

Genesis: *The Book of Beginnings*

CHAPTERS TO READ: 1—4, 6—8, 12, 18, 21, 22, 25, 28, 35, 37, 39—42, 45, 46, 49, 50.

TITLE

Even though the Old Testament was basically written in the Hebrew language, many of the titles of Old Testament books are Greek. They come from the Septuagint, the Greek version of the Old Testament, which was translated in the period between the Testaments. The title “Genesis” is a Greek word meaning “origin” or “beginning.” The title comes from the first word in the text, which is translated, “In the beginning.” The title is appropriate, for the book tells of the origin of many things.

BACKGROUND

The first five books of the Old Testament are sometimes called “The Pentateuch,” a Greek phrase meaning “five books” or “the five-volumed book.” We call the first five books of the Old Testament “the books of law,” because the heart of the law of Moses is found here, especially in the last four books. The books also contain much history, some poetry, and even some prophecy.

The author of the first five books is Moses, who led the children of Israel out of bondage. We do not know exactly when the Book of Genesis was written, but probably it was sometime during Israel’s wilderness wanderings. Since the Israelites spent about two years at Mount Sinai, perhaps that is when Genesis was written.

The Book of Genesis is a special book among the books of law, for it does *not* contain the special laws given to the Jewish people. Remember that the Old Testament was written for one nation of people, the Israelites, or Jews. Prior to the writing of the Old Testament, God had given no written law. He had dealt with mankind more directly, usually through the heads of families, called “patriarchs.” The Book of Genesis tells about the period of time before God separated the nation of Israel and gave them the law.

If the Old Testament was written to the Jews and the Book of Genesis predates the giving of the law, why is Genesis in the Old Testament? Genesis serves as an introduction to the Old Testament. It told the

Jews of their background and how they became God’s special people. Of special significance to them were the promises given to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.

The Book of Genesis also has special significance for *us*, because it tells of the origin of many things that relate to us: It relates the origin of mankind, the origin of marriage and the home, and the origin of God’s plan that culminated in Jesus Christ.

Because Genesis is an introductory book, it covers many years in a short space. The fifty chapters of Genesis cover more than 2,000 years, while the remainder of the Old Testament covers less than 1,500 years. We cannot date the beginning of Genesis with absolute accuracy, since the genealogies are often more concerned with lineage than with including every person in a given line. However, the Bible pictures man as being of relatively recent origin rather than as creatures which originated hundreds of thousands of years ago, as some scientists speculate.

The book closes with the death of Joseph.

OUTLINE

- I. THE BEGINNING OF THE WORLD (1:1—2:3).
- II. THE BEGINNING OF MAN (2:4-25).
- III. THE BEGINNING OF SIN (3:1-13).
 - A. The beginning of disobedience.
 - B. The beginning of death.
- IV. THE BEGINNING OF GOD’S PLAN TO REDEEM MAN (3:14—5:32).
 - A. The beginning of sacrifice.
 - B. The beginning of murder.
 - C. The beginning of craftsmanship and commerce.
- V. BEGINNING AGAIN (6—11).
 - A. The new beginning after the flood.
 - B. The beginning of nations.
- VI. THE BEGINNING OF THE ABRAHAMIC COVENANT (12—50).
 - A. Stories of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and Joseph.

- B. The beginning of the Israelite nation.

LESSONS FROM GENESIS

The Book of Genesis shows us that we were not evolved from lower animal forms. We were created in the image of God—and we should act like it!

The early chapters in Genesis tell how God instituted marriage with a plan of one man, one woman, for

life. When marriage is discussed in the rest of the Bible, these chapters are the point of reference (Mt. 19:3-9).

When man sinned, God immediately began to work out a plan for man's redemption (Gen. 3:15). The remainder of the Old Testament is the story of how God worked out this plan. One important step in the plan was the "seed" promise given to Abraham, which was fulfilled in Jesus (Gen. 22:18; cf. Gal. 3:16, 19).

The Ultimate Test (Genesis 22:1-19)

This study of Genesis begins a one-year journey through the Bible. I hope you have on your spiritual running shoes, because it is going to be a fast trip.

Once a man took his son to the place where he grew up. He told of things he did and showed where he did them. He was telling his son about his roots. Genesis is all about roots.

The name "Genesis" means "origins" or "beginnings"; the book tells of the beginning of many things. None is more important than the beginning of the seed promise to Abraham—and no character is more central to the book than Abraham. When the entire world had gone after pagan gods, he still believed in the one true God, Jehovah.

We will observe the ultimate test in Abraham's life. Abraham's faith had been tested before, but no test was like the one in chapter 22. Look at 17:19 and 21:1-3, 12 and then chapter 22.

I. ABRAHAM'S ULTIMATE TEST.

A. God tested Abraham (22:1-19).

1. The ultimate requirement (vv. 1, 2).
 - a. Abraham had not heard from God in years. He may have expected to hear God say, "Well done!"
 - b. This commandment was probably the last thing he expected.
2. The ultimate response (vv. 3-10).
 - a. Abraham might have argued with God. He might have suggested alternatives. He might have prolonged his preparations. Instead, he "rose early" to do God's will.
 - b. Note the faith in verse 5: "I and the lad will go yonder; . . . and return to you." Verse 8 says, "God will provide."
 - c. How was a 120-year-old man able to bind a much younger—and probably much stronger—man? He had raised his son right!
3. The ultimate reward (vv. 11-19).
 - a. Abraham met the test. This event is used as the great example of Abraham's faith (Rom. 4:1-22; Jas. 2:21-23).
 - (1) Nothing was more important to

Abraham than God!

(2) Is there anything in the world more important to us than obeying God? Job, health, family, possessions, plans and dreams?

b. God *did* provide.

c. God confirmed His covenant. The "seed" promise was given (v. 18) and was fulfilled in Christ (Gal. 3:16).

B. How Abraham met the test (Heb. 11:17-19).

1. He met the test *by faith* (Heb. 11:17).
 - a. He believed in a God who would provide (Gen. 22:8, 15).
 - b. He believed in a God who has great abilities (Heb. 11:19).
2. Abraham did not have everything neatly figured out. God did *not* raise Isaac from the dead (Heb. 11:19); God did *not* provide a lamb (Gen. 22:8), but rather a ram. Abraham had faith that God would make everything work out all right—and it did!

II. OUR ULTIMATE TEST.

- A. We all face tests in our lives, but sometime in our lives we may face the ultimate test, being asked to give up that which we value most.
 1. Corrie ten Boom said, "I try to hold precious things loosely because it hurts so much when God has to pry loose my fingers."
 2. God's purpose is not to make us happy and comfortable people; God's purpose is to make us better people.
- B. When we go through the ultimate test, can we believe God is able? Can we believe God will provide? Can we believe God will make everything turn out all right (Rom. 8:28)? The answer is "Yes!"

CONCLUSION

You may be going through the ultimate test right now. May God be with you. You will become a better person . . . or a bitter person. Strive to keep the faith which Abraham had. Remember that He will provide.

Exodus: The Book of Going

CHAPTERS TO READ: 1—5, 7—14, 16, 19, 20, 24, 25, 27, 28, 30, 32, 34, 35, 40.

TITLE

The title “Exodus” is a Greek word meaning “going out” or “departure.” It is a compound word which comes from *ek*, a Greek preposition meaning “out of,” and *hodos*, the Greek word for “road” or “way” (the word Jesus used when He said, “I am the way”). Literally the word means “the way out.” It is related to our word “exit.”

The book’s title refers to the Israelites’ going out of Egypt and establishing a special relationship with Jehovah.

BACKGROUND

Exodus picks up where Genesis leaves off. The author is Moses. The book reveals God’s shift of emphasis from individuals to a nation, the nation of Israel.

A pharaoh who did not know Joseph rose to power and made the Israelites into slaves. God raised up Moses as the deliverer. Exodus contains the fascinating stories of God’s calling of Moses, the confrontation of Pharaoh, and the ten plagues. The book tells how Moses at last led the Israelites out of Egypt, across the Red Sea, into the wilderness, and down the Sinai peninsula to Mount Sinai, where the Ten Commandments and related laws were given. A special place of worship, the tabernacle, was built. As the book closes, the people were still at Mount Sinai.

For continuity, we will take from the title of the book the idea of “going” for the main points in our outline.

OUTLINE

- I. GOING OUT: the deliverance.
 - A. The Hebrews as slaves (1).
 - B. Moses taken into Pharaoh’s palace (2).
 - C. The deliverance (3—14).
 - D. The song of deliverance (15:1-22a).

- II. GOING FORWARD: journeying.
 - A. Journeying in the wilderness (15:22b—18:27).
 - B. Arrival at Sinai (19:1, 2).
- III. GOING WITH GOD: acceptance of the covenant.
 - A. A covenant made between God and the Israelites (19:3-25; verses 3-6 are key verses).
 - B. The Ten Commandments (20:1-17).
 - C. Related laws (20:18—23:19).
 - D. The covenant expanded (23:20—24:11).
 1. God’s part: “I will bless you.”
 2. The Israelite’s part: “We will obey You.”
- IV. GOING TO GOD: worship—the tabernacle.
 - A. Moses in the mount forty days and nights (24:12-18).
 - B. Instructions for the tabernacle (25:1—31:11).
 - C. Final instructions (31:12-18).
- V. GOING AWAY FROM GOD: the golden calf (32).
- VI. GOING BACK TO GOD: repentance and the building of the tabernacle.
 - A. God’s warning; repentance (33:1-11).
 - B. Moses’ return to the mount to get a second set of laws (33:12—34:35); the covenant renewed (34:10ff.).
 - C. The tabernacle built (35—39).
 - D. The tabernacle erected and tabernacle worship begun (40; cf. 33:7-11).

LESSONS FROM EXODUS

Moses did not think he could do what God asked him to do, but God never asks anyone to do what he cannot do. God supplied all that Moses needed to do the job. God will also supply what *we* need—as long as we commit ourselves to do God’s bidding.

God made a covenant (solemn agreement) with Israel. The Israelites pledged themselves to obey God. God did not take that lightly. When we are baptized, God makes a covenant with us. He commits Him-

self to bless us, and we commit ourselves to obey Him the rest of our lives. We must take our commitment seriously. A child of God can be “blotted out” of God’s book of life (32:32, 33).

After the Ten Commandments, the rest of the laws are basically an expansion of those ten. Laws of interest include 21:22, 24; 22:16, 17, 25, 26, 27; 23:2, 4, 8.

God gave very detailed instructions regarding

the building of the tabernacle. Worship is a serious matter with God. The Israelites could not make the tabernacle any way they wanted. (Note: 25:9, 40; Heb. 8:5; 39:32.

Exodus contains many “types” or pictures of Christ: the Passover Lamb (Jn. 19:36), the manna from heaven (Jn. 6:33ff.), the rock that provided water (1 Cor. 10:4), etc.

Compromise in Egypt (Exodus 7-10)

For sheer drama, it is difficult to find anything in history or fiction to surpass the tug-of-war, the clash of wills, between Pharaoh and Moses. It was a long, drawn-out struggle.

The first confrontation between Moses and Pharaoh must have been something to behold, as Moses said, “The Lord, the God of the Hebrews, sent me to you, saying, ‘Let My people go, that they may serve Me in the wilderness’” (Ex. 7:16).

During this period, the dramatic series of plagues occurred. It is easy to lose sight of the clash of wills between Pharaoh and Moses, or more accurately, between Pharaoh and God.

Pharaoh’s economy was based on his slaves; he could not afford to let them go. What means did he employ to try to retain his hold on the Israelites? *Compromise*. His compromises sounded innocent enough on the surface, but such compromises would have destroyed the heart and soul of what Moses—and God—wanted to accomplish.

Compromise still threatens us today. Satan does not worry so much about inducing us to blatant disobedience; he tries to get us to compromise. In some ways, compromise suits him better, for it is more deceiving to the conscience and can do more damage to the cause of Christ.

Let us notice the four compromises Pharaoh proposed to Moses:

I. “SACRIFICE IN THE LAND” (8:25).

A. The compromise:

1. “We don’t mind adding one more god here in Egypt (and we can keep our eyes on you).”
2. Today: “Worship and doing good are the important things—and where we do them is not important.”

B. Moses’ answer: 8:26, 27.

1. “We cannot do it here. It would be an abomination to God.”
2. “Where” does make a difference. The church is God’s blood-bought institution (Acts 20:28; Eph. 1:22, 23; 2:16; 3:10). The

challenge is to come out: “‘Therefore, come out from their midst and be separate,’ says the Lord. ‘And do not touch what is unclean; and I will welcome you. And I will be a father to you, . . .’” (2 Cor. 6:17, 18).

II. “DO NOT GO VERY FAR AWAY” (8:28).

A. The compromise:

1. “Stay where I can keep an eye on you and where you will still have your ties.”
2. Today: “Don’t go crazy about religion! Don’t get too involved!”

B. We do need to go “all the way” with the Lord!

1. “All the way” in doctrine, “all the way” in Christian living.
2. Moses left Pharaoh’s presence—no compromise!

III. “LEAVE LITTLE ONES BEHIND” (10:8-11).

A. The compromise: “Men only” could go.

1. Pharaoh’s clever plea: “If you do this, you won’t go far; you will probably return; and even if you don’t return, when you die, the movement will die.”
2. Today: “Be religious, but do not force your religion on your children.”

B. There can be no compromise in this area!

1. Moses is driven out (probably with a sneer on Pharaoh’s face).
2. God help us as parents: to provide a spiritual atmosphere, to teach true values, to live the Christian life before our children. When they do not want this, God help us to create a desire within them!

IV. “LEAVE FLOCKS AND HERDS” (10:24).

A. The compromise:

1. “Thus you will not be able to sacrifice; you will have no food, so you will return.”
2. Today: “Leave behind the means to do the job (money, talents, time). Do not get involved.”

B. The great expression of a non-compromising

spirit: 10:25, 26.

CONCLUSION

- A. The Israelites left Egypt on God's terms, not Pharaoh's.
- B. They made a sacrifice of animals; we are to

make a sacrifice of our lives. Rom. 12:1, 2 says, "I urge you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies a living and holy sacrifice, acceptable to God, which is your spiritual service of worship."

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Leviticus: The Priest's Handbook

CHAPTERS TO READ: 1—5, 8—14, 16, 17, 19, 22, 23, 25, 26.

TITLE

“Leviticus” means “pertaining to the Levites.” The Levites were the offspring of Levi, one of the twelve sons of Jacob. Levi’s descendants became “the priestly tribe.” Aaron, the first high priest, was a Levite; the high-priesthood was passed from oldest son to oldest son. Aaron’s other descendants became the priests. All other Levites were assistants to the priests. The Levites took care of many duties relating to the tabernacle and later to the temple.

BACKGROUND

This book by Moses was apparently written shortly after Exodus. It is a book of laws; it contains little historical information. Many laws relate to worship and were to be administered by the priests.

A key word in the book is “holy,” which is found eighty-seven times in the book. The word “holy” is the same as “sanctified”; both mean “set apart” for a special purpose. God said to Israel, “You are to be holy to Me, for I the Lord am holy; and I have set you apart from the peoples to be Mine” (20:26; NASB).

OUTLINE

- I. HOLY SACRIFICES.
 - A. Burnt offering to be completely burned up (1).
 - B. Grain offering (2).
 - C. Peace offering (3).
 - D. Sin offering, for sins committed unknowingly (4).
 - E. Guilt offering (5).
 - F. How the priests were to perform their duties concerning these offerings (6, 7).
- II. HOLY LEADERS, part 1.
 - A. Consecration of Aaron and his sons (8).
 - B. They offer their first sacrifices (9).
 - C. Nadab and Abihu offer strange fire (10).
- III. A HOLY PEOPLE, part 1.
 - A. Clean and unclean animals (11).
 - B. Purifying the mother after a child’s birth (12).

- C. Laws about leprosy (13, 14).
- D. Unclean issue (15).

IV. HOLY DAYS, part 1: ritual of atonement (16, 17).

- V. A HOLY PEOPLE, part 2.
 - A. Abominations of the Canaanites (18).
 - B. God’s moral standard (19).
 - C. Warning not to follow nations about them (20).

VI. HOLY LEADERS, part 2: priests to be a separate and holy people (21, 22).

- VII. HOLY DAYS, part 2.
 - A. Weekly Sabbath and annual feasts: Passover, Harvest (Pentecost), Trumpets (23).
 - B. Weekly eating of showbread; an incident (24).
 - C. Special “days”: Sabbath year and year of Jubilee (25).

- VIII. A HOLY PEOPLE, part 3, and conclusion.
 - A. Obedience and disobedience—and consequences (26).
 - B. Laws about vows (27).

LESSONS FROM LEVITICUS

When you read Leviticus, are you not glad that you are under the New Covenant (Testament) instead of the Old Covenant? The complexity of the laws was probably part of the “yoke of slavery” of the law (Gal. 5:1).

All of these laws were important, however. They were important to guide and protect a nation through whom the Messiah was to come. They declared that sin is *terrible*; only blood (death) could atone for sin. Every sacrifice offered helped prepare minds for the perfect sacrifice of Jesus on the cross.

God *still* wants His people to be a holy people, set apart from the world for His holy purposes (1 Thess. 3:13; 4:3ff.)!

Tucked away in the myriad of laws, where it might be overlooked, is the command to love others, which Jesus called the second most important commandment in the Old Testament (Lev. 19:18; Mk. 12:31)!

How Sin Destroys Happiness (Leviticus 10:1-11)

It started as one of the most exciting days in Aaron's life. A few months before, Aaron had been a slave, facing a future with no hope. Then Moses came and said, "Jehovah has appointed you as my spokesman." Shoulder to shoulder with his brother, Aaron had seen God bring the people out of bondage. Then God appointed him as high priest. On this day he stood a proud and happy man in his new high-priest vestments. With him were his sons, God-appointed priests, the oldest slated to be the next high priest. His joy must have overflowed when God signaled His approval of their first sacrifices by sending supernatural fire to consume the offering (Lev. 9:22-24).

In a matter of minutes, though, the day turned to one of the saddest in Aaron's life. He saw his oldest boys die and saw them carried away, still in their priestly garb, to an ignominious grave. He heard the sternest of warnings from the mouth of God. All this happened because of sin. Sin destroyed Aaron's happiness—and it can destroy ours. We need to understand *how terrible* sin is.

I. SIN CAN DESTROY LIFE (10:1-3).

- A. Sin destroyed the lives of Nadab and Abihu.
 - 1. When they offered "strange fire," the same fire that had consumed the offerings consumed them.
 - a. We are not sure what "the strange fire" was, but it was *unauthorized* fire (see NIV). It was not that God had said, "Do not offer this fire," but rather that God had given His instructions, and Nadab and Abihu thought something else would do as well.
 - b. We must be careful not to offer "strange fire" today. Frequently people say, "Show me where it tells me *not* to do this or that." The question that should be asked is "What has God told us to do?" All else is "strange fire."
 - 2. We do not know *why* they offered this strange fire. Their motives may have been good; they may have wanted to add to this emotional occasion. Good motives cannot compensate for disobedience.
- B. Sin still destroys lives today.
 - 1. We, too, are priests before God (1 Pet. 2:5). We have influence as Nadab and Abihu had influence (Mt. 5:13-16). God cannot allow disobedience to go unpunished (Lev. 10:3).

- a. Some sins can destroy our physical lives.
- b. *All* sins can destroy our *spiritual* lives.
- 2. Let us determine to obey God in all things!

II. SIN CAN DESTROY HEARTS (10:4-7).

- A. Imagine the tragic scene as Aaron watched his sons being taken away. He was not allowed to mourn, lest this be interpreted by the people as a reflection on God's actions. He was not allowed to go to the funeral. He had to stay at his post until the appointed time was completed. Imagine how his heart was breaking!
- B. Sin continues to break hearts.
 - 1. Sinful people reap what they have sown.
 - 2. Sinful individuals break their mates' hearts.
 - 3. Sinful children break their parents' hearts.
 - 4. Sinful Christians break the heart of the church—and the heart of God!

III. SIN CAN DESTROY WISDOM: the ability to make wise decisions (10:8-11).

- A. Do verses 8-11 tell "the rest of the story"?
 - 1. Many scholars think so because of the parallels in the two sections.
 - a. Nadab and Abihu died (v. 2); alcohol can bring death (v. 9).
 - b. Nadab and Abihu failed to distinguish between "unauthorized" fire and that authorized by God (v. 1); alcohol can render one incapable of distinguishing between holy and profane (v. 10).
 - 2. Perhaps Nadab and Abihu had "celebrated" this special day by drinking. Whether that is the case or not, it *is* true that alcohol affects one's critical judgment.
- B. Today:
 - 1. Sin continues to cloud people's judgment.
 - a. Illustration: the Garden of Eden.
 - b. Some sins that destroy judgment: pride, prejudice, and indifference.
 - 2. A prime offender is still beverage alcohol.
 - a. Note that priests were not to drink "on duty." Remember, every Christian is a priest—and we are *always* "on duty."
 - b. The text indicates that drinking would affect a priest's ability to teach. Today every Christian is to teach others (Mt. 28:18-20), but alcohol can destroy our influence as teachers. It is something every Christian can do without!

CONCLUSION

May God help us to distinguish between the holy and the unholy, to resolve to obey God, and to re-

move from our lives anything that would hinder our ability to make critical judgments. It is the only way we can have truly happy lives!

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Numbers: Census Report in the Wilderness

CHAPTERS TO READ: 1, 3, 6, 9—11, 13, 14, 16, 17, 20—27, 30—33, 35.

