Old Testament

by

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Old Testament Survey Part I

The Christian Bible, made up of the Old and New Testaments, is a library of books. Each of these books is important for its unique contribution to the whole. Together, they combine history, theology and wisdom into a harmonious work that records the mighty acts of God in history and interprets them through the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. For the earliest Christians, the Holy Scriptures consisted of the Hebrew Bible, what we now call the Old Testament. In time, of course, the New Testament was written, but in this study we shall confine ourselves to thirteen Old Testament books and their message.

These thirteen books fall into three broad categories. The first category is the **Torah** (Hebrew for "the instruction" or "the law"). We often refer to them as the **Books of Moses**, since Moses was the primary compiler of the material. From the Greek translation of the Torah we also get another name, the **Pentateuch** (Greek for "five scrolls"). These books are Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy.

The second category is the history of the nation Israel before they had kings. The books here are Joshua, Judges and Ruth. The third category is the collection of literature called **Wisdom**, also sometimes referred to as the **Poetical Books**, since they are largely written in the style of Hebrew poetry. These books include Job, Psalms, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes and the Song of Songs.

The Beginnings (Genesis 1-11)

The first book in the Old Testament is entitled "In the beginning" in the Hebrew Bible and "Genesis" (= origins) in the Greek translation of the Hebrew Bible. The first major section of this book recounts four primary events, the **creation**, the **human rebellion** against God (usually termed "the fall"), the **great flood** and the **dispersion of the nations** throughout the ancient world. Since Genesis is one of five books that form the *Torah*, it should be read in light of the other four that describe the origin of the nation Israel. Genesis gives the pre-history of the nation Israel, and indeed, of the universe. This pre-history is written in the form of genealogical records common in the ancient Near East. In Genesis 1-11, there are six such genealogical accounts:

- Account of the heavens and the earth (1:1--2:4)
- Account of human origins (2:5--5:2)
- Account of Adam's family (5:3--6:9a)
- Account of Noah's family (6:9b--10:1)
- Account of the Nations (10:2--11:10a)
- Account of Terah's family (11:10b-27a)

The Torah	**Wisdom Literature**
Genesis	Job
Exodus	Psalms
Leviticus	Proverbs
Numbers	Ecclesiastes
Deuteronomy	Song of Songs
Before the Monarchy	
Joshua	
Judges	
Ruth	

The Creation (1-2)

There are two accounts of the creation, one focusing upon the origins of the universe, with the creation of humans as the crowning creative act (1:1--2:4), and the other focusing upon the humans themselves. In the first account, the name for God is the Hebrew *Elohim*, a common plural form of the word "God" in the ancient Near East carrying the nuance of a plurality of majesty (i.e., the God who is multi-faceted).

The second account consistently uses the compound title *Yahweh Elohim*, translated "LORD God" in the English Versions.

In the first account, the origin of the universe is described as the free creation of God by his sovereign word (1:3, 6, 14, 20, 24; cf. Heb. 11:3; John 1:1-3). The origin of the universe was a process, beginning with the creation of basic matter (1:1-2) and following with the subsequent fashioning and shaping of this matter into the universe and earth as we know it today (1:3-25). The movement of the creation narrative was from formlessness and emptiness (1:2) to order and habitation (cf. Isa. 45:18). The final act of creation was the making of humans as male and female in God's own image (1:26-30). Everything God made was good (1:31), and when he had finished, he rested (2:1-4).

Several important ideas reside in this first account. First, God is shown to be sovereign over all the universe. He did not struggle with pre-existing matter or forces outside himself, but rather, he created the universe out of his own sovereign freedom. Since humankind, the crowning aspect of creation, was endowed with God's own image, God's capacity for creativity was also passed on to these creatures. His work of creation was to be mirrored in their work of procreation and stewardship over the earth. His sovereignty over the universe was mirrored in their superiority among all the creatures of the earth (1:28). Furthermore, the fact that he made them as relational creatures, capable of communication and partnership, reflects God's own personal nature. God is *Someone*, not merely *Something*.

If the first creation account describes humans as the crowning act of the whole process, the second account focuses more closely on these humans God made. The first human was shaped from dirt, and God breathed into him life (2:7). He placed this creature in a tropical garden, while carefully instructing him as to his responsibilities (2:8-17). Once again, God's creativity and work was to be mirrored in the human's creativity and work. Yet God knew that the human, as a relational creature made in his own image, would not do well by himself (2:18). To sharpen the man's realization that aloneness was not good, he allowed him to name all the animals (2:19-20a). Of all the creatures, only the man was without his mate. So, God formed a woman, taking her from the man, so that each would belong to the other (2:20b-25).

The creation account in the Bible stands among other cosmogonies in the ancient world. The Genesis account was neither the only account nor the earliest account in the ancient Near East. Both the Mesopotamians and the Egyptians produced cosmogonies that antedate the Book of Genesis. The Mesopotamian account, called *Enuma elish*, held that the universe came about as the struggle between the gods and goddesses of chaos and order. Marduk, king of the gods of order, slew Tiamat, last of the gods of chaos. He split Tiamat's body into the heavens

and earth. The Egyptian accounts held that life originated from primordial waters out of which appeared islands. Re, the Egyptian god of creation, entered the universe by creating himself. He created other gods by sneezing or masturbating.

In Mesopotamia and Egypt there were pantheons of gods and goddesses. Genesis stands unique, both in its description of one God who acted alone, and in its affirmation that the origins of the universe were by his spoken word in which he created the heavens and earth out of nothing. As such, Genesis is a corrective to the alternative cosmogonies in the ancient Near East.

The Fall (3-5)

The account of human rebellion against God extends over three chapters. To the humans he had made God gave limited freedom (2:16-17). Out of this freedom humans rebelled, and their rebellion was the abuse of their freedom. No information is given as to why the snake in the garden was already set against God (though much later in the Bible there are hints about it), but this shrewd creature confronted the woman and the man, creating doubt about God's instructions. Though the man and woman were together (3:6b), the snake spoke only to the woman. Perhaps he considered her more vulnerable, since the original prohibitions were given to the man before she was created (cf. 2:17). In any case, she became confused, as is evident by her misquoting the words of the prohibition (3:3). The snake suggested that God was withholding from her something good (3:4-5). When she touched the forbidden fruit, nothing immediately happened, and so she also ate it (3:6a). She gave the fruit to the man, who all this time had not raised a single word of protest, and he ate it, too (3:6b). Suddenly, the significance of their rebellion burst upon them, and they were ashamed (3:7). Now both were vulnerable, not able to trust even each other.

Responsibility calls for accountability, and God confronted the man and the woman about their rebellion (3:8-11). The man blamed the woman (3:12), and the woman blamed the snake (3:13). Both, however, were equally culpable, as is apparent from the judgments that were meted out. The snake was promised that the offspring of the woman would crush his head (3:17), a first promise of the coming of Jesus Christ (cf. Rom. 16:20; Rev. 12:9-11). The woman was now susceptible to increased difficulty in childbirth, not to mention exploitation by men (3:16). The man would continue to work, but now his work would be frustrated with alien elements (3:17-19a). Most important, death had entered the human family (3:19b). So, the man and woman were driven from the garden and prevented from returning to it (3:22-24).

Depravity continued to spread throughout all the members of the human family. It moved from fratricide (4:3-8) to exploitation by polygamy (4:19) to uncontrolled revenge (4:23-24). Alongside this depravity, however, there were also

good qualities within the humans. They developed skills in farming, music and metallurgy (4:20-22). Some even began to seek after God (4:26). Notable among them was a man called Enoch, who found an intimate relationship with God (5:22-24). In the same family line as Enoch, a man was born named Noah, a name which is a play on words with the Hebrew word for comfort. This name shows that humans sought relief from the difficulty of surviving in a world that had now become cursed due to their sin (5:29).

The Great Flood (6-9)

If there were a few humans who sought after God, such pursuit of the divine was not generally characteristic of the race. Rather, human wickedness became rampant, epitomized in a race of giants (6:4). God determined to destroy the humans, because their immoral behavior grieved him deeply (6:5-7). Still, he extended to them 120 years of grace to give them time to avert judgment (6:3).

When there was no lessening of human depravity (6:11-12), God commissioned Noah to build a huge boat by which to save his family from the coming judgment (6:13-22). In this boat, eight humans as well as selections of the various animals of the earth survived a devastating flood that lasted some 371 days (7:11--8:14). When Noah emerged from the ark, he offered sacrifices of worship to God (8:18-20). God promised never again to destroy the human race in this fashion, even though he knew that humans would continue to abuse their freedom and descend into further depravity (8:21-22). He made a covenant (binding agreement) with Noah which began the structures of law and order out of anarchy and chaos (9:3-6). Unlimited vengeance was prohibited (9:6). God gave a sign in the rainbow that his covenantal promises would not fail (9:8-17). The sons of Noah would now become the heads of the various human families on the earth (9:1, 7, 18-19). However, among these families there would develop a particular tension, a tension between the family of Shem and the family of Ham (9:24-27). This tension would eventually reach crisis proportions between the nation Israel, from the family tree of Shem, and the nations of the Canaanites, from the family tree of Ham.

A number of flood traditions existed in the ancient Near East, the most well-known being the *Gilgamesh Epic*, a Mesopotamian flood account preserved in cuneiform. While there are many points of similarity with the Genesis flood (e.g., a hero, an ark, rain, flood and birds released from the ark), there also are striking dissimilarities. In the *Gilgamesh Epic* the story is thoroughly polytheistic, and the gods destroyed humans because they made too much noise. In the biblical account, one God decides to send judgment on the race for their violence and immorality. Like the creation account in Genesis, the account of Noah's flood is a corrective to the popular views.

The Dispersion of the Nations (10-11)

As in the creation, there are two accounts of the dispersion of the nations. The first is more general, while the second focuses upon the cause for the dispersion. The various branches of the families headed up by Noah's sons spread throughout the ancient world after the great flood (10:5, 20, 31). While some of the tribal names are difficult to identify, there is general agreement that the families descending from Japheth migrated toward the Mediterranean and Europe, while the families descending from Shem and Ham spread throughout the Middle East and northeast Africa. In the Table of Nations, Nimrod (= a name meaning "we shall rebel"), the founder of Babylon and other cities, is singled out for special attention in that he was a champion hunter (10:8-9). It is in the second account of the dispersion of the nations that the reason for this attention is provided.

Babel, the city of Nimrod, was the site where the dispersion actually originated (11:9). At the time, the descendents of Noah were all of the same language, and they settled in Shinar, better known as Babylonia (11:1-2). Though God's command was that they fill the earth (9:1), in Babylonia they organized themselves to build a ziggurat into the heavens, a form of self-designed worship that implicitly sought to displace God (11:3-4). Consequently, God confused their language so that they were compelled to scatter throughout the earth in their various language groups (11:5-9; cf. 10:5, 20, 31).

After this dispersion, the family line of Shem continued until the time of Terah, the father of Abram, whom the reader finds in Ur of Mesopotamia (11:26-28). Terah and his son Abram migrated up the Mesopotamia valley as far as Haran, a city in northwest Mesopotamia.

In the foregoing history, the biblical account demonstrates that God was no provincial deity. Rather, he was the Creator of the whole universe; he was the sovereign Lord over all humankind. The depravity of the human race and its deserved judgment became repeating patterns in the fall of Adam and Eve (3), the curse of Cain (4), the flood of Noah (6-9) and the confusion at Babel (11). If the human race was to be reconciled to its Creator, God must himself take the initiative to set it right. It could not right itself. To be sure, there were a few persons who sought after God, such as, Abel, Enoch and Noah. Such people were striking exceptions, however. The overwhelming trend was toward rebellion and violence (6:5; 9:21b).

The Patriarchs (Genesis 12-50)

While the first several chapters of the Book of Genesis gives the narratives of the origins of the universe, the beginnings of the human race, and the dispersion of

the nations within the three continents of Europe, Asia and Africa, the bulk of the book, chapters 12-50, provides details about the direct ancestry of the nation Israel. Four primary characters figure in this history, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and Joseph. Of these, the first three are usually called "the patriarchs," that is, the male clan leaders who became the fathers of the nation Israel.[1] Like the accounts of the origins of the universe and the human race, the stories about the patriarchs also are written in the form of genealogical records.

There are five of them:

- Account of Abraham's Family (11:27b--25:12)
- Account of Isaac's Life (25:13-19a)
- Account of Isaac's Family (25:19b--36:1)
- Account of Esau's Life (36:2-9)
- Account of Jacob's Family (36:10--37:2)

In addition to these genealogical records, the compiler of Genesis rounded off the book with the Joseph narratives, stories that explain how the descendants of Jacob migrated from Palestine to Egypt.

These stories were extremely significant for the nation of slaves that was redeemed from Egypt, an emancipation described in the books of Exodus through Deuteronomy. Though the events surrounding the patriarchs occurred centuries earlier than the exodus, they gave a sense of unity, longevity and manifest destiny to the nation. Of particular importance is the fact that when God would call the nation out of Egypt to go to the land of Canaan, this call was not to some unexplored frontier. Rather, it was a return to the ancestral home of the patriarchs, a home that God had promised to their descendants.

With the patriarchal stories, the reader of Genesis enters a new era of sacred history. In this new era, the God who created the universe but who was compelled by his own righteousness to judge it for its violence and evil took the initiative to win back to himself his wayward children. This process of reconciliation began with a single man, Abram of Ur.

God's Covenantal Promise to Abraham

The primary theme of the patriarchal narratives comes in God's call and covenantal promises to Abram. From Ur in lower Mesopotamia, God directed

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[1]The term "patriarch" can be applied to a rather broad range of ancient individuals, such as David (Ac. 2:29) and various leaders between Abraham and Daniel (1 Maccabees 2:51-60). However, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob are the patriarchs *par excellence*.

Abram to Haran, in northwest Mesopotamia, and then to Canaan (11:31-32; 12:4-5). Though Abram was originally a pagan (cf. Josh. 24:2), God spoke to him, calling him and giving him a great promise (12:1-3, 7; 13:14-17). The substance of this promise, which was reemphasized and detailed throughout Abram's life, contained three prominent features. God promised blessing for the nations through Abram (12:3; cf. 26:4; 28:14), posterity for Abram, and land for Abram's descendants. The legal form after which these promises were fashioned was the ancient Near Eastern covenant. Covenants were the primary legal structures of the times. They were sometimes established by the ritual of dividing an animal, the two contracting parties vowing their faithfulness to the covenant agreement as they stood between the halved corpses. In the case of Abraham, the animals were divided, and God, in the form of a smoking fire pot and blazing torch, passed between the carcasses to confirm his covenantal promises (15:7-21).

The life cycle of Abram, then, revolves around the fulfillment of the covenantal promises. There were serious threats to be overcome, not the least of which was the problem that Abram and his wife were childless. These threats and God's fulfillment of the covenant promises in spite of them began the building of a relationship between God and Abram on the basis of faith (15:5-6).

From the beginning, the compiler of Genesis juxtaposes God's promises alongside Abram's circumstances. Abram is to become a great nation, but his wife, Sarai, is barren (11:30). The land of Canaan was to belong to Abram's descendants, but the Canaanites occupied it (12:6b). When Sarai was almost taken into the harem of Pharaoh of Egypt, God intervened to protect her as the future mother of the covenant son (12:10-20). When Abram generously allowed his nephew to settle in the choicest areas of the Jordan Valley, while he himself turned toward the rugged hill country, God reaffirmed to Abram the promise of land (13:5-18). When Abram contemplated the adoption of a slave, in order to gain an heir, God spoke to Abram that his heir was to come from the sperm of his own body. In fact, his progeny would be so numerous that they would rival the number of stars in the sky (15:1-5). When, at Sarai's suggestion, Abram had a child by a slave-wife (16), God appeared to him and explained that the promised son would be born through his wife, Sarai (17:15-16, 19), even though Abram was now ninety-nine (17:1) and Sarai was eighty-nine (17:17). God even changed Abram's name to Abraham (from *Exalted Father* to *Father of a Crowd*), and he changed Sarai's name to Sarah (= *Princess*) to further mark his promise. The name of the covenant son was to be Isaac (= *He Laughs*). Even in her old age, Sarah was endangered by the desire of a local city-state king who wished to include her in his harem, but once again, God intervened to protect his promise (20). Finally, when Abraham was about a hundred and Sarah was about ninety, the promised son was born, just as God had said (21:1-7).

The test of faith in God's promise was not over yet, however. There was still the problem of Abraham's first-born slave-son (21:8-21), which necessitated God's explanation that Isaac was the true heir (21:12). Even more challenging, God tested Abraham by commanding him to sacrifice his promised son as a holocaust in the land of Moriah (22:1-2). At the beginning, God had called Abraham to cut off his past (12:1). Now he challenged him to cut off his future. Yet Abraham's faith did not waver (22:8), and at the last possible moment, God stayed the execution (22:9-18). Abraham's faith had triumphed in this final test (22:12)!

Most scholars put Abraham at about 2000 BC. A good deal about his surrounding culture in Mesopotamia can be filled out by the archaeological discoveries of vast cuneiform libraries at places like **Ebla** (in modern Syria), **Nuzi** (in modern Iraq near the Tigris) and **Mari** (in modern Iraq on the Euphrates). These ancient documents provide information about social customs, inheritance rights, primogeniture, slave adoption, slave wives, the rights of free women, and government administration. Such information illuminates and explains some of the more curious stories in the Genesis record.

The Isaac Stories

One of Abraham's last duties was to find a wife for his son, Isaac. He determined not to marry his son to a Canaanite (24:3), but rather, Isaac must marry someone from his own clan (24:4). A trusted slave was commissioned, and Rebekah was brought back to Canaan to be married to Isaac (24). Again, the central issue is the covenantal promise and the protection of the covenantal heir. Isaac and Rebekah, like Abraham and Sarah before them, were childless (25:21a). Nevertheless, because of God's intervention, they had twins, Jacob and Esau (25:21b-22). Each of these sons was to sire a nation (25:23). The younger of the twins was to be the covenant son (25:23b), though God's choice created great difficulty, since it flew in the face of ancient Near Eastern customs of primogeniture. Nevertheless, the rights of primogeniture were surrendered by the older son (25:27-34). In time, even though by subterfuge, the patriarchal blessing passed to Jacob, the covenant son (27). Still, the life of the covenant son was in serious danger because of Esau's sworn vengeance (27:41).

In the Isaac cycle, it is Rebekah, more than even Isaac, who figures in the fulfillment of the covenant promise. It is to her that God revealed the identity of the covenant son (25:22-23). Though the covenant promises given to Abraham were repeated to Isaac (26:2-5), it was through Rebekah's plotting that Isaac was deceived into bestowing the rights of primogeniture upon the proper heir (27:5-17). Finally, it was Rebekah who arranged to have Jacob shuttled out of Canaan and back to the land of her ancestors, so that he would not marry a pagan Hittite (27:42--28:5). On the

way, Jacob was confronted by God in a dream. Here, God repeated to him the covenant promises made originally to his grandfather Abraham (28:10-22).

The Jacob Stories

Jacob's life, also, was an arena of challenge for the covenant promises. His difficulties in acquiring the wife he loved (29:16-30), and the birth of twelve sons and a daughter by his two free wives and two slave-wives (29:31--30:24; 35:16-18), raised the question about the heir to the covenant promise. In the cases of both Abraham and Isaac, only one son was to be the heir to the covenantal promises. In the case of Jacob, however, the covenant promise passed to all his sons without distinction (35:11-15). Though there were still formidable threats to Jacob's family, including the tension between Jacob and his wives' relatives (30:25--31:21), God protected him (31:22-24). When Jacob traveled back to Canaan, he faced the threat of Esau's sworn blood vengeance (32:3-8). In Jacob's distress, God confronted him at Peniel, wrestling with him and blessing him (32:22-32). Finally, when Jacob and Esau were reconciled, Jacob knew that God had intervened, for he said that seeing the face of Esau was like seeing the face of God (33:1-10). Near the close of his life, God appeared once again to Jacob (35:9-15), changing his name to Israel (= *He Struggles with God*) and repeating to him the covenantal promises made to Abraham.

The Joseph Stories

In the Joseph stories, the covenant promises ceased to be individualized as they had been previously. As before, however, the central concern is the protection of the covenant promises through the protection of the covenant family. The exile of Joseph by his brothers (37, 39-40) and the possibility of Judah dying without posterity (38) were significant threats. An even greater threat was the possible extinction of the family of Jacob due to the severity of a famine in Canaan (42:1-2). God elevated Joseph, the exiled brother, to vizier in Egypt (41), and through him, he saved the lives of his brothers and their families (42-47). In the end, Joseph recognized that his betrayal by his brothers and his exile into Egypt had been used by God for the greater purpose of preserving the covenant family (45:4-11; 50:20-21).

The Joseph narratives conclude with Jacob's blessing of Joseph's sons, Ephraim and Manasseh (48), and his prophetic words over the entire group of the twelve sons (49). These blessings and pronouncements were prophetic for the future of the nation. Ephraim would eventually rise to be the prominent tribe in the north of Canaan, while Judah would rise to be the prominent tribe in the south of Canaan, each giving their names to the splits in the ruptured nation after the monarchy divided. The Book of Genesis closes with the family of Jacob living in Egypt but anticipating the trek back to Canaan, the land of promise (50:24-26). Earlier, God

had explained to Abraham that his family would be enslaved in Egypt before the land of Canaan passed into their possession (15:13-16). Because Canaan was the land of God's promise, Jacob instructed his sons that he should not be buried in Egypt, but in Canaan (49:29--50:14). Joseph, also, gave similar instructions for his burial. However, his request was for the clan to remove his bones from Egypt when they made their final trek northward toward the land of God's promise (50:22-26).

At the end of the book of Genesis, then, the reader is ready for the most important redemptive event in the Old Testament, the exodus. The basic scene has been set in which to fulfill God's promises to Abraham about the foreign domination of his family and the ultimate gift of freedom. The character of salvation, featuring God's sovereign superintendence of history, is captured in Joseph's words: "You sold me" and "God sent me" (45:4-8). Thus, the pattern of salvation-history is that God bends history to accomplish his purposes, and the theme of God's sovereignty over history will be played out again and again in both Testaments.

Biblical scholars usually suggest that Joseph entered Egypt during the Hyksos Period (c. 1700-1550 BC). The Hyksos seized control of Egypt during a time of weakness, and like Joseph they were not native Egyptians but came from Semitic, Hurrian and Hittite stock. (The name "Hyksos" means "rulers of foreign lands.") That Joseph was able to rise quickly to prominence may have been due to his Semitic background. At the same time, putting Joseph in the Hyksos Period helps explain the intriguing statement in Exodus 1:8 that a new pharaoh came to power who "knew not Joseph." This may well refer to the change of power at the beginning of the 18th Dynasty, the New Kingdom dynasty that succeeded the Hyksos. In the New Kingdom, every effort was made to expunge from the historical record every reference to the despise Hyksos. The Egyptians were apprehensive about invasion, and they were concerned about the loyalty of their citizens. Resident foreign elements might side with an invader, should one come, so the change in attitude toward the Semites was more than likely a form of self-preservation.

The Flight from Egypt into the Sinai (Exodus 1-40)

The remaining four books of Torah describe the primary redemptive event of the Old Testament, the exodus from Egypt. In the pre-history of the nation, the Book of Genesis describes how the seventy members of Jacob's family migrated to Egypt in order to survive a terrible famine Ex. 1:1-5). The promises of God to Abraham and his family, however, were inextricably bound up with the land of Canaan. God had informed Abraham about his family's future residency in Egypt, but he also spoke of their eventual ownership of the entire land of Canaan (Gen. 15:13-16). After Joseph's death, a new regime rose to power in Egypt which was not favorable

toward the family of Jacob (Exod. 1:6-14). Jacob's descendants were reduced to abject slavery in the government building projects. It is in the midst of this slavery that God's redemptive work began. Though many personalities figure in the event of the exodus, Moses towers above the rest as the leader whom God chose to lead his people, the Israelites, out of bondage.

Because the exodus is the central redemptive event in the Old Testament, it carries with it not only historical value, but also paradigmatic value. The theme of the exodus carries through into the New Testament in the imagery of humans as slaves to sin (John 8:31-34) and Jesus as the "second Moses" who leads them out (Luke 9:30-31).[2] Various parts of the exodus story, including the contest between God and Pharaoh, the Passover, the giving of the law, and the construction of the tent of meeting have their New Testament counterparts in Satan's subjugation of the human race (Heb. 2:14-15), the sacrifice of Jesus, God's Lamb, on the cross (1 Cor. 5:7), the new ethic of love and grace that is the fulfillment of the law (Rom. 13:8-10), and the building of the Christian church (Eph. 2:19-22).

Israel in Egypt (1-11)

The Greek word *exodos*, meaning "the way out," gives us the title of the second book in the Bible. The way out of Egypt for the descendants of Israel (Jacob) begins with God's call to an Israelite named Moses.[3] Though born into a slave family, he was reared by an Egyptian princess (2:1-10). Because he murdered an Egyptian slave-master, Moses was exiled to the Sinai desert, where he became a shepherd (2:11-25). Here, at the age of eighty, he was confronted by God at Mt. Sinai. God appeared to him in a burning bush and called him to return to Egypt that he might lead the children of Israel out of their bondage (3-4).

One of the most important things that occurred in Moses' divine call was the revelation to Moses of God's personal name, Yahweh (3:13-15). While the general word for God (*Elohim*) was used throughout the various cultures of the ancient Near East, the special name Yahweh (translated LORD in the English versions) was unique to Israel. Thus, when the Israelites looked backward to the ancestral stories found in Genesis, they were to understand that the God who spoke to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob was this same Yahweh who had intervened to deliver them from Egypt (3:16-17). The name Yahweh is based upon the Hebrew verb "to be," hence, the explanation "I am who I am" or "I will be who I will be."

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[2] It is apparent in the Greek text that Jesus' "departure" parallels the story of the redemption from Egypt, since Luke deliberately chose the Greek word *exodos* (= departure).

[3] The Hebrew name *Moshe* means "to draw out", recalling the circumstances of his protection by the Egyptian princess. In Egyptian, the name means "to bear," and the root is to be found in the names of various others Egyptian Pharaohs, such as, Ahmose, Thutmose, Amenmose and Ramose.

If anything, Moses was a reluctant prophet. He offered to God a string of excuses why he should not return to Egypt (4:1, 10, 13), but in the end, he obeyed. God demonstrated that he would empower Moses with miraculous signs, and he also sent along Moses' brother, Aaron, to assist him (4:14-17). Before his return, however, it was important that Moses circumcise his son in conformity to the covenant God had made with Abraham (4:24-26; cf. Gen. 17:9-14).

When Moses confronted Pharaoh with God's message to let the people leave, there ensued a divine contest. Pharaoh was the god-symbol of the state, while Moses was the spokesman for Yahweh. At stake was which deity had sovereign control, Yahweh or the deities of Egypt? In blow after blow, Yahweh crushed the various Egyptian religious entities by sending plagues upon the land (7-12; cf. Num. 33:3-4). The Egyptians worshiped gods and goddesses connected with the Nile, frogs, the sky, bulls and cows, the sun, and the realm of the dead. In the ten plagues, Yahweh demonstrated his divine sovereignty so that the Israelites knew, without doubt, that he, alone, was truly God (9:16).

