. And as we will talk about as we study the book of Leviticus, they are to make sacrifices to help the people be right with God. So chapters 25 through 31 are really about having priests to lead the new people of God in their keeping of their covenant with God that was introduced in chapters 19 to 24.

## Covenant Breaking and Covenant Renewal (32–34)

In the fourth major section of the book of Exodus, chapters 32 to 34, we see covenant breaking and covenant renewal. The Lord calls Moses to Mount Sinai to give him further information to share with the people. And Moses is gone for several days.

Meanwhile, on Mount Sinai, the people wonder what has happened to Moses and they decide to worship another god. The people encourage Aaron who is supposed to be their priest to help them understand the Lord, they ask him to make gods who will go before them (32:1). Without arguing Aaron, who Moses told will be the people's main priestly leader, makes an idol for them. He collects gold from the group and fashions an idol casts in the shape of a calf (32:4).

Forgetting all that the Lord has done, they declare "These are the gods, O Israel, that brought you out of Egypt." They've already broken the first 2 of the 10 commandments, they made an idol and worshipped it. And this so called worship soon turns into an orgy complete with gluttony, drunkenness and immorality (32:5-6).

God informs Moses what the people are doing and tells Moses that His anger is burning and He is ready to destroy the people. But Moses prays for the people, he intercedes for them, that is he puts himself and his prayers between the Lord and the people. And God decides not to destroy, He responds positively to Moses' prayer. When Moses gets to the camp in chapters 32 and 33 he is angry at what he sees and he punishes the people and God actually removes some of the people, He kills them.

Moses prays in 33:7-23 that God would give the people another chance and the Lord agrees. Moses renews the covenant on behalf of the people, the covenant that was broken through their sins and God begins again with the people. And as He does so He makes an important revelation about who He is. Moses is wondering what sort of God he is serving. God has delivered the people, He has judged the people, and yet He forgives the people. So he asks the Lord for an explanation of who He is.

And we see this explanation in 34:5 and I read it: "The Lord descended in the cloud and stood with him with Moses there and proclaimed the name of the Lord. The Lord passed before him and proclaimed, 'The Lord, the Lord (or Yahweh, Yahweh) is a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness. Keeping steadfast love for thousands, forgiving iniquity transgression and sin but who will by no means clear the guilty. Visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children and the children's children to the third and the fourth generation.' And Moses quickly bowed his head toward the earth and he worshipped."

These verses are quoted and reflected upon in several subsequent biblical books. You will find them reflected on in Numbers, Deuteronomy. You will find them reflected in

Jonah, in Joel, in Psalms and in the New Testament book of James. This is God's great self revelation that will be explained, lived out as the Scriptures unfold. God is merciful and gracious, He is slow to anger. It is not His desire to judge, it is not His first impulse to punish. Rather His first impulse is to wait and to call for repentance and to allow people time to come to Him. He abounds in steadfast love and faithfulness. That means He keeps covenants, He keeps all promises that He makes. And He is keeping steadfast love, covenant love for thousands. And that probably means thousands of generations, forgiving transgression and sin.

But lest we think God is a pushover, that God has no standards He tells Moses He will by no means clear the guilty. God does judge sin and He judges as many generations as it takes visiting the iniquity to the children, the children's children to the third and fourth generation. Now the Bible has already made it clear that God does not judge people for their parents' sin but only for their own sin, so this passage is really about how thoroughly God will judge sin but it is not His first impulse. He does not punish us for the sins of others. He does not judge us for what our fathers and mothers do. The passage rather says that if I sin the way my father did, God will indeed not clear the guilty. But never forget God's main impulse is to be patient and kind and forgiving and loving. It is not His first impulse to judge but He is willing to judge and the guilty will not get away with their sins.

### **Building the Tabernacle (35–40)**

So at the end of chapter 34 God has renewed the covenant with Israel, He has revealed Himself more fully to them. And the people are rather happy about this. Chapters 35 to 40 the book draws to a close with an account of how the Lord directs the people to build what the Bible calls a tabernacle for God. Now what this is is a portable worship center. It is like a great tent with poles that they can take down and set up as they travel.

At the center of their worship were sacrifices that were to be made to the Lord so as you came from the outside of the place you would come into a place where you could offer sacrifices to God that are described in the book of Leviticus. And in the interior of the area there was a closed off place where only the priests could go and the Lord's Ark, a box that represented His presence among the people, a place where the priest will drop blood once a year, was kept.

So you had increasing intensity of holiness of importance of reverence as you came in. You came inside the tabernacle area and you could offer a sacrifice. Then there was a little building set up inside the area that only the priest could go and inside that little area there was a place where only the high priest could go and that only once a year as we will see. But the tabernacle was set up in the center of the camp so that they might remember that God is at the heart of everything and that God is present among them.

When they marched out and broke camp the priest would take down the tabernacle, they would pack it up and the tabernacle and its contents particularly the Ark of the Covenant, the box that symbolized God's presence, led the people out. So they followed the Lord, He dwelt in their midst, and as they gathered all the materials that were needed to make the tabernacle the people gave so much that finally Moses had to tell them they had enough and to stop giving.

And at the end of the book of Exodus in 40:34-38 it tells us that the glory of the Lord, His presence, filled the tabernacle and His presence was so intense Moses and the priest were unable to enter in because the glory of the Lord filled the tabernacle. God lives in their midst. God is present among them and the people are back on track serving a forgiving God who is compassionate and gracious and forgiving and yet one that they have already learned will not clear the guilty.

## **Lesson 4 ■ Leviticus**

### **INTRODUCTION**

When we come to the book of Leviticus, we have a continued emphasis on God's holiness and His work with His people. We found out in chapters 25 through 31 that the Lord has called priests to minister to His people who are themselves a kingdom of priests to the nations. We learn in chapters 35 to 40 of Exodus that these priests will minister in the midst of the people at a tabernacle which is a portable worship center. In Leviticus we move on to find out what these priests will do and what God expects of the people.

The book of Leviticus stresses the fact that God is holy and His people are to be holy. What does this term 'holy' mean? Basically it means 'set apart,' set apart for a special purpose, unique, unusual. So Israel is holy because it is set apart to be God's people, His kingdom of priests. Yahweh is holy because He is set apart to be the creator, the God, the only God. He is also set apart morally, He is different than people, He is completely sinless and flawless and has no imperfection. So Israel is to be holy in that they will do what God has asked them to do. They will be set apart from the world; they won't act like the world; they won't believe like the world; they will not live like the world. So they are to be holy even as God is also holy.

The book of Leviticus is set in the wilderness in the desert area where the people are living. It is about the same time as the book of Exodus in fact we find out later in the book of Numbers a whole year has not yet passed since they were delivered and the day of Passover has occurred.

### **SECTIONS**

The book of Leviticus unfolds in the following several sections. First chapters 1 through 7 describe the sacrifices a holy people will offer to their holy God. Next, Leviticus 8 through 10 describes the holy priests who will offer the sacrifices with the holy people to the holy God. The third section of Leviticus is chapters 11 to 16. This section is about what it means to be ceremonially clean or unclean and we will need to define what clean and unclean is as we discuss that section. The fourth part of Leviticus, I think, is simply one chapter. At the heart of Leviticus, at the middle portion, the middle point of the first five books of the Bible, we have a description of an observance called the 'Day of Atonement.' The one day of the year in which God would receive a sacrifice to

forgive all the sins of the people for that entire year so that everyone who participates and believes would receive forgiveness. The fifth section is Leviticus 17 to 27. This section describes a holy society living for a holy God, being His priests in the world.

The book of Leviticus is really a utopian book. It really describes an ideal society. In the book of Leviticus we see what a society would be like if it lived fully for the Lord, always confessing its sins, always having faithful ministers and priests, always taking care of the physical needs of the poor. Always being clean and pure sexually, always protecting the poor and the weak and the needy. Always being an example in the middle of the earth of what a nation can be that fully serves the Lord. Now unfortunately these societal principles were never really enforced in Israel and so the world never got to see what this sort of ideal society would look like. But it gives us an example of what God can do in the world, what He wants to do through His people. It also gives us a down payment on what it will be like when we are with God forever and all things are set right.

## **CONTENTS**

### **Sacrifices (1–7)**

On to the contents of the book. The first seven chapters deal with sacrifices. Israel must offer five types of sacrifice. Each one has its own specific purpose and its unique form of presentation. Three types deal with sins that have been committed while two allow worshipers to express joy and gratitude to God. Allowances are made for poor members of the covenant community. Their sacrifices won't cost as much as what wealthier Israelites can offer. The three types of offerings that cover the people's sin are: burnt offerings, sin offerings and guilt offerings.

A burnt offering is given for general sins (1:3-17). Apparently, burnt offerings were a confession of general sinfulness, not unlike the phrase we use from the Lord's Prayer 'forgive us our debts.' We often ask the Lord to forgive us of our sins without us offering a great specific list of those sins. A burnt offering was offered on a regular basis so that people could show that they knew that we sin every day and that we are generally genuinely sinful persons. People who are poor may bring birds as their sacrifice while those who can afford to do so bring a male from their herd or flock. I want to emphasize that sin is costly and the sacrifices show this. It would not have been cheap for people in an agricultural economy to give up an animal like this. So their very offering of the burnt offering would show the seriousness of the sin and how seriously they take God forgiving them.

Sin offerings are brought, according to chapter 4 and verse 1, when anyone sins by mistake and does what is forbidden in any of the Lord's commands. This sacrifice, the sin offering, addresses specific, not general, sins that people commit. Despite being done by mistake rather than by open rebellion against God and His word such sin still has a negative effect. They are still a violation of God's commands and thus a sacrifice is required. But unlike the burnt offering, the sin offering is for specific types of sins. Most of this offering is burnt up but a sin offering part of it can be eaten by the priests according to chapter 6. So you see that the priests, in part, earn their living off the sacrifices the people brought. Of course, if the priest wanted to be dishonest this system could be very corrupt so we need good and holy priests for this system to work.

Guilt offerings cover specific sins committed by mistake that harm a neighbor. When this situation occurs the worshipper must make restitution to the neighbor first and then bring the same animal as in the sin offering. I think it's important for us to remember that some sins that we commit do harm others and we need to make restitution. One needs to give back what has been taken from the person. So those are the first three offerings: burnt, sin and guilt for people's sin.

The next two offerings are about expressing gratitude to God. A grain offering and a peace offering are really about praise and thanksgiving. Part of a grain offering is to be burned up and a priest may eat the rest. The peace offerings are to be male or female animals that are treated like sin offerings. These sacrifices, though, the grain and the peace offering, are offered in hopes that God will continue to bless the people and as a way of thanking the priests for their work.

Now whenever a sacrifice is made a set ritual is observed. First, the animal or object is presented for inspection at the entrance of the worship area. Second, the worshipper places a hand on the animal's head, which means the person claims responsibility its death. Again, in an agricultural community where you make your living off the land and off animals as quiet frankly my family did when I was growing up, the loss of an animal is a very personal thing. So the worshipper places a hand on the animal's head and claims responsibility for its death. Third, the worshipper kills the sacrifice, the priest doesn't do this. He will instruct the worshipper but the worshipper kills the sacrifice. This act also forces the individual to see the consequences of sin. Fourth, the priest then takes some of the animal's blood and sprinkles it on the altar and the appropriate portion is destroyed and the appropriate portion is saved for the priest usages.

Now I want to note several theological truths emerge in Leviticus 1 to 7. First, God forgives sin because of these sacrifices. The people's obedience to God's direction concerning sacrifice is part of the covenant relationship. It's God's way of saying you may be forgiven if you will by faith bring what I ask and do as I have directed. Second,

these offerings are specific and personal. Excuse making and blaming others for individual transgression – that is eliminated. Third, this system demonstrates God's fairness – rich and poor alike are equal before God and both can afford the sacrifices God requires. Fourth, each of these elements points to God's mercy. Regardless of the sin a loving, covenant God stands ready to forgive. God knew from the beginning that people would break the commandments He set forth. It is not alright that they sin but because He is merciful and gracious and abounding in loving-kindness, He offers a way that people may be forgiven. So while He knew they would sin and that sin is not alright, He does not expect the people to be sinless, to be flawless moral beings. He knows their weakness. He knows their sinfulness. And He makes a system so that their sin might not stand between them and God.

### **Priests Are Set Aside for Covenant Worship (8–10)**

In Leviticus 8 to 10, priests are set aside for covenant worship. Priests are mentioned many times in Exodus and Leviticus. Now I want to remind you that Aaron is the high priest, the chief priest, and his sons are to follow him. Aaron and his sons and indeed the whole tribe of Levi, one of the 12 tribes of Israel, are to be Israel's high priests, priests, and priestly assistants. It is interesting to note as you read these passages all the different things that the priestly group did. Again some of them were handling animals. Some of them were setting up and taking down the sanctuary. Some of them were carrying animal entrails and blood if I may say though so away from the place. Some of them were teaching the word of God. Some of them were praying with the people. There were many, many roles.

And to begin this work, Moses ordains or sets aside priests, makes the priests holy setting them apart for the work of God according to chapter 8. And without delay Aaron and his sons begin completing their tasks. They offer sacrifices and lead worship according to chapter 9 and the Lord approves of what they do. In chapter 10 we find out how serious it is that people would do the work of the priest appropriately and according to God's ways.

In chapter 10 Nadab and Abihu, Aaron's sons, offer what the Bible calls unauthorized fire before the Lord contrary to what He commanded (10:1). Because of this error, fire comes out from the Lord and kills them. Moses tells his brother that this event proves the seriousness of God's rules about priestly conduct. None of God's commands is trivial or open to human innovation. The people who lead the covenant nation's worship must have total respect for the Lord and the covenant He has made with Israel. It is extremely important that leaders understand the seriousness, the importance, the gravity of what they are doing. Whenever I lead a worship service I need to be aware of how important it is to do things God's way. To do things with reverence and respect. To

do things as He has set them forth in His word. It is not up to me to decide how we will run things. It is not up to me to innovate. It is up to me to be obedient.

## Clean and Unclean (11–15)

The third section of Leviticus is Leviticus 11 to 15. With the priesthood, the sacrificial system, and the worship center in place Leviticus 11 to 15 discusses situations and conditions that make what is usually translated as ‘make a person unclean.’

What does unclean mean? Well, unfortunately we don’t have good English equivalence for our translation. There is no problem with the Hebrew texts it’s just that a matter that English doesn’t have the necessary words or at least not a single word. But unclean really means a variety of things. It can mean that it is inappropriate for someone to come to worship. So we read in the text that if someone is sick and contagious it is inappropriate for them to come to worship. Now of course we know that even today where we have fear of contagion and outbreak and flu and all sorts of things sometimes we simply have to isolate people who are ill. So sometimes unclean means it is inappropriate for the person to come.

Other times it means they are excused from participating in community life. Such persons are relieved of the responsibilities of participating depending on what the problem is. For instance, we read that a woman who has had a baby is not required to come to worship. She is not required to come for six weeks if she has a boy baby and 12 weeks if she has a girl baby. We know that it is safer for babies to be at home with their mothers and to be able to grow and to get stronger. And for the mother to recover from childbirth we know it’s important sometimes for smaller babies and oftentimes female babies are smaller, for them to be protected and nourished. And so we shouldn’t read in the Bible where it says a woman is unclean that they thought birth was dirty and that giving birth to a boy is dirty and giving birth to a girl was twice as dirty. What we need to realize is that unclean here means that the woman is not required to appear, which basically means she has a maternity leave.

There are other things that can make someone unclean: you can sin against God, you can reject the Lord, you can break the Sabbath, you could do all sorts of things and until you repented you were not to come into the sanctuary. So you were morally defiled. So just to review, unclean means inappropriate for a person to come due to illness or some other difficulty. They are excused from community life for a time because of their situation. Or, in fact, they are morally unclean, they are not right with God and have the wrong attitude and are not seeking forgiveness.

There are a lot of things in chapters 11 to 15 that puzzle us as about why something is unclean and why it is not. We are particularly aren’t sure as to why some animals are

clean or unclean or why it is inappropriate for them to eat them. So there are several things that we are not quite sure about. But we can be sure God is protecting the community from epidemic, He is protecting them from exhaustion and infant mortality and He is trying to protect them from hypocrisy and moral corruption. This is what the text means by 'unclean.'

## Day of Atonement (16)

The fourth section of Leviticus is chapter 16 and this is one of the most interesting and important chapters in the Old Testament. We might put it this way: there is a nagging question remaining about the sacrificial system. Israel has the basic standards of the covenant, they have a place to worship and they have priests to lead that worship. Their sins are forgiven by a set of sacrifices and they know what specific circumstances make them unclean. But what if they fail to offer appropriate sacrifices when they sin? What if they are slack in their devotion to God? How can they renew their relationship with Him? The answer is in chapter 16.

Once a year Aaron must offer sacrifices to cleanse the priests, the tabernacle and the people (16:14-23). Let me repeat that: once a year, cleanse the priest, cleanse the tabernacle, and cleanse the people. Then God will forgive whatever sins have been committed during the previous year (16:21-22).

This Day of Atonement ceremony unfolds in four stages. First, as worshippers stand outside the tabernacle Aaron offers a sin offering for himself and his household. Second, he slaughters a goat as a sin offering for the people and remember that a sin offering is for specific sin. Third, he uses some of the blood from the bull and the goat to cleanse ceremonially the worship area. So so far he has cleansed the priests, himself, and the people and the worship area. Fourth, he places his hand on a live goat's head and confesses the people's sin. This act transfers the sins of the people to the goat. Then he has the animal taken far into the desert where it dies.

Let me read to you Leviticus 16:21 and following, the high point of this ceremony, "And Aaron shall lay both his hands on the head of the live goat and confess over it all the iniquities of the people of Israel and all their transgressions, all their sins. And he shall put them [that is the sins] on the head of the goat and send it away by the hand of a man in readiness. The goat shall bear all their iniquities on itself to a remote area and he shall let the goat go free into the wilderness."

The chapter goes on and says in verse 30, "For on that day shall atonement be made for you to cleanse you. You shall be clean before the Lord for all your sins." Atonement means that sin is covered. It is removed out of the sight of God and the people are forgiven. Regardless of the nature of their sins, God forgives the people.

This Day of Atonement has tremendous symbolic significance. Its comprehensive nature reveals God's power and love. Furthermore, the priests rare entry into the holy of holies emphasizes Israel's own commitment to the covenant. And finally the drama of the goat going into the wilderness provides an accurate picture of how God forgives sins, they go away from His sight, they are seen no more. Once covered the Lord acts as if all transgressions no longer exist. The God of the covenant offers full pardon, total forgiveness to the people of the covenant.

Later on in the New Testament in the book of Hebrews we read that God has sent Jesus Christ to be the sacrifice for our sins. And that His sacrifice is superior to this Day of Atonement. Why is it superior? Because the Day of Atonement, as wonderful as it was, was offered every year. The sacrifices that were offered for the sins, the burnt offering, the sin offering, the guilt offering, they were continually offered throughout the year leading up to the Day of Atonement.

Jesus is superior in that all sins, once for all, are forgiven in His single comprehensive sacrifice for us. The people of Israel had a great forgiveness. God gave them sacrifices; He gave them the Day of Atonement. He gave them prayers, He gave them a place to worship, He gave them priests to help them worship, He gave them a great deliverance. He gave them marvelous miracles. And He gave them His word. Christ is greater not because those things were bad or weak or terrible. But because He is even better, He is God's living word. He is God's final sacrifice.

As great as all these things we have been studying are, as the Bible unfolds, it tells us Jesus Christ is even greater. As Paul puts it "If the glory of God that Moses saw in the wilderness and on the mountain when he met with God was too much for him to bear, how much greater is the full glory of God in Christ?" Christ is greater. These passages that we have just been mentioning Leviticus 16 and Leviticus 1 to 7 remind us that God has laid all of our sins, for all time, on Christ. That as great as what He is doing in the book of Leviticus it will be even greater when Christ comes.

## **Israel as a Holy People (17–27)**

The last section of the book, Leviticus 17 to 27 emphasizes Israel as a holy people. God is not content to allow Israel simply to avoid sin. He tells the people how they can move towards moral excellence. And I want to just hit a few high points of this section.

In chapter 18, it's personal holiness, especially as it relates to sexual purity, that is the topic. Now I just want to summarize a few things. Israel is to be a holy nation that is set apart, different. Different from what? Well, hear the words of 18:1-5, "The Lord spoke to Moses saying speak to the people of Israel and say to them I am Yahweh your God. You shall not do as they do in the land of Egypt where you lived and you shall not do as

they do in the land of Canaan to which I am bring you. You shall not walk in their statutes. You shall follow My rules and keep My statutes and walk in them I am the Lord your God.”

So what He is trying to say is you know what happened in Egypt, you know the immorality that was there. And where you are going, to the land of Canaan, to the land that I am going to give to the people of Abraham just as I promised, they do all sorts of immorality there. They do the sort of things that God now warns Israel not to do.

What does He tell them not to do? In chapter 18, He tells them that they must not commit incest. We call that sexual abuse. You are not to use your children, your close relatives as sexual objects. Children and other family members are off limits sexually. Now, of course, we have an epidemic in the United States at least, of all sorts of child sexual abuse. That’s the way the Egyptians lived, that’s the way Canaanites lived, that’s not the way God’s people are to live.

He also mentions other sexual immorality. He talks about not committing bestiality, sexual acts with an animal. He speaks against homosexuality, that is sexual acts with someone of the same gender. And of course He also talks about adultery, the most common sexual sin of all. That is sexual relationships outside of your marriage, sexual relations with someone else’s spouse. And so, the Bible has this comprehensive approach to sexual sin and says that’s the way people who don’t know Yahweh live. You, however, are to be different, to be holy and to protect people from such sins.

In chapter 19, the key to obeying these commands are given to us. In 19:17, the text says, “You shall not hate your brother in your heart. But you shall reason frankly with your neighbor lest you incur sin because of him. You shall not take vengeance or bear a grudge against the sons of you own people but you shall love your neighbor as yourself. I am Yahweh.”

Eventually Jesus is going to say that love of God and love of neighbor are the key to all the Ten Commandments and all the commandments in the Scripture. And Moses is commanded to tell the people half of this truth right here, love your neighbor as yourself. You will not steal his goods, steal his wife, steal his reputation, etcetera, if you love your neighbor.

And as the passage goes on, the chapters go on, Moses tells the people not to engage in child sacrifice in chapter 20. No human sacrifice is to be done. In chapter 23 and following, he tells the people to keep certain feasts to the Lord. To use their time as a way of giving witness to other nations of what they believe about the Lord. In chapter 23 he reminds them to keep the Sabbath, one day a week for the Lord to show that He is important. To show that money, and commerce and the economy are not the most important things to the people of God.

They are also to keep the Passover. They are to remind themselves each year that God delivers them from bondage and from death and from sin. They are to gather for a Feast of First Fruits. This feast is to remind them that God is the Lord of nature. That He is the one who gives them what they need. They are to gather for the Feasts of Weeks and the Feasts of Trumpets to remind themselves that they are the people of God and that again He gives them the harvest. They are to observe the Day of Atonement that we have just been describing. And they are to gather as the people of God in the Feasts of Booths to remind themselves that they are the nation of the Lord.

In chapter 25, the Lord takes the principle of Sabbath of rest to a new level. He mentions a Sabbath year in which the people are to rest and they are to forgive debts and they are to use what has grown in the previous six years. In other words, the whole society will replenish itself, relationships will be restored, the land will be restored, and the people will have time for the Lord and one another. And they are to have a year of Jubilee, that is the fiftieth year; they are to have a year of release and liberty. The land is to lie fallow, debts are to be forgiven, the land is to return to its original owners. Servants are to be set free. In other words what God is saying the whole economy will get a rest, everything will be reset, families will be replenished, the land will be restored. The economy itself will be readjusted. God gives forgiveness and freedom to the people once a generation then.

Chapter 25 also reminds them to treat the poor kindly to make sure that the hired servant and the resident alien has his or her rights, to make certain that the rich are not favored over the poor. And in chapter 26, in a magnificent passage, the Lord tells the people that He will bless them beyond measure if they will obey Him and be His kingdom of priests, His holy nation in the land in this manner. If they will receive His word and believe it, if they will offer the sacrifices He has commanded they will receive forgiveness. If they will obey Him, He will bless them among all the nations so that the nations will see that the Lord reigns over all.

But if they disobey He will ask them to repent and come back to Him. If they continue to disobey He will discipline them through natural disasters, through failures in battle. And if they continue to persist in their rebellion, they will eventually lose the land and be driven from it until they realize that they have sinned against the Lord and come back to Him and He will restore them.

Leviticus 26 is foundational then to the rest of the Bible because this passage and as we will see in Deuteronomy 27 and 28 remind the people of the covenant what the Lord will do for them and His desire to bless them. But it also reminds them that if they sin against Him, worship other gods, turn aside from His standards, cease to give a witness to the nations about who He is, cease to treat one another with fairness and respect, He

will bring disciplinary action against them until such time as they either come to their senses, turn back to Him, or He drives them from the land.

## **CONCLUSION**

Well, at the end of the book of Leviticus we should be feeling pretty good about Israel's prospects. Israel possesses a comprehensive statement about what God expects from them and they know what He has done for them. They know the basics of the covenant and they know its finer points. They have a place to worship, leaders to guide worship, and sacrifices that will cover their sin. They have standards that will aide them in living wisely in their relationship with God and one another, and they now have a national identity. They are Yahweh's holy people set apart to bless the nations in the middle of the earth. This covenant relationship opens the way for them to have a new homeland if they will go to Canaan, possess the land God promised Abraham, and live for the Lord there, God will do great things for all nations because of them. It is all so very hopeful.

So to this point in the Bible we see the God who creates in Genesis, we see the God who delivers in Exodus, we see the God who is holy in Leviticus, we see God keeping His promises to Noah, His promises to Abraham, and now His promises to Israel through Moses. God has done great things. He has kept His promise to Abraham by giving him descendants and making them a great nation in the book of Genesis. And now He has given them a great covenant in Exodus and Leviticus. And what remains? Well, the land. What will God do to give the people the land? And that is our next part of our study.

# Lesson 5 ■ Numbers and Deuteronomy

## INTRODUCTION

The books of Numbers and Deuteronomy deal with the promise that God has made to give Israel the land. It continues all the promises made to Noah, all the promises made to Abraham, all the promises made to Israel and Moses. But it focuses now on the issue of Israel moving toward Canaan, toward the land promised to Abraham and we see some possibilities and some difficulties.

## NUMBERS

When the book of Numbers begins, we have great possibilities. There are three sections to the book of Numbers. And this book really is something like a travel document. Let me explain: in 1:1 to 10:10, that is 1:1 to 10:10 Israel prepares to enter the land of Canaan. In 10:11 through chapter 21 we have Israel leaving Mount Sinai but arriving in the desert of Kadesh-Barnea. You should be saying, wait a minute I thought they were supposed to be arriving in the land of Canaan. What happened? As we will see in 10:11 through chapter 21 a great deal of bad things happen. Third section: chapters 22 through 36. These chapters have them moving from the desert of Kadesh-Barnea to the plains of Moab right across from the land of promise.

What does the book of Numbers emphasize about God? It emphasizes that God expects faithfulness. He expects it from His people and He delivers faithfulness Himself. We won't be able to spend a long time on the book of Numbers and I apologize for that. It is one of the places where I decided to move a bit more quickly.

### Departure from Sinai (1:1–10:10)

This section is one of the most hopeful texts in the Old Testament. It covers their departure from Sinai and their arrival in Kadesh. So I should say it begins hopefully. As we start the book of Numbers an eventful year has passed. Remember that Israel has left Egypt, accepted a covenant with the living God who made heaven and earth and has rested near Mount Sinai. Now they prepare to leave Sinai and go conquer Canaan. In Numbers 1 and 2 they take a census to see who they have to go up into the land. In Numbers 3 and 4 they organize the priests who are going to be leading worship as they travel and get to the land. In Numbers 5 they purify their camp so the people will be right with God and ready to go up and do His work in the land.

In Numbers 6 and 7 they dedicate certain people and they make offerings to the Lord so that the work of the Tabernacle and the work of conquest can go on. In Numbers 8, they ordain, they set apart the priests and the Levites to do the work God described in Exodus 25 through 31 and the book of Leviticus. In Numbers 9 they celebrate their first Passover, noting that it has been a year since they came out of Egypt. So many wonderful things have happened: the Lord has sustained them, they have what they need, the Lord forgave them when they worshiped the idol in Exodus 32 through 34, they have much to be thankful for and in Numbers 10 they march out from Mount Sinai. So we see them leaving but soon we will find them not in Canaan but in Kadesh-Barnea.

### **Israelites Lose Their Opportunity to Gain the Promised Land (10:11–21)**

How do we go from all these exciting, hopeful, helpful things to being in the desert? In Numbers 11 through Numbers 20 we find them losing their opportunity to possess the land and instead dying in the desert. Chapters 1 through 10: departure from Sinai-very hopeful. Chapters 11 to 21: losing their opportunity and a very difficult section of the Bible to read because without question Numbers 11 to 21 describe some of the most tragic events of in the Bible. From the heights of marching into the Promised Land the people fall to the depths of dying in the desert. Even Moses, the great leader, loses the privilege of entering Canaan.

This whole segment chronicles one disaster and missed opportunity after another. It is used throughout the Bible from this point on as a cautionary tale of about not believing God and not following His commands. Hints of problems appear in chapters 11 and 12. Despite what God has done on their behalf the people complain about their living conditions (11:1-3). Now I think we have to admit that life in the desert is not pleasant be they have been promised that the situation is temporary, they will soon be in Canaan. But they demand meat instead of manna; they are tired of their diet so the Lord gives them quail and yet also sends a plague because of their complaining.

In chapter 12, Aaron and Miriam oppose Moses because he marries an Ethiopian woman. God defends Moses by striking Miriam with leprosy but He does heal her when Moses prays for her. Moses remains Yahweh's chosen ruler but these petty arguments and disputes and complaints are ominous. All is not well. There are struggles ahead. I might note here too it is interesting when I was growing up as a child and society was changing a great deal there was a lot of people who argued that people of different races should not marry. Well chapter 12 of course tells us that Moses who is an Israelite marries an Ethiopian so it is a mixed racial marriage. We would like to believe and hope that this Ethiopian woman had faith in Yahweh and I believe she did.

So the issue is one of what does this person believe, not what race do they come from. That is the end of chapter 12.

In chapter 13, Israel is now in striking distance of the Promised Land. To help them know their opponents strengths and weaknesses, Yahweh has Moses sent leaders to spy on the Canaanites (13:1-16). Moses instructs them to look at the land and bring back an assessment of the cities and its people (13:17-20). This information, I think, is intended to help Moses know where to invade. The spies carry out their mission and in the process they discover the land is extremely fruitful (13:21-25).

And in the rest of chapter 13 the spies make their report. Here is their report: first they say the land is very fruitful, they say it flows with milk and honey. Life would be preferable there than living in the desert. Second part of the report they state however that the inhabitants of Canaan are numerous and powerful and the cities are heavily fortified. We need to note that God never said this would be easy, it would take His deliverance. But the people making the report highlight the difficulties.

Third they note several people groups would have to be eliminated before the Israelites could conquer the land. This all sounds very hard therefore even though two of the spies, Caleb and Joshua, are in favor of invasion, the other 10 spies, the majority, counsel against attack. They even spread lies to advance their opinion claiming the land eats people and that all the Canaanites are giants (13:30-33). God's promise of a homeland and Israel's commitment to the covenant are both in jeopardy. Now the responses fly thick and fast. The people, their leaders, and the Lord all speak up.

Bitterly disappointed, as chapter 14 begins, the people crying wish for death. They now believe their wives and children will be killed by the Canaanites which makes them want to choose new leaders and return to Egypt. But Moses, Aaron, Joshua, and Caleb try to convince them to move forward. According to them rebellion is the only thing that can stop their ultimate victory. Because of these pleadings, the nation threatens to stone Moses and Aaron. Why are they so unable to move forward when indeed the Lord has delivered them from Egypt and sustained them from the desert?

The answer comes in 14:11-12 when the Lord speaks. And I read, "And the Lord said to Moses "How long will this people despise Me and how long will they not believe in Me? In spite of all the signs that I have done among them. I will strike them with the pestilence and disinherit them and I will make of you a nation greater and mightier than they."

Notice what God says: the problem is that the people do not believe in Me. Earlier the spies said that as far as they were concerned that when they looked at the Canaanites they looked like grasshoppers in comparison to the Canaanites. And I heard a series of sermons one time that claimed that the problem with Israel is that they had low self-

esteem. They just didn't think enough of themselves. They saw themselves as grasshoppers and were small and were therefore unable to get the victory.

The Bible places the problem quite elsewhere. It says they do not believe in God. God says they do not believe in Me in spite of all that I've done. Therefore, God punishes them. He says that all of these people who decided not to enter Canaan at this time will live the rest of their lives and die in the desert. The giving of the land has been suspended for 40 years by the end of the chapter 14. And yet more woes follow.

After some further instructions on sacrifice in chapter 15, chapter 16 tells about rebellion. A man named Korah leads a rebellion against Moses. And the Lord has to affirm Moses as leader again. But still a greater tragedy in my opinion occurs in chapter 20. Moses, who is one of the greatest of all Biblical leaders, a man that God uses to give His law to the people, a man God uses to deliver Israel from bondage. A man who is on the Mount of Transfiguration with Elijah talking with Jesus Christ about how Jesus will die and be raised from the dead. This great Moses will not go to the Promised Land.

In chapter 20 once again the people complain. As usual they wish they were dead or at least back in Egypt. Perhaps by now Moses wishes they were dead. The Lord tells Moses and Aaron to get water by speaking to the rock. But instead of speaking to the rock Moses strikes the rock. Worse still, in 20:10 he takes credit for the miracle instead of honoring God. Water comes from the rock but Moses has failed to believe in God and make Him holy in the people's eyes (20:12). He has never acted in such an arrogant way before. He has never taken credit for a single miracle. He has never failed to lift up the Lord more than himself. But because of his prideful insubordination neither Moses nor Aaron will enter in the Promised Land and they will die in the desert. I find it quite sad.

But I want to emphasize something very important. We see the rest of Numbers and Deuteronomy we also again see the greatness of Moses and it is this: that even when he knows he will not get what he so treasures most, that is to lead the people to the Promised Land, to see the fulfillment of God's promise to Abraham, even so, he leads the people, he is faithful to the Lord he does what God asks him to do. He is a faithful steward in God's household. Nonetheless, not even Moses can take credit for what God does. Not even Moses can fail to make the Lord set apart, special, unique in the eyes of the people. We begin to see a few glimpses of hope as we come to chapter 21, because the Lord is beginning to finish the old generation but then give the people victory, the new generation victory, against enemies who attack them in the desert.

## **A New Generation Enters the Promised Land (22–36)**

We then move on to the third section of the book of Numbers, chapters 22 to 36. And once again we have a hopeful section. We have a new people for the land, we have a

new generation rising up to be a faithful generation for the Lord. In these chapters, chapters 22 to 36, slowly, painfully the old generation begins to die. Yahweh remains faithful to the people even to those who have been rebellious.

And then in Numbers 22 to 24 we have the Balaam stories. These are unusual to say the least. A pagan prophet named Balaam hears from the Lord. His donkey also speaks to him. If you know the famous story you know what I'm talking about. Though Balaam's been hired to place a curse on Israel by a foreign government he cannot do so. He keeps going to a different spot looking at Israel and blessing them and incurring the anger of the people who have hired him to curse this people.

This is a strange and difficult account. Nevertheless one idea is evident: God will fulfill His promises made to Abraham. Let's illustrate. In 23:7-10 Balaam says Israel will be numerous and that God will be with them. He says in 24:3-9 that God will bless their friends and curse their enemies. He says in 24:15-19 God will help them conquer the land. In other words God will keep all the promises made to Abraham. Nothing can thwart, can change, can impede God's purpose. So, the Balaam stories I believe are factual, I believe they are historically accurate. I believe it is possible for the sovereign God who created donkeys to use them to speak. But I think it is even more important to focus on even this pagan prophet can see that God was keeping promises made to Abraham.

In chapter 26 the old generation has about died out. So in chapters 27 to 30 the Lord begins to re-instruct the people, to instruct the new generation how they will live and what they shall do. In chapter 31 and following we find God giving the people victory against their opponents. And we see the Lord instructing the people in how they will obey God and possess the land.

Finally this tragic books draws to a conclusion. Moses recounts the sad history of Israel's travels in the desert and warns the people to follow the Lord in chapter 33. It then follows a discussion of what part of Canaan each tribe will possess and there is a naming of new leaders in chapter 34. In chapter 35 Moses explains how the Levites are to be treated and in chapter 36 rules that women may inherit land, there is equality before the law.

Clearly the book's last few chapters point to a more hopeful future. Israel can expect to approach Canaan again. In fact they've journeyed within close range of the land already. Horrible things have happened but a new era is dawning. Numbers has delayed the fulfillment of the promise of the giving of the land. But it cannot stop God's fulfilling of His promise. God's word will come true.

## **DEUTERONOMY**

The last book of the law, of the five books of Moses is Deuteronomy. This book emphasizes the fact that God renews His covenant with His people. God starts fresh with His people. He is a God who forgives, a God who renews and a God who keeps His promises. So we come to Deuteronomy, a very important book for the rest of the Bible. We will summarize it fairly quickly but I want to emphasize a few important passages that are used throughout the Bible.

First, as we have been doing lets set out an outline of the book of Deuteronomy. The outline of Deuteronomy follows the pattern of an ancient covenant treaty. That is, it is in the form that nations would have used to make agreements with one another. In particular, the form of the book of Deuteronomy follows a format used by the Hittite nation. The Hittites were famous for making treaties with lesser nations, which were called vassal nations. Thus when we think of this treaty form, this covenant form, this outline, it is often called the Hittite Vassal Treaty Form.

This similarity between Deuteronomy and Hittite vassal treaty is significant in helping us to date the book of Deuteronomy. The Hittite vassal treaty was a format used in the second millennium B.C., in other words during the time of Moses. Some scholars have argued that the first five books of the Bible were written many, many centuries after Moses lived. Yet as we look at the shape of Deuteronomy and compare it to the ancient literature, we find that it fits a form that was being used quite frequently in Moses time.

Remember that the setting of the book is about 1400 B.C. If Israel went out of Egypt around 1446, as we discussed in our introduction to Exodus and they spent 40 years or so in the desert we are now coming close to 1406 to 1400 B.C. Israel has migrated northward from the desert now across the boarder of Canaan in the land of Moab poised to invade the land. Here Moses gives a series of three speeches in which he outlines God's covenant with the new generation. The book of Deuteronomy emphasizes God renewing His covenant. Well, back to the outline.

## **COVENANT STRUCTURE**

There are six basic portions to a Hittite vassal treaty. First of all there is the preamble, the opening to the covenant. It states the parties who are making the covenant. 1:1-5 correspond to the preamble to a Hittite vassal treaty. Second the Hittite vassal treaty offered a historical prologue outlining the relationship between the parties in the past. 1:6 to 4:49 give us the history between Israel and Yahweh their God. The third section of the Hittite vassal treaty was to give general stipulations, general rules for the

relationship between the two parties. In Deuteronomy 5 through 11 we find the general stipulations that God gives to Israel for His relationship with Him. These general stipulations include a repetition of the Ten Commandments. They also include some very basic statements about how Israel is to love Yahweh as He has loved them.

The fourth section of the Hittite vassal treaty stated specific stipulations. That is, the very particular details of how the nations would relate to one another. This relationship would include details about trade agreements, military agreements, borders and that sort of thing. In Deuteronomy 12 through 26 we have the very specific stipulations that the Lord gives to His people about how they will live with one another in the land. And in these chapters we have some very important material that gets cited and reflected upon later in the Old Testament. We have material about how specifically prophets must act and how priests must act and how kings must act and how the people must act. There are a lot of case laws in this section, that is, material that says that if one thing happens then this is what you do, so specific stipulations.

The fifth section of the Hittite vassal treaty included blessings and consequences. That is, the nation that was greater would say to the nation that was lesser, if you will keep this covenant and do as required, there will be good things happen to you. But if you break the agreement, then consequences will occur. Usually these consequences had to do with invading the land and defeating them or cutting them off economically. Chapters 27 and 28 of Deuteronomy outline God's blessings for His people and the consequences they will incur if they do not follow Him. These chapters, Deuteronomy 27 and 28, correspond to a similar passage in Leviticus 26 that we have already studied.

Sixth and finally, the Hittite vassal treaty included witnesses being called to ratify the covenant. Generally speaking chapters 29 through 33 include the witnesses and the ratification of the covenant in Deuteronomy.

So let me summarize the six parts. A preamble stating the parties (1:1-5). Second, a historical prolog detailing who is in the covenant and the relationship in the past, that's 1:6-4:49. Third, general stipulations for the relationship, that's Deuteronomy 5 through 11. Fourth, specific stipulations for how the relationship will unfold, that is chapters 12 through 26. Fifth, blessings and consequences for obedience to the covenant or for covenant breaking, that is chapters 27 to 28. And witnesses called and a ratification ceremony undertaken, that is chapters 29 through 33.

Now of course there are 34 chapters in Deuteronomy, not 33. So what is in chapter 34? It is a conclusion to the first five books of the Bible. It tells us of Moses' death and that a great chapter in Israelite history has ended. So it's not really part of the covenant structure of Deuteronomy. Rather it is a bridge text between the end of the Law and the beginning of the prophetic section of the Old Testament.