TITLE

The title “Numbers” in our English Bible refers to the two numberings (censuses) taken of men of fighting age. One (chap. 1) was taken as the people left Mount Sinai, to go to the promised land. The other (chap. 26) was taken thirty-eight years later, as the next generation prepared to go into Canaan.

BACKGROUND

Moses is the author of the book (note 1:1 and 33:2). It was written at the conclusion of the wilderness wanderings. In action, this book follows Exodus; in laws, it follows Leviticus.

Having received instructions on how to approach God, the people were ready to go into the promised land. They left Sinai and headed north for Canaan, a relatively short march. When they reached the southern border, spies were sent to survey the land. The people believed the ten spies who brought back the discouraging report. For their sin of unbelief, the people wandered in the wilderness until most of the original generation was dead. The time covered is thirty-eight years (Num. 1:1; Deut. 1:13).

Two words that summarize the book are “numbering” and “murdering.”

OUTLINE (the laws are set apart in italics)

I. GETTING READY TO LEAVE SINAI.

- A. The first census (1).
- B. Organizing the camp for traveling (2—4).
- C. *Laws on purity and the Nazarite vow* (5, 6).
- D. Sacrifices made by each tribe (7).
- E. *Laws about Levites* (8).
- F. The Passover kept; the cloud to guide (9).
- G. Signal trumpets (10:1-10).

II. A FORTY-DAY JOURNEY THAT TOOK FORTY YEARS.

- A. The first trip to the promised land.
 1. The start to the land (10:11-36).
 2. On the way; murmuring (11, 12).
 3. The southern edge of the promised land

- and the ten spies (13).
4. Doomed to wander in the wilderness forty years (14).
- B. Wandering (little information given).
 1. *Laws about certain offerings*; a man is stoned (15).
 2. Rebellion of Korah and others (16, 17).
 3. *Laws about offerings* (18).
 4. The water of purification (19).
- C. The last trip to the promised land.
 1. Starting from Kadesh; Moses’ sin (20).
 2. On the way; murmuring (21).
 3. The arrival on the eastern side of the promised land (22:1).

III. GETTING READY TO ENTER CANAAN.

- A. Opposition from Balak and Balaam (22:2—25:18).
- B. The second census (26).
- C. A problem of inheritance; Joshua chosen (27).
- D. *Laws about offerings on certain days and about vows* (28—30).
- E. A battle against the Midianites (31).
- F. Two and one-half tribes decide to stay east of the Jordan River (32).
- G. Summary of the wilderness wanderings (33).
- H. Instructions about inheritances after they enter Canaan (34—36).

LESSONS FROM NUMBERS

In 1 Cor. 10 Paul makes a powerful argument. He tells of the wilderness wanderings, notes how many of God’s people died in one instance, and then says, “Let him who thinks he stands take heed lest he fall” (v. 12). A child of God *can* fall. Of the 600,000 men of fighting age in Num. 1, only two entered the promised land: Joshua and Caleb!

The writer of Hebrews also uses the example of the Israelites to warn Christians (Heb. 3:7—4:12). He says they fell because of disobedience (3:11), a symptom of their unbelief (3:12). The most obvious expression of the Israelites’ unbelief was their *complaining*. Are we ever guilty of this sin?

Many memorable passages are in Numbers, such as the benediction in 6:24-26. Remember, however,

that everything in the Old Testament is either (1) to bring men to Christ or (2) to prepare minds for Him.

Note the parallel between the bronze serpent (Num. 21:8, 9) and Jesus on the cross (Jn. 3:14, 15).

— The Serpent in the Wilderness (Numbers 21:4-9) —

Many “types,” or symbols, of Christ are in the Old Testament. Christ personally identified only one: the serpent in the wilderness (Jn. 3:14-17; Num. 21:4-9). Let us draw a parallel between the Old Testament story and the New Testament application.

I. THE PEOPLE SINNED AND WERE PUNISHED (21:4-6).

A. The Israelites sinned.

1. The sin: The Israelites had been wandering for forty years and were now to move again. In the hot season in the desert (cf. chaps. 33 and 20), they were traveling “by the way of the Red Sea,” a desolate plain. Because of the Edomites, they were going away from the promised land, not toward it. They were discouraged (v. 4) and complained (v. 5).

2. The punishment: Fiery serpents filled the camp with sickness and death (v. 6).

B. Today, we sin and are under condemnation.

1. All have sinned (Rom. 3:23). A serpent started it (Gen. 3; Rev. 12:9.) Rom. 6:23 tells of the condemnation.
2. Like the Israelites, we often fail to *appreciate* who God is and what He has done for us!

II. GOD PROVIDED THE WAY OF SALVATION (21:7, 8).

A. God provided the way of escape. The people could not; Moses could not; only God could.

1. The people turned to Moses (v. 7). This was the only time the Israelites asked Moses to intercede. They acknowledged their sin, and Moses prayed for them.
2. God said, “Make a fiery serpent, and set it on a pole” (v. 8). “On a pole” literally means “on a standard, elevated.” The “fiery serpent,” or “serpent of brass,” was made (v. 9).

- a. It might have appeared foolish to some, but that is what *God* said (Is. 55:8, 9)!

- b. God’s plan was the only way of escape.

B. God has also provided the way of salvation today for those willing to face their sinfulness.

1. I cannot provide the way; you cannot (Jer. 10:23; Prov. 14:12). Only *God* can. There is

only *one* way (Jn. 14:6).

2. What is God’s provision? Jesus lifted on the cross (Jn. 3:14-17; 12:32; Rom. 5:8-10)!

a. A powerful parallel.

- (1) The Israelites were bitten by *serpents*, and a *serpent* was placed on the pole.

- (2) *Sin* is destroying us. On the cross Jesus became *sin* for us (2 Cor. 5:21).

- b. This appears foolish to some (1 Cor. 1:18), but it is *still* God’s provision for salvation—His *only* provision (Acts 4:12).

III. GOD’S PROVISION MUST BE APPROPRIATED (21:8, 9).

A. God’s way of healing did not automatically cure everyone of snakebite; those who were bitten had to *do* something to be healed.

1. They were to demonstrate their faith by looking on the serpent (v. 8).

2. When they did that, they were healed (v. 9).

B. Jesus died for all (Jn. 3:16), but not all are saved (Mt. 7:13, 14). We must *appropriate* what God has done for us.

1. We cannot *earn* our salvation (Eph. 2:8, 9), but we must obey (Mt. 7:21).

2. Jesus said to *believe* and *be baptized* to have salvation through the blood (Mk. 16:16).

- a. Note the blood/baptism relationship (cf. Mt. 26:28 and Acts 2:38; Rev. 1:5 and Acts 22:16; Heb. 9:14 and 1 Pet. 3:21).

- b. There is no contradiction between these passages. One group of Scriptures tells us *what* saves us (the blood); the other tells us *when* (at the point of baptism).

IV. IT IS POSSIBLE NOT TO APPROPRIATE.

A. Verse 9 stresses that *if* one was bitten, *when* he looked on the serpent, he was healed. If one was bitten and did *not* look, he was *not* healed.

1. At least some probably failed to utilize God’s provision—perhaps because of unbelief, indifference, or because they waited too long.

2. We know for sure: The *possibility* of not appropriating existed; God never *forces* His blessings on anyone. If any were not healed,

- it was *their* fault, not God's.
- B. Today, it is possible not to appropriate God's provision for salvation through the cross.
1. We are thankful for those who did: three thousand on Pentecost (Acts 2:36-38, 41),

- etc.
2. Some did not (Acts 24:25; 26:28).

CONCLUSION

If we are lost, we can blame no one but ourselves!

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Deuteronomy: Moses' Farewell Address

CHAPTERS TO READ: 1—8, 17, 18, 24, 27, 28, 30—32, 34.

TITLE

The title “Deuteronomy” is a compound Greek word that literally means “second law.” It is not, however, a *second* law, but rather a second *giving* (repetition) of the law. Close to forty years after the Ten Commandments were given, the venerable leader, Moses, reviews both the law and what happened in the wilderness.

BACKGROUND

The wilderness wanderings are over. The children of Israel are on the east side of the Jordan River, ready to go into the land of promise. Moses has many things he wants to share before the leadership passes to his right-hand man, Joshua. His “farewell address” is really four messages delivered close together (note the fourfold division of the outline).

The author of most of Deuteronomy is Moses, but since the last of the book records Moses’ death, someone added the final note. If Joshua wrote the next book (see Background on Joshua), the last words were probably written by him.

Since much of Deuteronomy is repetition, it is tempting to neglect it. Consider, however, that when Jesus was tempted, the book He quoted was Deuteronomy (Mt. 4:4, 7, 10; Deut. 6:13, 16; 8:3). If Jesus thought the book important enough to memorize, let us not slight it.

OUTLINE

- I. INTRODUCTION: HISTORICAL REVIEW (1—4).
- II. THE LAW REVIEWED, EXPANDED, AND APPLIED (5—26).
 - A. Looking backwards: the law reviewed (5—11).
 1. Looking back on the basic background of the law (5—7).
 - a. The basis of the law: the Ten Commandments (5).
 - b. The basis of obedience: love of God (6)!

- c. The basis of purity: destroying the Canaanites and their idols (7).
2. Looking back on the exodus and the wilderness wanderings; some practical applications (8—11).
- B. Looking forward: parts of the law expanded and applied to the situation they would have *in* the land of Canaan (12—26).

III. “THE CHOICE IS YOURS: OBEY GOD AND BE BLESSED OR DISOBEY GOD AND BE CURSED” (27—30).

- A. The law to be recorded on Mount Ebal (27).
- B. The choices outlined *and their consequences* (28).
- C. Reminded of their covenant with God (29).
- D. “When these things come to pass, remember . . .” (30).

IV. CONCLUSION: THE LAST DAYS (AND LAST WORDS) OF MOSES (31—34).

- A. On Moses’ 120th birthday (31—33):
 1. The law is completed; a song (31, 32).
 2. Moses blesses the tribes (33).
- B. Moses goes to the top of the mountain, views Canaan, dies, and is buried in an unknown tomb (34).

LESSONS FROM DEUTERONOMY

One of the greatest lessons is the life of Moses. Even though Moses had been told he could not enter the promised land, he did not get upset and quit. He remained faithful to the end!

The Shema, which appears in 6:4-9, was the heart of the Hebrew religion. These words were (and are) spoken by pious Jews on every solemn occasion. When Jesus was asked concerning “the great commandment in the Law” (Mt. 22:35-38), He quoted from this passage: “‘You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind.’ This is the great and foremost commandment” (v. 38).

A powerful passage in chap. 28 describes the blessings that come when we obey God and the curses which we bring upon ourselves when we

disobey. Re-read chap. 28, and think about the subsequent history of the Jewish people. It foretells what happened to them as a nation.

There are *many* ties between Deuteronomy and the life of Christ. In addition to those already noted, see 18:15-19 and 21:23.

Teaching Children to Love God (Deuteronomy 6:4-9)

Our text, Deut. 6:4-9, was central to the Jewish people. Verse 4 was called the Shema, because *shema*, the Hebrew word for “hear,” is the first word of the verse. As time went by, the Shema was expanded through verse 9 and sometimes included other pertinent references. The passage “Hear, O Israel! The Lord is our God, the Lord is one!” followed by the challenge to love God with one’s heart, soul, and strength, became the worship call, the battle cry, and the dying prayer of the Jewish people. It is the classic statement of monotheism and of a person’s relationship to the one God.

Jesus stressed the importance of this passage to Christians (Mt. 22:37-40). His words challenge us to love God with all that is within us—and then *to teach our children to do the same*.

I. WHY SHOULD WE TEACH OUR CHILDREN TO LOVE GOD?

- A. Loving God is involved in obeying God—even in becoming a Christian (Jn. 14:15; 1 Jn. 5:3; Rom. 6:17, 18; 1 Cor. 13:1-3).
- B. Loving God is essential to being *happy* as a Christian (1 Jn. 4:18; Rom. 8:28).
- C. For most of us, loving God is vitally linked with being faithful unto death (Rev. 2:10; 2:4).

II. HOW CAN WE TEACH OUR CHILDREN TO LOVE GOD (6:4-9)?

- A. We start by loving God ourselves (vv. 5, 6).
 1. We are told in 6:4-9 first to love God with all of our being, then to teach our children. If our children are to love God, they must first see that love in us.
 2. How can we love God? “We love, *because* He first loved us” (1 Jn. 4:19).
 - a. Let us learn about God’s love from the Bible—and let us *meditate* on all God has done for us.
 - b. Let our *deeds* show that we love God; let us love Him with all of our strength (Rev. 2:5).
- B. Let us then share that love with our children (v. 7).
 1. Our children will not automatically know of that love; we must teach them.

2. We need to be teaching them *all the time*: while we are walking, standing, sitting, lying down! Some suggestions:
 - a. Utilize all of the classes and youth activities of the church.
 - b. Provide home devotionals and planned activities.
 - c. Turn any and every occasion into an occasion for teaching: good times, bad times, inside the home, outside in nature, in connection with relationships (1 Jn. 4:11).
 - d. We must train our children to *obey* God; there cannot be love without obedience (1 Jn. 5:3).

C. Finally, we must provide our children with an *atmosphere* of love (vv. 8, 9).

1. These words were to be fastened to the hand, between the eyes, on the doorposts. The Jews invented *phylacteries* (a Greek word meaning “guards”), little boxes with these words in them, and put these on their hands, foreheads, etc. (Mt. 23:5). Moses was speaking of having the law of love on one’s hand, so the hand *acted* from love; on the head, so the brain *thought* from love; and on the doorpost, *so the house was filled with love*.
2. Some suggestions on filling our homes with love:
 - a. Let our children see our love for God.
 - b. Let our children see our love for them (Tit. 2:4).
 - (1) Let us always “seek their best” (the meaning of *agape* love).
 - (2) Let us be kind, patient, etc. (1 Cor. 13:4-7).
 - (3) Let us discipline them in love (Heb. 12:6, 7, 9).
 - (4) Let us be forgiving. (Note to fathers: The way a child sees his father generally forms his initial concept of God!)
 - c. Let our children see that everyone in the home loves everyone else in the home (Eph. 5:25, 28, 33; Tit. 2:4; remember 1 Jn. 4:20).

CONCLUSION

Like the Jews, we should strive to incorporate the

teachings of the Scriptures in every aspect of our lives. Only by doing this can we teach our children the importance of loving God.

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Joshua: Victory in Canaan!

CHAPTERS TO READ: 1—11, 13, 14, 18, 21—24.

TITLE

The Book of Joshua is named after its main character, who replaced Moses as the leader of the Israelites. His name originally was Hoshea (Num. 13:8), which means “salvation”; but Moses changed his name to Je-hoshua (Num. 13:16), or Joshua, which means “Jehovah is salvation,” an appropriate title for the contents of this book. The New Testament equivalent of the name “Joshua” is “Jesus.”

BACKGROUND

Even though this book is a follow-up to Deuteronomy, it begins a new division of the Old Testament: the twelve books of (Jewish) history. The first seventeen books of the Old Testament provide the historical framework for all of the Old Testament books.

Under the leadership of Joshua, the Israelites at last entered the promised land. The first half of the book tells of the Israelites’ conquest of the land with the help of God. Jericho and Ai are taken, dividing the land in half. The southern part of the country is conquered, then the northern.

The last half of the book tells of the division of the land. Each tribe received a portion. Special provision was made for the two faithful spies, Caleb and Joshua. The Levites received cities and land as their inheritance. The book closes with Joshua’s challenge to the people and his death. Three verses in Joshua 11 summarize the book: 15, 18, 23. Between fifteen and twenty years of history are covered (24:29; Deut. 34:5-9).

We are not sure who wrote the book. Suggested authors include Phinehas and Eleazer. Jewish tradition attributes the book to Joshua. The information we have agrees with the authorship of Joshua. The use of first person in 5:1 indicates that the author crossed the river Jordan; 24:26 speaks of Joshua’s writing all or part of the material in the book. If Joshua wrote the book, another writer added the account of the death of Joshua at the close of the book.

OUTLINE

INTRODUCTION: Leadership turned over to Joshua (1).

I. CONQUERING THE LAND (2—12).

- A. Spying out Jericho (2).
- B. Crossing Jordan on dry land and setting up stones for a memorial (3, 4).
- C. Preparing for battle (5).
- D. Taking Jericho (6).
- E. Problems taking Ai; blessings and curses are read (7, 8).
- F. Crafty Gibeon; battles with the kings of the south (9, 10).
- G. The defeat of the kings of the north (11).
- H. A summary of the battles (12).

II. DIVIDING THE LAND (13—22).

- A. Inheritance for two and one-half tribes (13).
- B. Inheritance for Caleb (14).
- C. Inheritance for the rest of the tribe of Judah (15).
- D. Inheritance for the rest of the children of Joseph (16, 17).
- E. Inheritance for the remaining seven tribes and for Joshua; the tabernacle set up (18, 19).
- F. Cities of refuge (20).
- G. Inheritance for the Levites (21).
- H. Two and one-half tribes go home; a memorial altar is set up (22).

CONCLUSION: Joshua’s farewell and death (23, 24).

LESSONS FROM JOSHUA

The Book of Joshua tells how God’s people can have *victory through faith*. The book contains great passages on God’s being with His people and giving them success—if they believe Him and obey Him. One of those passages is 1:5-9.

In the matter of obeying God, it is easy to go to extremes: to go to the extreme right of legalism (binding laws God has not made) or the extreme left of liberalism (loosing laws God has made). In 1:7 we see the balance we need to strive for: “Do not turn from it to the right or to the left.”

The events following the sin of Achan demonstrate that God’s people cannot have victory when there is “sin in the camp.” In 7:20, 21 we find a study of how sin can enter a man’s life and grow. Compare this with James 1:14, 15.

There are many New Testament references to

passages in Joshua. (Note Acts 7:16; 13:19; Heb. 4:8; 11:22, 30, 31; 13:5; Jas. 2:25.) Probably most signifi-

cant concerning Jesus is the story of Rahab, who was one of His ancestors (Mt. 1:5).

The Walls Came Tumbling Down (Joshua 6)

The Book of Joshua tells of the conquest of the land of Canaan by the Israelites under the leadership of Joshua. The theme of the book is "Victory Through Faith" (1:5-9). All of us would like to live lives of victory. To see how we can, let us look at an illustration of the victory God gave the Israelites: the battle of Jericho, where (to use the words of an old song) "the walls came tumblin' down"! These were gigantic walls three stories high and eighteen feet thick!

All of us have "walls" that need to come down: walls between us and God, walls between us and other people, walls between what we are and what we should be. We face marriage and family walls, financial walls, health walls, and emotional walls. This familiar story teaches at least four lessons, four things essential to making walls "come tumblin' down":

I. GOD'S WAYS MUST BE RESPECTED.

- A. A little boy was telling his mother what he learned in Bible class: "And they took planes and tanks and missiles and flattened the walls of Jericho!" His mother looked skeptical and asked, "Are you *certain* that's the way your teacher told the story?" The little boy said, "No, but if I told it the way she told it, you *sure* wouldn't believe me." In fact, Joshua 6 is *not* how we would capture a city—and it was not even the way armies captured cities in those days. They used battering rams, archers' towers, scaling ladders, and other engines of war. Why then did God choose the way He did?
 1. He was saying, "My ways are not your ways." He was saying, "I want you to know this is *My* victory, not yours."
 2. Joshua and the Israelites respected God's ways; forty years in the wilderness had convinced them that God knew best.
- B. It is still true that God's ways are not our ways (Is. 55:8, 9).
 1. Men try to second-guess God on salvation, worship, morality, and religion in general.
 2. We must learn to respect and obey God's way because God said it, not necessarily because we understand it. God's way works!

II. GOD'S GIFTS MUST BE ACCEPTED.

- A. There is a powerful message on grace in this story. Note that God *gave* the city to the Isra-

elites (6:2, 16). Did this mean there was therefore nothing for them to do? No, they still had things to do to *accept* that gift (6:3ff.).

- B. Today, when people learn that we are saved by grace (Eph. 2:5), some say, "That means there is nothing we must do, nothing we can do." Gifts can be accepted or rejected. We must accept God's gift by doing what God has said for us to do.
 1. Eph. 2:8 stresses that we accept God's spiritual gifts *by faith*. It is faith that gives the victory (1 Jn. 5:4)!
 2. It is not a dead, inactive faith (Jas. 2:14-26). We need a living, active faith (Gal. 5:6). Because the Israelites believed God, they *obeyed* Him.

III. OUR FAITH MUST BE EXPRESSED.

- A. Heb. 11:30 emphasizes that the walls of Jericho fell by faith, but note the word "after." It was *after* the people had done many things (6:8ff.).
- B. Even so our faith in God must be expressed.
 1. In order to become a Christian (Mk. 16:16; Acts 2:36-38; 8:35-39).
 2. In order to live the Christian life. Rev. 2:10: "Faithful" literally means "full of faith."

IV. OUR OBEDIENCE MUST BE COMPLETE.

- A. Imagine the scene as the people circle the city the first day, the second, the sixth, the sixth time on the seventh day: There is no trembling of the earth; there are no cracks in the wall. When the city has been circled the seventh time on that seventh day, the trumpets have been blown, and the people have shouted, *then* the walls fall (6:20). Hebrews 11:30 stresses that the walls fell after they had been circled *seven* days.
- B. Total obedience must ever be the goal of our lives (Mt. 7:21; Heb. 5:8, 9). We may never reach that goal, but to aim for anything less is to be less than God wants us to be and to jeopardize our souls.

CONCLUSION

Let us not argue with God. Let us believe God (Heb. 13:5b, 6) and *do* what He says. Then *our* walls will also come tumbling down! Whether we totally understand God's way or not, it works!