The Hebrew vocabulary in the accounts of the plagues reflects the idea that this was a terrific contest of wills between Yahweh, the true God, and Pharaoh, the god-symbol of Egypt. Thus, the plagues are called *maggephah* (= plague, torment), *nega'* (= assault, blow), *'oth* (= sign, mark), *mopheth* (= portent, omen) and *pele'* (= something extraordinary). The verb used is *nakah* (= to strike, to battter). This language of a divine contest helps to explain why Yahweh is described as "hardening Pharaoh's heart" (7:3, 13; 8:15). The hardening of Pharaoh's heart must be viewed against the background of the question, "Who is really God?" Yahweh will brook no rival from any other so-called deity. The hardening of Pharaoh's heart is a sign of Yahweh's sovereignty and demonstrates his power as the true God (10:1-2; cf. 14:4).

The date and Pharaoh of the exodus is a complex problem for biblical scholars. No conclusive information is offered in the Book of Exodus, and archaeological evidence is fragmentary. Two tentative dates have been offered. The early date, based on a calculation of time from 1 Kings 6:1, counts backward 480 years from the 4th regnal year of Solomon, who became king in about 971 BC. In this reckoning, the exodus occurred in about 1447 BC. If so, the Pharaoh of the exodus would have been Amenhotep II. The later date is based upon widespread archaeological evidence of a destruction level in the Canaanite city-states in the mid-1200s BC, which is taken to reflect the conquests of Joshua. Also, a set of correspondences between the Egyptian Pharaoh and several city-states in Canaan from the early 1300s BC suggest that the Israelites were not yet there. Hence, a later date of about 1290 BC is proposed as the time of the exodus. Here, the Pharaoh of the exodus would have been Raamses II. At present, there is no consensus, though it is fair to say that more liberal scholars tend to opt for the later date, while more conservative scholars tend to opt for the earlier

date.

The Passover and the Journey to Sinai (12-18)

With the Passover plague, Pharaoh had no choice but to allow Moses and the people leave (12:31-36). The eating of the lamb and the smearing of the lamb's blood on the door frames of each home became the highest symbol of redemption for the Israelites. Annually and ever after, they would celebrate their freedom of that night (12:1-30). With the bones of Joseph, they set out for the desert (13:19; cf. Gen. 50:24-25). Shortly, however, Pharaoh changed his mind and pursued the Israelites with the Egyptian army (14:5-9). Trapped between this army and a large body of water, the people cried out in despair (14:10-14). Here, Yahweh performed his climactic redemptive act, when he brought the people across the sea on dry ground and destroyed the armies of the Egyptians by drowning them in the sea (14:15--15:21).[4]

The miracles of the ten plagues and the miracle at the Red Sea were followed by other miracles of preservation. Bitter water was turned into sweet water (15:22-25), bread was given from the heavens each morning (16), water gushed from a rock when Moses struck it with his staff (17:1-7), and a desert enemy was soundly defeated (17:8-16). On their journey, Jethro, Moses' father-in-law, met them. His advice was for Moses to appoint administrators over the people in order to divide the responsibilities for oversight, a suggestion that Moses followed (18).

The Covenant at Mt. Sinai (16-31)

In the Sinai mountains, where Yahweh originally appeared to Moses, Yahweh established a perpetual relationship with the people by means of a covenant, the heart of which was the ten commandments (19-20). The people camped at the foot of the holy mountain, where God informed them that he had chosen them to be his treasured possession to serve as a kingdom of priests (19:3-6). Here, God audibly spoke the ten commandments from the mountain that was belching fire and smoke.

Though the ten commandments are generally familiar, even to modern people, their orientation may be somewhat different than is sometimes assumed. The essence of the commandments in the context of the ancient Near East was:

1. Exclusive loyalty to God alone
2. Preservation of God's mystery
3. Warning against presuming upon God's power

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[4] The translation of *Yam Suph* (= Sea of Reeds) as "Red Sea" is based on the LXX and Latin Versions. Location is uncertain, but it was probably one of the bodies of water now comprising the Suez Canal

4. Reverence for sabbath grace
5. Preservation of family
6. Respect for human life
7. Sanctity of marriage
8. Respect for personal ownership
9. Warning against perjury
10. Warning against materialism

Covenants were solemn promises between individuals, clans or city-states made binding by an oath (either a verbal formula or a symbolic action or both). Covenant obligations carried the force of law in the ancient Near East. By the time of Moses, a more-or-less standard form for covenants had been in effect for several hundred years, and God seems to have used this form in establishing his covenant with Israel. The form included:

Title
Historical Prologue
Stipulations/laws
Deposition of the covenant document
Requirement for public reading
Witnesses
Blessings and curses
Covenant oath or ceremony

All these elements are to be found in the covenant between God and the Israelites.

Along with the ten commandments, a variety of corollary laws also were given that addressed such things as slavery, personal injury, the protection of property, social responsibility, the exercise of justice and mercy, and religious calendar observances (21-23). These were recorded in a scroll called "the Book of the Covenant" (24:7-8). In a blood ceremony in which Moses sprinkled the altar (representing God) and the people, the covenant was confirmed (24). Then Moses ascended Mt. Sinai where he remained for forty days and nights, conversing with God (24:18).

The heart of this communication from God to Moses concerned the construction of a worship center called the Tent of Meeting (25-31). This tabernacle was to be a sanctuary for Yahweh in which he would live among his chosen people (25:8). It was to have a courtyard, an altar for burnt offerings, a basin for washing and two holy rooms. In the outer room, there were to be three pieces of furniture, a table for holy bread, a lampstand and an incense altar. In the inner room, there was

one piece of furniture, the sacred ark of the covenant adorned with cherubim. The two rooms were separated by a heavy curtain. Above the lid of the ark and between the cherubim, Yahweh's presence would be enthroned, and from there he would talk directly to Moses (25:22). Only consecrated priests from Aaron's line had access to the inner room in the Tent of Meeting. Finally, the construction of this worship center was assigned to skilled craftsmen who were filled with the Holy Spirit to enable them to complete their work (31:1-11). The fact that the worship center was a tent emphasized its mobility. It was to travel with them when they left the holy mountain.

Unfortunately, the moral constitution of the people was weak. It was one thing to take Israel out of Egypt and quite another to take Egypt out of the people. While still at the holy mountain, the people lapsed into idolatry by reverting to the worship of a golden calf (32). The worship of the golden bull calf was probably a reversion to the Ba'al cult, which was known in the Egyptian delta. Ba'al was the Canaanite god of storm and rain, and he was depicted as riding on the back of a bull. When Ba'al mated with his female consort, Asherah, their union was believed to cause fertility in the land, animals and people. A fundamental part of Ba'al worship was sacred prostitution, where worshippers mated with priests and/or priestesses in a ritual of imitative magic. The worship of the golden calf was a reversion of polytheism as well, for Ba'al was only one of the seventy gods and goddesses in the Canaanite pantheon. This is why at the making of the calf it was said, "These are the gods, O Israel, who brought you up out of Egypt." (32:8).

Moses was so angry when he descended the mountain that he smashed the newly made tablets of stone upon which were inscribed the ten commandments (32:19). His rash action necessitated a return to the top of Sinai so another set could be obtained from God (33-34). In all, the ten commandments were given three times-once orally by the voice of God, once on tables of stone (those broken), and at last reissued again on tables of stone. While on the holy mountain for a second stay of forty days and nights, Moses was privileged to see a theophany of God and his glory (33:18-23). When he descended the mountain the second time, his face was radiant because he had spoke with Yahweh (34:29-35).

The Book of Exodus concludes with the construction of the Tent of Meeting just as had been ordered. The Spirit-endowed craftsmen did their work (35:30-36:2), and they constructed the courtyard, altar, wash basin, sacred rooms, furniture and priestly garments. At last, when the tabernacle was set up, the ten commandments were deposited in the ark (40:20) and the cloud of Yahweh's glory filled the sanctuary (40:34-35). The cloud over the tent became the guide for the Israelites in all their travels from that day forward (40:36-38).

From the Sinai to the Plains of Moab (Leviticus 1-27;

Numbers 1-36)

The two books of Leviticus and Numbers are the least well-known of the five books of Torah for most Christians. They comprise the teaching and events that occurred from when the people were still at Mt. Sinai up until the time they camped in the Plains of Moab to the east of the Jordan River.

The Religious Life (Leviticus)

The third book of Torah, Leviticus, continues the laws by which the nation was to live. In the Hebrew Bible, the name is *wayyiqra* (= and he called), but the word "Leviticus" comes from the Greek Septuagint where it referred, more or less, to the priests. Since the term "Levites", which is a tribal name, is much broader than simply the priests, the name can be misleading. While the name might suggest that the contents were laws for the Levites only or even the priests only, the bulk of the book treats the laws of holiness for the entire nation, and in fact, the Levites are mentioned only once in the book (cf. Lev. 25:32-34). These statutes regulated the people's religious and civil life. If the Book of Exodus contains the more static implements of the Israelite faith (Tent of Meeting and related sacred objects), the Book of Leviticus describes the religious life itself (people and actions). The structure of the book falls broadly into two sections that pivot on the *Yom Kippur* ritual in chapter 16.

Laws for Sacrifice and Reconciliation (1-15)

First come the laws for the sacrificial system (chapters 1-7), which consisted of five offerings. These primary sacrifices were of two types. The first three were relational, that is, they were to provide "a sweet aroma" to Yahweh. The final two were expiatory, that is, they were to atone for sins.

The Five Levitical Offerings

The Burnt Offering: The Hebrew name *'ola* (= what ascends) implies that the entire offering was turned to smoke. This offering was intended to pay homage, offer thanksgiving, seek appeasement or gain expiation. The presenter's actions included the imposition of hands and the slaughter, skinning and dissection of the animal. The priest's actions were to sprinkle the blood on the altar and burn the animal entirely.

The Cereal Offering: Rabbinic tradition regarded the cereal offering, which consisted of raw flour, cakes, wafers or first-fruits with oil, as the poor man's substitute for a burnt offering. The grain could be baked, toasted or fried with salt, but it must not have yeast

or honey. It could be offered as an accompaniment to the burnt offering or by itself. The Hebrew word for this offering, *minha*, generally means "gift" as an expression of reverence, gratitude, homage or allegiance. In contrast to the burnt offering, the priest here only burned a portion and kept the rest for himself and his family.

The Fellowship Offering: The title of this offering is related to the Hebrew word *shalom*, meaning well-being, peace or fellowship. Hence, this offering was intended for the healing of relationship and for restoration to fellowship with God. The presenter laid hands upon the animal and slaughtered it. The priest sprinkled blood on the altar and burned the offering.

The Sin Offering: The Hebrew word for this offering, the *hattat*, means to deviate or fall short of the mark. Hence, this offering was for personal forgiveness or purification of the sanctuary if it had been contaminated by sinful action. As before, the presenter laid his hands upon the animal and slaughtered it. The priest offered its blood before the inner curtain, on the altar and on the base of the altar, after which he burned the sacrifice.

The Guilt Offering: The final offering, as its name implies, was intended to repair a breach of faith through sacrilege against holy objects, laws or oaths. The presenter must provide restitution. The priest sprinkled blood on the altar and burned the sacrifice.

Next comes the order for priesthood, which included a solemn ritual for the ordination of Aaron and his sons (8-9). When the rebel sons of Aaron dared to offer unauthorized fire to Yahweh, he executed them (10).

The third section of laws details the impurity system, including statutes about diet, childbirth, disease and bodily discharge. At issue is the basic principle that God is holy, so therefore, his people must prepare themselves to enter his presence. Anyone defiled by violating a purity law was restricted from the Tent of Meeting, and such cases included the transgression of *kosher* laws regarding food (11), defilement relating to childbirth (12), infectious diseases, such as, leprosy or boils, or contamination from clothing or mildew (13-14). Finally, there were purity laws concerning bodily secretion, such as, male genital discharge, menstruation, or venereal disease (15).

Yom Kippur (16)

Yom Kippur (the Day of Atonement) was the most solemn day in Israel's calendar. Unlike the five levitical offerings, which were for individuals, this sacrifice was for the atonement of the whole nation. The ritual began with the selection of a bull, a ram and two goats. The high priest bathed and vested before beginning the ritual. The bull and one goat was slaughtered, and their blood was sprinkled within the Most Holy Place of the Tent of Meeting. The other goat was driven into the

desert after the sins of the nation had been confessed over it. Finally, the bull and the ram, one for the priest and the other for the people, was burned on the altar.

In the New Testament, the Book of Hebrews draws an extended parallel between the ritual of Yom Kippur and the death of Jesus, showing that Jesus was the perfect atonement for all sin forever (Heb. 9-10).

Ethics, Morality and Holiness (17-27)

The final section of Leviticus contains the holiness code, which emphasizes the principle, "Be holy, for I, Yahweh your God, am holy" (e.g., 19:2; 20:7, 26; 21:8, etc.). The holiness code includes laws forbidding the eating of blood (17), laws forbidding incest, homosexual union and bestiality (18), miscellaneous laws for holy living (19), laws prescribing various punishments for sin (20), laws for priests (21-22), regulations for the liturgical seasons (23, 25) and case laws regarding blasphemy and personal injury (24). It also included blessings for obedience and cursings for disobedience (26). Finally, the book concludes with laws about vows and offerings (27).

In the Desert (Numbers)

The fourth book of Torah takes its English name from the two military censuses in it (1, 26). Its Hebrew name, “In the Desert”, is more descriptive, for the book begins with the Israelites still at the foot of Mt. Sinai and ends with them on the eastern border of Canaan. Various laws relating to the movement of the community are contained in this book along with their travelogue. In terms of time, the book occupies the thirty-nine years the people lived in the Sinai desert after spending a year at the sacred mountain. A direct route from Egypt to Canaan would have taken only a few days, and even an indirect route would not have consumed more than a couple weeks. However, the long stay in the desert was a punishment and waiting period for all the first generation to die off. Thus, the expression “sojourn in the desert” is more accurate than the popular phrase “the wandering in the wilderness.” The period was occupied mostly with prolonged encampments.

From Sinai to Kadesh (1-14)

The people prepared to leave Mt. Sinai by conducting a military census and celebrating their first Passover since the departure from Egypt (1-10). Also, they reviewed their purity laws and prepared trumpets for mustering the units for war.

Traveling northeast in battle formation, they arrived at Kadesh on the southern border of Canaan (11-12). Along the way, they were punished at Taberah (= the burning) for complaining about their hardships and at Kibroth-Hattaavah (= graves of

craving) for complaining about their food. Miriam and Aaron, also, were punished for criticizing Moses' choice of an Ethiopian wife. Finally, however, they arrived at Kadesh near the southern border of Canaan. Here, they sent twelve spies into the land to report on the prospects of an invasion (13). Due to the negative report of ten of the spies, the people were afraid to engage in war and rebelled against Yahweh and Moses (14). As a judgment, Yahweh condemned the nation to a forty-year sojourn in the desert, a year for each day the spies were in the land.[5] Thus, the generation that left Egypt would not be the generation that entered the Canaan.

This judgment on the older generation is one of the seeds for an important idea that arises many times in the Old Testament, the concept of a remnant. A remnant is the part "left over," and the second generation of Israelites would now comprise the remnant who would enter the land of Canaan (26:65).

The two census figures of about 600,000 fighting men (1:46; 26:51; Exod. 12:37) raise logistical problems. The total population of Egypt at the time was hardly more than 3 million, and there is lack of archaeological evidence for a depopulation of Egypt. Other logistical problems include the difficulty of communication, the fact that only two midwives served the whole population (Exod. 1), the improbability of such a group crossing the Red Sea in one night, birth rate logistics for this amount of people growing from only 70 in just a few generations, and the lack of archaeological remnants in the Sinai for such a large group. Known armies in Moses' day only averaged around five to six thousand soldiers, and the largest army Egypt ever fielded, according to their own records, was only about 20,000. Furthermore, Moses' own testimony was that the Israelites were "the fewest of all peoples" (Deut. 7:7).

One possible solution may be that the Hebrew word *alaphim*, usually translated as "thousands," should be translated as "clans", as in the Book of Judges (6:15). If so, then six hundred families would yield a much more realistic total number than the traditional 2 ½ million or more.

From Kadesh to Moab (15-21)

Gradually, the older fighting units began to die off as the nation camped near Kadesh (15-19). In addition to some additional legal obligations, the story of Korah's rebellion is recorded. Korah led a protest against Moses and Aaron and their claim to be the chosen mediators between Yahweh and the people. As a judgment, God caused Korah and his compatriots to be swallowed alive by the earth. This judgment culminated in the divine affirmation of Aaron's family as the sole source for high

[5] The total of the forty years was to be reckoned from the Israelite's departure from Egypt a year earlier (cf. Deut. 1:3).

priests. Also, the red heifer purification ordinance was instituted for those contaminated by a corpse.

At last, they took up their journey again, this time circling around the southern tip of the Dead Sea. Along the way, Moses once more brought water from a rock, though this time, because he struck the rock out of his frustration with the people, God judged him by promising to restrict him from entering the land of Canaan. Both he and Aaron would die with the older generation in the desert (20:12).

As the Israelites traveled to the south of the Dead Sea, the Edomites prohibited them from passing through their land, forcing them to detour in their route. As God had promised, Aaron died and was succeeded by his son (20). In another early war effort, the desert fortress of Arad in the Negev was destroyed.

Along their way, when the people continued to complain, God judged them with venomous snakes. Here, at God's instruction, Moses constructed a bronze snake on a pole to which the people could look for healing if they were bitten. In the New Testament, Jesus used this story to illustrate the meaning of his death on the cross, so that anyone who would look to the cross would be saved (cf. Jn. 3:14-15). Two other desert peoples from the Transjordan attacked the Israelites, but both were defeated by Yahweh's power (21). Finally, the people camped in the Plains of Moab, near the Jericho fords of the Jordan River.

Here, the indigenous Moabites hired a Mesopotamian prophet named Balaam to curse them. Four times he tried to deliver a curse on the Israelites, but each time his evil intent was thwarted by Yahweh's intervention, and he pronounced a blessing instead (22-24). In his last oracle, he predicted that a "star" and "scepter" would rise out of Israel (24:17), a prediction that anticipated the rise of David, and for many Christians, the messianic kingship of Jesus. Since the Moabites were unsuccessful in casting a curse on the Israelites, they resorted to seducing them into Ba'al fertility worship. Because of the Israelites' apostasy at Baal Peor, Yahweh again judged them with a severe plague (25).

Finally, the forty years were at an end, and Moses conducted a new military census (26). Joshua was selected to be Moses' successor (27), and following a review of several more laws, yet another desert enemy, Midian, was defeated (31). With the Transjordan now firmly in Israelite control, two and a half tribes, Reuben, Gad and half of Manasseh, were granted permission to take up residency to the east of the Jordan so long as they pledged support for the war effort on the other side of the river (32-36).

The Second Law (Deuteronomy 1-34)

The final preparation for entry into the land of Canaan consisted of Moses'

final admonitions to the people which he gave in three speeches (1:1-4:43; 4:44-28:68; 29:1-30:20). Here, he reviewed the history of the desert sojourn and the law that God had given at Mt. Sinai, hence the name Deuteronomy, which means "second law." (The Hebrew title consists of the first words in the book, “These are the words...”) The setting is in the Plains of Moab, just opposite Jericho, on the eastern side of the Jordan River. It was now forty years since the exodus. A new generation, except for Joshua and Caleb, had been born and reared in the desert. Here, the covenant made with the former generation at Mt. Sinai was to be renewed by the new generation. This covenant renewal stressed the deep relationship between Yahweh and his people. He had loved and chosen Israel, and now he urged Israel to love and choose him! Paramount is the idea that breaking covenant is not merely breaking a static law-it is breaking a relationship. The emphasis of the book is on the one God, the one people, the one land and the one faith.

Underlying the three speeches of Moses, the content of the book falls into the structure of an ancient Near Eastern suzerainty treaty. Such a treaty was usually made between two nations, one ruled over by a powerful king or suzerain and the other by a vassal. In the case of Israel, Yahweh was the Great Suzerain and Israel was his vassal.

The structure of the treaty included:

- An Historical Prologue (1-3)
- Legal Stipulations (4-26)
- A covenant record (27)
- Blessings and Curses (28)
- Recapitulation of Israel's history (29-30)

The closing chapters offer an appeal for covenant continuity, the deposition of the covenant document, and the record of Moses’ last acts and death (31-34).

That God used the covenant form of a suzerainty treaty, a form common in the ancient Near East, should not be surprising. The whole nature of covenant was part of the fabric of society, and employing a known structure made the law of God and the people’s responsibility to it understandable. Such treaties are well-known from ancient law codes uncovered in archaeological excavations. Notice the following parallels:

Covenant Between Hattusilis of the Hittites and Raamese II of Egypt	**Covenant Between Yahweh, the Divine King, and Israel, his chosen people**
1) Preamble beginning with “these are the words…" and giving the names and titles of the parties	1) Preamble beginning with “these are the words…" (1:1)

2) Historical prologue setting out the previous relations between the two parties	2) Historical prologue reviewing the wanderings in the desert and Yahweh's protection (1-3)
3) Stipulations of the covenant	3) Stipulations of the Sinai law code, including the ten commandments (4-26)
4) List of divine witnesses	4) Statement of blessings and curses (27-30)
5) Statement of blessings and curses	5) Witness of heaven and earth to Yahweh's words (Deut. 31:28; 32:1)

Usually, such an ancient Near Eastern covenant provided for the deposition of the covenant document and its periodic public reading. For Israel, the ten commandments were deposited in the ark of the covenant and a copy of the Book of the Covenant was placed beside the ark (Deut. 31:24-29). Every seven years, the covenant was to be publicly read to all the people (Deut. 31:9-13).

The Primacy of Covenant Relationship

Very early in the book, it is apparent that the relationship between Yahweh and Israel was intended to be more than just perfunctory. The original intent of the exodus-to occupy the land of Canaan-was clearly rehearsed (1:19-21), along with the people's rebellion at Kadesh (1:26-33). This rebellion, along with the people's various other rebellions, was a relational fracture. The people rejected the God who had carried them as a father carries his son (1:31). The discipline of wandering through that great and terrible desert for forty years was mitigated by the constant protection and sustenance of the God who blessed them and cared for them (2:7). During this sojourn, God humbled and tested them so they might learn that life was not about bread, but about relationship with him (8:2-5). When they met desert enemies, Yahweh gave them victory and promised to continue to fight for them (3:21-22). When they prayed, God was near them (4:7).

At the same time, such a relationship had to be nurtured. The Israelites were urged to watch themselves and not forget what God had done for them (4:9; 8:10-20). They were the covenant people, and in renewing the covenant, the second generation of Israelites, most of whom had not been at Sinai, were urged to consider themselves in unity with the first generation who originally received the Torah (4:10-20; 5:2-3). Yahweh would not forget his covenant (4:31), for he had chosen Israel out of his love (4:37; 7:7-9; 10:15). Israel, then, must take to heart God's sovereign choice and conscientiously keep his covenant (4:39-40; 5:6-11, 32-33; 8:6). They were to fear the Lord and love him with all their heart and soul (10:12-13, 16-22; 11:1). Especially, they were to remember their past failures in covenant relationship (9:7-

10:11).

In keeping this covenant, the *Shema* was the central confession of faith.[6] The *Shema* (Deut. 6:4-9) expressed the covenant loyalty that Israel was to show toward her divine Suzerain. Parents were to teach their children daily about this covenant (6:20-24),[7] and the moral heart of it was the ten commandments (6:7-21). Yahweh required exclusive fidelity to himself alone (6:13-14).

The Judgment of Invasion

The coming invasion of the land of Canaan was not merely a conquest. It was also a divine judgment on the Canaanites (9:4-6). Just as the flood of Noah was a judgment, so the invasion of Canaan was a judgment. God had informed Abraham, years earlier, that this would be so (cf. Gen. 15:16), and Deuteronomy bears it out. Thus, in the invasion of Canaan the Israelites were to totally destroy the inhabitants of the Canaanite city-states (7:1-6, 16, 21-26; 9:1-3).

Since the war effort was initiated by Yahweh, a priest must officiate at the muster of the troops. Also, certain rules of war applied concerning who was exempt from military duty and how terms were to be offered to an enemy (20).

The Blessings and Curses

Integral to ancient Near Eastern covenants are the pronouncements of blessings and curses, blessings for covenant-obedience and curses for covenant-disobedience. God's covenant with Israel was no exception. Earlier, a brief list of blessings and curses had been rehearsed with the original generation of Israelites (Lev. 36). Now, these blessings and curses are repeated to their children (4:25-28; 7:12-15; 8:19-20; 28:1-68; 29:18-28). When the Israelites would finally enter the land, they were to participate in a blessing-cursing ritual at the Shechem pass between Mt. Gerizim and Mt. Ebal (11:26-32; 27:4-26).

The likelihood of Israel's failure at covenant faithfulness was strong, and the curses of disaster and exile were virtually inevitable (31:16-22, 29). Nevertheless, the covenant promise of blessing for faithfulness held true. Even if the Israelites eventually were dispossessed of the promised land as a covenant curse, they still could repent and return to Yahweh. He would hear their prayer and restore them to their land (4:27-31; 30:1-10).

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[6] The first word of Deut. 6:4 is the Hebrew *shema* (= hear), and it has remained the central confession of faith for Israelites from the time of Moses to modern history. It is still recited in the Jewish synagogue service.

[7] It is from this passage that Jews derived the practice of putting *mezuzahs* in their homes. Also, the phylacteries worn in the time of Jesus also were based on this passage.

The Central Shrine

Of special importance in Deuteronomy is the call for a central place of worship after the land of Canaan had been conquered (12). Canaanite worship was performed at many different sites, shrines and high places, and Ba'al and Asherah, the Canaanite fertility deities, were believed to have many manifestations (12:1-3). The worship of Yahweh was to be different, however (12:4, 29-31). Even though the patriarchs had worshipped at several locations, once the Israelites were firmly in control of the land of Canaan, they were to establish a single place of worship (12:5, 11, 17-18, 26).

This instruction, of course, would become very important in the time of David and Solomon, when under their leadership the Israelites began constructing of a central, permanent sanctuary. Until then, there were a variety of sacred places used throughout the land of Canaan.

The Coming Monarchy

Another future institution anticipated in Deuteronomy is the kingship. In God's covenant with Abraham, he promised that kings would come from his posterity (Gen. 17:6, 16; 35:11). In the Balaam oracle, the same royal promise is reiterated (Num. 24:17). Here, God anticipated the day when the Israelites would adopt a monarchy as their form of government (17:14ff.). When they did so, the king they enthroned must be an Israelite chosen by God.

The rule for kingship included both restrictions and requirements. The king was forbidden to amass a huge herd of horses, he must not acquire a large harem, and he should refrain from building a large treasury of gold and silver (17:16-17). These restrictions were essentially aimed at the king not trusting in his own conventional resources for survival instead of Yahweh. Horses in the ancient Near East were used for chariots, harems were usually acquired to establish political alliances, and a treasury was often little more than a war chest. The king of Israel, however, must not trust in any of these things; he must trust in Yahweh! Furthermore, he must keep a copy of the Torah with him at all times and read it regularly (17:18-20). Israel, of course, indeed would become a monarchy in the days of Samuel (1 Sa. 8-10).