## **SECTIONS**

### **God Renews His Covenant with His People (1–4)**

Let's go back now and do a little bit of work on the specific sections of Deuteronomy. Deuteronomy 1 through 4 helps us understand how God renews His covenant with His people by stressing His gift of the land and the past. When Numbers ends a new generation has emerged. Raised in the desert, this group seems determined to avoid their parent's mistakes. Moses is determined to prepare them to enter into the land so he advises them on a number of issues. Including, how to wage war, establish their worship, chose future leaders and deal with false prophets. To convey this information he presents the nations past and God's standards as a revised, expanded covenant.

He reminds them of their history in Deuteronomy 1 to 4. Even though this generation did not participate in the events of Exodus 1 through Numbers 20, Moses says "You chose spies. You rebelled against God. You were brought out of Egypt" and so forth. He links the new generation to God's great past deeds and to their parent's mistakes. Why? Because he wants to encourage them to keep Yahweh's commands in the future.

Because in the past the people refused to invade Canaan (1:19-46). The Lord made them live in the desert forty years (2:1-25). He reminds them the Lord gave them victories in the desert to prepare them to conquer the Promised Land. He makes that statement in 2:26–3:11. Moses concludes this historical section of the treaty by reminding the people that obedience to God is the key to their future. He tells them in 4:39 that they serve the only living God. In fact, He is God in heaven above and on the earth beneath. There is no other. The God they serve is the only god. He is not just the only god for them, He is the only god there is. He is the sovereign Lord of the universe and they should obey Him. Just as a weaker nation must obey its stronger covenant party in the Hittite vassal treaty, so Israel must abide by Yahweh's standards if they are to inherit the Land.

So chapters 1 through 4 introduce the book. Reminds us that God renews the covenant, reminds us that He is taking His people to the land in fulfillment of the promise He made to Abraham back in Genesis 12:1-9. And He has reminded His people of the past, His great deeds, their parent's failures as a way to remind them to move forward with Him.

### **Basic Rules for Possessing the Land (5–11)**

In the next section, Deuteronomy 5 through 11 we have the basic rules for possessing the land. Having completed his brief summary of the past, Moses reviews the basics of

the covenant. He also establishes the basis of their national life. I think three ideas receive special treatment.

First, in Deuteronomy 5, Moses tells the people to keep the 10 commandments and the other foundational covenant laws. He tells them in 5:33 that their future in the land depends on this faithfulness.

Second, they must love God above all else, an effort that involves their hearts, minds and strength, all that they are. Dt. 6:4-9 became a very famous passage and was cited at the beginning of worship in Israel for hundreds of years and is even used still today in synagogues. 6:4-9 says, "Hear O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is one. You shall love the Lord God with all of your heart, with all of your soul and with all might. And these words that I command you today shall be on your heart. You shall teach them diligently to your children and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, when you walk by the way and when lie down and when you rise. You shall bind them as a sign on your hand and they shall be as frontlets between your eyes. You shall write them on the door post of your house and on your gates." Love of God is the most important motivation for their service. When they believe in God and know Him they will love Him. And according to Deuteronomy 8, this love motivates their obedience to Yahweh and eliminates idolatry.

Third, God has chosen them to be a special people. Because He loved them and because He made promises to Abraham, the Lord continues to bless this stubborn and rebellious group. On the subject of God's love see 7:6-11 and 9:1-6. Their love is as a result of His first love. As the New Testament says, we love God because He first loved us.

If Israel remembers and responds correctly to these truths, that their future depends on faithfulness to God and His teaching, that love is the motivation both for their relationship with God and His relationship with them, and that God has chosen them to be a special people as a way of keeping promises made to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. If they will remember these truths, their love for God will lead to a long stay in Canaan (Dt. 11). The new generation must understand and implement the covenant's basic stipulations before it could hope to obey more detailed instruction. Once grasped, however, the basic requirements unlock new opportunities for blessing.

### **Specific Rules for Possessing the Land (12–26)**

So with a history of the people outlined in chapters 1 to 4, and with the basic standards and motivations for serving the Lord and thus being prepared to possess the land in chapters 5 through 11, Deuteronomy 12 through 26 sets forth specific rules for possessing the land. Many of the standards that are explained in chapters 12 to 26 are

familiar to readers. After all they have already appeared in the Pentateuch, in the book of the Law, in the first five books of the Old Testament.

For instance, Deuteronomy 13 says Israel must not worship other gods. This is a repetition of the first two commandments. According to Deuteronomy 14, the people should avoid unclean foods, something that was outlined in Leviticus 11 to 15.

Deuteronomy 15 says they are supposed to cancel the debts of the poor, just as Leviticus' standards about a year of jubilee say. Deuteronomy 16 says they are to observe the national religious festivals that have already been outlined in the book of Leviticus.

They are also told that judges are supposed to be just, in chapters 16 and 17. That priests are to be provided for (Dt. 8). And that property rights and marital bonds are to be upheld (Dt. 22). These laws are restated for this generation but they are hardly new. But they deserve particular emphasis because the people are headed to the land where they will be a kingdom of priests in the middle of the world declaring God's glory to all other nations.

Because they will soon enter a new land though the people also receive some brand new instructions. According to 12:4-7 when they enter Canaan, they must worship Yahweh in one central place. No longer will they have a traveling sanctuary in their midst. Of course, they may pray and they may praise God wherever they are. But God will choose a permanent location for their major festivals. This emphasis on a particular worship center helps guard against a tendency to bow down to idols at various local shrines. The Israelites found that when they went to the land of Canaan that there were many, many local shrines, many places that people would worship a variety of gods. They were to have nothing to do with those sites and those gods, but were to gather together to worship the Lord at a central location as a means of withstanding idolatry.

Other rules apply directly to life in the new land. According to Deuteronomy 19, they are to set aside a few cities as places of refuge for innocent parties threatened by persons seeking revenge. When they fight wars they must destroy their enemies (Dt. 20).

Deuteronomy 20 is talking about their initial incursion into Canaan, not how they are to operate in all wars at all times. Yet, if they take a woman captive in war they may not abuse her sexually. They must marry her and give her all privileges of a wife (21:10-14).

According to Deuteronomy 26 they are to give tithes and offerings when they come into the land and it begins to give fruit and vegetables. Some of these gifts will support needy and defenseless persons. Some of the gifts will support the priests. But the people are to be generous, as the Lord has blessed them so they should bless others.

Two sets of laws about life in Canaan are particularly vital for understanding the rest of the Old Testament. Moses senses that Israel will eventually want a king so he sets rules

for the kings in 17:14-20. According to this passage, Israelite kings must come from the people. They must live simply. They must follow carefully all the words of God's laws and decrees. They are not to rule for their own benefit. They are to rule to bless and help the people. As a reminder of who they truly serve they are to have the law of God always before them and they are to walk according to His instructions.

Moses also knows that prophets will always exist. Prophets of all sorts were already in the ancient world. He knew that prophets would preach various doctrines and would come from many countries. So in 18:17-20 he says a prophet must preach worship of Yahweh only. Furthermore he says true prophets must always speak the truth. If they make predictions they must come true 100% of the time. These laws about rulers and preachers, about kings and prophets are intended to save Israel from political and spiritual ruin.

Various rules complete the specific requirements of the covenant found in Deuteronomy 12 to 26. For example in chapters 24 and 25 Moses includes statements and standards about divorce, about treatment of the poor and about care for widows. These laws combine God's mercy and justice and they deserve Israel's active allegiance. So Deuteronomy 12 through 26 gives us extensive examples of how Israel is to live once they come into the land.

All of these specific standards are based on the general stipulations. By that I mean, all of them can be traced to the Ten Commandments in one way or another. All of them can be traced to love for God with heart, soul, mind and strength in one way or another. But the specific stipulations help them know how to live in their homes, in their families, in their courtrooms, in their places of business, and so forth, they give very specific directions.

## **Blessings and Consequences (27–28)**

Deuteronomy 27 and 28 teaches about the God who renews the covenant by telling the people the blessings and consequences associated with obedience or disobedience to the covenant. As in Leviticus 26, Moses realizes that Israel needs reasons to keep the law. The mere promise of land did not assure faithfulness in Numbers 13 and 14. Therefore Moses chooses a picturesque and creative way to encourage them to renew the covenant. He reminds them of a place called Shechem in the new land. This city has special significance because Abraham was first promised a homeland there in Genesis 12:6.

Nearby two adjacent mountains illustrate Israel's choice of accepting or rejecting the covenant. On the one side of the valley stands Ebal, a rocky, barren mass. On the other side is Gerizim, a mountain that has trees and vegetation. Ebal represents what will

happen to Israel if they reject Yahweh's standards. They will have nothing, their life will be desolate. Gerizim symbolizes the richness of their lives if they will honor the Lord. The people may choose barrenness or fruitfulness, cursing or blessing. Their future in the land depends on this decision. If Israel chooses blessing, if they chose Gerizim, then they will be blessed in their homes, in their jobs and in the world beyond their homeland (28:1-6). All their enemies will tremble before them, they will truly be a special people of Yahweh.

But according to 28:15-68, if Israel refuses to follow the covenant they will suffer reverses in all walks of life. If they sin against God, He will send them reminders to repent to come to Him. Agricultural difficulties will hinder them. Enemies will scatter them. All of these difficulties will be disciplinarily actions given by God to bring them back to Himself. If they rebel long enough they will be eventually driven into exile where they will desire to come back to God and to home. Indeed their lives in exile will be as barren as Ebal, surely this generation has already experienced such existence in the desert. Their future depends on the choices they will make now and in the years ahead. Like other passages in Deuteronomy, chapters 27 and 28 are strategic to understanding the whole Bible.

Let's review a bit. Deuteronomy 6:4-9 is a central passage that tells us our motive to serving God must be loving God with all of our heart, soul, mind and strength. Jesus said this is the first and great commandment. And He reminded the people of His day of Leviticus 19:18 which says "You shall love your neighbor as yourself." So two great commandments: Deuteronomy 6:4-9, "Love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, mind and strength" and Leviticus 19:18, "Love your neighbor as yourself."

Deuteronomy 17:14-20 gives standards for kings that will stand for the ages.

Deuteronomy 18:15-22 gives us standards for prophets that are used throughout the Bible. Deuteronomy 27 and 28 alongside Leviticus 26 stands as a reminder throughout the Prophets and the Writings and into the New Testament that if the people will walk with God, He will give them all the spiritual riches of a relationship with Him. And He will protect and guide and help them.

But if they turn against Him, He will bring disciplinary measures and eventually even cast them off, at least cast those off who do not turn to Him. So all the prophets remind Israel of the covenant blessings and the covenant consequences and even into the New Testament as you recall the Hebrews 12 where it talks about the disciplinary action God brings to His people. We are reminded of how important it is to be covenant keepers living out our faith by showing our love for the Lord. As the apostle John put it, if you love God, or as Christ says, if you love Me you will keep My commandments.

## **The People Gather to Hear the Last Words of Moses and Affirm the Covenant (29–33)**

In Deuteronomy 29 through 33 we have the people gathering to hear the last words of Moses and to affirm the covenant. Moses writes down all the words of the covenant (31:9) and the people agree to keep the covenant. Moses tells them in a final great sermon poem in 32:47 that these words are not idle words to them, they are indeed their lives. By them they will live long in the land and they will cross over the Jordan and possess that land and they will serve the Lord as a kingdom of priests, a holy nation in that land.

## **Moses Dies (34)**

In Deuteronomy 34, Moses dies. And as this great leader passes away, we come to the end of the first great section of Scripture. Joshua will replace Moses, but he will be missed. The new generation will come into the land and do great things for God. But the old generation, in some ways, the old generation that includes Aaron and Miriam and all, they will be missed. But we will not miss, for the people's sake, the difficulties of living in the desert. Of disobeying God and suffering His consequences, these things are over.

And so we look forward to the future with certain promises in place. That God has created the heavens and the earth. He has made a covenant with all nations through Noah. And He has promised (Gen. 12:1-9) to bless all nations through Abraham. And He has delivered Israel through the Exodus to be a kingdom of priests, and a holy nation, to bless all nations as they live in the midst of the land. And God has given them His covenant of blessing, His gracious words about how to live in the days to come. And He has brought the people, fully instructed, fully empowered, fully blessed to the brink of receiving the promise that God made to Abraham in Genesis 12:7 of a new homeland. The Law ends, but in reality it truly simply a great beginning.

## **Lesson 6 ■ Joshua**

### **REVIEW OF THE LAW**

We now enter the second major part of our study. In the first part I gave you a bit of an introduction to the Old Testament and its value as Scripture coming from God Himself. And then we studied together the Law, the first five books of the Bible, the books of Moses, sometimes called the Pentateuch. You recall that we stress that God creates, judges, and renews in Genesis. That God delivers His people in fulfillment of His promises in Exodus. But He is a holy God and desires a holy people to serve Him, according to the book of Leviticus. And that He is a God who enforces the covenant in the book of Numbers, and yet a God who renews the covenant in the book of Deuteronomy.

You will recall some major emphases then: God creates, Genesis 1 and 2, human beings sin greatly against God, Genesis 3 through 8, God judges the world through a flood in Genesis 6 and 7 but makes a covenant with all living people in Genesis 8 and 9, that He will not again destroy the world by flood but He requires of human beings, respect for life and respect for Him.

Sin continues to escalate and in Genesis 12:1-9 God promises to bless all nations through Abraham. He promises Abraham many descendants and gives them to him in the rest of the book of Genesis. He delivers Abraham's people from slavery in Egypt in chapters 1 through 18 of Exodus. And He declares that Israel will be a holy people, a kingdom of priests, declaring His praises, living out His commandments in Exodus 19 to 24. And He asks them to be, requires them to be, a holy nation according to the book of Leviticus. It gives them clear standards about how it is to be a nation that will glorify Him in the world in the rest of Leviticus.

Now it is up to Israel to receive the promise of the land. But they sin against God in the book of Numbers and do not receive the land for some time. Forty years they are punished until a new generation arises who hears Moses' word in Deuteronomy and are ready to take the Promise Land. These are a people who are commanded to love God according to Deuteronomy 6:4-9, because He has loved them according to Deuteronomy 7:6.

It is fairly easy for us to get focused on Israel as we read these books but we must remember that Israel is God's instrument to bless all nations. Israel is not to keep God's greatness to themselves but they are to be His instrument for removing sin in the world.

## **INTRODUCTION TO THE PROPHETS**

And so we come to the second great part of the Old Testament. Having studied the Law we come to the Prophets. As I told you in the introduction to our study, in the Hebrew lists of books, the list of books that Jesus would have known and the New Testament writers would have known – the Law is followed by the Prophets and the following books are considered prophetic books in the Hebrew canon: Joshua, Judges, First and Second Samuel, First and Second Kings, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and the twelve Minor Prophets, which are considered one book.

The Hebrew canon divided the Prophets into two parts: the Former Prophets and the Latter Prophets, in other words the first and the second groupings. The Former Prophets are the narrative books, the history books of Joshua, Judges, Samuel and Kings. They are prophet because they have the same theology as Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel and the Minor Prophets. They have the same view of history, they have the same approach to loving God. So they share much in common as far as their outlook and their theology goes even if they don't share the same sort of literary type.

As we come to these former prophetic books, Joshua, Judges, Samuel, and Kings, it might occur to us that Deuteronomy leaves us a bit in suspense. Israel has set up camp just outside the Promised Land poised to complete God's promises to Abraham. Moses has said they would succeed but he is dead. Israel was in a similar pivotal position in Numbers and failed to conquer. Would the people waste a second chance to claim their homeland? God has promised to fight for them but will this second generation of Israelites believe Yahweh or will they be as rebellious as their parents?

Well, Joshua to Kings addresses these and other related issues. These books tell what happened in history and explain why it happened. They report events that state the theological factors involved in Israel's history. They feature human heroes and villains and yet always point to the Lord of history. For example 1 Kings 1–11 discusses Solomon's wealth and political savvy but it also emphasizes his weakening relationship with the Lord and its consequences. Thus the books do present a sacred history of Israel that is it is mainly interested in Israel's relationship with God. Nonetheless this history is accurate and insightful at the same time. This history takes both the human and divine elements of history seriously. Well how do the books achieve this balance?

Historians must have criterion to judge events and characters. Without question the writers of Joshua, Judges, Samuel, and Kings judged Israel leaders and people by the covenant principles they found in the Law. In particular, it is Deuteronomy's influence that is quite evident. The kings are measured by standards found in Deuteronomy 17:14-20. The people are blessed or punished according to the standards found in Deuteronomy 6 and Deuteronomy 27 and 28.

The author believes that Israel cannot keep their land if they break their promises to God. And so it's no surprise that if they do turn away from the Lord and they do not come back to Him there will be grave consequences including exile. This emphasis on the covenant makes these narratives prophetic literature. The prophets in these books and Isaiah through Malachi proclaim Yahweh as the only God and they call Israel and the world to faith in Him.

## **JOSHUA**

With that brief introduction to the prophetic section of our study, let's move on to the book of Joshua. Joshua's main theme is that God gives the land. God gives the land of Canaan to Israel just as He had promised Abraham. Joshua is an exciting and positive book seen from Israel's prospective. Israel finally conquers the land God promised to Abraham. The nation accomplishes this task because this new generation is determined to obey the Lord. They refuse to stay in the desert so they do whatever their leaders and Yahweh demand. They do not repeat their parents' mistakes.

Joshua takes place then just outside of the land Canaan in Moab but then moves quickly into Canaan, the land of promise. The time frame is about 1400 B.C. Scholars have worked very hard looking at the archeological evidence that remains in that part of the world today to try to determine when exactly this conquest took place and what nature it took. Though there are clearly many opinions on this subject there is good archeological evidence to indicate that the conquest took place about 1400 B.C.

The book of Joshua itself unfolds in three major sections. The first section is chapters 1 through 12. These chapters describe how Israel conquers most of the land promised to them. Details about significant battles appear and theological reasons for Israel's success or failure are given.

The second section is chapters 13 to 22. These chapters state how the nation's twelve tribes divided the land. Each tribe had its own territory, as is true of many countries. I live in the United States, we have fifty separate states. Other countries are divided into provinces or some other similar concept. Israel had twelve divisions, one for each tribe.

Third, the book concludes with a covenant renewal ceremony in chapters 23 and 24. Their leader Joshua encourages the people to obey God's laws and thereby keep the land. Each of these three sections focuses on Yahweh's faithfulness in offering Canaan and on Israel's challenge to respond in faithfulness. I want you to know that we are going through these three sections as we have other books we have studied.

At the end of this analysis I want to return to a special topic that concerns many people these days. That topic is why the Lord would allow Israel to conquer the land and displace the people who already lived there. More on that in a bit.

## **God Gives His People the Ability to Conquer the Land (1–12)**

Joshua 1–12 shows that God gives the land and that He gives His people the ability to conquer the land. Israel needs a capable leader if they are to conquer and God has chosen Joshua for this task. I have not said much about Joshua to this point so let me remind you who he is. Going back into the early chapters of the book of Exodus. Joshua was Moses' assistant. He helped Moses in all the areas of Moses' ministry. He was the one who led Israel into battle in the wilderness accounts given to us in Numbers 21 through 36. He was one of twelve spies who originally went to the land of Canaan and brought back a report. He was one of two spies, along with Caleb, who wanted to go ahead and try to conquer the land. He is a good choice to lead for no one else has his experience or potential for leadership. Still he has never lead the people before. He has yet to prove that he can replace Moses.

In chapter 1 the author tells us because of this awesome responsibility Joshua needs encouragement from Yahweh before Israel enters the land. God promises to never leave or forsake him (1:5). Yahweh also pledges to give the land to the people according to 1:3 and 4 and make Joshua great like Moses. In return Joshua must lead the people, keep the covenant, read and obey the Law of Moses just as Deuteronomy 17 to 18 commands. And he is to depend on God's promises. Three times in chapter 1 God tells him to be strong and courageous. This exhortation may speak to his natural fears. After this reassurance, Joshua is ready to lead. At the end of chapter one he tells the people to get ready to enter the land. They agree but they also add their own plea that Joshua be strong and courageous. So God has built up Joshua's strength. He has encouraged him in the faith and the people are ready to follow.

Joshua decides to attack Jericho first, according to chapter 2. Since Jericho is located in the middle of the region of Canaan, Joshua apparently intends to cut Canaan in two parts. Then Israel can move north and south from their central power base. He sends two spies to view the city of Jericho. The men enter Jericho and go up to a house owned by a prostitute named Rahab. Undoubtedly they exercise caution yet the leader of the city learns of their presence, sends messengers to arrest the spies, but Rahab says they have left town when she has actually hidden them in her home. The king's men then leave town to pursue the spies who are well hidden.

Once alone with the two Israelites Rahab confesses she believes God will give Jericho to Israel. She then asks the spies to spare her and her family's lives when they destroy the town. They agree and she helps them escape. In effect, Rahab joins Israel. She will

become part of the people of God because of her faith and because of her actions. Her confession of faith in what God will do indicates that other Canaanites could have believed. The story of Israel and their God was well known but she seems to be quite in the minority. She seems to be one of the few, if not the only person, who turns to faith in the Lord rather than accepting defeat by Israel.

In chapters 3 and 4 the people break camp and cross the Jordan. Priests carry the Ark of God in front of the people which symbolizes Yahweh's leadership of Israel. As He did at the Red Sea, God causes the river to stop flowing while they cross. As soon as they complete their crossing, the waters return to their place. Clearly, this event signals a new Exodus of sorts. Just as their parents went through the parted Red Sea to the wilderness, so now they leave the desert by crossing the Jordan to their new home.

According to chapter 5, once they enter Canaan the daily bread, the daily manna that God has been giving since they left Egypt ceases. They will now eat of the fruit of land God has given them. God has met their physical needs in the past and He continues to do so now.

Chapter 6 gives us details about Israel's conquering of Jericho. They have a rather odd method of conquering. For six days they march around the city without attacking. Surely this marching intimidated and unnerved Jericho citizens, their enemies. Finally on the seventh day Israel marches out to conquer. Joshua tells the people that all Jericho's wealth is sacred to the Lord and must go into His treasury. No individual must keep the spoils of war. These battles are not simply about making Israel safe, secure, rich or powerful. It is about establishing them as a holy nation in the land to bless all nations. Joshua reminds all the fighters to spare Rahab who is still in the city with her family. The priests sound the trumpet, the army shouts – Jericho's walls collapse upon themselves, they implode. Exposed, the city lies defenseless and Yahweh gives Israel the city.

In chapter 7, however, we learn that all is not well in Israel. In the battle of Jericho a man named Achan takes some gold for himself in clear violation of what God had commanded. So the next time the people go out to battle, this time to a tiny place called Ai, they do not succeed. They are defeated before this small city. God reveals to Joshua the problem. The people have sinned. A family has kept spoils of war rather than turning them over. Once exposed, this problem is solved.

And in chapter 8, Joshua and the people conquer the city of Ai. They then go to Mount Gerizim and Mount Ebal, the places Moses spoken of in Deuteronomy 27 and 28, and they renew the covenant before they renew the battle. In chapters 9 and 10 the battle goes Israel's way again and again. Kings unite together to fight against them only to make it easier for Joshua to conquer place after place. How is it that Israel is able to conquer? According to 10:14 the reason is that Israel had Yahweh fighting for them. God

gives the victory. Having defeated Jericho and Ai and other places, in the middle of the country, having established his base in the center of Canaan, Joshua now moves north and south to conquer a list of cities found in 10:29-43.

Then in chapter 11, Joshua attacks in the north. Major places such as Hazor fall. Once again a group of nations fights Israel and once again Israel prevails. By the end of chapter 12, most of the conquest is complete. At least the prominent population centers in the middle of the country and in the parts of the north and south have been subdued. In chapter 11:15-23 the book claims that all these victories fulfill God's earlier promises. Joshua simply carries out what Moses commanded. Yahweh has fought for Israel which is why they have beaten so many foes. Unlike their predecessors, this generation of Israel follows the Lord's direction, they are faithful to their Covenant Master, they receive the promised rest.

### **How the Israelites Divided the Land (13–22)**

Joshua 13 to 22 is the second major section of the book. As you will recall, the whole book of Joshua stresses that God keeps His promise of giving the land to Abraham's descendants. Chapters 13–22 describe how those descendants actually divided the land so that they might live there. At first glance, Joshua 13:1 appears to contradict 11:23. The first text says Joshua took the whole land while the second notes that in Joshua's old age large portions of land were yet unconquered.

What 11:23 probably means is that Canaan's power base is no longer existed. All their major military centers had fallen. Thus Israel now has to disperse, defeat the smaller towns and settle in their proper places. The most difficult task is over. The land does lay before them ready to be inhabited. So it does remain for the land to be divided. So Joshua with Eliezer, the high priest, divides the land among the tribes and tells them to displace the remaining Canaanites. He even allows the tribes whose inheritance lies beyond the Jordan (Num. 32) to go home. Their obligation to help the other tribes become established has been fulfilled.

### **Renewing the Covenant with Yahweh (23–24)**

Joshua 23 and 24 is about renewing the covenant. Joshua 23 and 24 revolves around the major character of the book of Joshua, Joshua himself. You recall that Joshua has been a part of the biblical story since the book of Exodus. Joshua was Moses' assistant. Joshua was the leader who helped Israel come into the Promise Land and conquer it. His life work nearly done, Joshua leads Israel in one last covenant renewal ceremony. You will recall that he led them in one in Joshua 8. You will also recall that Moses had told the

people in Deuteronomy 27 and 28 to renew the covenant regularly as a reminder of their love for the Lord.

So in this last ceremony, in 23:1-11, he encourages the leaders of the next generation, just as Moses had encouraged him. He tells the next generation of leaders they will inherit the land if they obey God's law for God will continue to fight for them. However, he says in 23:12-16, if they disobey the Lord, the Lord will bring destruction upon them. Clearly the blessings and consequences outlined in Leviticus 26 and Deuteronomy 27, 28 remain in effect. Israel has a permanent relationship with Yahweh. The relationship has not ended or altered because they have come into the land.

In chapter 24, Joshua continues the covenant renewal observance by retelling their national story. Starting with Terah, Abraham's father, Joshua describes how Israel went from serving other gods to worshipping Yahweh, the only true God. This story includes Israel's journey from slavery in Egypt to freedom and prosperity in Canaan. Given this great past, Joshua challenges the people to serve Yahweh in the present and in the future. And as all great leaders must, Joshua sets an example for his followers. Regardless of what others decide, he says, he and his family will serve the Lord.

He says this in probably the most famous passage in the book of Joshua (24:14-15). Having given them their history and challenged the leaders, he says, "Now therefore, fear the Lord and serve Him in sincerity and in faithfulness. Put away the gods that your fathers served beyond the river and in Egypt and serve the Lord. And if it is evil in your eyes to serve the Lord, chose this day whom you will serve, whether gods your father served in the region beyond the river or the gods of the Amorites in whose land you dwell. But as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord."

This last verse, "But as for me and my house we will serve the Lord" is a rather well known and famous one. I've actually seen this verse posted in people's houses stating that as Christians they will serve the Lord. It is important for us to remember that Joshua made this confession, this challenge, this promise in the context of covenant renewal. He is trying to make sure that his people understand the need to follow the Lord, the Lord only, and to avoid all worship of other gods. In response, the nation praises God and agrees to keep the covenant.

In chapter 24:16-18 they say they realize the Lord has given them the land. Joshua probes the depth of their commitment. He says in 24:19, "You are not able to serve the Lord for He is a holy God, He is a jealous God, He will not forgive your transgression or your sins. If you forsake the Lord and serve foreign gods He will turn and do you harm and will consume you after having done you good." And, of course, he is reminding them of consequences of covenant breaking already outlined earlier in the Bible.

The people respond positively: 'No but we will serve the Lord.' And so they continue on with the covenant renewal ceremony. Having said they will serve the Lord, taking them at their word, Joshua writes the covenant in the book of the law of God (24:26). He has done all he can to pass on the promises made to Abraham, the promises made to Moses, and the standards revealed through Moses.

When Joshua dies he is buried in his family's inheritance in the north (24:29-30). According to 24:32, Joseph's bones, which were carried from Egypt, are also buried in the Promise Land. These burial ceremonies stress the importance of the Promise Land. The land belongs to all people of faith and it symbolizes the permanence of God's love for Israel.

It also symbolizes Israel's role as a kingdom for God, as a kingdom of priests, a holy nation, living in the midst of the earth to tell God's praises and to teach other nations to follow Him. The leaders who succeeded Joshua continue to help the people follow the Lord. Yet the comment that Israel serve God as long as Joshua and his contemporaries live leads to a question: will Israel obey Yahweh when these giants die? Leadership is an ongoing issue for them just as it is for us.

Like Moses, Joshua is an extraordinary individual. He is both warrior and spiritual leader. At times he's afraid and needs to be encouraged yet he overcomes these fears and wins great victories. Though he could seek prestige for himself, he constantly praises the Lord and honors Moses' memory. By blending these qualities, Joshua is able to raise Israel to new national greatness. He is the person who finally helps fulfill the land promise. Abraham's descendants have a homeland. How long they keep it depends on their obedience to the Lord. Only time will tell if Israel will continue to uphold the standards of Joshua's generation.

## Authorship of Joshua

There are two items of introduction that I need to discuss at this point. One of them I promised when I gave the introduction to the book of Joshua. I promised to discuss and that is the issue of the conquest of the land. The other one is the authorship of the book of Joshua.

As you have now read and worked through the book of Joshua you will recall that there is really no author stated to this book. In other words we don't know who wrote this book. The same is true of Joshua, Judges, Samuel, and Kings. We have this great and magnificent and connected history. This accurate account of Israel's coming into the land clear on down to their loss of the land. So a time period that stretches nearly a thousand years. And yet we don't know who the author of the book is. But it is a careful historian. Someone who checked facts, who had a method of telling the account that

told about real people in a real way that showed how the people's relationship to God determined everything else about their history. But we simply do not know who this great historian was. We know this person was very committed to detailing Israel's history according to standards found in the books of Moses. But we simply do not know when the person wrote.

## Question of Fairness

Now the other issue. It often troubles people to begin reading the book of Joshua and see that Yahweh is giving Israel the land and they wonder if it is fair to the Canaanites and wonder what it is that God is doing. A book you might read to help you understand this is Christopher Wright's, *The God I Don't Understand*. In this very probing book, Christopher Wright deals with several difficult issues in the Bible and comes to good conclusions about how we can have faith in God and in what the Bible teaches. So some of what he says there I will incorporate into my discussion.

But the question is why would God give Israel the land of Canaan and is this fair to the Canaanites. On this subject I want to go back to the book of Genesis. I want to remind you that God made the heaven and the earth and all the people in it and that He has His righteous standards. You recall in Genesis 12, God promised Abraham that his family would have the land of Canaan as their homeland. I want to go to chapter 15 of Genesis to help us begin to understand some things. Having promised the land to Abram, you recall that Abram trusted God and God counted it to him as righteousness (15:6).

And then as a further understanding, a further revelation of what God would do, in 15:13, the Lord said to Abram, know for certain that your offspring will be sojourners, that is resident aliens, in a land that is not theirs, and will be servants there and they will be afflicted for 400 years. That verse reminds us that Israel went into Egypt and they were enslaved eventually as Genesis 27 through Exodus 18 tells us. Continuing in 15:14, God says, "But I will bring judgment on the nation they serve and afterward they shall come out with great possessions." That verse promises the Exodus.

Now verse 15, "As for yourself, you shall go to your fathers in peace. You will be buried in a good old age, and they shall come back in the fourth generation, for the iniquity of the Amorites is not yet complete." That phrase, "the iniquity of the Amorites is not yet complete," is important for us as we try to understand the conquest of Canaan. What God is saying to Abraham is his people, his descendants, will not be able to have the land for 400 years. The Amorites' sin is not yet complete. Now the Amorites is another way of saying the Canaanites, so the people of the land of Canaan. God is giving them 400 years to turn away from their sins.

In fact, Israel will be suffering for a time waiting for the sins of the Amorites to be complete before God will give them the land. So God is giving the people of Canaan lots of opportunity to turn from their sin. They will have hundreds of years in order to do that. Now continuing on to chapter 18 of the book of Leviticus, here is some more information. Prior to telling Israel that they shall not practice all sorts of sexual misconduct, the Lord says the following to Moses in Leviticus 18:1, "And the Lord spoke to Moses saying, 'Speak to the people of Israel and say to them, "I am the Lord your God. You shall not do as they do in the land of Egypt where you lived and you shall not do as they do in the land of Canaan to which I am bringing you.'"

Therefore whatever follows in this passage are things being done in the land of Canaan where they are headed. Then it goes on to show us that incest, sexual abuse, bestiality, heterosexual sins like adultery and homosexual sins are all committed in that place. In other words, the Canaanites were a corrupt culture and God is saying Israel shall not live that way. Their sins are becoming complete and their sins are quite terrible. God is going to give Israel this land in part as a judgment against what the people of the land are doing.

The next passage I want to remind you of is Joshua 1:2. That's the passage that tells us how the prostitute Rahab, the woman who hid the spies who had come to look at the city of Jericho, believed in God. She heard the stories about how the Lord had given Israel victory over Egypt and victory in the desert and she believed that this God is the one true living God and turned in faith to Him. And as the Bible goes on we find out she is one of the great grandmothers of King David and also of Jesus, the Son of God. So we see here that the Canaanites had heard who the Lord was, they had heard what He was doing and yet they chose to fight against Joshua and the Lord's army.

We also find in Joshua 9 that there is a group of people called the Gibeonites. They also turn and ask for mercy from Israel and they put their allegiance with Israel and with Israel's God. And they are spared. So I think it's important for us to see that for over 400 years the Lord bore with the sins of the Canaanites and these sins were considerable. But the day came when He gave Israel the land as not only a promise to Abraham but as judgment on those sins. People who believed that that was what was happening who were of Canaanite decent, who put their faith in God, were spared. They were not judged.

We also need to note that God treats Israel the same way He treats the Canaanites. That is, He has already told Israel that if they sin against Him and they sin over a long period of time and do not turn from those sins He will drive them out of the land just as He drove the Canaanites out of the land. The Bible does not teach that the Israelites, the Jewish persons, may inhabit the land of Canaan no matter how they lived. The land is not theirs, if they continue to sin in it. So I think it's important for us to see the whole

Bible perspective on what is going on with conquest in Joshua and not just drop into the book of Joshua, read the passages, think that it is unfair, and judge God harshly.

## Lesson 7 ■ Judges and 1 Samuel

### JUDGES

We now come to the book of Judges. The book of Judges really is a chaotic book. It is a book in which we see God disciplining and delivering His people. God disciplines and delivers. Judges is a unique book. It tells some of the most gruesome stories of the Bible. At the same time it stresses single minded worship of the Lord. Colorful characters appear. Some with some terrible and obvious character flaws. Yet God uses these individuals to govern and deliver Israel.

#### The Theme of Judges

Given these seemingly contradictory facts, this mixture of good and bad, it is important for us to ask, 'What is Judges main purpose'? Normally it is wise to let a book speak for its self, that is readers should study a text and then decide what it means. But because of its seemly offensive stories it is proper to announce Judges theme now as we begin study the book. There are two key passages that tell us what the book is trying to convey. When you look at 17:6 and then the book's last verse, 21:25, we see the book's main idea. The book describes what happens when everyone does what is right in his own eyes.

In other words, when everyone becomes a law unto themselves, when God is not followed, and there is no ruler in the land, there is chaos. When the covenant is ignored and when there is no king to keep order, terrible things happen. What sort of things? According to chapter 11 people offer human sacrifices. According to chapter 19 women are raped and dismembered. According to chapter 20 relatives kill one another in civil wars. Terrible, terrible things happen. But readers should not think the author of Judges favors such action. Rather the writer paints such gruesome pictures to warn future generations against lawlessness.

#### Setting and Dating

The setting for the book of Judges is in the land of Canaan. And it is probably between the years 1350 B.C. and 1050 B.C. So about a 300 year span. If the Exodus occurs about 1400 B.C. and it takes several years to conquer it then at least by 1350 B.C. the people are living in the land, under the circumstances described, and these circumstances will stay the same until about 1050 B.C. when Israel has their first king, an event that is described in the book of 1 Samuel.

So it is difficult to tell how much time unfolds in Judges for a lot of reasons. For example, it is possible that some of the judges lived at the same time and are ruling and judging in different parts of the country. It is difficult to connect archeological evidence with what we see in the text. Nonetheless, if we give ourselves a broad expanse of time we can tell that certainly these events had time to unfold in 300 years.

## **Sociological Factors**

There are certain sociological factors that impacted Israel during this era that might help us understand the book. First, during this era new enemies moved into the region. Among others, the Philistines who figure prominently in the book rose at this time. Second, new weapons were developed. Iron slowly replaced bronze as the metal for war instruments. Nations who possessed iron weapons defeated those who did not. Israel was slow to produce iron instruments so they were in trouble militarily.

A third factor, not only were new enemies moving into the region, not only were new weapons being developed, but vast migrations of peoples already in the land already occurred. No major powers ruled the area so various people groups came in and out of Canaan and some of these groups raided Israel's settlements. Fourth, Israel was extremely disorganized. They had no central government or standing army. So Israel was vulnerable to every moderately strong power in the region.

Fifth, besides all these difficulties, Israel had terrible spiritual problems as we shall soon discuss. So the one thing that would have held them together, their faith in God, was not even able to secure them. They cast off their faith in the one, true God, the God who brought them into the land, the God that their ancestors believed in.

They were disorganized, raiding parties moved in and out of the region. New weapons that they didn't have were being developed and permanent enemies were resettling in the land. Israel had severe problems. But again the main problem is that people were sinning against God by worshipping other gods and by turning away from their other covenant commitments.

## **OUTLINE OF JUDGES**

The book of Judges can be divided into the following main parts: the first major part is 1:1 to 2:5. Here we find the roots of chaos. This section explains to us why things got so bad in Israel. Judges 2:6 to 16:31 provides the second section. The second section stresses what it is like to live in chaotic situations. So Judges 2:6 through 16:31 gives us lots of descriptive information about what happened when the people begin to experience the consequences of deciding to sin against the Lord. The third section is

chapters 17 to 21. This section is the worst of all. These chapters are really hard to summarize, but they show the outer darkness of living against the standards of the Lord. So we have an increasingly bad situation.

Chapter 1:1 through 2:5 tells us where the people went wrong and how that happened. Chapter 2:6 to 16:31 shows us the typical normal upheaval that comes from living in a way that is displeasing to God. And then chapters 17 to 21 go even further. They show us some of the darkest, most horrible things that human beings do when they turn against the Lord. So we have increasing chaos as we go.

## The Roots of Chaos

In chapter 1:1 to 2:5, Israel struggles to complete the conquest of Canaan after Joshua's death. Some advances are made. Despite their success though, Israel never completely displaces the Canaanites. Many people groups are allowed to remain though these are forced to work for Israel. Unfortunately, Israel's unwillingness and inability to drive out their enemies causes problems. When the Canaanites are spared, their gods are also spared. Israel thereby breaks their covenant agreement with God. Because the people eventually worship these gods, God will not tolerate their disobedience and idolatry. According to 2:1-5, to remind Israel of their covenant obligation, the Lord allows their enemies to oppress them. God will always test their obedience by allowing the enemies they have spared to torment them.

This short section of the book serves two important functions. First, it reminds the reader of God's love for the people and Israel's past victories. Things have gone well for Israel since they left the desert when they keep the covenant. Second, it hints of trouble on the horizon. If Israel has powerful enemies and worships idols they cannot flourish in the land.

## Living in Chaos

Second section, Judges 2:6 to 16:31, after Joshua's faithful generation dies, a new unfaithful generation emerges. A leadership crisis leaves this group knowing neither the Lord nor what He had done for Israel according to 2:10. Israel plunges into a sin cycle that lasts throughout the book of Judges. Here is how the cycle goes: the people do not appreciate Yahweh, so they worship Canaanite gods (2:11-13). Because of their idolatry, God sends nations to defeat Israel, to encourage the people to change (2:14-15). When they fall into trouble, Israel cries out for the Lord's help (2:15). Out of kindness the Lord will send judges or military leaders to defeat the oppressing, punishing nation (2:16-18). The people serve God while the judge lives but they turn away when he or she dies (2:19).

Then rebellion starts the cycle all over again: covenant breaking leads to God's discipline usually in the form of a foreign enemy oppressing them. The people cry out to God, He sends them a judge, a person who will rule over them spiritually, militarily, and economically, and judicially. And this person helps the people defeat their enemy, but when he dies or when she dies the people go back to their old ways. And this pattern happens over and over again.

Starting with Othniel, the nation's first deliverer. His story is told in 3:7-11. In that story Israel angers the Lord by serving the Canaanite fertility gods Baal and Asherah. Since Baal and Asherah appear throughout the Old Testament from this point forward it might be good for us to explain a bit about what sort of religion worshipped them. It goes back to some fundamental things. The Canaanites, like Israel, were farmers and herdsmen. They depended on the land's fertility for support. According to the Canaanites beliefs, Baal was the fertility god. Baal was the god who made animals fertile, women fertile, the land fertile and so forth. He and his sister-wife, Asherah, caused crops to grow and animals to bear the young. So he was seen as the god of fertility and his sister, who is also in some stories his wife, is his consort who, as they reproduce, the land reproduces.

How do you worship such a god? Well because of its emphasis on fertility, Baal worship had strong sexual overtones. In fact, some Baal worshipers even had sexual relationships in worship centers with prostitutes dedicated to Baal. So there would be female prostitutes and some scholars think also male prostitutes so that men and women could go to this center, have sexual relationships with these sacred prostitutes, to worship sex and fertility, and in an agricultural community if you are worshipping the god who makes the crops grow you are also worshipping a god who gives you money.