Judges and Ruth: Love in the Midst of Turbulence

CHAPTERS TO READ: Judg. 1—4, 6—16; Ruth 1—4.

TITLE

The title of Judges is taken from the leaders raised up by God (2:16) after the death of Joshua. The Greek title means simply “judges,” but most of them never presided over a court. The title in the Hebrew is more comprehensive, meaning “judges, rulers, deliverers.”

The title of Ruth is taken from one of the main characters, Ruth, the Moabitess, who became a believer in the true God.

BACKGROUND

The period of the judges was a period of turbulence. After the death of Joshua, there was no central government; “every man did what was right in his own eyes” (17:6; 18:1; 19:1; 21:25).

God had told the Israelites to drive out completely the inhabitants of the land, but they did not (1:21-36). Influenced by the pagans among them, many of the Israelites turned away from God. When they did this, God allowed other nations to oppress them. When they repented, God sent a deliverer, “a judge” (2:16-19). For a time the people would obey God; then they would lapse again into idolatry and the whole process would be repeated. This cycle of *relapse, retribution, repentance, and rescue* occurred again and again.

The judges were not like kings ruling over all the land, but rather local deliverers raised up by God for specific needs. Their work probably overlapped.

Reading the Book of Judges, one would get the impression there was only violence in the land; but the calm, sweet Book of Ruth is set “in the days when the judges governed.” In the midst of turmoil, ordinary people still lived their lives faithful to their God.

The primary purpose of the Book of Ruth

seems to be to establish the lineage of King David (4:21, 22) and, ultimately, the lineage of Jesus (Mt. 1:5, 6). We do not know who wrote these books; a good guess would be Samuel, the last judge of Israel.

OUTLINE OF JUDGES

BACKGROUND: Israel did not drive out the inhabitants (1), and God was displeased (2:1-5). A vicious cycle began (2:6—3:4).

I. FIRST CYCLE.

- A. Apostasy (3:5-7).
- B. Oppression: Mesopotamians (3:8).
- C. Deliverance: Othniel (3:9-11).

II. SECOND CYCLE.

- A. Apostasy (3:12a).
- B. Oppression: Moabites, with Ammonites and Amalekites (3:12b-14).
- C. Deliverance: Ehud (3:15-30).

III. THIRD CYCLE.

- A. Oppression: Philistines (3:31).
- B. Deliverer: Shamgar (3:31).

IV. FOURTH CYCLE.

- A. Apostasy (4:1).
- B. Oppression: Canaanites (4:2, 3).
- C. Deliverers: Deborah and Barak (4:4—5:31).

V. FIFTH CYCLE.

- A. Apostasy (6:1a).
- B. Oppression: Midianites, with the Amalekites (6:1b-10).
- C. Deliverer: Gideon (6:11—8:32).
- D. Apostasy again (8:33-35).
- E. Usurper: Abimelech (9).
- F. Deliverers: Tola (10:1, 2) and Jair (10:3-5).

VI. SIXTH CYCLE.

- A. Apostasy (10:6).
- B. Oppression: Philistines and Ammonites (10:7-18).
- C. Deliverers: Jephthah (11:1—12:7), Ibzan (12:8-10), Elon (12:11, 12), and Abdon (12:13-15).

VII. SEVENTH CYCLE.

- A. Apostasy (13:1a).
- B. Oppression: Philistines (13:1b).
- C. Deliverer: Samson (13:2—16:31).

APPENDIX: The moral climate (17—21).

OUTLINE OF RUTH

See sermon outline.

LESSONS FROM JUDGES AND RUTH

When man follows his way instead of God's,

chaos results. God will not tolerate sin among His people. God may send punishment upon us to wake us up. If we will repent, God will receive us back.

We must teach our children. The church can be lost in a single generation if we fail (see Judg. 2:10-13).

Regardless of the bad condition of the world, we can live fulfilling lives faithful to our God, as Naomi, Ruth, and Boaz did.

Most important is that God was continuing to work out His plan to bring Jesus into the world!

A Story of Love (Ruth)

After reading of the turbulent rule of the judges, we may think that Israel was filled only with faithlessness, apostasy, and moral degradation. The beautiful Book of Ruth shows that faith, goodness, and love still lingered in quiet scenes. Even in the worst of times, there are those who are faithful to God.

This story of love is really *three* stories of love. The first two center on Ruth: the story of Ruth's love for Naomi and the story of Ruth and Boaz. The third story of love is less obvious, but is the most important. See if you can identify it as we retell the story.

I. RUTH AND NAOMI'S LOVE FOR EACH OTHER.

- A. Because of a famine in Palestine, Elimelech, Naomi, and their two sons move to Moab. There, tragedy after tragedy befalls them. Elimelech dies. The sons marry Moabitish women, Orpah and Ruth. The two sons die (1:3-5, 13, 20, 21).
- B. Learning that things are now better in Judah, Naomi decides to go home. Her daughters-in-law go with her to the border. At Naomi's urging, Orpah turns back (1:8-10, 14), but Ruth refuses to leave Naomi (1:15-17).
 - 1. One of the great statements of commitment in the Bible is in 1:16, 17. Love is sacrificing oneself for the happiness of another.
 - 2. We need to make this kind of commitment to our mates. We need to make this kind of commitment to the Lord.

II. RUTH AND BOAZ' LOVE FOR EACH OTHER.

- A. To support Naomi and herself, Ruth gleans in the fields (note Lev. 23:22). While she is gleaning, Boaz, a kinsman, comes to the field (2:1,

4) and reveals that her sacrifice of love is known (2:11, 12). Boaz is impressed with Ruth (2:5, 6) and tells her to feel free to glean with his own maidens. That night she has an ephah (three bushels) of barley—enough for many days.

- B. Naomi notes that Boaz is a near kinsman (2:19, 20) and says, "It is good" (2:22). The law gave the nearest of kin the right to redeem the property of the deceased (Lev. 25:25) and the responsibility of raising up children to wear the name of the man who had died (see Mt. 22:24).
- C. Boaz shows his affection for Ruth, but apparently he does not press his courtship because he is older than she. Naomi, knowing the customs of that time and place, tells Ruth how to let Boaz know she is interested.
 - 1. Ruth at Boaz' feet (3:9, 10). Boaz is excited! Naomi knows things will work out (3:18).
 - 2. Boaz and the kinsman who had *first* right (4:1, 3-6, 8). The ceremony with the sandal (Deut. 25:9ff.).
- D. Boaz and Ruth wed, and a son is born (4:13).

III. GOD'S LOVE FOR ISRAEL AND FOR US.

- A. The less obvious love story is that of God's love for His people.
 - 1. Note the many references in the book to the fact that God is in control (1:6, 8, 9, 17, 20, 21; 2:4, 12; 4:11-14). We may dispute Naomi's theology (1:20, 21), but not her faith.
 - 2. Why did God include this story in the Bible?
 - a. Because love is a beautiful thing.
 - b. To show He was working out His plan for man. Here God established the line that led to King David (4:17)!
- B. The Book of Ruth shows God's love for Israel and God's love for us.

1. The book said to Israel: Regardless of the times, God will still show His love.
 - a. He was working in the lives of ordinary people who kept their faith in Him.
 - b. He was working in the nation of Israel to give them King David.
2. The book also speaks to us: Regardless of the times, God will always show His love.
 - a. God shows His love for people in general. The line that led to David ulti-

- mately led to Christ (Mt. 1:15, 16)!
- b. God shows His love for us specifically, every day we live!

CONCLUSION

- A. Ruth loved Naomi, but Naomi also loved Ruth.
- B. Boaz loved Ruth, but Ruth also loved Boaz.
- C. God loves us.
- D. Wouldn't it be sad if the love were one-sided (1 Jn. 5:2, 3)?

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1 Samuel: The Kingdom Established

CHAPTERS TO READ: 1—4, 7—13, 15—18, 20, 21, 23—25, 27, 28, 31.

TITLE

The Book of 1 Samuel is named after Samuel, the last of the judges and the great king-maker (he anointed the first two kings: Saul and David). Originally, 1 and 2 Samuel were one book, called 1 Kings. The books were divided when the Septuagint translation was produced in the second century B.C. “Samuel” means “heard of God” (1:20).

BACKGROUND

The book tells of the transition from the rule of judges to kings. Eli, the high priest, and Samuel were both judges (4:18; 7:15). Samuel was a great man. In addition to being a priest and judge, he is known as the first of the oral prophets (3:20, 21; 4:1a).

The people, however, desired a king like the nations about them had (8:5). This was not so much a rejection of Samuel (and his ungodly sons) as it was a rejection of the sovereignty of God (8:7). The people were warned of the consequences of having an earthly king, but they still cried for one (8:10-22). God made provision to give them the best available.

Much of the book tells of the reign of Saul, who was anointed by Samuel to be the first king over all of Israel. Saul started out as an humble young man, but he soon became a proud ruler who felt he could do as he pleased, even regarding God’s commandments. God rejected him as king, and young David was anointed by Samuel in anticipation of his being the next king. The last part of the book tells of the rise of David and the decline of Saul. (Many of David’s psalms were probably composed during this troubled time; note Psalm 37.) The book closes on the sad note of Saul’s suicide.

Samuel probably wrote much of this volume

(note 10:25; 1 Chronicles 29:29). If he did, the section after his death (25:1) was written by someone else, probably the prophets Nathan and Gad (1 Chronicles 29:29).

OUTLINE

- I. THE GREAT KING-MAKER: SAMUEL (1—8).
 - A. Early life of Samuel (1—3).
 1. Birth of Samuel (1:1—2:11).
 2. Eli’s failure contrasted with Samuel’s growth (2:12-36).
 3. Samuel’s prophetic call (3).
 - B. Another cycle (4—7).
 1. Oppression by the Philistines (4:1—7:2).
 2. Repentance and deliverance (7:3-17). Samuel is the judge.
 - C. Samuel rejected; the people want a king (8).
- II. THE FIRST KING OVER ALL OF ISRAEL: SAUL (9—31).
 - A. Saul anointed and Samuel’s resignation (9-12).
 - B. Saul’s decline (13—15).
 - C. Rise of David (16:1—18:9).
 - D. Persecution of David (18:10—27:12) and death of Samuel (25:1).
 - E. Saul’s last days and death (28—31).

LESSONS FROM 1 SAMUEL

It is possible to be a good man and a bad father. Eli is one example (2:12, 17, 22). He did not keep up with what his sons were doing. He waited too long to do anything about their actions. He was not firm enough when he did try to discipline them (3:13). Another example is Samuel (8:2, 3). He probably lost his children because he was too busy doing good things himself to keep up with what they were doing.

Saul is a classic example of “a self-made fool” (26:21). He made at least six fatal mistakes: impatience (13), rashness (14), self-will (15), jealousy (18:8, 9), final and complete disobedience (28), and suicide (31:4). It is possible for one to say, “I have sinned,” without real penitence and change of life (26:21).

God looks at the heart, not at the outer man (16:7). God desired a servant “after His own heart” (13:14; note Acts 13:22).

In the New Testament, Jesus is called *the Christ*. “Christ” is Greek for “the anointed one.” The Old Testament word for “anointed” is “Messiah”; the word first appears in 2:10. Anointing

was used to install priests and prophets, but most significant was that *kings* were set apart by anointing (10:1; 16:13). Saul was called “The Lord’s anointed” (24:6; 26:9, 11), literally “The Lord’s Messiah.” When the Jews looked for the Messiah, more than anything else they looked for a *king*.

Seven Things to Remember About Fighting Giants (1 Samuel 17)

We all have giants to face in our lives: people, pressures, worries, and fears. That which is a giant to me may not look like a giant to you, but it is still very real to me—and must be faced.

How can we defeat the Goliaths of life? In 1 Samuel 17 we find seven things to remember about fighting giants.

- I. GIANTS APPEAR WHEN YOU LEAST EXPECT THEM.
 - A. David came to see his brothers, not to fight giants.
 1. Goliath challenges the army of Israel (17:11, 16).
 2. David is sent to check on his brothers (17:12-19).
 3. When David gets there, he sees Goliath (17:20-23).
 - B. You can be sure: Sooner or later, you will have to face your giant.
 - II. YOU CAN FACE GIANTS WITH FAITH OR WITH FEAR.
 - A. Notice the contrast between the soldiers and David.
 1. The men of Israel were afraid (17:24).
 2. David was upset because the name of God was blasphemed. Great incentives were offered, but David was not interested in the rewards; he was concerned about the honor of his God (17:25-27).
 - B. We can be overwhelmed by the giants in our lives—or we can see them as opportunities to glorify God.
 - III. SOMEONE WILL ALWAYS BE READY TO DISCOURAGE YOU.
 - A. Many people tried to put David down.
 1. David’s brother (17:28, 30).
 2. Saul (17:31-37).
 3. Goliath (17:43).
 - B. Do not be surprised if people say, “You can’t do it!”
 - IV. YOU MUST PREPARE BEFORE YOU MEET YOUR GIANTS.
 - A. When Goliath appeared, David was ready. He had prepared:
 1. Fighting lions and bears (17:34-36).
 2. Developing his *faith* in the solitude of the shepherd’s field (17:37; see chap. 16).
 - B. You get ready to meet the *big* problems in life by meeting the *little* problems in life successfully—with the help of God.
 - V. PREPARE THE BEST YOU CAN; THEN DEPEND ON GOD.
 - A. David’s trust was not in himself, but in God.
 1. He had confidence in his training (17:38, 39).
 2. He had confidence in his tools (17:40).
 3. Above all, he had confidence in *God*.
 - a. Goliath’s challenge (17:41-44).
 - b. David’s great expression of trust (17:45-47).
 - B. Sooner or later you will face a giant that you cannot defeat alone. Work on your relationship with God.
 - VI. IF YOU HAVE GIANTS, FACE THEM AT ONCE.
 - A. David *ran* to meet Goliath (17:48), and victory was his (17:49-51)!
 - B. The longer you put off facing your problems, the bigger they become.
 - VII. ONE VICTORY PREPARES FOR ANOTHER.
 - A. David’s victory helped others—and himself.
 1. The Israelite army was then full of courage (17:51-53).
 2. David now had experience to strengthen his faith for later battles (17:54).
 - B. Every time God helps you to win a battle, engrave that fact in your heart. Nothing will give you more strength in future battles!
- CONCLUSION
- As you are confronted by problems in your

life, you can rely on God for strength. Build your faith daily so that you will be prepared to face

and overcome your struggles. Each victory will strengthen you for the next confrontation.

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2 Samuel: A Man After God's Own Heart

CHAPTERS TO READ: 1—7, 9—20, 23, 24.

TITLE

Even though Samuel does not appear in 2 Samuel, it bears his name because 1 and 2 Samuel were originally one book (see notes on 1 Samuel).

BACKGROUND

The Book of 2 Samuel is about the reign of David. David reigned forty years, but only thirty-three of these were over all of Israel; for the first seven years and six months, he reigned over Judah only (5:4, 5). This division continued to exist until it broke forth in the divided kingdom after Solomon's death.

David's reign ultimately became the criterion by which all other reigns were measured (1 Kings 15:3; etc.). Among the accomplishments of David was the establishment of the capital in Jerusalem (5:6-10), a city that became, in the minds of most Israelites, the center of their religion.

One proof that the Bible is from God, not from men, is its openness concerning its greatest characters. There is no covering up of the sin of David. David was "a man after God's own heart" not because he was perfect, but because he was willing to repent and return to God (see Ps. 32 and 51).

Nathan and Gad are possible authors of the book (see notes on 1 Sam.).

OUTLINE

- I. DAVID'S FAME (1—10).
 - A. David's lament over Saul's death (1).
 - B. David made king over Judah only (2:1-11).
 - C. A period of civil war (2:12—4:12).
 - D. David made king over all Israel; he reigns in a marvelous way (5, 6).
 - E. The covenant made regarding the everlasting kingdom (7).
 - F. The high point of David's reign (8—10).

II. DAVID'S SHAME (11—24).

- A. David's sin with Bathsheba (11).
- B. David's repentance (12:1-14).
- C. The sword does not depart from his house (12:15—18:33).
 1. The death of the child (12:15-25).
 2. The rape of Tamar (13:1-22).
 3. The revenge of Absalom upon Amnon (13:23-29).
 4. The revolt of Absalom (14—17).
 5. Absalom killed (18).
- D. The final days of David: troubled, but triumphant (19—24).
 1. David reinstated in Jerusalem (19).
 2. Civil war again (20).
 3. Famine and war (21).
 4. The psalm of thanksgiving (22).
 5. The last words of David (23).
 6. The sin of census and pestilence (24).

LESSONS FROM 2 SAMUEL

David's life is a great object lesson on the consequences of sin. The truth of Gal. 6:7, 8 is written into the fabric of the universe: "Do not be deceived, God is not mocked; for whatever a man sows, this he will also reap. For the one who sows to his own flesh shall from the flesh reap corruption, but the one who sows to the Spirit shall from the Spirit reap eternal life." Even when one repents and the guilt of his sin is removed, the *consequences* of that sin linger on. An act of sixty minutes can devastate a life of sixty years. Young people, old people, stay away from sin! Sin is terrible!

Someone is always around to give us bad ideas (13:3-5).

Unscrupulous men tell women, "If you really *love* me, you'll sleep with me." After they have their way, their "love" generally turns to hate (13:1, 15).

Two thought-provoking verses are 12:23, where David says of his son, "But now he has died; why should I fast? Can I bring him back

again?" and 24:24, where David tells Araunah the Jebusite, "I will not offer burnt offerings to the Lord my God which cost me nothing."

One of the great chapters in the Bible is 2 Samuel 7, in which we find God's covenant

with David. This covenant was partially fulfilled in Solomon and the kings of Judah (1 Chron. 22:6-10; 28:3-6), *but it was completely fulfilled in the coming of Jesus Christ* (Heb. 1:1-8).

A Teen-age Rebel (2 Samuel 13-18)

Picture David with tears streaming down his cheeks, crying, "O my son Absalom, my son, my son Absalom! Would I had died instead of you, O Absalom, my son, my son!" (2 Sam. 18:33). Let us look at this young man whom David loved so much.

I. A YOUNG MAN OF PROMISE.

- A. Our story starts when Absalom is young, perhaps still in his teens.
 - 1. Our world is young today. A high percentage of our population is young—and most of the rest of us are trying to act as if we were.
 - 2. Youth is a wonderful time, but it is also a time of responsibility.
- B. Absalom was not only young; he had great promise.
 - 1. He was a son of the king—King David.
 - 2. He was blessed with good looks and personality. He was a man whom people loved.

II. A REBEL.

- A. For some young people like Absalom, rebellion is the "4th R."
 - 1. Most people go through a period of rebellion in their teens, but the majority make it through this period with a minimum of damage.
 - 2. For some people, however, this rebellion becomes a way of life, something they never grow out of. Absalom was one of these.
- B. The trouble was that Absalom's *heart* was not right.
 - 1. Outside he was handsome; inside he was ugly.
 - 2. He could probably point to David's sin with Bathsheba—and perhaps David's neglect of him—but he was still responsible for himself before God.
- C. Some of the expressions of his rebellion:

- 1. He was deceitful. He presented one face to his father and another face to the people. He started a whispering campaign to gain support.
- 2. He ran with the wrong crowd.
 - a. Some gravitate to the wrong crowd and then stay with it.
 - b. Jesus challenges us not to go along with the crowd. It is hard, but He can help.
- 3. He was immoral.
 - a. The story of his immorality is a sordid one.
 - b. God gave you the gift of sex; do not misuse it.
- 4. He was selfish. Over 20,000 were killed because he wanted to be king. He did not care who got hurt as long as he could have his way.
- D. One of his problems was that he had *some* religion, but *too little*—not really enough to affect his life.

III. JUDGMENT FINALLY CAME.

- A. God was patient with him, but judgment finally came to Absalom.
 - 1. It comes to the young as well as to the old.
 - 2. Absalom's sad death. (Was it worth it, Absalom?)
- B. A point to be made: David's love for him could not keep judgment from coming.
 - 1. Back to the scene with which we started.
 - 2. God loves you! He sent His Son to die for you! If you reject Him, judgment *will* come! Do not rebel against God!

CONCLUSION

Even the greatest love of a parent cannot prevent the consequences of sin. The rebellious child will perish, and his parents will suffer with him. God, our Father, has made provision to turn aside the consequences of our sins. Do not choose His judgment over His love!

A Biographical Outline of 1 and 2 Samuel¹

- I. Samuel, the man of prayer (1 Samuel 1—7).
 - A. Samuel and his mother (1, 2).
 - B. Samuel and his Lord (2, 3).
 - C. Samuel and his people (4—7).
- II. Saul, the king who played the fool (1 Samuel 8—31).
 - A. His early success (8—12).
 - B. His grievous sins (13—15).
 - C. His lack of genuine sorrow (15—31).
- III. David, the man after God's heart (2 Samuel 1—24).
 - A. His early success (1—10).
 - B. His grievous sins (11—12).
 - C. His genuine sorrow (13—24).

¹William Hendriksen, *Survey of the Bible* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Book House, 1976), 225.

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1 Kings:

The Rise and Fall of the Israelite Empire

CHAPTERS TO READ: 1—19, 21, 22.

TITLE

Originally 1 and 2 Kings were one book, even as 1 and 2 Samuel were. The Books of 1 and 2 Samuel were known as “1 Kings,” and 1 and 2 Kings were known as “2 Kings.” Our present 1 and 2 Kings were named after the first word of 1 Kings 1:1 in the Hebrew text, which is translated “Now King. . . .”