The Law of the Prophet

The vocation of prophets in the ancient Near East was not confined to Israel. Archaeological texts as well as biblical ones indicate that other countries and other religions had prophets, Balaam being one the most notable. However, the law of the prophet for Israel was rigid. Since a prophet in Israel claimed to speak for Yahweh, his predictions and imperatives must be absolutely accurate and faithful. Thus, the third commandment warns that he must not use Yahweh's name in vain (5:11). If the prophet makes a prediction, it must come to pass, else he must be executed as a false

prophet (18:14-22). If a prophet urges the people to turn away from Yahweh to worship the Canaanite deities, even if he is able to perform miracles, he is still a false prophet and worthy of execution (13:1-5).

Within the deuteronomic law of the prophet there appears the prediction of a coming faithful prophet comparable to Moses himself (18:15, 18). At the end of the book, the appendix states that no prophet of this status had ever arisen by the time the book reached its final form (34:10-12).[8] This prediction was never fulfilled in the Old Testament. It would await the coming of Jesus in the New Testament to be hailed as the "prophet like Moses" (cf. John 6:14).

Miscellaneous Laws

Various others laws were reviewed with the people in the Plains of Moab. These included instructions concerning:

- Kosher food (14:1-21)
- Tithing (14:22-29; 26:1-15)
- The sabbatical year (15)
- The annual pilgrim festivals (16)
- The institution of tribal judges (16:18-20; 17:8-13; 19:15-21)
- The priestly share of offerings and sacrifices (18:1-8)
- The refuge cities for someone accused of manslaughter (19:1-14)
- Procedure for unsolved murder (21:1-9)
- Miscellaneous laws for the community (21:10-22:12; 23:1-25:19)
- Laws for sexual violations (22:13-30)

The Song and Blessing of Moses

Before he died, Moses composed a song for the Israelites that appears in the form of a covenant lawsuit. In a suzerainty lawsuit, the suzerain confronts his vassal with violating the covenant and appeals to witnesses to substantiate his charge. Here, Moses confronted the Israelites with their past rebellions and the inevitability of their future covenantal failure (31:14-32:47). Then, after being instructed by God to ascend Mt. Nebo where he was to die (32:48-52), Moses blessed the tribes (33). He died on Mt. Nebo, and Joshua took his place as the leader of the people (34).

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[8] There are different theories about when Deuteronomy reached its final form. Though the substantial part of the book comes from Moses, there are some parts that may have been composed or edited later. (We assume, for instance, that Moses did not record the narrative about his own death, cf. 34:1-8).

THE HEBREW BIBLE

Torah	**Prophets**	**Writings**
Genesis	*Former Prophets*	Psalms
Exodus	Joshua	Proverbs
Leviticus	Judges	Job
Numbers	Samuel	*Megilloth*
Deuteronomy	Kings	Song of Songs
	Latter Prophets	Ruth
	Isaiah	Lamentations
	Jeremiah	Esther
	Ezekiel	Ecclesiastes
	The Twelve	Daniel
		Ezra-Nehemiah
		Chronicles

The Conquest Narratives (Joshua 1-24)

Following the section of the Hebrew Bible called Torah comes a second section called The Prophets. The first division of this section, called the Former Prophets, consists of the books Joshua, Judges, Samuel and Kings. (In our English Bibles, of course, Samuel and Kings have been further divided into 1 and 2 Samuel and 1 and 2 Kings).

Together, these documents provide a history of the nation Israel while in the land of Canaan. These books have a special theological relationship to the Book of Deuteronomy, especially with respect to the covenant blessings and curses for obedience and disobedience. The fortunes of the people of Israel were shaped by these blessings and curses. When the nation was faithful to Yahweh, he blessed them and gave them success. When the nation fell away from the pure worship of Yahweh, he judged them through the events of history, allowing foreign nations to invade and oppress them. The blessings and curses were spelled out vividly. If the nation was faithful to the covenant, Yahweh promised fertility, peace and general favor (Deut. 11:13-15; 28:1-14; 30:15-16). If the nation broke covenant, they could expect disease, drought, invasion, devastation and exile (Deut. 11:16-17; 28:15-68; 30:17-18). Longevity in the land was entirely dependent upon covenant faithfulness (Deut. 4:25-28; 8:19-20; 28:36-37, 64-68).

In the history recorded in the Former Prophets there is the single dominant objective. It is to understand the factors that led to the dissolution of the kingdom of Israel. Joshua, the first book, describes how Israel entered the land. The book of Kings, the last book, describes how Israel ultimately lost the land. Why was Israel,

the nation of God's chosen people who had received such great promises from him, a kingdom under divine judgment? Why did Yahweh allow the destruction of the culture, religion, temple and political entity of the people he had called to be a great and vast nation. Above all, why had Israel lost the land that was intended to be hers forever?

The Book of Joshua begins the history by recording the invasion of the land of Canaan. Though the nation had failed forty years earlier at Kadesh, this time, under Joshua's leadership, they did not hesitate.

The War Record (1-12)

The first section of the book details the war record as Yahweh led his people against the Canaanites. God had promised Abraham that when the iniquity of the Canaanites reached its full measure, he would give the land to his descendants (Gen. 15:16). The invasion was to be considered a divinely ordered judgment on the Canaanites (Deut. 9:4-6). Before his death, Moses had commissioned Joshua, at God's directive, to begin the invasion (Deut. 31:1-8). Appearing yet again to Joshua, Yahweh announced that the moment to initiate the wars had come (1:1-9). Of course, the Transjordan already was under Israelite control. However, the two and a half clans who were to settle east of the river had promised not to neglect the war effort on the west side of the river (Num. 32).

The first task was to reconnoiter the initial military target, Jericho, which lay just over the Jordan River from the Plains of Moab. Two spies were sent in (2). Though their mission was dangerous, they were sheltered by a Canaanite woman, Rahab, and in return for her help, they promised that she would be spared when the invasion took place. When the spies returned, the army crossed the Jordan as God held back the waters, just as he had done at the Red Sea (3-4). After renewing the covenantal sign of circumcision (5), the army encircled Jericho, marching around it at God's instruction until, when the war trumpets sounded, the walls fell down flat (6). It was their first great victory. The city of Jericho was banned from habitation as a symbol of God's judgment.

Two major excavations at Jericho have sparked heated debate. The earlier one, by John Garstang in the 1930s, uncovered a collapsed double wall and an occupational layer indicating a destruction by fire. He dated both to about 1400 B.C. and concluded they were caused by Joshua's troops. The later one, by Kathleen Kenyon in the 1950s, overturned the dating of Garstang, putting both the double wall and the destruction layer several hundred years too early to be connected with Joshua. At present, there is no consensus on the relationship of Jericho's excavation and the narratives in Joshua.

Late 13th century destruction levels at other sites, such as, Hazor, Bethel and

Lachish, demonstrate that many Canaanite cities were attacked and dismantled. However, some sites show multiple destruction levels, and the identification of particular strata with the conquest of Joshua can only be by inference. Thus, at present archaeological evidence relating to Joshua's time is fragmentary and inconclusive.

Israel's invasion of Canaan was strictly regulated by Mosaic law. If a city under siege was not within the boundaries of the Holy Land, its citizens might be offered terms of peace, under which they would be enslaved though not exterminated (Deut. 20:10-15). However, if the city was within the borders of the Holy Land, then the procedure was to exterminate everything that breathed (Deut. 7:1-2, 16; 13:12-16; 20:16-18; cf. Num. 21:1-3). All entities within the borders of Israel's inheritance were to be irrevocably given over to Yahweh, and nothing was to be kept as booty. When Jericho fell, Joshua pronounced the required ban over the ruins (6:26). However, an Israelite infantryman broke the ban by keeping several items from the cursed city as booty (7:1). Because of this violation, the advance against the next military target, Ai, was a disaster (7). Only after the soldier and his family had been executed and the covenant with Yahweh had been renewed did the army succeed in exterminating Ai, the second target (8). After the fall of Ai, the Israelites staged the ceremony of covenant blessings and curses that had been ordered by God when they had secured the Shechem pass between Mt. Ebal and Mt. Gerizim (8:30-35; cf. Deut. 11:26-32; 27:11-26).

The strategy of invasion took the form of divide and conquer. Joshua pushed through central Canaan, effectively dividing the north from the south. Though tricked into making a forbidden alliance with one Canaanite group (9; cf. Deut. 7:2), Joshua did not falter. When a coalition of five city-state kings attacked what was now an Israelite stronghold, Joshua led the army on a forced march and took the Canaanites by surprise. Two miracles, one a hailstorm against the Canaanite armies and the other the lengthening of daylight, marked this battle as especially significant, for as the narrator of Joshua says, "Surely Yahweh was fighting for Israel" (10:15)! So Joshua completed war campaigns in central, southern and northern Canaan respectively until the land was under Israelite control (10-12).

In addition to the Israelites, other newcomers to Canaan arrived on the south coast sometime in about 1200 B.C. They were part of a wave of Aegean peoples, called "sea peoples" by the Egyptians, who invaded Egypt by boat. After being turned back by Pharaoh Ramesses III, many of them settled in Palestine's southern Mediterranean coast into a pentapolis of military cities: Ashdod, Ashkelon, Ekron, Gaza and Gath. The best known group among them were the Philistines, and they gave to Canaan the name "Palestine," which is derived from "Philistine." Archaeologists have noted that Philistine pottery decoration, much of which has

survived and been excavated, shows affinities with Aegean pottery more than indigenous Canaanite pottery.

Though the Philistines are mentioned in the Book of Joshua only once (13:2-3), where it indicates that the Israelites did not gain control of the five Philistine cities, in later times these immigrants would become a terrible military threat to the Israelites.

The Tribal Allotments (13-21)

The second section of the Book of Joshua is concerned with territorial allotments to the nine and a half clans. The preface to this section is important for a fair assessment of what had happened in the initial invasion. While the narrative states that Joshua "took the entire land, just as Yahweh had directed Moses" (11:23), it must not be assumed that every Canaanite city was under Israelite control. In fact, a considerable number of areas remained in Canaanite hands, including the land of the Philistines (11:22; 13:2-7; 15:63; 16:10; 17:12-13, 16-18). Essentially, the Israelites controlled the spine of Canaan in the central hill-lands, but along the sea coast and the broad Valley of Esdraelon (Jezreel) between Galilee and Mt. Carmel, they held only minimal control. Thus, the land was allotted, and the tribal boundaries were fully described, whether or not the clans fully controlled the area. The land was divided by lot so as to be fair (14:2; 18:11; 19:1, 10, 17, 24, 32, 40).

Special towns were designated as sanctuaries for persons fleeing from blood vengeance (20; cf. Deut. 19; Num. 35), and other towns were designated as the homes for the Levites, since they were to receive no tribal holdings (21). After all allotments had been completed, Joshua dismissed the clans to their respective territories. Though the initial invasion had been highly successful, there still remained significant tracts of land to subdue. It was left to the individual clans to completely drive out the Canaanites from the territories that had been allotted to them.

Epilogue (22-24)

After the tribal allotments west of the Jordan had been concluded, Joshua dismissed the Transjordan tribes to their homes across the river (22). He blessed them (22:6) and warned them that they must carefully obey the covenant (22:5). Near the Jordan, the Transjordan tribes built a memorial altar as a witness to their unity with the tribes on the west of the Jordan (22:9-34).

The book closes with Joshua's farewell address to the clan leaders in which he encouraged them to pursue a full occupation of the land (23:4-5). Even though Canaanite enclaves persisted, the Israelites must not assimilate them or their pagan lifestyles into their own culture (23:6-13). Rather, they must faithfully keep

Yahweh's covenant, else they would earn for themselves the curses of covenant disobedience (23:14-16).

Finally, Joshua led the clans in a ceremony of covenant renewal (24), once again inscribing a record of the covenant laws and erecting a covenant memorial stone (24:25-27). At last, Joshua died. The last words of the book describe the burial of Joseph's bones which had been carried from Egypt to Canaan (24:32; cf. Gen. 50:25-26; Exod. 13:19).

The Tribal League (Judges 1-21)

The Book of Judges is the history of the Tribal League before the Israelites adopted a monarchy. The precedent for this political structure lies in the book of Deuteronomy, where Moses appointed "judges and officials" for each of the tribes in their various towns (Deut. 16:18-20; 17:8-13). The judge was ostensibly a civil magistrate who presided over criminal charges and civil disputes. As such, there was not a single judge for the whole nation, but many judges who lived and served among the various tribal allotments. In the Book of Judges, however, the role of the judge takes on a decided military character. The description of the judges is not so much the work of a civil magistrate as that of a deliverer from Canaanite oppression. To be sure, there are brief descriptions of the former type of judgeship, as when the record says Deborah "held court" (4:5). More typical, however, is the statement made of Othniel, the first judge, when the text says, "He became Israel's judge and went to war" (3:10). The general description of a judge comes early in the book as one who was raised up by Yahweh to "save them [the Israelites] out of the hands of their enemies" (2:18).

The Book of Judges is a theological record of failure (cf. Ps. 106:34-43). A casual reading of the Book of Joshua might seem to describe a completely victorious invasion of the land of Canaan. However, the Book of Judges begins with a preface which modifies this picture considerably (1:1--3:6). Though effort was made to conquer the Canaanites, the Israelites were successful only in the mountains. In the plains, where the Canaanites possessed the military superiority of chariots against infantry, the Israelites were regularly overpowered (1:19).

The various enclaves which remained, and there were many of them (1:21, 27-36), stood as glaring evidence that the Israelite invaders had breached their covenant responsibility before Yahweh (2:1-4). Though dire warnings against Israelite treaties and intermarriages with the Canaanites had been issued (Deut. 7:3-4; Josh. 23:12-13), such treaties and intermarriages did, in fact, occur (3:5-6; 14:1-3). These treaties and intermarriages served to elevate the Canaanites to a position of theological acceptance, and this, in turn, threatened the very definition of Israel as the people of

God.

Thus, the failure of the Israelites to dislodge the Canaanites resulted in a shifting of the divine purpose from extermination to coexistence. The appearance of the Angel of Yahweh at Bokim to announce the fatal nature of this covenant failure was cause for great grief (2:1-5). Yahweh intended to leave these enclaves of Canaanites as troublers for the Israelites (2:11-15, 20-23; 3:2). This alien military threat continued throughout the period of the judges.

The Preface (1:1-3:6)

The Book of Judges is arranged in three easily identifiable sections, a Preface, a History of the Judges, and an Appendices. The Preface provides two windows through which to look at the covenant failure of the nation. The first window (1:1--2:5) shows that the conquest of Canaan and the final settlement of Israel in the land was punctuated with the clans' failure to dislodge many of the enclaves of Canaanites. In addition, the Israelites also made provisional treaties with some Canaanites. These treaties were a direct violation of the covenant code. At Bokim, an angel appeared to announce the Israelites' failure to keep the covenant code of conquest (2:1-3). The name *Bokim* (meaning "weepers") symbolized the nation's covenantal failure.

The next part of the Preface describes the apostasy of the nation as its citizens indulged in the pagan religions of the Canaanites who still lived among them (2:6--3:6). After the death of Joshua and the warriors of his generation, the new generation failed miserably. The nation abandoned Yahweh repeatedly in order to serve the Canaanite fertility gods (2:10-13, 17-19). In accordance with the covenantal curses, Yahweh turned the nation over to her enemies (2:14-15). The phrase, "Israel did evil in Yahweh's eyes" (3:7-8, 12; 4:1-2; 6:1; 8:33-34; 10:6-8; 13:1), becomes the hallmark of the Tribal League, and inevitably, such covenant violations led to the anger of Yahweh, Israel's divine Suzerain.

History of the Judges (3:7-16:31)

The second major section of the book describes a repeating cycle of apostasy, oppression, repentance, deliverance, and temporary peace. Again and again the Israelites demonstrated their vacillation and faithlessness toward Yahweh's covenant. This covenant-breaking pattern led to the nation's repeated oppression, with military superiority shifting back and forth between Israel and the various Canaanite nations. Of course, such oppressions were largely local. In most cases they involved a few of the Israelite clans rather than the subjugation of the entire land of Palestine. Nevertheless, such encroachments were a serious religious matter under the articles of Yahweh war, and all of the clans were expected to respond.

Successively, various tribes of Israel were oppressed by Cushan-rishathaim of northwest Mesopotamia (3:7-8), Eglon of Moab (3:12-14), Jabin of northern Canaan (4:1-3a), the bedouin clans of Midian and Amalek (6:1-5, 33), the Transjordan Ammonites (10:6-9) and the Philistines along the south coast (13:1). In each case, because of Israel's repentance, Yahweh sent a judge to rescue the nation (3:9-10, 15, 31; 4:3b-10; 6:6-12, 34-35; 10:10-16; 11:29; 13:2-5). Following the deliverances, there was usually a time of temporary peace before the cycle began all over again (3:11, 30; 5:31b; 8:28). Altogether, there were twelve judges, six of them described in varying detail (Othniel, Ehud, Deborah, Gideon, Jephthah and Samson) and six in brief notations (Shamgar, Tola, Jair, Ibzan, Elon and Abdon). In addition, two other persons of note figure in the history. One was Barak, a military leader who worked closely with Deborah, and the other was Abimelech, a leader who unsuccessfully attempted to establish the first Israelite monarchy.

The exploits of the judges must be assessed in light of the supernatural power of God. The repeating idea is that the Spirit of Yahweh "rushed upon" these deliverers, empowering them to defeat their Canaanite foes (3:10; 6:34; 11:29; 13:25; 14:6, 19; 15:14).[9] Ehud, one of the early judges, assassinated Israel's Moabite oppressor while he was in his privy, stabbing him to death (3:20-23).[10] Deborah, coming to the aid of a timid Barak, led the Israelites in the battle of Mt. Tabor against the Canaanite king of Hazor. Sisera, the enemy general, was killed by Jael, a woman who tricked him into sleeping and then drove a tent nail through his head (4). Gideon defeated the Midianites with a small force of 300, who shocked the enemy with trumpet blasts and the sudden flash of lamps in the night (7). Later, however, he succumbed to a religious perversion of his own (9). Samson, a man under Nazarite vow (cf. Num. 6), was supernaturally empowered to attack the Philistines with stupendous feats of strength. He killed a lion with his bare hands (14:5-6), struck down thirty opponents in a single confrontation (14:19), tied 300 foxes together in pairs and sent them into the Philistine grain fields with fiery torches tied to their tails (15:3-5), struck down a thousand enemies with the jawbone of a donkey (15:15), uprooted the gates of Gaza, posts and all (16:3), and in his death collapsed the roof of the Philistine temple in Gaza by pulling down the pillars, thus killing several thousand (16:27-30).

In spite of these miraculous deliverances, the period of the judges must be reckoned as a time of terrible failure. Some of the judges themselves, in spite of their

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[9] More than one Hebrew verb is used to describe this endowment with the Spirit, including "impelled", "clothed" and "rushed upon."

[10] The story contains several puzzling Hebrew words and expressions, but one plausible interpretation, based on archaeological data, is that Eglon's "upper chamber" contained a toilet, cf. B. Halpern, "The Assassination of Eglon," *Bible Review* (December 1988) pp.32-41, 44.

supernatural endowments, were flagrantly unfaithful to Yahweh's covenant. Gideon, as we have already seen, lapsed into false religion (8:22-27). Abimelech, Gideon's son, was little more than a ruffian and bandit (9). Jephthah made a rash vow culminating with the execution of his own daughter (11:30-40).[11] Samson consorted with Philistine prostitutes (16:1, 4) and despised his Nazarite vow to God (16:17-19). In the end, though there are some bright spots, most of the history of the judges is aptly described by the ancient poet who said of the times, "Many times he [Yahweh] delivered them [the Israelites], but they were bent on rebellion and they wasted away in their sin" (Psa. 106:43b).

Canaanite religion was obsessed with ritual sex. A major mythological theme was the mating of the storm god Ba'al (= master, husband) with his consort Asherah (=goddess of fertility). Cultic sites on high hills or raised platforms, and fertility symbols such as stone pillars (phallic representations) and sacred trees (groves), dotted the landscape. These cultic places were designed for ritual prostitution, a sort of imitative magic mimicking the mating of Ba'al and Asherah. One of the most common small finds in Palestinian archaeological excavations are cultic figures of Asherah with pronounced genitalia. Thus, when Israel "served the Ba'als and Asherahs" (3:7) and went "whoring after other gods" (2:17; 8:27, 33, KJV), it was more than just a figure of speech.

Appendices (17-21)

The final section of the book recounts two unconnected incidents of the period, both demonstrating the general internal disorder of the times. In this section, no less than four times the narrative explains that, "Israel had no king," and/or "Everyone did as he saw fit" (17:6; 18:1; 19:1; 21:25). The first incident tells of the kidnapping of a Levite by the clan of Dan as the Danites were migrating from central to northern Palestine, a story painted against the backdrop of religious syncretism and idolatry. That the Danites migrated north at all was due to their failure at Yahweh war. They had not yet been able to establish a land holding in the coastal plain (18:1). Traveling to the north, they attacked Laish, an ancient city in northern Galilee, destroying it and rebuilding their own city, which they named Dan. Here they established a cultic center, a maverick religious expression that endured even throughout the time of the divided monarchy (18:30-31; cf. 1 Kg. 12:26-30).

The second incident recounts a civil war that nearly exterminated the Benjamites. This war was instigated by a corporate attempt at sodomy and a devastating gang rape in Gibeah of Benjamin (19). In retaliation for this outrage, the

[11] There is some discussion about whether or not Jephthah followed through on his rash vow, but the Hebrew text most naturally is read that he killed his own daughter, when it says, "He did to her as he had vowed" (11:39).

other clans mustered for war against the Benjamites, nearly exterminating them (20). Special provision had to be made to the surviving Benjamites to provide wives for them in order to preserve a future for their clan (21).

Finally, the book closes on this solemn pronouncement: "In those days Israel had no king; everyone did as he saw fit" (21:25).

The Beginning of the Royal Family (Ruth 1-4)

The first line in the story of Ruth identifies the events as having occurred during the period of the Tribal League (1:1). The story is at once a romance and a bright spot in the dreary history of tribal failure. It tells how God preserved the immediate ancestral family of David from extinction. Central to the story is a repeating play on words between the names of the characters and the events. An Israelite Elimelech (= My God is King), his wife Naomi (= Pleasant), and his two sons Mahlon (= Sickness) and Kilion (= Consumption) left Bethlehem (= the House of Bread) to live in Moab, due to a great famine. In Moab, the sons married Moabite women, but in time, all the males died. When Naomi determined to return to her Israelite homeland, Orphah (= Back of the Neck) elected to stay in her native Moab. Ruth (= Friend), however, refused to part with her mother-in-law. Accepting the faith of Israel, and rejecting the ancestral gods of Moab, Ruth became an Israelite by adoption (1:16-18). When the two women returned, Naomi refused to be called by her former name, choosing rather to be called Marah (= Bitter). With no male heirs, it appeared that the family line was doomed (1).

Back in Bethlehem, however, Ruth was given the right to glean in the fields of Boaz, a wealthy bachelor. Providentially, he turned out to be a near relative, and as such, was in a position to marry Ruth and preserve the family line of her deceased husband. Though there were some serious obstacles, not the least of which was the fact that a relative more closely related to Ruth had first right to marry her, in the end, Ruth and Boaz were indeed married (3-4). The theme of redemption rings clear in the story, since the marriage of Ruth to her relative Boaz fell under the redemption laws of the Torah.

One of the most pervasive laws in ancient Near Eastern patriarchal society concerned men who died without a surviving heir. The common way of providing an heir was for the widow to marry a close relative, and the first son of this second union would be reckoned to the deceased husband, thus becoming his legal heir. Legislation for levirate marriage (lit., "brother-in-law marriage") is to be found in many ancient Near Eastern law codes, and the same legislation is found in the Torah (Deut. 25:5-6).

God blessed Ruth and Boaz with a child, and thus the family line of Elimelech

and Naomi was preserved (4:14-17). This family became the ancestors of David, Israel's greatest king (4:17-21).

Poetical Books

The Literary Style of Hebrew Poetry

Accustomed as readers are to the dominance of rhyme and meter in English poetry, Hebrew poetry comes as something of a surprise, since it employs somewhat different dynamics. This difference is more of an advantage rather than a disadvantage with respect to translation, however, since rhyme and meter are virtually impossible to retain once a text is translated into a second language. Hebrew poetry does employ accented syllables (3 + 3 or 2 + 2, etc.), assonance, alliteration and other phonetic devices that are only discernible in the Hebrew text. Still, the primary feature of Hebrew poetry--parallel lines of thought--is for the most part quite capable of being reproduced in the second language. Thus, the English reader can gain a considerable appreciation for Hebrew poetry even though it is translated.

There are various styles of parallel thought in Hebrew poetry. The most basic is **synonymous** (or congruent) parallelism, where the first thought is repeated by different words in the succeeding line(s).

He-made-known his-ways to-Moses, *a b c*
His-deeds to-the-people-of-Israel. *b' C'*
(Psa. 103:7)

Another is **chiasmus** in which there is an inverted parallelism, the first and last lines paralleling each other, while internal lines between them parallel each other in a sort of stair step fashion. Notice the inversion of "hearts", "ears" and "eyes" in a pattern of *a b c // c' b' a'*.

*Make the **heart** of this people calloused;*
*make their **ears** dull*
*and close their **eyes**.*
*Otherwise they might see with their **eyes**,*
*hear with their **ear**s,*
*understand with their **heart**s, and turn and be healed.*
(Isa. 6:10)

Yet another form is **antithetic** parallelism, where the lines are contrasting

rather than similar. Here the pattern is a+ b+ // a- b-.

Reckless-words pierce-like-a-sword,
but-the-tongue-of-the-wise brings-healing.
(Pro. 12:18)

The group of writings generally labeled "the poetical books" are by no means the only poetry in the Old Testament. In fact, many if not most of the oracles of the prophets were also poetical, and varying amounts of poetry appear in Genesis, Exodus, Numbers, Deuteronomy, Joshua, Judges, 1 and 2 Samuel, 1 and 2 Chronicles, and so forth. In all, more than a third of the Old Testament was originally composed in poetic form. In the older English Bibles (as well as in the ancient translations of the early church), this poetry was not set off in poetic lines. The Revised Standard Version (1952) was the first English translation to use indented lines. Now, most modern translations do so.

What distinguishes the five books of Job, Psalms, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes and the Song from the others is that they are not so directly connected the political fortunes of the nation Israel. While some Psalms are related to personal circumstances in the life of David, by and large the poetical books contain compositions of worship and wisdom that can be read largely independent of any identifiable national crisis.

The Problem of Innocent Suffering (Job 1-42)

This work addresses the difficult problem of human suffering, and in particular, the suffering of those who do not deserve it. Why is the distribution of suffering in the world so inequitable? Is life simply cause and effect, in which suffering is punishment and blessing is reward, or are there deeper issues? As an approach to these questions, the book of Job is one of the world's oldest philosophical works.