So Baal worship was really about worshipping sex and money and power. It was a very popular religion. It was connected to the lifestyle of the people to the fleshly desire of human beings and to people's basic desire for power, sex, and money. So the people were worshipping these gods according to chapter 3. Now clearly Baal worship violates the covenant God has made with Israel. Thus the Lord allows a migrating people to oppress Israel (3:8). So then Israel cries out to God and God chooses Othniel to deliver them from their enemies. And the land has peace for forty years. Yet when Othniel died, the sin cycle begins again.

There are a whole series of these judges, we can name many of them but just a few. There is Ehud, a skillful crafty left-handed man whose story is told in chapter 3. There is Deborah, a female judge whose story is told in chapter 4. She leads Israel to defeat Jabin, king of Hazor. There is Gideon, whose story is told in chapter 6 and following.

Gideon is well known because he is the person who is called by God to deliver Israel from Midian and he asks the Lord for a sign. He takes a fleece from lambs and puts it

the ground and asks the Lord to make it wet and the ground dry once and to make the ground wet and the fleece dry at another point in time. God does what he asks and in an unusual decision gives His servant Gideon a sign of the truthfulness of the calling to deliver the people. Gideon also is famous because though he starts with 30,000 warriors the Lord tells him it is too many for him to win the battle and God get the glory so He strips Gideon down to 300 soldiers who are able to win a great victory against a much larger opponent. Gideon's story covers chapter 6, 7, and 8.

There is another famous judge we might mention his name is Jephthah. Jephthah delivers Israel from the people from Ammon. His story is told in chapters 10 and 11. Jephthah is famous because at one point to secure victory he vows to sacrifice to the Lord the first thing out of the door of his house when he returns home (11:30-31). Perhaps he thought an animal would emerge first since they normally stabled animals in their homes during this era.

But much to his surprise, however, his only child, his daughter comes out to meet him. And because of his vow to sacrifice the first thing that comes out he offers her as a sacrifice. Now does God approve of such actions? If we started reading the Bible at this point we might not know, but if you have been reading the Bible you know of course God does not approve of such actions. How do we know? Leviticus 20:1-5 and several other passages have already prohibited human sacrifices. Killing children and siblings does not honor God despite the beliefs and practices of Israel's neighbors. Many of them did practice human sacrifice.

Again it is important to remember the book's theme – unthinkably immoral things happen when all the people do what is right in their own eyes. Jephthah should have known God's standards. As Israel's leader he should have been following Moses' commands. And yet he does not and his daughter pays the price for his misguided religion.

But perhaps the most famous judge of all is the man, Samson. His story is told in Judges 13 to 16. In my opinion, Samson embodies the mistake of living by mere human standards. As we read the story we see Samson does whatever he wishes at all times and therefore squanders great potential. Like other important Biblical characters he has an unusual birth. His parents are unable to have children yet God tells them they will have a son.

He will be a special child. He will be what Numbers 6 describes as a Nazarite. That was a particular group of people who committed themselves to not drink strong wine, cut their hair, touch dead bodies or eat unclean food. They were set apart for special service of God. Yahweh promises to use this child to deliver Israel from the Philistines who have been oppressing them. So he is a special person with particular commitments but he breaks every one of those commitments and several others.

Contrary to Moses' law Samson decides to marry a Philistine woman according to chapter 14. Now you will recall Israelites could marry foreigners who followed the Lord, Moses had an Ethiopian wife and the book of Ruth tells us about Ruth a Moabite woman who marries an Israelite. But marriages with idol worshippers such as the Philistines were forbidden. Samson's parents warn him against this union but he persists. He says in 14:3, "She is right in my eyes," an obvious reference to the book's main theme. Samson will do what he thinks best despite what the Lord and his parents say. God will wrench some good from Samson's disobedience as we will see.

But still the disobedience leads to several terrible events. Samson and his parents will eventually go to Philistia to make the marriage arrangements. While on the way Samson kills a lion with his bare hands. This event demonstrates Samson's great God-given strength. Going home Samson finds honey in a lion's carcass. He eats a little and gives some to his parents but he does not tell them where he got it. Again Samson has broken Moses' law. Nazarites were supposed to avoid dead bodies of all kinds. So once more, Samson simply does as he pleases; he does what is right in his own eyes.

During his wedding feast Samson asks his guests a riddle. He bets 30 linen garments that they can't solve it. Based on the lion and the honey he says in 14:14, "From the eater comes something to eat. And from the strong comes something sweet." The guests ponder this puzzle for three days. Then they threaten to burn the bride, her parents and their home if she does not give them the answer. She gets Samson to tell her the answer to the riddle after much nagging and whining. The guests solve the riddle, Samson loses his bet. To collect the garments, Samson kills 30 Philistines and takes their cloths. So God does use him to defeat Israel's enemies. Samson is so angry at his bride he leaves her. Killing these men is just the first time he attacks the Philistines.

According to chapter 15 he stays away for some time and so his wife is given away. Angry at the Philistines he then torches their fields, destroys their crops. Eventually over 20 years he will kill dozens of Philistines. So of course they want to remove him. You may know the story of how they ask a Philistine woman named Delilah, a woman that Samson loves, to betray him. She plots to betray him for money.

She wants to know the source of his strength. It is apparently in his hair, he has never had his hair cut. And despite all his other sins as long as he has his hair as a symbol of his commitment to the Lord as a Nazarite, the Lord has been with him. Eventually he tells her this is the source of his strength. She cuts his hair and the Lord leaves him and the Philistines take him. They put out his eyes and imprison him. On a festival day they bring him out to make fun of him and to rejoice how their god has given them victory over this enemy. Samson is placed at the pillar of the whole structure. God restores his strength and he pushes them down killing more Philistines in his death than he did in life.

Samson has a spectacular career. But perhaps more than any other judge he illustrates Israel's attitude during this era. Like the people, Samson does whatever is right in his own eyes. Despite his Nazarite vows he repeatedly follows his own appetite. Certainly God uses him to punish the Philistines. Certainly at times Samson honors the Lord. But sadly he personifies Israel as a whole by being a rather inconsistent follower of the Lord.

## Consequences of Living in Chaos

Judges 17 to 21: these chapters tell us some of the darkest stories in the Bible. In fact the writer knows that these are going to be such difficult stories that he begins by telling you in verse 6 that this is what happens when everyone does what is right in his own eyes. Chapters 17 and 18 describe the career of a young Levite who stops serving the Lord. For a salary, for room and board, he agrees to serve as a priest for idols. This story shows how bad it is when even the priests do what is right in their own eyes.

But chapter 19 and following are even worse. The story begins with a Levite, yet another priest from Northern Israel, taking a concubine, that is a woman who would provide sexual favors for him and live with him, but who he doesn't marry, takes a concubine from the southern town of Bethlehem. She runs away to return home so he goes south to retrieve her. With the reclaimed woman he begins the journey home.

They stop in a town called Gibeah, which is in the tribal territory of Benjamin. It was customary for inhabitants of Israelite towns to offer visitors a place to stay but no one invites them in. Finally though an old man invites them to stay with him. This is a wicked city. During the night a group of men surround the house, they demand that the Levite be sent out so they can have sex with him.

To quiet and perhaps shame the crowd the old man offers his daughter to them instead but the men refuse. So the Levite sends his concubine into the street. She is raped and abused until morning. Her body weakened, she only has enough strength to crawl to the house's doorway. Her master exhibits no concern for her. As he leaves in the morning he finds her at the door and says, 19:28, "Get up, let's go," but she has died. To protest her death he takes the grisly step of cutting her body into 12 pieces and sending a portion to each tribe of Israel.

This awful action causes Israel to gather and ask what has happened in chapter 20. The Levite describes the woman's death and the people decide to confront the city of Gibeah. They ask that the murderers be handed over but the city refuses. They protect the murderers, these rapists. This sparks a civil war in which thousands of Israelites die. At least 40,000 of them die. Israel pays a high price for doing what is right in their own

eyes. An innocent woman has been raped and killed. Her body has been dismembered. Her killers have been protected. And 40,000 people die in battle.

Without obedience to the covenant, without a king to enforce civil laws, such atrocities can happen. Judges concludes with an episode that hardly eases the reader's disgust with the events of chapters 17 to 20. Since the men from Benjamin have been guilty of rape and all kinds of sexual abuses, the other tribes vow not to let their daughters marry them (21:1).

How then will Benjamin get wives? How will this tribe continue? They cannot intermarry indefinitely. So the people decide on a rather odd method for gaining wives. An annual festival is planned in Shiloh. The girls from Shiloh dance in this festival. The men from Benjamin are told to hide in the vineyards near Shiloh, wait for the girls to dance by the road, and then grab one for a wife. Read 21:19-24. Each man therefore snatches a wife. Of course this method of choosing a wife is not God's will. This is not what Moses taught at all. The story is disturbing. Because it is the result of sin it is also tragic. These events only happen because, one last time, the people do what is right in their own eyes, as the book concludes in 21:25.

## Concluding Thoughts

What can we say about the book of Judges? There are many things to say but it is important for us to see that Judges illustrates the consequences of lawlessness and poor leadership. Covenant breaking can only lead to punishment and loss. Often Israel has no leadership and at other times their leaders do not serve God wholeheartedly. No one like Moses or Joshua appears. This spiritual and political vacuum must be filled or Israel will never become a great nation, it will never be a kingdom of priests showing the other nations how to find the Lord. It remains to be seen what God will do to address these problems.

We are at a critical state as we conclude the book of Judges. The nation is worshipping idols. The nation is living as they wish. The nation is certainly not showing the other nations how to serve the Lord. I think it is important for us to understand that just as in these days, turning away from the Creator and His standards and His redemption and His plan for us leads to all sorts of chaos. Human beings cannot live however they wish and have everything go well. God's people, those who are called by His name, cannot turn away from Him, serve idols, and do as they wish, and ever hope to have His blessing and His approval.

The book of Judges is a cautionary tale for us all. It causes us to ask ourselves about our commitments, about our covenant keeping. It calls us to understand that there is a difference between God's standards and the world's standards. It calls us to understand

that all truth is ultimately God's truth. And we must follow His standards. People will say that it is fine to serve other gods. People will say that all standards are equal. But the Bible warns us that not following the principles outlined by the Creator in His word will have terrible consequences in the end.

## **1 SAMUEL**

We now come to the books of 1 and 2 Samuel. So far in the prophetic section of the Old Testament we have studied the books of Joshua and Judges. In Joshua we saw the Lord keeping His promise in giving land to Abraham's descendants so that they might be a kingdom of priests, a holy people and declare God's greatness to all the nations so that they might be redeemed.

But we saw in the book of Judges that the people had a very uneven witness to the Lord. That the majority of the time they were sinning against the Lord and living as the other nations. And the Lord was having to discipline them and bring them back to Himself. When the book of Judges ends things are at a low ebb. The people have fallen to new depths of immorality. They have perpetuated some of the worst deeds that we find recorded in the pages of Scripture. So we are at a crucial point when we come to 1 and 2 Samuel. And these books emphasize that God provides a kingdom for Israel in the Promised Land. That God will give a king who will rule the people with whom God will make a covenant to give an eternal kingdom that will provide a blessing to all nations.

We will see that this king is David, but before David we have Saul, the first king of Israel. And before Saul emerges we have Samuel, the last judge of Israel. So we are moving in 1 and 2 Samuel from the era of the judges through the ministry of the last judge, Samuel, into the era of the kingdom, the monarchy, that begins with Saul, continues with David, and then in 1 and 2 Kings continues with his son Solomon and on down the ages. So 1 and 2 Samuel emphasizes God giving the kingdom in the Promised Land.

The setting for the book is as I just mentioned in Canaan, the land of Israel. The time period that is covered in 1 and 2 Samuel is about 1070 or so B.C. down to about 970 B.C., so about a hundred years are covered in 1 and 2 Samuel. As is true of Joshua and Judges we do not know who wrote this book. Certainly we can see that the person is using authentic material, is giving an accurate portrayal of what is happening, but this person's name is never given.

## **OUTLINE OF 1 SAMUEL**

The book of 1 and 2 Samuel can be divided in the following manner. In chapters 1 through 8 we have Samuel's career. Samuel is the last judge of Israel. He is the last of the type. The type of people we have already seen such as Othniel and Ehud and Jephthah and Samson and Deborah. He is the last of that type of leader. And he is a great one. Chapters 1 to 8 we have his career. And then in chapters 9 through 15 we have an emphasis on the kingship of Saul. Saul is chosen to be the king of Israel but after a series of decisions he makes to honor himself instead of the Lord he is replaced. In 1 Samuel 16 to 31 we have the rise of a new king, King David. Saul continues to be the official ruler, but God has chosen a new king to replace him, this king is David, a man after God's own heart, that's 1 Samuel 16 to 31.

### **Samuel's Career (1–8)**

So there are three major parts to first Samuel: chapters 1 to 8, chapter 9 to 15 and chapters 16 to 31. So 1 Samuel 1 to 8: Samuel's career. Israel's woes continue as the book of 1 Samuel begins. Israel still has no king and the people do not obey God's command. Something is needed to break the endless cycle of sin, punishment, oppression, etc. Judges has already hinted at a temporary solution in 17:6 and 21:25 – if Israel had a king perhaps law and order would exist and the nation would serve Yahweh. Moses mentioned that eventually Israel would have a king in Deuteronomy 17: 14-20. So as the book unfolds we are going to see the kings arise. But before that we have Samuel.

Like Isaac, Moses, Samson, and other important characters, Samuel's birth occurs under unusual circumstances. According to chapter 1, his mother, Hannah, cannot conceive. To make matters worse, her husband has another wife who has had children and this rival wife taunts Hannah unmercifully. So Hannah prays for a son and God opens her womb. And she promises to give this son back to the Lord. True to her word when her son Samuel is born she turns him over to God's service. She takes him to Shiloh where the priest Eli is serving the people.

According to chapter 2, Eli's own sons are corrupt men, they are the worse sort of priest. They take choice portions of meat from the sacrifice, they sleep with the women who serve in the sanctuary. Clearly these are unsuitable leaders for God's people.

According to chapter 3, while Samuel is still young, God chooses him to be a prophet. The story I was told when I was a child, and told in very vivid detail I recall, the Lord calls Samuel at night. Three times He calls him. It is not until the third time that Samuel realizes that it is the Lord who is calling. The Lord calls Samuel and gives him a

message and it is that Eli's family can no longer be servants and priests. They will be displaced for their sins and Samuel will become the person who will serve the Lord as the major priest and leader.

In chapters 4, 5, and 6, we find Israel being defeated by their old enemies the Philistines. God's people are unable to overcome their enemies because they are worshipping other gods. And so the Lord allows them to be defeated. Not even a good person, not even a good judge like Samuel can help them during these days. He attempts to turn them back to the Lord.

According to chapter 7, he challenges the people to destroy their idols and serve the Lord. He prays for the people and offers sacrifices on their behalf, so eventually the Lord does give them relief from the Philistines in chapter 7. But the Philistines never go away completely. Samuel is a great leader. According to 3:19-20 he is a prophet. According to 7:9 he is a priest. According to 7:15 he is a judge. He pushes the nation to keep its covenant obligations to God. He intercedes for the people and prays for them when they are sinful. At times he is able to help them with military victories. In short he is an ideal judge.

No other judge is as faithful to God as Samuel. No other judge has his moral and ethical excellence, with the exception, perhaps, of Deborah. Yet despite his efforts Israel will ask for and receive a totally different kind of leader. Israel will ask for a king. This occurs in 1 Kings 8. There the people demand that Samuel help them find a king. They want to be like the other nations, they say. They want a king who will lead them out and defeat their enemies and will give them the government they need.

Samuel warns them that a king will draft some of their sons and daughters into the army. He warns them that he will tax the nation. He warns them of all sorts of abuses and yet the people still demand a king. Samuel takes this matter to the Lord who tells him the people have not rejected Samuel, they have rejected Yahweh. They have rejected God and that he is to help the people have a king.

Now we have already said Moses had said that this would occur. That the time would come when the people would want a king and that God would give them a king. This king was to follow God's Word carefully. He was to serve the people, not himself. We already have standards for a king. And so we will see how this king does once he is chosen.

### **Saul as Israel's King (9–15)**

The second section of 1 Samuel is chapters 9 through 15. These chapters emphasize Saul as Israel's king. Saul is chosen by Samuel. He seems to be a likely candidate to be king. According to 9:2 he is tall and physically impressive. He is unassuming. According to

9:3-21 Saul finds it hard to believe that God would chose him to be king. He realizes he is from an insignificant family and from Israel's smallest clan. He certainly hasn't asked for this privilege. In chapter 9, he takes being king of Israel as a great honor. He receives it as God's calling in his life. God gives Saul His Spirit to rule the people. And the first years of Saul's reign go very well.

Once chosen, in chapter 11, the text tells us that he has initial success in battle. Ammonites surround an Israelite town and demand surrender. The city calls for help. Greatly moved by God's Spirit, Saul gathers a mighty army and routes the Ammonites. He is the king the people have all been looking for. He can defeat their enemies, he can lead their armies. And at first he seems to be the kind of king God would approve. He has God's Spirit, he has humility, he is following God's standards. God has given Saul a great start to his kingdom.

But after this positive start, things go very wrong. In chapter 13, Saul is faced with fighting the Philistines. To demonstrate God's approval of what the army was doing Samuel was supposed to come and offer sacrifices. He promised to arrive in seven days but is late. With his army scattering, Saul offers the sacrifice himself, an act only priests were supposed to perform.

According to 13:10-12, just as he finishes, Samuel appears and corrects him. Samuel declares that because of what Saul has done his kingdom cannot endure. His sons will not rule Israel. Samuel says in 13:13 God would have established Saul forever but his disobedience has disqualified him. And Samuel says a man after God's own heart will lead Israel but this person has not yet been identified. So for now God allows Saul to continue to rule Israel.

He and his son Jonathan lead the people in a decisive victory over Philistia in chapters 13 and 14. So at this point it seems that Saul will be allowed to be king. God will use him to help the people but his sons will not succeed him. But one more sad episode causes Yahweh to reject Saul altogether. God decides to allow Israel to defeat the Amalekites, an old enemy. Samuel tells Saul that all the Amalekites and their animals must be killed. These are basically the same rules of war God gave Joshua.

According to chapter 15:4-9, though, Saul kills all the Amalekites but spares Agag their king and keeps some of the best animals for spoil. It seems he's extended a little professional courtesy to his fellow king and that he has decided to keep some of the animals for himself. Only the weak and worthless animals are destroyed. Saul has disobeyed a second time. He has been very selective in his obedience. His actions may make political and financial sense, but they are not what God commanded him to do.

The Lord reacts strongly to Saul's disobedience. He sends Samuel to Saul to confront the king. Saul is filled with pride. According to 15:12 he has already made a monument to

honor himself. And he tells Samuel he has kept all God's commands. But Samuel rebukes him and tells him that the Lord has rejected him as king. Saul pleads with Samuel to be reinstated but Samuel offers him no comfort. God has rejected Saul by the end of chapter 15.

We might ask at this point in light of the faults of other leaders God leaves in place, why is Saul rejected? After all, David, Saul's successor will sin greatly, as we will see in our study. Men like Gideon and Samson are far from sinless. I suppose no perfect answer can be given. But perhaps it's helpful if we compare Saul's rejection with Moses' punishment. Both Saul and Moses are chosen by God and both have success. Yet both disobey God in areas of worship. Both also disobey Yahweh's direct commands. Both fail to honor Yahweh. The swiftness of the punishments each receives reveals how seriously God takes worship and His word.

Let's see a contrast, too. Moses accepted Yahweh decision and led Israel toward the Promised Land. He prepared Joshua to succeed him. Having sinned against the Lord, having received his punishment, Moses accepted what God had said and moved forward to obey God in the new circumstances.

As becomes quite clear as we proceed in the book, Saul has no intention of following Moses' example. He will cling to power as if power is God. He will do everything he can to remain king. He will not prepare his successor. He will not give up power. He will continue to rebel against God. He will continue to rebel against God's true worship and God's clear word.

## **David Becomes King (16–31)**

1 Samuel 16 to 31 tells us about the rise of a new king. David is the chief character here. In 1 Samuel 16 the Lord directs Samuel to go to Bethlehem and visit the family of a man named Jesse. And there Samuel sees one son after another. They all seem impressive but God does not choose the first set of men that Samuel sees. God tells Samuel in 16:7, "The Lord does not view things like men do. Men look at outward appearances, but the Lord looks at the heart." So Jesse's seven oldest sons pass before Samuel, yet none of them is God's choice.

Finally, the youngest son David who has been watching the sheep meets Samuel. He is a handsome young man. He is a capable young man. And God commands Samuel to anoint him king, just as Samuel had anointed Saul earlier. When Samuel anoints David in 16:13, God's Spirit rushes upon him. Whereas God had once empowered Saul to rule, see chapters 10 and 11, now David receives this strength. In fact, the next verse states that God's Spirit leaves Saul. And that Spirit is replaced by a harmful spirit from the

Lord that terrorizes Saul. Placed together, verses 13 and 14 clearly indicate that a change in God-appointed and God-approved leadership has occurred.

Because of the strangeness of 16:13-14 perhaps a brief explanation is necessary. You may fear that this text means that God deserts and then terrorizes people who disobey the Lord. Perhaps the following points can help ease such concerns. First, the passage does emphasize that God punishes sin. Not even believers can sin without experiencing the Lord's gracious discipline. Second, the passage's main purpose is to note the change in leadership. We need to keep that point clear in our minds.

Third, this harmful spirit, which some translations render as 'evil' spirit, was not, in my opinion, some demon or some other frightening being. Music soothes this spirit according to 16:15-16. So I don't think music soothes a demon. Saul's actions indicate that this evil spirit, this harmful spirit, is rather a form of some sort of depression. The Hebrew word often translated as evil is often just the common word for 'bad.' The word is used to designate everything from bad food to bad people. It does not have the force of the English word 'evil.'

Just to summarize, the evil spirit, the harmful spirit is not a demon. It is some form of depression. And I want to be clear here. This particular form of depression was a specific judgment of God on Saul's life. I am not saying that every form of depression comes because someone has sinned against God. The Lord just in this case uses a particular sort of depression or mental problem to judge Saul.

Fourth, the author of first Samuel wants readers to know that God rules history. Whatever happens to Saul is controlled by God. And we need to remember that God is merciful. Whatever God is doing He is doing to bring Saul back to Himself.

Fifth, 1 Samuel never says Saul was eternally damned for his sins. In other words, we are not told here that Saul was not a believer. Saul is a rather mixed bag, isn't he? He is a person who expresses faith in the Lord. He is a person who serves the Lord at some points but he also is a person who sins greatly. It is important for us to remember all of Scripture. It is important to remember that God loves all people, including Saul. It is important to remember that the Lord does not punish unjustly. But it is also important to remember that sin has consequences, that the same God who used plagues to judge Egypt, could use a depressive spirit to judge Saul.

So David is chosen king. But yet it is a long time before he rules. Saul has not resigned. Saul has not died. Saul never considers abdicating, so only his death can bring David to the throne. David rises to prominence. He serves in Saul's court as a musician. And he defeats the champion of Philistia, the man named Goliath. That famous story is told in chapter 17, that this massive man Goliath taunts Saul's army, and taunts the living God.

And David, despite his youth and inexperience, slays this giant and gives Israel the victory over the Philistines. Of course, such a dramatic event makes David famous.

In 18:7 the text tells us of women singing about David's exploits. They say, "Saul has slain his thousands, but David his tens of thousands." This sort of song makes Saul jealous of David. According to chapter 18, Saul tries to kill David. The same thing happens again in chapter 19. And in chapter 20 David flees from Saul's court even going to live with the Philistines in chapters 21 through 27. When chapter 28 begins, Israel and Philistia are at war again. Since David and his followers are living in Philistia, his Philistine benefactor tells him he will have to fight against Israel, and David agrees. At this point it seems his future as Israel's king is in jeopardy. How can the nation ever accept a leader that killed his own people? A crisis has developed.

To summarize again: David is God's chosen leader, that's 1 Samuel 16. David has killed Goliath, the Philistine champion and great enemy of Israel in chapter 17. According to chapter 18, this great victory and several others bring David to prominence. But as chapters 18 to 27 unfold, Saul tries repeatedly to kill David. David flees from Saul's court. Saul pursues David and David is driven to the Philistines. And now it seems in chapter 28 that David will fight against his own people. But the Lord intervenes. The Philistines decide not to trust David. And he is not forced to go to battle.

Meanwhile Saul's days are drawing to a close. He has no word from the Lord because of his disobedience. And so he decides to break Moses' law yet again. Quite against Leviticus 19:31 he decides to seek help from a medium (28:7). He asks the medium to bring Samuel back from the grave and she does it (28:8-14). Saul asks Samuel how the battle will go. Samuel's reply drains away all Saul's strength. Samuel informs him that David has been chosen king and that Saul and his sons will join Samuel in the grave the next day. Whatever his other faults, Saul is not a coward. He fights the battle despite knowing he will die.

Still Saul has broken God's rules again. He seems to believe in God and he certainly wants God's help but he does not obey the Lord. In chapters 29, 30, and 31 the text tells us that the Philistines do kill Saul. The battle is lost. Saul's son Jonathan, who is a wonderful friend to David, also dies. It seems things are at a low ebb. Israel's armies have been defeated before their enemies, their king has been killed. God has chosen a new king, David, but he is not yet king at all. So the book of 1 Samuel ends much like Judges ends. Everything seems in disarray. The promises of God seem set aside. The covenant of God appears all but forgotten. What will God do?

As we come to the end of the book we must admit it is difficult to assess Saul's life and work. On the one hand he helps establish Israel as a legitimate nation. Israel no longer fears every enemy, they've been able to have some military victories. On the other hand though, he disobeys God repeatedly, which brings negative consequences for himself,

his family, and for the whole nation. He could have had a permanent kingdom. But instead he becomes jealous, vengeful, petty. In many ways, then, Saul is a hard man to characterize. He is inconsistent at best, yet we regret his demise. Perhaps in this way he is more like Samson than he is like anyone else.

## **Lesson 8 ■ 2 Samuel and 1 & 2 Kings**

### **OUTLINE OF 2 SAMUEL**

Second Samuel unfolds in the following sections. In 2 Samuel 1 to 10 the text highlights the fact that David builds a kingdom. Of course, David doesn't build it in his own strength. He doesn't build it on his own. God gives David the ability to build this kingdom. God gives special promises to David in these chapters. The second section is 2 Samuel 11 to 19. These chapters are a sad reminder that no one is sinless. So 2 Samuel 11 to 19 emphasizes David's sin and its consequences for himself, his family, and the kingdom. The third section is 2 Samuel chapters 20 to 24. These chapters explain to us God's faithfulness to David during his last years. David himself offers a psalm that it is also found in Psalm 18. Now this psalm emphasizes all the great things that God has done and all the different ways God has delivered David during his time as king. So let's look at 2 Samuel together recalling that we continue on to see God keeping His promises to establish Israel in the land of Canaan. The goal is for them to be a kingdom of priests that blesses all nations.

#### **David Builds a Kingdom (1–10)**

Saul the first king has ruled from 1050 to 1010 B.C. He has been killed, an account that is given in the last chapter of 1 Samuel but then also repeated in 2 Samuel 1. So the death of Saul is a bridge text between first and second Samuel. David will be king from about 1010 to 970 B.C. As we open up 2 Samuel 1 we find that David does not rejoice when he learns of Saul's death and of Jonathan, Saul's son's death. In fact, he mourns them greatly and seems to lament for them in 1:17-27.

Saul's death does not automatically allow David to rule Israel. In chapter 2, verse 1 to 7, Judah makes him their king. But other tribes support Saul's son. His name is Ishbosheth. Both sides have armies, both sides are contending for their man to be king. The rest of chapter 2 tells us that a man named Abner rules Ishbosheth's forces and a man named Joab leads David's. These armies fight regularly leading to many deaths. It is a civil war not unlike what we read about in Judges 17 to 21. The conflict continues for several years.

According to chapter 3, it begins to end between Abner and Ishbosheth. Ishbosheth accuses Abner of sleeping with one of his concubines according to chapter 3 verses 6 through 7. This leads Abner to decide to turn to David's side. But Joab, in retaliation for Abner killing one of Joab's brothers, in turn murders Abner. In chapter 4 Ishbosheth is

murdered while he sleeps. David punishes the men who murder Ishbosheth, but he does not do anything to Joab who has murdered Abner. So at this point in time the major opponents of David have been removed.

So in chapter 5:1-5 all 12 tribes anoint David king. It has taken quite a long time for God's promises to come true but they do come materialize. God who anointed David king in first Samuel 16 has made him king. God has remained faithful. In chapters 5 and 6 David consolidates his power in three important ways.

First according to 5:6-14 he conquers Jerusalem. He then unites the nation's government by establishing Jerusalem the permanent capital. He now has a solid political base. Second, in 5:17-25, he subdues the Philistines. Ridding Israel of this old foe establishes his military power, his armies are strong and he has a capital city. Third, David brings the Ark of the Covenant to Jerusalem displaying his religious commitment and uniting Israelite worship in a central place. We find this ceremony in 6:1-23. I'll remind you that Deuteronomy 12:1-14 had said long ago that there would be one place God would choose to put His name there so that the people would come there to worship. Jerusalem will be this place.

So he has a capital city, he has military might, and there is a religious center for Israelite worship. Each of these achievements helps make him the undisputed authority in the land. For now Israel's nagging long term problems of poor military, poor organization and scattered religious rites have been solved. Because they have a good leader they follow Yahweh and defeat their enemies. No ruler since Joshua has done so much for the people.

We come to chapter 7 of second Samuel. This chapter is one of the most important chapters in the Old Testament. It has the sort of magnitude that Genesis 12:1-9 has. For from this passage all the prophets and the psalmist will look to David's family for a Messiah, a ruler, a savior. This person will fulfill the promise that Genesis 3:15 made that a Child of a woman will defeat the serpent. And the New Testament routinely looks to David's lineage as a source of the coming Savior. So we come to second Samuel 7.

To demonstrate approval of David's work the Lord makes him an astounding promise. This pledge is linked to those made to Abraham and it represents a high point in the Old Testament story. The episode begins when David desires to build a temple for the Lord (7:1-2). He thinks it's wrong that he has a nice permanent home to live in, he has a palace, while God's Ark sits in a tent.

At first Nathan, the king's prophet, encourages David to build. But God instructs Nathan to tell David not build the temple, rather David's son will build the house of worship (7:5-13). What then can David do for God? Well, the issue becomes instead of what David can do for God and turns around to what God will do for David. Yahweh

appreciates David's gesture. But instead of asking David to build God a house, Yahweh promises to build David a house (7:11). What kind of house, a royal house that consists of David's descendants.

Hear 7:12-13: "When your days are fulfilled and you lie with your fathers I will raise up your offspring after you who shall come from your body. And I will establish his kingdom. He shall build a house for My name and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever." So God promises David that his son will construct the temple and that God will establish his throne, his kingdom, his rule forever. It won't be like in Saul's time – when his lineage was cut off. David will be superior to Saul in that way.

Verse 14, "I will be to him a Father. And he shall be to Me a son." This is God speaking of Solomon, David's son, who succeeds David as king. It is interesting that throughout the Old Testament the descendant of David who was on the throne of Judah was called God's son, that is His adopted son, His sub-regent to rule over Judah, whereas God rules over the heavens, the earth and all that is in them.

God continues to promise David in 7:14, "When he, your son, commits iniquity I will discipline him with the rod of men, with the stripes of the son of men. But my steadfast love, that is my covenant love, this promise I am making will not depart from him as I took it from Saul whom I put away from before you."

So, so far God has promised that David's son who, as the story continues, turns out to be Solomon, will be on the throne, he will sin, he will commit iniquity but God will forgive him, and discipline him but God will not take the kingdom away from David's family. Chapter 7:16: "And your house and your kingdom shall be made sure forever before Me. Your throne shall be established forever." So verse 16 promises David not only will he have a son who will be on the throne, but there will be an unbroken lineage, there will always be a king from David's line ruling.

This passage is quite significant for the rest of the Old Testament. Like Abraham, David has been promised special descendants. God will use the children of both men to bless the world. Even more importantly, the rest of the Bible argues that 2 Samuel 7:1-17, means that the Messiah, Israel's savior, will come from David's family.

As the course goes on we will find that Isaiah, Jeremiah, Micah and the other prophets look for an ideal son of David who will serve the Lord and rule justly. Many Psalms, such as Psalm 110, expresses belief in the same thing as do the gospel writers, see Mathew 1:2 and Luke 1:2. Also see the first few verses of Romans 1. Therefore, this promise serves as a theme that unites the Old and New Testaments because it will eventually lead us to Jesus. Jesus will not just be a son of God in the sense that Solomon is a son of God. He is God the Son. He is God's Special One, but He is also God.

The promises of Abraham of having descendants, of receiving a covenant, of having land, of blessing the nations continue to shape the Old Testament, but they are now joined by the theme of the eternal nature of David's kingdom. Like the promises to Abraham this new idea will grow and take clearer shape as the biblical story unfolds. Only after David's earthly kingdom disintegrates will the deeper meaning of the promise become apparent. Well after this great promise David continues to prosper. He defeats Israel's enemies in chapter 8. He creates an organizational structure for his kingdom in chapter 8. And he also shows kindness to the son of his old friend Jonathan in chapter 9. God blesses everything the king does. His life has reached a high level of success.

### **David's Sin and Its Consequences (11–19)**

In chapters 11 to 19 at the pinnacle of his career David stumbles and falls. He sins in a way that causes himself and his family and his kingdom serious problems. These difficulties begin when David stays at home instead of going with his army to war. Chapter 10 tells us that he has had several great victories. He stays at home rather than fighting further in chapter 11. He sends his armies out, Joab and the men, but he stays at home according to chapter 11:1-2.

One night he sees a beautiful woman bathing. He inquires about her identity perhaps to find out if she is married. If she is unmarried he can add her to the harem. His messengers tell him however that her name is Bathsheba and she is married to Uriah one of David's best warriors. Despite this knowledge the king sends for Bathsheba and sleeps with her. She becomes pregnant and David begins to try to conceal the affair.

He brings Uriah home from war but Uriah will not sleep with his wife. David gets Uriah drunk and then tries to send him to Bathsheba, still he will not go home. Finally David has Joab make sure that Uriah dies in battle. Then he marries Bathsheba and it seems David has covered his tracks, all this in chapter 11.

But at the end of chapter 11 we find that this thing displeases the Lord. So in chapter 12 God sends Nathan the prophet to confront David with what he has done. And the king to his credit admits his sin and repents of his sin in a way that Saul never would. There is great tragedy here, but at least there is repentance.

Further tragedies grow out of what David has done as his moral influence wanes. We see one of his sons raping his half-sister. This leads to the half-sister's brother, a man named Absalom, killing his half-brother and trying to overthrow his father. So chapters 13 to 19 are taken up with revenge for a sister, civil war that grows out of it, terrible death and loss in Israel. God has promised David an eternal kingdom. He has promised David his son will sit on his throne. God keeps His promise to David.

David gets control of himself and leads his men back to Jerusalem. His sin with Bathsheba has brought death, misery and civil war yet God pardons him and allows him to remain king. The Bible rarely offers a more striking portrayal of the effects of sin, punishment, and God's ultimate forgiveness. David remains on the throne but only at a terrible personal cost.

### **David's Last Years (20–24)**

In chapters 20 to 24 David's final years are marked by yet more turmoil. In chapter 20 he endures a rebellion led by a man named Sheba. Once again God rescues David's kingdom and restores him to power. Yet according to chapter 21, war continues with the Philistines and some of Saul's mistakes continue to haunt the people. Yet through all these difficulties God keeps the promise to David that he and his descendants will remain on the throne. David's failings do not negate God's faithfulness. And the king praises the Lord's goodness in chapter 22:1 through 23:7. This is a full and wonderful confession of David of all that God has done for him. Whatever his other flaws, and there are many, David rarely forgets how he rose from shepherd boy to king. He is not guilty of ingratitude, he always gives God the praise for the good things he has.

One last rather difficult story ends 2 Samuel. For some unstated reason, Yahweh becomes angry at Israel, and then He incites David against Israel by ordering him to take a national census (24:1ff). In this last chapter of the book, David commands Joab to number the people with the counting of warriors in mind. Even Joab, who is hardly a moral giant, thinks this plan is wrong. It seems to be presumptuous, it seems to not trust the Lord.

Apparently, Joab thinks David fears another rebellion or has perhaps grown proud. Joab loses the argument so the project proceeds. After the census is taken David feels guilty and learns that God will now punish the nation. Thousands of people die in a plague before the Lord relents. David admits his sin and asks God to punish him, not the people. Thus this odd punishment stops as it began with no explanation. After the plague David worships Yahweh. He purchases a threshing floor, offers a sacrifice there and receives God's forgiveness as the book ends. This threshing floor becomes the place where the temple will be built later.

### **Conclusion**

As 2 Samuel ends God's promises to Abraham have basically been fulfilled. His heirs have become a great nation. His descendants have become a homeland and possess a covenant with Yahweh. Israel even seems to have solved the leadership crisis and David has helped the people become a special people who live for the Lord in the midst of the

world. After decades of floundering in a sin cycle that includes all sorts of religious sins including polytheism and the worship of idols Israel appears to be beginning a great new era in its history. Yahweh continues to bless the people, correct their faults and turn their errors into benefits.

## **1 & 2 KINGS**

The story of Israel's kingdom continues in 1 and 2 Kings. These books move from David's death in chapters 1 and 2 and Solomon's rise to the throne in about 970 B.C. And the books will continue to tell Israel's story down to about 560 B.C. But instead of the nation growing stronger and stronger and getting greater and greater, this account describes how the nation declines and falls. We will go from the heights of David and Solomon's kingdoms to the division of the kingdom through many, many decades of sin, with some revival of religion then finally failure, ongoing sin, and God visiting the punishments described in Leviticus 26 and Deuteronomy 27 and 28 on the people.

So 1 and 2 Kings give us about 400 years of history from 970 to 560 B.C. and it tells us the story of a great fall of the nation. Along the way the books give us a dazzling array of characters and events.

Starting with David's death in chapter 1, 1 Kings 1 to 12 tells the story of the rise and fall of Solomon's family. So the first section of 1 Kings is 1 Kings 1 to 12 which gives us the rise and fall of Solomon's family. In chapters 13 to 15 we have the rise and fall of Jeroboam's family. Third section, 1 Kings 16 to 2 Kings 10 we have the rise and fall of Omri's family. In 2 Kings 11 to 17 we have the decline and fall of Northern Israel. And in 2 Kings 18 to 25 we have the decline and fall of Judah.

Let me repeat those, 1 Kings 1 to 12: the rise and fall of Solomon's family. Solomon rules all 12 tribes of Israel from 970 to 930 B.C. When he dies the kingdom divides into two sections. One of those sections is led by Jeroboam. His family's rise and fall is told in 1 Kings 13 to 15. After Jeroboam's death, several years thereafter, a man named Omri leads Northern Israel. His family's story is told in 1 Kings 16 through 2 Kings 10. Once this prominent family falls 2 Kings 11 to 17 describes the decline and fall of the Northern Kingdom. That is the 10 Northern tribes that split with Judah and Benjamin when Solomon died in 930 B.C.

This portion of what is left of the kingdom ruled by Saul, David, Solomon, these 10 tribes are defeated by the Assyrian nation and their capital is destroyed in 722 B.C. And then 2 Kings 18 to 25 describes the fall of Judah and Benjamin, the two tribes that split with the 10 northern tribes of Israel when Solomon died in 930 B.C. Judah is destroyed by Babylon in 587 B.C. The book ends by giving us an account of about 27 or 30 years

beyond that defeat. We will go over these major sections. There are a lot of characters and there are a lot of kings so I am going to try to emphasize these major families and the major events as a way of holding these books depicting 400 years of history together.

## **The Rise and Fall of Solomon's Family (1 Kings 1–12)**

Just as Joshua's death links Joshua and Judges and Saul's death links 1 and 2 Samuel, David's death provides a transition between 2 Samuel and 1 Kings. According to the first chapter David has grown old now and cannot even stay warm with the help of a beautiful young woman named Abishag. Given his condition a new king must take the throne. As when Saul died this current situation causes rivalry and upheaval. David's son Adonijah proclaims himself king with the support from Joab and other prominent leaders. But Nathan the prophet and others want Solomon to replace David. And after a struggle well described in the rest of chapter 1, Solomon becomes king.

In chapter 2 David advises Solomon in three areas. First, he encourages Solomon to follow God and obey the covenant. He says Yahweh will then bless Solomon and keep the promises made in 2 Samuel 7. Second, David tells his son to execute Joab and some men who aided Absalom's revolt. Of course, Joab, the killer of Abner and others, has long deserved some sort of punishment. David's advice reveals a potential flaw in David. He never punished Joab or the others but he asked Solomon to do so. Political expediency sometimes takes over justice. Third, David asks Solomon to reward some old friends. His counsel is wise: Solomon must learn to trust God, distrust his enemies and honor his allies. Probably no one in Israel's history understood the difficulty of balancing these aspects of leadership better than David.

When David dies in chapter 2, an era has passed. David was a great military leader. He was flawed ethically but he never served any god other than Yahweh. He kept his covenant commitments in these areas. When he sinned he repented, but David's life shows the difficulty of trying to balance politics and faith in God and family and power. But David is a great figure, alongside Abraham and Moses he is one of the greatest figures in the entire Old Testament. It is to David that God makes the promise of the Messiah who will bless all nations in fulfillment of His promise to Abraham and His promises to Moses and His promises to Noah. So David is an extraordinary figure and his death marks the passing of an important era.