BACKGROUND

The Book of 1 Kings has two natural divisions: (1) the reign of Solomon over all of Israel and (2) the division of Israel into the southern kingdom and the northern kingdom.

The reign of Solomon completed the period of the united kingdom, which lasted 120 years. Saul, David, and Solomon each reigned for forty years. Solomon is noted for the building of the temple. During his reign, the Israelite empire reached its peak economically, politically, and geographically (4:21; 10:23, 24).

After Solomon’s death, his son, Rehoboam, listened to bad advice. The ten tribes in the north rebelled and formed the kingdom of *Israel*. Rehoboam was left with two tribes in the south, which became known as the kingdom of *Judah*. From that point, there were always two kings in the land: one ruling in the south and one in the north. This can be confusing to the beginning student. To keep everyone straight, make a chart listing in order the kings of Judah on the left and the kings of Israel on the right.

Because of the promise made to David in 2 Samuel 7, the kings of Judah continued David’s dynasty. Some were good; some were bad. In the north, only occasionally did a son replace his father on the throne. *All* of the kings of the north were *bad*! Some were worse than others. Ahab,

with his wife Jezebel, was the worst. During Ahab’s reign, God sent one of the most amazing men who ever lived: Elijah, the prophet.

Jewish tradition says Jeremiah wrote the book. If he did, he may have been guided by the Holy Spirit to use some of the records preserved by the kings and prophets (1 Kings 11:41; 2 Chron. 9:29; etc.; cf. Is. 36—39 and 2 Kings 18—20). If he was the author, someone else added the final chapter of 2 Kings.

OUTLINE

- I. THE REIGN OF SOLOMON (1—11).
 - A. The wisest man in the Bible (1—10).
 1. The third king over all of Israel (1, 2).
 2. Solomon’s choice of wisdom (3).
 3. Solomon’s power, wealth, and wisdom (4).
 4. The building of the temple (5—8).
 5. The splendor of Solomon’s kingdom (9, 10).
 - B. The most foolish man in the Bible (11).
 1. Solomon’s wives (11:1-3).
 2. Apostasy (11:4-8).
 3. The kingdom largely to be taken away (11:9-40).
 4. The death of Solomon (11:41-43).
- II. THE DIVIDED KINGDOM (12—22).
 - A. The division of the kingdom (12:1-24).
 - B. Subsequent history (12:25—22:53).
 1. Reign of Jeroboam in Israel (12:25—14:20).
 2. Reign of Rehoboam in Judah (14:21-31).
 3. Reign of Abijam in Judah (15:1-8).
 4. Reign of Asa in Judah (15:9-24).
 5. Reign of Nadab in Israel (15:25-31).
 6. Reign of Baasha in Israel (15:32—16:7).
 7. Reign of Elah in Israel (16:8-14).
 8. Reign of Zimri in Israel (16:15-20).
 9. Reign of Omri in Israel (16:21-28).
 10. Reign of Ahab in Israel (16:29—22:40); the work of Elijah!
 11. Reign of Jehoshaphat in Judah (22:41-50).
 12. Start of reign of Ahaziah in Israel (22:51-53).

LESSONS FROM 1 KINGS

Next to the decision to become a Christian, the most important decision one makes is whom he or she will marry. Consider Solomon's marriages to foreign wives and Ahab's marriage to Jezebel.

Learn from Rehoboam, who "forsook the counsel of the elders" and listened to his peers (12:8; 1 Cor. 15:33).

When concern for God's commandments

wanes, division invariably results.

One of the saddest stories in the Bible is the story of the young prophet who believed a lie and was killed (13). God holds us responsible for testing those who say they are speaking for Him (1 Jn. 4:1).

John the Baptizer came in the spirit of Elijah (Mal. 3:1-3; Mt. 17:10-13), preparing the way for the Messiah (Jesus).

Who Turned Off the Water? (1 Kings 17:1-16)

Have you ever had the water turned off at your house? If so, you had two questions: "Who turned off the water?" and "Why?" As we study 1 Kings 17:1-15, we will ask, "Who turned off the water?" and "Why?"

"Why?" is a question we struggle with: "Lord, I'm doing the best I can. Why are all these bad things happening to me?" As we consider the question of "Why?" we must keep in mind Is. 55:8, 9. We do fairly well with the truth of this passage as long as we apply it to others. It is harder to apply it to ourselves!

I. WHY DID GOD TURN OFF THE WATER IN ISRAEL (17:1)?

- A. Let us review what had happened in Israel.
 1. Notice the warning of Deut. 7:1-6 not to intermarry with the surrounding nations. This warning had not been heeded. By Ahab's side is Jezebel.
 2. What did God do to carry out His threats? He sent Elijah to Ahab: 1 Kings 17:1. Notice the word "years"; it did not rain for three and one-half years (Lk. 4:25; Jas. 5:17).
- B. *Why* did God turn off the water in Israel?
 1. God's warning (Deut. 7) is followed up (Deut. 11:16, 17). Elijah prayed that it would not rain (Jas. 5:17). Evidently he prayed that God would do what He had threatened to do in Deut. 11.
 2. God might answer the question "Why?":
 - a. "Because the people disobeyed My voice and deserved punishment."
 - b. "Because My faithful servant Elijah prayed earnestly."
 - c. "To show that I am God; to show My people the error of their ways so they will repent and turn back to Me."

II. WHY DID GOD TURN OFF THE WATER AT CHERITH (17:2-7)?

- A. After the warning to Ahab, God delivered step two in His plan.
 1. Elijah was told what to do one step at a time.
 2. Step two was unexpected: "Go to the brook Cherith and wait" (vv. 3, 4).
 3. Elijah did what God said to do (vv. 5, 6).
 - a. "Cherith" means "cut off" or "separation." For a year or so, Elijah was cut off from all others as he stayed by the brook.
 - b. This time of inactivity must have been hard for Elijah.
- B. Then God turned off the water at Cherith!
 1. Elijah was where God wanted him to be, but the water was turned off! (v. 7).
 2. *Why* did God turn off the water at Cherith?
 - a. Because Elijah had prayed (v. 7; Jas. 5:17). Sometimes our prayers are answered in ways we do not expect.
 - b. Because it was time for the next step. We need to learn to trust in God and His plan for our lives.

III. WHY DID GOD TURN OFF THE WATER AT ZAREPHATH (17:8-16)?

- A. God told Elijah to go to Zarephath (vv. 8, 9).
 1. Zarephath was a small sea-coast town in Phoenicia, directly north of Israel. This was 75 to 100 miles northwest of where Elijah was, across the drought-stricken area. Elijah was still to retain a low profile. He was to stay with a widow there.
 2. How did Elijah respond? "He arose and went"
- B. When Elijah got there, the water had been turned off there, too!

1. The widow with whom he was to stay was dying of starvation!
2. *Why* did God turn off the water at Zarephath?
 - a. The trouble in Israel had come from the north; therefore, they should share in the consequences.
 - b. To continue to stress to Elijah that he was totally dependent upon God.
 - c. To convince a poor widow that Jehovah is the true God.

CONCLUSION

- A. How important it is for us to realize, no matter what happens to us in life, that God has not forsaken us, but still loves us and will provide for us (Is. 49:14-16)!
- B. Here are a few of the great lessons in 1 Kings 17:1-15:
 1. Obey God, even when you do not understand.
 2. Trust God, even when you do not comprehend.
 3. Thank God for whatever you have, even when you do not have what you would like to have.

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2 Kings:

The Last Days of the Kingdom

CHAPTERS TO READ: 2—25.

TITLE

The Books of 1 and 2 Kings were originally one book named from the first word in 1 Kings (see notes on 1 Kings).

BACKGROUND

This book is a continuation of 1 Kings. As the book opens, the kingdom is still divided. The northern kingdom of Israel continued to deteriorate until it was destroyed by Assyria in 722 B.C. The northern kingdom had a total of nineteen kings, all evil.

After the Assyrians destroyed the northern kingdom, they marched into the southern kingdom of Judah. Through the efforts of King Hezekiah and Isaiah, the prophet, God spared the southern kingdom, and it lasted another 150 years. Finally, however, the southern kingdom also fell; it was conquered by the Babylonians in 586 B.C. Judah also had a total of nineteen kings. Some, like Hezekiah and Josiah, were good. Most worshiped both God and idols.

Basically history books, 1 and 2 Kings are written from the standpoint of the prophets who tried to call the people back to God. Most of the political accomplishments of the kings are ignored as irrelevant to God's plans and purposes.

Jewish tradition says that Jeremiah wrote 1 and 2 Kings (see notes on 1 Kings).

OUTLINE

I. THE DIVIDED KINGDOM CONTINUED.

- A. Continuation of the reign of Ahaziah and the reign of Joram (or Jehoram) in Israel (1:1—8:15, 28, 29; 9:1-26, 30-37).
 - 1. Elijah taken up in a whirlwind.
 - 2. Elisha's miracles begun.
- B. The reigns of Jehoram and Ahaziah in Judah (8:16-29; 9:17, 18, 27-29).
- C. The reign of Jehu in Israel (10).
- D. The "reign" of Athaliah and the reign of Joash (or Jehoash) in Judah (11, 12).

- E. The reigns of Jehoahaz and Joash (or Jehoash) in Israel (13:1-13; 14:8-16).
- F. The reigns of Amaziah and Uzziah (or Azariah) in Judah (14:1-14, 17-22; 15:1-7).
- G. The reigns of Jeroboam, Zechariah, Shallum, Menahem, Pekahiah, and Pekah in Israel (14:23-29; 15:8-31; see 16:5ff.); Jonah's prophecy mentioned (14:25).
- H. The reigns of Jotham and Ahaz in Judah (15:32-38; 16).
 - 1. The reign of Hoshea in Israel.
 - 2. Assyrian captivity (17).

II. THE KINGDOM OF JUDAH ALONE.

- A. The reign of Hezekiah (18—20); Isaiah (19:2ff.).
- B. The reign of Manasseh (21:1-18).
- C. The reign of Amon (21:19-26).
- D. The reign of Josiah (22:1—23:30).
- E. The reign of Jehoahaz (23:31-34).
- F. The reign of Jehoiakim (23:35—24:5).
- G. The reign of Jehoiachin (24:6-16).
- H. The reign of Zedekiah and the destruction of Jerusalem (24:17—25:21).

CONCLUSION (25:22-30).

LESSONS FROM 2 KINGS

One person can make a difference, if that person is dedicated to God. Look at Elijah and Elisha.

When we feel overwhelmed by life, we may need to pray that God will open our eyes to the spiritual resources available to us (6:16, 17). Eph. 3:20 points out that God is "able to do exceeding abundantly beyond all that we ask or think, according to the power that works within us."

God has blessed us abundantly. What a tragedy if we remain silent and do not share the good news (7:9; Rom. 1:14, 15)!

There is a message in 2 Kings for every nation on earth. When a nation goes away from God, destruction is inevitable. Sometimes it is delayed, but still it is inevitable. God is in control, and He will not be mocked (Gal. 6:7).

Satan continually tried to frustrate God's plan to bring the Messiah into the world. Wicked

Athaliah attempted to destroy the line of David, but God's plans cannot be thwarted (11:1-3).

“But He Was a Leper” (2 Kings 5:1-15)

The Bible holds a mirror up to man's nature. As we look at the colorful personalities that walk among its pages, we cannot help but see people around us and even ourselves. In the story of Naaman we see many pictured-as Naaman gets sick, as he seeks a cure, as the prescription does not suit him. Hopefully, we can also see some pictured as he cools off and takes the prescription.

I. THE DIAGNOSIS (5:1).

A. Look at Naaman.

1. Many good things are said about him (v. 1).
2. “*But* (subversative conjunction) *he was a leper*. This totally changes the picture! He was a powerful man, but he could not change the diagnosis.

B. A parallel.

1. There are many good people today about whom many good things could be said.
2. *But . . .* they are *sinners* who have never obeyed the gospel. They are *lost*.
 - a. Regardless of how good we are, we are still sinners (Rom. 3:23; Eccles. 7:20), lost in sin (Rom. 6:23). Just being a good person cannot save anyone (Acts 10:2, 22).
 - b. Salvation is found only in Christ (Acts 4:12); we need to be baptized “into Christ” (Rom. 6:3; Gal. 3:27).
 - c. If one thinks he can be saved by his own life, he is guilty of self-righteousness (Prov. 30:12; Rom. 10:3) and needs to look at his true spiritual condition (Is. 64:6).

II. THE PRESCRIPTION (5:2-13).

A. Naaman was told what to do.

1. A ray of hope (v. 3).

2. At first he went to the wrong place; he confused a title for authority.

3. Finally he got his instructions on how to be cured (v. 10). The instructions were simple and conditional.

4. The prescription did not appeal to the patient (v. 11). It hurt Naaman's pride; he had already decided how it would be done (v. 11). He suggested a substitute (v. 12). He went away angry!

B. That is childish, but some do the same today.

1. They have the leprosy of sin, but there is a ray of hope (Jn. 8:32)!
2. Perhaps they go to the wrong place. They ask men, “What do *you* think?” (Prov. 14:12). Only God's Word has the answer (Jn. 17:17).
3. The instructions are given (Mk. 16:16; Acts 2:38). The prescription is simple and conditional.
4. The Lord's prescription does not appeal to many. “Behold, *I* thought”! They try substitutes. Some even get angry (Gal. 4:16).

III. THE CURE (5:14).

A. There is a turning point in our story.

1. Naaman's servant asked a question (5:13).
2. Naaman took the prescription. He had to do it just as the prophet said (v. 14a).
3. As a result he was *cured*—and the cure was even greater than he had hoped (v. 14b)!

B. Trust and obedience are always the turning point.

1. We must obey—*fully* (Mt. 7:21-23).
2. If we do, we will be cured—more wonderfully than we can imagine (Rom. 6:3-11; Eph. 3:20)!

CONCLUSION AND INVITATION

Trust the Great Physician! Obey Him!

1 and 2 Chronicles: Preparing to Return From Captivity

CHAPTERS TO READ: 1 Chron. 13, 15, 17, 21—24, 28, 29; 2 Chron. 3, 6, 9, 11, 23, 24, 29, 32, 35, 36.

TITLE

Originally 1 and 2 Chronicles were one book. The Hebrew name means “diaries, journals, or annals.” The Greek name in the Septuagint means “Things Passed Over,” referring to the supplementary material in the volumes. The English name “Chronicles” is attributed to Jerome.

BACKGROUND

At first glance, 1 and 2 Chronicles seem to be dull genealogies and repetition. There *is* some repetition, but it is not *just* repetition. It is material written at a different time for a different purpose.

Approximately seventy years have passed since the last events of 2 Kings. (There are no historical books on that seventy-year period; see Ezekiel and Daniel for information on the years of captivity.) The Israelites are ready to return from Babylonian captivity (note 2 Chronicles 35:25; 36:23). The Books of 1 and 2 Chronicles are written to give information necessary for resettling the land and re-establishing temple worship. There is emphasis on the need to obey God if the people are to be blessed—and if they are to keep the past tragedy from reoccurring.

In comparing 1 and 2 Chronicles with 1 and 2 Samuel and 1 and 2 Kings, we may note two significant differences: (1) In 1 and 2 Chronicles, only the southern kingdom of Judah is emphasized, and (2) the history in these books was written more from the standpoint of the priests than from the standpoint of the prophets.

One of the best ways to study 1 and 2 Chronicles is to examine these books alongside 1 and 2 Samuel, as well as 1 and 2 Kings, espe-

cially noting the supplementary material in 1 and 2 Chronicles. The following outline notes some of this information.

Jewish tradition attributes the writing of the Books of 1 and 2 Chronicles to the priest Ezra (see background notes on Ezra). This authorship seems likely, since the Book of Ezra picks up where 2 Chronicles leaves off and since the three books are similar in style.

OUTLINES

1 CHRONICLES

I. GENEALOGY (1—9).

II. THE REIGN OF DAVID (10—29).

- A. Further notes on the sin of Uzza (15:2, 13, 15). This is a classic example of doing the right thing in the wrong way.
- B. Satan instigated David’s census (21:1).
- C. The pattern of the temple was given by God, just as the pattern for the tabernacle was (28:11, 12, 19). David did not have the right to “update” the pattern for “changing times.”

2 CHRONICLES

I. THE REIGN OF SOLOMON (1—9).

- A. The extent of Solomon’s kingdom (9:26).
- B. The land promise to the Jews was fulfilled.

II. THE KINGS OF JUDAH (10:1—36:13).

- A. Those from the ten northern tribes who wished to worship God as He had directed joined Rehoboam (11:16, 17). The Bible does not speak of “ten lost tribes” who remained part of God’s plans and purposes.
- B. The work of Isaiah (26:22; 32:20, 32) and Jeremiah (35:25; see also 36:12, 21, 22).

III. THE CAPTIVITY (36:14-23).

- A. God’s messengers had been ignored (36:15, 16).

- B. The period of seventy years is covered in one verse (36:20).
- C. Jeremiah's prophecy that they would be in captivity seventy years—and the fulfillment (36:21-23).

LESSONS FROM 1 AND 2 CHRONICLES

Repetition is not necessarily bad. We learn from repetition; it provides emphasis. If God sees fit to repeat certain information, that shows the importance He placed on it and emphasizes our need to study it carefully. Today people call for "something new" (Acts 17:21); what we need instead is a repetition of God's eternal truths: "Therefore, I shall always be

ready to remind you of these things, even though you know them, and have been established in the truth which is present with you. And I consider it right, as long as I am in this earthly dwelling, to stir you up by way of reminder" (2 Pet. 1:12, 13).

Dry lists and facts are not all that is found in 1 and 2 Chronicles. There is a deeper messianic message. The names listed stand for great periods of time which God's purpose was being unfolded. God was saying to the Jews that, just as He had cared for His people in the past, He would continue to do so. He would fulfill their hopes for a Messiah in due time.

God continues to care for His own!

God's Plan for Revival (2 Chronicles 7:14)

One of the great needs of our day is for revival. The Old Testament gives God's plan for revival in an obscure passage: "If I shut up the heavens so that there is no rain, or if I command the locust to devour the land, or if I send pestilence among My people, and My people who are called by My name humble themselves and pray, and seek My face and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven, will forgive their sin, and will heal their land" (7:13, 14).

The temple had been built, and Solomon had dedicated it. In response, God said, in effect, "Solomon, I accept the house, but don't think that building houses can take the place of building lives. In addition to dedicating this building, you and your people must also dedicate your lives. If you do not, I will send pestilence on you—drought, locusts, and all kinds of trouble—to bring you back to Me." Then He gave our text, 7:14. Let us analyze it to see what God's plan for revival is.

I. A PEOPLE: "Churches don't need new members as much as they need the old ones made over."

A. "My people."

1. God has always had His people.
2. Today: Jn. 1:12; 3:5; 1 Pet. 1:22, 23.

B. "Who are called by My name." God's people have worn His name.

1. Old Testament (Num. 6:27).
2. New Testament (1 Jn. 3:1, 2; 1 Cor. 1:2; Acts 11:26).

II. A PEOPLE SPIRITUALLY PREPARED.

A. Through humility: "Humble themselves." See Prov. 6:16,17; 8:13; 16:18; Is. 57:15; Mt. 5:3; Lk. 14:11; Jas. 4:6; 1 Pet. 5:5, 6.

B. Through prayer: "Pray." See Mt. 7:11; 21:22; Jas. 1:17; 5:16; 1 Jn. 5:14, 15. "We are not prepared until we have pre-prayered."

C. Through seeking God's face: "Seek My face."

1. This implies effort.
2. This implies submitting our wills to the will of God (Mt. 6:33; Ps. 27:8).

D. Through a change of life: "And turn from their wicked ways."

1. Turn from our neglect of the Bible (Hos. 4:6).
2. Turn from our ugly attitudes toward each other (Jn. 13:35).
3. Turn from our indifference toward those who are lost.
4. Turn from all forms of worldliness, putting the things of this world above the things of God. "We have been high-pressured into low living."

III. A PEOPLE PREPARED TO RECEIVE GOD'S BLESSINGS.

A. The blessing of God's hearing: "Then I will hear from heaven."

B. The blessing of God's forgiveness: "I will forgive their sin."

C. The blessing of God's healing: "And will heal their land."

1. In the Old Testament, the emphasis was on physical healing.

2. In the New Testament, the emphasis is on spiritual healing.

CONCLUSION

Consider Ps. 85:6: "Wilt Thou not Thyself revive us again, that Thy people may rejoice in Thee?" Let each of us say, "Let revival begin with me!"

1 and 2 Chronicles: God's Standpoint

While 1 and 2 Chronicles cover the same period of history as Kings from Saul to Zedekiah, they are not a mere duplication, for they include

much which does not occur in previous historical books. Chronicles is an interpretation of Kings, which explains the constant reference in Kings to Chronicles. The former books give us man's standpoint—the latter, God's standpoint. While the Books of Samuel and of Kings deal with both kingdoms of Israel and Judah, Chronicles is concerned only with Judah. Breathing an ecclesiastical atmosphere, 1 Chronicles emphasizes the Lord's activities on behalf of His people, and the justice of His judgments (see 4:9, 10; 5:20, 22, 25, 26, etc.).

All the Books and Chapters of the Bible
Herbert Lockyer

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Extra and Nehemiah: Returning From Captivity

CHAPTERS TO READ: Ezra 1, 3—10; Neh. 1—8, 13.

TITLES

The Book of Ezra is named after the priest who led the Israelites' second return from Babylonian captivity. The Book of Nehemiah is named after its main character, who led the third return.