Three preliminary questions arise about the book. First, was Job an historical person, or is this story a kind of long parable? The essential message of the book would remain the same in either case, but references to Job in other parts of the Bible seem to decide the question in favor of his being an historical person (Eze. 14:14; James 5:11). If it can be assumed that Job was an historical person, the second question concerns his era. When did he live? No final answer can be given, except to say that the patriarchal description in chapter 1 as well as the absence of any distinctively Israelite institutions seem more typical of the period before the time of Moses. The third question, "When was the account written?", is equally dubious,

with scholarly opinions varying by several centuries. A composition date within the age of Solomon has been supported by some early church fathers, some Jewish rabbis, Martin Luther and others. Also, it is not impossible that the original composition might have been edited subsequently (there are various linguistic and literary reasons that tend in that direction). Still, these questions, even if answered, would not substantially change the basic meaning of the book. It is to this meaning that we now turn.

The Prologue (1-2)

Job, a man of substance living somewhere east of the Jordan River, was innocent and devout (1:1, 4-5, 8, 20-22; 2:3, 10). This fact must be clearly understood if the story is to have any real meaning. Nevertheless, he experienced great personal tragedy (1:13-19; 2:7-8), losing his wealth, his children, and finally, his health. Behind the scenes, the reader is privy to a divine contest between God and Satan over Job's loyalty. Cynically, Satan says Job's faith is little more than a fair weather convenience. God, by contrast, allows Satan to remove from Job every vestige of comfort and resource in order to demonstrate that Job's loyalty is not simply self-interest.

The Complaint (3)

The severity of Job's tragedy causes him to curse his existence (3:1-2). His haunting questions, "Why was I not a still-born?" (3:11ff.), and "Why do people live who would be better off dead?" (3:20ff.) set up the dialogue that follows between Job and his three friends.

The Dialogue with His Three Friends (4-31)

The discourses between Job and his friends explore the meaning of his suffering. Each friend offers an explanation for Job's downfall, and to each Job replies in turn. The dialogue moves in cycles. In the first cycle, Eliphaz suggests that Job suffers because he is guilty of some heinous offense against God (4:7-9; 5:17, 27). He assumes that all life experience is cause and effect. Bad things happen to bad people, and good things to good people. Job, for his part, commiserates that his friends lack compassion (6:14-15). In any case, Eliphaz' blustering insinuations are not supported by any proof that Job has done evil (6:24-30).

When Bildad speaks, it is only to say more forcefully the same thing as Eliphaz (8:20). Job's children died because they sinned (8:4). To rectify his circumstances, Job needs only to confess his sin and repent (8:5-7). Job's second reply is to complain that a mortal such as himself is incapable of arguing his case with God (9:1-3, 14-15). There is such an infinite qualitative difference between

them that the only way they could communicate is if there were a mediator between them both (9:32-35). Job even speculates about whether or not God might enjoy watching his creatures suffer (10:3).

Zophar, the third friend, more-or-less repeats the arguments of the first two with the added retort that Job's sins are so many that even God has forgotten some of them (11:5-6). To this, Job bitterly retorts that his three counselors are thoroughly heartless (12:1-4; 13:2-5, 12). Nevertheless, he states his resolved to maintain his faith in God, even if to the death, and persists in defending his own innocence (13:15-19). He laments the trouble of life (14:1-2) and speculates about the possibility of justice in an afterlife (14:13-17).

The cycle then repeats, with each of the friends offering platitudes that do not substantially differ from the arguments of the first cycle (15-21). Yet a third time the cycle repeats (22-31). In the end, neither side convinces the other.

The worst feature for Job throughout this devastating tragedy is the silence of God (9:14-20; 19:7; 23:8-9; 31:35). His friends present their long and tedious arguments that such misfortune must surely be a judgment, if not for some obvious sin, then certainly for some hidden one (4:7-9; 5:17; 8:1-6, 20; 11:1-6). Defiantly, Job defends his innocence (6:24-30; 23:11-12; 27:1-6; 31:5-40). Finally, they all fall silent, since their arguing finds no resolution (32:1).

The Elihu Speeches (32-37)

Finally, a fourth friend, Elihu, appears. Apparently, he has been silently listening to the debate for some time (32:2-3), hesitating to intrude because of his youth (32:4). When the others fell silent, however, he ventured to offer his opinion, too. His speeches cover no new ground, even though he prefaces them with bombastic rhetoric (32:17-21; 33:2). At last, he, too, falls silent.

God Speaks (38:1-42:6)

In the end, God himself speaks to Job out of the whirlwind, yet at no time does he answer the obvious question, "Why?" Instead, he only asks Job a series of rhetorical questions that point out the infinite difference between God's sovereignty and wisdom and Job's human limitation (38-41). In view of God's infinite greatness, Job can only confess his unworthiness (40:3-5). In the end, Job realizes that the answer to the problem of evil is greater than his human capacity to understand (42:1-3). Nevertheless, Job is consoled because God is conscious of him (42:4-6). The message of the Book of Job is that the important thing-the truly important thing-is **not** to know why, but to know that God is there! That God speaks at all is enough for Job. Knowing this, Job does not care what happens to him. It doesn't really matter what he and God talk about. Any topic will do for a satisfying

conversation between friends-for it is *each other* that they are enjoying.

It is important, also, to notice specifically the one thing God did not say. God does not demand of Job a confession of sin. Instead, God invites Job on a tour of the world. "Walk through my creation," God says in effect, "and look how I care for my creatures!" God takes Job into the world he made, and there Job finds God. In looking at the whole of life that God sustains, Job is at last able to say, "Now, I am satisfied! Now, I have seen you with my own eyes!"

In the end, the message of Job is that only God can destroy creatively. In allowing the suffering of Job, God created in Job something that could never have been there any other way. Only God can then transmute evil into good. Only he can make everything, both good and evil, work together for good. Suffering, then, must be seen not merely as a consequence of sin, but as an occasion for grace.

The Epilogue (42:7-17)

While God does not charge Job with sin, he does say that the conventional explanations of Job's three friends were wrong (42:7-8). They must go to Job and offer sacrifices for their foolish advice. The ultimate insult is paid to Elihu, the fourth speaker, for he is ignored altogether in the epilogue. After Job had interceded for his friends, his trial ended and he became prosperous again (42:10-17).

Israel's Hymn Book (Psalms 1-150)

One of the most beloved portions of the Old Testament is the Book of Psalms. Its value for Christians is evident in that many editions of the New Testament, even though they may not contain the Old Testament, include the Book of Psalms. The psalms were prayers and songs for worship. While about half of the psalms are associated with David (seventy-three have the title "to David"), other psalms are associated with people like Moses (90) and Solomon (72 and 127). Some psalms are credited to less well-known poets, such as Asaph (50, 73-83) and the priestly descendents of Korah (42, 44-49, 84, 87-88). The psalms were composed all through the period of Israel's national history, some possibly as late as the exile (89, 137).

The Psalms are the opening of the third section of the Hebrew Bible, called the Writings (*Kethubim*), an arrangement not followed in our English Bibles. Nevertheless, this placement is important with respect to the Old Testament canon, since Jesus used the Psalms to represent the whole third section of the Hebrew Bible when he referred to the Torah, the Prophets and the Psalms (Lk. 24:44).

In the psalms there are a wide variety of types. Some seem to be specifically composed for corporate worship, since they were written antiphonally (e.g., 136). Some fifty-five of them were composed for the levitical choirs according to the

superscriptions (e.g., 53). Some were apparently chanted by pilgrims as they approached the holy city for the annual festivals, and thus were entitled "Songs of Ascents" to be sung as the worshipers ascended Mt. Zion (120-134). At least one was written for a royal wedding (45). Others are related to particular incidents in the life of David (3, 7, 18., 30, 34, 51-52, 54, 56, 59-60, 63 and 142). There are psalms of repentance (6, 32, 38, 51, 102, 130, 134), messianic psalms (2, 22, 110, 118), imprecatory psalms (35, 69, 109), enthronement psalms (47, 93, 95-99), and psalms that reflect upon Israel's national history (105-106). In the later history of the Jews, some psalms were especially associated with Jewish festivals.[12] In addition to psalms for corporate worship, of course, there are also psalms expressing personal devotion to God (23, 27, 103-104).

Many attempts to categorize the psalms have been made, but it must be conceded that all such attempts, however plausible, involve subjective judgments. Following is one way, among several, of categorizing the various types of psalms:

- **Praise Psalms** (these would include general praises to God, psalms celebrating Yahweh's kingship, the Songs of Zion, individual and national expressions of thanksgiving)
- **Laments** (these may be either for the individual, such as the one who has been unjustly accused or the one who needs to repent, or they may be for the whole nation)
- **Royal Psalms** (these describe the relationship between God and the Davidic king, but especially, they anticipate a king *par excellence* who is still to come and, hence, are messianic)
- **Minor Types** (wisdom psalms, e.g., 1, 37, 49; pilgrim psalms, e.g., 84, 122; acrostics, e.g., 119; historical psalms, e.g., 78, 114)

Structure of the Book

The larger Book of Psalms is divided into five smaller books, each of which terminates with a doxology. They are:

- **Book I:** 1-41
- **Book II:** 42-72
- **Book III:** 73-89
- **Book IV:** 90-106
- **Book V:** 107-150

[12] By the time of Jesus, for instance, Psalms 113-118, called "the Egyptian Hallel", were sung at the feasts of Passover, Pentecost, Tabernacles and Dedication.

The reason for all these divisions is not entirely clear. At least one division, Book II, concludes with the superscription, "The prayers of David, the Son of Jesse, are ended" (72:20), but oddly enough it comes at the end of a psalm ascribed to Solomon, while there are psalms later than this that are ascribed to David as well. There are some differences in the use of the divine name Yahweh in these different books. Book I, for instance, has the name Yahweh some 273 times and Elohim only 15 times. In Book II, Elohim appears some 164 times and Yahweh only 30 times. In Book IV, only the name Yahweh appears. Still, such observations may not provide the clue to the divisions. Most scholars suppose that these divisions were originally separate collections brought together later. The fact that there are doublets (e.g., 14 and 53; 40:13-17 and 70:1-5; 108 and 57:7-11; 60:5-12) makes it unlikely that such duplications would have occurred if all were a single collection by a single editor. Perhaps David began a formal collection and arrangement of psalms, and others followed this lead.[13]

Corporate Worship and Private Devotion

David began the practice of assigning levitical choirs to use the psalms liturgically (1 Chr. 16:4-38). The first psalm he assigned to them for memorization was drawn, with very slight changes, from Psalm 105 (1 Chr. 16:8-22), Psalm 96 (1 Chr. 16:23-33) and Psalm 106 (1 Chr. 16:34-36). Similarly, at a later time, Solomon used phrases from Psalm 132:14-18 at the dedication of the temple (2 Chr. 6:41-42). Some of the psalms have superscriptions indicating how they were to be used (e.g., Psalm 100 was for the thank offering, Psalm 92 for the sabbath and Psalm 30 for the dedication of the temple). The various musical notations and interjections, most of which we do not know the meaning, should be understood in this context. The most common interjection, *selah* (occurs 71 times), is probably a signal for an interlude or pause, possibly to strike up the instruments, change the musical accompaniment or give a liturgical response. Some notations are usually taken to refer to tunes (e.g., "The Doe of the Morning", 22; "According to Lilies", 45, 69, 80).

However, one must not assume that the psalms were composed for corporate worship alone. Many of the psalms were composed in the first person, and while later they may have been used in the context of corporate worship, originally they came from a single poet in the crucible of a particular life experience. Good examples are the psalms of David when he was "in the cave" (142) or when he "feigned insanity before Abimelech" (34). The individual in the psalms looms large, and it is for this

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[13] The Jewish Talmud, for instance, states that David wrote (and collected) psalms from Adam, Melchizedek, Abraham, Moses and others (*Baba Bathra* 14b). We know that during the time of Hezekiah many of the proverbs were collected (cf. Pro. 25:1), and this pattern may have been repeated for the psalms, also (cf. 2 Chr. 29:30).

reason that the psalms long have been a powerful resource for private devotion.

Messianic Psalms

Christians, following the lead of traditional Judaism, have understood that many passages in the psalms, and in some cases entire psalms, are messianic. Often, this messianic character is not strictly along the lines of simple prediction. Rather, the ancient individual who puts his prayers into verse anticipates by his experience the coming of one who is greater. Thus, when David says, "I will praise you among the nations" (18:49), there is no reason to think that this expression was anything other than his personal response to God. Yet, centuries later, St. Paul sees in these words the wonder of the Gentiles who would believe in Jesus, the Messiah (Rom. 15:9). Similarly, the experience of the ancient sufferer who prayed that it seemed God had forsaken him (22:1) is recapitulated in Christ's terrible cry of abandonment on the cross (Mt. 27:46; Mk. 15:34). The ascension of David's descendants to the throne (2) anticipates the ascension of a greater king yet to come (Acts 13:32-33).

Sometimes, of course, the New Testament writers do see straightforward predictions in the psalms, as when David predicted that God's Holy One would not "see decay" (16:8-11; Acts. 2:25-28) or that Christ would serve as a priest forever in the order of Melchizedek (110:4; Heb. 5:5-6). Jesus himself set the pattern for such interpretations when he implied that he was himself the stone rejected by the builders (118:22; Lk. 20:17) and that he was the one whom David called "his Lord" (110:1; Mt. 22:41-46).

Imprecatory Psalms

Theologically, some of the most difficult psalms are those that cry for vengeance. The cry against the Babylonians, "Happy is he who...seizes your infants and dashes them against the rocks" (137:8-9), strikes Christians as discordant and out of harmony with Jesus' dictum to love one's enemies. However, one must remember that in the period when the psalms were composed, there was no gospel or clear expectation of an after-life with rewards and punishments. In the absence of these theological truths that Christians know through the coming of Jesus, we must read these ancient expressions for what they are-the call for vindication and justice within history. Derek Kidner as aptly stated that the hard words of these ancient poets attune our ears to the gospel, for as he cogently put it, "We cannot truly hear its answers until we have felt the force of their questions."14 Thus, this cry is not so much for personal retribution as it is for God to vindicate himself by establishing justice.

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14 D. Kidner, *Psalms 1-72: An Introduction and Commentary* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 1973), p. 26.

It is always well to remember that these are prayers for God's righteousness; they are not the act of taking vengeance into one's own hands. David's imprecatory prayers, such as, "break the teeth in their mouths, O God" (58:6) or "consume them in wrath, consume them until they are no more" (59:13) must be balanced with the fact that he steadfastly refused to take vengeance into his own hands (1 Sam. 24:3-7; 1 Sam. 26:8-11; 2 Sam. 16:11-12; 19:18-23).

Should Christians, then, pray such sentiments following the psalter? Perhaps Jesus offers the lead in his own quotation of a passage in which he omitted the reference to the "vengeance of our God" when announcing the gospel (Isa. 61:1-2; Lk. 4:18-19). With the coming of Jesus, a new element surfaces that is only hinted at in the Old Testament, that is, that all judgment has been committed to the Son (Jn. 5:22-23) and that justice awaits the end of the age. In the meantime, humans everywhere are called to repent (Acts 17:30-31). Two New Testament quotations of prayers for vengeance in the psalter are instructive. The first is David's prayer that the table of his enemies become a snare and a trap (69:22-23), a passage that Paul relates to a rebellious Israel (Rom. 11:9-10). However, Paul is just as insistent that if these rebels do not persist in their unbelief, they, too, will be saved (Rom. 11:23-24). Similarly, in view of the harm done him by Alexander and others who deserted him, Paul recalls Psalm 62:12 that God will reward each person according to what he has done (2 Tim. 4:14-15). However, he is quick to add, mirroring the words of Jesus and Stephen, "May it not be held against them" (2 Tim. 4:16; cf. Lk. 23:34; Acts 7:60). So, while the imprecatory psalms are a trenchant cry for justice, they must not be read by Christians as though Christ had not come. The sentiment of Christians must always be to "leave room for God's wrath", while at the same time, feeding one's enemies (Rom. 12:17-21).

Wisdom for Living (Proverbs 1-31)

Wisdom in the ancient Near East was the practical art of being skilful and successful in life. The Book of Proverbs is the collected wisdom of Israel's wise persons, including Solomon (1:1; 10:1; 25:1), Agur (30:1), Lemuel (31:1), and others (22:17; 24:23). Of course, not all wise sayings found their way into Holy Scripture; even Solomon, who composed some 3000 proverbs (cf. 1 Kg. 4:32-35), has only a selection of some 300 within the book. While there are some long pieces of poetry in Proverbs, particularly chapters 1-9 which give a lengthy paternal exhortation of a father to his son, much of the wisdom in Proverbs appears in antithetical couplets, that is, two line poems which present a sharp contrast. Such proverbs accent a general truth, and while they are part of Holy Scripture, they should not to be interpreted as though they were law or promise. They invite meditation, however, for many of the comparisons and contrasts call for sober introspection (27:6). There is

also a fair amount of humor in Proverbs (cf. 26:17), so it is appropriate to read some of the proverbial sayings with a smile.

Proverbs usually appear in couplets, the first line offering a thought that contrasts with the succeeding one. Proverbs are usually brief, rarely more than twenty-five words. They are concrete, that is, the imagery usually is not abstract but drawn from physical life. Proverbs express general lessons, and while there may be exceptions, most of the time proverbial wisdom holds true.

A wide range of subjects are covered in the Proverbs, including the relationship between God and humans (e.g., 9:10), the many facets of wisdom (e.g., 8:1-36), the character of the fool (e.g., 18:2), the tragi-comedy of the sluggard (e.g., 22:13), the value of friendship (e.g., 18:24), the power of words (e.g., 18:21), the importance of the family (e.g., 17:6; 18:22), and the issues of life and death (7:21-27; 8:35). For the most part, these subjects are random, and the proverbs addressing them are scattered throughout the book. Should one wish to review the various proverbs under headings, a Bible concordance will be helpful in which one can locate general subjects by finding associated word groups. Here are some word groups in the Proverbs based on the New International Version (other English Versions might use somewhat different words).

- Wisdom/understanding/training/instruction/learning/knowledge
- Fool/folly/the simple
- Mocker/the proud
- Sluggard
- Friend/neighbor/brother
- Father/mother/son/child/parent
- Words/tongue/slander/truthful/gossip/falsehood/honest/lies/lips
- Correction/rebuke
- Life/death
- Wife/husband
- Righteous/righteousness/just/justice
- Discerning/discernment/judgment/discretion

The Preface (1:1-7)

The initial collection of proverbs seems to have been composed by Solomon, since the opening line of the book says as much. The preface sets the tone for the entire collection. The proverbs are for attaining wisdom, discipline, prudence and moral discretion. The type of literature is described as "proverbs, parables,[15] sayings

[15] The Hebrew term rendered "parable" can also refer to satire.

and riddles." Such a description suggests that the style of teaching intends to be provocative, sometimes paradoxical, illustrative, witty and symbolic. The motto of the preface, which reappears later in the book (cf. 9:10; 15:33) as well as in other wisdom literature (cf. Psa. 111:10; Job 28:28), is that the controlling principle for wisdom is not merely intellectualism, but a relationship with God as epitomized by the phrase "the fear of the LORD." To fear God means to respond to him with an attitude of deep reverence and submission.

Father to Son (1:8-9:18)

This section is the longest sustained presentation of wisdom in the book. It adopts the framework of the advice a father gives to his son (1:8, 10, 15; 2:1; 3:1, 11, 21; 4:1, 10, 20: 5:1; 6:1, 20; 7:1, 24; 8:32). Some have speculated that it might reflect upon the advice David gave to Solomon, though most interpreters take this framework as a literary device rather than an historical circumstance. Regardless, the author surely intends his readers to put themselves in the place of the son while he, the father-teacher, imparts wisdom.

There are two ways that lie before the son. One is the path of sinners, whose siren call beckons the listener toward dissipation (1:8-19). The other is the path of wisdom.[16] Wisdom is personified as a woman searching the streets for any who will heed her trenchant cry (1:20-33).[17] She calls to everyone, but not everyone listens. The simple and the foolish reject her, and she in turn will reject them when they stumble into calamity.

For those who listen, however, wisdom is a moral safeguard. It will "enter the heart" (2:10) and protect those who accept its treasured message (2:11-12, 16). Wisdom offers serenity, long life and prosperity (3:1, 21-24). It begins in one's deep dependence on God (3:5-6), and it becomes an internalized law leading one to a life of integrity and generosity (3:27-32). Wisdom is supreme (4:7), and its natural home is the heart (4:23).

One of the perennial temptations for all young men is sexual promiscuity. Again and again, the wise father warns his son against the horrible consequences of this sin (5:1-14; 6:23-35; 7:6-27). The one who follows a promiscuous woman is scooping coals into his lap (6:27). He is as oblivious to disaster as an ox on its way to slaughter (7:22-23), and when he follows her, he is on the highway to death (7:27). Rather, he must treasure his own wife, and her alone (5:15-19). Of course, promiscuous sex is not the only vice to be avoided. A collage of other vices (6:1-15),

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[16] The word "wisdom" appears in a plural form, but most translators understand this to be a plural of intensity (similar to Elohim), especially since the verbs are singular. Hence, they render it "wisdom", not "wisdoms."

[17] The same personification of wisdom can be found later in 8:1-36 and 9:1-6.

including the seven things God hates (6:16-19), are cited, too.

One of the most intriguing passages is the personification of wisdom as God's divine persona in creating the universe (8:22-31). Some interpreters have understood this depiction of wisdom to be a hypostasis of God, more-or-less along the lines of the Holy Spirit as the third Person in the Trinity or the *Logos* who was both with God and who was God (Jn. 1:1-2). This was the position of some of the early church fathers (e.g., Justin Martyr, Athenagoras, Tertullian). In the context of Hebrew monotheism, however, we should avoid any suggestion that Wisdom represents a goddess alongside Yahweh.

More Proverbs of Solomon (10:1-22:16)

Beginning with chapter 10, the reader encounters a collection of Solomon's proverbs that conform to the more usual definition of independent antithetic couplets. This collection seems to defy any chronology or formal arrangement other than the fact that sometimes two or three proverbs of similar subjects may fall together. Each couplet requires independent reflection, and themes such as wealth, diligence, reputation, conduct, rewards, speech and so forth are recurring.

To explore one such theme by way of example, observe the multi-faceted wisdom concerning the speech patterns of the "chattering fool". Such a person not only invites ruin for himself (10:8, 10, 14; 13:3; 15:2; 18:2), he ruins others also (12:6, 18; 15:4; 16:27; 17:9). Better to be silent altogether (10:19; 11:12; 12:23; 17:28)!

The Sayings of the Wise (22:17-24:22)

Wisdom in the ancient Near East often crossed national boundaries. Wise persons as a class of respected advisors stand alongside prophets and priests (cf. Jer. 18:18). The Queen of Sheba came from southern Arabia to investigate Solomon's wisdom (1 Kg. 10:1ff.; 2 Chr. 9:1ff.), and the Bible itself speaks of the wisdom of people other than the Israelites (e.g., 1 Kg. 4:30-31; Jer. 49:7; Obad. 8).

Still, it may come as something of a surprise to discover that there are striking parallels between the wisdom sayings in the Book of Proverbs and the collected wisdom of other cultures. Nevertheless, this parallelism exists. The same sort of proverbial sayings that one finds in Proverbs can also be found in other wisdom literature of the ancient Near East dating well before the time of Solomon. Actually, this body of shared wisdom should not be too surprising, since ancient Near Eastern wisdom was more of a practical observation about life and human behavior than theoretical abstractions. What might be observed by one wise person in one culture could surely be observed by someone else in another.

Here, for instance, are some of the striking parallels between the "sayings of the wise" and the Egyptian "Teaching of Amenemope", a collection dating to about 1000 BC or earlier. Since its publication in 1923, a considerable number of proverbs in the Egyptian source parallel some of the proverbs in Proverbs 22:17--23:18.

Proverbs (NKJB)	**Amenemope**
Incline your ear and hear the words of the wise, and apply to your heart my knowledge. (22:17)	*Give your ears, hear what is said, Give your heart to understand them.*
Do not rob the poor, nor oppress the afflicted at the gate. (22:22)	*Guard yourself against robbing the oppressed and against overbearing the disabled.*
Make no friendship with an angry man, and with a furious man do not go. (22:24)	*Do not associate to yourself the heated man, nor visit him for conversation.*
Do not remove the ancient landmark, nor enter the fields of the fatherless. (23:10)	*Do not carry off the landmark at the boundaries...nor encroach upon the boundaries of a widow.*

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

Yet another short collection of proverbs is headed by the superscription, “These also are sayings of the wise” (24:23a).

Hezekiah’s Collection of Solomon’s Proverbs (25:1-29:27)

Hezekiah, king of Judah (716-687 B.C.), commissioned scribes to copy out the proverbs of Solomon. The “men of Hezekiah” apparently were professional servants under royal patronage responsible for the literary records of the kingdom. Since the northern nation had just fallen and many northern refugees were swelling Jerusalem’s population, it is not impossible that the newcomers brought with them texts previously unknown in the south. In any case, scribes were assigned to transcribe Solomon’s proverbs. This may only mean that they transcribed them from one scroll to another, or it may mean they committed to writing what was formerly maintained by oral tradition.

This collection, like those preceding it, is filled with maxims and antithetic couplets following a variety of themes.

The Wisdom of Agur (30)

This collection introduces an anomaly since the name of the author is found nowhere else in Scripture. Perhaps Agur was an otherwise unknown sage of Solomon's time (cf. 1 Kg. 4:30). Some voices in Jewish and Christian tradition suggest that Agur is really Solomon who has taken upon himself a literary persona, though there is nothing in the text to push such a conclusion. The Hebrew word *massa* can mean either an oracle (so NIV, NASB, cf. Zech. 9:1; 12:1; Mal. 1:1) or to a geographical location (so RSV, NEB, NAB). If the latter, then Agur was an Ishmaelite (cf. Gen. 25:14-16).

Whoever Agur is understood to be, he was certainly a worshipper of Yahweh, since he uses this name for God (30:7, 9). The most well-known passage is the prayer for a balanced life (30:7-9). One passage (30:4a) echoes the question of Deuteronomy (Deut. 30:12) that is quoted by Paul in regard to the incarnation (Rom. 10:6).

The repeating style of "two things" (30:7, 15a) and "three things" and "four" (30:15b, 18, 21, 24, 29) is a Hebraic way of saying that the list is suggestive, not exhaustive (cf. 6:16; Amos 1:3, 6, 9, 11, 13, ; 2:1, 4, 6).

The Wisdom of King Lemuel (31:1-9)

Once again we meet an enigmatic character. No king of Israel or Judah was ever named Lemuel. As in 30:1, the term *massa* can be understood to refer to an oracle (so NIV, NASB) or a territory of the Ishmaelites (31:1, so RSV, NEB, NAB). This collection is described as wisdom taught by Lemuel's mother (31:1-2). It emphasizes that monarchs must remain sober if they are to fairly administrate justice, especially defending the rights of the poor and powerless.

The Noble Wife (31:10-31)

This final section, an acrostic poem (its 22 verses match the 22 letters of the Hebrew alphabet), describes the character of an industrious, capable and virtuous woman.