Solomon's reign begins auspiciously. Things are very encouraging because in chapter 3 and following Solomon asks God to give him wisdom to lead the people. And God grants him wisdom in great measure. In fact, he becomes famous for his wisdom. His wisdom includes dividing the nation into new districts in chapter 4. It included building the temple in chapter 5 and chapter 6. He takes great pains to make plans to

build the temple and gains the workmen and the material and the temple is completed. In chapter 7 the temple is furnished and in chapter 8 the temple is dedicated.

## The Temple

It would be important for us to understand a few things about the temple. Perhaps the following information will help you conceptualize the temple and understand a bit about it. Temple construction began in the fourth year of Solomon's reign, or about 966 B.C. By current standards the temple was not very big. It was 30 feet wide, 90 feet long, and 45 feet high. Hundreds of modern and not so modern churches are a lot larger.

What made the temple so stunning was its interior and furnishings. Inside the stone walls were covered with cedar and the cedar with gold. Ornate carvings adorned the sanctuary as well. Many scholars today think that these carvings reminded Israel of God's creation of the world and of the original fact that the garden was a place of worship and now God's temple will be a garden in the midst of the world.

All the utensils for worship were finely crafted and made of precious metals. The temple itself was, as I said, 30 feet by 90 feet and 45 feet high or about three stories high. The temple building itself was divided into two parts just as the tabernacle was. The larger portion was a place where the priest could go and offer prayers and incense before the Lord.

There was a special room, however, where the Ark of the Covenant was kept and once a year the priest would go in and offer Day of Atonement blood on it. So the ceremony from Leviticus 16 was transferred to the temple when the temple was built.

Outside the temple building proper was a sacrificial altar where the people could come bring their sacrifices. Only the priest could go in the temple remember and only the high priest could go into the Holy of Holies where the Ark of the Covenant was. But the people could come to the outside portion of the temple courtyard bringing their sacrifices where they would be offered on an altar.

Beyond that place as time passed there was an area where Gentiles could come, people who didn't yet profess faith in the Lord God. Or also people who were in the process of joining, becoming full members of Israel. The temple was next door to Solomon's palace. Therefore the government arm of Israel and the worship arm were very close together. So later on when we read about the prophets preaching nearby in the temple, they are often easily within earshot of the king, and his officials and the government's comings and goings of the day.

I consider the dedication of the temple to be the high point of Solomon's reign. It is here that Solomon shows most faithfulness to the Lord God. In 8:22-61 he offers a wonderful prayer to the Lord about the temple. He admits that God can't be conformed or

confined in any single space and that God is greater than this temple. And the Lord has chosen to put His name there. And He has chosen to dwell with Israel there. And he also confesses that Israel must have their hearts right with Him if their worship is to be accepted, if the sacrifices that will be offered there, if the psalms that will be sung there, if the teaching of the word of God that will happen there is to be acceptable to God their hearts must be right.

He also asked that the Lord would bless the people and when they sin and confess their sin that God would forgive them and that He will be with them. Solomon is humble in this prayer, he is godly in this prayer and he shows himself to be the right sort of king. At the end in the time of dedication in 8:62-66 the king and the people offer sacrifices to the Lord and Solomon donates enough animals to keep the sacrifice going for some years ahead.

Sadly, as he gets older, Solomon turns away from the Lord. Chapters 9 and 10 indicate that he was renowned for his wisdom, the whole world knows of the greatness of Solomon. But in chapter 11 the text says that as he gets older he marries women from other lands and he builds worship sites for the gods from those other lands. And he begins to worship these other gods. And because of this sin the Lord tells him that the kingdom will be torn from him.

Ten tribes ultimately leave the nation of Israel to form a new nation. These 10 tribes are from the northern part of the country. This will leave only Judah and Benjamin to be descendants of Solomon. But because God has made promises to David that his kingdom will endure he does not do away with the lineage of David and the lineage of Solomon completely. But David's descendants are ruling now over a much smaller portion after Solomon dies.

Solomon, like his father, like Moses, like Joshua, like Samuel is a great figure in the Bible. He is a man of extraordinary wisdom and he has a part in books of wisdom such as Proverbs and Ecclesiastes. And yet he is also a man who doesn't always live wisely. He is a man who turns away from the Lord at the end of his life. And he mixes the religion of Moses that is revealed by God with religions from other countries. So he stands as a warning to all of us that just because we are wise and understanding in portions of our lives and during parts of our lives does not mean that we are safe from the temptations and the failures that can arise in life. We must practice wisdom till the end of our days not just for part of our days.

And so as we look at the life of Solomon like all biblical characters except Jesus he is a man who sins. Solomon is a man who sins. But yet God uses him, flawed as he is, for His purposes of keeping His promises to Noah and Abraham and Moses and David.

## **Lesson 9 ■ 1 & 2 Kings (part 2)**

### **1 & 2 KINGS (CONTINUED)**

#### **Rise and Fall of Jeroboam's Family (1 Kings 12–15)**

In 1 Kings 12 to 15 we have the rise and fall of Jeroboam's family. Jeroboam is the first king of the Northern Kingdom and he serves that land starting in 930 B.C. when Solomon dies. Solomon's son Rehoboam succeeds his father. But he also succeeds in making the people of the Northern portion of the land very mad. They ask for tax relief and for less burdens, Solomon has taxed them heavily and used them as laborers for his projects, and so they ask him for some relief. But Rehoboam speaks harshly to them and they revolt against him. So Rehoboam, Solomon's son, is left with just Judah and Benjamin as his kingdom.

But Jeroboam, the first king of the Northern Kingdom receives ten tribes. God makes him king and yet when he becomes king he sets up an alternative religion. Even though God made him king and God revealed the fact that He made him king through the prophets this king does not believe God will sustain him. He fears that if he allows his people to go Jerusalem for the festivals outlined in Moses' books and allows them to go and offer their worship and their sacrifices there, he will lose them forever. So he does not trust the Lord.

He sets up an alternative religion that is described to us in 1 Kings 12 and 13. You recall that Moses had said only Levites should be priests. Jeroboam said anyone from any tribe could be a priest. You will recall that Moses said that the people were to gather in Jerusalem in one place or I should say Moses said they would gather in one place for their festivals and for the Day of Atonement and that God had revealed that place as Jerusalem. Jeroboam decided to set up two major sanctuaries – one in the Northern part of his kingdom and one in the Southern part. So he said you could go to either one of those places, but you could not cross the border into Judah. So he set up new places of worship.

Third, you will recall what Moses said there will be no images of God used in worship. That is the second commandment – You shall not make any image of God. And yet Jeroboam set up calves as symbols of God and God's power and God's strength and fertility. But the people then had an image that they could worship. And Moses said they are to keep their religion free from mixture of other religions of Canaan. But clearly Jeroboam decided to mix in the religious emphases on idols and he also mixed Israel's

religion with Canaanite worship of Baal, because Baal was often depicted as a bull in his full powers.

So Jeroboam set up an alternative religion that was very much like, in some ways, the religion that Moses had set up. That is they still talked about Yahweh, they talked about the Exodus, they talked about the Lord. But in many, many ways the religion diverged from what God had set up. And so a prophet speaks to Jeroboam in chapter 14 and tells him that his kingdom cannot endure. His descendants will only last a few generations and as we go through chapter 15 we see that this is what happens. His lineage dies out and eventually it is usurped by an outsider who begins his own lineage, his own kingdom. We should say that in the Southern kingdom Rehoboam and his descendants continue on. But they are not very faithful followers of Yahweh. They allow many divergences from Moses' teachings and they allow idols to be worshipped in the land.

### **Rise and Fall of Omri's Family (1 Kings 16 – 2 Kings 10)**

In 1 Kings 16 to 2 Kings 10 the emphasis lies on the Northern kingdom. And as I've said it is about the rise and fall on Omri's family. Omri was a powerful king who was able to set his descendants on the throne of the Northern Kingdom. Omri came to power between 885 and 880 B.C. And during a short reign that lasts only a few years he achieves a great deal.

According to 1 Kings 16 he stabilizes the government and builds a capital city that he calls Samaria. His son Ahab succeeds him and then the descendants of Ahab govern Northern Israel for some time. Omri also arranges a marriage for his son Ahab, arranges that he be married to Jezebel, the King of Tyre's daughter. Tyre was a nation just to the north of Israel. And so Omri thought it best to marry his son to the neighboring king's daughter so as to have peace in the area.

Omri was so impressive to other nations that Northern Israel was called the House of Omri by other nations long after his death. As important as Omri is, however, it is his son Ahab who takes precedence in chapter 17 and following. But even more than that there is a prophet who dominates the next several chapters. That prophet's name is Elijah.

Elijah bursts onto the scene in 17:1. Because of Ahab's sins there will be no rain except at my word. What are the sins of Ahab? Well they are many but chiefly Elijah is concerned that Ahab has allowed his wife Jezebel to bring Baalism into the land. You will recall that Baal is the fertility god, that there are strong sexual and economic facets to the worship of Baal. Jezebel is a committed worshiper of Baal in fact she imports 400 prophets of Baal to be missionaries throughout the land. One of the beliefs of Baalism was that it is Baal who makes it rain therefore fertilizes the ground.

So, Elijah challenges Baal worship by saying only Yahweh can make it rain and only Yahweh will say when it will rain and He will say so through Elijah, His prophet. The rain is withheld. There is a terrible drought. During this drought God provides for Elijah through miraculous means and through the hospitality of a widow in 17:1-17. Elijah demonstrates his prophetic powers by multiplying the widow's food sources and by raising her son from the dead in 17:14-23. Elijah is truly a man of God. He is doing God's work and speaking God's word accurately. He qualifies as a God sent prophet.

According to chapter 18 three years of drought pass. The resulting famine becomes severe. Finally Elijah meets with Ahab who calls the prophet the troubler of Israel in verse 17. Elijah says it is the king, not the prophet, who is the problem. It is the king who troubles Israel because it is the king who has rejected God and begun to serve Baal.

To illustrate God's power and Baal's non-existence, Elijah proposes a great duel. He and Baal's prophets will pray on Mount Carmel and whichever deity answers with fire from heaven, lightening from heaven, that is the God who will be sovereign. This is the God who deserves to be served. The king and the people agree to this contest.

On the mountain 450 prophets of Baal all supported and fed by Jezebel oppose Elijah. They place a bull on an altar and ask Baal to consume it. For half a day they pray, shout and dance but Baal doesn't answer. Elijah taunts them; he suggests that Baal maybe asleep or busy or perhaps using the bathroom (18:27). They respond with frantic worship that lasts until late afternoon but no answer comes.

Elijah takes over. He has the altar soaked with water three times according (18:30-35). So if fire falls from heaven it will have to burn up a very wet sacrifice. He prays that God will prove His power and vindicate Elijah's ministry (18:36-37). And without delay fire falls from heaven, burns the sacrifice, scorches the earth and evaporates the water. The people see that the Lord is God and they put Baal's prophets to death. Having achieved this victory, Elijah says it will now rain and rain it does. But this great miracle does not result in faith by Ahab and Jezebel. Instead, Jezebel threatens to kill Elijah. The prophet flees but sustained by the Lord and His promises he returns to further ministry.

In chapter 20 the Lord continues to help Ahab and defeat his enemies despite his unfaithfulness. In chapter 21 in a naked act of aggression Ahab and Jezebel seize a man's field and put him to death. Elijah tells the king that he will lose his life because of this and Jezebel will as well. Ahab repents for a time, Jezebel never does.

Three years pass before the first part of Elijah's prophecy against Ahab and Jezebel comes true. According to 1 Kings 22 both portions of Israel, both the 10 Northern tribes and the two Southern tribes decide to fight together against Syria. Ahab decides to go out to battle but a prophet named Micaiah warns him that he will go to his death if he goes to battle. False prophets tell Ahab that he will be fine. And yet when he goes out to

battle, according to word of Micaiah the prophet, which is in concert with the threats that Elijah has already given to Ahab, King Ahab dies in battle. His life ends just as the prophetic word had said.

When we come to the book of 2 Kings, Elijah continues his prophetic ministry in chapter 1. But then in chapter 2 he is taken up into heaven. He does not have to see death as the rest of us do. He was taken up to be with God. He is replaced by his associate Elisha who asks that God give him a double portion of Elijah's spirit. Several scholars have noted that Elisha does twice as many miracles as Elijah. Be that as it may, he has a great ministry for the Lord.

In chapters 3 and 4 Elisha speaks to the kings of Israel and Judah about their battles and about the Lord's help. Elisha also helps a widow in need by multiplying resources for her. He also raises from the dead the son of a woman who is helping support him. So just as Elijah raised a young man from the dead in 1 Kings 17, so Elisha does the same in 2 Kings 4. The parallel accounts are intended to help us understand that these are two great prophets both of them serving the Lord.

In 2 Kings 5 we have an important story of Elisha healing a man named Naman. Naman was a leper, he had a skin disease. He was also a great warrior; he had defeated Israel many times. So he came to Israel seeking healing from his leprosy. And Elisha was able to help him be healed. Naman confesses faith in Yahweh as the only God. So 2 Kings 5 gives us one of the accounts in the Bible that allows us to see God saves Gentiles. We also see this fact in the book of Jonah. And we also see this fact in the book of Ruth and the book of Daniel. There are several gentile conversions in the Old Testament. 2 Kings 5 is one of the exciting and clearly told ones.

Elisha's ministry oftentimes saves Israel's kings from defeat. We see him helping them in this way in chapters 6 and 7 of 2 Kings. We also see that Elisha understands what will happen to Israel in the future. In chapters 8 and 9 he predicts who will be the king of Syria and he predicts who will be the king of Israel. He is a man whose word always comes true. He is a man who always sticks to covenant that God gave Israel through Moses. He is a man who reaches out to bless people from other nations just as God said would happen in the Abrahamic covenant. So he proves a worthy successor to Elijah.

God uses Elijah and Elisha to encourage Israel to repent. They validate their claim to speak for God by performing extraordinary acts. Although Elijah probably captures the imaginations of more readers than Elisha partly because he is compared to John the Baptist in the New Testament, in many ways Elisha's career surpasses his. Future biblical prophets follow their example of especially in the messages they preach. Elijah and Elisha set the tone for future prophets. They speak the word of God with accuracy, they uphold the covenant fully. Their predictions come true. Their actions are always marked by integrity. They do become discouraged, they have very human emotions, but

they are worthy precursors to prophets like Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and the 12 Minor Prophets.

About 10 years after Ahab's death, Omri's descendants cease ruling Northern Israel just as Elijah had promised. In 841 B.C., Elisha anoints Jehu, Northern Israel's army commander as king. Jehu immediately kills both the king of Northern Israel and the king of Southern Israel according to 2 Kings 9. Next he orders Jezebel slain. She remains proud and defiant to the end (9:30-37). But her death brings to pass the threat that Elijah had given in his career, that Ahab and Jezebel would die for the sins they committed as king and queen of Israel.

Once he's killed Jezebel, Jehu also puts to death the remaining descendants of Omri (10:1-17). He lures the priests of Baal to the temple and executes them all (10:18-27). Thus Omri's house falls. The Baal worship that they champion has been crippled. Jehu himself doesn't worship idols yet neither does he follow the Lord's law carefully (10:28-31). So the mighty house of Omri has risen and it has fallen. The prophets have spoken to it and spoken against it.

## **The Decline and Fall of Northern Israel (2 Kings 11–17)**

In 2 Kings 11 to 17 the author highlights Northern Israel's descent towards exile. You recall that in Leviticus 26 and also in Deuteronomy 27 and 28 that Moses warned the people that if they sinned against God He would discipline them and try to bring them back to Himself. And we see that He does this through wars and through famines and through droughts and through other means in 1 Kings 16 to 2 Kings 10.

He also sends prophets to warn them. We see Elijah, we see Elisha, we see Micaiah, we see others. But Leviticus 26 and Deuteronomy 27 and 28 remind us that if the discipline and the preaching do not avail, God will drive the people from the land. And this is what happens in 2 Kings 11 to 17 to the Northern portion of the kingdom.

The descent quickens in these next seven chapters. Four of Jehu's descendants govern after him in the North; none of them serve Yahweh fully. All of them practice the sins of the house of Jeroboam. That is, they follow Jeroboam's version of worship and all of its abhorrent ways rather than the worship set forth by Moses.

The third of these kings, Jeroboam II, enjoys military and economic success (2 Kings 14:28). His military might is good. His economic success is evident but the anonymous author of 1 and 2 Kings assess him by spiritual standards. And he fails in this area. He does not worship the one true God and worship Him alone. To punish Northern Israel and to continue to warn them of coming defeat God allows Syria to oppress them in chapters 13 and 14.

After Jeroboam II five more kings serve before Northern Israel's destruction in 722 B.C. The first is assassinated, the second serves 10 years. During this time Assyria becomes a major threat to the whole region. We have come to about 740 B.C. At this point in time the great nation of Assyria became a major threat to the entire world and, of course, then to Canaan, to Israel, to Judah.

The Assyrians were based in what we know today as Iraq. And they marched against Israel as early as 740 B.C. led by their mighty king Tiglath-Pileser III who ruled from 745 to 727 B.C. The fierce Assyrian army threatened Syria, Israel, Judah, Philistia and even Egypt. The kingdom of Israel decided to pay the Assyrians to stay away (15:19-20). But soon they decide to reverse policy and begin to fight against Assyria. A king named Pekahiah is murdered by a successor name Pekah (15:23-26). Assyria threatens Israel and this time the king refuses to pay the Assyrians to leave them alone.

Therefore, according to 15:29, Tiglath-Pileser conquered portions of Northern Israel and deports some of the Israelites to Assyria. This would have occurred about 733 to 732 B.C. The covenant consequences stated in Leviticus 26 and Deuteronomy 27 and 28 begin to take effect. Parts of Israel go into exile; still there is time to repent.

Unfortunately, Northern Israel refuses to seek God. Hoshea becomes their last king in 732 B.C. His tenure leads to religious and political disaster. He does not cooperate with Assyria (17:4). Therefore, the Assyrians attack Northern Israel, lay siege to Samaria, and capture it in 722 B.C. Many Israelites are killed and enslaved. Others are deported to Assyria (17:6).

To summarize a bit then, Jehu dies in 814 B.C. There are several kings who serve between 814 B.C. and 722 B.C., the last of these is Hoshea, who serves between 732 to 722 B.C. In 722 B.C. Assyria defeats Northern Israel. They had already captured many persons and had really taken control of the region 10 years before in 732 B.C. But after 722 B.C. Northern Israel ceases to operate as a sovereign nation with its own king. They become completely a portion of the Assyrian empire.

Everything Moses and the prophets have warned about has come true, Israel's idolatry, disregard of the covenant and the prophets, and participation in religious rites have angered God and led to their defeat. The prophets' prediction of disaster have proven true (17:8-23). Of course, we can see that political mistakes were made, but it was spiritual errors that caused Israel's downfall. Yahweh is the Lord of history. He is the covenant God of Israel. He is working out his purposes in history. He has asked Israel to be a kingdom of priests, a holy nation, and in general despite the witness of a minority embodied by Elijah and Elisha, a majority of people turn away from the Lord and He allows them to go into exile.

## **The Decline and Fall of Southern Israel (2 Kings 18–25)**

2 Kings 18 to 25 describe the last years of Judah's kingdom. There are two positive kings in this time: Hezekiah, who is highlighted in chapters 18 through 20, and Josiah, who is highlighted in chapters 22 and 23.

So before Judah disintegrates, two significant kings try to lead religious renewal. The first king is Hezekiah. He rules about 715 to 687 B.C. He has seen the destruction of the Northern kingdom. And he is a man who receives almost unqualified praise by the author of 1 and 2 Kings as one who avoids the mistakes of the Northern kings. 2 Kings 18:3-5 says his faith is like David's for he worships only Yahweh and destroys all idols. In 18:6 says Hezekiah obeys Moses law. In 18:7 it says he refuses to pay money to Assyria and rejects their ownership of Judah.

His faithfulness does not bring him an easy life. Assyria leaves Jerusalem alone when they destroy Northern Israel but they invade Judah later and defeat every city in Judah except for Jerusalem. They lay the land completely waste. God spares Jerusalem, thus He spares David's kingdom for a time. But Hezekiah is now king over very little. God provides an extraordinary miracle to deliver Jerusalem from Assyria's hand. In fact, God strikes 185,000 soldiers from Assyria dead, according to 2 Kings 19. But David's kingdom has been reduced to a tiny fragment. They have a faithful king. This king listens to the prophets. In fact, he calls upon the prophet Isaiah who listens to him and does what he tells him what to do. Nonetheless, Judah's days are numbered.

Hezekiah dies in 687 B.C. and he is followed by his son Manasseh. This king rules until 642 B.C. And he is one of the worst kings in Israelite history. He leads the people to worship many idols. He builds altars to the gods that are represented by the stars. He engages in occult practices. He offers human sacrifices. The prophets warn him and he has them killed. The book of 2 Chronicles tells us that in his old age, Manasseh repents. This is wonderful news, at the same time the damage has been done to the nation. The country is in an awful state.

Josiah governs in Jerusalem from 640 to 609 B.C. He is only a boy when he becomes king. When he becomes a man he puts away all the idols that are in the land. He has the temple restored, refurbished, and put back in the shape that Moses and Solomon intended. He sends the news throughout the land that the people may worship again in Jerusalem. He does everything he can to restore the nation to worship of the one, true and living God. But the people never accept his reforms. The writer of 1 and 2 Kings finds no fault with his life and work but the people never accept his beliefs.

Josiah dies in 609 B.C. In the three years prior to that, Babylon who had always been a part of the Assyrian empire, but an unhappy part of the empire, was finally able to defeat the Assyrians and take over all of their territory and be free of their Assyrian overlords. It was in 609 B.C. when Josiah dies. The circumstances were that Egypt was trying to march through Judah to help defeat the Babylonians. For once, Assyria and

Egypt are on the same side. Josiah engages the Egyptian army and is killed in a battle. Israel and Judah have lost their last good king.

From 609 to 587 B.C. the people have a series of kings. All of them fail to bring the people to the Lord. None of them is as dedicated to serving the Lord as Hezekiah and Josiah. By 605 B.C., Judah is dominated by Babylon. Babylon decides who will be king in Judah. And as a show of their strength, Babylon comes to Jerusalem and takes several captives. Among the exiles taken at this time include Daniel and his friends as we know them Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego of Daniel 1 to 3.

God is trying to help Judah understand that their days are numbered if they do not repent. The prophet Jeremiah is trying in particular is trying to help them come to their senses. But they do not. In 597 B.C. Babylon comes again and takes more captives. This time they do so because there is rebellion in Judah against their rule. Among the exiles taken at this time Ezekiel was taken away into Babylon as Daniel had been in 605 B.C.

And finally in the last 10 years of the kingdom of Judah, Zedekiah serves as Judah's last king. He rebels against Babylon and in 587 B.C. the Babylonians have had enough. They send their armies to Judah, conquer the land, come to Jerusalem, break down the city walls, tear down the temple, torch the entire place. Jerusalem is a ruin. 2 Kings 25 tells us of this terrible event. The book of Lamentations sings sorrowfully of what it means for the city and its nation to fall.

The reforming kings Hezekiah in chapters 18 to 20 and Josiah in chapters 22 and 23 are unable to bring the people back to the Lord. The prophet Isaiah, the prophet Jeremiah, and others, seek to preach to the people, write to the people, and try to help them come back to God but the people refuse. And so the covenant consequences outlined by Moses in Leviticus 26 and Deuteronomy 27 and 28 come to pass. Israel is out of the land; Judah is out of the land. All 12 tribes have suffered losses.

I should say some people remained. There were always Israelites left in the land. There were not 10 lost tribes of Israel, there were always some people living in the land. Not just in Judah and around Jerusalem and in Benjamin but also in the whole of the country of Israel, the former country of Israel. So there were always some people in the land. And yet many, many souls had been taken captive to a variety of places in the world.

In fact, the Israelites were scattered into Babylon and into Assyria in the north, and were scattered as far south as Egypt and Ethiopia. And they were everywhere else in between. And some remnants of them still in the land of promise. One has to ask at this stage, with the nation defeated, Israel no longer a nation, the temple destroyed, all the evidence of the kingdom of priests seems to be torn down.

## All Is Not Lost (Deuteronomy 30)

But we need to remember another passage from Deuteronomy. We need to remember Deuteronomy 30:1ff. And I'd like to read just a few of these verses. This passage tells us that all is not lost with the people, Deuteronomy 30:1-6: "And when all these things come upon you, the blessing and the curse which I have set before you, and you call into mind all the nations where the Lord your God have driven you, and return to the Lord your God, you and your children, and obey His voice in all that I command you today, with all of your heart, with all of your soul, then the Lord your God will restore your fortunes and have compassion on you. And He will gather you again from all the peoples where the Lord your God has scattered you. If you are outcasts are in the outermost parts of the heaven, from there the Lord your God will gather you and from there He will take you. And the Lord your God will bring you into the land that your fathers possessed that you may possess it. And He will make you more prosperous and numerous than your fathers. And the Lord your God will circumcise your heart and the heart of your offspring so that you will love the Lord your God with all of your heart, with all your soul that you may live."

You see these six verses that I just read teaches that Moses knew that eventually the people would be driven from the land. But he also knew this – that the Lord will not be left without followers. That the promises to Abraham and to Moses and to David will come true. He said that when the people would wake up in the land where they had been driven and return to the Lord and to serve Him in a covenant relationship, that He would bring them back to the land. And that He would restore them. And so as we come to the end of 2 Kings, we need to know that already the Law has taught that even the loss of the land is not God's final word for His people. That He can restore and He will restore. And we must simply wait as the Old Testament unfolds for this restoration.

## **CONCLUSION TO THE FORMER PROPHETS**

But for now we have certain problems. We read about some of these in texts like Psalm 89 where it talks about how God has created the heavens and the earth and He has made a special relationship, a special covenant with Israel and then makes special promises to David, that David will have an eternal kingdom. But what of this eternal kingdom if there is no descendant of David on the throne. What will God do? What of the promise that the people will be a kingdom of priests in the land? What of the witness of the Lord? What of the promise to Abraham that his descendants will be a blessing to all nations? What about Israel's repentance and their desire to return to the land? How will these things unfold? These are questions that we are left with as we conclude the first half of the prophets section of the Old Testament.

As we finish these Former Prophets, as we come to the end of Joshua, Judges, Samuel, and Kings we have seen about 900 years of history. We have seen what happens in the history of Israel. How God keeps His promise to Abraham, brings the people into the land, fulfills the word of Moses that He will chose a place where the people will worship Him. Fulfills His promise that Israel will be a blessing to other nations. But yet fulfills the threats that said if Israel turns away from Him, that they cannot keep their land.

We have seen in these 900 years of history God's truthfulness, God's faithfulness. We have seen great unfaithfulness, by several, in fact most of the people of Israel. But we have seen great acts of faithfulness. We can remember Joshua and that generation. We can remember Deborah in her time. We can remember faithfulness of Samuel and of David at his best. Of Solomon at his best and Elijah and Elisha and Isaiah and Hezekiah and Josiah. Yes, there were faithful people in those days. And yet they were unsuccessful in stopping what was happening to the nation.

## **Lesson 10 ■ Isaiah**

### **INTRODUCTION TO THE LATTER PROPHETS**

We now know what has happened. In the next stage of our study we need to ask ourselves why these things happened. And for that answer we now turn to the latter prophets. We turn to Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and the 12 Minor Prophets. Because you have already studied and read through Joshua, Judges, Samuel and Kings, you will have a fairly good idea of what happens, what is the background, rather, of Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and the first nine of the Minor Prophets. We start with the prophetic literature, the latter prophets. These books will tell us why the events we have just studied occurred.

#### **How to Read the Prophetic Books**

First a bit of introduction to how we can read the books of Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel and the twelve. I found through the years that most readers need some help to understand how to read prophetic books. They do fairly well as they read through Genesis to 2 Kings. Up to that point, they've had narratives, they've had stories with characters and plots that they can follow.

But when they come to the prophetic books stories are fairly rare. Poetic speech has replaced prose narrative as the main type of writing. Major characters appear yet they seem to have different functions than those of in Genesis through 2 Kings. Therefore, many readers have to develop some new skills to be able to read Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel and the 12 effectively.

A scholar named B. D. Napier notes seven themes that dictate the action and the argument in prophecy. Through the years I've found these themes to be very helpful as I've tried to read prophetic books. These concepts emerge from Israel's history so you will already be familiar with them. Anytime you are reading in poetic, prophetic material just ask yourself which of the following themes is being emphasized and I think you will be able to find your way.

There are seven basic themes according to Napier. First, over and over again the prophets stress 'Thus says Yahweh.' In other words their books are about God giving His word through the speech, the writing and the actions of the prophets. The second major theme after word and symbol is election and covenant. God stresses the fact that He has chosen Israel to be His people so that they might bless the other nations. They are not chosen so that they can have special privileges and do as they wish. They are

chosen to minister to the rest of the world, as we have been emphasizing throughout our study.

The third theme is rebellion. God's people and all the other nations of the world have rebelled against His word; they have rebelled against His authority. He is the great King of Kings and Lord of Lords and yet they want to serve other kings, other gods, other rulers. And in Israel this sin is particularly terrible because they have had special privileges of knowing God and knowing who He is and being ministered to by His prophets. The prophets speak through word and symbol. They emphasize election and covenant. And they emphasize rebellion against the covenant.

The fourth theme is judgment. God judges sin. We've seen this throughout the Scriptures – from the Garden of Eden to the flood of Noah to Israel being driven from the land. God judges sin. Just as a great and mighty king like Tiglath-Pileser III of Assyria will come and judge insurrection in his kingdom, so Yahweh the King of Kings and Lord of Lords will judge rebellion. Often the prophets call this Day of Judgment the Day of Yahweh – the day Yahweh fills the picture of the world. And fills the horizon with His power and with His judgment. And yet that is not the last theme.

The fifth theme is God's compassion. He does not give up on people. He does not give up on the nations and He does not give up on Israel. He loves the people He has made and He reaches out to them through His word, through the prophets through events - compassion. The sixth theme is redemption. In fact, God always judges in order to redeem. He gives His word and symbol through the prophets. He has elected and made covenant with Israel. Israel and the nations have rebelled against Him. He judges that sin. He has compassion as He judges and He uses judgment to redeem. God is merciful and kind. He will not clear the guilty but He redeems sinners. We have seen many, many times in the Bible that God has accepted frail, failed human beings as His own.

The seventh and final theme is consummation. That is there is coming a day when God will create the heavens and earth anew. As William J. Dumbrel writes "In the Bible we are moving from creation to new creation. God who created the heavens and the earth will recreate the heavens and the earth and make them without sin, sorrow, suffering or death."

These ideas can be compressed into three main emphasizes: sin, judgment, and renewal. Sin, judgment, and renewal. Sometimes as I teach I call judgment, punishment. Sometimes I call the renewal, restoration. But it is these three main ideas. We understand that sin is breaking God's standards and breaking our relationship with Him.

Judgment comes in life as God tries to correct us. And it will come at the end of time as He sets all things new and restoration. God forgives, God renews, God makes us new

and God will make all creation new. Each of these three themes sin, judgment and renewal follow naturally. God has loved, redeemed, and made covenants with Israel. So the Lord sends the prophets to correct Israel for breaking the mosaic covenant. God has been faithful but the people are corrupt and ungrateful. Therefore as Leviticus 26 and Deuteronomy 27 and 28 warn God punishes Israel by sending them into exile.

God waits patiently for repentance before allowing Assyria and Babylon to conquer people. And we know that despite this rebellion God promises to restore the nation, recall Deuteronomy 30. In fact the punishment He sends helps cleanse and renews the people. Punishment is not solely negative in these books. Punishment is God's tool for bringing about a brighter future for the people who turn back to Him.

Now you will find as you read that declarations related to sin, punishment, and restoration crisscross the next few books helping us follow the texts argument. If you are confused by a passages contents you can normally determine whether it is sin, punishment, or renewal that is being stressed and understand the book again. When most readers learn to recognize these fundamental notions they can begin to enjoy prophecy.

Most scholars stress the sin and punishment aspects of the prophecy. This tendency is legitimate since the prophets do constantly expose Israel's covenant breaking and its consequences for individuals and society as a whole. However it is important to remember that God always punishes as a last resort and only to create a brighter future. The brighter future will also ultimately result in a bright future for all nations not just Israel.

## **Books of Prophecy Stress How to Live for God**

As you will see these books of prophecy really stress how to live for God. Most of the time the prophets stress how we are to live for God now. They do in fact talk about the future. They do predict some things about the future. But I want to remind you that the prophets are mainly talking about how to live effectively for the Lord. They aren't just books that try to give you details about the coming days.

I also want to remind you that several of the things that the prophets predicted have already come true. For instance, many times the prophets speak about the Messiah coming, that is the special Son of David, the Special One who will defeat sin as Genesis 3:15 promises, this Messiah is already come, Christians believe Jesus is the Promised King, the Promised Messiah, the Promised Savior. The prophets also predict that Assyria and Babylon will also destroy the 12 tribes of Israel, and that's already happened.

We do know however that the prophets say that there is coming a final day of judgment and that God will judge all peoples and remove sin. That day is yet to come, but as we learn to live for the Lord now as we follow the principles as taught by the prophets, which by the way are the principles also taught by the apostles Paul and John and Peter in the New Testament, as we follow these teachings we will be prepared for the final day of judgment whenever it may happen.

## ISAIAH

Isaiah is the first of the great Latter Prophets. He is an extraordinary thinker, writer and lover of God. As we turn to the book of Isaiah we see in the first few verses or rather in the very first verse the basic historical background. The text says, "The vision of Isaiah, the son of Amoz, which he saw concerning Judah and Jerusalem, in the days of Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz and Hezekiah kings of Judah." You will at least recall that Hezekiah was king of Judah from 715 to 687 B.C. Ahaz, Jotham, and Uzziah were his predecessors. You can read about them in the book of 2 Kings beginning with chapter 15. And you will recall Hezekiah's days are recounted in chapters 18 to 20.

As the book unfolds we find that Isaiah was a prophet beginning as early as 745 B.C. and served perhaps as late as 680 B.C. So he had a long career of about 65 years. He was probably about 20 years old when he became a prophet and he served for a long period of time, retirement not being an issue in those days. These were days of momentous happenings in the history of Judah as you know.

Isaiah 1:1 says that Isaiah does serve in Judah and preaches about Jerusalem. Jerusalem was probably his home town. It is impossible to know but it seems likely to me that he was a priest who also had access to a lot of information about the government's decisions, plans, and he had a lot of information about what foreign governments were deciding to do. I noted when we talked about the temple that it was next door to the government headquarters in Jerusalem. It could be that Isaiah worked as a priest and as a government official or he just might have been someone who had information about both areas of life.

These were momentous days as we talked about in our study of 2 Kings. By 745 B.C. Assyria was beginning to assert itself as the great nation of the time. And Assyria was the dominant nation during the entirety of Isaiah's ministry. Assyria dominated Northern Israel from 733 B.C. onward. And they really dictated much of the policy in the absence of Judah from the same time period.

Isaiah warns his people about the folly of idolatry. He warns them about sinning against one another through injustice and oppression. He warns about many things but

ultimately he has few followers. But Isaiah doesn't just talk about what is going on in his day. He looks far into the future to the time when God will send the Messiah. He looks far into the future and looks forward to the time in which God will judge all sin on earth and create new heavens and new earth.

In fact, we need to think of Isaiah as someone who is always moving from creation to new creation. He is always one who is moving from the fact that God created the heavens and the earth, that people on earth sin against God. But that God will send a Savior, judge sin and create a new home for His people. It's no wonder with this constant emphasis of going from creation to Messiah to judgment to final victory of God over sin and the new creations, new earth, that the New Testament writers cite Isaiah so often.

He is giving a great example of God's gospel: that the Creator has been sinned against but will send a Redeemer who will remove sin from the redeemed and will remove sin from the earth and take the redeemed to live with Him forever. This is the way the book of Isaiah unfolds, always moving from creation to sin to the Savior to transformation.

## **THE STRUCTURE OF ISAIAH**

In fact, there are at least seven of these cycles in the book of Isaiah and I want to use these cycles as a structure for the book. And I will cite this structure and then describe the contents for you.

### **The First Cycle (1–4)**

The first cycle is chapters 1 through 4. In chapter 1 Isaiah calls the heavens and earth as witnesses to the sins committed in Jerusalem and calls the heavens and the earth to hear that Yahweh will change Jerusalem. All this in chapter 1. He asks the people of Judah to realize that they are according to 1:4 a sinful nation a people laden with inequity. He asks them to come to their senses. He says in 1:18, "Come now let us reason together says the Lord. Though your sins are like scarlet they shall be white as snow. Though they are red like crimson they shall become like wool. If you are willing and obedient you shall eat the good of the land. But if you refuse and rebel you shall be eaten by the sword, for the mouth of the Lord has spoken."

Going on from chapter 1, in chapter 2, Isaiah describes the coming Day of the Lord that is the coming Day of Judgment, in which all sin will be destroyed. In the destruction of sin God will gather many nations to live with Him in Jerusalem, which is now called Zion after the mountain upon which Jerusalem was. Throughout the book of Isaiah,

Jerusalem, the city that he knows, is constantly becoming Zion, the city he envisions, the place where God lives with His people in the absence of sin forever.

And in chapters 3 and 4 Isaiah completes the first cycle by stating that Yahweh will create a covering over Zion to shield His people. That God is the maker of Israel is clear in chapter 1. That they have sinned against God is clear in chapters 1 and 3. That God will judge this sin is clear in chapter 2.

But in chapter 4 the section ends gloriously. In 4:3 and following it says, "And he who has left in Zion and remains in Jerusalem shall be called holy. Everyone who has been recorded for life in Jerusalem. When the Lord shall have washed away the filth of the daughters of Zion and cleansed the blood stains of Jerusalem from its midst by a spirit of judgment and by a spirit of burning. Then the Lord will create over the whole side of Mount Zion and over her assemblies, a cloud by day and smoke and the shining of a flaming fire by night. For over all the glory there will be a canopy. There will be a booth for shade by day from the heat and for a refuge and shelter from the storm and the rain."

Chapter 4 ends with God's people who are written in His book, who are recorded for life, living with Him forever, in a city that is protected from the heat and protected from the rain and protected from sin forever. So we start with God as Israel's maker and the Judge of all the heavens and earth who will then bring His people to Himself in a wonderful city.

## The Second Cycle (5–12)

The second cycle is chapters 5 through 12. In chapter 5 the Lord declares that Israel is like a wild, unruly vineyard that simply refuses to grow what is planted. Israel has sinned against God. Israel has oppressed one another. Israel has not been a light to the nations.

So in chapter 6 God declares to Isaiah what kind of ministry he will have from now on. He says that he must preach until there is little left. He must preach until there is only, as verse 13 says, only a tenth of the land remaining. And yet verse 13 also says even if there is only a tenth of what was once Israel and Judah, yet from that tenth God will raise up a faithful people. That even though there is only but a small remnant of faithful ones in Isaiah's day, from that remnant will grow followers of the Lord.

How will this happen? Well Isaiah declares in chapter 7 that the days of the Northern kingdom of Israel are coming to an end. Assyria is going to destroy them. Not only that, Assyria is coming to Jerusalem. And Assyria will destroy everything but Jerusalem in Judah. We read about this prediction in chapter 10. So Isaiah knows well before it

happens, in fact 30 years before it happens that the Assyrians are going to invade the land during Hezekiah's time.

Well, if this is the immediate future what is the long term future? Isaiah tells us that God will send a King, a Savior. Here are some of the passages. In 7:14 he tells the doubting king Ahaz, "Therefore the Lord Himself will give you a sign. Behold the virgin shall conceive and bear a Son and she will call His name Emmanuel. But before the Boy knows how to refuse the evil and chose the good the land whose two kings you dread will be deserted."

People of this day are worried about an invasion from their neighbors Assyria and Israel. But Isaiah tells them that these things will not unfold. God will protect the Land and not only that He will send a King whose name will be Emmanuel.

As the people continue in the darkness of their sin, Isaiah writes in 9:2, "The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light. Those who dwelt in deep darkness on them, light has shined. You have multiplied the nation, You have increased its joy. They rejoice before You as with joy at the harvest as they are glad when they divide the spoil. For to us a Child is born, to us a Son is given. And the government shall be upon His shoulder and His name shall be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. Of the increase of His government and of peace there shall be no end. On the throne of David and over His kingdom to establish it and to uphold it with justice and with righteousness from this time forth forever more the zeal of the Lord of Hosts will do this."

This passage 9:2-7 Isaiah looks well into the future and he sees that God will send a King from David's lineage. He will be Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. When he says that He is Mighty God he is saying the coming Messiah will indeed be God. This is the only time in the Bible that we read of a prediction of a coming person who is given deity status. So the coming one from David's lineage will be the perfect ruler and He will be God.

As he looks into the future, what else does Isaiah say? Again the people continue in darkness year after year. The rulers of Judah before Hezekiah takes the thrown remain rather corrupt. But Isaiah looks down the years and he says there shall come forth a shoot from the stump of Jesse, that is from David's father, from David's lineage. Chapter 11 verse 1 continues, "and a branch from his root shall bear fruit and the spirit of the Lord shall rest on Him, the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of counsel and might, the spirit of knowledge and the fear of the Lord. And His delight shall be in the fear of the Lord. He shall not judge by what His eyes see or decide disputes by what His ears hear but with righteousness He shall judge the poor and decide with equity for the meek of the earth. And He shall strike the earth with the rod

of His mouth and with the breath of His lips He shall kill the wicked. Righteousness shall be the belt of His waist and faithfulness the belt of His loins.”