BACKGROUND

Jeremiah prophesied that the Captivity would last seventy years (Jer. 25:11, 12; 29:10). The seventy years went from the first time Babylon carried the royal seed into Babylon in 605 B.C. (2 Kings 24; Dan. 1) to the first return under the leadership of Zerubbabel (Ezra 1). Three stages of events occurred as the Israelites were carried away into captivity, and there were three stages of their return.

The Book of Ezra tells of the first two returns. In 538 B.C. Zerubbabel led the first return; he served as governor (Hag. 1:1). Working with him were Joshua, the priest (Ezra 3:2), and the prophets Haggai and Zechariah (Ezra 5:1, 2). Their greatest challenge was the rebuilding of the temple.

Since the only tribe that returned *en masse* was the tribe of Judah, the remnant were now called "Jews" (Ezra 4:23). This does not mean, however, that only the tribe of Judah returned. A remnant of all twelve tribes returned (Ezra 6:17; 8:35).

The story of Esther fits into the period of time after the temple was rebuilt. About sixty years went by, and then Ezra led the second return in 458 B.C. Part of his mission was to restore temple worship. Ezra was the first of the specialists in the law, who were known as "scribes" (Ezra 7:6).

Ezra worked with Nehemiah, who led the third return in 444 B.C. to rebuild the walls of

Jerusalem. Nehemiah served as governor (Neh. 5:14). The prophet Malachi probably worked with Nehemiah and Ezra; he addressed the problems which are dealt with in the last half of the Book of Nehemiah.

Ezra probably wrote the book that bears his name; note the use of the first person in chaps. 7—10. If he also wrote the Book of Nehemiah, he probably utilized Nehemiah's personal records (note Neh. 1:1), by the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

OUTLINES

EZRA

- I. FIRST RETURN: REBUILDING THE TEMPLE (1—6); opposition by the Samaritans (4).
- II. SECOND RETURN: REBUILDING SPIRITUALITY (7—10).

NEHEMIAH

- I. THIRD RETURN: REBUILDING THE WALLS (1—6).
 - A. A great example of how to "build."
 1. Great leadership: Nehemiah (a man of prayer: 2:4; 4:4, 5; 6:9, 14).
 2. Great fellowship: the people (2:18; 4:6).
 - B. Attempts to discourage.
 1. Mocking (4:1-6).
 2. War (4:7-23).
 3. Invitation to a "summit" meeting (6:1-4).
 4. Nehemiah's motives impugned (6:5-9).
 5. A false prophet (6:10-14).
- II. GOVERNING: REBUILDING THE NATION (7—13).

LESSONS FROM EZRA AND NEHEMIAH

The Jews' return from captivity again underlines the great truth that God is the God of the second chance.

One lesson the Israelites learned from their captivity experience was the consequences of idolatry. Idolatry was never a major problem with the Jews again.

One problem they did continue to struggle with was mixed marriages—marriages with non-Jews (Ezra 9, 10; Neh. 13). It makes a difference whom one marries.

One of the great descriptions of real teaching, preaching, and Bible reading is given in Nehemiah 8:8.

God continued to work out His plans to bring the Messiah into the world. Zerubbabel was a grandson of King Jehoiachin (1 Chron. 3:19), in the royal line of David. He was an ancestor of Christ (Mt. 1:12)!

Forsaking the House of the Lord (Nehemiah 13:1-11)

Nehemiah is known for the rebuilding of the walls of Jerusalem, but he did many tasks harder than that. The first six chapters of the book revolve around the rebuilding of the walls; the last seven are concerned with his serving as governor over Judah. Rebuilding a people is a harder task than rebuilding a wall.

Chap. 13 tells of the hardest task Nehemiah faced. After serving as governor for twelve years, he went back to Babylon for a while. When he returned to Judah, much of what he had accomplished had to be redone. A question summarizing the problem is found in verse 13: *“Why is the house of God forsaken?”*

Before Nehemiah had left, the people had committed themselves to do the will of God and glorify Him (10:28, 29). However, everything they said they would do, they did not; everything they said they would not do, they did. They forsook the house of the Lord.

Forsaking the house of the Lord involved their forsaking the appointed services at the temple and failing to make the prescribed sacrifices, but it involved more than that. Forsaking the temple service was symptomatic of the general religious decline of the people. Serving God and glorifying God took second place in their hearts and lives.

The question is *“Why?”* Our text gives a number of reasons why they forsook the house of the Lord—and why people do today.

I. PEOPLE FORSAKE THE HOUSE OF THE LORD BECAUSE OF IGNORANCE (13:1-3).

- A. This is basic to all the other problems. They did not know God’s will.
- B. Ignorance is behind all forsaking of the house of God, whether we are talking about attendance or involvement.

II. PEOPLE FORSAKE THE HOUSE OF THE LORD BECAUSE THEY HAVE NOT SEPARATED THEMSELVES FROM THE WORLD (13:1-3).

- A. The Jews were to be a separate people (Deut. 23:3-5). An intimate association with pagans made them lose their distinctiveness.
- B. We are still to remain a distinctive people (2 Cor. 6:14-18; Rom. 12:2; Jas. 4:4; 1 Jn. 2:15-17). We are to be in the world but not of the world (Jn. 17:11, 14-16).

III. PEOPLE FORSAKE THE HOUSE OF THE LORD BECAUSE OF UNCLEANNES IN THEIR LIVES (13:4-8).

- A. The leaders were also affected by the spirit of compromise. They had to get rid of the uncleanness before they could remedy the problem.
- B. We need to be clean in thought (Phil. 4:8) and life (Jas. 1:27; 1 Tim. 5:22).

IV. PEOPLE FORSAKE THE HOUSE OF THE LORD BECAUSE OF GREED AND STINGINESS (13:10-13).

- A. Nehemiah took steps to make sure the tithes were paid.
- B. We are not told to tithe in the New Testament, but we are told to give: 1 Cor. 16:2; 2 Cor. 9:6, 7.

V. PEOPLE FORSAKE THE HOUSE OF THE LORD BECAUSE THEY THINK OF THE LORD’S DAY AS BEING LIKE ANY OTHER DAY (13:15-17).

- A. The Sabbath was set aside for people to think about the things of God.
- B. One of the great challenges we face today is the secularization of the Lord’s Day. Are we part of the problem or part of the solution?

VI. PEOPLE FORSAKE THE HOUSE OF THE LORD BECAUSE THEY MARRY PEOPLE

WHO PULL THEM AWAY FROM THE LORD (13:23-25, 28).

- A. It is hard to serve God when one's mate pulls in the other direction.
- B. See 2 Cor. 6:14.

CONCLUSION: Two things stand out in the chapter:

- A. Nehemiah loved the house of the Lord. Do we love the church (1 Tim. 3:15)?
- B. When something relating to God's will needed doing, Nehemiah *did* it. Do we?

Nehemiah

Nehemiah, the cupbearer in the court of Artaxerxes, received from the king royal ap-

proval for his plan of rebuilding the walls. A strong citadel close to the Egyptian border in the hands of a friendly people would be an asset to Persia. Empowered to proceed with the building of the walls, Nehemiah was given a leave of absence from his royal duties to make a trip to Jerusalem. After surveying the broken-down walls of the city, Nehemiah presented his plans for reconstruction to the elders of Jerusalem and gained their approval. The work was divided into units and the people assigned their task in the total project.

Adapted from *An Outline of Old Testament History*
Charles F. Pfeiffer

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Esther: *God Protects His People*

CHAPTERS TO READ: 1—10.

TITLE

The Book of Esther bears the name of its leading character. The name “Esther” is apparently derived from the Persian word for “star.” Esther’s Hebrew name means “myrtle.”

BACKGROUND

The story of Esther historically occurred between the first and second returns from captivity (see background notes on Ezra and Nehemiah). It tells how God kept His people from being annihilated. If it were not for the courage of Esther, there might have been no nation through whom the Messiah could come. Esther and Mordecai pave the way for the work of Ezra and Nehemiah.

Ahasuerus (1:1) is considered to be another name for Xerxes the Great, who ruled Persia from 486 until 465 B.C. The great feast in the third year of his reign (1:3ff.) may have been in preparation for his ill-fated military expedition against the Greeks. If so, the events of the sixth and seventh years of his reign (2:12, 16) took place after his defeat, as Ahasuerus sought comfort.

The story of Esther takes place at Susa (1:2), the winter residence of the Persian kings, two hundred miles east of Babylon. The month Adar (3:7) corresponds to our March or April.

The feast of Purim is one of the most joyous in the Jewish religious calendar. During the celebration, the Book of Esther is read. In some synagogues, noisemakers are given to the children. When the name of Haman is read, the people hiss and boo. Whenever the name of Esther or Mordecai is read, the people shout and spin noisemakers.

The Book of Esther is the last of the twelve Old Testament books of history. After the recording of events in Ezra, Nehemiah, and Esther, it

would be four hundred years before sacred history was resumed. From this point on, in our study of the Old Testament, we will fit the remaining books into the historical framework of the first seventeen books of law and history.

We do not know who wrote the book. Some early Christians thought it was written by Ezra; others, by Mordecai. The important thing regarding all the books of the Bible is not who the human penmen were, but rather that *God* inspired the writers through His Holy Spirit (2 Pet. 1:21; 2 Tim. 3:16, 17).

OUTLINE

I. ESTHER BECOMES QUEEN (1:1—2:20).

II. HAMAN’S PLOT (2:21—3:15).

III. ESTHER’S COUNTER-PLOT (4—7).

IV. MORDECAI’S ELEVATION; THE DELIVERANCE OF THE JEWS (8:1—9:16).

V. THE FEAST OF PURIM (9:17-32).

VI. THE GREATNESS OF MORDECAI (10).

LESSONS FROM ESTHER

The Book of Esther is one of the finest studies of the providence of God. It is a confirmation of Rom. 8:28: “And we know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose.” The events in the story also confirm Ps. 37:12, 13: “The wicked plots against the righteous, and gnashes at him with his teeth. The Lord laughs at him; for He sees his day is coming.”

Was Vashti right to disobey her husband or not? Perhaps. Since it was inappropriate in that society for women to mingle socially with men (note 1:9), and since the king was drunk when he

called for Vashti (1:10), his request probably involved some impropriety. Some scholars believe he commanded her to appear naked. The important thing, however, is not whether Vashti was right or wrong, but rather that her dismissal provided the opportunity for Esther to become

queen, putting her in a position to help her people.

The book graphically demonstrates the power and influence of godly women!

God continued to protect His people, the through whom the Messiah would come.

═══════ *“For Such a Time as This” (Esther 4:13-17)* ═══════

The name of God does not appear in the Book of Esther. Yet in no other book of the Bible can the hand of God be seen more clearly. It is a beautiful example of God’s providence.

The word “providence” comes from the Latin *provideo* (pro means “before”; *video* means “to see”). *The New Dictionary of Theology* defines it as “the beneficent outworking of God’s sovereignty whereby all events are directed and disposed to bring about those purposes of glory and good for which the universe was made.”

The book has special application to us because in it God works behind the scenes as He does in our own lives. It is clear that He does work!

In our text, Mordecai challenges Esther to consider God’s providential workings in her own life: “Who knows whether you have not attained royalty for such a time as this?” (4:14).

I. A TIME OF FAR-REACHING DECISIONS (1, 2).

- A. The decision to get rid of Vashti (1).
 - 1. The introduction of Ahasuerus (Xerxes).
 - 2. The king’s stag party and Vashti’s refusal.
 - 3. The king’s decision and decree.
- B. The decision to get another queen (2).
 - 1. The king is lonely (after his defeat by the Greeks in 480-479 B.C.?). The proposal of a beauty contest.
 - 2. The introduction of Mordecai and Esther.
 - 3. The selection of Esther. It is not known that she is a Jewess.
 - 4. A side note: Mordecai foils a plot against the king.

II. A TIME OF LONG-STANDING ANIMOSITIES (3).

- A. Haman’s animosity.
 - 1. The introduction of Haman. (An “Agagite” is a descendent of Agag, an Amalekite king killed by Samuel.)

- 2. Haman decides to initiate a Persian Holocaust. The Pur (lot) is cast to determine the best day to wipe out the Jews.

- B. Haman’s under handedness: He bribes the king into signing a decree for the Jews’ destruction. Ten thousand talents of silver would equal 375 tons!

III. A TIME OF LIFE-THREATENING CHOICES (4).

- A. Nationwide mourning by the Jews.
- B. Mordecai challenges Esther to intercede on behalf of her people. She reminds him of the danger of this action. He makes his arguments as to why she should (4:13-17). Esther prepares to go and says, “If I perish, I perish” (4:16).
- C. Three days of fasting (and prayer?).

IV. A TIME OF LIFE-PRESERVING ACTION (5:1—9:16).

- A. The king receives Esther, so she does not die. The first banquet is given and then the invitation to the second.
- B. Haman builds a seventy-five-foot gallows on which to hang Mordecai.
- C. Mordecai is honored for his service to the king.
- D. At the second banquet, Haman’s plot is revealed. He is hanged on the gallows which he himself prepared.
- E. The original edict concerning the massacre cannot be revoked, but a counter-edict is written, allowing the Jews to defend themselves and retaliate.
- F. On the day appointed for the massacre, the Jews are assisted by the king’s forces and win a great victory.

V. A TIME OF LONG-LASTING CELEBRATION (9:17—10:3).

- A. The feast of Purim is established (“Purim” is the plural of “Pur”).
- B. Mordecai is exalted.

CONCLUSION

There are many lessons in the book: the importance of one person, the danger of holding grudges, etc. The greatest lesson is that if we will make ourselves available to God, He will work in our lives!

Here is a question for all to consider: Why has God put us in this place at this time? Are we here “for such a time as this”?

God’s Providence Illustrated

A peculiar feature of the Book of Esther is

that, with the Song of Solomon, it shares the distinction of not mentioning God or any divine name once throughout its pages. Yet the fast-moving action in this drama is eloquent with the overruling providence of God in bringing Esther to the throne for such a time. At times, God may appear as if He is hiding Himself, but seen or unseen He ever accomplishes that which is according to His will.

All the Women of the Bible
Herbert Lockyer

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Job: The Most Patient And Impatient Man in the Bible

CHAPTERS TO READ: 1—11, 32—42.

TITLE

The Book of Job is named after its central character. The original Hebrew title meant “persecuted one.”

BACKGROUND

The Book of Job is the first of five books of Jewish poetry. It is also classified, along with Proverbs and Ecclesiastes, as “wisdom literature.”

The book is not an allegory. Job was an historical character (Ezek. 14:14; Jas. 5:11) who struggled with a question as up-to-date as tomorrow’s headlines: “Why have terrible things happened to me when I’ve spent a lifetime serving God?”

The book is an ancient one, perhaps the most ancient book in existence. The religion depicted is that of the patriarchs (1:5). Job possibly was a contemporary of Abraham.

Look at the book in a modern translation. The first two chapters and most of the last chapter are prose; the middle of the book (more than thirty-nine chapters) is poetry. The discussion between Job and his “comforters” is not impromptu. The orderly sequence of speakers, the rhetoric, and the presence of others (32:2ff.) suggest a planned public debate, perhaps with written speeches (13:26). If the speeches were written, someone added the introduction and conclusion. The Jewish Talmud attributes the book to Moses. The only thing we know for sure is that God preserved the book for our edification (Rom. 15:4).

The rhetoric makes it difficult to follow the arguments of the participants, but the main thoughts are clear: Job’s “friends” say Job’s trials are a result of his sins, that righteous people are not so punished—and if Job does not acknowledge his sin, he adds the sin of hypocrisy. Job

insists that his suffering is not connected with personal sin. He pleads his innocence and notes that the wicked often prosper while the innocent suffer. At the end of the book, God says that Job’s basic position is correct (42:7).

Some think that Elihu was an earthly or heavenly messenger of God. The strongest proof for this is that, at the close, God does not mention Elihu (42:7ff.). In the story, Elihu’s speech serves as a transition from the debate between the three men and Job to the “debate” between God and Job.

OUTLINE

- I. BACKGROUND OF JOB’S SUFFERING (1, 2).
- II. DISCUSSION OF JOB’S SUFFERING (3:1—42:6).
 - A. Job’s discussion with his “friends” (3—31).
 1. Job’s complaint (3).
 2. The first cycle (4—14).
 - a. Eliphaz’ first speech; Job’s reply (4—7).
 - b. Bildad’s first speech; Job’s reply (8—10).
 - c. Zophar’s first speech; Job’s reply (11—14).
 3. The second cycle (15—21).
 4. The third cycle (22—31).
 - B. Elihu’s transition speech (32—37).
 - C. God speaks to Job out of a whirlwind (38—41).
 1. God poses questions (38, 39); Job cannot answer (40:1-5).
 2. More questions (40:6—41:34); Job repents (42:1-6).
- III. THE OUTCOME OF JOB’S SUFFERING (42:7-17).
 - A. Job is vindicated (42:7-9).
 - B. Job is rewarded (42:10-17).

LESSONS FROM JOB

Job is known for his patience (Jas. 5:11), but in his case “patience” does not mean “meek acceptance.” Job did *not* meekly accept what happened to him. He did not understand what was

happening; he got discouraged; he did some ranting and raving. As we usually use the word, Job was very *impatient*. How was Job “patient”? “Patience” here means “endurance,” or refusing to give up. Job said, in effect, “No matter what happens to me, I will stay with God!” (1:21; 2:10). We all get discouraged at times; the great need of our lives is to make a commitment to God that cannot be moved (James 5:10, 11).

The answer to the question of suffering in the Book of Job may disappoint you. God never answers Job’s question of “Why?” Instead, God asks a series of nature questions that Job cannot answer. The point seems to be that if Job cannot

understand things he can see and touch, how can he understand things of the spirit? Since we cannot understand the purposes of God, we must learn to leave things in God’s hands and trust in Him. If we will, things will turn out all right for us, even as they did for Job (Rom. 8:28). This may not be intellectually satisfying; but when tragedy strikes the life of the Christian, it is the only answer that brings lasting comfort.

The Book of Job is not the final word on suffering; the greatest lesson on suffering is found in the New Testament—as the ultimate Righteous Person suffers that we might be saved (Heb. 2:9, 18; 2 Tim. 2:12).

═══════════ *What Is Your Price for Serving God? (Job)* ════════════

Job can be studied on many levels. It is an extremely ancient book with strange customs. It has fascinating things to say about nature. It is probably the first book to wrestle with a problem that still plagues us: “Why do bad things happen to good people?” It is a classic illustration of the biblical concept of patient endurance (Jas. 5:11).

Let us study the book on levels that touch all of our lives.

I. A DEEP LEVEL: A PEEK INTO THE WORKINGS OF THE SPIRITUAL WORLD.

- A. The book does not tell us all, but it does let us see that what happens in heaven affects what happens on earth.
 1. On earth: 1:1-5.
 2. In heaven: 1:6-12 (note 1 Pet. 5:8).
 3. On earth: 1:13-22.
 4. In heaven: 2:1-6.
 5. On earth: 2:7-10.
- B. Some insights from this story:
 1. Some insights into Satan and his work.
 - a. Satan is real.
 - b. Satan is trying to destroy man.
 - c. Satan is powerful, but he is not omnipotent, omnipresent, or omniscient (Jas. 4:7).
 2. Some insights into divine workings.
 - a. God *allows* Satan to do what he does; God is even spoken of as being *active* in what happened to Job (42:11). God and Satan are working at the same time in the same events. They are not *cooperating*; their *purposes* are very different.

Satan is trying to destroy Job; God is trying to help Job. Other events in which both worked, one to destroy, the Other to help: the cross and Paul’s “thorn in the flesh,” for example (see 2 Cor. 12:7, 9).

- b. Maybe God was trying to help Job with a *pride* problem (note 33:17; 42:5, 6).
- C. When trouble comes, we need to understand that it does not come directly from God. We also need to understand that God may be *using* that event to make us better people!

II. A DEEPER LEVEL: THE QUESTION OF WHY WE SERVE GOD.

- A. In the interchange between God and Satan, an underlying theme emerges: *Will man serve God without selfish motives?*
 1. Satan was convinced that every man has his price when it comes to serving God (1:10, 11; 2:4). He thought that most, if not all, serve God for what they can get out of it—material wealth, a happy family, good health, or whatever—and that if they stop receiving those blessings, they will turn away from God.
 2. Job’s friends would not have stated their belief in that way; but they still believed that the way to get what one wants out of life is to serve God, and if one is not getting what he wants out of life, there is something wrong with his relationship with God. Job, having been raised in the same philosophy, cried, “Not fair! Not fair!”
 3. The influence of Satan can still be seen in the “health and wealth gospel”: “Serve God

(and send us money) and God will give you everything you want!"

4. We can fall into the same trap. "Serve God," we often say, "and you will have happy lives, great marriages, and financial prosperity."
 - a. Christianity can enhance any life; but if this is as far as we have gotten in our thinking, we have left our minds wide open for Satan to plant doubt there.
 - b. When the world falls in on us, as it did on Job, what then? If everything we

hold precious is taken from us, will we still serve God?

- B. We need to serve God, because it is *right!* It took Job forty-one chapters to realize this, but finally he said, in effect, "You are God and I bow before you for that reason and no other" (42:2). God *deserves* our allegiance! This is difficult, but it is right!

CONCLUSION

Do *we* have a price for serving God? It is a question worth asking ourselves.

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Psalms: *The Jew's Song Book*

PSALMS TO READ: 1, 2, 8, 14, 15, 19, 22, 23, 32, 37, 42, 46, 51, 73, 90, 100, 110, 121, 122, 127, 136, 137, 139, 148.