The Question of Existential Meaning (Ecclesiastes 1-12)

While the general nature of wisdom literature in the ancient Near East can be described as the expression of religion outside the formal structures of cultic worship, occasionally such wisdom literature addressed philosophical questions as well. The little work called *The Preacher* or *The Teacher* or *The Philosopher* describes the explorations of a thinker about the meaning of life. The actual Hebrew title, *Qoheleth,* is very difficult to capture in English. Quite literally, it means one who

calls an assembly, but in context it can mean any of the above. The more familiar title, Ecclesiastes, comes from the Greek Septuagint, where it is related to the Greek word *ekklesia* (= congregation, assembly).

Ecclesiastes is one of five Old Testament books that in the Hebrew Bible composed a single collection called the *Megilloth* (= scrolls). These five scrolls were read annually at the celebration of the following Jewish festivals:

- *Passover* (Song of Songs)
- *Pentecost* (Ruth)
- *Ninth of Ab, the anniversary of Jerusalem's destruction* (Lamentations)
- *Booths* (Ecclesiastes)
- *Purim* (Esther)

Just who is Qoheleth, anyway? Clearly, the author patterns himself after Solomon, the son of David (1:1, 12, 16). Traditionally, it has been supposed that Solomon wrote the work near the end of his life after he turned away from God (1 Kg. 11:1-13). Hence, the pessimistic tone of the book is read almost as a confession. Other interpreters, however, believe that the persona of Solomon is a literary fiction. Some of the passages, for instance, are written in the third person (1:1-2; 7:27; 12:8). In any case, pessimism is not the book's final word. In some strands of Jewish tradition, the book was held to be edited, if not written, by the company of Hezekiah. In the end, the question of authorship must be left open.

Unlike Psalms and Proverbs, Ecclesiastes contains an implicit narrative line. The book is not merely a collection of disconnected thoughts, but the author intends to "go somewhere." The reader must persevere to the end if he is to discover the full meaning. Still, there is no obvious structure to the book, but rather, a series of repeating themes, such as, work, wisdom, time, knowledge, death, justice, memory and vexation.

Character of the Book

At first glance, Ecclesiastes seems like a book of unmitigated pessimism. Some of its lines appear to be in significant conflict with the theology of the rest of the Bible, as for instance, when the author suggests that at death "all [humans] go to the same place" (6:6b) or that "man's fate is the same as that of the animals" (3:19). Even the repeating theme, "Utter futility, everything is meaningless," does not harmonize well with the biblical world view that life is the good gift of the Creator.

Still, the author is clearly not an atheist, and in any case, atheism was not an

option in the ancient Near Eastern range of world views. Two expressions arising several times in the book help us. One is the word *hebel* (= vapor, breath, futility, vanity). This word frames the entire book (1:1; 12:8), and it clearly connects with the repeating metaphor "all is a chasing after wind" (14:b; 2:11, 17, 26; 4:4, 16; 6:9). The other is the description of life "under the sun" (1:3, 9, 14; 2:11, 17, 18-19, 20, 22; 3:16; 4:1, 3, 7, 15; 5:13, 18; 6:1, 12; 8:9, 15, 17; 9:3, 6, 9, 11, 13; 10:5). This description, while not denying God's existence, brackets out everything but the repetitious experiences of life that are common to humans, whether or not they believe in God. The author takes the reader on a grand experiment "under the sun." This experiment is what the modern secularist would call the existential search, the search for meaning. Systematically, the author will move from lifestyle to lifestyle, experimenting with all types of vocation and human experience. His resolve, it seems, is to see how far a person might get without the fundamental framework of a deep reverence for God. He invites the reader to come along.

The Experiment (1-6)

In the beginning, the author sets the agenda for his experiment by posing the basic question, "What is to be gained?", or as we might put it today, "What is the point?" (1:3). In the treadmill of daily life under the sun, nothing seems to matter (1:4-11). He explored the life of royalty (1:12-18), the life of hedonism (2:1-3), and the life of the entrepreneur (2:4-11), but in the end, because everyone dies, there was no enduring meaning (2:16-23). The seasons of life come and go (3:1-8), but the basic question remains, "What is to be gained?" (3:9). By itself, work of whatever sort is only meaningless (4:4). Oppression, injustice, greed and dissipation are rampant (5:8-11), and they only yield frustration and anger (5:16-17). Appetites are never satisfied (6:7).

Along the path of this existential *angst*, however, there are some glimmers of hope. One is that life and work can have meaning when they are related to God (2:24-26a). Another is that relationships rather than individual achievements are to be valued (4:9-12). Vows and faithfulness, motivated by the awe of God, are worthwhile (5:1-7). Still, these are relative gains, not eternal ones.

The Search for Wisdom (7-10)

Given this numbing view of life, it is no surprise that the author examines the human experience of wisdom. He collects the wisdom of the ancient Near East to see if it will offer an answer to the emptiness of life under the sun (7:25), and he allows the reader to "look over his shoulder" as he does so. He finds that conventional wisdom is often wrong, however. The idea, for instance, that virtue wins out in the end is impaled upon the undeniable fact that the righteous often are exploited while

the wicked often succeed (7:15). So, who is really wise (8a)?

In the end, there is a common destiny for all-death (9:2-6)! Still, wisdom is better than folly (9:13-18), even though folly always threatens (10:1-3).

The Conclusion (11-12)

In the end, Qoheleth reaches the conclusion that the only thing that gives meaning to life is the presence and recognition of God (12:13-14). God must be revered while one is young before the despair of old age and the cynicism of death crowd out this awareness (12:1-7). Otherwise, everything will be meaningless indeed (12:8)!

The Beauty of Love (The Song of Songs 1-8)

The Song of Songs is an extended love poem that celebrates romance, love and human sexuality in the context of life commitment. The title Song of Songs,[18] which in Hebrew idiom means "the best of songs" (similar to Holy of Holies and King of Kings), indicates that the work is "to Solomon", though scholars debate whether this means it is ascribed to Solomon as its author or composed in honor of Solomon (1:1). At least it can be said that Solomon's name appears several times in the book (1:5; 3:7, 9, 11; 8:11, 12) and there are other references to "the king" (1:4, 12; 7:5). Solomon was a prolific writer, and his songs numbered more than a thousand (1 Kg. 4:32). This song may very well have been one of them. The Jewish Talmud assigned this work to Hezekiah's court (cf. Pro. 25:1), but even if they produced the finished form it does not eliminate Solomon as the principle author.

While not always apparent in the English translations, the Song is a series of speeches by male and female lovers to each other, punctuated at intervals by a chorus of friends. It contains striking and graphic imagery which anticipates union, struggles with temporary separation, and exults in sexual consummation. Consequently, it has frequently remained somewhat in the shadow of Christian attention, since such candid language about human sexuality is often avoided for cultural and religious considerations. One Christian, Theodore of Mopseustia, was condemned as a heretic in AD 553, because he voiced the opinion that the book was to be taken at face value.

Love songs were not uncommon in the ancient Near East. Unlike many ancient compositions, however, the Song of Songs does not arise from the context of the fertility cults that proliferated among the Canaanites. It does not deify sex. Rather, it arises out of the faith of Israel, who accepted sexuality as the good gift of God from

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[18] An older title, Canticles, is also sometimes used. It comes from the Latin translation of the Bible.

the creation.

Interpreting the Song

In the older English versions, the conversations between the male and female lovers were difficult to follow since the gender of first and second person English pronouns are indistinguishable. In the Hebrew language, however, such gender identification is usually clear, and modern English translations are very helpful. The New International Version, for instance, marks off the conversations as between the "Lover" and the "Beloved." The New English Bible uses the designations "Bride" and "Bridegroom." The modern reader should not be put off by the familial language of "sister" (4:9-10, 12; 5:1-2) and "brother" (8:1). Such language is frequent in ancient Near Eastern love poetry and does not indicate that the lovers were siblings, but rather, that they treated each other with high regard and intimacy.

Beyond that, however, there are wide ranges of interpretation. Hellenistic Judaism and medieval Christianity sought to interpret the Song allegorically. This approach takes the poem to be an extended metaphor for God and his people (either Yahweh and Israel or Christ and the church). Most modern interpreters have abandoned this approach due to its thoroughgoing subjectivism and the fact that nothing in the Song itself suggests such an intent.

Among those who accept the subject matter as a straightforward celebration of human love there is still no consensus, however. Some simply categorize the work as a collection of wedding songs that are not necessarily related to each other. In the early 1800s a novel approach was developed that read the Song as a dramatic love triangle. Here, the Song was read as the conversations of three principle characters, a beautiful maiden, her shepherd lover, and King Solomon. Solomon sought to entice the girl by extravagant offers of luxury. In the end, however, the maiden resisted his crude temptations and was united with the shepherd, her true love.

A simpler reading, still following the form of a drama, is that there are two primary characters, the Shulamite maiden and her lover. The plot consists of the first awakening of love (1:2-4), the separation of the lovers (3:1-3), and finally their reunion (3:4). Here, the references to "wedding" and "bride" are not merely incidental but fundamental (3:11; 4:8-12). Sexual promiscuity is painted in the darkest colors in the Bible's wisdom literature (Pro. 2:16-18; 5:1-14, etc.), so this Song should be no exception. On the other hand, within marriage the lovers may freely express themselves in uninhibited union. In the context of marriage and life commitment, a commitment that is "strong as death" (8:6-7), love can be freely given and freely received (8:12; 2:16; 4:16; 6:3; 7:10). In the words of one New Testament writer, "Marriage is honorable among all, and the bed undefiled" (Heb. 13:4, NKJB).

Characteristics of the Song

However one interprets the Song, there are striking figures of speech that emphasize the sensual. The language is highly erotic (though never obscene). Often physical beauty is associated with the imagery drawn from flora and fauna (1:9, 15; 2:1-3, 8-9, etc.). The full range of bodily parts are beautiful and worthy of description, including the head (1:10; 4:1-3; 7:4), the body (5:14; 7:2, 7) and the appendages (7:1). Especially prominent are the descriptions of the five senses, all of which are to be enjoyed (1:3; 2:3; 4:9; 7:7-9; 8:13). Gestures of love, such as kissing and embracing, are more or less universal (1:2; 2:6; 4:11a; 8:1, 3). Clothing and adornment, like physical gestures, are also universally recognized in the language of love. The Song speaks of jewelry (1:10-11; 4:4), veils (4:3; 6:7) and sandals (7:1). Perfume is a common sensuous element (1:3, 12; 4:13-14) as are aphrodisiacs (2:5; 7:13).

Besides all these elements, the arrival of spring is another universally recognized season for love (2:10-13; 7:12). Special settings for love-making are important, and the Song pictures a variety of scenes for rendezvous, such as, a private room (1:4; 3:4), a green bed (1:16), a private dinner (2:4), a secluded valley (4:8), an orchard (6:11-12; 8:5) or a vineyard (7:12). The garden motif appears repeatedly (about 20 times) and is usually a double entendre signifying not only the rural setting for love-making, but also, the sexual charm of the lovers.

Love carries a deep emotional power, and the anxiety of the seek/find theme expresses this emotion (1:7-8; 3:1-4; 5:4-8). Also important are the feelings of nostalgia and innovation in which the things "old" recall previous delights while the things "new" keep the relationship fresh and exciting (7:13).

> The Bible endorses the concept of sexual pleasure and assumes a healthy passion. Read the Song of Solomon; it contains some of the most beautiful and erotic poetry ever written... Obviously, these passages don't encourage us to hold back our passionate feelings! Yet many people come to the sexual experience with the feeling, 'I can't really let go.' 'It's not right for me to feel that strongly.' 'I couldn't face God again.' 'Nice girls don't behave that way.' Yet as we understand God's message, it is his intention for us to enjoy the sexual experience and to let our feelings flow freely.
>
> **Clifford and Joyce Penner, *The Gift of Sex***

Finally, it is appropriate to point out that there is a remarkable freedom for expression by both the male and the female. Traditionally, at least, the male has taken the initiative while the female as been reluctant and sometimes victimized. In the

Song, the woman is not at all reticent. Nearly twice as many verses are from her lips as from his. She is as much the pursuer as the pursued, and she is as ardent and forthright as he. There need be no hesitation in accepting the poem for just what it purports to be-the celebration of exhilarating and committed love between a man and a woman who were created by God for mutual support and enjoyment!

Old Testament Survey Part II

Here, we shall look at the kings and prophets in the Hebrew Bible along with the history of Israel during and after the exile. Altogether, twenty-six books comprise this portion of the Old Testament, and they take us from somewhat earlier than 1000 BC until about 450 BC. These books primarily fall into two broad categories, narrative history and prophetic oracle. However, it should be understood that there is a marked relationship between such history and prophecy in that all prophecy takes a particular period of Israelite history as its context. History itself, at least in the Old Testament, has a prophetic quotient, since God interprets the meaning of historical events in terms of his purposes and covenants. In the Hebrew Bible, the books in this series belong to the *Nebiim* (= prophets) and the *Kethubim* (= writings), the second and third sections respectively after the Torah.

Biblical scholars have long recognized that the story of Israel's kingdom life comes to us in two histories, one comprising the books of 1 & 2 Samuel along with 1 & 2 Kings and the other comprising the books of 1 & 2 Chronicles along with Ezra & Nehemiah. The earliest of these histories is collected in the *Nebiim*, while the second appears at the end of the *Kethubim*. Parts of each history are unique as in, for instance, the stories about Samuel, Saul and David's early life, which are found only in the first one, and the stories about the return from exile, which are found only in the second one. The kingship narratives from David until the exile, however, are found in both histories.

Prophets (Nebiim)	**Writings *(Kethubim)***
Samuel	Daniel
Kings	Ezra-Nehemiah
Isaiah	Chronicles
Jeremiah	Lamentations
Ezekiel	Esther
The Twelve	

Birth of the Monarchy (1 Samuel)

The Book of 1 Samuel begins an important transition in Israel's national life, moving the nation from a tribal confederacy to a kingdom. This transition approximately parallels the shift in the ancient Near East from the Late Bronze Age to Iron Age I. The coalition of Israelite tribes was at a low ebb, as is evident from the closing accounts of the Book of Judges. By aggressive military action, the Philistines

gained control of the Negev, some areas of the mountains, and the entire Plain of Jezreel. During the period of Eli's priesthood, they destroyed Shiloh, the central place of worship, and captured the sacred ark of the covenant (1 Sa. 4:1-11). They deployed forces at key border locations (1 Sa. 10:5; 13:3) and dominated Israel's metal industry (1 Sa. 13:19-22).

The Philistines, who gave to the coastal area of the Levant the name "Palestine," were not indigenous Canaanites. Rather, they settled on the south coast of Palestine as part of the Sea Peoples invasions from the Aegean in the 13th century BC (cf. Ge. 10:14; Dt. 2:23; Je. 47:4; Am. 9:7; Eze. 25:15-16; Zep. 2:4-5). Outside the Bible, the Philistines are mentioned by Egyptian Pharaoh Raamses III (1184-1153) as enemies in land and sea battles, and it is from his records that the term "sea peoples" derives. After being turned back by Raamses, the Philistines settled in the south coast of Palestine, building five military cities as the center of their culture: Gaza, Ashkelon, Ashdod, Gath and Ekron.

To complicate matters, the leadership of Eli and Samuel was seriously compromised by the degeneracy of their sons, whom they installed in positions of authority (1 Sa. 2:12-17, 22-25; 8:1-5). It was in this circumstance, when the nation was on the verge of collapse both from external threats and internal decline, that the clans asked Samuel to help them for a monarchy. Yahweh had promised to Abraham and Sarah that they would be the ancestors of kings (Ge. 17:6, 16), and Moses had anticipated a monarchy as well, so the idea itself was not alien (Dt. 17:14-20).

The story of Israel's monarchy continues the theological history of the nation as it lived out the code of blessings and cursings found in the law of Moses. The various kings are evaluated by their faithfulness or lack of faithfulness to the covenant.

Samuel (1 Sa. 1-8)

Samuel sometimes has been called the last judge and the first prophet. While such a claim is somewhat of an overstatement, certainly Samuel was the primary transitional figure between the tribal league and the monarchy. His birth, a direct answer to his mother's prayer (1), and her subsequent dedication of her son to be a Nazarite for life (1 Sa. 1:11; cf. Nu. 6) marked Samuel as especially set apart for God's service. As a youth he gave his first oracle of judgment concerning the destruction of the family of Eli (3).

When just a boy Samuel began his life's work as an apprentice to Eli, the judge and high priest at Shiloh, Ephraim, where the Tent of Meeting had been erected. When Shiloh was destroyed, Eli and both his sons died, leaving a severe vacuum in leadership (1 Sa. 4). In time, Samuel stepped in to fill that gap (1 Sa. 7:6). Under his leadership the nation began the process of rebuilding from the devastating

Philistine encroachment (7). In the meantime, the most sacred object in all Israel, the ark of the covenant, languished in the Israelite borders, first as a trophy of war among the Philistines (5) and later as a relic housed in a private home (6).

War for Israel was a religious act stemming from the fact that Yahweh himself was a "man of war" (Ex. 15:3). The expression "rise up, O Yahweh" is a prayer for God's warrior-like presence among his people (Nu. 10:35-36). Such war involved making vows to God (Nu. 21:2), and any success was contingent upon the nation's faithfulness to Yahweh (Dt. 6:18-19; 11:22-25). War efforts were to commence with a priest, who charged the soldiers with their solemn duty (Dt. 20:2-4).

During the time of Samuel, war was still part of the conquest of Canaan, which was not fully under Israelite control. Everything within the borders of the Holy Land itself was to be *herem*, that is, irrevocably given over to Yahweh, usually by total destruction (Dt. 7:1-2, 16; 20:16-18).

Samuel rallied the Israelite forces to face the Philistines in pitched battle. The Philistine attack began while Samuel still was performing the ritual of sacred war, a sacrifice (7:7-10a). Yahweh miraculously gave Israel victory by a thunderstorm (7:10b-11), after which Samuel set up a memorial stone named Ebenezer (= Stone of Help).

Nevertheless, though Samuel's leadership was revered, the fractured history of the judges, and especially, Samuel's unwise appointment of his sons as magistrates (8:1-3), prompted the tribes to call for a king (8:4-20). God gave Samuel permission to initiate a monarchy (8:21).

Saul (1 Sa. 9-15)

In spite of serious misgivings on the part of Samuel concerning the whole new direction, Saul of Gibeah in Benjamin was chosen as Israel's first king. The new monarch began his career with a victorious campaign against the Ammonites (11) in the Transjordan, and after the battle was completed, Samuel stepped aside to allow the new king full political control (12). Saul's primary task was the completion of the conquest, begun many years earlier by Joshua. Canaanite enclaves remained scattered throughout Israel (Jg. 1:21, 27-36), and the biggest military threat was from the aggressive Philistines (9:16).

Saul's court was quite humble even by modest standards of minor powers in the ancient Near East. His early kingship was not much different than the judgeships before him, with the exception that his office was recognized as a permanent institution. His administration brought little change to the internal structure of the nation. He had no bureaucracy, no large harem, no officer except Abner, and no palace. Gibeah, his headquarters, was little more than a military camp. Saul did,

however, begin a standing army, and he opened the way for military conscription.

Though Samuel had anointed and confirmed Saul to be king (10:1, 20-25; 11:14-15), two incidents turned Samuel against Saul. In the campaign to the southwest against the Philistines, Saul usurped the priestly role in the rituals for sacred war (10:8; cf. Dt. 20:2-4). For this error he earned Samuel's sharp rebuke that his kingship would not endure, and he would be replaced by a better man (13). As the wars continued (14), Saul made a second serious mistake in the campaign against Amalek, where he did not complete the extermination of the Canaanite enemy as commanded in the Torah and reiterated by Samuel (15:2-3). Because of his flagrant disobedience, Samuel informed Saul that God had rejected his kingship altogether (15).

The Rise of David and the Demise of Saul (16-31)

Immediately following the announcement that Saul had been rejected, Samuel secretly anointed a new king, a shepherd boy from Judah named David (16). David's rise to national prominence was meteoric. From his lowly position as the youngest in a family of eight sons (an unenviable position in the ancient Near East), he rapidly captured the hearts and imaginations of both his king and his countrymen.

The biblical writer gives a threefold introduction to David, first as a shepherd (16:1-13), then as a court musician (16:14-23), and finally as a warrior (17). In these three settings the reader sees the diversity and capability of the man who was to replace Saul.

The implications of Samuel's public retraction of Saul's kingship must have been devastating for the Benjamite hero (13:13-14; 15:26-29). His position was now cast in doubt before the whole nation. Rapidly, he began to deteriorate. As the pressure mounted both from the external threats of the Philistines and the internal insecurity of his position, he became increasingly mentally disturbed, eventually succumbing to insanity. When David joined the military service and distinguished himself in the contest with Goliath, Saul was alarmed and became extremely jealous (18). Shortly, Saul's suspicion that David was to be his replacement drove him to attack his young soldier (19). David was forced to become an outlaw, while Saul, for his part, abandoned his primary responsibility to liberate Israel from the encroaching Canaanites. Instead, the king poured all his energies into his obsession to eliminate the perceived threat to his throne (20-30). Ironically, David's best friend turned out to be Saul's own son, Jonathan, who helped David escape his father's murderous intrigues (20).

The remainder of the book of 1 Samuel details David's harrowing outlaw period when the hue and cry was raised against him. It is a story of flight and pursuit--David always one step ahead of death (21-23). Zigzagging his way across Judah's

wastelands, time and again David barely escaped the clutches of the mad Saul. During this period, David further endeared himself to the Israelites, especially the citizens of Judah, his native tribe. Various disenfranchised Israelites joined him (22), forming a private army that David eventually used as mercenaries in service to the Philistines (27). Twice, Saul's life fell completely into David's hands, but in both cases, David refused to exact personal vengeance (24, 26). In the meantime, Samuel died (25:1). For a time, David used his private army to protect Judah's ranchers, though one of them nearly incited David's personal vengeance for a particularly insulting rebuff. When the rancher died of a paralytic stroke, David married the beautiful widow (25).

In the end, the Philistines mustered their troops and mercenaries for a full and decisive invasion of Israel. They marched up the coastal plain and bivouacked near the Megiddo pass at the upper end of the Jezreel Plain. Saul could not avoid an invasion of this magnitude. Originally, David anticipated being with the Philistines in this campaign, since he was now serving them as a mercenary. However, his position among the forces would have been as the Philistines' rearguard, a position the Philistine war lords were not about to give to an Israelite from Judah. Might he not turn against them, leaving the Philistine troops in a crushing pincer between David on one side and Saul on the other? So, the Philistines refused to allow David and his men to accompany them (29). Instead, David raided the Amalekites in the Negev, sending the booty of war to thirteen towns in Judah (30).

With Samuel now dead and God against him, Saul as a last extremity turned to a witch for spiritual direction just before his final conflict with the Philistines (28). At the battle on the lower slopes of Mt. Gilboah, Saul's three oldest sons were killed, and at the last, Saul committed suicide after being critically wounded in the battle (31).

David Establishes the Kingdom of Israel (2 Samuel 1-10; 1 Chronicles 10-18)

Though David deeply mourned the tragic deaths of Saul and his sons (2 Sa. 1), their deaths left the nation in a political vacuum. The Philistines were not slow in following up their advantage and pushed deep into the central mountains (2 Sa. 5:17ff.; cf. 23:14). Furthermore, leaders during the period of the judges had been chosen by divine appointment. However, in most monarchies, the transition of power went to the son of the deceased king, and apparently Saul's surviving son, Esh-Baal (also called Ish-Bosheth), assumed that the crown would fall to him. There was no formal policy for the transition of power, and the nation quickly erupted into civil war. The clan of Judah supported David, its favorite son, because he had been divinely chosen, as had been the judges and Saul, the first king. The other clans

supported Saul's son Esh-Baal after the more traditional pattern (2 Sa. 2).

A brief word should be given about the relationship between 1 & 2 Samuel, 1 & 2 Kings and 1 & 2 Chronicles. In the Hebrew Bible, there are just the three books Samuel, Kings and Chronicles. When the Hebrew Bible was translated into Greek about 250 BC, Samuel and Kings were subdivided into 1, 2, 3 & 4 Kingdoms, while Chronicles was divided into 1 & 2 Chronicles. In the Latin Vulgate, the four books of Kingdoms were finalized as we see them today in the English Bibles: 1 & 2 Samuel and 1 & 2 Kings. The books can be generally harmonized in the following manner:

- 2 Samuel roughly parallels 1 Chronicles
- 1 & 2 Kings roughly parallels 2 Chronicles

The Civil War (2 Sa. 2-4)

The next seven and a half years the two families struggled for political supremacy. David was able to end his outlaw period, of course, but while the clan of Judah anointed him king, the other clans staged a coronation for Esh-Baal at Mahanaim in the Transjordan. The aggressor in the war clearly seems to have been Abner, who gathered up Saul's refugee army and moved them to Gibeon, a city in Benjamin near the border of Judah. David's general, Joab, mobilized David's army for defense, and the two armies met at the Pool of Gibeon, where they agreed to a gladiatorial contest between a dozen soldiers from each side, a contest with no decisive outcome since all of them were killed. Nevertheless, a major battle commenced in which Abner's forces were routed.

As the war dragged on, Saul's faction grew increasingly weaker while David's grew stronger. Finally, Abner defected, and was subsequently assassinated by Joab in an egregious act of treachery. Esh-Baal, also, was assassinated in his bed by two of his own officers. With this collapse of the Saulide claim to the throne, the entire twelve tribes assembled to crown David king at Hebron.

David Establishes National Security (2 Sa. 5-6; 1 Chr. 11-16)

After his coronation, David's first concern, understandably, was the security and consolidation of the nation. Threatened by encroaching Canaanite nations and exhausted during the period of Saul's insanity and the civil war following his death, the nation was at a very low ebb. Using his private army, David quickly captured Jebus (Jerusalem), possibly by gaining entrance into the citadel through an underground water shaft (2 Sa. 5:8), and made it the capital of the newly united kingdom. Ever afterward, Jerusalem was known as the "city of David."

David followed up his victory over Jebus by striking quickly at the Philistines, driving them back into the south coastal plain. During the period of the civil war, it is

possible that the Philistines still considered David to be their mercenary. In any case, they had been content to watch from the sidelines. Now, with David's coronation over all Israel, it was apparent that he was no longer willing to play the part of a vassal, and they mustered their armies to whip him into line. David, with the help of Yahweh, defeated them and burned their gods. Never again would the Philistines gain a stranglehold over the Israelites.

Political security was by no means David's only concern. The heart of Israel's national consciousness was their ancient faith, and the expression of this faith had been seriously compromised when the ark of God was separated from the Tent of Meeting in the days of Eli. David determined to bring back the ark, and he took oath to do so (cf. Ps. 132:2-5). In a united effort, the whole nation came together to support David's proposal (1 Chr. 13:2-6, 8), and though they were stymied temporarily, due to careless arrangements, in the end the ark arrived in Jerusalem, his new capital.

The Davidic Covenant (2 Sa. 7; 1 Chr. 17)

After David had secured the nation, both politically and religiously, he determined to follow through on the mandate in Deuteronomy to establish a permanent place for worship (cf. Dt. 12). His idea was to build a temple for the newly returned ark of the covenant. A permanent structure, as compared with the tent, would symbolize the completion of the conquest of Canaan begun many years earlier by Joshua. The prophet Nathan came to David at God's direction to inform him that actually it would be his son who would build this temple. (Later, David would reveal that God's refusal to allow him to build the temple was due to his career of violence as a soldier, cf. 1 Chr. 22:6-10). However, though Yahweh forbade David to build the temple, he did establish with David a solemn covenant, a covenant with far-reaching implications for the faith of Israel, not to mention the coming of Jesus and the Christian church.