Chapter 11 verse 10 says, “In that day the root of Jesse,” again the family of David, “shall stand as a signal to the people. Of Him shall the nations inquire of its resting place shall be glorious.” The text goes on to say that wherever Israel has been driven in exile God will bring them home to the Messiah, to this new King. And not only that, other nations will serve Him.

How does Isaiah foresee the end of things? In chapter 12 he speaks of a time when God’s people will draw water from the wells of salvation in Zion. He says then in 12:5-6, “Sing praises to the Lord for He has done gloriously. Let this be known in all the earth. Shout and sing for joy oh inhabitant of Zion for great in your midst is the Holy One of Israel.”

Isaiah sees only judgment ahead but beyond that judgment is a people who will not repent. He does see the Messiah coming who will be the Perfect King, who will be God with us, who will be Mighty God, who will bring righteousness and justice and peace. And His kingdom will have no end. Thus, when His people are gathered to His great city they can live with Him with peace and justice and righteousness forever. That’s cycle two, chapters 5 to 12, again begins with Israel and the world as an unruly place and it ends with the righteous ones of God living with God forever because of the work of the Messiah.

### **The Third Cycle (13–27)**

The third cycle in Isaiah is chapter 13 through chapter 27. And these chapters declare the future of many nations. Often in these chapters Yahweh is described as the maker of humanity or of humanity’s future (17:7-8; 19:25; 22:10-11; 25:1; 25:6). All these state that Yahweh is the maker of heaven and earth and of humanity’s future. He is the ruler of history. There are also several texts that says He plans human history. I’ll give you two examples, 14:26 and 19:11. So Yahweh makes people and He makes their future. He plans for them and He plans their future.

According to chapter 24 through 27, the whole earth will be eventually ravaged by judgment and that God will remove sin from the world. Having removed sin God will gather people to Himself. Chapter 25 verses 6 to 8 tells us that God will give His people a wonderful gift. On this mountain, on Mount Zion, where He lives, the Lord of Hosts will make for all peoples, not just Israel, all peoples, a feast of rich foods, a feast of well aged wine, a rich food full of marrow, of aged wine well refined. And God will swallow up on this mountain the covering that is cast over all people, the veil that is spread over all nations. He will swallow up death forever and the Lord God will wipe away tears

from all faces. And the reproach of His people He will take away from all the earth for the Lord has spoken.

In other words, as first Corinthian 15 indicates God will take away death from all His people. Death will be no more, sorrow, suffering, sin and death will all be removed when God judges the nations and brings His people to Zion, He is their Creator and He is the One who gives them a place to live forever.

How will God do this? According the chapter 26 and verse 19, "Your dead shall live their bodies shall rise. You, who dwell in the dust shall awaken, sing for joy for your dew is the dew of light, and earth shall give birth to the dead." Again the New Testament rightly picks up on this passage as an understanding that God raises the dead. He will raise some up to judgment, but He will raise His people up for glory, for victory over sin, death, and the grave. And again this is for all nations.

Isaiah not only says that God will remove death from all nations in chapter 25, in chapter 19 he has already said that God is reaching out to all the peoples of the world. It says indeed that He will reach out to Assyria and to Egypt, not just to Israel. And that the day is coming when God will say blessed be Egypt My people, Assyria the work of My hands and Israel My inheritance (19:25).

God has not given up on His promise to Abraham, to bless the nations through Israel. And Isaiah envisions a time when God will gather believers from the nations, gather them to live with Himself forever and ever. God is the creator of the nations. He is the One who will judge the nations. He is the One who will give the nations a home with Himself through His power according to chapters 13 to 27.

### **The Fourth Cycle (28–35)**

Cycle four is chapters 28 to 35 and again Isaiah calls Yahweh the planner and maker of human beings and of their history in chapters 28, 29, and 31. He identifies Yahweh as the One who makes the earth mourn because of judgment, and rejoice when the judgment ends according to chapter 32 through 34. And in chapter 35 in a triumphant song Isaiah says God is the One who will bring His people to Zion. Again God is the planner of history according to chapter 28. He is the maker of all people. He is the One who will bring His people to Himself. The text is moving from God being the Creator to God being the One who creates a new place for His people as He redeems them from sin.

### **The Fifth Cycle (36–56:8)**

Cycle five is chapter 36 through chapter 56 verse 8, that's chapter 36 through chapter 56 verse 8. These chapters are some of the most important in the entire Old Testament. For

they help us to understand a great deal about our savior Jesus. New Testament writers cite these passages repeatedly as they try to teach the people of their day who Jesus was. This cycle includes the highest concentration of terminology related to Isaiah's approach to a new creation.

In chapters 36 and 37 Isaiah reveals that his earlier promise of an Assyrian invasion of the Jerusalem has come to pass. It is described in chapters 36 and 37. In chapter 36 verse 16 and chapter 37 verse 26, Isaiah declares that Yahweh has planned Assyria's defeat from of old. He still remains the Lord of history, the creator of nations, and the planner of those nation's history. God saves Jerusalem as He promised in Isaiah 8 and Isaiah 10.

But of course as you know from 2 Kings 18 to 20 and you see again in chapters 38 and 39, all of Judah, except Jerusalem, has been devastated. Therefore in chapter 40 Isaiah speaks words of comfort to Judah and to Israel. He uses language in 40:12-41, language of creation to comfort. He reminds them that Yahweh has laid out the heavens and the earth. That the nations in His hands are like dust on the scales. That the kings of the earth who seems so prominent and important are really under Yahweh's control. He sets them up and He takes them down. Therefore, the people can be refreshed. They can mount up with wings like eagles they shall run and not be weary, walk and not faint as they put their trust in God who is their creator.

Yahweh continues to encourage Judah and Israel in chapter 41 and following by introducing the concept of God's servant. In 41:8-10 God calls Israel His servant, "But you, Israel My servant, Jacob whom I have chosen, the offspring of Abraham My friend, you whom I took from the ends of the earth called from its farthest corners saying you are my servant, I have chose you and not cast you off, fear not for I am with you. Be not dismayed for I am your God. I will strengthen you, I will help you. I will uphold you with My righteous hand."

So God encourages Israel by calling Israel His servant. The one who He will redeem from the ends of the earth. He has chosen them He has not cast them off. He is their creator and their sustainer. He will not forget them.

But then the servant image grows and perhaps changes a bit in chapter 42. There the servant appears again in a passage that is cited in Matthew 12 :18-20, "Behold My servant whom I uphold, whom I chosen, whom My soul delights. I've put My spirit upon him. He will bring forth justice to the nations." We stop here for a moment and remind ourselves that this language sounds very much like Isaiah 11. where the Messiah will have God's spirit on Him and bring justice to the nations. Again not just to Israel but to the nations.

Continue in verse 2, "He will not cry out loud or lift up His voice or make it heard in the streets. A bruised reed He will not break. A faintly burning wick He will not quench.

He will faithfully bring forth justice. He will not grow faint or be discouraged until He has established justice in the earth and the coastlands wait for His law. Thus says God, the Lord, who created the heavens and stretched them out and who spread out the earth and what comes from it. Who gives breath to the people on it and spirit to those who walk in it. I am the Lord; I have called you in righteousness. I will take you by the hand and keep you. I will give you as a covenant for the people a light for the nations to open the eyes that are blind to bring out the prisoners from the dungeon, from the prison those who sit in darkness. I am the Lord, that is My name. My glory I give to no other, nor My praise to carved idols. Behold the former things have come to pass and new things I now declare before they spring forth I tell you of them.”

So this description of the Servant sounds very much like the Messianic passages of chapter 7, 9, and 11. And indeed the New Testament says that’s what they are in speaking of the Messiah and the One who is coming. That it is the Messiah who is God’s best, brightest servant. That the God who created the heavens and stretched them out is choosing a servant and sending Him to the people. He will be a light to the nations. Thus fulfilling the promises to Abraham. And He will be a Davidic Messiah, a servant who God will put His spirit on and have rule the nations, just as God promised to David.

So, it seems as if we have shifted from Israel being the servant to the Messiah being the servant. Now of course on the one hand this is not so drastic an issue in the Bible. Moses is God’s servant. David is called God’s servant. Israel is called God’s servant. Later on in the Bible, Jesus is called God’s servant. Paul is called God’s servant. So in this section we see that Israel is God’s servant and so is the Messiah.

In chapter 43, 44, and 45 and following Jacob is again encouraged by the Lord, Israel is encouraged, Judah is encouraged by the Lord. God promises in chapter 44 and 45 that Babylon and Assyria will not always rule. God will give power to Persia in the future and Persia will defeat Israel’s enemies. We continue on with God encouraging the people to know that Israel has been set apart for God’s glory until we come to chapter 49 where there is another mention of the servant occurs. In 49:1: “Listen to Me, O coastlands and give attention you people from afar. The Lord called Me from the womb, from the body of My mother He named My name. He made my mouth like a sharp sword. In the shadow of his hand He hid me. He made me a polished arrow in his quiver he hid me away. He said ‘You are My servant Israel in whom I will be glorified.’”

So to stop for a moment 49:10-3 make it clear that Israel is God’s servant. Verse 4, Israel is discouraged, “But I said, ‘I labored in vain I spent my strength for nothing in vanity.’ Yet surely my right is with the Lord and my recompense is with my God.’ And now the Lord says, ‘He who formed me from the womb to be His servant to bring Jacob back to Him and that Israel might be gathered to Him. For I am honored in the eyes of my Lord

and my God has become my strength.' He says, 'It is too light a thing for you to be My servant to raise up the tribes of Jacob and to bring back the preserved of Israel. I will make you as a light for the nations that My salvation may reach to the ends of the earth.'"

In 49:5-6 we see another person called a servant who is ministering to Israel who is also called God's servant. As we have already seen in the book as we seen in the Old Testament as a whole God will send His servant the Messiah to minister to His servant Israel. And this servant Messiah will bring Jacob, that is Israel, also God's servant, back to Him. That Israel might be gathered back to God, and that this servant would help the tribes of Jacob be a light to the nations, that God's salvation may reach to the ends of the earth. So the Messiah servant will help Israel the servant. And together they will glorify God's name among the nations.

As we come to the New Testament we see that Jesus the Messiah, God's servant does minister to His servant Israel. In fact, He founds a new Israel with 12 disciples like the 12 tribes of Israel and with Jewish persons placing their faith in Him. He sends them out to the ends of the earth to take a message of salvation to all the nations. So, we see God the Creator sending His servant to Israel for His glory.

The servant mentioned in 50:4-11 as one who is abused, mistreated, suffering. And that emphasis on a suffering servant finds its greatest expression in 52:13-53:12. It is in this passage that all the text about Christ's crucifixion that we find in the New Testament find their shape. They seem to all portray Christ as He is found in Isaiah 53.

Listen to some of these familiar verses, 53:1ff, "Who has what he has heard from us and to and to whom has the arm of the Lord been revealed? For He grew up before Him like a young plant and like a root out of dry ground. He had no form or majesty that we should look on Him and no beauty that we should desire Him. He was despised and rejected by men. A man of sorrows and acquainted with grief. And as one from whom men hide their faces He was despised and we esteemed Him not.

"Surely He has born our griefs and carried our sorrows. Yet we esteemed Him not, stricken, smitten by God, afflicted. But He was wounded for our transgressions. He was crushed for our iniquities. Upon Him was the chastisement that brought us peace and with His stripes we are healed. All we like sheep have gone astray. And we have turned everyone to his own way and the Lord has laid on Him the iniquity of us all.

"He was oppressed and He was afflicted, yet He opened not His mouth. Like a lamb that is led to the slaughter and like a sheep that before its shearers is silent, so He opened not His mouth. By oppression and judgment He was taken away and as for His generation who considered that He was cut off out of the land of the living stricken for the transgressions of His people. And they made His grave with the wicked and with a

rich man in His death, although He had done no violence and there was no deceit in His mouth.

“Yet it was the will of the Lord to crush Him. He has put Him to grief. When His soul makes an offering for guilt He shall see His offspring. He shall prolong His days. The will of the Lord shall prosper in His hand. Out of the anguish of His soul He shall see and be satisfied. By His knowledge shall the Righteous One, my servant, make many be counted righteous. And He shall bear their inequities. Therefore, I will divide to Him a portion with the many and he shall divide the spoil with the strong. Because He poured out His soul to death, and was numbered with the transgressors. Yet He bore the sin of many and makes intercession for the transgressors.”

I read that whole chapter of Isaiah 53 because it so thoroughly expresses what the Bible teaches about the suffering and death of Jesus Christ. He died for our sins. It was because of our griefs, our sorrows, our transgressions, that He died. And yet even though He had a grave, according to verse 9, He is an offering for guilt and the Lord somehow prolongs His days. The Lord is going to raise Him up and give Him a portion with the many. So 53:1-10 talk about how the Lord is going to put the servant to death as an offering for our guilt. And by the way this is the only time the Bible speaks approvingly of a human sacrifice. This person’s death will be for others and will remove their sins as a guilt offering. But yet according the verses 11 and 12 that is not the end. He will see His offspring. He will divide spoil. He will rise again.

As we then proceed into chapters 54 and 55 and 56 the Lord continues to encourage His people and to remind them to come to this Messiah. But not just the people of Israel. As 56:1-8 ends the section the text reminds us foreigners may come to the Lord. That He is going to gather people from all nations to His Mountain, to His house of prayer, according to chapter 56:7-8. God again is the creator. God again points out the sins of human beings. God again provides a sacrifice, this time His Son, His Servant, His Special One, who will die and rise again for the people. And for the people who put their faith in Him will come from many nations. They will come to His holy mountain and they will be received forever.

### **The Sixth Cycle (56:9–62:12)**

The sixth cycle of Isaiah is 56:9 through 66:12. I will summarize this very quickly. In this passage once again we are reminded of the wickedness on the earth. Blind watchmen and slack shepherds rule God’s people. Righteous persons die without an advocate. Idolatry continues but Yahweh will end idolatry. He will bring His people to Himself.

How will He do so? Chapter 61:1-3 are passages Jesus cites when He begins His ministry. You can find this passage cited in Luke 4:18 and following. The text says, “The

Spirit of the Lord is upon Me.” And you will recall that is a phrase that applies to the Messiah in chapter 11 and also in chapter 42. “The Spirit of the Lord is upon Me because the Lord has anointed Me to bring good news to the poor. He has sent Me to bind up the broken hearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives and the opening of the prison to those who are bound. To proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor and the Day of Vengeance of our God to comfort all who mourn. To grant to those who mourn in Zion, to give them a beautiful headdress instead of ashes, the oil of gladness instead of mourning, the garment of praise instead of a faint spirit that they may be called oaks of righteousness, the planting of the Lord that He may be glorified.”

God’s anointed One, His Messiah, will open the eyes of the blind, He will bring good news to the poor, and He will proclaim both judgment and renewal and He will be the means by which God will bring His people to Zion, according to chapter 62.

### **The Seventh Cycle (63–66)**

Our last cycle of Isaiah is in chapters 63 to 66. In chapter 63:1 to 65:16, Isaiah states once again that Yahweh’s judgment will create a people who will bless themselves in Him. In chapter 65:16 he says that for these people the former troubles of life and history will be forgotten. This will happen when, according to verse 17, God promises, “I create new heavens, and a new earth and the former things shall not be remembered or come to mind.”

What is it that God will do in this new heaven and new earth? Verse 18: “But be glad and rejoice forever in that which I create. For behold I create Jerusalem to be a joy. Her people to be gladness. I will rejoice in Jerusalem and be glad in My people. No more shall be heard in it the sound of weeping and the cry of distress. No more shall there be in it an infant who lives but a few days or an old man who does not fill out his days.”

The passage goes on to describe that death will be gone. That displacement and exile will be gone. That God’s displeasure will be finished. And a hostile environment will no longer exist. These will simply no longer be issues because God has created a new heavens and a new earth. And when the apostle John is on the island of Patmos and writing about future things in Revelation 21 he cites this passage as he thinks about how God will remake the world that we know. He will give His people a new home where sadness, sickness, sorrow, and death are no longer possible.

Isaiah 66 concludes the book by reminding us in versus 18 to 21 that God will call priests and servants of His from all nations. Yes, God’s promise to make Israel a kingdom of priests will be fulfilled. His promise that those priests will bless all nations and bring them to themselves, promises made to Abraham, will come true.

And yet the book ends with a final warning against not believing in God. Chapter 66:22 says, "For as the new heavens and new earth that I make shall remain before Me so shall your offspring in your name remain. From new moon to new moon and from Sabbath the Sabbath all flesh shall come to worship before Me declares the Lord." Reminds us of Paul's statement in Philippians 2, "Every knee shall bow and every tongue shall confess that Jesus is Lord to the glory of God the Father."

But as a final warning in 66:24, a final warning of judgment, "And they," that is those who serve the Lord, "shall go out and look on the dead bodies of the men who rebelled against me. For their worm shall not die and their fire shall not be quenched and they shall be an abhorrence to all flesh." Isaiah warns that there is eternal judgment for those who turn against God, who reject His ways, who reject His servant, who will not be His priest, who will not worship before Him; they shall be cast off forever.

So Isaiah expresses and preaches God's gospel. The good news is that though we have sinned there is mercy and pardon, as the old gospel song says. That God judges sin but He also offers His servant, a Savior who dies for sins, who rises from the dead. Who gives new life to His people and resurrects them and provides a home for them with God forever.

## Conclusion

So as Isaiah moves from creation to new creation at least seven times in the book he presents God's pathway to forgiveness and new life for the people of Israel and for the people who come from all nations. Clearly Isaiah is a perfect way for the Latter Prophets to begin. The book unfolds during the crisis years of Israel and Judah's history. It explores extensively sin, punishment, and restoration. And it clearly portrays a great coming of the Messiah who will bring all of history to a perfect conclusion when He judges the heavens and the earth and provides a home for His people.

## **Lesson 11 ■ Jeremiah**

Isaiah dies about 680 B.C. or sometime shortly thereafter. The book of Jeremiah unfolds a few decades after that. Jeremiah is a prophet whose ministry extends from about 627 B.C. to after 587 B.C. In other words, Jeremiah becomes a prophet during the days of Josiah. You will recall he was the last righteous king of Judah and Josiah rules 640 to 609 B.C. So Jeremiah lives during this time. He also continues to work as a prophet after Josiah dies in 609 B.C., clear on down to the time that the Babylonians destroyed Jerusalem and put an end to Judah for the time being.

The book of Jeremiah thus unfolds against very turbulent times. Jeremiah himself becomes a refugee. So his book is not as orderly as Isaiah's. It really operates like a book written during terrific upheaval by people who don't have an easy life. Though I love the book of Jeremiah a great deal, I will not be able to describe it in the detail that I did Isaiah. This is not a sign of disrespect, rather just an understanding of the time I have available. But I must say, I have probably learned as much about living for God in difficult times from the book of Jeremiah as I have from any other piece of Scripture or any other kind of literature I have ever read.

### **OUTLINE OF JEREMIAH**

Jeremiah unfolds in five basic sections. These sections reflect the great emphases of prophecy. The first section is Jeremiah 1. In this chapter we have an introduction to the prophecy. It emphasizes for us who Jeremiah is, the times in which he lived and the message that he preached, the promises that God made to him. Jeremiah 2 to 29 stress Israel's sin and the sins of the nations. Israel's sin is seen as covenant breaking and the nation's sin is seen as violence against one another. Jeremiah 30 to 33 stresses restoration and renewal. In the famous passage in Jeremiah 31, the prophet states that renewal will come through a new covenant that God will make with his people.

Jeremiah 34 to 51 emphasizes Israel and the nation's punishment. Judah is destroyed by Babylon. But as we come toward the end of the book, Jeremiah 46 to 51 highlights the destruction that will come to the nations that sin against God. Jeremiah 52 brings the book to a conclusion by repeating really chapter 39, by repeating the material about the destruction of Jerusalem. So, Jeremiah 1 introduces the prophecy. Jeremiah 2 to 29 emphasizes Israel the nation's sin. Jeremiah 30 to 33 highlights restoration of Israel and the nations. Jeremiah 34 to 51 outlines Israel and the nation's punishment. And Jeremiah 52 gives us a conclusion to the book.

We must say that Jeremiah begins with warnings and ends with destruction. It is really like 1 and 2 Kings that way. But in the middle of the book Jeremiah, a man who has perhaps only two converts in the entire ministry that lasts for over 40 years – this man is the one God uses to express to us his promise of a new covenant with his people. It is this new covenant that we take as we speak of the New Testament – that is, the new covenant. And this is the new covenant that Christ says is founded and based on his blood. So Jeremiah has an incredibly important role to play in the Old Testament and in the Bible.

## Introduction to the Prophecy (1)

In chapter 1 we are introduced to Jeremiah's time, his message, and the challenges and promises that he will face. In chapter 1, verses 1-3, we are told that these are the words of Jeremiah, the son of Hilkiyah, one of the priests. This was his profession, if you will, he was a priest and he lived in Anathoth in the land of Benjamin. So this means that he is from the smallest tribe of Israel, that is Benjamin, and that he lived about four miles away from Jerusalem, so he lived in the shadow of the temple.

Verse 2 says the Lord came to him in the days of Josiah, son of Ammon, king of Judah in the 13th year of his reign, that is 627 B.C. It also came in the days of Jehoiachin, the son of Josiah, king of Judah, until the end of the eleventh year of Zedekiah, the son of Josiah, king of Judah, until the captivity of Jerusalem in the fifth month. These three verses tell us that he served from at least 627 B.C. until 587 B.C. and a little bit after.

As you know already, these are very tumultuous times, the time in which Judah finally declines and is destroyed by Babylon. These times include smaller numbers of Israelites being taken out of the land in 605 B.C. and 597 B.C., as we have already discussed in our study. These verses also tell us that Jeremiah, like Isaiah and the other prophets, speak the word of the Lord. They speak a message that has been revealed to them. It is not simply their own message. They have God's revealed word through Moses and through the other prophets and in the histories and summaries. They also have God's word revealed directly to them. They are his conduits of truth as we studied in our very first lesson. So this is the word that he preaches that comes from outside of himself. These are words that he writes that come from outside of himself.

God's word comes to him in chapter 1, verses 4 and 5 and says, "Before I formed you in womb, I knew you and before you were born, I consecrated you. I appointed you a prophet to the nations." So his teachings are to go, not just to Israel, but to all lands. I think of that call of Jeremiah when I'm doing these lectures, knowing that his words, Jeremiah's words, God's word through Jeremiah, will be explained by me and go out to many nations. Therefore, Jeremiah's words are not just for Israel, they are for many

other nations. And as we explain them in our different lands, we are fulfilling God's word through Jeremiah.

At first, Jeremiah doesn't believe he should be a prophet. He says, "I don't know how to speak, I'm only a youth" and asked the Lord to excuse him. But the Lord says in verse 7, "Do not say, 'I am only a youth', for to all to whom I send you, you shall go and whatever I command, you shall speak. Do not be afraid of them, for I am with you to deliver you, says the Lord." And he tells Jeremiah that he has put his words in his mouth, and he has set him this day over nations and over kingdoms, to pluck up and break down, to destroy and overthrow, to build and to plant. In other words, to preach sin, judgment and renewal.

And judgment is coming, according to verses 11 and 16. God is sending disaster from the north, from Babylon, to judge Judah's sins. And in verses 17 and 19 he tells the prophet, "You are going to face many difficulties." In fact, he says, "I make you a fortified city, an iron pillar, bronze walls." Why? Because the whole land, the kings, the officials, the priests, and the people will be against him. Verse 19 says, "They will fight against you, but they will not prevail against you, for I am with you, declares the Lord, to deliver you."

Jeremiah learns from the outset that he will have a very, very difficult life, that he is living in times in which there will not be much positive response. He will not be preaching to receptive hearers. In fact, he will have very little but opposition in his life. What he is promised is God's presence and God's pleasure at what he is doing. In a lot of ways, it is Jeremiah and the Lord against the world. Most of us are blessed to have other believers, perhaps believers in our home, believers in our churches. I know it is not this way for everyone. Some of you may have a very lonely life in the Lord. But if so, know that he is with you to deliver you.

## **Israel's Sins and the Sins of the Nations (2–29)**

In chapters 2 to 6, Jeremiah learns that the people have gone away from the Lord. At one time they were very devoted to the Lord; but now, they have walked away from him to serve other Gods and to follow other lords. What should Israel do? Several times in chapters 2 to 6, Jeremiah tells the people to repent. That is, to turn around from serving idols, to return to serving the Lord.

For example, in chapter 4, verses 1 to 4, "If you return O Israel," declares the Lord, "to me you should return. If you remove your detestable things from my presence and do not waiver, and if you swear, 'As the Lord lives' in truth, in justice and in righteousness, then nations shall bless themselves in him and in him shall they glory. For thus says the Lord to the men of Judah and Jerusalem, 'Break up your fallow ground and new not

among thorns, circumcise yourselves to the Lord, remove the foreskin of your hearts, O men of Judah, inhabitants of Jerusalem, lest my wrath go forth like fire and burn with none to quench it because of the evil of your deeds.”

James Leo Green says that Jeremiah uses some form of the word “repent” or the concept “repent” over 100 times in the book. It is his constant message, repent, return to the Lord, he will receive you, he will forgive you. When he tells them to circumcise their hearts reminds us of the book of Deuteronomy, which makes the heart the beginning point of all faith in God and all covenant keeping. We are to love the Lord our God with all of our heart, soul, mind and strength Deuteronomy 6:4 tells us. Here he says, “Return to the Lord. Turn away from idols.” But these chapters also tell us Jerusalem and Judah have refused to repent.

So in chapters 7 to 10 Jeremiah preaches to the people. He preaches at the temple in chapter 7. He preaches a sermon based on the Ten Commandments, reminding the people that their worship must be heartfelt, it must grow out of love for the Lord, out of repentance from their sins and out of a desire to love God and love one another. He asks them if they think they can steal and kill and destroy, and commit adultery and break the Ten Commandments, and yet come to worship without any intent to change.

Do they think they can be right with God? Simply coming to the ceremonies will not do. There must be a turning from sin to God and a living for him. Jeremiah reminds the people in chapter 10 that there are idols in the world, but they are not real gods, they have not created the heavens and the earth, Yahweh has done that. These idols have not redeemed Israel from Egypt, Yahweh has done that. So they should return to him. And yet, at the end of chapter 10, they have not done so.

In chapters 11 to 20 we see that the sin cycle continues. God sends drought, but the people do not return to him. Jeremiah preaches the word, yet they do not return to Yahweh. In these chapters Jeremiah himself gets utterly discouraged. He has good reason to be discouraged. In chapters 11 and 12 it tells us the people from his home town desire to kill him, make threats on his life. It tells us in chapters 13 and 14 that Jeremiah has to repent of his own sin and turn to the Lord. It tells us in chapters 19 and 20 that he feels like God has forced him to be a prophet and he has not had a choice.

God has asked a great deal of him. In chapter 16 it says that he is not to go near dead bodies, so he cannot even mourn the dead in his family. It says that he is not to marry, he cannot even have a wife or children because God says he is to be a symbol to the people, that it is better to have no family than to see them die and go into exile. Jeremiah is a man who has had much asked of him; and in chapter 20 he cries out of the bitterness of his soul, that the Lord has made him be a prophet.

Yet, in chapters 21 to 29 he continues. He is opposed by false prophets. He is threatened by the people. Yet he continues. Not only does he preach about sins of the day and the need to turn to God in repentance, but he also has one passage about the coming Messiah.

That is chapter 23, verses 1 to 8, where in speaking of the leaders of his day, he says, “Woe to the shepherds who destroy and scatter the sheep of my pasture, declares the Lord. Therefore thus says the Lord, the God of Israel concerning the shepherds who care for my people’, you scattered my flock and have driven them away and you have not attended to them. Behold, I will attend to you for your evil deeds, declares the Lord. Then I will gather the remnant of my flock out of all the countries where I have driven them, and I will bring them back to their fold and they shall be fruitful and multiply. I will set shepherds over them who will care for them and they shall fear no more, nor be dismayed, neither shall any be missing, declares the Lord. Behold, the days are coming, declares the Lord, when I will raise up for David a righteous branch and he shall reign as king and deal wisely and shall execute justice and righteousness in the land. In his days, Judah will be saved and Israel will dwell securely. And this is the name by which he will be called, ‘the Lord is our righteousness.’”

So Jeremiah, like Isaiah, looks to a time when the Messiah will come. He will be the king. He will be righteous. He will bring righteousness to the people. He will be a just and righteous ruler. He will be from David’s lineage. And he will be the ideal shepherd, even as David was a careful shepherd for the sheep of his father and Yahweh’s people, Israel. Meanwhile, some of the people go into exile and Jeremiah ministers to them through letters. Again he preaches at the temple, warning the people in chapter 26 of the dangers of not repenting. False prophets oppose him in chapter 28 and 29; but the Lord always vindicates Jeremiah’s word.

So in chapters 2 to 29, to summarize a big segment of Scripture, Jeremiah learns of the people’s sin and of their spiritual adultery against God. He preaches to them in the temple of their need for repentance. He tells them of the coming Messiah. He stands up to the false prophets of the day. But as we are going to see as the book unfolds, he really only has one or two people who respond positively to his message. He remains a fairly lonely figure, but he is a very faithful individual.

### **Renewal through the New Covenant (30–33)**

Chapters 30 to 33 give us material about renewal through the new covenant. Jeremiah begins in chapter 30 by talking about restoration and renewal for Israel and Judah. Like Isaiah, he calls Israel “God’s servant” in chapter 30 and verse 10, and offers comfort and encouragement to this servant, who has not always been faithful to the Lord. In chapter 31 Jeremiah teaches that the Lord will turn the people’s mourning into joy. At this time

in their history the people have already had many losses. Babylon in effect rules their country. They have had exiles in 605 and 597, and they are suffering again. But “better days are coming,” Jeremiah writes.

In chapter 31, verse 31, he writes, “Behold the days are coming, declares the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah, not like the covenant that I made with their fathers on the day when I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt, my covenant that they broke, though I was their husband, declares the Lord. But this is a covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, declares the Lord. I will put my law within them and I will write it on their hearts, and I will be their God and they shall be my people.

“And no longer shall each one teach his neighbor and each his brother saying, ‘Know the Lord’. They shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest, declares the Lord, for I will forgive their iniquity and I will remember their sin no more. Thus says the Lord who gives the sun for light by day and the fixed order of the moon and the stars for light by night, who stirs up the seas so that its waves roar. The Lord of hosts is his name. If this fixed order departs from before me, declares the Lord, then shall the offspring of Israel cease from being a nation before me forever. Thus says the Lord, ‘If the heavens above can be measured and the foundations of the earth below can be explored, then I will cast off the offspring of Israel for all they have done,’ declares the Lord.”

Let’s unpack these verses just a little bit. Jeremiah is telling us that in days to come, that is days beyond his time, God will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah. So the covenant will be with the same partners. God made a covenant with Abraham and with his children, the twelve tribes of Israel. The new covenant will begin with them.

But this covenant will be different. How will it be different? It won’t be like the covenant that he made with them when he brought them out of Egypt. Why? How will it be different? Verse 32 says that a problem with that covenant was that they broke it. I often hear people say that the old covenant was hard to keep, the old covenant was difficult, that’s why the people couldn’t keep it. The Old Testament does not teach that, neither do I believe does the New Testament teach that.

Rather, it says the Lord was good and gracious and kind, but his covenant partner, Israel, was unfaithful for the most part. There were always some faithful Israelites. We are studying the books, the writings of many of them, people like Isaiah and Jeremiah. But for the most part, the people were unfaithful. But the day is coming when things will be different. That is, the covenant partner will not break the covenant. According to verse 33, God will put his law within them, he will write in on their hearts, that the law will be in their hearts, the way God intended as he taught them in the book of

Deuteronomy, to love him with all of their heart, soul, mind and strength. And God will be their God and they shall be his people, and they will all know him. Instead of there being some people who know him and some people who do not within the covenant group, as was always true of Israel, all the people in the covenant will be covenant keepers. They will all know God and they will all serve him, from the least to the greatest.

As we come to the New Testament, we see that Jesus establishes a new covenant in his blood with his disciples the night before he dies on the cross. He re-establishes that covenant with them after his resurrection. That the early church consists of all Jewish persons, who then go out to the ends of the world to share the Gospel. That the Gospel comes to Gentiles and they believe, and that many nations trusted in Christ by the end of the New Testament era.

And that today Christians exist on every continent of the earth and Christians know and serve God. They all know him. They all come to him through the Messiah, through Jesus, and he forgives their iniquity, remembers their sin no more. All of this started because God began afresh with Israel through Jesus. Beginning with Jewish disciples, with Israelites, he has built a multi-national group of believers. The new covenant is indeed glorious because it is made through Christ and through his blood. It is written on our hearts and we can be covenant keepers. Jeremiah 32 and 33 continue these promises, continue to stress that renewal will occur, that God will restore people to himself, that the future is bright.

### **Israel and the Nations' Punishment (34–51)**

But sadly, chapters 34 to 51 return to the days in which Jeremiah lived. He could look to the future and know that there would be great things ahead, but he still had to live in the present, that present was difficult. Jeremiah 34 and 35 introduced Judah's downfall, by once again stating why the devastation approaches. As in earlier sections, direct prophet preaching and prophetic symbolic actions present the book's message.

There are three episodes. In the first segment Jeremiah tells Zedekiah, Judah's last ruler, he will be exiled to Babylon, though he will die in peace. Second, while the Jews battle the Babylonians, Zedekiah releases some Israelite slaves, only to enslave them again when times get better. Jeremiah condemns these actions. Third, Jeremiah compares the nations to the Rechabites, an unusual clan, in chapter 35. They are faithful to all the traditions of their fathers and yet Israel cannot be faithful to God. Thus, the nation suffers in comparison with the Rechabites.

In chapter 36 we see just how ingrained the sins and the stubbornness of the people got. Jeremiah sends a scroll to the king that has words of God on it. The scroll warns the

king to repent. He thinks nothing of what Jeremiah says. In fact, as he reads it, he cuts off pieces of it and throws it in the fire in front of him. Thus, he despises the word of God. Eventually Jeremiah suffers further. He is imprisoned in chapter 37 and 38. Once delivered, he tells the king yet again that judgment is coming; and indeed in Jeremiah 39, judgment does come. The Babylonians invade the land, conquer Jerusalem and destroy it. The fall of Jerusalem was already explained to us and described in 2 Kings 25, is described again here in chapter 39 and then again in chapter 52.

Jeremiah remains on in Jerusalem, trying to minister to the people. But we find in chapters 40 to 44 that the people have not learned their lesson. They once again rebel against Babylon, killing the governors set up by the king of Babylon. To make matters worse, they ask Jeremiah what they should do, and he tells them to stay in the land, that all will be well. But a group of people flee the land and they take Jeremiah hostage with them to Egypt. It is almost as if they think if they have Jeremiah with them, God will not strike them down. Jeremiah tells them, ironically, they have fled to Egypt and they will be in Egypt when Babylon comes there.

In chapters 46 to 51 Jeremiah makes it clear that wicked nations will not prosper endlessly. God will judge Egypt. God will judge Babylon. All the great nations of the day will rise and fall. They are instruments in God's hand as he shapes history. But the nations that sin shall fall.

## **Conclusion to the Prophecy (52)**

Jeremiah 52 concludes this long and great book by reminding us of the destruction of Jerusalem. The summary of the prophet at the end of the book is that everything Jeremiah warned about did occur. The people continued to sin. God sent the Babylonians to destroy them. The people are now scattered to different parts of the world. The ones who are left in Judah are poor and disorganized and dispirited. We must be reminded again of Deuteronomy 30. That passage says that if God's people, when they are in exile, when they have lost everything, if they will come to their senses and repent and turn to God, he will receive them, bring them back to the land, and bless them.

So, all is not lost, though everything is very bad at this point. We need to remember that God will send the Messiah. We need to remember that God will begin afresh with Israel through a new covenant. We need to remember that God will continue to keep his promises to Noah, to Abraham, to Moses, and to David. God's word cannot fail. The new covenant will come. The new day will dawn. God's glory will be revealed and all will be well.

As Jeremiah ends, I think we have to have tremendous respect for him. He is a man who serves for a long time. He preaches hard messages. He pulls no punches as he explains to the people what God expects. He is a man who lives in crisis days, but he is a man who knows the future is bright. He is a man who knows that the new covenant is coming, that the Messiah is coming, that final judgment will fall and sin, death, sorrow will all cease. God will make all things right.

Like Isaiah, he sees that God is a God of hope. He also learns that God's presence is enough. He stands as this tremendous witness to all of us, that no matter what we suffer as we serve God and as we are faithful to him, he sustains us. He gives us his protection. He gives us his word. He gives us what we need to serve him. The times may be extraordinarily difficult, but God remains faithful to his promises.

## **Lesson 12 ■ Ezekiel**

### **INTRODUCTION**

We now come to the book of Ezekiel. In the book of Joshua we studied God keeping his promises. In Judges we saw God judging his people for their ongoing sin. In 1 and 2 Samuel we had God giving a kingdom to his chosen servant, David. In 1 and 2 Kings we read about how God held his people accountable for covenant faithfulness and how he sent them out of the land that he had given them because of their sins.

Isaiah stresses God's saving power, constantly moving from creation to new creation. Isaiah expresses how God delivers people from sin, sorrow, death into a new home with him forever. Jeremiah stresses God holding Israel accountable and emphasizes the sin and judgment that the people experience. Yet, Jeremiah also emphasizes the new covenant, that God will again work with his people, that eventually he will re-establish them and they will become a holy people, a kingdom of priests, taking his words to the nations.

Ezekiel is a prophet of restoration and hope. He balances the messages of Isaiah and Jeremiah. I will remind you again that Isaiah states the seriousness of Israel's sins and notes that only the coming of the Messiah and the Day of Yahweh can change the people. Jeremiah discusses Israel's continuing rebellion, then details the fall of Jerusalem and its aftermath. Both books emphasize hope. Ezekiel comments on sin, as well. This prophet, though, encourages the people immediately before and after the nation's defeat. He offers hope that God still loves the exiles and will make the future brighter than the past.

As mentioned before, Ezekiel was one of the persons sent into exile in 597 B.C. This was the second deportation of Israelites undertaken by Babylon. The first was in 605 B.C. and, of course, the greatest of these was in 587 B.C. when the Babylonians destroyed Judah and Jerusalem. So Ezekiel is taken to Babylon in 597 B.C. along with several other exiles. He doesn't experience Jerusalem's Fall himself, but he does mourn the event in his book. Like most of the exiles, Ezekiel seemed to have a fairly good life in Babylon. The book tells us that he is a priest, chapter 1, verse 3; that he has a wife that he loves, 24:16; and that he has respect in his community, 8:1.

Despite the reasonably good life in Babylon, the exiles wrestle with some fundamental theological issues. First, they could easily lose their national and spiritual distinctiveness. They could easily adopt Babylon's lifestyle and religious beliefs. This is a problem. Second, the people may wonder if God cares for them now that they are out

of the Promised Land. Perhaps their sins have cut them off from Yahweh. Do they have a future with him? Third, they may consider whether God is more powerful than Babylon's many deities. After all, Yahweh did not keep the people out of exile. Is Yahweh all powerful then? Or should the Jews, the Israelites, seek another God to worship? Fourth, they may wonder why they are in exile at all. They tend to blame their elders' sin and incompetence for their predicament.

So God calls Ezekiel to address these issues. Because the book dates its messages, it is possible to note that he ministers from 593 to 571 B.C. So his ministry overlaps with Jeremiah's, though they serve at very different locations. Ezekiel corrects, comforts, and informs the Jews living in Babylon. Like the other prophets, he speaks of sin, punishment and restoration. He both preaches sermons and performs symbolic acts.

Unlike some of the other prophets, he has extremely unusual visions. He sees angelic beings in chapters 1 to 3. He sees a valley of dry bones in chapter 37 and he sees a new and beautiful and changed Jerusalem in chapters 40 to 48. In chapter 8 he sees events in Jerusalem, even though he no longer lives there. All these visions relate to Israel's questions about God and the future. What he sees, coupled with what he says and does, makes him a creative and powerful prophet.

## **SECTIONS OF EZEKIEL**

The book unfolds in five major sections. The first section is chapters 1 through 3. These chapters describe the prophet's call. He has a great inaugural vision of God on his throne and God being present everywhere in the world. In the second section, which spans chapters 4 to 24, Ezekiel stresses judgment on Jerusalem and Judah. Ezekiel speaks in very frank terms about how the people have committed spiritual adultery against God. He speaks regularly about how it is that the people have been like an estranged spouse. And he is very clear that God's glory will leave such a people.

The third section is chapters 25 to 32. Here Ezekiel offers sermons against foreign nations. Already we have had prophets give similar messages. I would remind you of Isaiah 13 to 23 and Jeremiah 46 to 51. Now, Ezekiel 25 to 32 joins these earlier prophets in stressing that God is sovereign over all nations. He rules them. He reigns over them. They belong to him. Chapters 33 to 39 depict what happens after the fall of Jerusalem. These are some of the more hopeful passages in the book, for chapter 36 talks about God's Spirit coming upon the people in future days and chapter 37 depicts the people as being raised from the dead by the God who loves them. Fifth, chapters 40 to 48 offer a vision of a restored and renewed Jerusalem, of a great temple and of a perfect city. These nine chapters really express what Isaiah says in chapter 65 and verse 17 of his

book. That is, that God has a future for his people and a home for his people in Zion, in the absence of suffering, sin and death, forever.

I will not be able to go into a great amount of detail with Ezekiel. He is a very important and wonderful prophet, but I will try to highlight a few things.