TITLE

The Hebrew name for Psalms means “book of praises.” Our title comes from the Greek word *psalmos*, which basically means “songs.”

BACKGROUND

Psalms was the Israelites’ prayer book and hymnal. It was used for both private and public worship. The early church probably used some of the psalms in their worship (Eph. 5:19). We still sing songs based on Psalms 19, 23, 100, and others.

Though the psalms were written thousands of years ago, they are timeless. They tell of the depths of despair and the heights of happiness. Always they speak of the writer’s relationship with his God. They strike a response in our hearts today and make up the favorite Old Testament book of many Christians.

The book is written in poetry (note a modern translation). The poetry of the Jews was not written with rhyme, but with rhythm. Their poetry used *parallelism*. Two of the more common types of parallelism were *synonymous* parallelism (where two lines say the same thing in different words; note Ps. 19:1, 2) and *antithetic* parallelism (where one line expresses a thought and the next line gives the other side of the coin; note Ps. 1:6).

We generally think of this book exclusively as the psalms of David. David was known as “the sweet psalmist of Israel” (2 Sam. 23:1; see also Lk. 20:42). According to the notes before the psalms, although David wrote at least half of the psalms, many writers contributed to the book, including Moses, David’s three music leaders (1 Chron. 15:16-20; 16:37-42), and Solomon. The

Septuagint also attributes Psalms 1 and 119 to Ezra, who was probably the final compiler.

We do not know where the notes before the Psalms originated, but they predate the Septuagint. Though not inspired, they are generally helpful. Many of the notes refer to musical directions; some of the more obscure words were probably names of familiar tunes (check a Bible with good sidenotes or footnotes). Musical directions are sometimes found within the psalms; “selah,” for example, may indicate a pause.

OUTLINE

Psalms is divided into five books. If your Bible does not indicate this, check the last few verses in each section. Each book closes with words similar to these: “Blessed be the Lord God of Israel. . . .”

- I. 1—41 (mainly psalms of David?).
- II. 42—72 (mainly historical psalms?).
- III. 73—89 (mainly ritualistic psalms?).
- IV. 90—106 (mainly pre-Captivity psalms?).
- V. 107—150 (mainly Captivity, restoration psalms?).

There are many interesting sections and types of psalms. There are acrostic psalms (such as 25, 34, 37, 111, 112, 145); in these psalms, the first word of the first line begins with the first letter of the Hebrew alphabet, and each line begins with the next letter. Psalms 90 through 100 may have been the original hymnbook of the Jews. The Hallel (or “Praise”) Psalms (113—118, 136) were used at the Passover feast (these would have been sung by Jesus and the disciples at the Last Supper). The “Degree” (or “Ascent”) Psalms

(120—134) were sung by pilgrims on their way to Jerusalem. The book closes with the Hallelujah Psalms (146—150). “Hallelujah” means “praise Jehovah.”

The psalms are often studied by categories: royal psalms (such as Psalm 2), historical psalms (66), creation psalms (8), psalms that glorify God’s Word (119), penitential psalms (51), psalms of thanksgiving (103), etc. The most difficult category for us to deal with is psalms of vengeance, such as Psalm 58. Regarding these psalms, keep in mind (1) that the Book of Psalms is in the *Old Testament* and (2) that the psalmist leaves the matter of vengeance in the hand of God; he does not take the law into his own hands.

LESSONS FROM PSALMS

Although we must go to the New Testament to find specific instructions for worship today,

the Book of Psalms teaches us much about the *spirit* of worship. True worship is not mere ceremony; it is based on a *relationship* with God and a *life* with God (see Ps. 84; Jn. 4:23, 24).

Though we categorize Psalms as poetic rather than prophetic, there are more references to the Book of Psalms in the New Testament than any other book in the Old Testament. Of 283 Old Testament quotations in the New Testament, 116 are from Psalms.

Of greatest importance are the Messianic references (note Lk. 24:44). Among other things, the psalms tell us of the sonship of Jesus (2:7), His ministry (40:7, 8), His zeal (69:9), His rejection (118:22), and His betrayal (41:9). His death is described in Psalm 22, with details given in 34:20 and 69:21. References are also made to His resurrection (16:8-10), ascension (24:7-10; 68:18), glorification (110:1), and reign (8:6).

“Why Hast Thou Forsaken Me?” (Psalm 22)

When you hear the words “Why hast thou forsaken me?” no doubt you think of Jesus’ words on the cross, but these words are from the first verse of Psalm 22. *More lines apply to Jesus in Psalm 22 than in any other psalm.* Psalms 22, 23, and 24 are often thought of as a trilogy of psalms that tell of Jesus: the Cross (22), the Crook (23), and the Crown (24).

Psalm 22 can be approached from three viewpoints: (1) the viewpoint of *David*, who wrote the psalm; (2) the viewpoint of *Jesus*, who completely fulfilled the terms of the psalm; and (3) *our* viewpoint, for whom this psalm was recorded (Rom. 15:4).

I. A MESSAGE ABOUT SUFFERING.

- A. David’s *problems*, possibly during the time he was being pursued by Saul (vv. 1-21).
 - 1. Basically three problems are spoken of in the Psalms; David speaks of all three:
 - a. The feeling of being God-forsaken (v. 1; see also vv. 6-8, 11, 19).
 - b. Physical (and spiritual?) illness (vv. 14, 15, 17).
 - c. The persecution of powerful enemies (vv. 6-8, 12, 13, 16-18).
 - 2. Even though David is perplexed, he does not forsake his faith. In the first twenty-one verses David’s focus switches constantly

between his troubles and his God.

- B. David’s *praise*, perhaps after God answers his prayers (vv. 22-31).
 - 1. Praise for how God had blessed him:
 - a. David would praise Him “in the midst of the assembly” and encourage others to praise Him.
 - b. He would share his blessings.
 - c. Others would be brought to faith.
 - 2. The psalm begins in crisis (“*why?!?*”) and ends in confidence (“*he has performed it!*”).
- C. A lesson for us: When troubles come into our lives, we may sometimes feel “God-forsaken”; but we need to keep in mind that God is always there, even in the middle of our troubles (Ps. 46:1). If we do not lose faith, we shall have the victory.

II. A MESSAGE ABOUT SALVATION.

- A. When the first line of a psalm was given, the whole of the psalm was brought to the minds of those who knew the Scriptures.
- B. When Jesus echoed the first line of Psalm 22, He was probably not speaking merely of the *pain* of the psalm, but also of the *promise* of the psalm (1 Pet. 1:11).
 - 1. The psalm gives a graphic picture of the *suffering* of Jesus.
 - a. The piercing of His hands and feet (v. 16; Lk. 23:33; 24:36-40; Jn. 20:24-29).

- b. His clothing stripped; exposed to the gaze of those who passed by (v. 17).
 - c. The casting of lots for His garments (v. 18; Mt. 27:35; Mk. 15:24; Lk. 23:34; Jn. 19:24).
 - d. The abuse of the soldiers and the crowd (vv. 6-8; Mt. 27:39ff.; Mk. 15:20, 29ff.).
 - e. The words of Jesus' enemies (v. 8; Mt. 27:43; Lk. 23:35).
 - f. His cry on the cross (v. 1; Mt. 27:46; Mk. 15:34).
 - g. The words "I am thirsty" (perhaps v. 15; Jn. 19:28-30).
2. The psalm also anticipates the *glory* of Jesus—His resurrection, His ascension, the

establishment of His kingdom, and its growth. Heb. 2:12 quotes verse 22.

C. Lessons for us:

1. The death of Jesus was according to the plan of God, a plan to bring about our redemption. The psalm begins, "Why?" We now *know* "why" (Is. 53:6; 1 Cor. 15:4).
2. We need to *accept* God's marvelous provisions through faith and obedience!

CONCLUSION

Like David, we should keep our faith in good times and bad. We can find comfort in the pain and promise of our Savior.

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Proverbs: The Book of Practical Wisdom

CHAPTERS TO READ: 1, 3, 5, 6, 8—25, 30, 31.

TITLE

The title of the Book of Proverbs comes from the first line. The Hebrew word for “proverb” is *mashal*; the Greek equivalent is *paroimiai*. Both indicate “a comparison.” A proverb is defined as “a short, pithy, axiomatic (self-evident) statement.”

BACKGROUND

What the Book of Psalms was to devotional life, Proverbs was to practical life. Psalms made the heart warm toward God; Proverbs made the face shine toward men.

The stated purpose of Proverbs is to impart wisdom (1:1ff.). In addition to being “a book of poetry,” Proverbs is classified as “wisdom literature.” Wisdom has been defined as “the practical application of knowledge”; wisdom in Proverbs includes that, but goes deeper. It is “coming to see things as God sees them.” “*The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom*” (9:10; see also 1:7).

Wisdom is imparted in the book through proverbs. A proverb is a *general* truth, recognized by most people. “Do you see a man skilled in his work? He will stand before kings” (22:29). That such a man will be successful is a *general* truth, not a *universal* one. Economic conditions can negate the most conscientious diligence. All other things being equal, a man diligent in business will be more successful than one who is not. Take care not to make a proverb say more than it says.

Some proverbs are grouped together, but most of the book goes from subject to subject with little connection between themes. Proverbs were an important teaching tool, since most people could not read and manuscripts were few. Proverbs were easily committed to memory. They were especially useful for teaching the young (note the phrase “my son” in 1:8, 10; 2:1; etc.).

Solomon is the main writer of the book (1:1; 10:1; 25:1). Jewish tradition says Solomon wrote the book in middle age. Of the three thousand proverbs he wrote (1 Kings 4:32), these have been preserved. Other writers contributed to the book, including Agur

(30:1) and King Lemuel (31:1). Some think “Lemuel” was Bathsheba’s pet name for her son, Solomon. “The men of Hezekiah” (25:1) apparently were the final compilers of the book.

OUTLINE

Proverbs is arranged in five books, as was Psalms:

- I. “PROVERBS OF SOLOMON” ON THE PRAISE OF WISDOM (1—9).
- II. “PROVERBS OF SOLOMON” ON A VARIETY OF SUBJECTS (10—24).
- III. HEZEKIAH’S COLLECTION, PERHAPS WITH AN ECONOMIC EMPHASIS (25—29).
- IV. “WORDS OF AGUR,” MAINLY ON NATURE (30).
- V. “WORDS OF KING LEMUEL,” RELATING TO HIS MOTHER (31).

Usually the book is studied by subjects. Here are some of the practical subjects:

1. Work (6:6-11; 14:23; 18:9; 19:24; 22:13, 29; 24:30-34).
2. Honesty (11:1, 3; 16:11; 20:17).
3. Self-control (14:17, 29; 15:18; 16:32; 19:11; 25:28).
4. Drinking and drunkenness (20:1; 23:20, 21, 29-32; 31:4-7).
5. The tongue (10:18, 19; 11:13; 12:22, 25; 13:3; 15:23; 18:21; 25:11).
6. Nagging (9:13; 19:13; 21:9, 19; 25:24; 27:15).
7. Being a wife and mother (5:18-20; 11:16, 22; 12:14; 14:1; 18:22; 19:14; 31:10-31).
8. Discipline of children (13:24; 19:18; 22:15; 23:13, 14; 29:15, 17).

LESSONS FROM PROVERBS

Like the Book of Psalms, Proverbs has universal appeal. Little in the book is distinctly Jewish; the name of Israel is not found, and there is no mention of the feasts, etc. The truths found there are still as generally true as they were in the days of Solomon.

The book has been called “the best guide book of success a young man can follow.” But this is not necessarily success as the world defines it. Proverbs tells of a lifestyle based on *reverence for God*. “The fear of the Lord” is a key phrase in this book (1:7, 29; 2:5; 8:13; 9:10; 10:27; 14:26, 27; 15:16, 33; 16:6; 19:23; 22:4; 23:17; 31:30), as it is in all the books of poetry and wisdom. The phrase “the fear of the Lord” refers to a profound respect and abiding reverence for God, acknowledging Him as the ruler of all things, includ-

ing our lives. Perfect love may cast out the fear of punishment (1 Jn. 4:18), but it cannot and must not cast out “the fear of the Lord” (Mt. 10:28; Acts 10:35; 2 Cor. 7:1; Heb. 12:28; Rev. 11:18; etc.).

Jesus’ practical teaching often echoed the teachings of the Book of Proverbs. He often taught in *parables*. (The original words in the Hebrew and Greek languages did not make a distinction between a “proverb” and a “parable”; both taught by making comparisons.)

The Neglected Garden (Proverbs 24:30-34)

The Book of Proverbs is filled with practical advice on almost every subject we might imagine. One topic that is emphasized is the importance of diligence and hard work. Laziness is severely condemned (6:6-11; 20:4; 22:13; 26:14). A key passage on this is 24:30-32: “I passed by the field of the sluggard, and by the vineyard of the man lacking sense; and behold, it was completely overgrown with thistles, its surface was covered with nettles, and its stone wall was broken down. When I saw, I reflected upon it; I looked, and received instruction.” The story of the neglected garden has lessons for us all.¹

I. THE WONDERFUL POTENTIAL.

- A. The man failed, but *not* for these reasons:
 1. Because he had no garden in which to work. (We do not fail because God has not given us a chance.)
 2. Because the soil was not good. Soil that will grow weeds can grow flowers and vegetables. (There is within each one of us a tremendous potential for good—or evil.)
 3. Because God failed to send rain and sunshine. Weeds require rain and sunshine just as good plants do. (God does not fail us; we fail ourselves.)
 4. Because he could not keep animals out. He had a stone wall to keep animals out, but he had allowed it to fall down. (We cannot blame society, our parents, or the church; if we are not what we should be, we can only blame ourselves.)
- B. He did not fail because he *could* not, but because he *would* not. The potential was there!

II. THE SHAMEFUL NEGLECT.

- A. The man had tremendous potential, but he neglected that potential. As a result:
 1. He raised no crop; he made no positive contribution to life.
 2. He did raise something—thorns and nettles; he made life harder for others.

3. He destroyed his soul; he became a man “lacking sense.”

B. What about our potential? Have we neglected it? Are we “lacking sense”?

1. God expects us to be busy, to work, to take advantage of our opportunities, to develop our potential (Eccles. 9:10; Mt. 24:46; Lk. 2:49; Jn. 9:4; Gal. 5:6; 6:9; Eph. 4:28; Col. 3:23; 2 Thess. 3:10; 1 Tim. 6:18;).
2. We often fail to obey God in these matters because of neglect (Heb. 2:3; 1 Tim. 4:14).
 - a. Neglect will keep us from doing what we should do and being what we should be.
 - b. Neglect will affect others adversely.
 - c. Ultimately, neglect will destroy our souls.

III. THE AWFUL RESULT.

- A. Because of laziness and neglect, the man was a failure in life.
- B. All of us want to succeed, but success cannot be found on the half-price counter. It takes much effort. Most who fail will not fail because they decided to fail or because they desired to fail, but because of *neglect*. It is easier to do little or nothing than to work for success.
 1. Neglect a piece of machinery, and it will fall apart.
 2. Neglect a marriage, and it will crumble.
 3. Neglect a child, and he will break your heart (29:15).

CONCLUSION

Have we neglected our souls?

¹Material has been taken from Clovis G. Chappell, *The Village Tragedy and Other Sermons* (New York: Abingdon Press, 1925), 158-68; George W. Bailey, “The Neglected Garden,” *The Preacher’s Periodical* 3 (August 1982): 15; and others.

Ecclesiastes: The Emptiness of Life *The Song of Solomon: A Song of Love*

CHAPTERS TO READ: Eccles. 1—12; Song 1—3, 7, 8.

TITLES

The title of the Book of Ecclesiastes begins with the Greek word for “church” or “assembly” (*ekklesia*), then adds an ending (*tes*) which indicates occupation or primary pursuit. “Ecclesiastes” is generally translated “preacher,” but this is not the usual Greek word for “preacher.” A literal translation of “Ecclesiastes” would be “church-man.” The closest we can come in modern parlance is “lay preacher”—one who usually does not preach, but who has a message to share.

The title “The Song of Solomon” is a shortened form of the first line of the book: “The Song of Songs, which is Solomon’s.” “Song of Songs” is a Hebrew expression for “the greatest of songs.” Solomon wrote 1005 songs (1 Kings 4:32); this apparently was one of his favorites.

BACKGROUND

At first reading, Ecclesiastes seems to be a gloomy book. The writer, having tried everything to find happiness, is disillusioned. “Everything is vanity,” he concludes. (“Vain” here means “empty, useless.”) Phrases like “vanity of vanities” are used thirty-four times in the book. We need to understand the perspective of the writer. “Under the sun,” which appears thirty-one times, is a key expression in understanding his perspective. “Under the sun” (i.e., in *this* life), all is emptiness. This book has a powerful message for all who try to find happiness in the things of this life (Lk. 12:15; Phil. 4:11). The book hints that we must look *beyond* this life to find happiness. “God” is used forty times. We must look beyond “the sun” to “God”; *then* life will make sense (12:13; Rom. 8:18-25).

Jewish tradition says that Solomon wrote this book in his old age. The historical books (1 Kings; 2 Chron.) do not record that Solomon repented after he went astray in his old age; perhaps this book is his cry of penitence.

Also, according to Jewish tradition, Solomon wrote The Song of Songs in his youth. Since at the writing, the groom (probably Solomon) apparently

had only a few wives (6:2, 3, 8), this may be true. In contrast with Ecclesiastes, this book is full of zest for life. It seems to celebrate Solomon’s love for his bride. Since most of Solomon’s marriages were politically motivated, marrying for love was a special thing.

It is often difficult to grasp who is speaking in the Song. The Hebrew text has masculine and feminine pointings and often indicates shifts from one individual to a group. Versions which show this are helpful.

The simplest way to view the book is that God recognizes the importance of married love. The Jews preferred to think of the book as an allegory that spoke of God’s love for Israel. Since the Israelites were God’s special (chosen) people, but not God’s only people (God was concerned about all nations, as the Book of Jonah shows), this interpretation does no violence to general Bible truth. Many Christian interpreters advocate the idea that the book speaks of Christ’s love for the church, but this idea poses a major problem: It makes the church one love among many, and this is not so (Mt. 16:18; Acts 20:28; Eph. 1:22, 23; 5:23, 25). Usually, the simplest view of a given passage is the correct one.

OUTLINES

Ecclesiastes is hard to outline, and there are a variety of views of The Song of Solomon. The outlines below represent one approach to each:

ECCLESIASTES

PROLOGUE (1:1-11).

- I. Solomon seeks happiness in wisdom (1:12-18).
- II. Solomon seeks happiness in riches and regal living (2, 3).
- III. Solomon seeks happiness in prominence, power, and prestige (4—6).
- IV. Solomon seeks happiness in earthly, forbidden pleasures (7, 8).
- V. Solomon comes to the conclusion that happiness

is not found in these, but in devotion to duty in this life and in preparation for the life to come (9:1—12:7).

EPILOGUE (12:8-14).

THE SONG OF SOLOMON

- I. Scene one: In the king's palace (1:2—2:7).
- II. Scene two: The bride recalls her days of courtship in the spring in northern Palestine (2:8—3:5).
- III. Scene three: The writer recalls the wedding day, when the bride came to the palace (3:6—5:1).

————— *Making Sense of Life (Ecclesiastes 3:1-15)* —————

The best known passage in Ecclesiastes, 3:1-9, begins, "There is an appointed time for everything. And there is a time for every event under heaven," and then it lists examples: "a time to give birth, and a time to die; a time to plant, and a time to uproot what is planted; a time to kill, and a time to heal; . . . a time to weep, and a time to laugh; . . . a time to keep, and a time to throw away; . . . a time to be silent, and a time to speak; a time to love, and a time to hate; a time for war, and a time for peace." Some scholars take the passage to teach that all of life is predetermined, but that would remove the free moral agency of man. Others say that these verses stress there is *an appropriate time* for all things. Solomon makes that point several times in the book (3:11; 8:5, 6; 11:9; 12:1). Since the context (2:26; 3:9, 10a) is negative, however, the passage under consideration seems to teach that life is *frustrating*. Nothing stays done; good and bad seem to cancel each other out.

Is there any way to make sense out of life? Verses 1-9 are followed by one of the most meaningful passages in the book, one of the rare occasions in Ecclesiastes when heavenly sunshine breaks through the earthly gloom. In verses 10-15, we see four suggestions for making sense of life:

- I. KNOW THAT THE HAND OF GOD IS IN ALL THAT HAPPENS (3:10).
 - A. God's name was not mentioned in 3:1-9. Now it is.
 - B. God's plan in all that happens is to "exercise" men.
- II. UNDERSTAND THAT THERE IS VALUE IN ALL THAT HAPPENS (3:11).
 - A. All of the things in 3:1-8 are "beautiful" in their time ("beautiful" is the literal Hebrew). We may not always see the beauty, but consider Rom. 8:28.

IV. Scene four: Returning to the palace setting, the bride sings of her love; she wishes to return to the scene of courtship days (5:2—8:4).

V. Scene five: Back home in northern Palestine (8:5-14).

LESSON FOR US

There are no direct references to the Messiah in Ecclesiastes or The Song of Solomon, but we must always keep in mind that it is *Jesus* (Lk. 11:31) who gives meaning to life . . . and who makes our marriages all they can be!

B. One value exists in all that happens: We are impressed with the fact that this world is not our home. God has set "eternity" in our hearts (see NASB, NIV, and other modern translations), so this world can never satisfy.