This covenant promised to David three divinely guaranteed provisions. First, the nation would be secure in the land that they now fully possessed. Second, in a play on words, Yahweh promised to build David a house, though here the term "house" takes its symbolic meaning of posterity. Third, from this posterity would come a future son whose kingdom and throne would last forever. This son rather than David would be the one to build a house for Yahweh. To this son God guaranteed his loyal love forever, a sharp contrast with Saul who was rejected. This son not only would be the son of David, he also would be reckoned as the son of Yahweh.

The implications of this covenant were staggering! In a personal way, the covenant reflected David's assurance of salvation (cf. 2 Sa. 23:5). In a practical way, it indicated that his son, Solomon, would build the temple (1 Chr. 22:6-10). In a

theological way, it bound together God's choice of David, Judah, Jerusalem and Mt. Zion into a secure matrix that stood in sharpest contrast to Shiloh's destruction during the priesthood of Eli (Ps. 78:56-72). Out of this covenant would rise the messianic hope, especially in the *aftermath* of the future exile.

Israel Becomes An Empire (2 Sa. 8-10; 1 Chr. 18)

With Jerusalem secure, David began expanding the kingdom in all directions. God gave him military victory everywhere he went. He expanded toward the southwestern coast (Philistia), the southern and eastern Transjordan (Moab, Ammon and Edom), and the northern highlands (Syria). Under David, the loosely federated tribes truly became a united monarchy, and David's expansions gave the nation a modest claim of being an empire.

Among the accounts of the expansion wars appears a story about David's graciousness to a surviving member of Saul's family, Mephibosheth. Years earlier, David had established a personal covenant of faithfulness with Jonathan, his closest friend (cf. 1 Sa. 20:1-23). It is because of this promise that David sought out the crippled son of Jonathan and made him a royal pensioner. This act marks the high point of David's career. He was king over a united Israel, the benefactor of God's covenantal promises, and the founder of an empire.

Saul and David are the earliest Old Testament characters who can be dated with a fair degree of accuracy. Several factors converge to make this possible. First, Assyrian records yield a continuous 261 year calendar which can be fixed from 910 to 649 BC based on recorded solar eclipses. Shalmaneser III (859-824 BC), an Assyrian monarch listed in this calendar, mentions in his annals two Israelite kings, Ahab and Jehu, and dates them within his own reign. Since the Bible gives the lengths of their reigns, their regnal dates can be fixed. Working backward using the regnal years of the biblical record, we can fix the split of the kingdom upon the death of Solomon in 931/930 BC, and backward further still, the beginning of Solomon's reign 40 years earlier in 971/970 BC. Hence, the reign of David, which was 40 years, was c.1009--971/970 BC, while the reign of Saul was c. 1030-1009 BC.

These dates often appear as double dates in biblical reference works, since the people of the ancient Near East counted their years from spring to spring rather than mid-winter to mid-winter, as we do in the western calendar. Thus, an ancient year would span parts of two of our years, leaving some ambiguity. To complicate it further, the kingdoms of Israel and Judah began their years in different seasons so that a year in one kingdom straddled two years in the other. Nevertheless, David's dates can be correlated quite closely with our modern calendar.

The Court History of David (2 Sa 11-24; 1 Chr. 19-29)

David's Great Sin (2 Sa 11-12; 1 Chr 19-20)

If his kindness to Mephibosheth shows David at his best, his adultery with Bathsheba shows him at his worst. David's great sin occurred during the final stages of the campaign against the Ammonites. The army was sent to Rabbah in the Transjordan to finish the campaign, but David stayed in the capital, where he fell into adultery with the wife of one of his soldiers (2 Sa. 11). When it became apparent that Bathsheba was pregnant, David initiated a scheme to hide the evidence, first by inviting her husband home for a war leave (thus hoping the baby would be passed off as a natural offspring), and when that failed, by ordering Uriah's murder so it would appear a casualty of the war. After Uriah's death, David quickly brought the widow into his harem, and the cover-up was complete. The only thing with which David did not reckon was the watching eye of God. 2 Samuel closes with the fateful words, "But the thing David had done displeased the Lord." David's sin and the court history that follows was excluded from the Chroniclers' record, but it appears in full in 2 Samuel.

The remainder of David's court history details the terrible aftermath in his family life. When Nathan the prophet confronted David, the curse of divine retribution was solemnly pronounced: *the sword will never depart from your house, because you despised me and took the wife of Uriah the Hittite to be your own... Out of your own household I am going to bring calamity upon you* (12:10-11). In the ancient Near East, nowhere but in Israel could a prophet denounce his own king and escape. Prophets like Samuel, who confronted Saul, and Nathan, who confronted David, would become a spiritual balance of power for the next several centuries as they confronted erring kings, false prophets and unfaithful priests. As for David, a series of family tragedies scarred his remaining years.

- Amnon, his son, raped his half-sister Tamar.
- Absalom, another son and Tamar's brother, murdered Amnon.
- Absalom was exiled to Geshur, the home of his grandparents.
- Absalom engineered a *coup d'etat* against his father's kingship, forcing David to abdicate the throne temporarily.
- Joab, David's general, killed Absalom against David's express orders.
- Sheba, another insurgent, revolted against David.
- David incited God's anger by conducting a military census.
- Adonijah, another royal son, attempted a *coup d'etat* while David was on his deathbed.

Rape, Murder and Revolt in the Royal Family (2 Samuel 13-20)

Life within the royal harem must have had its share of special tensions, but the rape of Tamar by Amon, who was assisted in his premeditated crime of passion by a cousin, would have been especially devastating. David was furious (13:21), but his own adultery stymied his response, and he did nothing. Absalom, the brother of the offended girl, was not so timid, and he immediately began planning revenge, which he carried out with lethal efficiency before fleeing to his maternal grandparents (cf. 3:3).

After three years, Absalom returned to Jerusalem through the artifices of Joab, though he was not allowed to face his father directly for another two years. Absalom had designs on the throne, and he began a slow but effective effort to turn the affections of the citizens to himself. When he judged the time ripe, he executed a conspiracy against his father, causing him to evacuate to the Transjordan. There seems little doubt that David's willingness to abdicate was directly due to the heavy guilt he still carried regarding his affair with Bathsheba and the murder of Uriah (cf. 15:25-26). He even permitted a loyalist of Saul's family to pelt him with stones and call down curses on his head as he fled, and he forbade his retainers to respond (16:5-12).

In the end, David managed enough time to gather up his scattered forces and establish a base for resistance. Soon, the Absalom conspirators began to waver because of their inability to strike directly at David, and when Absalom himself was trapped while trying to escape David's men--and subsequently was killed by Joab--the conspiracy collapsed. David returned to Jerusalem, though factionalism continued to plague the clans long after his death. This factionalism, which surely had roots as far back as the civil war between the families of Saul and David, erupted in yet another revolt, this time by Sheba, who called for a secession of the northern tribes. The Sheba revolt, also, was put down successfully, but the kingdom would endure an troubling undercurrent for the last years of David's life.

The Davidic State (2 Samuel 20:23-26; 23:8-39; 1 Chronicles 6:31-47; 11:10-47; 23:1--27:34)

For all David's troubles, there is no doubt that he welded the tribes together into a cohesive nation. Though the future would bring trouble, the tribes would never turn back from the ideal of a monarchy. Few facts are known about David's administration, however. Religiously, he established musical guilds to minister before the ark of God. He arranged for a choirmaster and three directors of music (cf. 1 Chr. 15:17, 22), and the directors' names appear in the Psalms (Psa. 39, 50, 62, 73-83, 88). Also, he appointed musicians (1 Chr. 15:16, 19-21, 24). When the ark was brought to Jerusalem, David composed the first psalm for choir and orchestra (1 Chr.

16:7-36), which is duplicated in the Psalter (Psa. 105:1-15; 96:1-13; 106:1, 47-48).

Politically, David's cabinet consisted of his general over the army, a commander of mercenaries, a court recorder, a secretary, a commander of forced labor, and his advisors. Alongside these, of course, were the chief priests, and David had a personal priest as well, Ira. In addition, David maintained his private army of "mighty men" alongside the conscripted army divisions, temple workers, civil magistrates, gatekeepers and others.

As David grew old and his reign drew near its close, the problem of throne succession loomed large. During the history of the Tribal League, the nation had no capital, no central government, no standing army, no treasury and no official head of state. The judges were military leaders, but they adamantly refused dynastic succession. With the new monarchy, all the elements lacking in the tribal league were quickly developed. However, the kingship of Saul had not ended with a dynastic succession, since God rejected Saul's family and chose David. Hence, there was no precedent for the transition of power. It is likely that both the Absalom conspiracy and the Sheba revolt were symptomatic of Israel's uncertainty about the future. While David was on his deathbed, yet another son, Adonijah, conspired to seize the throne (1 Kg. 1-2). David, at the prompting of Bathsheba and with the help of Nathan, was able to secure the kingdom for Solomon, but the fact that Solomon had to be inaugurated more than once belied the national instability (1 Chr. 29:22).

The Last Years of David (2 Samuel 21-22, 24; 1 Chronicles 21-22, 28-29)

Several events are described as belonging to David's declining years, but surely two loom over the others as the most important. One was David's great military census. Though the reader is not told why this act was so displeasing to God, it may have been an expression of David's personal pride in his own accomplishments. In any case, God responded with a severe judgment of three days plague.

The other noteworthy activity of David was his preparation for building the temple. Though God had relegated the building of the temple to David's son, David had a hand in collecting funds, commissioning architectural plans, and designing furniture. Though Solomon is often thought to be the genius behind the temple, the Chronicler credits David with many of the basic plans.

The Division of the Monarchy (1 Kings 1-14; 2 Chronicles 1-12)

Solomon's Reign (1 Kings 1-11; 2 Chronicles 1-9)

After the Adonijah conspiracy (1 Kg. 1), David's final charge to Solomon can be described as nothing short of a call for a purge (1 Kg. 2:1-12). Solomon took David's advice seriously, and his reign began with the execution of his older brother Adonijah, the removal of Abiathar the priest from office and the execution of Joab for their support of the Adonijah conspiracy, and the execution of Shimei, the Saulide loyalist who had pelted David with stones during the Absalom revolt (1 Kg. 2; cf. 2 Sa. 16:5ff.). Other efforts toward national security included a political marriage to an Egyptian princess (1 Kg. 3:1), and in time, a harem greatly increased by the addition of foreign princesses from various surrounding nations (1 Kg. 11:1-3).

Solomon's Wisdom (1 Kg. 3-4, 10; 2 Chr. 1, 9)

Early in his career, Solomon prayed for wisdom, and God granted it to him (1 Kg. 3:1-15; 2 Chr. 1). Wisdom in the ancient Near East was the practical art of being skilful and successful in life. Solomon's rulings in domestic cases (1 Kg. 3:16-28) and his administration of the kingdom (1 Kg. 4) became cause for international fame. The most illustrious visitor to Solomon's court, who came to see his splendor for herself, was the queen of Sheba, probably located somewhere on the Arabian peninsula (1 Kg. 10; 2 Chr. 9). His court was replete with precious metals, imported ivory, sculpture and a host of other wonders garnered through an extensive international trade. Solomon engaged in two massive building projects, the temple and a royal palace.

The First Temple (1 Kg. 5-8; 2 Chr. 2-7)

The temple, originally described in the Torah (Dt. 12) and envisioned by David (2 Sa. 7), was Solomon's greatest accomplishment. It was constructed in seven years using combined Israelite and Phoenician artisans (1 Kg. 5; 2 Chr. 2). The general floor plan was similar to the Tent of Meeting, though of course, there was considerable development of supporting architectural features, including a portico designed by David (cf. 1 Chr. 28:11), a courtyard, sculptured bas-reliefs, a huge basin held by a series of sculptured bulls and various furnishings (1 Kg. 6-7; 2 Chr. 3-4).

One article of furniture, however, remained unchanged from the Tent of Meeting, the ark of the covenant. This sacred chest, which held the stone tables of the ten commandments, was brought into the new sanctuary with great ceremony and solemn prayers of dedication (1 Kg. 8; 2 Chr. 5-6). God honored his new temple by filling it with a cloud of glory (2 Chr. 7:1-10). By contrast, Solomon's construction of the palace complex occupied some thirteen years (1 Kg. 7:1-12).

The Covenant Code (1 Kg. 9-11; 2 Chr. 7-8)

In a special appearance to Solomon, God reaffirmed to him the covenant code of blessings and cursings for obedience or disobedience (cf. Lv. 26; Dt. 28). Theologically, this reaffirmation of the Sinai covenant falls in line with a series of such speeches over the years, sometimes from the mouth of Yahweh, sometimes by leaders to the people, and sometimes in prayers (cf. Jos. 1:1-5, 8; 8:30-35; 23:6-13; 1 Sa. 12:6-15, 24-25).

Nevertheless, Solomon, for all his wisdom and splendor, took several disastrous steps. In direct violation of the covenant code, he collected a huge harem, he fortified his military with chariotry, he built a large national treasury, and he brought pagan religions into the very capital of the nation (1 Kg. 10-11; 1 Chr. 8-9; cf. Dt. 17:16-17; 13:12-18). By the end of his reign, his policies of forced labor for citizens as well as heavy taxation put the nation on the brink of political rupture. His former overseer of forced labor, Jeroboam, was informed by a prophet that the kingdom would indeed split, and the dynasty of David would be left with only two tribes. Though the kingdom remained united until Solomon's death, it was Solomon's own state policies and religious deviations that set in motion the forces of disintegration.

The North Secedes from the South (1 Kg. 12-14; 2 Chr. 10-12)

A north-south mentality had long been a feature of the Israelite tribes going back into the period of the judges. Geography, no doubt, contributed to this distinction, especially when the Plain of Jezreel was in the hands of the Philistines and Jebus, the most important central city in the south, was still controlled by Canaanites. Jebus controlled the major central route between Judah and the northern clans. Though the Tent of Meeting was pitched at Shiloh, a rival shrine was built at Dan in the north (Jg. 18). Later still, the civil war during the aftermath of Saul's death was largely along north-south lines, while the Sheba revolt during David's latter years aimed at a similar split. In all, the united monarchy lasted hardly more than a century. Upon Solomon's death, the nation would rupture never to be united again.

When Solomon died there were no immediate rivals to challenge the ascension of his son Rehoboam to the throne. However, Jeroboam, the former overseer of forced labor who had been exiled to Egypt (cf. 1 Kg. 11:26-40), had returned to Israel. The citizens allowed him to serve as their spokesman at the coronation of Rehoboam. Through him, a request was submitted to the new king. The citizens wanted relief from heavy taxation and forced labor in the government projects. Foolishly ignoring the counsel of his senior advisors while adopting the arrogance of his younger colleagues, Rehoboam taunted the citizens that he would be even more demanding than his father. This insult was all that was required to drive the northern

clans into secession. Rehoboam attempted to control the crowd by sending out the current master of forced labor, but the man made a poor diplomat, and the people stoned him. Rehoboam himself barely escaped being lynched (1 Kg. 12:1-19; 2 Chr. 10).

It was only natural that the northern clans should turn to their spokesman, Jeroboam, for leadership. They crowned him king of the northern tribes, while only the clan of Judah remained loyal to Rehoboam. Rehoboam mustered his army for an invasion to try to take back the north by force, but a prophet of God forbade him, saying that the rupture of the nation was a divine judgment (1 Kg. 12:20-24; 2 Chr. 11:1-4; cf. 1 Kg. 11:29-33). It is likely that the loyalties of the Benjamites were divided. The clan's territory lay between Judah and the northern tribes of secession, and only Judah was clearly loyal to the dynasty of David (1 Kg. 12:20). However, Rehoboam probably took steps to annex Benjamin as a buffer zone, since Jerusalem, his capital, was too close to his northern border. Armed rivalry along this border continued for many years (1 Kg. 14:30).

The division had major repercussions in the religious life of the nation. The new northern king could hardly allow his subjects to go to the annual festivals at Jerusalem, so he established two rival shrines for worship. One was the northern shrine in Dan that had been in use since the Tribal League, and the other was Bethel, the ancient holy place where their ancestor Jacob had dreamed of a ladder reaching into heaven and named the place "the house of God" (cf. Ge. 29). Here, Jeroboam erected altars with golden calves for worship, reminiscent of Israel's idolatry at Sinai (cf. Ex. 32). Since a major Canaanite religious symbol was the storm god Ba'al riding upon the back of a calf, it is not surprising that these shrines quickly were identified with the Canaanite fertility cults. While the northern clans ostensibly retained loyalty to the covenant of Moses, they fell prey to religious syncretism and rejected outright God's covenant with David, abandoning both his dynasty and the Zion shrine in Jerusalem built by his son (1 Kg. 12:25-33). To denounce this religious outrage, God sent an unnamed prophet to predict doom upon Jeroboam's Bethel shrine (1 Kg. 13), a prediction that came to pass three centuries later in the reign of Josiah (cf. 2 Kg. 23:15-18). Furthermore, the prophet Ahijah pronounced terrible judgment, including eventual exile to Mesopotamia, upon the dynasty of Jeroboam, because he had led the nation into Canaanite paganism (1 Kg. 14:1-20).

Rehoboam, meanwhile, fortified his defenses in the south. Many priests and Levites fled from the north as refugees to escape Jeroboam's policies (2 Chr. 11:5-23). Early on, Rehoboam remained faithful to Yahweh, but before long, he also fell into the snare of syncretism. Because of his unfaithfulness, God allowed Shishak (Sheshonq I, 22nd dynasty, ca. 945 BC) of Egypt to invade Judah from the south, causing Judah to serve as an Egyptian vassal state (1 Kg. 14:21-31; 2 Chr. 12).

The Early Divided Monarchy (1 Kings 15-22; 2 Chronicles 13:1--21:4)

The division of the tribes into two nations created not only a deep political wound but also a profound theological separation. Judah, the southern nation, remained faithful to David's dynasty, the Davidic covenant, and the temple on Mt. Zion. Israel (or Ephraim), the northern nation, rejected them all, reverting back to older patterns of theology and worship. The north held the covenant of Moses--the Torah--as supreme. Both nations maintained a stubborn optimism that the land was theirs unconditionally forever, the north on the basis of the patriarchal promises, and the south on the basis of God's promises to David.

This division shows up in the respective histories. The history in the Kings' record details both the north and the south, evaluating their kings and assessing the moral climate of the nations. The Chroniclers's record addresses only the southern nation, Judah. The evaluation of the kings in both records generally follows a stereotypical pattern.

For the kings of Judah, it went like this:

a) *In the ____ year of so-and-so, king of Israel, so-and-so, king of Judah, began to reign.*
b) *Facts about his age, length of reign, name, and queen mother*
c) *Evaluation with reference to his ancestor David*
d) *Source listing for further information about his reign in the royal archives*
e) *Concluding statement that he died, and so-and-so reigned in his place*

For the kings of Israel, the pattern was similar:

a) *In the ____ year of so-and-so, king of Judah, so-and-so, king of Israel, began to reign.*
b) *Facts about the length of his reign and the location of his capital*
c) *Negative evaluation, because he "did what was evil in the eyes of Yahweh, and walked in the ways of Jeroboam"*
d) *Source listing for further information about his reign in the royal archives*
e) *Concluding statement that he died, and so-and-so reigned in his place*

To a man, the kings of the northern kingdom were judged as evil. In Judah, only two kings were given unqualified approval (Hezekiah and Josiah), though several others were commended, even though they retained some religious weaknesses.

The Earliest Kings of the Divided Monarchy (1 Kings 15:1--16:20; 2 Chronicles 13-16)

Of Judah's first three kings, only Asa was judged to be good. Abijah, Rehoboam's son, continued hostilities with Jeroboam in the north. He urged Jeroboam to recognize the validity of the Davidic dynasty and the Zion temple, though to no avail. The numbers of soldiers and casualties in these hostilities seem extraordinarily large. (By comparison, the 500,000 casualties for Israel alone were more than the USA lost in World War II). However, the word for *'eleph* (= thousand, NIV) might also refer to fighting units or officers, which would significantly reduce the size of the armies to more reasonable numbers. Asa, Abijah's son, attempted religious reform by removing the *bamoth* (= high places) and other paraphernalia of the Ba'al cult. He also increased Judah's fortifications, and defended his country against an encroachment from Egypt. In his declining years, however, he entered into a political alliance with Aram, a violation of the Mosaic code.

In the north, Nadab, Jeroboam's son, fell victim to the first dynastic change. He was assassinated by Baasha, who proceeded to slaughter the entire royal family. The new dynasty lasted only one generation, however. Baasha's son, Elah, was assassinated by Zimri, one of his own officials, and Zimri purged Baasha's family in the same manner as Baasha had purged Jeroboam's family. Zimri's blood bath did not last long--a scant week--before he in turn was rejected by the nation. The citizens enthroned Omri, the commander of Israel's armed forces, as the new king, though not without a rival claimant (1 Kg. 16:21-22).

The Omri Dynasty, Elijah and Jehoshaphat (1 Kings 16:21--22:53; 2 Chronicles 17:1--21:4)

The Omri Dynasty

The Omri dynasty marked the fourth dynastic change in the northern kingdom. For the biblical author, Omri's significance is confined to his moving the capital of the north from Tirzah to Samaria. His son Ahab, however, receives considerable press, since he, at the instigation of his Phoenician wife, made a concerted effort to supplant Torah religion with the Ba'al cult (1 Kg. 18:4; 21:25-26).

The Canaanites worshipped a divine pantheon of gods and goddesses. El, the nominal head, presided over the assembly of divine children, which he, along with his consort Asherat (Asherah), produced. The most important of these gods was Ba'al, celebrated as the lord of the gods and master of rain, storm and fertility. (His title, Ba'al, means "lord" in the Canaanite languages.) He is depicted in Canaanite art as riding upon the back of a bull. His consort sister was the warrior goddess Anath (Astarte or Ashtaroth), famous for sexual passion and sadistic brutality. In Caananite

mythology, Mot, the god of summer drought, killed Ba'al and carried him to the underworld. Anath engaged Mot in a terrific battle, finally killing him, after which she was reunited with her lover ,who was enthroned again as lord of the earth.

Canaanite worship involved imitative magic, in which the fertility of the land, herds and people was stimulated by sacred prostitution at the high places, thus imitating the reunion of Ba'al and Anath. Hence, Canaanite worship was little more than orgiastic ritual, featuring male and female prostitutes playing the part of the divine lovers. The entire natural sphere was believed to be governed by the vitalities of sex.

Elijah, the Prophet

Against this revival of Canaanite paganism God sent to the northern nation the powerful prophet Elijah. Elijah confronted Ahab and Jezebel in a series of conflicts reminiscent of Moses and Pharaoh. In the first, he challenged the nation with a three year drought, during which Yahweh preserved the prophet's life by ravens and a widow (1 Kg. 17). In the second conflict, Elijah challenged Ahab and the Canaanite prophets at Mt. Carmel to a divine contest. The deity who answered by fire (or lightning) would be truly God. Elijah prayed, calling fire out of heaven to consume the sacrifice he had prepared for Yahweh. He then executed all the false prophets who had gathered to participate in the contest (1 Kg. 18). In the third conflict, Elijah fled to Horeb (Sinai) to touch the very roots of his faith (1 Kg. 19). In the meantime, Ahab continued his violation of the Mosaic code, as did Saul before him, by failing to follow the requirements of sacred war (1 Kg. 20). Through the conniving of his wife, he annexed a free Israelite's property after having him murdered, for which Elijah pronounced a death sentence upon the entire Omri dynasty (1 Kg. 21). The biblical historian's evaluation of Ahab is extreme: *there was never a man like Ahab who sold himself to do evil in the eyes of the LORD, urged on by Jezebel his wife* (1 Kg. 21:25). Also confronting Ahab was the prophet Micaiah, who predicted his death in battle (1 Kg. 22: 2 Chr. 18).

Important extrabiblical references to the Omri dynasty come from three independent archaeological finds. One, the Moabite Stone (Stela of Mesha), is a monument by a Moabite king discovered in 1868 and now residing in the Louvre. Mesha, the Moabite king, claimed a victory over the Israelites and the dynasty of Omri, a claim that intersects with 2 Kg. 1:1; 3:4-27. This monument contains one of the oldest extrabiblical references to the name Yahweh, the God of Israel. The second reference appears on Shalmaneser III's Monolith Inscription describing the Battle of Qarqar (854 BC), where the Assyrians defeated a coalition of twelve Canaanite kings, among them "Ahab the Israelite". Ahab is said to have contributed 2000 chariots and 10,000 infantry to the conflict. The third reference

appears on the Black Obelisk of Shalmaneser III. One panel portrays Jehu, the successor of Ahab and Omri, bringing tribute to the Assyrian king on bended knee.

The Reforms of Jehoshaphat

In the southern nation, Jehoshaphat began his reign with an attempt to continue the religious reforms initiated by Asa, his father. He sent teaching priests throughout the southern kingdom to explain the Torah (1 Kg. 22:41-50; 2 Chr. 17). He also appointed magistrates to judge civil cases in accord with the Torah (2 Chr. 19). When the Transjordan nations of Moab and Ammon formed a coalition against him, he sought Yahweh in the ancient manner of holy war. God miraculously gave him the victory (2 Chr. 20).

Nevertheless, though Jehoshaphat was praised for his reforms, his commendation was marred due to the fact that he did not carry them far enough. Twice he was censured for making alliances with the northern nation Israel, which was spiritually bankrupt (2 Chr. 19:1-2; 20:353-37).

The Late 9th and 8th Centuries (2 Kings 1-20; 2 Chronicles 21-32; Amos; Hosea)

For both Israel and Judah, the late 9th century continued the pattern of covenant breaking. As this rebellion against God went on and on, powerful prophets arose to call the nation to repentance and to warn them of impending judgment from Yahweh if they did not come to their spiritual senses. Though Elijah was not the first prophet, he is the epitome of prophethood, called to restore the balance of moral power within the nation of Israel. His scathing confrontations with Ahab and Jezebel, who led God's people astray, became the prototype for prophecy. Not only did Elijah condemn Ahab and Jezebel, he pronounced judgment on their successor (2 Kg. 1).

The Elisha Era (2 Kg. 1-10)

During the height of his ministry, Elijah chose Elisha to be his successor (1 Kg. 19:16, 19-21). When it was time for Elijah to be taken from the earth in a whirlwind of fire, Elisha continued in Elijah's office (2 Kg. 2). Like his predecessor, Elisha was a prophet of profound miracles. Some eighteen episodes are recounted concerning his life, the most famous being the miracle of the widow's oil that did not fail, the raising of the Shunamite's son from death, and the healing of Naaman (2 Kg. 3-8).

Probably the action of Elisha that had the most far-reaching effects, however, was his anointing of Jehu as king of Israel with the command to exterminate the remaining family of Ahab. In a bold *coup d'etat*, followed by a bloody purge, Jehu wiped out the family of Ahab, just as Elijah had earlier predicted (2 Kg. 9-10; cf. 1

Kg. 21:17-24).