### **The Prophet's Call (1–3)**

In section 1 in Ezekiel 1 to 3 the prophet's call is more unusual than Isaiah's or Jeremiah's. In 593 B.C., when he is 30 years old, according to the first two verses of the book, God shows Ezekiel a vision. While sitting by a river, Ezekiel observes a storm from the north; four creatures, each with four faces and two wings emerge from the storm according to 1:5-14. These angelic beings are followed by wheels moving in the directions of the four angel faces. Together the angels and wheels cover each of the four directions. Next, Ezekiel receives a vision of Yahweh. Yahweh sits on a throne, high above the angels in 1:25 and 26. His appearance is fire-like, brilliant, and colorful, according to 1:27 and 28. This vision causes the prophet to fall on his face, overwhelmed at God's greatness. He hears a voice, which will presumably give him more instructions.

What do these visions mean? Primarily, they mean that God is present everywhere, no matter which direction the angelic faces look, no matter which direction the wheels may go, Yahweh is there. Yahweh's presence is real for his people, whether they live in Israel, Babylon, Egypt, or the ends of the earth. God is present with the exiles and he is present with Ezekiel because God calls Ezekiel to be a prophet in chapter 2.

Like Jeremiah, Ezekiel will have a very difficult mission. His people will refuse to hear, according to 2:1-7. He will eat God's words, eat God's scroll, chapter 2, verse 8 to chapter 3. He will eat the scroll of God's word. He will speak only that which God has given him. But again, chapter 3 emphasizes the people will reject the word. Nonetheless, according to chapter 3, verses 16 to 21, Ezekiel is a watchman for the house of Israel. As watchman, he must warn the wicked to change and challenge the righteous to remain faithful. God will hold Ezekiel responsible for his actions. According to 3:19, if he warns the people to change and they refuse, God will be pleased with his work. On the other hand, if he fails to warn the wicked, then God will hold him accountable for their rebellion. Clearly, he has an awesome and dangerous mission.

God sends Ezekiel out to preach to people who have already gone into exile for their sins. These people will not be anxious to hear the word of the Lord, but this does not matter. His calling is to do God's will. His calling is to speak God's word. So however difficult the task may be, God expects him to be faithful. It is important for us to remember in ministry that the results belong to God. The task that we do comes from his hand. It is not up to us to figure out the better method and the best way of doing

things. It is up to us to share God's word effectively and to put it before people. The results then will belong to God.

### **Sermons about Judah (4–24)**

In chapters 4 to 24 the sermons about Judah get very specific and detailed. But before that happens, in chapters 4 and 5 Ezekiel has a vision of Jerusalem being invaded, the city being laid siege by other nations. According to chapter 6 and chapter 7, this is all because of the sins of the people and because of the wrath of God. Chapter 8 gives us detailed pictures of what that sin was like, and it is amazing to see that idols were erected in the temple, that all sorts of religious sins were committed, all sorts of idolatries were there. So according to chapter 10, the glory of God has left the temple, the Lord will no longer put his name there. The Lord will depart from them.

In chapter 16, chapter 20, and chapter 23, Ezekiel speaks of Israel in very stark and lurid terms. In very detailed language, in very specific words, Ezekiel compares Israel to a spouse who has gone away from her husband. In fact, he portrays Israel as a spouse who has sinned in particularly graphic and shameless ways. These passages are much like Jeremiah 2 to 6; and when you read Hosea 1 to 3, you will remember these passages from Ezekiel. So these aren't minor sins that the people have committed. This is a very terrible and evident covenant breaking.

### **Doom for Israel's Enemies (25–32)**

In chapters 25 to 32 the prophet adds the nations to the list of people to be judged. It will not just be Judah and Israel. They will be joined in judgment by several nations, including all the mighty nations of the day. As we recall from the covenant God made with Noah in Genesis 8 and 9, God holds all nations accountable for how they treat one another and how they respond to God's word. These nations live as if there is no God other than themselves. They worship idols, they oppress others, and they will pay the price for this sin in the end.

### **What Happens after the Fall of Jerusalem (33–39)**

In chapters 33 to 39 the book returns to the idea of Ezekiel as Israel's watchman. He watches over the people and preaches to them and asks them why they will die and why they choose to receive judgment rather than blessing. In chapter 34 the prophet begins talking about the future and how it can be brighter than the present. He agrees with Isaiah and Jeremiah in that he teaches the future will be brighter because of what God will do through the coming Savior and through the day of judgment.

In chapter 34 and verse 20 the text says, "Therefore, thus says the Lord God to them, behold, I myself will judge between the fat sheep and the lean sheep. Because you push the side and shoulder and thrust all the weak with your horns, so you scattered them abroad, I will rescue my flock. They shall no longer be prey and I will judge between sheep and sheep." Now what these verses are saying is, the people have harmed one another, they have oppressed one another, they have cheated and lied and stolen from one another. Thus, because of this, God has sent them away from the land.

But as we have already studied from Deuteronomy 30 and the books of Isaiah and Jeremiah, God will restore the people when they repent and turn to him. Ezekiel 34:22 says, "God will rescue his people." What will he do next? According to verse 23, which says, "And I will set up over them one shepherd, my servant David, and he shall feed them and be their shepherd, and I the Lord will be their God and my servant David shall be prince among them. I am the Lord. I have spoken." This passage refers us back to 2 Samuel 7 where God promised an eternal kingdom to David, thus starting the messianic promise, from that point on focused on David's family.

And you will recall that the book of Isaiah says that this will be God with us, Emmanuel. He will be mighty God, everlasting father, prince of peace, wonderful counselor. He will be anointed with God's Spirit. He will bring the nations to the Lord. He will suffer for the sins of the people. He is the one that Jeremiah 23:1-8 calls the righteous branch. God will send his servant and this servant will lead God's people.

What else will God do for the people? According to chapter 36 he will put his Spirit within the people, chapter 36, verse 22: "Therefore say to the house of Israel, thus says the Lord God, 'It is not for your sake, O house of Israel, that I am about to act, but for the sake of my holy name, which you have profaned among the nations to which you came, and I will vindicate the holiness of my great name which has been profaned among the nations and which you have profaned among them, and the nations will know that I am the Lord, declares the Lord God, when through you I vindicate my holiness before their eyes.

"I will take you from the nations and gather you from all the countries and bring you into your own land. I will sprinkle clean water on you and you shall be clean from all your uncleanness and from all your idols I will cleanse you. And I will give you a new heart and a new spirit I will put within you, and I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. And I will put my Spirit within you and cause you to walk in my statutes and be careful to obey all my rules."

So what Ezekiel stresses here is that the people of Israel have not been a kingdom of priests, glorifying God in the nations. In fact, their ways have made God look very bad among the nations. But he says, I will take you from these nations, I will gather you, I will bring you to the land. I will cleanse you and I will put my Spirit in your heart, so

that you might have the heart that Deuteronomy asks them to have, and that Jeremiah spoke of when he said they should have a circumcised heart. God will do this in the people.

And the people will be like Isaiah and Jeremiah. They will be like Abraham and the other spirit led people in the Old Testament. And God will begin again with these people. But it is important for us to see that God will change the heart, fill them with his Spirit, so that when we come to the New Testament and particularly books like Luke and Acts, we will see that God is keeping his promise, to fill his people with the Spirit of God, a spirit of holiness and that he is using them to be a people who glorify his name among the nations.

Chapter 37 emphasizes the fact that at this stage Israel is in no position to do anything great for God. In fact, they are like a bunch of scattered, dry bones in a valley. So God gives Ezekiel a vision of these bones and asks them if they can live. God told him to prophecy to the bones and they all came together and stood on their feet and were alive.

In chapter 37, verse 11, "Then God said to Ezekiel, son of man, these bones are the whole house of Israel. Behold, they say, 'our bones are dried up and our hope is lost. We are indeed cut off.' Therefore, prophecy and say to them, 'Thus says the Lord God, behold I will open your graves and raise you up from your graves, O my people, and I will bring you into the land of Israel. You shall know that I am the Lord when I open your graves and raise you from your graves, O my people. And I will put my spirit within you and you shall live. And I will place you in your own land and you shall know that I am the Lord. I have spoken and I will do it, declares the Lord.'"

So here Ezekiel agrees with Isaiah 25 and 26, that a resurrection is coming. God will raise up the nation. He will raise up the servant, according to Isaiah 53. And whatever happens to God's servant, his Messiah, will also happen to the people. He will resurrect the servant, the Messiah. He will resurrect the people with him. And there will be a great future coming.

### **Vision of Restored and Renewed Jerusalem (40–48)**

Chapters 40 to 48 remind us of the importance of God's temple, that it was to represent his presence in the middle of the people and to be the central portion of their life. So in chapters 40 to 48, as Ezekiel thinks of a great new home for the people, he envisions a new and wonderful temple; and at the end of the book he envisions new boundaries for the people as they live in the heavenly place.

So Ezekiel begins with visions of God in exile, but he ends with visions of God in glory in Zion. He preaches about the sins of the people of God, the people of Judah and of

Israel, and he preaches about the sins of the nations, the people who want nothing to do with God.

But he says there is a future for both through God's servant, through David's descendant, the Messiah. God will reach out to the people, give them a leader. God will fill them with his Spirit. God will teach them his ways. And God will raise his people from the dead, that they might become kings and priests to all nations. As I have already said, we need to see the New Testament teachings on the Spirit of God, particularly in the books of Luke and Acts, in light of Ezekiel, the prophet who gave so much information and had so much interest in the Spirit of God.

So Ezekiel is a rather unusual prophet. He is a man of great and troubling visions. He is a person who sees Israel in a very negative visionary way and yet, in the future in a very positive way. He has extraordinary manifestations of God's greatness; but he also lives in a very down-to-earth way among the exiles, ministering to them. He continues to emphasize the prophetic scenes of sin, judgment, and renewal; but he does them in a way that is very, very extraordinary and shows him to be a great prophet of the Spirit, even as Jeremiah is a great prophet of the word of God and Isaiah is a great prophet of the salvation of God.

# Lesson 13 ■ The Book of the Twelve (Part 1)

## INTRODUCTION

We now come to the last book in the Prophets and for us, this is the most unusual book of all, because it is the Book of the Twelve; that is, it is 12 prophets conceived as one book. We are used to calling these the Minor Prophets, that is the shorter books, the shorter prophets. Oddly enough, in the ancient world, the Minor Prophets size books were more normal than the prophetic books like Isaiah, Jeremiah and Ezekiel, which are quite long. Shorter prophetic texts were what were written in other ancient countries. The Book of the Twelve was considered in Hebrew tradition as one book. I am going to ask you to take the unusual step of looking at them as one book, and to see them as a united prophetic testimony. How can we do that?

### Structure of the Book

I think we can do that by seeing that the Book of the Twelve emphasizes sin, punishment, and restoration, the great themes of prophecy in some unique and creative ways. Let's note the structure of the Book of the Twelve. In my opinion, the first six prophecies describe Israel and the nations' sins. The next three books stress the punishment of sin on the Day of the Lord, and the last three emphasize the restoration of Israel and their neighbors. Now of course, all three themes are found in several of the books. But I am asking you to see what each one emphasizes.

That is, the first six prophecies, all of which pre-date the destruction of Jerusalem, emphasize the sins that lead to destruction. The next three pre-date the destruction of Jerusalem as well, but are much closer in time and they are looking to the destruction of Judah and other nations, but also starting to ask about renewal. The last three emphasize renewal, though they note what Israel and the nations have done to bring judgment on themselves. So that is the structure of the Book of the Twelve.

### Characters, Historical Details, and Theological Themes

I also want you to realize that like Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, the Book of the Twelve has some fascinating characters. In the Book of the Twelve, you will find Yahweh appearing as father, husband, king, and judge. You will see obedient prophets like Hosea, a rebellious prophet Jonah, and an intellectual prophet Habakkuk. Israel emerges both as

a God-figuring minority and as a callous, perverse majority. The nations are both wicked and repentant, depending on which book you are reading.

The Twelve also has historical details and theological themes that are important. For instance, Hosea and Amos describe Israel just before Isaiah's time. Haggai, Zechariah and Malachi address the people after the exile, a new subject for us. Jonah shows that God's love extends even to the Assyrians. Habakkuk questions how God can allow the wicked to prosper. So clearly, the Book of the Twelve has a literary and theological richness as a group that it would not have as separate books.

## Overview of the Structure

I want to give you an overview now of the structure of the Book of the Twelve and the emphases that are found there. I will do this by mentioning each of the 12 prophets that make up the Book of the Twelve. The first six prophets highlight sin, the covenant breaking that Judah and Israel do, but also the sins that other nations have committed. In Hosea the text highlights Israel's general spiritual adultery. In many ways, in very general ways, the people have committed what Hosea considers spiritual adultery. This theme reminds you of Ezekiel 16, 20, and 23 and Jeremiah 2 to 6.

Then the book of Joel emphasizes Israel's sins and mentions the nations' general wickedness. In the book of Amos the specific sins of Israel and the nations are recounted. Whereas Joel and Hosea are more general, Amos is very specific, mentioning oppression, sexual immorality, and all manner of particular wickednesses. Obadiah then talks about Edom's hatred of Israel. Edom was a neighboring country and had a long-term animosity towards Israel.

In Jonah we see Israel's hatred of Assyria; that is, Jonah the prophet does not want these people in Nineveh, one of the major cities of Assyria, to repent. So there is equal distaste between Israel and the nations as they sin against one another. Then in Micah we have the solution for sin; that is, the coming of the Messiah, the coming of the Day of the Lord and God's plans to give a future for his people. But the sins are still recounted in many, many ways in Micah; but we begin to see the solution for sin coming.

The next three books highlight punishment. The book of Nahum emphasizes a serious destruction by Babylon in 612 to 609 B.C. Even the great and powerful nation of Assyria could not sin and do as they wished forever. God judges them. The book of Habakkuk highlights the punishment that God brings on both Israel and Babylon. Habakkuk, a very intelligent prophet, wonders why God has not judged the wicked in Israel. God responds by telling him he will send Babylon to defeat the wicked people in Israel. But Habakkuk knows that still leaves the Babylonians, wicked people themselves, prospering. What will God do about that? God promises to judge Babylon as well. The

book of Zephaniah begins with God punishing the entire world, but it ends with promises that God will renew all nations. Still, the emphasis is on judgment on the Day of the Lord.

The last three books highlight restoration. Haggai emphasizes the restoration of the temple. Zechariah stresses restoration of Jerusalem and the nations through the work of the Messiah. And Malachi stresses restoration of the Israelites as the return to the land.

So this is the structure of the Book of the Twelve. These are the 12 prophets that are part of the Book of the Twelve and the general emphases that they highlight in their book. So we will spend just a few minutes talking about the books themselves, giving you a bit of setting and a little bit of the outline of each. You will want to go back and study these books yourselves, using what you have learned in 1 and 2 Kings and what you have learned in Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel as a baseline for understanding what you find in these books.

## HOSEA

A few words on Hosea, the book that stresses Israel's general spiritual adultery. According to the first verses of the book, Hosea's ministry lasts from 750 to 725 B.C. In general, these were good years for the northern and southern kingdoms. Both nations enjoyed political security due to long-term, successful kings. Traditionally powerful countries like Egypt, Assyria, and Babylon were temporarily weak, so the Israelites could extend their borders. Unfortunately, as we know, good times do not always produce good worship. Israel has become what Yahweh calls "spiritual prostitutes." They chase after idols of all kinds and thereby break the covenant. When Hosea informs the people of God's displeasure, they are amazed. After all, if Yahweh is so angry, why is the nation so blessed. Hosea's preaching sounds like nonsense.

We need to remember that military success and financial ease is not evidence of God's pleasure. Indeed, it is only faithfulness to him in all of our ways that pleases God. Riches will come and go, according to the Scriptures. They are not sure signs of God's blessing and providence on us. Rather, it is only our faithfulness to him based on our faith that pleases him. He will bless us as he wishes, but riches are no sure guarantee of spiritual power.

### Israel's Adultery Dramatized (1–3)

In Hosea 1-3, the first major section of the book, we have Israel's adultery dramatized. God uses Hosea's marriage in these chapters to illustrate Israel's sin. It is a very painful and difficult passage to read, for the Lord asked Hosea to go and marry a prostitute and

have children, who were born out of prostitution. So he takes a wife to himself and she soon strays away from him; and yet, he loves her and takes her back.

God says in chapter 2 that this is a picture of what Yahweh has been doing with Israel all along. He has called Israel to himself, he has married her and yet she has gone away from him repeatedly. And so, God pursues Israel, brings her back to himself, and makes plans for a brighter future. We have seen this pattern throughout the Scripture, whether it was in the law, when Israel went away from God and worshiped the golden calf and the Lord forgave them through the intercession of Moses and through prayers of the people; or whether as in the book of Judges, the people constantly went away from the Lord and he took them back because of their pleading with him; or whether it is in Jeremiah 2–6, or whether it is in Ezekiel 16:20 or 23, this is a common picture. It is amazing that God forgives Israel. It is amazing that God forgives us for all the times that we stray away from him and yet repent.

Chapters 1-3 show us that Hosea suffers more personal humiliation than perhaps any other prophet. Twice he has to love an adulterous woman. There is no doubt that his obedience to God cost him dearly. Still, he does not suffer alone, for Israel sins like Hosea's wife. Yahweh experiences the humiliation of the covenant people worshiping idols. Both God and prophet then pay a huge price to redeem their straying spouses. Few other Biblical tests combine divine and human pain so keenly.

### **Israel's Adultery Detailed (4–14)**

In Hosea 4–14 Israel's adultery is detailed. God states that there are several sins that the people have committed. In Hosea 4:1-3 God mentions five sins that are in the Ten Commandments with adultery included in the list. Yahweh denounces priests in chapter 4:6-9, prophets in chapter 4:5, the people in 4:9-14. They are all lovers of adultery and prostitution. They all love Baal worship. They all love mixing God's religion with other religions. And prior to the days in which Samaria was destroyed by Assyria, the people are told by Hosea that their actions will lead to defeat and to death. But they do not listen.

Hosea describes this descent into sin in chapters 5–10 as a spirit of prostitution, of giving birth to illegitimate activities that can only lead to death. But in chapter 11 the Lord says he cannot give the people up. He will continue to reach out to them. He will continue to find ways to bring some of the people to himself. So the prophet concludes the book with a heartfelt call to return to the Lord: "Return O Israel to the Lord your God, for you have stumbled because of your iniquity," chapter 14:1 says.

Verse 2 continues, "Take with you words and return to the Lord. Say to him, 'Take away all iniquity. Accept what is good and we will pay with bulls the vows of our lips.

Assyria shall not save us. We will not ride on horses and we will no more say 'our God' to the work of our hands. For in you the orphan finds mercy.'"

And God's response as they return to him is as follows in 14:4: "I will heal their apostasy. I will love them freely, for my anger has turned from them. I will be like the dew to Israel. He shall blossom like the lily. He shall take root like the trees of Lebanon. His shoots shall spread out. His beauty shall be like the olive and his fragrance like Lebanon." The Lord asked finally in verse 9, the last verse of the book: "Whoever is wise, let him understand these things. Whoever is discerning, let him know them. For the ways of the Lord are right and the upright walk in them, but transgressors stumble in them." God loves his straying people and calls them back to himself with a love that cannot be denied. God's love is unquenchable and he will draw his people to himself.

## JOEL

The book of Joel is impossible to date with precision; but in the Hebrew tradition, it is linked with other books from the 8th century B.C. The book of Joel in chapter 1 threatens the people with a great invasion of locusts. God will use natural causes to bring the people to himself, to try to show them about their sins. In 1:13-20 Joel calls on the people to repent and fast and pray and change their hearts. For, according to chapter 2, the Day of the Lord is coming. God is sending his judgment.

So, in 2:12 the text says that, "Even now declares the Lord, Return to me with all of your heart with fasting, with weeping and with mourning and rend your hearts and not your garments. Return to the Lord your God, for he is gracious and merciful, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love, and he relents over disaster. Who knows whether he will not turn and relent and leave a blessing behind him, a grain offering and a drink offering for the Lord your God."

You should hear in 2:12-14 echoes of Exodus 34:6-7. God is gracious, compassionate. He is willing to forgive. But the warning is there, he will not clear the guilty. The day of the Lord is coming. But there is good news about this day of the Lord in a passage cited in Acts 2 that reminds us of Ezekiel 34 and 36. The Lord promises to pour out his Spirit through the day of the Lord.

In Acts 2:28: "It shall come to pass afterwards that I will pour out my spirit on all flesh. Your sons and your daughters shall prophesy. Your old men shall dream dreams. Your young men shall see visions. Even on the male and female servants on those days I will pour out my Spirit." The Lord will pour out his Spirit on his people. Again, they will be faithful to him and again, they will take his word to the nations.

Now I want to remind you that when I say he will redeem his people and he will pour out his spirit on his people, I don't mean every Jewish person alive in the time of the book of Acts. It is always a smaller number on earth of people who follow the Lord. But he will pour out his Spirit on Israelites and the Israelites are Jesus' disciples, according to the book of Acts; and they take his words to the ends of the earth. All of this happens because of God's power and as part of God's judgment.

## **AMOS**

### **Worldwide Lack of Justice and Love (1–2)**

Speaking of judgment and justice, the book of Amos is all about justice, because the Lord mentions several sins that the people have committed. As we look at the book of Amos, in chapters 1-2 there is a worldwide lack of justice and love. Amos 1–2 mentions several places in the ancient world and he talks about violence done by one nation to another. In fact, he says in 1:3 that Damascus has threshed Gilead with threshing sledges of iron; that is, they have brutalized people with their war machines.

We look in 1:6 at Gaza, part of the Philistine nation – in fact, it is where the Gaza strip is today – that they have exiled a whole people and sold them into slavery, and God will judge them for this. It says in 1:13-15 that the Ammonites have committed atrocities in war, they have ripped open pregnant women who were part of the lands they were invading. Such atrocities continue to this day.

In Judah meanwhile, there is immorality. The text says that the immorality is of such nature that a father and son will lie down with the same prostitute and tells us in Israel Baal is alive and well and that Judah has rejected the law of the Lord. So there is a worldwide lack of justice and love.

### **The Injustice in Israel (3–6)**

Chapters 3-6 highlight the injustice that is in Israel. All this has occurred despite the fact that Yahweh has chosen Israel, according to 3:1-2. What are they doing? According to chapter 4, Samaria's women oppress the poor and crush the needy. Why do they do this? So they can have enough wine. They are sleek and well-fed cows while the poor lack food and shelter. These women love to brag about what they give to God, according to 4: 4-5. This sort of false worship will not be tolerated. Chapter 4 tells us that these people will go into exile at the hands of the Assyrians. Israel's men are no better.

According to chapter 5 they visit pagan worship centers. They corrupt the judicial system. They trample the poor. They give bribes to keep the poor from receiving justice. According to chapter 6, they are rich and complacent. They lie on luxurious beds and eat choice meats. They enjoy playing and improvising harp music and they drink wine by the bowlful. It is a constant party for these people. Despite their ease or perhaps because of it, they don't care about their nation's spiritual condition. What will God do? By now you should know the answer. The Day of the Lord will punish these oppressors. According to chapter 5, this day will be a day of darkness and terror. It will be a day in which judgment will fall and God will take sin from the land.

### **Visions of the Coming Destruction (7:1–9:10)**

In fact, Amos 7:1 to 9:10, the next section of the book, gives us visions of this coming destruction. God has measured out the people. They will be judged. They are like a basket of ripe fruit that is ripe for judgment. God will wait no longer. He will judge. But this is not the entirety of Amos' message. Though the book does emphasize the injustice that comes from a worldwide lack of justice and love in chapters 1 and 2, the injustice in Israel and Judah in chapters 3-6 will lead to destruction, according to 7:1–9:10.

### **Statement of Restoration (9:11-15)**

The book ends with a statement of restoration that is quoted in Acts 15 as the early church is thinking about its future. Amos 9:11 says, "In that day I will raise up the booth of David that has fallen and repair its breaches, and raise up its ruins and rebuild it as in the days of old, that they may possess the remnant of Edom and all the nations who are called by my name 'declares the Lord who does this.'"

In other words, God is going to restore the line of David. The Messiah will come. And when the Messiah comes, he will rebuild David's people. He will rebuild Abraham's descendants and they will have all the blessings that the Lord gives them. And all nations will benefit from what they do on behalf of the Lord.

So Amos 9 ends with emphases we have heard before. He stresses the covenant that Noah mentioned, that God has made with all the nations. He emphasizes Abraham, blessing all nations through his descendants. He emphasizes the Davidic covenant and he emphasizes the covenant made with Israel through Moses. All of these things are connected images. They come together in the day of judgment, on the Day of the Lord, as the Lord sets all things right in the future.

## **OBADIAH**

Obadiah is the shortest book of the Hebrew Bible and its message is simple. Israel's neighbors have done violence to them and hated them. And the Lord will judge their pride on the Day of the Lord.

## **JONAH**

The book of Jonah is quite frankly the most unflattering portrait of a prophet that we have in the Bible. Jonah is a true prophet. He ministers in the 8th century B.C. As I mentioned, Hosea serves about 750 to 725 B.C. We are not sure when Joel ministers. But we think that because he is placed in the 8th century, it is probable that he is placed with the other 8th century prophets in the Book of the Twelve, and he may well have written in the 8th century.

Amos serves about the time of Hosea, that is 750 to 725 B.C. Obadiah, we are not certain when this book was written. There are many times that Jerusalem was under siege and in difficulty; but again, it is placed alongside other prophets from the 8th century B.C. Jonah is a prophet roughly from the time of Hosea and Amos. So again, he ministers before the fall of Israel in 722 B.C. Not only that, it is probable that he ministers even earlier. He probably ministers before Assyria becomes a great, conquering nation under the leadership of Tiglath-pileser III, who became king of Assyria in 745 B.C.

### **God Calls Jonah to Go to Nineveh (1–2)**

In chapter 1 Jonah is given the command to go and to preach to Nineveh. He is to take God's word to this foreign nation before they ever become the terrible, destroying, sinning nation that they become later. But as is well known, Jonah does the opposite of what he is commanded and he flees in the direction of Tarsus, that is Spain, rather than going north and east to what we know as Iraq today.

God is angry with this. He causes a great storm to toss the ship on which Jonah is fleeing, and the sailors throw him into the sea and he is swallowed by a great fish, which is God's way of preserving him and chastising him. And while he is in the fish, he repents and agrees to go to Nineveh. The fish, according to chapter 2:10, vomits Jonah out on dry land, and he has plenty of time to think about what he has done as he goes overland to Nineveh.

### Jonah Preaches Repentance in Nineveh (3)

In chapter 3 Jonah preaches repentance in Nineveh. Much to his anger, the people repent. They believe his word and there is a great revival. Chapter 4 tells us that God confronts Jonah about the fact that Jonah is upset that God has forgiven these people.

### God is Concerned about All Nations (4)

It becomes clear to us in Jonah 4 that God is very, very concerned about all nations, about all people. He said, "Should I not have compassion on Nineveh? They don't know their right hand from their left because of their great sins." So the Lord is having his prophet reach out to these foreign people and giving them his word. By 612 B.C., as we will see when we come to the book of Nahum, the people of Nineveh have forgotten all about what God has done. In the century that passes, the people who follow these who repent, do not turn to the Lord, but they turn to money and power and military as their gods.

## MICAH

Micah concludes the section on sin by reminding the people of the danger they are in. In chapters 1 and 2 the prophet announces judgment on Israel and Judah. This announcement of judgment comes about 705 to 700 B.C. So Micah ministers during the same time as Isaiah. Both of them warn Judah and Israel of Assyria's march against their lands. The judgment is coming because of all the abuses in the land.

Chapters 3-5 stress the present injustice, but also the future prospect of glory in Israel. This glory will come for one very simple reason. God will send the Messiah. The passage is often cited at Christmas-time in my country. Micah 5:1 and following: "Now muster your troops, O daughter of troops; siege is laid against us; with a rod they strike the judge of Israel on the cheek. But you, O Bethlehem Ephrathah, who are too little to be among the clans of Judah, from you shall come forth for me one who is to be a ruler in Israel, whose coming forth is from of old, from ancient days.... And he shall stand and shepherd his flock in the strength of the Lord, in the majesty of the name of the Lord his God. And they shall dwell secure, for now he shall be great to the ends of the earth. And he shall be their peace."

What is their hope, according to chapters 3-5, in the midst of all of this injustice, in the midst of all of this sin? The hope is that God will send a descendant of David, a Messiah, a Savior, who will be born in Bethlehem, who will give them peace and who

shall rule to the ends of the earth over all nations. The Messiah is their best hope for the future.

Then chapters 6 and 7 conclude with yet another indictment of the Lord against the people. According to chapter 6, the people have been involved in all sorts of covenant violations and corruptions. There have been many breaches of relationship, including oppression, which have led to social upheaval. But according to chapter 7, God will come and judge all of this sin. But through this judgment, according to the last verse of the book, God will show faithfulness to Jacob and steadfast love to Abraham, as he has sworn to our fathers from days of old. That is, even though he will send the day of judgment, he is not through with his people. As we have said many times, he will restore them through the work of the Messiah. He will restore them through the day of judgment. And they will be to him a people who will share his word to the ends of the earth.

Once again, I say, the New Testament claims that the early followers of Jesus, the first century Jewish Christians, fulfill these promises, just as Jesus himself fulfills the promise of a savior being born in Bethlehem. So these first six books remind us of the emphases, particularly on sin and covenant breaking and injustice and international wickedness, that we have already heard about in Isaiah, Jeremiah and Ezekiel.

## **Lesson 14 ■ The Book of the Twelve (Part 2)**

### **NAHUM**

Nahum, Habakkuk, and Zephaniah remind us of punishment. First Nahum, who is the prophet of Assyria's punishment. Nahum reminds us that God's patience with the gentile nations will not last forever. Their punishment must take place. Nahum announces that Assyria, the fierce conqueror of northern Israel, will be destroyed. This prediction begins the punishment emphasis in The Twelve. Nahum mentions the fall of Thebes, which happens in 663 B.C. and the fall of Nineveh in 612 B.C. Therefore, he preaches sometime between those dates.

Assyria has already defeated Samaria and other countries and now has begun to decline. As I have already mentioned, Babylon destroys Nineveh in 612 B.C. and Assyria is finished as a major power. Nahum stresses that the Lord does not punish Assyria because of personal vindictiveness. In a quotation of Exodus 34:6-7, Nahum says in 1:3: "The Lord is slow to anger and great in power" and the Lord, though, "will by no means clear the guilty."

These characteristics of God are eternal and they apply to all nations. God is gracious to Assyria, we have already seen that in the book of Jonah. But God is also not going to clear the guilty. And the time has come for guilty Assyria to be judged. So chapter 1 emphasizes God's wrath against Nineveh for all the sins they have committed through the years, for all the nations they have harmed, for all the war atrocities they have committed, for all the inequities they have perpetrated. God will judge.

Chapter 2 describes the actual destruction of the city and what it is like when the armies come against them that destroy them. Chapter 3 mentions the woe that comes to Nineveh. That their leaders are asleep. Their kings are unaware of their needs. That this city will be wasted and destroyed. That the nation to whom God sent the prophet Jonah, in his grace and through his power, he will destroy because of their lack of compassion and kindness and their lack of faith in him.

### **HABAKKUK**

The book of Habakkuk emphasizes God's punishment of both Israel and Babylon. As I mentioned in the introduction to the Book of the Twelve, Habakkuk is a very bright

individual who asks very telling questions of the Lord. In chapter 1:2-4 he makes a complaint to the Lord and it is simply this: The law is paralyzed and justice does not go forth. What will God do about wickedness in Judah? God's answer in chapter 1:5-11 is that he, Yahweh, has a plan. He will send Babylon to defeat all the wicked persons that concern Habakkuk.

Then in 1:12 to 2:1, Habakkuk makes a second complaint, asks a second question: How is this just? Because if Babylon defeats Judah, in this case it is simply the wicked defeating the wicked. The wicked still prosper. What will God do about that? God says he will also defeat the Babylonians. And as history unfolds, in 539 B.C., Persia conquers Babylon. Habakkuk is working before any of that happens. In fact, he is probably working in the late years of the 7th century B.C. and prior to the destruction of Jerusalem in 587 B.C.

How is someone supposed to live in such terrible and tumultuous times? In chapter 2:2 and following we have one of the most important passages of Scripture on this subject. It reminds us of Genesis 15:6 where the text says that Abraham believed God and it was credited for righteousness. It will remind us of Hebrews 11, which gives us a whole portrait of faith through the ages and the importance of trusting God and believing in him.

In chapter 2:2 the Lord answers Habakkuk's second question. He says: "Write the vision; make it plain on tablets, so he may run who reads it. For still the vision awaits its appointed time; it hastens to the end – it will not lie. If it seems slow, wait for it; it will surely come; it will not delay." So far God has said, even though it will seem like I am not judging sin, even though it will seem like I am doing nothing, wait for my word to come through.

Verse 4: "Behold, his soul" - that is, the soul of the Babylonian, of the wicked - "is puffed up; it is not upright within him, but the righteous shall live by his faith." That is, those who trust in God and live for him in these times, will live. They are the ones that God blesses. They are the ones that God saves. They are the ones that God approves. They are the ones that God sees through the day of judgment and vindicates on the day of judgment, and makes one of his own and allows to live with him in Zion, his home. It is those who by faith trust in God and by faith live for God, so that their faith flows seamlessly on to faithfulness. These are the people whom God approves.

In chapter 3 Habakkuk offers a great and wonderful prayer about all the work God has done from Exodus on, and how he will trust in the Lord, no matter what. Chapter 3:17-19 stresses his faith in God, even in terrible times. The prophet ends his book by saying: "Though the fig tree should not blossom, nor fruit be on the vines, the produce of the olive fail and the fields yield no food, the flock be cut off from the fold and there be no herd in the stalls, yet I will rejoice in the Lord; I will take joy in the God of my

salvation. God the Lord is my strength; he makes my feet like the deer's; he makes me tread on my high places."

Habakkuk says that even if the whole agricultural economy collapses, he will trust in the Lord. Once again we see that anyone who preaches that people who are faithful in God will always have money and riches and luxuries, simply do not understand the Bible, are not taught by the Bible, or pervert the Bible. The health and wealth gospel and prosperity is really simply a misunderstanding or a twisting of the Word of God.

Habakkuk understands what Christians worldwide have seen for years and years and that is, that there may be terrible times for a believer. You may be harassed and harmed like Jeremiah and Ezekiel. You may be jailed the way Jeremiah was, or the apostle John was. You may be crucified as Jesus or Peter were. That is up to the Lord's good providence. But even when there is nothing, we can trust in him because he is enough.

## **ZEPHANIAH**

Zephaniah brings the section of judgment to a close by stressing universal punishment. He begins his book in 1:2 by saying: "I will utterly sweep away everything from the face of the earth," says the Lord. And as chapter 1 unfolds, it is a statement of how the Day of the Lord will in effect do what Noah's flood did, will destroy the earth, will wipe away all sin and all human failure from the earth. God will start over, in other words. There will be a new creation.

This judgment, according to chapter 2, includes Israel and Judah, but also all the other nations of the world who have sinned against God. What sort of attitude do these other nations have? According to 2:15, here is their attitude: "In their heart they say: 'I am, and there is no one else.'" In other words, they are filled with pride. They are filled with their own ways and their own plans. They have no time for the Creator of the heavens and the earth. And they will find that judgment awaits.

Chapter 3 talks about this judgment and states it in no uncertain terms. But it also concludes with a statement of why this judgment occurs. In chapter 3:8 the text says God will pour out his anger on the nations. But for what purpose? Zephaniah 3:9 says: "For at that time I will change the speech of the peoples" - that is, of the nations - "to a pure speech, that all of them may call upon the name of the Lord and serve him with one accord, from beyond the rivers of Cush, my worshipers, the daughters of my dispersed ones, shall bring my offering."

According to Zephaniah 3:9-10, God is bringing judgment so that people from all nations might call on him. We see many people from different lands coming to faith in the Old Testament. And as we come into the New Testament, we see even more of them.

Zephaniah ends with this wonderful statement of joy and restoration, 3:14: “Sing aloud, O daughter of Zion; shout, O Israel! Rejoice and exult with all of your heart, O daughter of Jerusalem! The Lord has taken away the judgments against you; he has cleared away your enemies. The king of Israel, the Lord, is in your midst; you shall never again fear evil. On that day it shall be said to Jerusalem: ‘Fear not, O Zion; let not your hands grow weak. The Lord your God is in your midst, a mighty one who will save; he will rejoice over you with gladness; he will quiet you by his love; he will exult over you with loud singing.’”

Verse 20: “At that time I will bring you in, at the time when I gather you together; for I will make you renowned and praised among all the peoples of the earth, when I restore your fortunes before your eyes, says the Lord.”

God will indeed save people from all nations and all lands. God will indeed sing over these people in Zion. There is a bright future. But Nahum, Habakkuk and Zephaniah help us understand that this bright future will occur through the ashes of judgment. To remind you, Nahum, who is writing about 612 B.C. and Habakkuk and Zephaniah, who both minister nearly at this same time and before the destruction of Jerusalem in 587 B.C., these people are telling the Israelites of coming judgment. But yet they are also telling them of coming glory. This coming glory is emphasized in Haggai, Zechariah and Malachi.

## **HAGGAI**

Haggai is the prophet of temple restoration. It is important for us to understand that Haggai is written against the background of the years 520 to 516 B.C. Despite all we have learned about the history of Israel, these years have not been covered. The author of Haggai simply expects you to know that after Babylon destroyed Jerusalem in 587 and took complete control of the political affairs of the Israelite people, the people served under Babylon’s rule from 587 to 539 B.C.

Many of the people were exiled throughout the ancient world. Some lived in the land, but it was difficult at best for the people in the land and often bad for those outside the land. In 539 B.C. the Persians defeated the Babylonians and took over their empire. The Persians were led by a great king, Cyrus the Great.

In 538 B.C. Cyrus began to allow some subjugated peoples to go home, to go back to their ancestral homelands to rebuild there; and he allowed some Israelites to go back to Judea, to go back to Jerusalem and the area. So they began to go back in 538 to 535 B.C. Haggai is one of the prophets who ministered to these people.

In a very short book, in chapter 1, he tells the people it is time to rebuild the temple. It is time to rebuild that symbol of God's presence in their midst. It is time to restore worship. It is time for them to show that God matters most to them. The people have been suffering under famine. They have been suffering without enough to eat. But yet, when the prophet tells them the key to their future is to build this temple, they do so.

It is not as magnificent as Solomon's temple, and yet it is significant. It is an important step. In fact, according to chapter 2, the glory of this temple will be greater than the glory of the past temple. The reason this will be so is because the Messiah will come there. The Messiah, the one God has promised, will someday come to this place. So there is a renewed temple as the people return to the land.

## **ZECHARIAH**

The next book is Zechariah. Zechariah continues the restoration theme by talking about Jerusalem's restoration. Like Ezekiel, Zechariah is a book of many visions, in the same time period as Haggai, that is 520 to 516 B.C., in chapters 1-8, Zechariah has visions of a restored Jerusalem. He has eight of these visions and they are often very difficult to understand. Stated simply, we see their emphasis, the emphasis of all these chapters in chapter 8. In this chapter, according to verse 3, Jerusalem is the holy mountain of God. Their God will bring peace to his people, according to 8:4-5. Their exiles will gladly return, according to 8:7-8. The temple has been rebuilt and the land will be fruitful, 8:8-12. The people will be righteous says 8:14-19. And Israel will be a blessing to all nations, 8:20-23.

Jerusalem's restoration marks Israel's return to the Promised Land, where they will be a kingdom of priests, a holy nation, showing God's glory in the middle of the earth to all the people around. This is the future that began with a restored Jerusalem in 520 to 516 B.C.

Zechariah 9-14 closes the book with some extraordinary statements about the king who will rule in Jerusalem. These passages are cited in the New Testament as well. For instance, Zechariah 9:9: "Rejoice greatly O daughter of Zion! Shout aloud, O daughter of Jerusalem! Behold, your king is coming to you; righteous and having salvation is he, humble and mounted on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey." This passage is cited in Matthew 21:5 when Christ enters Jerusalem. The text says this king will come and he will save his people, according to 9:14-17.

But chapter 11 mentions the fact that the shepherd will be struck, the shepherd will be harmed. In chapter 12 it says the shepherd will be pierced. This king who has come to

shepherd the people, to be the new David, will be pierced and die and his people will be scattered.

These verses state that in Zechariah 13:7: “Awake O sword against my shepherd, against the man who stands next to me, declares the Lord of hosts. Strike the shepherd and the sheep will be scattered. I will turn my hand against the little ones. In the whole land, declares the Lord, two thirds shall be cut off and perish, and one third shall be left alive. And I will put this third into the fire, and refine them as one refines silver, and test them as gold is tested. They will call upon my name, and I will answer them. I will say, ‘They are my people’; and they will say, ‘The Lord is my God.’”

What Zechariah 13:7-9 is indicating is that the servant of the Lord, the shepherd who is coming, the king who comes to the people, will be struck and killed and his people will be scattered and they will be refined. But those who are refined will call upon his name. They will be his people and he will be their God. The rest of the Bible helps us to understand that this king is not just struck and killed but he is raised from the dead, according to Isaiah 53.

In the coming Day of the Lord, Zechariah 14 says, “God will cleanse all of Jerusalem, make Mount Zion a place for God’s people. This is glorified Jerusalem. This is what we commonly call heaven. It is what we call from Isaiah 65 and Revelation 21, the New Jerusalem. God will put his people in a perfect place and everything there will be holy unto him.