III. REALIZE THAT THERE IS MUCH GOOD IN THIS LIFE THAT WE SHOULD ENJOY (3:12, 13).

- A. Look again at 3:1-8. Sad times follow happy times, but happy times also follow sad times. There is always something to look forward to.
- B. Notice the simple pleasures of 3:13; these are things the humblest of men can have. We must learn to enjoy the simple things of life (Phil. 4:11); these are God's *gift* to us.

IV. LEARN THEN TO TRUST IN GOD—AND LEAVE ALL THINGS IN HIS HANDS (3:14, 15).

- A. Verse 15 again notes the endless repetition of life, but adds the important thought that *God* is in control.
- B. Verse 14 lets us know that when God does something:
 1. It is *permanent*.
 2. It is *perfect*.
 3. It has *purpose*.
- C. Since God is in control, we may draw some conclusions:
 1. We need God; without Him, all is a vicious circle.
 2. We need to learn to *fear* Him, respect Him, and do His will (12:13).
 3. We need to trust Him and leave things in His hands.

CONCLUSION

Eccles. 3:1-15 puts us in our place. It humbles us, but it also fills us with confidence. We are nothing; God is everything. *In Him*, all is right!

Isaiah: The Messianic Prophet

CHAPTERS TO READ: 1, 2, 6—9, 13, 28, 35, 40, 43, 45, 49, 52, 53, 55, 57, 59, 60—62, 64—66.

TITLE

The Book of Isaiah is named after the author. “Isaiah” means “salvation is of Jehovah.”

BACKGROUND

The Book of Isaiah is the first of the seventeen Old Testament books of prophecy. The first five prophetic books are classified as “Major Prophets.” A prophet was a spokesman for God. In speaking for God, a prophet sometimes foretold the future, but this was not the major thrust of his mission. His primary burden was for his own day.

Isaiah had an illustrious mission of fifty or sixty years as prophet, poet, statesman, advisor, orator, and writer, starting in the days of King Uzziah (1:1) and closing after King Hezekiah’s death (2 Chron. 32:32). During Isaiah’s lifetime, the northern kingdom of Israel was destroyed by Assyria. Because of Isaiah’s influence, Jerusalem was spared at that time. Isaiah anticipated, however, that the period of reform would not last, so he looked ahead to the Babylonian captivity and the return from captivity. In his book, Isaiah does three things: (1) He warns the people of Judah about what will befall them; (2) he thunders prophecies against other nations, proving that God knows what He is talking about; and (3) he looks ahead to brighter days: to the return after captivity, and to the coming of the Messiah and His kingdom.

Because Isaiah named the Persian king Cyrus almost two hundred years before Cyrus was born, those who deny the verbal inspiration of the Scriptures think that the Bible refers to two or more “Isaiahs,” at least one of whom lived after Cyrus. However, the inspired Bible (see 2 Tim. 3:16, 17) knows of only one prophet named Isaiah. The prophecy about Cyrus (44:28; 45:1-14) is one of the most remarkable in the Bible.

Isaiah is especially known for his messianic prophecies (note Lk. 4:17-21; Jn. 12:41; Acts 8:26-35ff.). He is quoted more than forty times in the New Testament—more often than any other prophet. There

are so many passages concerning the Messiah and His kingdom in Isaiah that the book has been referred to as “the fifth gospel” or “the gospel according to Isaiah.”

OUTLINE

Isaiah has been called “the Bible in miniature.” The Bible has sixty-six books, and Isaiah has sixty-six chapters. The first thirty-nine chapters have an Old Testament flavor, while the final twenty-seven chapters have a New Testament flavor.

I. WARNINGS (1—39).

- A. Against the ungodly alliance of Judah with Assyria (1—12).
- B. Against various nations, many of whom had been looked to by both Israel and Judah for assistance (13—27).
- C. Against Judah’s futile alliance with Egypt made by Hezekiah (28—35).
- D. Historical section, showing that many of the things prophesied earlier came to pass (36—39; cf. 2 Kings 18—20).

II. CONSOLATION (40—66).

- A. Deliverance from Babylonian captivity (40—48).
- B. The Messiah revealed (49—57); the Suffering Servant (53)!
- C. The Messiah and His kingdom; references to the return from captivity (58—66).

LESSONS FROM ISAIAH

Here are a few of the passages from Isaiah about Christ and His kingdom: a root out of Jesse (11:1), the virgin birth (7:14), the work of John (40:3, 4), His ministry (61:1, 2), rejection by the Jews (8:14, 15; 28:16), His trials and death (53), His resurrection (25:8), sitting on David’s throne in the heavens (9:6, 7), establishment of the church or kingdom (2:2, 3), a new name to be given (62:12).

Many of Isaiah’s prophecies about the Messiah and His kingdom were misunderstood by the Jews of Jesus’ day—and are misunderstood by some today. The Jews looked for a physical fulfillment, while

Jesus stressed that His kingdom was “not of this world” (Jn. 18:36). As far as this life is concerned, the promise of peace in Isaiah finds fulfillment in the hearts of God’s people; the ultimate fulfillment of the promise will take place in heaven. Again, the “new heavens and a new earth” (65:17) referred to a restoration of an original relationship. To the Jews, this referred to the return from captivity; to us, it speaks of heaven where we will be with God.

Misunderstanding also surrounds “Lucifer” (14:12, KJV; the NASB has “star of the morning”). The name “Lucifer” means “the shining one.” It does not refer to Satan, but to Babylon. This is the only place the name “Lucifer” is found in Scripture.

Like other prophets, Isaiah is an example of faithfulness. Many think Heb. 11:37 refers to him. Tradition says that Isaiah, at age ninety, was sawn in two in the trunk of a carob tree, by order of King Manasseh.

“Holy, Holy, Holy” (Isaiah 6:1-9a)

Uzziah reigned fifty-two years and was a great king; the nation prospered (2 Chron. 26:5). Then pride led King Uzziah into the temple to perform as a priest, and God cursed him with leprosy. He was banished; when he died, he was not even buried with the kings (2 Chron. 26:16-23). This surely shook all whose trust was in men. Isaiah needed to see that the true King was *not* dead (6:1, 5)!

Problems in the world, in our community, in the church, and in our own lives shake our faith today. We, too, need to see the living God!

I. THE VISION (6:1-4).

A. Isaiah in the temple, in the presence of God!

1. The description of God (v. 1).
 - a. On a throne—He rules.
 - b. High and lifted up—He is above all and over all.
 - c. His robe (presence) *fills* the temple!
2. The seraphim (vv. 2, 3).
 - a. Literally “the fiery ones.” These angelic beings or manifestations of God’s majesty express God’s character.
 - b. With two wings, each hovers and flies about the room. With the other four, each shows his awe of God’s presence.
 - c. They cry to each other, “Holy, Holy, Holy.” God is holy to the superlative degree. The *whole earth* is filled with His glory; He is not confined to the temple.

3. The entire structure trembles and is filled with smoke (v. 4).

B. God is holy! Jesus is holy (see Jn. 12:37-41)!

1. We will have an identity crisis until we learn who we are. How we see ourselves as Christians depends on how we see God.
2. Far too many have a “good-ol’-boy” concept of God as One who condones their decisions and actions. We need to come face to face with a holy God!

II. THE COMMISSION (6:5-9a).

A. It starts with a “woe” of confession (v. 5).

1. Prophets often spoke “woes” (curses of

God) on others; Isaiah pronounces one on himself.

2. In the light of God’s fiery presence, Isaiah sees himself clearly for the first time. (See also Job 42:4-6; Dan. 10:8, 15-17; Hab. 3:16; Mk. 4:41; Lk. 5:8; Rev. 1:17.)
3. He thinks he is doomed (Ex. 33:20).

B. All changes with a “*lo*” of cleansing (vv. 6, 7).

1. Isaiah has not asked for mercy; he considers his case hopeless.
2. Because Isaiah’s heart is stirred by the vision of God, mercy is extended. God is not just a holy God; He is a merciful God!
 - a. A burning coal: Repentance is painful; changing is painful.
 - b. Beautiful words: “Your iniquity is taken away, and your sin is forgiven.”

C. It ends with a “*go*” (vv. 8, 9a) of commission.

1. For the first time, *God* speaks.
 - a. “Whom shall I send, and who will go for *Us*?” Not spoken to Isaiah, but to a heavenly audience.
 - b. God looks at a world lost in sin and still wonders.
2. Isaiah need not be asked; he *volunteers*.
 - a. “Here am I!” Will I do?
 - b. Before Isaiah had seen the Lord, he could not be used by Him. Our problems today are not evangelism problems, service problems, Bible reading problems, attendance problems, or contribution problems. Our problem is a worship problem; we have not seen God for who He really is! When we do, we will not have to be urged and begged to say, “Here am I. Send me!”
3. God says, “Go. . . .” Amen, amen, amen.

CONCLUSION

We cannot see God sitting on a throne in a temple, but we can see Him in the Scriptures. If we learn to see ourselves clearly, as Isaiah saw himself before God’s holiness, then we, too, will have a firm faith which leads us to say, “Here I am. Send me!”

Jeremiah and Lamentations: The Weeping Prophet

CHAPTERS TO READ: Jer. 1, 3, 6, 7, 9, 20, 23, 25, 26, 28, 29, 31, 32, 36—44, 52; Lam. 1.

TITLES

The Book of Jeremiah is named after the author (Jer. 1:1). The name can mean several things, including “Jehovah establishes” and “Jehovah appoints.”

“Lamentations” means “weeping.” To get the feel of the word, think of someone *wailing* uncontrollably over a loss that cannot be recovered. The “lamentation” under consideration is over the destruction of Jerusalem (Lam. 1:1; 5:22).

BACKGROUND

Like Isaiah, Jeremiah worked in the southern kingdom of Judah when a foreign power threatened to destroy Jerusalem and Judah. Unlike Isaiah, Jeremiah was unable to prevent the destruction or the subsequent carrying away of the people into captivity. By Jeremiah’s day, the hearts of the people were hardened; God’s patience had run out.

Jeremiah had a long ministry, spanning five kings. His ministry started in the days of Josiah, a time of reform. The reform did not last long, however, and the kingdom quickly degenerated, in spite of the efforts of Jeremiah. Worthy of special note is Jeremiah’s prophecy that the Babylonian captivity would last seventy years (25:11; 29:10). (Note: The seventy years began with the first deportation in 605 B.C., not with the destruction of Jerusalem in 596 B.C.)

When it was obvious that destruction was inevitable, Jeremiah urged the leaders to submit to the Babylonians, to accept the punishment they deserved. In this way Jerusalem would be spared. Delivering such a message branded Jeremiah as a traitor.

More biographical information is given on Jeremiah than on any other Old Testament character, including David; yet most of us know little about him. His writings, arranged not chronologically but for effect, are difficult to read. As a possible help, the following outlines are arranged chronologically.

Jewish tradition says that the Book of Lamentations was written by Jeremiah; internal evidence in the book agrees with that authorship. In the Septuagint, Jeremiah and Lamentations were one book.

OUTLINES

JEREMIAH

I. DURING JOSIAH’S REIGN (1—12).

II. AT AN UNDETERMINED TIME: PROPHECIES IN SYMBOLS (13—20).

III. DURING JEHOAHAZ’ REIGN (nothing specifically attributed to this period).

IV. DURING JEHOIAKIM’S REIGN.

A. Beginning of reign—Jeremiah tried (26).

B. Fourth year of reign—Babylon approaching (25).

C. Also fourth year—the king burns the book (36).

D. Also fourth year—follow-up (45, 46).

E. During reign—example of Rechabites (35).

V. DURING JEHOIACHIN’S REIGN (nothing specifically attributed to this period; perhaps some of the symbolic prophecies were during this time).

VI. DURING ZEDEKIAH’S REIGN.

A. Beginning of Zedekiah’s reign; Jeremiah’s yoke, a letter, and a song (27—31).

B. Seven years before the destruction of Jerusalem; a reference to the fall of Babylon (50, 51).

C. Beginning of the siege (21—24).

D. Tenth year of Zedekiah’s reign; Jeremiah in prison (32—34).

E. Ninth to eleventh years: Siege and burning of Jerusalem (37—39).

VII. DURING THE EXILE (40—44).

VIII. AT UNDETERMINED TIMES: PROPHECIES AGAINST THE NATIONS (47—49).

IX. FINAL REVIEW (52).

LAMENTATIONS

I. THE WAY OF WICKEDNESS (1).

II. THE WRATH OF GOD (2).

III. THE WEIGHT OF SORROW (3).

IV. THE WANT OF HELP (4).

V. THE WRECK OF INIQUITY (5).

LESSONS FROM JEREMIAH AND LAMENTATIONS

Do “real men” cry? Our Lord wept (Lk. 19:41; Jn. 11:35). Jeremiah is known as “the weeping prophet” (Jer. 9:1), but he did not weep for himself. He wept over the lost condition of his people. Some think weeping proves a man is weak, but Jeremiah was not weak. How many of us could persevere for more than forty years without seeing any lasting results of our work? Real men are sensitive; they can cry.

We remember much more of what we see than of what we only hear. The Book of Jeremiah is filled

with object lessons, such as the soiled linen sash (13), the potter and the clay (18), the broken flask (19), wearing a yoke (27, 28), and tying a stone to a message and throwing it in the Euphrates (51). We sometimes need visual aids so people can *see* what we are *saying*.

Jeremiah’s statement about the *new* covenant is significant (31:31-34). The Old Testament (covenant) was a temporary covenant that was to be replaced. Heb. 8:6-13 quotes Jeremiah 31, noting that the first covenant was being replaced by the New Testament (covenant) of Jesus Christ.

There are several references to the Messiah in Jeremiah (cf. Jer. 31:15 with Mt. 2:16-18). Especially note Jeremiah’s references to the “Branch,” a term for the Messiah (Jer. 23:5, 6; 33:14-18). When people saw Jesus, they thought of Jeremiah (Mt. 16:14).

The Magnificent Failure (Jeremiah)

How do you measure success—by accomplishments, meeting goals, popularity, enjoying life? By almost any standard you might name, Jeremiah was a failure. He was, however, a *magnificent failure*.

Jeremiah worked for more than forty years under five kings (Josiah, Jehoahaz, Jehoiakim, Jehoiachin, and Zedekiah) and one governor. Let us look at the book and see what the prophet did during this time.

I. JEREMIAH’S CHALLENGE.

A. His call (1:4-10).

B. His message.

1. He started in the days of Josiah, saying, “You have gone away from God [3:12, 13, 22; 8:5]. You must repent, and it must not be superficial; it must be from the heart [3:10; 4:4]. If you do, there is hope” (26:3). He spoke of a better day and a new covenant.
2. Familiar passages: 6:16; 10:23; 17:9.
3. As time went on, he had to proclaim more and more that God’s patience had run out, that punishment was inevitable (2 Chron. 36:16) and they should prepare to take what was coming to them. “*Magor-missabib*”!
4. When finally Babylon came, he said that the people’s only hope for saving their lives and their city was to surrender (38:2, 17).

C. This message was presented in many ways:

1. Preaching.
2. Writing (16:2; 30:2).
3. Object lessons (see notes). Others were present for these lessons.

II. JEREMIAH’S FAILURE.

A. Did the people repent? Did he save their lives

and the city? No.

1. They did not listen (25:3).
2. After forty-plus years of preaching, all he had to show for it was the smoking ruins of a once beautiful city (39:6-8; 52:3-23; 2 Chron. 36:18, 19)!
- B. Was he appreciated for what he tried to do? No. He was opposed by the people, the priests, the (false) prophets, and the princes.
 1. They threatened him (26:8ff.).
 2. They mocked him (18:18; 20:7).
 3. They hit him (20:2).
 4. They restricted his movements (36:5).
 5. They burned his message (36).
 6. They put him in public stocks (20:2).
 7. They imprisoned him for years (32:2, 3; 37:15, 21).
 8. They put him in a dungeon to die (38).
- C. Was he happy? No.
 1. He did not want to preach in the first place—and he did not want to continue.
 2. He complained to the Lord. At least five complaint sections appear in the book (chaps. 11, 12, 15, 17, 18, and 20).
 3. He is known as “the weeping prophet” (9:1, 10; 14:17; Lam. 1—5).

III. THE MAGNIFICENT FAILURE.

- A. In spite of it all, *he did not quit*. He was faithful to his charge daily for over forty years (20:9).
- B. We need this message (see Rev. 2:10).

CONCLUSION

God does not measure success by happiness or popularity, but by faithful service to Him.

Ezekiel: Preacher of the Exile

CHAPTERS TO READ: 1—5, 8, 9, 11, 12, 14, 16, 18, 20, 22, 24, 28, 33, 34, 36, 37, 40, 43, 47, 48.

TITLE

The Book of Ezekiel is named after its author (1:3). “Ezekiel” means “God will strengthen.”

BACKGROUND

Ezekiel was carried away to Babylon in the second deportation in 597 B.C. He lived with the exiles “by the river Chebar” (1:1, 2), which perhaps was a canal off the Euphrates. He preached among the Jewish captives, while Daniel (who had been deported in 605 B.C.) ministered in the palace. Ezekiel and Daniel probably knew each other well (14:12, 20; 28:3).

Ezekiel had two tasks as a prophet: (1) Before the destruction of Jerusalem, he had to combat undue optimism. The optimism of the exiles was based on three things: They were Abraham’s seed, a descendent of David was still on the throne, and the temple of God still stood. (2) After the destruction of the city, he had to combat undue despair.

Ezekiel used a variety of teaching methods. Often God had Ezekiel act out what would happen; many of these symbolic acts were hard on Ezekiel personally. The most difficult parts of the book are the visions. It is easy to get involved in the details of a vision and lose sight of the main idea being presented. Think of each vision as a *panoramic view* of a basic truth.

OUTLINE

- I. BEFORE THE DESTRUCTION OF JERUSALEM: THE PREACHER OF JUDGMENT (1—24).
 - A. Fifth year of the Exile (1—7).
 1. Ezekiel’s commission (1—3).
 2. Destruction of Jerusalem foretold (4—7).
 - B. Sixth year of the Exile (8—19).
 1. Ezekiel’s vision-journey to Jerusalem (8—11).
 2. Allegory of the unfaithful wife (16).
 - C. Seventh year of the Exile (20—23); the sins of Israel and Judah.
 - D. Ninth year of the Exile (24).

1. As the siege begins, Ezekiel’s wife dies.
2. Ezekiel is struck dumb.

II. THE SIEGE AND DESTRUCTION: PROPHECIES AGAINST THE NATIONS (25—32).

III. AFTER THE DESTRUCTION OF JERUSALEM: THE PREACHER OF COMFORT (33—48).

- A. Twelfth year of the Exile (33—39; note 32:17; 33:21).
 1. The commission renewed (33); word comes that Jerusalem has fallen.
 2. The indictment of Israel’s shepherds (34).
 3. The land to be reinhabited and the nation revived (36, 37).
- B. Twenty-fifth year of the Exile (40—48); the vision of the rebuilt temple.

LESSONS FROM EZEKIEL

Ezekiel shows the twofold task of a preacher: to comfort the afflicted and afflict the comfortable.

As preachers and teachers of God’s Word, it is not our responsibility to convert everyone, but to proclaim faithfully God’s message (3:17). When we do so, we fulfill our responsibility, whether or not our hearers respond in a positive manner (3:18-21; 33:7-9).

As human beings, we want to blame others for our problems. Some blame their environment. Religionists often blame Adam for all mankind’s problems. The Israelites blamed their ancestors (18:2). The Bible, however, teaches *personal responsibility*; we cannot blame someone else for our own sins and their consequences (18:3, 4, 19, 20)!

Ezekiel’s passage on false shepherds (34:11-31) is required reading for all God’s shepherds (elders) today (1 Pet. 5:1-3). The Chief Shepherd today is Jesus (Jn. 10:8-11; Heb. 13:20; 1 Pet. 2:25, 5:4).

The vision of the temple (40—48) does not refer to Zerubbabel’s or Herod’s temple; those structures were not like the one in Ezekiel. Nor do the chapters give a blueprint for a future millennium age; animal sacrifices were still being made at this time (43:18ff.), but they were banished after Jesus’ perfect sacrifice (Heb. 10). Rather, this vision is a prophecy of the Christian Age, when God’s people, the church, are

God's dwelling place, or temple (1 Cor. 3:16). The prophecy refers to Jesus' spiritual sacrifice (Heb.

9:11-15, 23-28) and to the Christian's sacrifice of service (Rom. 12:1).

The Valley of Dry Bones (Ezekiel 37:1-14)

Ezekiel was taken to Babylon in the second stage of the carrying away of Israel into Babylon. Thus, he arrived there with other Jewish captives before Jerusalem was destroyed (which took place in the third stage). When he first arrived, the captives were filled with an unfounded optimism that Jerusalem could not be destroyed. The first task God gave him was to deliver the unpopular message that Jerusalem *would* be destroyed. When Jerusalem did fall—when the temple was destroyed and the walls were broken down—the captives were filled with despair. Then Ezekiel's message was one of hope. A better day was ahead; if the people would repent, God would restore them to the land. Let us look at one of the more vivid of these hope messages.

I. THERE IS HOPE EVEN FOR OLD DRY BONES (37:1-14).

A. The vision: vv. 1-10.

1. God takes Ezekiel to a valley filled with dry bones. The bones of soldiers who fell in battle lie bleaching in the sunlight, scattered by wild beasts. The bones are old and dry, ready to crumble.
2. God tells Ezekiel to preach to the bones.
3. In a vivid scene, life returns to the dry bones.
 - a. There is a noise and some shaking.
 - b. The bones are joined together into skeletons, ligaments bind the bones together, muscles cover the bones, and finally skin covers the muscles. Now the valley is covered with corpses.
 - c. The breath of God comes into the bodies, and the army stands, ready once more to do battle for the Lord.