Late 9th and Early 8th Centuries (2 Kg. 11-14; 2 Chr. 21-25)

Jehu's dynasty lasted for a century and a half in the northern nation, producing a relatively long era of stability. Nevertheless, the kings in his line were evaluated as evil, since they did not stem the tide of religious syncretism (2 Kg. 13). The apex of Israel's power came during the reign of Jehu's great grandson, Jeroboam II. Though evil in the assessment of the biblical historian, he nevertheless extended the boundaries of the northern nation and brought it to a peak of economic prosperity and influence (2 Kg. 14:23-29).

The southern nation of Judah, on the other hand, came near to capitulating to the family of Ahab. Jehoshaphat's son, Jehoram, married Athaliah, the daughter of Ahab and Jezebel. When he died under divine judgment (2 Chr. 21), and when his son died after only a year on the throne, Athaliah, the queen-mother, seized the throne in Jerusalem for six years (2 Kg. 11; 2 Chr. 22). It was only due to the courageous action of Jehoiada, a priest, that a surviving royal son was secretly reared in the temple until he could be established as king. This son, Joash, was crowned when he was only seven years old. Under the tutelage of Jehoiada, he began extensive religious reforms in Judah, repairing the temple (2 Kg. 12; 2 Chr. 23:1--243:16). However, when Jehoiada died, Joash reverted to the paganism of his grandmother, and he died under God's judgment for his sin of covenant-breaking (2 Chr. 24:17-27). Joash's son, Amaziah, foolishly agitated the king of Israel. In a pitched battle, the army of Judah was badly defeated, and the Israelites even destroyed some 600 feet of Jerusalem's fortification wall, taking back with them booty from the temple and the royal treasury as well as slaves (2 Kg. 14:1-22; 2 Chr. 25).

The Writing Prophets

A new development in prophetic ministry appears in the 8th century BC, the collecting of written prophetic oracles. These oracles or sermons were careful literary compositions, often poetic, and their messages held religious, political and social implications that reach all the way to modern times. It is a common misconception that the prophets primarily were prognosticators of the future. To be sure, there is a distinct element of prediction in their voices, but for the most part, their predictions concerned the near future rather than the far future, and their warnings of disaster were motivated by ethics, not curiosity. They used the predictive element to buttress a call to repentance rather than to describe some precisely dated fate. Predictions of judgment could be and were postponed (cf. 2 Kg. 21:10-15; 22:2, 11-20), and a common element in their sermons was the possibility of reversal on the basis of

repentance (Je. 18:1-10: Eze. 18; Jl. 2:13-14). God's reversal of his judgment on Nineveh, as warned by the prophet Jonah, is a bright example.

The primary concern of the writing prophets was the moral consequences of covenant breaking. Their oracles often begin with the formula, "Thus says Yahweh...," denoting that their authority was derived. They were seized by the word of Yahweh and compelled to speak. Sometimes, their verbal and written oracles were supported by parabolic actions and physical demonstrations. The prophets were iconoclasts, challenging the *status quo* of current religious practice. They felt an overwhelming sensitivity to evil, and a major concern was the social injustice of the times. In the midst of surrounding Canaanite cultures with a religion derived from mythology and the deification of natural forces, the prophets articulated a view of religion derived from Yahweh, a personal God, who was the Lord of history as well as of all created things.

DATING THE PROPHETS

A number of the prophets dated their oracles to the tenures of particular kings of Israel and Judah or non-Israelite kings. Ezekiel dated his oracles from the year of the first deportation of exiles from Jerusalem (597 BC). Other prophets, however, do not offer any definite historical markers, so the times of their ministries must be deduced by correlating internal evidences in their sermons with external historical circumstances.

Prophets Who Date Their Oracles:

8th century	*7th century*	*6th century*	*Post-exilic*
Amos	Zephaniah	Ezekiel	Haggai
Hosea	Jeremiah		Zechariah
Isaiah			
Micah			

Prophets Who Do Not Date Their Oracles:

Jonah *(probably in the 8th century, cf. 2 Kg. 14:25)*
Joel *(possibly as early as the 8th century, but the date is uncertain)*
Nahum *(probably the late 7thcentury)*
Habakkuk *(probably the late 7th century)*
Obadiah *(probably the mid-6th century)*
Malachi *(probably the mid-5th century)*

Amos and Hosea to the North

During the reign of Jeroboam II in Israel, a powerful shepherd-prophet named Amos preached against the sins of the northern nation. On one occasion, he discharged his words of censure at the Bethel shrine erected by Jeroboam I, though he was banished from the premises for his pains (Am. 7:10-13). He launched a devastating attack upon the social evils of the north, condemning the sins not only of Israel's neighbors, but of Israel herself (Am. 1-2). In particular, he preached against war crimes, decadence, luxury, false religion and the abuse of the poor and disadvantaged (Am. 4:1-3; 5:10-15; 6:4-7; 8:4-6). Yahweh had measured the nation with his moral plumb line, and she was severely out of alignment (Am. 7:7-9). She was like a basket of ripe fruit, ripe for judgment (Am. 8:1-3). Nevertheless, though Yahweh intended to exile the nation for her covenant-breaking ways, Amos predicted that God would restore her in the future (Am. 9).

Hosea, also, preached to the northern nation over the span of several kingships (Ho. 1:1). His life became a living parable of the nation's relationship to God. At Yahweh's command, he married a prostitute, who was unfaithful to him and gave birth to illegitimate children (Ho. 1). Israel was herself like a prostitute in her relationship to God, for she went whoring after the gods and goddesses of the Canaanites (Ho. 2, 5). The prophet's broken marriage covenant was like the broken covenant between God and his people. Israel maintained no faithfulness, no covenant love and no acknowledgement of God (Ho. 4:1). The land was full of rampant dishonesty, crime and religious perversion (Ho. 6:8--7:7; 8:4-14). Like Amos, his contemporary, Hosea preached that Yahweh would attack the nation in judgment (Ho. 13:6-8). Yet also like Amos, Hosea predicted that after the nation had been judged, God would woo her back to himself (Ho. 2:14-23; 14). To illustrate this hope of reconciliation, Hosea graciously bought back his prostitute wife from the slave market after she had run away and been abandoned to slavery (Ho. 3).

Israel and Judah in the Middle and Late 8th Century (2 Kg. 15-20; 2 Chr. 26-32)

The political fortunes of the two nations continued to seesaw back and forth. When Jeroboam II died in the north, the stability of his reign crumbled. A series of assassinations occurred, some claimants to the throne lasting only a few days, others lasting several years. Finally, Pekah emerged from this confusion to reign for some twenty years, though he also was assassinated (2 Kg. 15). Alongside the political intrigue, the moral climate in the north continued to degenerate.

In the southern nation of Judah, a long and stable period began with the reign of Uzziah (also called Azariah), who held the throne of Judah for over half a century. He was one of Judah's better kings, and while he did not receive full commendation

from the biblical historian, he was better than most (2 Chr. 26). His son, Jotham, also followed the covenant of Yahweh, though not as fully as could have been hoped (2 Chr. 27). However, when Ahaz came to the throne, the good that had been accomplished by his father and grandfather was quickly destroyed. He immediately turned back toward syncretism and the Canaanite religions (2 Kg. 16; 2 Chr. 28).

A formidable foe was rising in the northeast. Assyria's expansionist policies in the ancient Near East was the most important political event of the 8th century. Tiglath-pileser III turned his eyes toward the treasures of Egypt, and the kingdoms of Israel and Judah lay directly in his path. After forcing Mehahem of Israel to pay tribute, the kingdoms of Israel and Aram attempted to force Ahaz of Judah to join them in a coalition against the Assyrian threat, but instead, Ahaz directly petitioned Tiglath-pileser for help. To no one's surprise, the Assyrians eagerly responded to Ahaz' call for help, decimating the northern nation of Israel and crushing Damascus. Citizens from both countries were deported in 721 BC. The northern nation of Israel would never exist again. Tiglath-pileser III seems to have been the first Assyrian king to practice mass deportation, and his campaigns in the west left Judah with no buffer zone of protection against the Mesopotamian superpower. The dire predictions of Amos and Hosea had come to pass!

When Ahaz died, he was succeeded by Hezekiah, one of the very few good kings of Judah who were given full commendation for following Yahweh. Hezekiah survived the invasion that ended the national life of the northern tribes and began massive religious reforms in Judah (2 Kg. 18:1-16; 2 Chr. 29-31), including the purification and restoration of temple worship. Before the death of the northern nation, he even invited her citizens to come celebrate the Passover in Jerusalem, though his overture was largely ignored (2 Chr. 30). He also arranged to preserve and collect many of Solomon's proverbs, which eventually became part of the book of Proverbs (Pr. 25:1). Later, he was invaded again, this time by Sennacherib of Assyria, but he escaped subjugation through God's intervention (2 Kg. 18:17--19:37; 2 Chr. 31:1-23; Is. 36-37). In anticipation of this invasion, he engineered a subterranean channel to protect the city's water supply while under siege, a tunnel that can be seen even today in Jerusalem. Though advised by God that he was going to die, Hezekiah was granted an extension of life for another fifteen years (2 Kg. 20; 2 Chr. 32:24-33; Is. 38). Near the end of his life, he made the ill-advised choice to allow diplomats from Babylon to see his royal treasury and the temple. Isaiah predicted that this was an omen of the future, for Babylon would be used by God to destroy the southern nation (Is. 39).

The 8th Century Prophets to Judah (Micah and Isaiah)

Only slightly later than Amos and Hosea in the north, a pair of powerful

prophets preached to Judah, Israel's sister nation to the south. Like their northern counterparts, the sermons of Micah and Isaiah had a strong social bent. Micah, who lived in the border town of Moresheth-Gath near the Philistine country, championed the plight of the peasants who were being abused by the rich and powerful. Isaiah, by contrast, preached in Jerusalem, the capital city, and Jewish tradition held that he was a cousin to King Uzziah. Both prophets conducted ministries spanning the reigns of several kings (Mic. 1:1; Isa. 1:1), a political background that included the end of Uzziah's long and stable kingship (792-740 BC), the rise of Assyria, the ineptitude of Jotham and Ahaz, and the reforms of Hezekiah.

Micah (1-7)

Micah delivered and recorded three oracles, each beginning with the imperative form of the Hebrew verb "Hear"! (1:2; 3:1; 6:1). His first oracle actually addressed both the southern and northern nations in the form of a covenant lawsuit (1:2). Yahweh intended to prosecute his case against Samaria and Jerusalem, the two respective capitals, and his charge as covenant unfaithfulness expressed in rebellion and pagan syncretism (1:5, 7). Because of its crimes, Samaria would be razed to its foundations (1:6). Divesting himself of his clothing to depict a refugee, Micah howled and moaned as though mourning the dead (1:8). The sins of Israel had come to Judah as well (1:9), and the Assyrian attacks that already had begun in the border towns would come to the very gates of Jerusalem (1:12).

Besides the rampant idolatry in the land, the powerful land owners were driving out the farmers with small holdings augmented by an unjust court system (2:1-2). Working in cahoots with civil leaders, priests and prophets (3:1-3, 9-11), they were stripping the lowly dirt farmers of everything, much as Ahab once stripped Naboth of his vineyard.

In his second oracle, Micah rails at the dirty politics of Judah's cultural elite (3:1-3), denouncing them all. Micah became the first prophet to directly predict the destruction of Solomon's temple as a divine judgment (3:12). Yet for all his words of judgment, Micah also held forth a hope for the future on the far side of disaster. A deliverer would come--a king following the Lord (2:12-13). In the future, Yahweh's temple again would flourish and become a center of worship for all the nations (4:1-5). The future leader would come from David's home village of Bethlehem (5:2), though in the meantime, the land would be abandoned in judgment (5:3) and the people would live without a king (4:9).

Micah's third oracle, like the first, returns to the imagery of the court scene (6:1-2). Yahweh presses his case, testifying to the long history of his covenant relationship with the Israelites (6:3-5). His law was not grievous but could be summarized briefly as acting with justice, loving mercy and humbly serving the Lord

(6:8). Nevertheless, Judah had fallen prey to the paganistic ways of Ahab and Jezebel (6:16), and judgment was coming (6:17).

As for Micah, he was miserable over what was happening and what was about to happen to his beloved homeland (7:1-6). His only hope was to wait for God's justice to prevail (7:7). The divine promise that the people would rise from the ashes of judgment to rebuild (7:8ff.) prompted him to finish his oracles with a prayer to Yahweh, the true Shepherd of Israel. Yahweh's last word was compassion and forgiveness (7:19-20), and in the end, he knew the Lord would be true to his covenant oath.

Isaiah (1-39)

Isaiah's ministry was long--a full half century. Like Micah, he also predicted the exile of the southern nation, and even called his sons by prophetic names pointing to this tragic future, *Shear-yashuv* (= only a remnant will return, cf. Is. 7:3; 10:22-23) and *Maher-shallal-hash-baz* (= the spoil hastens, the plunder comes quickly, cf. Is. 8:1-4). Like Amos, Hosea and Micah, Isaiah preached against religious distortion and brazen social injustice (Is. 1:10-17, 21-23); 5:8; 10:1-2).

Isaiah's Early Oracles (1-12)

Isaiah's call to prophetic ministry came in a vision in which he saw God in his temple surrounded by the angelic seraphim (Is. 6:1-4, 8ff.). In the divine presence, Isaiah deeply sensed his own unworthiness but was quickly shown that holiness could be imputed by an atoning act of heaven (6:6-7). Like other prophets, Isaiah's preaching develops along the lines of predicted disaster in the near future but blessing after disaster. The looming judgment on Jerusalem and Judah (3) contrasted sharply with the vision of peace to come (2:1-5). At various times Isaiah used the metaphor of deforestation to symbolize the coming catastrophe. The people would be left like stumps in a clear-cut forest after the Mesopotamian enemies had finished (6:13). However, among those stumps, the stump of Jesse's family would yield a small shoot or branch (11:1). This Messianic Branch--for so we may call it--would embody the very Spirit of the Lord as he ushered in an era of world-wide peace (11:2-9; 4:2-6). In the meantime, however, the nation was like a vineyard gone bad, fit only to be abandoned (5:1-7).

One of the important incidents in Isaiah's life occurred during the reign of Ahaz. In the face of the Assyrian threat, Israel and Aram to the north had formed a political alliance to try to stem the advance of Tiglath-pileser III, and they tried to intimidate Judah to join them (2 Kg. 15:37; 16:5-6; 2 Chr. 28:5-8). Isaiah, of course, knew that such an alliance was a violation of the Torah, and he warned Ahaz against knuckling under (7:3-9), even offering a miraculous sign to bolster the king's wobbly

faith (7:10-11). Ahaz, however, refused Isaiah's advice and instead appealed directly to Tiglath-pileser III, offering Judah as an Assyrian vassal (2 Kg. 16:7-9; 2 Chr. 28:16, 20). The Assyrian warlord was only too happy to respond, so he invaded Aram, executed its king, and annexed a considerable part of Ephraim (2 Kg. 15:29). Isaiah's next message to his king was that since Ahaz had ignored the appeal to quiet confidence in God symbolized by "the gently flowing waters of Shiloah", he could now expect a veritable flood of grief from the Assyrians (8:6-10). Now, God would assume the role of the angry parent, disciplining his wayward son Judah with the Assyrians as his whipping rod (9:12b, 17b, 21b; 10:4b-5).

Yet in spite of looming disaster, Isaiah never failed to look beyond judgment to hope. Yahweh's last word was never judgment. Even from among those who would experience the heavy hand of the Assyrian war machine, a remnant would survive for the future (10:20ff.).

Oracles to the Nations (13-23)

Like other prophets, Isaiah's ministry was not restricted to addressing the sins of his own people. God was the Creator of all, and therefore, the Judge of all. Hence, various oracles of judgment were announced against Babylon, Assyria and the nations of Canaan, Syria and Egypt (13-21, 23). The presence of Jerusalem in these oracles against the foreigners is somewhat surprising (22), but Judah had wandered so far from God that the nation would meet disaster just like all the others.

Isaiah's Apocalypses (24-27, 34-35)

Two sections of Isaiah are written in the style of apocalyptic literature, that is, literature featuring the sharp contrast between the present age and the age to come, with the present age given over to the powers of evil until its closure by the abrupt intervention of God. The first of these oracles describes God as the righteous judge who will devastate all the earth (24). A redeemed people will survive this judgment and remain to celebrate God's salvation (25). A new Jerusalem will arise, and those who died would be raised again (26:1-6, 19). Leviathan, the great antagonist of God, would be vanquished (27:1). From among the nations, God's people will gather to worship in this new city (27:13).

The second apocalypse contains poems of judgment (34) and salvation (35). The nations will be summoned to God's court for judgment, but if God is coming to judge, he is also coming to save. The people of faith must take courage (35:3-4). Only the redeemed will survive to enjoy the blessings of God's great future (35:8-10).

Kingdoms Under Judgment (28-33, 36-39)

For the present, both the kingdoms of Israel (Ephraim) and Judah were under divine judgment (28:1; 29:1). Both were like stubborn children who refused to obey (30:1). Instead of relying on the Lord, they relied on their political alliances with Egypt (31:1).

Isaiah's gloomy predictions were not long in being fulfilled. During the reign of Hezekiah, even though he was a good king, Sennacherib of Assyria invaded Judah with terrific force (2 Kg. 18; Is. 36). However, unlike his father Ahaz, Hezekiah listened to the advice of Isaiah and put his full trust in God (2 Kg. 19; 2 Chr. 32; Is. 37). As a result, God intervened and drove the Assyrians back to their homeland. Hezekiah's final years were marked by his extension of life after he was informed he would die (38) and his ill-advised entertainment of the ambassadors from Merodach-Baladan of Babylon (39). Isaiah informed him that it would be Babylon, not Assyria, that would sack Jerusalem and carry her nobles into exile. The remainder of the Book of Isaiah, chapters 40-66, addresses the exiles in Babylon about a century and a half later, so it is appropriate to examine this section in its historical context.

The Threat from Mesopotamia Becomes Overpowering (2 Kings 17, 21-23; 2 Chronicles 33-35)

The Fall of Israel (2 Kings 17)

In 722 BC, the dire predictions of Amos, Hosea, Micah and Isaiah came due to the northern nation of Israel. Ahaz' rash invitation to Tiglath-pileser III was the beginning of the end. Hoshea, who claimed the throne after assassinating Pekah, was the final king of the north, though by the time of his ascension, Assyria had already annexed the larger part of his kingdom (2 Kg. 15:29-30). To preserve his throne, Hoshea quickly gave tribute to Tiglath-pileser as a vassal, and in fact, according to an Assyrian inscription, Tiglath-pileser actually installed Hoshea as a puppet king.

When Hoshea developed aspirations for independence through an alliance with Egypt (2 Kg. 17:3-4), Shalmaneser V, Tiglath-pileser's son, invaded Israel again, this time occupying what territory was left and putting Samaria to a final and successful siege. The city fell in late summer or autumn of the year 722/721 BC. The biblical historian was in no doubt: *This took place because the Israelites had sinned against the LORD their God... The LORD warned Israel and Judah through all his prophets and seers...but they would not listen...* (2 Kg. 17:7-23). The citizens of the northern kingdom were deported by the thousands, resettled in other Assyrian provinces, and never allowed to return.

Judah Struggles On (2 Kings 21-23; 2 Chronicles 33-35; Zephaniah)

Manasseh

After the fall of Israel, the southern nation of Judah carried on for another century and a half. Hezekiah's efforts to return to the covenant demands was short-lived. When he died, his son Manesseh began a fifty-five year, blood-filled reign (2 Kg. 21:6). Manasseh seemed to be both terrified of Assyria and equally fascinated with her religion. Not only did he quickly build again the shrines of the Ba'al cult, he also built shrines in honor of the astral cult for the worship of the constellations and heavenly bodies (2 Kg. 21:2-9; 2 Chr. 33:2-9). He even engaged in the cult of making his children pass through the fire. It is unclear whether this latter practice was a ritual of magic, or worse, child sacrifice, but it was certainly pagan. He even put an Asherah pole in the temple on Zion. Because of his paganizing ways, the nation of Judah was consigned by God to destruction (2 Kg. 21:10-15; 24:3-4). Amon, his son, continued the paganizing trend (2 Kg. 21:19-22; 2 Chr. 33:21-23).

Manasseh's name is inscribed as a vassal of Assyria on more than one Assyrian archaeological artifact. He even was taken as a prisoner to Assyria with a hook through his nose, where he repented of his evil and prayed to God for mercy (2 Chr. 33:10-13). Eventually, he was restored to Jerusalem. A written copy of his penitent prayer was kept in the royal archives (2 Chr. 33:12, 19), and later, an anonymous Jew penned a similar prayer in honor of this repentance. This latter prayer was included in the canon of Scripture in the Eastern Orthodox Church. When he died, he was succeeded by his son, Amon, and two years later, by his grandson, Josiah.

Zephaniah and Josiah's Reforms

Probably early in the reign of Josiah, yet another prophetic voice was lifted against the sins of Judah, this time from Zephaniah. Like those before him, he thundered out a message of rebuke against the religious and social abuses that filled the land. He announced that Yahweh was sending a blistering judgment upon Judah because of her pagan worship (Zep. 1:4-5) and the adoption of pagan customs and superstitions (Zep. 1:8-9). Political and religious leaders alike were deeply corrupt (Zep. 3:1-4). The citizens were indifferent (Zep. 1:12), and the only hope of averting disaster was a thorough-going repentance (Zep. 2:1-3), though there was little hope that this would happen (Zep. 3:6-7). The Day of Yahweh's judgment was near (Zep. 1:17-18).

Zephaniah's preaching apparently spurred Josiah, the young grandson of Manasseh, toward a spiritual reformation that was unparalleled in Judah's history (2 Chr. 34:1-13). To add impetus to his reform, Josiah discovered a long-misplaced

Torah scroll in the temple, probably the Book of Deuteronomy (2 Kg. 22; 2 Chr. 34:14-33). After he had listened to the searing denunciation of Canaanite religion in the Torah scroll and the terrible curses that would come upon the nation that followed paganism, he began a purge of every vestige of false religion from Judah, calling for a renewal of the covenant (2 Kg. 23) and staging the greatest celebration of Passover since the time of Samuel (2 Chr. 1-19).

The Decline of Assyria and the Rise of Babylon

In the end, the kingdom of Judah was still under the threat of the Mesopotamian empire builders. Not only was Assyria to be reckoned with, Babylon was also now on the rise. A series of raids in the west by the Scythians and Cimmerians broke Assyria's hold west of the Euphrates River. A Chaldean named Nebopolassar conquered Babylon and broke Assyria's hold over southern Mesopotamia. Josiah, for his part, was left free to break Judah's Assyrian vassalship, and he lost no time in doing so. As Assyria weakened and Babylon became stronger, a definitive showdown was inevitable. Assyria, for her part, was supported by Egypt, who probably felt that Assyria was the lesser of two evils. In 612 BC, the Babylonians conquered Nineveh, Assyria's capital, and continued to push westward. Remnants of the Assyrian administration fled even further west and formed a refugee government in Haran. When Pharaoh Neco II of Egypt marched northward to support the faltering Assyrians, Josiah of Judah, trying to prevent such a union, interposed the Judean army between the Egyptians and Assyrians. He was mortally wounded in the conflict at Megiddo and died shortly after (2 Kg. 23:29-30; 2 Chr. 35:20-24). Jeremiah was left to compose laments for his beloved king (2 Chr. 35:25). Finally, in 605 BC, Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon defeated what was left of Assyrian resistance at Carchemish.

The Prophet Jeremiah

The spiritual figure that looms larger than any other in the 7th century is the brooding Jeremiah. With a powerful sense of the implications of covenant faithfulness and unfaithfulness for Judah, he called the nation to come to its spiritual senses.

Jeremiah was chosen and shaped for prophetic ministry from conception (1:4-5). The paradigm for his preaching was "to uproot and tear down, to destroy and overthrow, to build and to plant" (1:10). Thus, while his initial word from Yahweh was terrible judgment in the near future, like the prophets before him, he offered a word of hope beyond judgment. Two initial visions reinforced and explained his calling, the first an almond tree with a word-play on the Hebrew word "watching" 1:11-12), and the second a boiling pot tipping its scalding contents toward the south,

a potent symbol of the Mesopotamian invasion (1:13-14).

One of Jeremiah's most remarkable sermons was preached from the courtyard of Solomon's temple, where he denounced the worshippers who came with outward shows of religion but inwardly demonstrated no genuine repentance (7, 26). Yahweh's house, he declared, had become a den of thieves, and Yahweh would do to the temple what once he had done to Shiloh during the priesthood of Eli. It was not even worth praying for the nation any longer so far had it gone down the path of paganism (7:16). As might be expected, his sermon created an uproar. The official clergy wanted to execute him (26:10-11), but some court officials, recalling Micah's prediction a century earlier about the temple's destruction, were willing to let him go.

Over the course of his ministry, Jeremiah contended with the kings of David's dynasty. After Josiah's death, his son Jehoahaz (Shallum) was deposed and exiled to Egypt. Pharaoh-Neco II installed Jehoiakim as a puppet king. After Jehoiakim burned the scroll of Jeremiah's oracles, the prophet informed him that God had rejected his family (36:30-31). Jehoiakim's son, Jehoiachin, lasted only three months after his father's demise (2 Kg. 24:6, 8-9). In fact, Jeremiah described Jehoiachin as a discarded signet ring and a broken pot, declaring that none of his sons would sit on David's throne (22:24-30). Zedekiah, Jehoiachin's uncle, was placed on the throne by Nebuchadnezzar as the last of the puppet kings (2 Kg. 24:17), but he was no better than his predecessors. When he attempted to break his vassal relationship to Babylon, hoping against hope that Yahweh would perform another miracle at the last minute (21:1-2), Jeremiah scorned him as foolish and told him the intelligent thing to do would be simply to surrender to the Babylonians (21:3-10). If Jeremiah was set against the kings of Judah, he was equally set against the false prophets who preached only in support of the status quo (14; 23; 27-29).

Jeremiah's messages were punctuated with colorful demonstrations. In a series of powerful acted out parables, he described the imminent disaster to come. These included an illustration using an unwashed loincloth, a demonstration before the city elders in which he smashed some wine jars (13), a parable based on a potter's work (18), an illustration using two baskets of figs (24), and the purchase of a field in Anathoth from a near relative (32).

Some of the most memorable of his compositions were his confessions and prayers to Yahweh expressing his frustration with his calling and message (11:20-23; 12:1-6; 15:10-21; 17:14-18; 18:18-23; 20:7-18). It is fair to say that Jeremiah's ministry was a terrible burden, not a joy, and he lived to see his dire predictions come to pass. He endured the Babylonian siege of Jerusalem and saw the city fall (34, 37-39, 52). In the end, Jeremiah was taken to Egypt with fleeing Jewish refugees (40-41).