In 14:8 Zechariah writes, “On that day living waters shall flow out from Jerusalem, half of them to the eastern sea and half to the west. It shall continue in summer as in winter and the Lord will be king over all the earth. In that day the Lord will be one and his name shall be one.” God will rule in his place with his people through his power. This reminds us of Isaiah stressing over and over again that from creation to new creation, the Lord is working his purposes. There is coming a day when there will be a home for his people. Israel’s return to Jerusalem in 520 to 516 helped the prophet see God’s work in his time and helped him think about God’s work in the future.

## **MALACHI**

Malachi, the last book of the Book of the Twelve, is a prophet of restoration of Israel’s people. Malachi knows that a restored temple and city mean little if the people themselves fail to serve the Lord. During Haggai and Zechariah’s ministry, the people are receptive to the Lord’s commands. They repent, rebuild the temple, and plan to restore Jerusalem. But between the years 520 to 516 B.C. and in the time of Malachi, things change. Decades pass. Sin sets in.

Most scholars date Malachi about 450 to 425 B.C., in other words, about 70 years after Haggai and Zechariah. Israel has gone backwards spiritually in these years. Israel's attitude leads to much of the decline. What do they think? First, they doubt God's love because they have not been very prosperous, Malachi 1:1,2. Yahweh reminds them that he has loved them and chosen them through the centuries.

Second, Malachi 1:6-14 states that the priests and the people disdain proper worship. They bring crippled, worthless animals for sacrifice in the temple, and yet they expect God to be pleased and bless them. They consider the whole worship process a waste of time. Why? Because they simply want the money. They want God to give them what they want as far as food, luxuries, money. God warns them this mindset is unacceptable.

Third, according to Malachi 2:1-9, the priests have no reverence for God's law. They have lied about God's standards. So the Lord has humiliated them. He reminds them that the priests are supposed to teach the word of God. He reminds them that their father Levi had true instruction in his mouth, and he turned many away from iniquity. What is the role of a priest? According to Malachi 2:7, "The lips of a priest should guard knowledge and the people should seek instruction from his mouth, for he is the messenger of the Lord of hosts. But you (the priests of that day) have turned aside from the way. You have caused many to stumble by your instruction."

Priests were not just to pray and offer sacrifices and sing in the temple, they were to teach the people the word of God. This was their primary function, to share God's standards with God's people. These priests have not done so. And the people have suffered. What has happened? Well, according to Malachi 2:10-16, men are divorcing their wives, breaking their marriage vows. According to Malachi 3:1-12, they have withheld their offerings and speak against God and rob him.

So what will God do? Well, by now you should know. He will judge through the day of the Lord. He will judge in time and at the end of time. He will send punishment in their daily lives, so that they will return to him as Leviticus 26 and Deuteronomy 27, 28, said would happen. If they don't turn, he will send greater judgments until he drives them from the land.

The Book of the Twelve ends and the prophets end with the following warning, Malachi 4:1: "For behold the day, the day of judgment is coming, burning like an oven when all the arrogant and all the evildoers will be stubble. The day that is coming shall set them ablaze, says the Lord of hosts, so it will leave them neither root nor branch. But for you who fear my name, the son of righteousness shall rise with healing in his wings. You shall go out leaping like calves from the stall and you shall tread down the wicked, for they will be ashes under the soles of your feet, on the day when I act, says the Lord of hosts. Remember the law of my servant Moses, the statutes and rules that I commanded him at Horeb for all Israel. Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the great

and awesome day of the Lord comes. And he will turn the hearts of the fathers to their children and the hearts of the children to their fathers, lest I come and strike the land with a decree of utter destruction.”

God says there is a day of judgment coming. He warns the people to repent. He warns them to keep the covenant standards set forth by Moses. He warns them to return to the ways of righteousness and truth. He warns them to put their faith in him and to be faithful to one another because of their faith in him. He also says, “I am sending Elijah before the great day comes.”

The New Testament states that John the Baptist, who prepared the way for Jesus by preaching to the people of the coming of judgment, he is the Elijah promised, he is the prophet promised. Just as David is said to be the Messiah when Jesus comes, David is standing as a representative for all the people. Elijah is a representative of all the prophets. John the Baptist is Elijah in that he shares Elijah’s beliefs, he shares Elijah’s teachings and he comes and preaches and he preaches judgment to the people. If they do not turn from their sins and turn to the Messiah, Jesus, they will be judged.

## **CONCLUSION**

So God continues his pattern of sending his prophets to warn the people, of sending his prophets to turn them back, so that he will not judge. But as is often the case, the people do not respond. So the Book of the Twelve shares in the prophetic books of Joshua, Judges, Samuel and Kings, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel. Together, these books tell us the history of Israel, what happened and the meaning of that history, why it all happened. It explains to us that God in his faithfulness brought Israel to the land. He made them a kingdom of priests and a holy nation, to be a witness to the nations. He gave them his standards, so that they might live out his word. He gave them prophets and priests to teach them.

But the people, the prophets, the priests and then the kings all became unfaithful. God never left himself without witness. There were great people. There were great people even in the era of the judges. The prophets themselves are giants of faith. But sadly, the people turn away from him and he has to send judgment in the form of destruction of Samaria, destruction of Jerusalem, and promise of greater destruction at the end of time.

In the meantime he promises that David will have a descendant on the throne. David’s great son, the Messiah, will come. The Lord’s promises are that when the Messiah comes, Israelites will put their faith in him, build their lives in him and take God’s message to the ends of the earth. God’s promises to Noah, Abraham, Moses and David will come true. They must be kept. They cannot fail.

So the prophets give us this great scope of how God expects his people to live in the land that he has given them, the message that he intends them to take to the nations and how he expects all nations to live before him. So they tell us about truth. They also tell us about love and hope, as we look not only to the day of the Lord and the removal of sin from the earth, but we look to the salvation that will come through that day, through the Messiah; and we can look forward to the time when God will put his people in Zion with him in the absence of sin, suffering, sorrow, and death, forever. This is the message that the prophet gives us.

## **Lesson 15 ■ Psalms**

We now come to the third and the final section of the Old Testament books. This section is called The Writings. This is the most diverse of all the materials that we have. The law is a pretty standard mixture of narrative and commands and case laws. The prophets are a fairly solid mixture of narrative and of history and interpretation of that history and preaching and teaching and writing about it. The writings span everything from Psalms and Proverbs and narratives, to laments and love songs. It is a very diverse set of books. These books together tell us how it is that Israel lived throughout their history, how the faithful people related to God and related to one another.

As we are going to see, The Writings begin with the book of Psalms, which tells us how to worship, and it goes clear on to the end to 1 and 2 Chronicles to tell us how to view the past. Along the way, it tells us how to live wisely, how to live in the midst of suffering, how to live in exile and how to mourn terrible losses, and how to enjoy love. So this diverse section is the “how” part of the Old Testament book. The law and the former prophets tell us what has happened. The latter prophets tell us why it has happened. Now The Writings give us instruction in how it is that people lived for the Lord and for one another throughout these great events of history that we have already learned.

The Psalms represent the best prayers, hymns and calls to worship that Israel produced. They were collected over a long period of time as the different historical events they describe indicate. All are poetic in form. Their broad subject matter and poetic genius have long made the Psalms popular with readers. They have blessed Christians for 2000 years and prior to that, Israelites for centuries.

### **THREE WAYS TO INTERPRET THE PSALMS**

#### **Individual Expressions of Spirituality**

There are basically three ways in which we can interpret the Psalms. First, many people read them as general, individual expressions of spirituality. These readers expect Psalms to speak to the personal lives, regardless of the text’s original setting or purpose. Unfortunately, this type of interpretation too often misuses Scripture. A text can be made to mean whatever the reader wishes. Too, this kind of interpretation misses the opportunity to apply the Psalms to national and community issues.

## According to Literary Type

Second, the Psalms can be interpreted by their literary type or form and then applied to worship. The pioneer of this type of study is named Herman Gunkel. He wrote about 100 to 125 years ago. He argued that we ought to group Psalms that are similar in content, tone and settings, and then understand how they were used in their original setting, and then use them in similar circumstances today. Gunkel stated that there were five basic types of Psalms, and here they are: First type, hymns of praise. Second type, royal psalms. Third type, individual thanksgiving songs. Fourth type, individual laments. Fifth type, community laments. Let me repeat those: Hymns of praise, royal psalms, individual thanksgiving songs, individual laments and community laments. Other scholars have observed that you can basically boil these five categories into two, praises or laments. Though the list is not perfect, Gunkel these five types provide an adequate introduction to the various types of psalms that we find.

### Hymn of Praise

Let me go over a few of these with you. The hymn of praise: A hymn of praise usually unfolds in the following manner. First, there is a call to praise, then there are reasons given for praising God, and then there is a concluding praise. So, three sections: Call to praise, reasons for praise and concluding praise. And a hymn of praise usually is stating something wonderful about God's character and his deeds, but the emphasis is on God's character and his greatness. Examples of this type of psalm can be found in Psalm 8:29 and 104, where worshipers praise the Lord as creator. Other hymns of praise, Psalm 100 and Psalm 103, these two psalms praise God as our savior. Also, you could look at Psalms 46 and 48. These psalms stress that God is the King of Israel and the king of all nations. So hymns of praise are fairly common.

### Royal Psalms

The second type of psalms that we have already mentioned are royal psalms. As you can expect, these psalms comment on the lives and actions of Israel's kings. While doing so, they often refer to the Messiah, the coming king, the son of David, the Davidic descent who will rule Israel and all nations. Royal psalms do not follow a set pattern. They also cover a variety of situations. For example, Psalm 2 probably is about a coronation. Psalm 45 is about a marriage. Psalm 144 is about a battle. I think the clearest Messianic royal psalm is 110, which speaks of a king who is also a priest after the order of Melchizedek (see verse 4). Hebrews refers to this text five times to describe the person and work of Jesus Christ. So quite often, when the New Testament cites a psalm that it claims is a psalm speaking about the coming Messiah and thus about Jesus, they pick a royal psalm to cite.

### Individual Thanksgiving Psalm

The third type of psalm, the thanksgiving psalm. These mention particular times and ways God has blessed an individual or the nation. The hymn of praise emphasizes God's character and then God's deeds. Thanksgiving psalms do mention God's character, but focus on God's deeds. They are therefore more specific in nature than hymns of praise. They often unfold in the following way: They open with a statement of praise, describe some past trouble, then note how God helped in that situation and conclude with a statement of gratitude. For instance, Psalm 30 begins by thanking God for his help (verse 1), calls the problem he faces life threatening (verses 2-5), claims God heard the cry for help (verses 6-9) and promises to thank God forever (verses 10-12). Other thanksgiving psalms include Psalms 18, Psalm 32, 107, 116 and 138.

### Individual Lament

The fourth type of psalm is the individual lament. Interestingly enough, individual laments appear more often than any other psalm type. They appear for a variety of reasons. They mourn personal sin, as we find in Psalms 6, 32 and 51. They also mourn the presence of enemies, Psalms 3, 7 and 13. They often also mourn or lament sickness and disease, Psalms 31 and 102. Typically, individual laments unfold in four segments, as Psalm 51 illustrates. First, the worshiper offers a general prayer for deliverance, verses 1 and 2. Then he describes the problem, verses 3-6. He then asks for help in verses 7-12 and pledges to serve God when forgiveness is granted, verses 13-19. I find it interesting that individual laments are so prevalent in the Psalms, when in my church tradition we so rarely ever use laments at all. I think it is important for us to recall that people in the Scriptures were willing to share their sorrows with God in clear and telling ways and ask for his help.

### Community Lament

The fifth type of psalm, the community lament, is of course similar to the individual lament. They differ in that the whole nation, or at least a large group of people, mourn together when war, famine, drought or some other disaster afflicts Israel. Psalms 44, 74, 79 and 80 are all community laments. Psalm 80 shows us the format of a community lament. First, the community calls on God, verses 1-3. Then the community complains about a situation, verse 4. Next, the community reviews Yahweh's help in the past, verses 8-11. Next, they petition for help in the current situation, verses 12-17. Finally, they vow to serve God when trouble passes, see verses 18, 19.

Sometimes contemporary readers are offended at the way community and individual laments complain to God. We must remember, though, that the psalmist believed God will solve the problem. Therefore, they base the complaint on faith in God. I also want to remind current readers, we often do complain to God. We may as well learn to pray

in a way that would be pleasing to him. He is willing to hear our complaints. The Psalms gives us ways to complain with the purpose of having greater faith in God, not less faith in him, and not to develop a bitter spirit.

Not all psalms fit neatly into these categories, as Gunkel and other scholars admit. Still, readers can understand most psalms by following these patterns. Now the main problem with this approach is that it doesn't make sense of the order of The Psalms as they appear in the Scriptures. In this approach, readers must take each individual psalm, classify it and move on to the next text. Little continuity emerges. So, I want to mention a third way to interpret the Psalms and I want you to see ways to link it with the second way that we just mentioned. The first way to interpret the psalms, we mentioned, was to treat it individualistically, find words or phrases that comfort or encourage us in the psalms, and read them regardless of context. The second way is to read them by their literary type, by the five different literary types that we mentioned, and how they function. I think that's a very important way for us to read the psalms.

## Reading the Psalms as a Whole Book

Recently however, scholars have given us a lot of help in trying to understand how the psalms may be read as a whole book. Pioneers in this form of study of the psalms include Gerald Wilson and John Walton. You know by looking at your Bible that the psalms are divided into five parts: Chapters 1–41, chapters 42–72, chapters 73–89, chapters 90–106 and chapters 107–150. This division reflects some purposeful arranging of the book.

Wilson notes the titles of the Psalms and he notes how the end of each segment of the psalm is often reflected in the first chapter of the next section of the psalm; and he notes that every section of the psalms ends with a doxology with praise to God. Based on his analysis of the book, Wilson thinks the Book of Psalms discusses how Israel has kept or broken her covenant with Yahweh.

According to Wilson, chapters 1–41 focus on proclaiming the covenant. Then, chapters 42–72 discuss the passing on of the covenant to the next generation. But, chapters 73–89 reveal that the covenant has not been kept. Therefore, chapters 90–106 may state how an exiled Israel should repent. Chapters 107–150 then conclude the book by offering hope to those who ask the Lord to forgive them. You will probably notice that this format parallels the prophet's emphasis on election, sin, punishment and restoration.

John Walton agrees that The Psalms charts Israel's relationship to the covenant. He takes the psalm titles seriously and uses them to date the five sections of the book. He says Psalms 1 and 2 introduce God's love for the righteous and special covenant he has made with David. Then, chapters 3–41 deal with David's conflict with Saul and chapters

42–72 with David’s reign. Next, chapters 73–89 discuss the Assyrian crisis, the era in which the Assyrians dominated Israel’s and Judah’s history. Chapters 90–106 reflect on the temple’s destruction after 587 B.C. Chapters 107–145 contemplate the return of worship in Jerusalem and Psalms 146–150 complete the book by commanding the nation to praise Yahweh. Walton’s scheme helps readers see how Psalms parallels the historical events discussed in Samuel and Kings, as well as using the great prophetic themes of election, sin, punishment and restoration.

## **OUTLINE OF PSALMS**

In the rest of the time in Psalms, I will give you an outline of the book that will help you see how they worshiped God. I will make a few comments on psalm types. But in a study of this type, we do not have a long time to spend on a great book like Psalms.

### **Worshipping God in Times of Trouble (1–41)**

Psalms 1-41, in my opinion, stresses worshiping God in times of trouble. Worship must be durable to be authentic; and Psalms 1-41 stress maintaining faithfulness to God under extreme pressure. Most of these psalms are personal laments and most of the titles connect them to David. Of course, David endured many problems, such as Saul’s jealousy and Absalom’s rebellion and so forth. Israel also experienced many national problems, even when they tried to follow Yahweh. These troubles helped strengthen and purify Israel and David’s faith. Their problems were real, but they were not the most important reality in their lives. God occupied that position. I want to mention Psalms 1-3 and Psalm 8 as a way of reminding you of the major types of psalms.

Psalms 1 and 2 introduce the book’s main emphasis, the human struggle to honor God and God’s greatness. In other words, how to worship. Psalm 1 contrasts the fate of the righteous and the wicked. The righteous refuse the counsel of the wicked. They spurn the lifestyle of sinners and obey God’s law. Thus, they are secure in life and will be secure after death. In a strong contrasting statement in 1:4 the text says, on the other hand the wicked will blow away like chaff from the threshing floor on judgment day. Yahweh knows and will not tolerate the breaking of the law. So the Psalms are intended to distinguish between those who are righteous and those who are wicked, so that those who want to serve the Lord will walk with him and worship him. Those who are wicked should be warned to turn away from their sins and come to God.

Psalm 2 is a Messianic psalm. It shows us that the wicked never accept God’s sovereignty willingly. In chapter 2, verses 1-3 the nations oppose the Lord and his people. But this rebellion is described as foolish. God laughs at the wicked in 2:4. He

reminds them that he rules the earth and he has established David's throne forever. See 2:5-7 and remember 2 Samuel 7 and all the prophetic passages associated with it. In 2:8-9 Yahweh tells the nations they belong to David and God's son, so they should stop their ridiculous behavior. They should bow to David's authority as God commands in 2:10-12. As you may know, the New Testament cites Psalm 2 on more than one occasion to explain that Jesus will rule all nations, but also to explain why people are often so rebellious against him. Unfortunately, Israel's enemies often ignore these warnings. As a result, troubles abound. In Psalms 3-7 individuals and the nation ask God for deliverance from harm, as do Psalms 9-14 and 16-17.

I want to remind you about Psalm 8. This psalm breaks the chain of lament by praising Yahweh's majesty, by describing the person who pleases God. Psalm 8 emphasizes how kind God has been, to make human beings in his image and cause them to rule over the world. It wonders why God is so concerned with human beings. The answer is always, his love and his kindness endure forever.

So these psalms remind us that psalms are about worshiping God and following his ways. The Psalms will remind us of the importance of the coming Messiah. They will remind us of how God expects and loves for us to bring our troubles to him. So, Psalms 1-41 is about worshiping God in times of trouble.

## Teaching Worship to the Next Generation (42-72)

Psalms 42-72 are about teaching worship to the next generation. Faithful worship will not be passed on by accident, it must be taught to each new generation. Remember what Moses says in Deuteronomy 6:4-9: "You are to teach your children to love the Lord your God with all of your heart, soul, mind and strength." Laments, praises and thanksgiving psalms like those in Psalms 1-41 can aid any person who knows them. It is important, though, for such psalms to be handed down, or faith may die out.

The titles in part 2 of The Psalms continue to highlight David's life. They also feature psalms of Korah, Asaph, and Solomon. The psalms attributed to David model proper worship. The other psalms focus on God's continuous relationship with Israel. I won't take time to describe all of these, but the next generation theme is highlighted in Psalm 72, which describes the changing of kings in Israel.

The psalm is attributed to David, but it also mentions that the prayers of David the son of Jesse end here. Apparently David prays for his son here. He asks God to make his son judge correctly, aid the afflicted and thus enjoy a long and prosperous reign. In other words, David is passing on the faith and the responsibility of being king to the next generation. In this way it parallels 1 King 2, which describes the advice David gave to Solomon upon becoming king.

## **The Consequences of Rejecting a Godly Heritage (73–89)**

The third section of Psalms, Psalms 73–89, show us the consequences of rejecting a godly heritage. Godly parents do not always produce godly children. Remember Judges 1:1 to 2:5 show us that a generation after the conquest of the land and those faithful people, their children and their grandchildren do not trust the Lord. So godly parents do not always produce godly children, even if they are trying their very best. David himself fathers both Solomon and Absalom. Of course, 1 and 2 Kings chronicle Israel's sin into idolatry and national defeat. Hezekiah was a good king who had a bad son. Similarly, Psalms 73-89 describe a nation that loses the faith that had sustained David. As a result, the people experienced devastation and exile. Even during these bleak times, the righteous continue to seek God and pray for their nation's restoration.

Two psalms may be of interest to you. If you want to know how Israel continued on into sin and how The Psalms reflect that, read Psalms 78, which surveys the nation's history. Also read Psalm 89, which talks about God's special covenant with David and how the Lord had made promises to him that are outlined in 2 Samuel 7. But 89 also notes that David's lineage has now ended, so probably Psalm 89 is reflecting the destruction of Jerusalem by Babylon in 587 B.C.

This destruction, in relationship to the promises of God to David, lead to some conflicting emotions. In verses 1-18 the psalmist exalts God's greatness. Yet in verses 38-45 he recognizes that Israel is under judgment. Therefore he asked God in verses 19-37, "What has happened to the Lord's promises to David? Will David always have a son on the throne? How can it be that God has forsaken Israel and allowed Babylon to destroy them?" The psalmist asks a common question, "How long will the punishment last?" in verses 46-48. So at the end of 89, we see that Israel has lost everything, including the Davidic kingship; and the question is, What will God do now?

## **Israel Must Exercise Worship While Being Patient (90–106)**

Psalms 90–106 emphasize what Israel must do in this situation is exercise worship while being patient. The righteous are forced to wait for some time before they see Yahweh redeem Israel. While waiting, they attempt to strengthen their commitment to the Lord. Psalms 90–99 stress God's sovereignty.

First, Psalm 90, which is attributed to Moses, notes that Israel's secret sins have brought them public shame. Still, Israel can trust in the Lord who is eternal, he is from everlasting to everlasting. In fact, Psalms 95 and 96 and 99 and 100 praise God as the sovereign creator of all things. It is he who has made us, not we ourselves. He has made the sea and all that is in it. His hands have formed the dry land. Therefore, we should

worship him and not harden our hearts. We read these things in Psalm 95 and 96 and Psalm 100.

Psalms 104 to 106 are like Psalm 78; that is, they give a comprehensive history of Israel. In fact, 104 begins with creation and tells of all God's wonderful works as we come into 105 and Psalm 106 says that despite all God has done, the people have sinned against God and have suffered the consequences of exile. So Psalm 106:47 ends, "Save us, O Lord our God, and gather us from among the nations, that we may give praise to your holy name and glory in your praise."

So the history of Israel, according to Psalms 104-106 is that they have sinned against the creator, the one who redeemed them from Exodus and he has fulfilled the threats of Leviticus 26 and Deuteronomy 27 and 28. The people have been driven from the land. But, as Deuteronomy 30 has promised, if they will repent, they can come back to him. And it is the attempt to repent that Psalm 106 is trying to achieve.

## **Worship and Restoration (107–150)**

Psalm 107 to 150 emphasizes worship and restoration. Eventually the righteous have their patience rewarded. Psalm 107:1: "O give thanks to the Lord for he is good, for his steadfast love endures forever. Let the redeemed of the Lord say so, whom he has redeemed from trouble and gathered in from the land, from the east and the west, to the north and the south."

In other words, Psalm 107 celebrates the fact that God has begun to bring his people back. As we know, he did in 538 to 535 B.C. when Cyrus allowed some exiles to go home. The Lord has begun to bring them back, so how shall they serve the Lord in these days? Psalm 1:10 stresses that they need to serve the Lord by recognizing the Messiah. This Messiah is the king and he is a priest forever after the order of Melchizedek; that is, he has no beginning and he has no end. For his sake, the Lord will shatter all enemies. So, how should the people live now? With trust in the promise of the coming Messiah.

How else shall they live? Psalm 119 is the longest chapter in the book, 176 verses long. Each section of eight verses, 22 in all, beginning with the next letter of the alphabet. In other words, it is an acrostic psalm. It is saying that everything from A to Z is in this psalm. And the psalm stresses everything from A to Z about God's Word. That we know God's Word is true and perfect, as Psalm 19 that we studied at the beginning of our course, teaches. The Bible, God's Word, is perfect and flawless and it shapes our souls and helps us to live for God.

So if the people are going to be faithful to the Lord, they would look to the Messiah (Psalms 110), they would follow God's Word (Psalms 119), they would journey to Jerusalem to worship according to Psalms 120-134. These Psalms are often called the

songs of ascent, that is the psalms the people sang as they journeyed upward to Jerusalem for worship. Worship and fellowship together is very, very important. And daily, chapters 146-150 tell us, praise and honoring and glorifying God in our lives and with our lips will help the people live for God as they wait for the Messiah and faithfully proclaim his name to the nations.

## Conclusion

In conclusion, Psalms is a beautiful and potent book. It contains soaring praise and horrible confessions. It spurs individuals and the whole nation to pure worship. Yet it also condemns the behavior of God's people. Psalms provide instruction, rebuke and encouragement. In other words, it defines, inspires and safeguards worship. All who accept its principles nurture their relationship with God. All who ignore its truth seek God on their own terms, an attitude that will lead to destruction.

What is worship? In the Old Testament it is bowing before the King of kings and the Lord of lords. It is giving God the King his due, his due in praise, his due in service, his due in confession. Worship is bowing before a king. It is about who he is, it is not about who we are. By confessing our sin and enjoying God's forgiveness, we worship. By lamenting our pain, but expecting Yahweh to help us, we worship. By thanking God properly and by sharing our faith with the next generation, we worship. By keeping God's word and waiting for our final redemption, we worship. All of these actions honor God. They demonstrate our commitment and love for the Lord. In short, they give glory to God, glory that he deserves.

These days worship is being defined in many ways. But only worship that begins and ends and has its goal in God is Biblical worship. Only worship that stresses the importance of relationship with God through the Messiah and stresses that our walk with God is defined by the Word of God, and we who accept the Word of God will then live out the ways of God in our life. Only this sort of worship is actual worship. Singing is not worship. Dancing is not worship. Exuberance is not worship. These things may go alongside worship, but the truth is, it is only the person who bows before the Lord and goes from his presence to serve the Lord has truly worshiped.

## **Lesson 16 ■ Job and Proverbs**

### **JOB**

After the book of Psalms, we come to the book of Job, which is an extraordinary book by anybody's definition. Job gives us an understanding of how to struggle with doubt and pain and suffering. Job has long been considered a literary masterpiece. Its stimulating discussion of the human/divine relationship, its portrayal of fascinating characters and use of rich imagery and irony, place it among the best works in world literature. Written mostly as a drama, the book's alternating speeches gradually force readers to consider God's character, especially as it relates to human suffering. If we understand the book properly, it will teach us about the value of struggling with our faith.

#### **Description of Wisdom Literature**

Job, Proverbs, and Ecclesiastes are part of a great ancient tradition called Wisdom Literature. Wisdom Literature was written in many countries, including Babylon, Egypt, Edom and Israel. The authors of this type of literature sought to tell people how to live wisely. To achieve this goal they explored life's mysteries, such as why the righteous suffer and how and why God will judge people. Wisdom writers also catalog common, everyday advice. They also observe how nature works quite closely. They wanted to know how to relate to neighbors, how to serve the king and how to avoid seductive men, women and habits.

Most wisdom literature is conservative. That is, it gives us rules to follow that will make our lives go well. It claims that if we keep these rules, we will typically prosper. If we break these rules, we will usually suffer. Some wisdom literature, however, is rather radical, it probes the depths of things. It discusses what happens when the rules simply don't work. Job fits into this category.

#### **Background of Job**

It is impossible to know when Job was written. The text has both old and relatively late Hebrew words, which probably means it was copied and recopied over a long period of time. Its setting may be during Abraham's era. There is no Mosaic law and Job acts as priest for his family. The story takes place in Uz, an unknown location in the east. In fact, it may be important to note that Job is not an Israelite at all, he is a gentile. That

category makes sense prior to Abraham's family growing. But it is important for us to see that God is revealing himself to Job in an important way.

There have been a lot of suggestions about why the Book of Job was written. Some have said it has been written to solve the problem of suffering, to tell us why we suffer. Others have said it is really about God showing us that he is with us in our suffering and that he will sustain us through our suffering. Others have mentioned that it is about how we trust God, the creator and sustainer of all things, in the midst of our troubles.

I think the last two options are most likely. The first option that explains why we suffer simply doesn't work. God does not give us an explanation of why he does what he does in this book. Yet the text does tell us that God is with Job throughout, that God does love Job throughout and that Job has reason to put his faith in God.

### Testing of Job (1–2)

In Job 1 and 2 we have the first section of the book. The first section is the testing of Job. We are told right away in chapter 1 that Job was a blameless and upright man. He fears God and shuns evil. In other words, he is an ideal character for Wisdom Literature. You really have to wonder, what more can anyone ask? Job's character is fully intact. The book also tells us he has seven sons and three daughters, an ideal family in those days. He has large numbers of animals and servants; in fact, is one of the great men of the east. He is also pious. He offers sacrifices for his children while they feast together, just in case one of them might curse God in their heart. He is one of the greatest individuals in Scripture.

But in Job chapter 1 the scene shifts from earth to heaven. In 1:6-12 the text tells us that Satan, a word that means "adversary," Satan, a figure, comes before the Lord and has to give an account of himself. And Satan, who is described much more fully in the New Testament than the old, makes the accusation that if God will take everything away from Job, all his money and family, he will turn away from the Lord. Without explaining why he does so, the Lord allows Satan to take away what Job has, including his family and his business and his wealth. It is important to note that the Lord does not allow Satan free reign. The Lord determines what happens to Job.

In 1:13-22 Satan does take away Job's property and children; and yet, though he has suffered greatly, great emotional and financial loss, Job does not turn away from God. So in chapter 2 Satan asks for and receives permission to take away Job's health; and indeed, he does so and yet Job does not deny God. But he does probe why God has done these things and he does ask for an explanation.

## Job's Dialogue with His Three Friends (3–31)

Three friends come to see Job in 2:11-13 and they speak with him throughout the rest of the book. But chapters 1 and 2 focus on the testing of Job, introduce the characters and in chapters 3-31 we have Job's dialogue with three of these friends. To summarize things, in chapter 3 Job laments the day he was born and talks about his terrible troubles. But unlike the laments in the Psalms, he offers no statement of faith.

Apparently his friends then assume that Job has lost his faith. So they ask Job in a variety of ways to consider his life, to note that no-one has ever perished being innocent; that those who sow trouble receive it; that probably sin has caused everything that has happened to him; and that Job should consider looking into his life, repenting of sin and turning back to God. Sometimes these discussions get very involved, and I won't have time to develop them fully. But at the end of the day, what they are arguing is, that there is a direct correlation between what Job has done and the trouble he has received.

Now, we need to know that in the Bible it is true that at times people suffer in direct proportion to their sin. Yet there are other times that people sin and God does not punish immediately. And sometimes people do not sin at all and yet, they suffer. Abel did nothing to Cain to cause Cain to murder Abel. David did nothing to Saul to make Saul pursue and try to harm David. The Bible is filled with all sorts of people who suffer despite their righteousness. Job's friends don't seem to entertain that possibility; and so Job and the friends are at standstill in their discussion.

But Job quite clearly expresses that he will believe in God, no matter what. Look at Job 13:13. Job says, "Let me have silence and I will speak and let come on me what may. Why should I take my flesh in my teeth and put my life in my hand? Though he slay me, I will hope in him. Yet I will argue my ways to his face." In other words, he says I will hope only in the Lord, yet I will argue before him. I will argue my case before him and say that I have not sinned against him. Job has many questions, but he does not give up his faith in God and he keeps taking his questions to God.

In chapter 19 he expresses again his faith in God, verse 23: "O that my words were written! O that they were inscribed in a book! O that with an iron pen and lead they were engraved in the rock forever! For I know that my redeemer lives and at the last he will stand upon the earth. And after my skin has been thus destroyed, yet in my flesh I shall see God, whom I shall for myself and my eyes shall behold, and not another. My heart faints within me!" So Job is saying, "I have a redeemer. I trust in Yahweh. I know that I will see him even after my flesh is gone. " He has complete confidence that despite what he sees now, God will answer and God will help.

## Fourth Friend (32–37)

In Job 32–37 we have a fourth friend speaking. He tells Job in chapters 32-37 that God has already spoken. God has spoken to Job through his suffering and through his pain; and what he is trying to tell Job is that he has sinned. As for Job wanting God to answer him directly, this friend whose name is Elihu, says God will not do that.

## Yahweh Confronts Job (38:1–42:6)

In chapter 38:1 to 42:6 Yahweh does come and speak and he confronts Job with Job's attitude. And he reminds Job that he, Yahweh, takes care of all the creatures on earth; and in an extraordinary piece of wisdom literature, the author of Job describes all the different characters and individuals and animals that God cares for, and all the things he does for them. This drives Job to say that he is of small account. He is not sure how to answer. He will say nothing else, Job 40:3-5.

But then God continues, showing Job that he is ruling the earth, he is ruling it well and he can be trusted. Job responds in 42:1 as follows: "He answers the Lord and says, 'I know that you can do all things, that no purpose of yours can be thwarted. Who is this that hides counsel without knowledge? Therefore I have uttered what I did not understand, things too wonderful for me which I did not know. I had heard of you by the hearing of the ear, but now my eyes see you. Therefore I despise myself and repent in dust and ashes.'"

Many scholars I have read seem to think that Job lets God off the hook. He doesn't press things the way he should. But it seems to me that God's answer has satisfied Job. God has said he is in control of the world. He is sovereign over all things. He is good and he is caring for his creation. Job is satisfied by this answer. Therefore, it seems to me that what Job really wanted to know all along was, is God still sovereign? Is he still in control? Has the world lost its senses, or is there someone in charge of things?

The answer is, God continues to rule the world. Once Job knows that whatever has happened to him has not been outside of God's providence and God's strong purpose for his life, he is satisfied. This teaches us something very important. As long as we know our God, the one in whom we trust, the one who has made us and redeemed us; as long as we know that this good God is on the throne, that which happens to us has reason and purpose, and we can trust him.

## Healing and Restoration (42:7-17)

In 42:7-17 the book ends with healing and restoration after Yahweh confronts Job in 38:1 to 42:6. God restores Job's fortunes and his finances. He gives him more children. He also sends along friends who are more sympathetic to his situation.

## Conclusion

As we bring our brief discussion of Job to a conclusion, perhaps it is important to remember the following. Many Christians believe doubting and questioning God constitutes a lack of faith. Job shows doubts come even to the blameless. They are a part of life. Thus doubts, however severe, should be taken to God. He is not intimidated by human questions. In fact, the Lord is willing to reveal answers to those who ask. God is present with even the doubter, as long as the doubter truly seeks God and no-one else. People who do seek this goodness will find that God is sovereign, he is in charge and that nothing can happen to us that he hasn't decided can occur. Unfortunately, many Christians also agree with Job's friends. They believe suffering always results from sin or from lack of faith in God's restorative power.

Job demonstrates suffering may result from sin, but does not necessarily do so. Therefore, as we have friends who are suffering, we ought to show compassion, for God may be as displeased with us as he was with Job's friends. Trust the providence of God, Job says. And though life may be extremely difficult, even horrible, and unacceptable at times, we will find that our God has a purpose in it. And we have a redeemer who will stand upon the earth and even after our flesh is gone, we shall see him. The stubborn faith of Job is the kind of faith many of us need; and as we exercise it, we find Yahweh faithful, true and restoring.

## **PROVERBS**

So the book of Psalms talks about how to worship and the book of Job talks about how to struggle with doubt. The book of Proverbs is about how to develop wisdom. Job discusses life gone bad and teaches us how to absorb life's blows and how to think about them and how to come to an understanding of our relationship with God. But what about normal life? Thank goodness, most of us do not live as Job does, most of the time.

So we should be thinking about how we should live in everyday circumstances. We should be thinking about how to develop character that pleases the Lord. We ought to be concerned with how we relate well to others. Thankfully, Proverbs deals with such

practical questions. It examines the art of living well. So it addresses issues that affect everyone. Proverbs admits that wisdom is difficult to attain, but available to all who will learn from God's revealed word lived out in daily life.

## Description of Wisdom Literature

I want to say, because of the special nature, it is particularly important for us to learn how to interpret Proverbs correctly. I want you to know that the Hebrew word usually translated "Proverbs" is *mashal*, probably means to rule or to be like. In other words, the book of Proverbs is a book of analogies. It shows us what life is like. It tells us what is normal. A proverb, then, is a comparison about life drawn from life.

A proverb attempts to teach by showing what life is like. Proverbs state the normal results of correct or incorrect behavior. Thus, they are not absolute promises. To treat them as such can lead to some very difficult issues that we can avoid. Simply knowing what proverbs are will help us to know they are not absolute promises.

Let me give you an example or two. Proverbs 10:3 says, "The Lord will not allow the righteous to hunger, but he will thrust aside the craving of the wicked." Certainly, Yahweh usually feeds the righteous. Still, we know throughout history, some righteous people have starved. It is possible to read this proverb and think the writer is speaking of eternity. But probably I think he is showing again what is normal.

Proverbs 10:4 says that, "The hand of the diligent makes its owner rich." But we look at life and see that some people work hard, yet are poor. Normally, however, those who are industrious have what they need. Again, the proverbs are talking about what is normal.

One other example: We know that the proverbs say that "If you train up a child in the way he should go, when he is old he will not depart from it." I've known many good parents who tried to raise their children well, and the children rejected God, who read this proverb and somehow blame themselves for what their children became. It is typically true that if you train up a child in the way he should go, if you instill in him good habits and good character, that character will last, those good habits will endure. But we also know that the Bible shows us that this is not always the case. Again, proverb by definition is showing us what life is normally like.

## Themes in Proverbs

The material in Proverbs was composed and gathered over a long period of time, something like The Psalms. Three texts link Solomon to the book: Chapter 1:1, 10:1 and 25:1. Thus, some of the proverbs date at least from his era; that is, from 970 to 930 B.C.

when he was king. Of course, Solomon could also have recited proverbs that were older than himself.

Proverbs 25:1 mentions Hezekiah. You will remember that he was king of Judah from 715 to 687 B.C. It says that his men collected some of Solomon's texts. Other proverbs follow that are probably even later. Therefore, the book itself reveals to us that the contents of the book can span as long as 1000 to 400 B.C. Like Psalms, Proverbs contains the best literature of its type from many periods in Israel's history.

It is extremely difficult to divide Proverbs into large sections. Chapter 1 through 9 are fairly clear. These chapters stress pursuing wisdom and avoiding foolishness. However, chapters 10–31 change subjects rapidly, seemingly at random. Despite this problem, there are unifying factors. There are six headings in the book. These headings occur in 1:1, 10:1, 22:17, 25:1, 30:1 and 31:1. After each heading, a proverb or exhortation follows that announces at least the section's main purpose. Each section moves learners closer to the goal of achieving wisdom.

Like all wisdom literature, Proverbs teaches us how to live. It seeks to convey a mindset, a world view, that will guide readers. Knowledge is important, since it begins the process. Wisdom only results, though, when a learner applies wisdom teachings to life. Knowledgeable persons become disciplined and skilled enough to act consistently. Therefore, I like to read the book of Proverbs as a growth process, seeing the six headings in the book as examples and evidence of what it means to choose wisdom and to choose it for life. In the book we move from people learning how to serve the Lord and choosing it, to becoming leaders and wise persons.

## **Choosing Wisdom and Avoiding Foolishness (1–9)**

So let's go through the book fairly rapidly. Proverbs 1–9 emphasizes choosing wisdom and avoiding foolishness. We all know that the first stages of a new venture are often the most important. Choices and plans made then can determine the project's success or failure. This tendency holds true for learning how to live wisely as well. Learners must make some decisions in Proverbs 1-9. Proverbs 1:1 to 7 introduces the whole book. It tells us that these proverbs are given for a purpose. According to 1:2,3 Proverbs intends to make readers discerning, righteous and just. It wants to help inexperienced youths gain knowledge and discretion, says 1:4. It also hopes older, wiser persons will increase in learning, 1:5. How will these goals be achieved? By learning Proverbs' word pictures, traditions and riddles, according to 1:6.

I need to warn you that in Proverbs, learning is always an interactive thing. It involves the mind, it involves study, it involves thinking. And it involves putting all that thinking and studying into practice. It is a holistic process. Wisdom Literature never pits

thinking against doing. Knowing includes both. Wisdom includes all of the above. In chapters 1-9 in a series of passages the author asks people to choose wisdom, who is portrayed as a wonderful woman, and reject foolishness, which is portrayed as a lying, seductive, sensual woman. Those who pursue the wicked woman, foolishness, will find the way of death. Those who listen to the wise woman will find life. "Make your choice," Proverbs 1-9 says. Determine to be a person of wisdom. Set a course for your life. Listen to God, follow his word, and you will find the right path.

## **How to Become a Righteous Child (10:1–22:16)**

Proverbs 10:1 to 22:16 tell us how to become a righteous child. Proverbs 10:1, the next section of the book, announces the next stage of the quest for wisdom. Already, learners have chosen the path of humility before God and have rejected foolishness in favor of wisdom. Now, a new set of Solomon's proverbs explains how learners can truly please God. Several things are important.

First, it is important to work hard, 10:1-5. Wisdom is not for the lazy. Second, learners should strive for righteousness in every area of their lives, chapter 11. Greed must go. Humility, integrity and knowledge are more important than economic wealth. Telling the truth, helping the community, aiding neighbors. These things matter more than collecting money and sexual conquest.

Third, righteous persons need to accept advice. They have to be humble. They have to listen to others, so that they can choose an appropriate spouse. Learn their trade well. And learn how to raise their children. We see these things in chapters 12 and 13. So hard work, striving for righteousness in every area of life, understanding what is important. Third, taking advice about life's crucial decisions, learning to live for the Lord by listening to others who are wiser.

Fourth, how can someone remain humble and fear God? How can they secure their life? Well, it is by helping those who are weaker, according to chapter 14. It is by fearing the Lord and speaking carefully and good words, according to chapter 15. It is by avoiding pride, chapter 16 says. It is by shunning evil persons and choosing good company, according to chapters 18 and 19.