B. The explanation: vv. 11-14.

1. The bones were the house of Israel, which was filled with despair. God could give them new life and restore them to their land. They needed to keep their faith in the Lord!
2. This was fulfilled when the Israelites returned to their land from captivity. God *did* restore life to dry bones!

II. THERE IS HOPE EVEN FOR US!

A. We are surrounded by despair.

1. Dry bones are in the world.
 - a. Dry bones of national and international life.
 - b. Dry bones of personal life.
2. Dry bones can even be in the church. *Spiritual*

life can be missing, and we can be filled with despair (Lk. 24:21).

- a. Congregational dry bones.
 - b. Individual dry bones: Our dreams, our aspirations may be dashed. To some each day looks like the last, except a little bleaker.
- #### B. We need hope (1 Cor. 13:13)!
1. The importance of hope (Rom. 8:24; Tit. 1:2).
 2. Real hope comes not from a vague possibility that things will get better; rather, real hope is in a *Person*.
 - a. Read Ps. 42:5; Rom. 4:18; 10:11 (see 2 Cor. 11:24-27).
 - b. Think of God's wondrous promises (Mt. 17:20; Jn. 14:14; 16:33; Mt. 28:20; Rom. 8:28; Jn. 14:1-6). These promises are for those who cling to Him in trust and obedience.

CONCLUSION

- A. Let us take hope; God can restore life to the dry bones of our life!
- B. Do you have a relationship with God that gives you this hope? The psalmist says, "Why are you in despair, O my soul? And why have you become disturbed within me? Hope in God, . . ." (Ps. 42:5).

The Work of Ezekiel

The prophet Ezekiel brought a message of hope and deliverance to an unhappy and discouraged people. A younger contemporary of Jeremiah and Daniel, he was of priestly stock, and had been carried into captivity with King Jehoiachin in 597 B.C. He lived among the colony of Jews at Tel Abib on the Kabar canal and began to prophesy some five years after his captivity (Ezek. 1:2). Recapturing something of the spirit of Jeremiah, he pointed out to the exiles the underlying causes of the disaster that had overtaken Judah, and roundly condemned the wickedness and idolatry of his fellow countrymen.

The versatility of Ezekiel made it possible for him to act as prophet and priest to the exiled community. . . . Although his message seldom appealed to the majority of the exiles, his integrity and sincerity won for him the admiration of the Jewish elders (Ezek. 14:1; 20:1), and his eloquence carried his utterances far beyond the limited audience to which they were addressed.

Adapted from *Old Testament Times*
R. K. Harrison

Daniel: Stranger in a Strange Land

CHAPTERS TO READ: 1—12.

TITLE

The Book of Daniel is named after the author (8:1). “Daniel” means “God is my judge.”

BACKGROUND

Daniel and others of the royal seed were carried into Babylon in the first deportation in 605 B.C. Daniel would have been just a lad at this time, probably in his late teens or early twenties. Because of his commitment to God, Daniel rose to a position of prominence in Nebuchadnezzar’s kingdom. During the period of captivity, Daniel ministered in the palace, while Ezekiel preached to the exiles (see background notes on Ezekiel).

In the Book of Daniel, Belshazzar is mentioned immediately after Nebuchadnezzar. We know from secular writings that there were four rulers between Nebuchadnezzar and Belshazzar, including Belshazzar’s father, Nabonidus. At the fall of Babylon, Belshazzar was on the throne in his father’s absence. Since Belshazzar was second ruler in the kingdom, the highest position he could offer Daniel was that of “third ruler” (5:16, 29). Since the Captivity lasted seventy years (9:2), Daniel would have been in his late eighties or early nineties when the Medes and Persians came to power.

The book is divided into two distinct sections. The first half is historical; the last half is prophetic. Daniel uses third person in the first section, first person in the second. Each section is arranged chronologically; they overlap by several years.

The prophetic section uses classic apocalyptic language. Apocalyptic literature arose during times when God’s people were oppressed. Its message, written in symbolic language, was to comfort those who remained faithful. If you do not understand all of the symbols, do not worry; Daniel did not understand all of them either (8:27)! (For more on apocalyptic literature, see notes on Revelation.)

OUTLINE

- I. HISTORICAL SECTION (1—6).
 - A. The reign of Nebuchadnezzar (1—4).

- 1. Daniel and his friends (1).
- 2. The image made of four metals (2).
 - a. Head of gold—Babylonian Empire, the first kingdom.
 - b. Breast and arms of silver—Medo-Persian Empire, the second kingdom.
 - c. Belly and thighs of brass—Grecian Empire, the third kingdom.
 - d. Legs of iron, feet of iron and clay—Roman Empire, the fourth kingdom.
- 3. The fiery furnace (3).
- 4. Nebuchadnezzar’s proclamation (4).
- B. The end of Belshazzar’s reign; the handwriting on the wall (5).

II. PROPHETIC SECTION (7—12).

- A. The reign of Belshazzar (7, 8).
 - 1. Vision of the four beasts (7); same as four kingdoms in chap. 2.
 - 2. Vision of the ram and he-goat (8); details of second and third kingdoms.
- B. The reign of Darius (9).
 - 1. Daniel works on return of Israelites (9:1-19).
 - 2. Vision of future (9:20-27). “Seventy weeks” may give a timetable of the Messiah.
- C. The reign of Cyrus; more prophecies about the second and third kingdoms (10—12).

LESSONS FROM DANIEL

If you mention Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah, you will probably be greeted by blank stares, but most of us recognize the names Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. For some reason, we call Daniel’s three friends by their Babylonian names, rather than their Hebrew names. Whatever we call them, the three Hebrew youths, along with Daniel, continue to inspire generation after generation to faithfulness and strength of character in the face of adversity. Like them, we are strangers in a strange land (Heb. 11:13; 1 Pet. 2:11, 12); like them, we can be victorious with the help of God!

A theme running through the Book of Daniel is that God rules in the kingdoms of men (4:17). Most of the prophecies relate to this. Daniel outlines history

from the Babylonian Empire to the Roman Empire, through the destruction of Jerusalem (Dan. 9:27; 12:11; Mt. 24:15ff.). When things look bad in the world, it is important to realize that God is in control and that He will ultimately work out His plans.

Several of Daniel's prophecies relate directly to the coming of the Messiah and to His kingdom. Dan.

2:44 predicts the establishment of the kingdom, or church, during the days of the Roman Empire, the "fourth kingdom." Dan. 7:13, 14 anticipates the ascension of Jesus to heaven and the establishment of the kingdom ten days later on the Jewish Day of Pentecost (Mk. 9:1; Lk. 24:46-53; Acts 1:6-12; 2:1-4, 33, 36, 47).

————— *Daniel in the Lion's Den (Daniel 6:1-28)* —————

Daniel had been "laid on the shelf" from the time of Nebuchadnezzar (4:37) to the end of the Babylonian Empire (5; also note 6:30). When Darius the Mede was set over Babylon by Cyrus, King of Persia (9:1), Daniel would have been eighty or ninety years old, but he was still capable, still full of faith, and still ready to be used by the Lord!

I. DANIEL'S ENEMIES TRY TO DESTROY HIM (6:1-17).

- A. The trap sought (vv. 1-5).
 - 1. Daniel's success makes his co-workers jealous.
 - 2. They examine his public and private life to try to find something they can use against him, but they can find nothing.
 - a. "They could find no ground of accusation or evidence of corruption, inasmuch as he was faithful, and no negligence or corruption was to be found in him" (NASB).
 - b. What if someone were digging deep to find incriminating information on *us*? (Prov. 20:6).
- B. The trap set (vv. 6-9).
 - 1. Daniel's enemies go to the king and use all the tools of the manipulator: flattery, lies, and pressure.
 - 2. Darius agrees to their proposal, showing two weaknesses: pride and haste.
- C. The trap sprung (vv. 10-17).
 - 1. Daniel knows the consequences, but he still does what is right (6:10), disobeying a law that is contrary to God's will (see Acts 5:29)
 - a. He makes no attempt to hide what he does. He prays in an open window toward Jerusalem (1 Kings 8:33, 35, 48; 2 Chron. 6:18-40; 7:11-16) three times a day (Ps. 55:17). Read a sample prayer (9).
 - b. This is Daniel's lifestyle.
 - (1) He is not showing off.
 - (2) He is not using prayer as an emergency measure.
 - 2. Daniel's enemies have been watching, and

they rush to the king. (Note the irrevocable nature of the law of the Medes and Persians; see Esther 1:19; 8:8.) Darius tries to change the edict, but Daniel's enemies will not allow this. Daniel is thrown into the den of lions.

- 3. Daniel is neither the first nor the last to suffer for doing what is right (see 1 Pet. 2:20).

II. GOD RESCUES DANIEL (6:18-28).

- A. Daniel is saved, and God is glorified.
 - 1. The king spends an unhappy night, but the next morning Daniel is all right.
 - a. He has suffered "no injury whatever"; "there is not a scratch on him." (Note the ministry of angels; see Heb. 1:14.)
 - b. Why? "*Because he had trusted in his God*" (v. 23).
 - 2. The trap has not caught Daniel; instead, it snaps shut on his enemies and their families! (This is an illustration of Oriental justice; the purpose in the story is to show that the lions were not tame and that they were hungry.)
 - 3. Darius' decree is given regarding Jehovah (vv. 25-27); Daniel continues to serve (v. 28).
- B. Is the point of the story that God will not allow physical harm to come to us if we really believe?
 - 1. No. What about early Christians who were thrown to the lions? What about Stephen, the first Christian martyr?
 - 2. The story does, however, tell us that *God will protect us*—in the way that is best for us and that will best serve His purposes. Even if we are killed for our faith, as we rise from the grave in our new bodies, it can also be said of us that *we have suffered "no injury whatever"*!

CONCLUSION

Dare to be a Daniel! Dare to stand alone for what is right!

The Minor Prophets: Little Books With a Big Message

CHAPTERS TO READ: Hos. 1—3; Joel 1, 2; Amos 3, 4; Obad. 1; Jon. 1, 3; Mic. 4, 5; Nahum 1, 3; Hab. 1, 2; Zeph. 1, 3; Hag. 1, 2; Zech. 7, 8; Mal. 1, 4.

THE MINOR PROPHETS

The last twelve books in the Old Testament are called “The Minor Prophets.” In the Hebrew Bible, they were combined into one book. They are not called “minor” because they are unimportant; rather, as a rule, they are shorter than “The Major Prophets.” Some of the books refer to rulers; it will help your understanding to review the spiritual situation at the times when those men ruled. Since some of the books are not dated, we cannot be dogmatic as to when they were written. Note, however, that all the dated books are arranged in chronological order. It does no harm to think of each undated book as being written in the general time frame between the previous dated book and the next dated book.

HOSEA

“Hosea” means “salvation” or “deliverance.” Hosea worked for more than sixty years with the northern kingdom of Israel (7:5), starting with the reign of Jeroboam. He was a contemporary of Isaiah (1:7), who worked with the southern kingdom of Judah. Chaps. 1—3 are the key to the book. They tell of the unfaithfulness of Hosea’s wife, Gomer, and her subsequent acceptance by Hosea. Gomer is typical of Israel; Hosea, typical of God. The message is that God loves His people even when they go away, and He longs for their return. Hos. 11:1 is quoted in Mt. 2:15.

JOEL

“Joel” means “Jehovah is God.” Joel worked with the southern kingdom. He pictured a plague of locusts (probably, it literally came; see Amos 4:9). The locusts were symbolic of God’s judgment. The figure of the locusts is reflected in the Book of Revelation (9:1-11). Joel 2:28-32 is quoted by Peter in Acts 2:16-21.

AMOS

“Amos” means “burden-bearer.” As a life’s

work, he was neither a prophet nor the son of a prophet, but a farmer (1:1; 7:14). In the days of Uzziah, king of Judah, and Jeroboam, God called Amos from his home in the southern kingdom (1:1) and told him to go the northern kingdom to prophesy (7:15). He apparently went north (7:10, 13), spoke God’s message of judgment against Israel, and then went home.

OBADIAH

“Obadiah” means “servant of Jehovah.” This is the shortest book in the Old Testament. Obadiah’s message is basically against the Edomites, the descendants of Esau (Gen. 25:30; 36:1). Throughout their history, the Israelites and the Edomites were hostile toward one another. The final blow was the action of the Edomites when Jerusalem was destroyed (vv. 10-14).

JONAH

“Jonah” means “dove.” Jonah lived and worked in the northern kingdom in the days of Jeroboam (2 Kings 14:25). He followed the work of Elijah and Elisha in that area. God told him to preach to the city of Nineveh, the capital of Assyria, which destroyed the northern kingdom a few years later. Jonah’s experience in the great fish is a type of the resurrection of Christ (Mt. 12:39, 40).

MICAH

“Micah” means “Who is like Jehovah?” Micah lived in the southern kingdom and preached during the reigns of Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah (1:1). He was a contemporary of Isaiah. He is the only minor prophet who addressed his messages of judgment to both the northern kingdom, Israel, and the southern kingdom, Judah (1:5). He also looked ahead to the return from captivity (2:12, 13), the birth of Jesus (5:2), and the establishment of the church (4:1-4).

NAHUM

“Nahum” means “consolation” or “comforter.” Nahum’s message was one of consolation to the Jews, for one of their worst enemies, Assyria, was to be destroyed. He worked more than one hundred years after Jonah’s preaching produced peni-

tence in Nineveh, the capital of Assyria. By Nahum's day, God's patience had run out.

HABAKKUK

"Habakkuk" may mean "one who clings or embraces." Habakkuk's topic, the destruction of the Chaldeans (Babylonian Empire), is not unique, but his approach is. The first two chapters are a dialogue between Habakkuk and God on the problems of evil and suffering. The last chapter is a prayer-song that resolves the issue. The message is that God has a plan and purpose, so we must trust and believe in Him. Hab. 2:4 is quoted in Rom. 1:17, Gal. 3:11, and Heb. 10:38.

ZEPHANIAH

"Zephaniah" means "Jehovah has guarded or hidden." Zephaniah worked during the reign of Josiah (1:1). He was a contemporary of Jeremiah. He not only described the fall of Judah; he also told of the fall of the surrounding nations. He embodied many of the prophecies of the Old Testament in one package.

HAGGAI

"Haggai" is an abbreviation of a Hebrew word that means "festival of Jehovah." Haggai encouraged the rebuilding of the temple following the Israelites' return from captivity, after Zerubbabel

and Joshua had ceased to build.

ZECHARIAH

"Zechariah" means "remembered of Jehovah." Zechariah worked with Haggai in encouraging the rebuilding of the temple. Haggai dealt mainly with the present and with the immediate future as he urged the Israelites to build; Zechariah held out as encouragement the promise of a brighter tomorrow. His book contains a number of messianic prophecies, such as The Triumphal Entry (9:9, 10) and the betrayal (11:12, 13). The book contains more specific references to the crucifixion than any other Old Testament book except Psalms (note 12:10-12; 13:6, 7).

MALACHI

"Malachi" is an abbreviation of a Hebrew word that means "messenger of Jehovah." Malachi was probably a co-worker with Nehemiah; they dealt with the same problems: indifference in worship, indifference in marriage, etc. Malachi's prophecy about the coming of Elijah (4:5, 6), or John the Baptizer (see Mt. 11:7-14), ties the last book of the Old Testament with the first books of the New Testament.

THE BIG MESSAGE

God is God! We must take Him seriously. "God is not mocked" (Gal. 6:7).

When God's Children Get Bored (Malachi)

The spoiled child throws his toys down and pouts, "I'm bored!" The successful man sprawls in the middle of his prosperity and complains, "I'm bored!" The ungrateful child of God ignores his spiritual blessings and cries, "I'm bored, bored, bored!"

When the Jews returned from Babylonian captivity, they were too busy and had too many obstacles to overcome for them to be bored. Gradually those obstacles were removed: The temple was rebuilt; temple worship was resumed; the walls of Jerusalem were rebuilt; Israel was re-established as a nation. Then, as life returned to normal, when the Israelites could have (and should have) rejoiced in all Jehovah had done for them, they became bored.

I. BORED WITH WORSHIP (1:6-14).

- A. It was the same thing week after week: Pick out the best lamb, the best calf, or the best goat (Lev. 22:20-24; Deut. 15:21) and bring it to the priest to be sacrificed. "How tiresome! What a burden!" (v. 13; NASB; NIV). As a result, their worship had deteriorated into a half-

hearted sham (vv. 7, 8).

B. The prophet's response:

1. "The problem is not with the worship arrangement. The problem is with *you*. It is a problem of how you view God!" (v. 6).
2. If we cannot give God our best, it would be better to shut the doors of the church (v. 10)!
3. God never expects what we cannot give, but He does expect the best of what we *have*. He will not accept less (v. 14; cf. 2:13; 3:3, 4).

- C. The lesson for us: If we are bored with worship, let us first look at *ourselves*. Each of us should ask, "What is my relationship with God? Why do I come to worship anyway? Do I fit God into my schedule? Do I always give God my *best*?" (Note Jn. 4:23, 24.)

II. BORED WITH MARRIAGE (2:10-16).

- A. Is this an abrupt break in thought? No. Their failure in worship was a failure to understand

who God *is*. God is a God of *covenant* (vv. 4, 5, 8, 10; 3:1), a God who makes promises and keeps them! He expects His people to be a people of covenant and to keep their word. These people were not honoring their promises. Proof: They were not keeping the covenant of marriage.

1. Two things are mentioned: intermarriage with pagan women (v. 11; see also Ezra 9:1ff.) and divorcing the wives they had married when they were young (vv. 14-16).
 2. These problems probably went together: Bored with their Jewish wives, the men turned to exotic pagan women.
- B. We can imagine their line of thought: "I'm bored with this marriage. All the fun has gone out of it. I'm not *happy*. Surely God wants me to be happy!" The prophet's reaction:
1. "God made both you and your wife; you should respect her [v. 10]! Instead, you are dealing *treacherously* with her" (v. 14).
 2. "You are violating the second most important *covenant* one can make—second only to one's covenant with God" (v. 14).
 3. The purpose of marriage is not to scratch you where you itch, but to produce godly offspring (v. 15), i.e., children who love and obey God.
 4. *God hates divorce* (v. 16)!
- C. This message is needed today (Mt. 19:3-9)!

III. BORED WITH GIVING (3:7-12).

- A. This may seem to be an anti-climax, but one way to tell if our relationship with God and others is going sour is to look at our giving. When God challenged His children to repent, they, in effect, said, "We have nothing to repent of." God answered, "Let Me give you a vivid example of what you need to repent of: You have been *robbing Me!*" (3:7, 8).
1. Tithes, or 10 percent (Lev. 27:30-33; Num. 18:21-32; Deut. 12:17, 18; 14:28, 29).
 2. Offerings, including annual contributions in addition to the tithes (Deut. 12:6, 11, 17).
- B. Again we can imagine the people's reasoning: "I get so *tired* of hearing of money, money, money! Do they not realize the economy is bad (vv. 11, 14)? How can I maintain my house, my chariots, my slaves, my valuable collection of mint-condition shekels if I keep giving?" The prophet's response:
1. Failure to give indicates failure to recognize the source of one's blessings and failure to understand that God owns everything (v. 8).

2. Failure to give as one should is worse than robbing a bank; it is robbing *God* (v. 8).

3. The reason we have financial problems may be that we do not trust the Lord enough to give properly (vv. 9-12; note 2 Chron. 31:10).

C. God does not bind the tithe in the New Testament, but He has commanded us to give liberally (2 Cor. 9:6, 7; 1 Cor. 16:2). If we do, He has promised to bless us (Lk. 6:38; 2 Cor. 9:10).

CONCLUSION

I remember Grandma's response when we said, "I'm bored." She would tell us, "You get *out* of something what you *put in*." Malachi says essentially the same thing to those who have said it is vain to serve God: "Then those who feared the Lord spoke to one another, and the Lord gave attention and heard it, and a book of remembrance was written before Him for those who fear the Lord and who esteem His name. 'And they will be Mine,' says the Lord of hosts, 'on the day that I prepare My own possession, and I will spare them as a man spares his own son who serves him.' So you will again distinguish between the righteous and the wicked, between one who serves God and one who does not serve Him" (3:16-18).

The Minor Prophets

The twelve books that comprise this prophetic anthology differ considerably in substance and style. Some contain elements of biography that supplement the prophetic preaching with some insight concerning the preacher (Amos, Hosea). Others remain for practical purposes anonymous, despite the names attached to them (Obadiah, Malachi). They range in date from periods separated by more than three centuries (from about 750 B.C. to 400 B.C.). They reflect different geographical locations, some reflecting life in the ancient monarchical states of Israel and Judah, others pertaining to the period after the Exile. But for all the differences between them, the books share common ground. All are concerned with prophecy, namely the declaration of God's word to the people of God. And taken together, the Twelve Prophets provide us with a panorama of Israel's religion during one of the most critical periods of its history. From the false confidence of the time of the monarchy, to the despair of those in exile, and finally to the new hopes and aspirations following exile, we are provided with an understanding of the transition from an old state-religion to the birth-pains of a newly formed community of God's people.

A century or so after the completion of the Book

of the Twelve Prophets, Joshua ben Sira wrote his famous wisdom work, in which he extolled the fame of Israel's past heroes. His words concerning the Twelve Prophets indicate not only their greatness in bygone years, but also their potential contribution to the future: "May the bones of the twelve prophets

also send forth new life from the ground where they lie! For they put new heart into Jacob (Israel) and rescued the people by their confident hope" (Ecclesiasticus 49:10).

Twelve Prophets
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