Four Voices About the Northern Threat (Joel, Jonah, Nahum and Habakkuk)

When the Israelites originally established themselves in Canaan, the only superpower they confronted was Egypt. To be sure, the Philistines posed a serious threat in the period of Eli and Samuel, though David eventually was successful in quelling it. As the centuries rolled onward, however, and the threat from Mesopotamia became increasingly sharp, the prophets could hardly fail to address the potential consequences of northern invasion. They did so in ways that were hardly an endorsement of the *status quo* of Judah's politics, however. Each struggled with the northern threat in unique ways. The four prophets to be addressed here all are concerned about the northern invader. For Joel, the threat was a piercing call to repentance for Judah. For Jonah, God's commission to preach to the Assyrians was an unwelcome call that smacked of favoritism toward the enemy. For Nahum, the fall of Assyria to Babylon was the righteous judgment of God on godless infidels. For Habakkuk, the whole idea that God would use a pagan nation like Babylon to judge his own people raised the question of God's justice. So, each prophet in his own way wrestled with the Mesopotamian threat.

Joel

The date of the Book of Joel is debated. A late date takes the reference to "the Greeks" (3:6) as referring to the campaigns of Alexander, though this reference may be no more than a reference to Greek raiders who could have made their forays in several periods, either early or late. An early date takes into account the internal references to the Philistines, Edomites, Egyptians and Phoenicians as still the enemies of Judah (3:4, 19), a situation that favors the book being composed prior to the fall of these various nations to Babylon. Since in the Hebrew canon the book was placed between Hosea and Amos, it is possible that Joel was envisioned as a contemporary in the 8th century or at least near enough to have addressed the Assyrian threat.

In any case, Joel portrays the invading northern army with the imagery of a locust plague (1:2-12). This "locust" invasion, in turn, prompted the call for repentance (1:13ff.). The invaders are Yahweh's army of judgment, harbingers of the Day of Yahweh (2:1-11). If God's people would turn to him with their whole hearts (2:12-13), then Yahweh would turn to them (2:14). A full-scale national repentance was the only hope (2:15-17). As it was, the northern invasion seemed inevitable, though afterwards, God would again turn to his people, repay them for the devastation of the northern army (2:18-27), and pour upon them the gift of the Holy Spirit (2:28ff.). In the end, the nations of the world would be held accountable to Yahweh, the Judge of all (3). Judah would be restored and inhabited forever (3:20-

21).

Jonah

Jonah has been rightly perceived as the first missionary book in the Bible. If 2 Kings 14:25 refers to the same prophet as the book that bears his name, Jonah's ministry was during the reign of Jeroboam II (c. 793-753 BC), a period when the Assyrian threat may have seemed remote. Jonah was commissioned by God to preach to Nineveh, one of the principle Assyrian cities. For his part, Jonah refused to go, choosing instead to run from his calling (1:1-3). As he stated later, he ran because he was afraid Yahweh might have mercy on the Ninevites (4:2), and apparently, the Assyrians were the people he loved to hate.

Jonah's flight was arrested by God. God prepared a great fish to swallow Jonah (1:4-16), and in the belly of the fish, Jonah despaired and prayed for God's mercy (2:1-9), and God caused the fish to spew Jonah out upon dry ground (2:10). Now, Jonah obeyed God's second commission to go to Nineveh (3:1-3), and he preached that the city soon would be destroyed. The Assyrian response to Jonah's preaching was incredible. From king to commoner, the citizens heartily repented of their sins (3:4-9), and Yahweh relented and did not destroy them (3:10).

The final act in this drama concerned Jonah's belligerent attitude. He still harbored the same hostility toward the Ninevites as before, and now that they had been spared, he was even more angry, this time not only at them but also at God (4:1-3). Yahweh had a final lesson for his recalcitrant prophet. The same God who prepared the fish (2:1), now prepared a vine to shield Jonah's bald head from the oppressive sun (4:6). The next day God prepared a worm to gnaw the vine, causing it to wither. Finally, he prepared a scorching wind to blast Jonah (4:8), causing Jonah's ire to rise yet again. In the heat of the prophet's anger, God rebuked him for his preoccupation with his own comfort and his total lack of compassion for those around him (4:9-11). This was God's lesson in grace--that God cares for what he creates, and even though the Ninevites were hardly better than children in their moral sensibilities, God was concerned about them, too!

Nahum

A century after Jonah's sermons to the Ninevites, Nahum also addressed the Assyrians. This time, however, Yahweh's word was a blistering announcement of doom. He depicted God as descending upon the world as a warrior bent on judgment (1:2-6). In particular, his divine wrath was aimed at Nineveh (1:9-14). God would do to Nineveh, the city of blood (3:1-7), what the Assyrians had done to Thebes only half a century earlier (3:8-11). Under Ashurbanipal, the Assyrians had sailed up the Nile and destroyed the Egyptian capital in 663 BC. Now, what Assyria had done to

others would be done to her, and all the nations of the ancient Near East would rejoice (3:19).

Nevertheless, in the midst of this vision of judgment, Nahum foretold a coming herald of good news on the mountains of Judah, a messenger bringing good news (1:15). This passage, like its counterpart in Isaiah 52:7, was taken by the earliest Christians to refer to the coming of Christ (Ro. 10:14-15).

Habakkuk

The short Book of Habakkuk is primarily a dialogue between the prophet and God. Habakkuk was appalled at the corruption that surrounded him in Judah. He asked God why he allowed this to go on (Ha. 1:2-4). Yahweh responded that he was indeed going to do something--he was going to allow the Babylonians to invade Judah (Ha. 1:5-11). Such an answer was not at all what Habakkuk was looking for, and it raised yet another ethical problem. How could Yahweh punish Judah with a Babylonian invasion, since Babylon was even worse than Judah (Ha. 1:2--2:1)? Would God simply allow violence and destruction to increase without limit (Ha. 1:17)? God responded that he intended to punish the Babylonians, also (2:2-5).

Habakkuk's questions, then, are about God's justice, and in this sense, they are similar to the questions posed in the Book of Job. Is God really in control of a world filled with evil? How can he allow the Babylonians to destroy Judah, his own people? Granted, they were sinful, but the Babylonians were even worse! The divine answer is that God's resolution to the problem of evil would come later rather than sooner--at "the end" (2:3). In the meantime, Habakkuk (and God's people) could only wait in faith as they continued to exist between the times (2:4b), between the promise of justice and the fulfillment to come.

In the end, Habakkuk wrote a prayer about God's judgment on the nations and his salvation of his own people (3). The person of faith can trust only in God, nothing else (3:17-19).

The Exile of Judah (2 Kings 24-25; 2 Chronicles 36; Jeremiah 52; Ezekiel; Lamentations)

The exile of the southern nation of Judah was a theological crisis of immense proportions. When the northern nation went into exile after the invasion of Assyria, its demise was doubtless put down to the north's rejection of the covenant of David and the temple. Judah still could consider herself to be the faithful remnant to whom the land promises would be maintained. Yet a century and a half later, Judah, also, went into exile, this time as a result of the Babylonian invasion. Serious questions now were to be raised. Why was Judah a kingdom under divine judgment? Why had Jerusalem, the city of David, and Mt. Zion, the place where Yahweh had chosen to

place his sacred name, been desecrated by pagans and destroyed? Why had Yahweh allowed the destruction of the culture, religion, shrine and political entity of the people he had called to be a great and vast nation? Above all, why had the people lost control of the land that was to be theirs forever?

The Prophet Ezekiel

One voice who addressed these questions was Ezekiel. The ministry of this priest began a new phase in Old Testament prophecy. Ezekiel was taken to Babylon in the first deportation (Eze. 1:1-2; 2 Kg. 24:10-16). Whereas the prophets who preceded him spoke of the coming desolation of Jerusalem from within the city itself, Ezekiel looked at the same event both before and after the fact from far-off Babylon (Eze. 1:1; 8:1). His oracles were visionary and full of strange and perplexing images and symbols, such as, the chariot throne of God supported by four living creatures, each with four faces, and the wheels intersected with wheels (Eze. 1:5-21). Ezekiel's visions, though sometimes obscure, stressed the transcendence of Yahweh. Some fifty-four times in the book Yahweh spoke through his mouthpiece to explain that the coming events were so that *people may know that I am Yahweh.* He makes clear that God's omnipotence was not limited by the failure of his people. In the end, of course, Ezekiel predicted a restoration for Judah, yet even here, the restoration would be an act of grace (Eze. 36-37).

Central to Ezekiel's visions was the Spirit's abandonment of Solomon's temple. The initial vision of the chariot throne (1) later was continued to show that the Spirit was withdrawing from the Most Holy Place (10:4). God's glory crossed the threshold of the outer doors (10:18) and disappeared over the eastern hills (11:23-24). His abandonment of Jerusalem signaled the end. The exiles of the first deportation, like the citizens back in Jerusalem, could hardly believe that God would do such a thing. They passed off such announcements as empty threats (12:21-28). Nevertheless, Ezekiel did not back down. He illustrated his oracles with the imagery of siege (4-5) and execution (6-7, 9). Ezekiel's mimes of deportation (12) and his portrayal of Samaria and Jerusalem as two prostitute sisters (23) left little doubt about God's moral sentiments. In the end, Jerusalem would be cooked like a stew (24).

God warned Ezekiel that his own wife would die as a symbol of the coming death of Jerusalem (24:15ff.). Her death would occur on the very day the siege of Jerusalem started (24:1-2; cf. 2 Kg. 25:1; Je. 52:4), January 15, 588 BC. Until the city fell and a refugee came to Babylon to announce the disaster, Ezekiel would be mute (24:25-27; cf. 33:21-22). Still, if Ezekiel predicted divine judgment on Judah, he was no less adamant that God also would judge the nations (25-32).

In the end, like the other prophets Ezekiel looked beyond the pending disaster to a future hope on the other side of judgment. A new order was coming, and it

would be inaugurated by a coming good shepherd (34) who would herald good news upon the mountains of Israel and give to his people a new heart (36). The entire community would be reorganized around a new form of worship and a new temple to replace the one that had been destroyed (40-48).

The Fall of Jerusalem (2 Kings 24-25; 2 Chronicles 36; Jeremiah 52; Lamentations)

The final years of the kingdom of Judah after the death of Josiah were precarious, at best. One king, Jehoahaz, was taken prisoner to Egypt (2 Kg. 23:34) and another, Jehoiachin, to Babylon (2 Kg. 24:15; cf. Eze. 19). Zedekiah, the last king, tried to break the stranglehold of Babylon and was repaid with a terrible siege against Jerusalem, during which the city fell. Jerusalem and the temple were burned, and many of the people were taken as exiles to Babylon in a second deportation. Jeremiah in Jerusalem and Ezekiel in Babylon both lived to see their own terrible predictions come to pass. It was the clear conclusion of the biblical historians that this exile was a direct historical judgment on the nation (2 Kg. 24:2-4; 2 Chr. 36:15-17; Je. 37:6-10; 52:3; Da. 9), a judgment that had been part of the Mosaic code from the beginning (Dt. 28:64-68).

The death of Jerusalem is described in five poetic dirges in the little Book of Lamentations. Whereas the biblical historians give the factual accounts, Lamentations describes the emotional devastation. Jerusalem and Judah were now dead! Though the author of these poems is unnamed in the Hebrew text, the vividness with which they are constructed suggests that the author was an eyewitness. (Actually, the Septuagint, the Greek translation of the Hebrew Bible, credits Jeremiah with the Lamentations.) Yet even here, in the very middle of these death chants, a ray of hope appears concerning those who wait for God's future (La. 3:22-26).

The Return (Isaiah 40-66; Ezra 1-6; Haggai; Zechariah)

All along, the prophets had announced disaster because of the covenant breaking behavior of the Israelites. Samaria fell in 721 BC, and Jerusalem in 586 BC, just as the prophets predicted. The terrible curses for covenant breaking as outlined in the Torah had finally come due. Yet, the same prophets who spoke of the coming disaster also spoke of hope beyond the disaster. Each in his own way described a restoration, and particularly, a restoration through the dynasty of David (Am. 9:11-12; Hos. 3:5; Is. 9:7; 11:1, 10;16:4b-5; Mic. 5:2; Je. 23:5-8; 30:8-9; 33:19-26; Eze. 34:23-24; 37:24-25). When would this reversal of judgment take place? The prophets did not say, except that Jeremiah put the length of Babylonian exile at seventy years (Je. 25:8-11), after which Babylon itself would fall (Je. 25:12-13) and the exiles

would be allowed to return to Judah (Je. 29:10-14; 32:15).

The Consolation (Isaiah 40-66)

Though all the prophets spoke of hope beyond judgment, the latter half of the Book of Isaiah contains, by all accounts, the most complete and breath-taking description of this future. This section of Isaiah, chapters 40-66, abruptly changes context from chapters 1-39. Whereas Isaiah 1-39 has a context in the 8th century BC, with references to contemporary kings like Ahaz and Hezekiah as they faced the Assyrian threat, Isaiah 40-66 has a context in the 6th century BC and no references to Judah's political situation prior to the exile. Here, the institutions of Judah already have fallen, Jerusalem is in ruins (Is. 44:26-28; 49:14-23), and the anticipated ruler of Mesopotamia who will succeed Babylon is Cyrus of Persia (Is. 44:28; 45:1, 13). The destruction of Judah is now a past event (40:2; 42:22-25).

This part of Isaiah is properly called "the consolation", since it commences with a message of comfort to the Babylonian exiles (40:1-2). The period of judgment was now nearing its conclusion, and a mysterious "voice" from the desert called to the exiles to come home to Jerusalem (40:3-11). The impetus for this restoration would come through Cyrus of Persia, whom God had chosen as his "shepherd-messiah" to allow the Jews to return to their homeland (Is. 44:28--45:1; cf. 2 Chr.36:22-23; Ezr. 1:1-4). However, though Cyrus may have been *a* messiah, he was not *the* messiah. In fact, he was himself an unwitting tool of Yahweh (Is. 45:4-7).

In the midst of these oracles announcing restoration appear several descriptions of a figure called "the servant of the Lord". In one sense, this figure is a collective metaphor for the entire nation (Is. 41:9-10). As Yahweh's servant, the nation had been chosen to carry his glory, but all along she had been blind and deaf to her calling (Is. 42:18-22, 25). Repeatedly she turned away from God (Is. 43:22-24). Nevertheless, God intended to redeem his wayward people, forgiving their transgressions and blessing them with the gift of the Spirit (Is. 43:1-7, 25; 44:1-5, 21-23). The most remarkable aspect of these predictions concerns a coming individual, also called "the servant of the Lord." This coming one not only would be God's means of redeeming Israel, but through him God would redeem the nations of the whole earth (Is. 49:1-6). Unlike Israel, who had failed so terribly, this coming Servant would never fail (Is. 42:1-7). Though mistreated and rejected, he would bear the sins of others unto death (Is.52:13--53:12). In the end, a new Jerusalem would arise and a new Mt. Zion would thrive (Is. 60:10-11, 19-22; 62:1, 11-12). God's unfailing promises to David would be fulfilled (Is. 55:3-5), and a new heavens and a new earth would become the habitation of God's people forever (Is. 65:17-25; 66:22).

The Road Home (Ezra 1-6; Haggai; Zechariah)

Two leaders, initially, figure in the Jews' return from exile, Sheshbazzar and Zerubbabel. As predicted, Cyrus issued the proclamation in 539 BC that exiled peoples in his domain could return to their ancestral lands (Ezr. 1:1-4; 6:3-5). Sheshbazzar assembled as many Jews as would accompany him and began the trek back to Judah (Ezr. 1:5-11). Sheshbazzar's name quickly vanishes from the record for unknown reasons, however, and the name of a new leader appears, Zerubbabel. He, along with Joshua the High Priest, led the people to rebuild their lost heritage (Ezr. 2:1-2; 3:8). The first project was to reconstruct the temple, and they began by erecting the great altar (Ezr. 3). Soon, however, the work was suspended due to formidable opposition by local authorities (Ezr. 4-5). Discouragement set in (Hg. 1:2), and the land suffered a severe drought (Hg. 1:10-11). For sixteen years, the work floundered (Ezr. 4:5). It took some fervent encouragement from the prophets Haggai and Zechariah to induce the people not to lose heart altogether (Hg. 1:13-14; Zec. 1:16-17; Ezr. 5:1-2; 6:14). At last, however, they resumed the work in 520 BC and completed the second temple in 516 BC (Ezr. 6:15).

A further word should be said about the two prophets who worked alongside Zerubbabel and Joshua. Haggai sought to show the discouraged remnant that through their work on the temple they had a stake in a much bigger future. God intended to shake every nation on earth, and the glory that had abandoned the first temple in Ezekiel's vision would return in even greater measure to the second one (Hg. 2:6-9). Furthermore, Zerubbabel's leadership in the work of restoration was a kind of down payment on this future (Hg. 2:20-23). Zechariah, for his part, added a number of mysterious visions about the future. The burden of these messages was that Yahweh once again had chosen Jerusalem and Mt. Zion (Zec. 1:17; 2:10-13). The mission of Zerubbabel and Joshua were symbols of God's redemptive future (Zec. 3:8-10). They were like conduits of holy oil, anointed by God to complete the rebuilding project (Zec. 4). In the end, Jerusalem would be blessed, and the second temple was to be the beginning of this amazing future (Zec. 8:1-3, 9-13). That future stretched ahead indeterminately, but it would include the coming of a great king (Zec. 9:9) and a great cleansing from sin (Zec. 12:10; 13:1). In the end, Jerusalem and the temple would become the center of worship for the nations (Zec. 14:16-21).

The Beginning of Judaism (Ezra 7-10; Nehemiah; Malachi)

With the completed temple in Jerusalem, the primary work of Zerubbabel, Joshua, Haggai and Zechariah was finished. It had taken more than twenty years. However, it must be remembered that the Jews who rebuilt their temple were still citizens of the Trans-Eiuphrates Province of Persia. Neither independent political status nor a monarchy were revived.

The period that follows the reconstruction of the temple is the formative period of Judaism. The term Judaism is etymologically related to the words Judah and Jew, and it points to the fact that Judah, rather than Israel as a whole, would now constitute the national life of the remnant who survived the Babylonian captivity. Hence, the ethnic definitions of God's chosen people from the time of Abraham continually become more narrow. Abraham and the patriarchs were Semites or Hebrews. The descendents of Jacob were the Israelites composed of twelve clans. After the division of the monarchy at the death of Solomon, the clans were divided into two nations, Israel (or Ephraim) with ten clans and Judah with two clans. After the exile, only the clan of Judah survived in any substantial numbers, and their descendents are called the Jews, that is, Judeans.

The Coming of Ezra and Nehemiah (Ezr. 7-10; Nehemiah)

The opening of Ezra 7:1 reads simply, "After these things..." However, the reader should note that it was more than half a century since the completion of the temple, and the former leaders all had passed from the scene. The community was now under the Persian rulership of Artaxerxes I Longimanus (464-424 BC). Three primary areas of the world contained large Jewish communities, *Mesopotamia*, where many Jews had been exiled but who had not returned to Judah, *Palestine*, where the returning Jews had rebuilt a second temple, and *Egypt*, where Jewish refugees fled at the time of the fall of Jerusalem.

In 458 BC, Ezra arranged yet another expedition of Jews to Jerusalem from Mesopotamia. As a priest from Aaron's family, he came both as a ceremonial leader and a teaching scholar (Ezr. 7:6, 10), and his entourage included various Jews associated with temple service (Ezr. 7:7). With a letter of authority from Artaxerxes (Ezr. 7:12-16), he brought both priests and Levites along with him. His primary concern was to encourage and enforce the laws of the Torah (Ezr. 7:25-26). Within weeks of his arrival, his teaching ministry produced a deep moral response (Ezr. 7:8-9; 9:1-2; 10:9ff.), especially concerning mixed marriages with pagans, which was a clear violation of the Torah. The issue, of course, was not purely racial, since non-Jewish peoples could become part of the community by conversion. Instead, the real issue was religious, especially since it was the Jewish mother who taught and instilled in her children the life, culture and faith of the Jewish tradition.

In Jewish tradition, Ezra is said to have reconstituted the Torah long after it had been forgotten. In Talmudic tradition, he was a second Moses and the father of Judaism. As the leader of a special group called "the Great Synagogue," he also is believed to have restored the entire record of Jewish literature and copied it in Aramaic. Whether these traditions are historically accurate, there can be little doubt that Ezra was a key figure in preparing the Jewish community for the future.

The renewal described in Ezra 7-10 continues right on into the Book of Nehemiah. Nehemiah, another Jew still in Mesopotamia and an attendant in the emperor's court, also secured permission to make the trek to Jerusalem. His concern was the lack of protection for the Jews, since reconstruction of the city and walls had been halted many years earlier (cf. Ezr. 5:17-22; 4:23). Armed with a commission from Artaxerxes himself, Nehemiah surveyed the devastation and led the Jews in rebuilding the walls (Neh. 2-7). Though opposition was strong from local dissidents, Nehemiah managed to secure the city in less than two months (Neh. 6:15), just in time for the liturgical celebrations of the seventh month. Here, they listened to Ezra read and interpret the Torah (Neh. 8). The remainder of the Book of Nehemiah describes the work of bringing the community into alignment with the statutes of Mosaic law, where, once more, the issue of intermarriage with pagans was a central concern.

The Messenger (Malachi)

In spite of the return of many exiles and the rebuilding of the temple and the city walls, many in the post-exilic community were terribly disillusioned. The breath-taking promises about the future described in Isaiah 40-66 and the other prophetic books did not materialize. The dynasty of David, which had fallen like a tree before the Babylonians, was supposed to rise again, but it did not do so. Jerusalem certainly had not become a center of worship for the nations. Harassed and discouraged, the post-exilic community floundered. The final prophetic voice to them, urging them to remain faithful in view of God's great promises, was the Book of Malachi.

Malachi appears in about 450 BC, and by the time of his ministry, worship at the second temple had lapsed into perfunctory acts (1:13; 3:8-9, 13-14). The people were bitterly disillusioned (1:2; 2:13, 17; 3:7-8, 13-14). The priests were deficient in their duties of moral instruction (2:7-8). Malachi's approach to these problems was to create literary dialogues representing the complaints of the community on the one hand and the thoughts of God on the other. Hence, the bulk of the book is a set of questions, answers and discussion. Most important, Malachi preached that the future for which the people longed would indeed come (3:1). The promise that the Lord would return to his temple was not a failed prediction. Before that great day, however, Elijah the prophet would arise to preach, preparing the hearts of the people for the advent of God (4:5-6). In the New Testament, of course, the prediction about Elijah would be fulfilled by one who came "in the spirit and power of Elijah," John the Baptist (Lk. 1:17).

The Diaspora (Esther; Daniel; Apocrypha)

The First Pogrom (Esther)

Those Jews in Mesopotamia who did not return to Jerusalem found life quite tolerable. They were content with Jeremiah's instructions that they should settle in this new land and find a means of support (Je. 29). Persia, far more than either Babylon or Assyria, seemed reasonably accepting of all its ethnic subjects, and Jews settled in Babylon, Elam, Parthia, Media and Armenia. Hence, they came to be called the *Diaspora* (the Dispersion). Communications between the Jews in Persia and the Jews in Palestine were maintained, as the Books of Ezra and Nehemiah demonstrate. Nevertheless, all was not favorable. The scroll of Esther describes the plotting of a vicious pogrom against the Jews by a Persian official named Haman (Est. 3).

The story of Esther is full of intrigue and daring heroism. Chosen as the replacement queen for the banished Vashti (Est. 1), Esther was shocked to discover through the ears of her uncle that a day of execution was planned for all the Jews in the Persian Empire (Est. 3). This plot had been validated by Medo-Persian law, and it must be remembered that since the pogrom was to be empire-wide, the Jews in Jerusalem had no more guarantee of safety than the Jews in the Persian capital of Susa.

Esther, at the urging of her uncle, risked her very life to appeal to Xerxes, her husband the king (Est. 4-5). In the end, though the Medo-Persian law of extermination could not be reversed, the Jews were authorized by a second law to defend themselves with arms--a permission that effectively stifled the attacks of those who hated the Jews (Est. 6-8). Haman, the perpetrator of the plot, was hanged on his own gibbet. Since that time, Jews have celebrated the Feast of Purim to commemorate Esther's heroism (Est. 9). Though many pogroms against the Jews have occurred since, the story of Esther gives hope and confidence in God's protection.

The Exile Is Not Over (Daniel)

Near the end of the Hebrew Bible appears a strange and wonderful book about a Jewish seer in Mesopotamia. Exiled to Babylon when quite young, this Jewish boy, Daniel, lived through the fall of Babylon and the early Persian administration. Though not listed with the prophets in the Hebrew Bible, and though not called a prophet until one reaches the New Testament (Jesus called him a "prophet"), Daniel offered startling visions about the future of his people.

While the visions of Daniel have become fertile ground for various speculations about the end of the world, one thing is clear. Daniel foretold that the exile of the Jewish people would not end with the return of the Jews to Jerusalem. In

spite of a rebuilt temple and a newly fortified city, the Jewish people would continue to subsist under Gentile empires for a long time to come (Da. 2, 7). Such subservience was not to be interpreted as weakness on Yahweh's part, however. In fact, during Daniel's own lifetime, God demonstrated his sovereign power over Nebuchadnezzar (Da. 1, 3-4), Belshazzar (5) and Darius (6). Nevertheless, the seventy years predicted by Jeremiah must be understood as "weeks" of years, hence, a much longer period--490 years altogether (70 x 7)--before the redemption of the Jews by the Messiah (Da. 9:2, 24-27). During this time, empires would rise and fall, some of them persecuting the Jews (Da. 7:25), until at last God would establish an everlasting kingdom that would never be destroyed as had the kingdom of Judah (Da. 2:44-45; 7:13-14, 26-27). In the meantime, the Jews could expect the Persian Empire to succumb to the Greeks (Da. 8). After the rise of the Greeks, they could expect severe persecutions from both northern and southern Greek rulers (Da. 8, 10-11). Finally, after this period of great distress, the righteous would be resurrected to live forever and ever (Da. 12:1-4).

The Additional Writings (the Apocrypha)

The life of the Diaspora Jews under Gentile dominion came to pass, just as Daniel had predicted. During the next several centuries, various other writings were produced by Jews. Though not included in the Hebrew canon of Scripture nor accepted by Protestant Christians as Scripture (though they are accepted as Scripture by Roman Catholics and Orthodox Christians), these writings offer considerable detail about the Jews during the period between the Old and New Testaments. Some of them, like 1 Esdras, the Additions to Daniel, the Prayer of Manasseh and the Additions to Esther, actually parallel or add to the books in the Old Testament. Others, like Tobit, Judith and 1 & 2 Maccabees, describe the times and events of Jewish life after the close of the Old Testament. Still others, namely the Wisdom of Solomon and Sirach, belong to the wisdom tradition and are similar in style to the Old Testament books of Proverbs, Ecclesiastes and Job.

These books as a collection, though not canonized by the Jews, were valued by them as well as by the first Christians. When the Jews translated the Hebrew Bible into Greek, they also translated the books of the Apocrypha. This Greek Bible (the Septuagint) was the one used most frequently by the earliest Christians. Furthermore, the writers of the New Testament were familiar with these books, since they quoted from them or alluded to them in the New Testament itself. Perhaps the proper balance in appreciating their value comes from Luther's preface to the Apocrypha, "...these books which are not held equal to the Sacred Scriptures...are useful and good for reading."