We could extend the list, but the point has been made. In effect, to become a righteous child of God, the person will have faith in God and follow the teachings of his word. Everything in Proverbs 10 to 22:16 has already been explained in the Bible. But these proverbs put the truths that have already been explained into neat, bite-sized pieces to teach us how to live in our families, in our communities, before God and with our neighbors.

## **Sustaining Righteousness (22:17–24:34)**

Once we have chosen wisdom and we have begun our path, it is important to go to the third stage. That is in Proverbs 22:17 to 24:34. That is, sustaining righteousness. As you know, many people serve God for a time, only to fall back into foolishness later. Proverbs anticipates this possibility, therefore addresses individuals who are established in life. How can we grow in sustaining righteousness? This section gives us four warnings.

First, if you want to sustain the righteous, don't oppress the poor or deny them justice and use them. Second, avoid hot tempered companions. Third, practice economic common sense, see 22:26. Guaranteeing others debts can lead to poverty, or to abusing the poor, so be very careful how you use your money. Fourth, traditional land boundaries should be maintained. We should respect our communities and the land that God has given us. Those who stay consistent, become skilled in their work, should be honored by it. Vicious and wicked schemes are unnecessary. God will reward the wicked. Remember these four principles.

Also remember that there are things that will try to tempt you away from the Lord's work. Chapter 23 says you may desire power and luxury, so avoid the king's deceptive food, 23:3. According to 23:4,5, acquiring wealth requires nonstop labor, yet is not worth it. He also reminds us that wicked companions may seem to give us what we want, but in the end will lead us to death. This section reminds us that wisdom's path seems long and hard, but those who build their lives on wisdom find food for their souls.

Read 24:3,4 and 24:13,14. Those who build their lives on the wisdom that God provides in his Word and through the example of his people, don't need to worry about evildoers. They can focus on justice, honesty and working hard, according to chapter 24. It takes endurance to be a wise person. It takes endurance and perseverance to continue on in the Lord's ways. But such behavior marks those who persevere and who endure, as people who sustain their righteousness in the difficult middle years of the quest for wisdom.

## **Becoming a Righteous Leader (25–29)**

Proverbs 25–29 emphasize becoming a righteous leader. These passages are especially important for people who have arrived at the age where they are looked up to by others. These people must be humble. They must be willing to settle disputes with others. They must be ready to speak words of comfort. They must even help their enemies. All of these truths are in chapter 25.

In chapter 26 and 27 we are reminded that good companions are important throughout life. It tells leaders not to honor fools, not to become addicted to your own opinions, and

not to become addicted to foolish ways. It reminds leaders that gossipers make poor companions and that flatterers tell you what you want to hear, more than they tell you what you need to hear. So, value good friends and wise counsel. Chapters 28 and 29 remind leaders to protect the poor, to avoid oppression, lawlessness, injustice, lack of integrity. Refuse crooked gain. Show no partiality.

Like all of the steps toward wisdom, this advanced stage is not easy. Few people can accept responsibility for their community's welfare and maintain their own integrity at the same time. Proverbs insist, though, that some of us must become leaders. The principles shared in earlier chapters still apply and must be taught to the wider audience. As before, the key to wisdom, the key to living for God in his way in our world, is fear of God, humility before him. As 1:7 began the book, "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom." It is also continuation of wisdom.

### **Dealing with Pride (30)**

Chapter 30 deals with a special problem in growing in wisdom, that is dealing with pride. It is so easy for us to be filled with ourselves, rather than to seek a balanced life that would love others.

### **Importance of Choosing a Faithful Life Partner (31)**

Proverbs 31 deals with yet another issue. Just as it is true that pride will keep us from seeking God's wisdom, that pride will keep us filled with our own ways, pride will lead us to fear and reverence others, rather than to fear and reverence God. Proverbs 31 concludes with the importance of choosing a faithful life partner. In chapter 31 we have the description of a woman who is faithful to God, faithful to her husband, faithful to her family.

Her efforts help her husband become a respected leader. She herself teaches others, works hard, makes sure her family has what is needed. This woman, her value is above all rubies and gold. Finding a life partner who walks with you along the way, serving God fully, the value of such a person cannot be estimated, it is beyond all value. But just as pride can keep you from serving the Lord, so can longing for and lusting after the wrong kind of life partner can do the same.

### **Conclusion**

In conclusion, I think Proverbs carefully leads us in a seminar on how to live. It guides seekers through the various stages of acquiring wisdom, always identifying dangers, yet never making the process seem impossible. However difficult the task may be, wise

persons will determine to learn to fear God, embrace humility, accept discipline and thus, develop character.

Other paths are easier to travel and the writer of Proverbs freely admits this. But no other path yields true and lasting benefits. In a way, then, if you read passages in the New Testament about perseverance and endurance and the value of them, you would keep all the proverbs in mind. It is this sort of patient endurance on the pathway of choosing wisdom, becoming a righteous learner, enduring in righteousness in the middle of life, becoming a righteous leader, avoiding pride and choosing the right life partner. As we walk this path, we persevere in the teachings of the Lord and we find ourself living appropriately, thus wisely before the Lord with our neighbors.

## **Lesson 17 ■ Ruth, Song of Songs, Ecclesiastes & Lamentations**

### **RUTH**

In the Hebrew canon Ruth follows. You will note that Ruth is from the time of the judges and that is why Ruth is after Judges in the Latin and English versions of the Bible. In Hebrews, quite interestingly, Ruth follows the description of the ideal woman in Proverbs 31. The book of Ruth as a whole tells us how to survive personal difficulties. It is a story about how some women who were seemingly helpless, help one another and fulfill God's will for their lives. As we have already seen, several Old Testament stories point out life's difficulties. Some individuals cause problems for themselves. Other characters, though, such as Abel and Job, suffer despite their innocence.

Ruth presents a story of two women, Ruth and Naomi, who encounter personal setbacks through no fault of their own. Because they are widowed, they appear helpless and frail. Through a series of events that convey tragedy, courage, comedy and intrigue, these women prove they are hardly weak or without resources. Their story follows very naturally after Proverbs, as I have said, since Proverbs concludes with a discussion of a virtuous woman. I want us to understand that the book of Ruth emphasizes God's mercy.

In chapter 1 the book emphasizes God extending mercy to the bereaved. We have much grief in this first chapter. In the first five verses the book announces the problem that must be solved. As if living chaotic times in the times of the judges were not bad enough, a famine arises. And an Israelite family that is described here is forced to go live in Moab. There are four persons in this family: Elimelech the husband, Naomi the wife and two sons, Mahlon and Chilion. This family is normal, reasonable and just doing what it takes to get along in life.

They are Israelites, they are from Bethlehem and Naomi, who will become the chief character, seems well set for the future. She has a husband and two sons to support her. But sadly, in 1:3, the text says her husband dies. Still she has her two sons. These sons marry Moabite women named Orpah and Ruth and they all settle in the land for 10 years. Then Mahlon and Chilion die. This leaves three widows and no men to father more sons. Orpah and Ruth are young enough to remarry, but Naomi feels she has no hope. So she decides to return to her old home, Bethlehem, and live among her people.

In 1:8,9 she advises Orpah and Ruth to go back to Moab and search for new husbands. These younger women weep and profess their loyalty to Naomi. They don't want to go.

They want to be with her, they say. Naomi tells them in 1:11-13 she has no more sons for them, so they should leave her. Orpah does leave, but Ruth clings to Naomi. She begs Naomi not to make her go; and in an extraordinary statement, she accepts Naomi's God and wants to be part of her people.

Listen to 1:15 where Naomi says, "See, your sister-in-law has gone back to her people and to her gods; return after your sister-in-law." But Ruth said, "Do not urge me to leave you or to return from following you. For where you go, I will go, and where you lodge, I will lodge. Your people shall be my people and your God my God. Where you die I will die, and there I will be buried. May the Lord do so to me and more also if anything but death parts me from you."

So Ruth has converted from the gods of Moab to the one true and living God, Yahweh, because of the influence of Naomi and Ruth wants to be part of the people of Israel. She is ready to go to their land with Naomi, her mother-in-law. And so chapter 1 says they do return. At this stage of her life, though, Naomi, whose name literally means "pleasant," returns to town and the people say, "Is this Naomi?" They haven't seen her for years.

She says, "Don't call me Naomi, don't call me 'pleasant', call me 'marah', call me 'bitter' for the Almighty has dealt very bitterly with me." She has endured great pain and she deserves some sympathy from us. I once heard a sermon that said Ruth should be commended for dealing with such a bitter, old woman like Naomi. But I think we need to remember, Naomi has suffered tremendous losses. But God is extending mercy to Ruth, who herself is without a husband, extending mercy by giving her Naomi and giving her a new people and giving her Himself.

In chapter 2 the text emphasizes the God who extends mercy to the bitter. Naomi has been bitter, but God extends mercy in that she has Ruth to care for her. And Ruth goes out to work in the fields, to try to gain some food for them. She gathers grain in the field of a man named Boaz, who is a relative of Naomi's deceased husband. After Ruth has labored for some time, Boaz arrives and he notices Ruth almost immediately and asks about her. He has heard how Ruth has cared for Naomi, so he tells his servants to protect her and leave extra grain for her to collect.

His actions show he is a kind man. They may also show that he has interest in Ruth already. I think it is important to show Boaz's willingness to let the poor and the widow glean in his fields, reveals that he is a faithful adherent of God's covenant standards. For if you read Leviticus 19:9,10, Leviticus 23:22 and Deuteronomy 24:19-22, you will find that Moses commands the people to allow the poor and the needy and the widow and the resident alien and the orphan, to glean in their fields, to leave some for them to gather. So he is a good man, a covenant keeper and he tells Ruth that he appreciates

what she has done for Naomi and that the whole community has noted her goodness, her worthiness.

In chapter 3 the text stresses the God who extends mercy to the humble. Ruth is humble enough to do as her mother-in-law says in this passage and Boaz is humble enough to accept the offer of marriage from Ruth. Naomi decides to repay Ruth's loyalty by helping Ruth find a new husband. As it turns out, this new husband will not only take care of Ruth, but will also take care of Naomi. Naomi suggests that Ruth go down to the threshing floor and lie down at Boaz's feet after suppertime and when it has gone dark.

Ruth does this, she lies at his feet and he is startled in the night and awakened; and when he sees Ruth there and asks what it is she wants, Ruth asks him in effect to marry her, to spread his garment over her. Apparently Boaz had not thought this possible. He is excited that she has indeed chosen him over some younger man. He sends her back to Naomi with the intention of marrying her, but there is a problem. There is one person ahead of him who has more right to marry her than he.

But in 4:1-17 we see God extending mercy to Boaz and to the women. We see God extending mercy to the childless. Boaz indeed does settle the issue. He gains the right to marry Ruth and he not only marries her, but he also takes Naomi into their household. When they have their first child, the child is given to Naomi as one who will take care of her in her extreme old age. His earnings will support her.

The people of Israel rejoice in what God is doing in the family. In fact, if you look at 4:11, it says, "Then all the people who were at the gate and the elders said, 'We are witnesses. May the Lord make the woman, who is coming into your house, like Rachel and Leah, who together built up the house of Israel.'" And the women say in verse 14 when the child is born, "Blessed be the Lord, who has not left you this day without a redeemer, and may his name be renowned in Israel. He shall be to you a restorer of life and a nourisher of your old age, for your daughter-in-law who loves you, who is more to you than seven sons...."

God has reached out in mercy to the childless. He has given Ruth and Naomi, who have no children, a child to sustain them. He has given Boaz a wonderful new wife. He has made a family out of these three persons and given the next generation to them.

I think it is also important to see that the women and the men of Bethlehem have received this foreign woman. They have not rejected her because she is from another nation. They have accepted her because she is a worthy woman. She is a Proverbs 31 woman. She is a woman who puts her trust in Yahweh. She is a person who serves Yahweh by serving others. She is a covenant keeper and they receive her gladly.

This is surely Israel at its best. This is Israel being a kingdom of priests and a witness to the nations. This is God blessing other nations through Abraham. In other words, we

see the promise of God made in Genesis 12:1-9 and the commission of the God of Israel in Exodus 19:5,6 coming true. We see God blessing the nations as Israel reaches out to the nations. We see Israel being a light to teach others about Yahweh.

But the book is not quite finished. In 4:18-22 we have God extending his mercy to all of Israel. We have a genealogy that connects Ruth and the events of this book to King David. Thus, the Old Testament moves forward to Jesus Christ. So it is not just the promise to Noah and the promise through Abraham and the commission of Israel in Exodus 19:5, 6 that comes true here.

The promise to David of his kingdom growing up was in God's mind even before 2 Samuel 7. God has always had a plan for David and his family. So we see Ruth at the beginning point of this promise, that God is preparing and making a plan and fulfilling that plan through David. As we read in the New Testament genealogies in Matthew 1 and Luke 1 and 2, we see that Ruth, this Moabite woman, has been received into Israel and she is one of the great-grandmothers of the Messiah.

So we have this wonderful story of how one is to survive terrible personal difficulties. How does one survive? Through the mercy of God, who extends his mercy to the bereaved. He extends his mercy to the bitter. He extends his mercy to the humble. He extends his mercy to Israel, all through friendship and faithfulness.

We have a marvelous picture in the book of Ruth of people who "love God with all of their heart, soul, mind and strength," Deuteronomy 6: 4-9, and thus "love their neighbor as themselves," Leviticus 19:18. We see the sort of family and friendship that stand as models for us for all time. If Job's three friends are models of flawed friends, surely Naomi and Ruth and Boaz give us evidence of great friendship.

## **SONG OF SOLOMON**

We move from a love story in Ruth to an extended love story in the Song of Solomon. Proverbs 31 began a series of texts on love and marriage. Comments there on the virtuous woman are followed by the life of a virtuous, loyal, hardworking woman named Ruth. That story ends in a marriage.

The Song of Songs continues this trend by rejoicing in the beauty and joy of love. This book has been interpreted in one of two ways throughout the centuries. Scholars have seldom agreed on its interpretation. Its theme and its content have been difficult. For one thing, the book never mentions God's name. At other times, this poetry becomes very explicit. We see this as love poetry and sometimes people have wondered why it is necessary for this material to be in the Bible. Commentators have wondered why this, what seems to be very unspiritual and non-edifying material, could be in the Bible; so

they treat the book as an allegory or a symbolic story. In this scheme, Solomon represents God and his beloved represents Israel and the church. Their love then demonstrates God's love for his people.

So to summarize, there are two ways the book has been read. One is as a series of love poems that will explain how human beings are to do what? How they are to enjoy love. Second, people have interpreted the book as an allegory of Christ's love for his church. Though I do agree that Ephesians 5 and other passages compare the relationship between Christ and the church to a marriage, I don't believe that Song of Solomon is in that vein. In fact, in Ephesians 5 and other places where the relationship of Christ and the church are compared to a wedding, we don't have the sort of explicit imagery and detail that we have in Song of Songs.

Thus, I think the book is about enjoying love. I won't spend time on the book, in part because I am running out of time in the course. But I want you to read the book of Song of Solomon at some point and see in chapter 1 that you have first, expressions of love. In chapters 2 and 3 you have the desire to be together. In chapter 4 you have beautiful statements of affection. In chapter 5, 6 and 7 you have longing for love and praise of beauty. And in 7:10 to 8:14 you have the desire to be together permanently.

So the book of Song of Solomon I think may not be our greatest theological book in the Bible. But it does address some very basic and important human emotions. It demonstrates that love must be expressed verbally as well as physically. It suggests lovers should enjoy praising one another as a prelude to sexual fulfillment. It also shows the wonder and beauty of love without discussing rules and warnings. Such rules exist in enough other places in the Bible.

Love is kept simple and sensual. Lovers who imitate the books, gain spontaneity and joy. They discover that their own beloved's charms may be greater than they knew and worth keeping. In short, they learn how to grow in love without love growing old. They can persevere in joyous love.

I think these days it may be important for us to stress another thing about Song of Solomon. It is appropriate to comment that the marital love depicted here and elsewhere in the canon is heterosexual in nature. Leviticus 18:22 and 20:13 show that the Old Testament is well aware of homosexual sexuality. Its denial there and in the rest of the canon's emphasis on male/female marital bonds point to the conclusion that heterosexual marriage is the only type sanctioned in the Old Testament.

Paul's statements in Romans 1:18-32 also agree with this conclusion. By no means do the Scriptures indicate that all heterosexual relationships are perfect. We certainly have seen that fact in our study. But nonetheless, it is important to notice that in Song of Solomon and in the rest of the Bible, God's vision for male/female marital relationships

and thus sexual relationship are male/female relationships. I think the Bible teaches that idolatry is the most dangerous of all sins. I do not think homosexuality is the worst sin in the Bible. Nonetheless, the Bible does teach it is a sin, that heterosexual love is God's pattern for marriage and sexuality. So the book of Song of Solomon would remind us of what love is like and what its standards are and who should engage in human sexual activity.

## **ECCLESIASTES**

The next two books of the Hebrew canon take us in a much more sober direction. The book of Ecclesiastes describes how to search for meaning in life. Proverbs, Ruth and Song of Solomon are basically positive books. They show that life's problems can be overcome. Therefore, if they are not careful, readers may misunderstand their message. They may think these books present life as a simple sequence of causes and effects. We might suppose that when rules are kept, when people are righteous and when love exists, all will be well.

At this point we should recall Job and we should read Ecclesiastes. Ecclesiastes and Job help balance Proverbs in the Old Testament wisdom literature. Proverbs tells us what is normal in life. Job and Ecclesiastes are a bit darker, they tell us that which is difficult. Job tells us what life is like when things are not normal. Ecclesiastes reminds us that it is often difficult to search for meaning; but it also reminds us that if we search for meaning in the wrong places, we have no hope of finding meaning.

Ecclesiastes has been associated with Solomon, but we have no idea when it is that Solomon would have written this material. Ecclesiastes 1-6 has as its theme, "All is vanity." What do these six chapters mean? In short, they mean that if we seek our meaning in riches, learning, building of buildings, building of kingdoms, the enjoyment of sexual experiences, the accumulation of wealth and in the desire for power, we will find life to be meaningless. If we seek our meaning in this life alone, we can surely say, "All is vanity."

Chapters 7-12 have an even stronger statement. It is that death is better. In the author's mind, life consists of preparing to die and chapters 7-12 emphasize preparing to die, for death is better. People should learn to mourn, to prefer sorrow over laughter, and to forget about the past, according to 7:1-10. Most of all, they should gain wisdom that will balance their lives, according to 7:11-17. But who is wise?

According to chapter 8, it is the person who obeys the king, yet realizes that those in authority are often unjust. Wise people fear God and enjoy life, but they recognize the limits of their knowledge. In chapter 9 the wise person knows that everyone dies. Thus,

they eat well, dress well, love well and work well. After all, such opportunities cease in the grave. They know that fools often prosper, that life is uncertain, that wealth ends. So, what do they do?

Chapter 12 gives the answer, 12:1 says, "Remember God before it's too late." Chapter 12:2-7 says that old age will come soon, eyes will dim, hands will grow too feeble for work, ears will grow deaf, the body will die and return to dust. All opportunity to serve God ends there. So, 12:13 and 14 says, "Fear God, keep his commandments, live for him." These things matter to Yahweh. All else is vanity. The person who accepts this advice will live carefully and thoughtfully. That person's death will be better than his or her life.

The person who lives knowing that we all die, will live their life differently. The person who knows that we will face God when we die, will live differently than those who have no hope or have no belief in God. The person who understands that this life is a prelude to the next life, will understand that what matters most is to reverence God – that is, love him, fear him, respect him, keep his commandments. Because of that relationship we have with him, then life has meaning.

In effect, Ecclesiastes says that if you don't live as Proverbs and Job teach you to live, you can expect vanity. If you live as the book of Proverbs and Job teach you to live, that our relationship with God matters most and that following his will matters most, then life has meaning. Fear God, keep his commandments and you will know that all else is vanity and death is better.

Without question, Ecclesiastes offers a dark and sometimes depressing world view, so it is important for us to remember what he is trying to teach us about what matters most. Futility and emptiness seem to overwhelm joy and success. But this perspective is necessary for readers of the Old Testament to grasp how to find meaning. This book forces us back to basics and eliminates false notions about life. It reminds us that life is not about building buildings, enjoying relationships, making money, gathering degrees, gaining influence, becoming prominent.

Life is about loving and respecting God, following his ways. It is about loving him, it is about loving neighbors, it is about being part of his kingdom of priests, blessing all nations. Ecclesiastes is the last bit of wisdom literature in the Old Testament. It helps us recall that Proverbs begins with the fear of God. It then shows the blessings of fearing God.

The danger of this approach is that readers may seek the blessing and forget respect for Yahweh. Ecclesiastes works in the opposite way. It argues that blessings, in and of themselves, are meaningless. Only fearing God and preparing for judgment matter. Of

course, the danger of this approach is that readers will become too discouraged to serve the Lord.

Both viewpoints can lead to God, though, and thus to wisdom. In fact, Ecclesiastes agrees with Proverbs and Job, teaches us to search for meaning in the proper places. Pleasure, riches and power are meaningless, they cannot satisfy the wise. Only God can give life lasting meaning, and only then after death. Seekers of meaning must be sharp, critical and honest. Fools will be happy to settle for temporary answers. The wise, though, struggle through vain solutions to more lasting convictions. They prepare well for death, which they know will certainly come.

I want to encourage you to read the whole of the Bible, to know that we have several books to tell us the whole story of God's revelation. Proverbs tell us what is normal. Job tells us what is abnormal. Song of Solomon tells us the joys of love. Ruth tells us how God helps us overcome life's difficulties. But Ecclesiastes helps us to remember that we had better seek meaning in the right places, or we will in effect become foolish.

## **LAMENTATIONS**

Ecclesiastes is followed by another sad book, the book of Lamentations. This book is about how to mourn national tragedy. You already know that the Babylonians invaded Judah and destroyed Jerusalem in 587. This was a devastating blow to the people. They had lost their capital, they had lost their king, they had lost their temple. Lamentations is an anonymous book, written during the dark days after 587 B.C.

Like Psalm 119, Lamentations uses acrostic poetry; that is, using successive letters of the Hebrew alphabet to start verses and chapters. So in chapters 1, 2, and 4, each succeeding verse begins with the next letter of the Hebrew alphabet. Chapter 3 has three such poems. Chapter 5 has 22 verses, the numbers of letters in the Hebrew alphabet, but is not an acrostic. So we have five distinct poems. The first three are longer than the last two. The five work together to again give you all that we should know about lamenting this national tragedy from A to Z. Lamentations unfolds in the following manner.

Chapter 1 describes the lonely city. In the first 11 verses it describes Jerusalem's devastation and in verses 12-22 Jerusalem's call for help, 22 verses, each verse beginning with the appropriate letter of the Hebrew alphabet from beginning to end. The city admits that God has been just in punishing; that it has been their sins that have caused the punishment.

Yet, they call out in verse 20, "Look O Lord, for I am in distress. My stomach churns, my heart is wrung within me because I have been very rebellious. In the street the sword bereaves. In the house it is like death." So the lonely city, destroyed and rejected,

emptied of people, devoid of help, calls out to God, who has been forced to judge them by their constant sin.

Chapter 2 states, "God has set Zion under a cloud." The first 10 verses describe the effects of God's punishment and they are terrible. Death, defeat, desolation are everywhere. Verses 11 and 19, the people express their need to cry out to God and in verses 20-22, Jerusalem asks God to see and to act. We need to remember here that Jerusalem is asking for outrageous acts of grace. They have sinned greatly. They have brought this punishment upon themselves. They have been an unfaithful spouse, a bad parent, a terrible covenant partner.

God has been forced by their actions to turn them over to the Babylonians. And yet, they are praying for help. Will God hear them? In chapter 3 we have a man step forward to encourage and instruct the people. He says, "I am a man who has seen affliction." In the first 24 verses he says he has endured suffering; and yet he says, "I have come to understand that God will forgive because God is faithful."

Chapter 3, verse 19: "Remember my affliction and my wanderings, the wormwood and the gall! My soul continually remembers it and is bowed down within me. But this I call to mind, and therefore I have hope. The steadfast love of the Lord never ceases, his mercies never come to an end; they are new every morning; great is your faithfulness. 'The Lord is my portion' says my soul, therefore I will hope in him." Like Job, this character says, "I will hope in him." This character admits that he has sinned against God, that God brought him low; but when he was at this low point, his soul remembered God and he had hope, knowing that God's mercies cannot be exhausted, that somehow God is so merciful that even the worst person who turns to him, the worst sinner, the most corrupt individual who turns to him in repentance, God receives them, gives them hope, makes them whole.

So he says to the rest of the people in verses 25-39: "Respond to God's goodness and his sovereignty." In a very important verse, 33, he says, "God does not afflict from his heart or grieve the children of men. " It is not God's primary impulse to judge. No, God is gracious and merciful and loving. He will not clear the guilty, but his impulse is not to judge from his heart, but to judge out of necessity. So in 3:40-47 the individual counsels the others to pray for renewal; and in verses 48-66 the person maintains confidence in God.

But chapter 4 does not yet show the people finding hope in God. The theme of this chapter is how the goal has grown dim. It's about the terrible suffering of Jerusalem's children and about the punishing of Israel's religious leaders in the first 16 verses. In verses 17-20 it is about the power of Jerusalem's enemies. But yet, at the end of chapter 4 the people are coming to understand that God is forging a new day. Verse 22: "The

punishment of your iniquity, O daughter of Zion, is accomplished. He will keep you in exile no longer.”

In other words, God is ready to receive the confession of the people, their repentance, and restore them. He is ready to do what he promised in Deuteronomy 30, that he would do, that when the people were in exile, as they turn to him, he would forgive, he would restore, he would return them to the land.

So in chapter 5, all the people pray in this great prayer, that God would restore them, in a great lament. Verse 1, they pray to the Lord through an opening petition. Verses 2-18 they express the woes Jerusalem has faced; and in 5:19-22 they offer a concluding prayer of restoration. The theme of this chapter is the following words: “Restore us to yourself, O Lord.”

So they pray the prayer that they must pray, according to Deuteronomy 30, the prayer of repentance, the prayer that God would in his grace receive them. And they expect that he will do so. No answer comes in this book yet. The answer comes in the rest of the books of the Old Testament; but they expect that God, who is merciful, will pardon. They expect that he will keep his word and restore. They expect that he will grant them this outrageous act of grace that they have asked for.

How do we mourn national tragedy? How do we mourn personal tragedy? Let me be explicit, let me be plain: How do we mourn those tragedies we bring on ourself? This is not like Job. This is not like Abel. This is not like David. This is not the innocent suffering. These people have sinned and brought these woes upon themselves. Is there hope for them? There is. God’s grace reaches out to them. He is ready to forgive according to the word of God. Lamentations reminds us of the history of Israel, that the people went into exile many times; but mainly and specifically and dramatically after 722 B.C. when Assyria destroyed Samaria and after 587 when Babylon destroyed Jerusalem.

## **Lesson 18 ■ Esther, Daniel, Ezra– Nehemiah & Chronicles**

So what follows in the Old Testament canon are two books about people who live in exile. First of all, there is Esther, a woman who lived in exile in Persia; and Daniel, a man who lives in exile in Babylon. Esther unfolds in the Persian capital of Susa. The date of this book is probably about 487 to 465 B.C. because the king featured in this book is Xerxes I. We know of him, not only from the Bible, but from Persian records. So we know that Esther and the events in the book of Esther occurred about 100 years after the events described in Lamentations, the destruction of Jerusalem. Esther and Daniel explain to us how it is we are to survive in exile.

### **ESTHER**

Like the book of Song of Solomon, Esther never mentions the name of God. Yet, as one scholar says, God is always working behind the scenes in the book of Esther. He is the one who can deliver the people. In the book of Esther we find Esther herself becoming queen of Persia in chapters 1 and 2. But she becomes queen of Persia through an unusual set of circumstances. She becomes queen because her predecessor refuses to obey her husband.

So chapters 1 and 2 talk about Esther's rise to the throne. The previous queen, Vashti, refuses to appear before the king when he commands her to come. He has decided to have a massive party that lasts for six months. There is much drinking and revelry, and he requires the queen to appear to show her beauty to the guests. Perhaps she was to show more than her face, though it is impossible to know for certain. She refuses to come and the king is humiliated before his guests. Drunk and angry, he decides she can no longer be queen. So he needs a new queen. He decides to have a beauty contest and have a new queen chosen. Esther wins this contest. The reader know that Esther is Jewish, she is Israelite, and Israelites have almost no rights as exiles in the land; or at least, they have no rights that are not extended to them by the king. But Esther has become queen.

In 3:1 to 9:19 we have threats against the Jews. These threats begin because of a particular villain named Haman. He gets mad at Esther's relative, Mordecai, because he will not bow down to him and do what he says. So in chapter 3 Haman plots to have all Jews killed. Mordecai comes to Esther in chapter 4 and asks her to intercede for her people with the king. She is afraid to do so, but she eventually agrees.

And in chapter 5 she takes the request to save her people to the king and the king agrees. Eventually, Haman is destroyed. He is put to death on the very apparatus on which he had prepared to kill his enemy, Mordecai. Before he died, Haman had gotten the king to agree to allow the Israelites' enemies to attack them.

Persia had a very interesting way of making laws. You could not repeal a law, you could only pass another law that could counteract it. So the king could not repeal his allowing of Israel's enemies to attack them. But he could allow Israel to prepare for the attack and kill their enemies, and this is what they do. So through the intercession of Mordecai and through the intercession of Esther, the king of Persia allows the Jews to defend themselves against their enemies and thus they are spared.

Esther 9:20 through 10:3 tell us that the feast of Purim, which is still celebrated by Jewish persons today, was instituted to mark the deliverance of the Jews from their enemies.

So, how does one survive in exile? By the grace and the providence of God. It was God's providence that Esther became queen. It was God's providence that Mordecai was a faithful person who interceded on behalf of his fellow Jews. It was God's providence that the king would listen to Esther. God saved the people through these circumstances.

## **DANIEL**

The book of Daniel is a companion piece to Esther. Daniel deals with how you maintain distinctive faith in exile. Daniel was one of the exiles taken to Babylon in 605 B.C. He lives in Babylon until 536 B.C., always serving this foreign government. Chapters 1-6 indicate this was not easy. He was asked to learn Babylonian ways and eat Babylonian food. He learned their ways, but he rejected the food and maintained his purity before God. He was asked to bow down to other gods and to pray to other deities, but he refused to do so. He suffered punishment and embarrassment, but God delivered him out of every single trial.

As a punishment for praying to his God and no other, he was actually put in a den of lions and God delivered him from the lions, even though they would normally have wanted to eat him, of course. God delivers him and Daniel is faithful, maintaining his walk with the Lord under extreme circumstances in exile, thus showing the people how they might maintain their own faith as they live in exile.

In chapters 7-12 of Daniel the book gives us extraordinary visions of the future, of kingdoms that will rise and will fall. These chapters are certainly worth extensive study. But I want to just warn you that these chapters do not give us a roadmap of every current event. Basically they tell us that great kingdoms will rise and fall. Babylon will

rise. Persia will rise. Greece will rise. Rome will rise. And they will all fall. But God and his kingdom endure forever. And God's kingdom ultimately will reside in the Messiah, in the Savior. God gives this person the kingdom.

Daniel 7:13, 14 are very strategic for the book of Daniel and for the New Testament as they think about the Messiah. Daniel writes in 7:13, "I saw in the night visions, and behold, with the clouds of heaven there came one like a son of man, and he came to the Ancient of Days and was presented before him." The Ancient of Days of course is God. "And to him was given dominion and glory and a kingdom, that all peoples, nations, and languages should serve him; his dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and his kingdom one that shall not be destroyed."

This individual, this Son of Man, this one born of woman, as Genesis 3:15 promised, will be given the kingdoms of the world and all nations will serve him, as God had promised David in 2 Samuel 7; and as Psalm 2 had promised about the Messiah. This son of man will be given the kingdoms of the earth and peoples, nations and languages will bow down to him. We need to remember, as the prophet said over and over again, as Zephaniah 3:8.9 said, as Isaiah 19:16-25 said, and a host of other passages, God will keep his promise to Abraham. All nations will be blessed through him and it is through the Messiah, the son of Abraham, the son of David, that these promises will be kept.

So as they read Daniel toward the end of their Bible toward the end of the Old Testament they would have seen God giving the kingdom of the earth and the kingdom of heaven to this one called the son of man. So when Jesus called himself the son of man, this was not a minor statement. This was not some comment that he is a human like everyone else. No, he is really saying, he is the son of man, to whom the Ancient of Days gives the kingdoms of the world, that all peoples, nations and languages should serve him. No wonder then in Mark 14:62 when Jesus claimed to be the son of man, that he was the one to whom God would give the kingdom, that those who did not believe he was the Messiah decided to kill him. The Messiah is the one who shall rule.

What shall the people do? Daniel 9:1-19 says that while they are waiting in exile, they can repent of their sins. They can turn to the Lord in faith. And they can put their trust in him. And he will restore them. Chapter 12 ends with great promise to Daniel. God says that great princes will rise and fall, that kingdoms will come and go; but he says in verse 4: "But you, Daniel, shut up the words and seal the book until the end of time. Many shall run to and fro and knowledge shall increase."

But what shall Daniel look forward to? He shall look forward to the fact, as 12:2 says, "Many of those who sleep in the dust shall awake, some to everlasting life and some to shame and everlasting contempt." God will raise the dead. He will judge the wicked and the righteous. And Daniel could know that though these great kingdoms will rise

and fall, God will give his kingdom to the Messiah, that he will raise those who have died, from the dead. He will make all things right.

So Daniel could know, as all the other exiles could know, how can he live? You live in faithfulness to God's word. You live expecting God to protect you. You live being committed to his ways, even if it means death. When faced with idolatry or death, Daniel's friends say in chapter 3: "God is able to deliver us. But even if he will not deliver us, we will not serve idols." That's how people should live in exile. They should know that the Messiah will come and they can live for him. They can repent and turn to God and he will receive them.

All the promises of God made to Noah, Abraham, Moses and David will be kept. All the promises of Deuteronomy 30, that if the people return to God, even in exile, he will restore them. Daniel was a faithful man. He did not expect to live to see those promises come true; but by faith, he received the promises; and because of his faith, he lived faithfully in exile.

## **EZRA-NEHEMIAH**

As we conclude our study, there are some rather long books to go. Ezra–Nehemiah talk to us about how to rebuild the nation. And 1 and 2 Chronicles teaches how to view the past. Just a few words on both. Ezra and Nehemiah describe how to rebuild the nation.

In Ezra 1-6 we are told that prior to Ezra's time, which is about 450 B.C. – in other words, about the same time as Malachi – the Lord began bringing Israelites back to Judea. You will recall that this began because of the decree of Cyrus in 538 B.C. So several Israelites returned and as you will recall from the books of Haggai and Malachi, they rebuild the temple in 520 to 516. The first six chapters of Ezra summarize that material for you.

But then in Ezra 7-10 we have an emphasis on rebuilding Israel's spiritual life. Ezra begins to teach the people, to correct the sins that they have been committing and to enforce God's rulings. Ezra is a priest. He is a religious ruler. He is a teacher of the word. He is a studier of the word and a teacher of the word. In fact, 7:10 summarizes him when it says, "For Ezra had set his heart to study the law of the Lord and do it and to teach his statutes and rules in Israel." This is a summary of all good servants of the Lord, all good priests, all good prophets.

He set his heart to study the law of the Lord, to do it and to teach his statutes, and rules in Israel. Why? Because he knew and loved Yahweh and Yahweh's people. So he teaches the people the word. He establishes the Levites in the temple. He teaches his people

how to be faithful to one another in their marriages in chapter 9; and in chapter 10 he helps them confess their sins.

The book of Nehemiah gives us a good partner to Ezra. Ezra, as I said, was a priest and religious leader. Nehemiah was a builder. He is not secular, in that he doesn't care about God, but he is not a priest, he is not a prophet. He is a governor, one who does what? Chapters 1-7, he leads the people to rebuild Jerusalem's walls and to rebuild its population by encouraging people to live in Jerusalem. The idea is for Nehemiah to help Jerusalem become an established city again. He gains permission from the king of Persia and gains funding from the king of Persia to help this process.

When he first gets to Jerusalem, it is very discouraging. The city walls are down. The people are defenseless before their enemies. But soon the wall is rebuilt. The people are organized to guard their land and their city. More people move into the city and the place begins to grow again. Again, all this happens about 450 B.C. So Ezra, Nehemiah, Malachi may have been contemporaries. They may have worked together the same way Haggai and Zechariah might have as they ministered together.

In Nehemiah 8-13 we have the rebuilding of Israel's spiritual life. In chapter 8 Ezra and the priests read and explain the law while standing on specially built platforms in the new temple area. Nehemiah has the people celebrate instead of mourn when they hear the teachings, according to 8:9-12. After several days of hearing the word of God, see 8:13-18, the people confess their sins and plead for forgiveness in chapter 9. They also make a covenant to follow the Lord in chapter 10. All seems well.

But human sin is persistent. While Nehemiah is back in Persia, the people sin again. The high priest allows enemies of the people to live in the temple. Support for the Levites and temple worship wanes and the Sabbath is broken. So Nehemiah has to come back and correct these errors. We have to wonder, will Israel ever live like a restored people? But the books of Ezra and Nehemiah show us that though human failure is a constant in this fallen, sinful world, God never quits. He always sends his faithful servants like Ezra and Nehemiah to rebuild the religious life of the people, to rebuild the physical life of the people, until such time as the Messiah comes and teaches the people and builds them up and heals their sicknesses and gives them that which they need: Ezra, a true student of the word of God, a great teacher of the word of God; and Nehemiah, a great leader of the people, one who truly shows God's best strength to the people.

Nehemiah and Ezra work together to restore the people in the land. How shall they live in the land? In faithfulness to God's word, in faithfulness to one another, with hope for the future. J. I. Packer has written a wonderful book about Nehemiah entitled, *A Passion for Faithfulness*, published by Crossway Books. One could say the same about Ezra. He had a passion for faithfulness. Packer's book stresses Nehemiah's leadership skills and

his greatness. I think most everything one could say about Nehemiah, one could also say about Ezra. They were God's instruments for helping rebuild the nation.

## **1 & 2 CHRONICLES**

I conclude our study with just a few comments from 1 and 2 Chronicles. This is a marvelous book that tells us how to view the past. It focuses on the positive things of Israel. The first nine chapters are one long genealogy that connects the history of Israel clear back to Genesis. We find genealogies from Genesis and other books here. And it brings us from Adam to David. Then after we read about Israel's ancestors and genealogy in chapters 10-29, the book focuses on David's reign. Chapter 17 repeats the promises of God made in 2 Samuel 7. David is the main character in the history of Israel, according to 1 Chronicles. God's promise to David is the mainspring of all Israelite hope.

Second Chronicles 1-9 tells us about Solomon's reign and about all that God did for Solomon and the positive elements of Solomon's reign. When I say Chronicles is a positive book, I can illustrate it by telling you, there is nothing about Bathsheba and David in Chronicles; and there is nothing about Solomon's great idolatry in Chronicles. The positive is focused on. But you see, the writer of Chronicles expects you to know 1 and 2 Kings because he quotes the book repeatedly. So he knows you have that book in hand. He is not trying to pull the wool over your eyes or be phony about the history of Israel. He just expects that you know that. So he is highlighting God's promise to David and he is highlighting God's promises to Solomon.

Then in 2 Chronicles 10-36 you have the division, the fall and the defeat of Israel. The focus at all times is on Judah because David is from Judah, Solomon is from Judah and the promises of God for a Messiah come through Judah. There is very little about the northern kings in this book.

First and 2 Chronicles were probably written as late as 300 to 400 years before Christ. It may be the last book written in the Old Testament. If so, it is a marvelous summary, from the genealogies of Genesis to the life of David, to the life of Solomon, to the life of Hezekiah and Josiah, all these faithful kings, clear on down to the fall of the nation. And how does the book end? It ends with Cyrus allowing Israelites to go home and rebuild their temple.

And when we open the New Testament, we find promises of the Savior and this Savior being brought to the temple to be circumcised when he is a baby. And we find people at the temple, Anna and Simeon, proclaiming who he is, God's Messiah. We find the temple restored as the central representative of God's presence among the people. There

we see this temple has greater glory than the first, just as Haggai promised, because the Savior comes to this temple.

The book of 1 and 2 Chronicles tells the people how to view the past. It is to view it in light of God's promises, and it would remind us as we conclude our study, to remember to view the Old Testament and the whole Bible in view of God's promises. That God is moving from creation to new creation. That we have sinned against our creator. But he has made covenants with Noah, that all nations should respond positively to him. He has made a covenant with Abraham, that all nations will be blessed through Abraham. He has called Abraham's descendants to be a kingdom of priests and a holy nation to declare his glory to the world. He is a God who is saving and just and gracious, according to Exodus 34:5, 6. And he is a God who has made a promise to David that his kingdom will rule forever; his descendant, the son of man, will be on the throne. He will die for the sins of the people. He will be raised from the dead, and he will rule forever. Sin will not always mark this world. God will remove sin. He will restore purity. There will be a new creation.

So as we conclude our study, as we think of what 1 and 2 Chronicles teaches us, let us view the past through the lenses of the promises of God and see in the Old Testament that God has given us one united message of moving from creation to new creation through the promises to Noah, the promises to Abraham, the promises to Moses, the promises to David; and now, because we read the Scriptures, promises to us; and that these promises are breathed out by God and profitable for every aspect of living today. So may God bless you as you read the Scripture in greater detail and learn more about God's promises.

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