OLD TESTAMENT Book By Book

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GENESIS: beginnings

EXODUS: redemption

LEVITICUS: holy living

NUMBERS: walk by faith

DEUTERONOMY: obedience

JOSHUA: conquest

JUDGES: defeat & deliverance

RUTH: kinsman-redeemer

I SAMUEL: look inside

II SAMUEL: effects of sin

I KINGS: idolatry

II KINGS: judgment

CHRONICLES: faithfulness

EZRA: return

NEHEMIAH: renewal

ESTHER: providential care

JOB: suffering

PSALMS: worship

PROVERBS: wisdom

ECCLESIASTES: life without god is empty

SONG OF SOLOMON: married love

ISAIAH: God is salvation

JEREMIAH: final chance

LAMENTATIONS: sin brings sorrow

EZEKIEL: God's glory

DANIEL: sovereignty

HOSEA: loyal love

JOEL: day of the Lord

AMOS: accountability

OBADIAH: retribution

JONAH: obedience

MICAH: hope

NAHUM: justice

HABAKKUK: patience

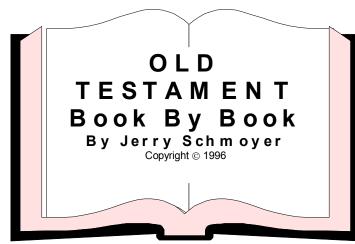
ZEPHANIAH: day of the Lord

HAGGAI: priorities

ZECHARIAH: history

MALACHI: repentance

(HARD COPIES OF THIS ARE AVAILABLE. THEY INCLUDE CHARTS, DIAGRAMS AND PICTORAL OUTLINES OF THE BOOKS. WRITE TO ME AND REQUEST A COPY IF YOU WANT ONE.)



GENESIS: BEGINNINGS

TITLE: Greek for "Beginnings"

AUTHOR: Moses

DATE of WRITING: About 1440 BC PLACE of WRITING: Desert wilderness TIME COVERED: Creation to 1804 BC

RECIPIENTS: Jews

KEY VERSE: And I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring

and hers; he will crush your head, and you will strike his heel." Genesis 3:15

KEY WORD: "Generations" (19 times)

PURPOSE: To show the beginnings of all things, especially Israel.

THEME: The origin of all things.

Several years ago a man named Alex Haley wrote a book called "Roots" which captured the attention of the entire nation. It was about his search for his background, where he came from. "Roots" was an appropriate title. We all need roots. Knowing where we came from can help us understand where we are and where we're going.

BEGINNINGS: Moses wrote a book that also could have been called "Roots." Instead it's called "Genesis." Genesis is the Greek title, taken from the first words of the book in Greek: "In the beginning." Genesis is a book of beginnings. In it we see the beginning of the universe, life, revelation of God and the Trinity, grace, man, Sabbath, marriage, home, sin, temptation, confession, forgiveness, pride, Satan, Christ, election, prophecy, faith, judgment, suffering, murder, family, worship, rewards, prayer, eternal security, witnessing, stewardship, capital punishment, love, sin nature, and so much more. Virtually everything has its beginning in Genesis. The only beginning that isn't told about is the beginning of God, for He has no beginning.

Because Genesis is so important, it is attacked quite heavily. Any book gets most wear and tear on its exposed sides: front and back. Those pages take the most abuse. That is true in the Bible, too. The first three chapters of Genesis (creation) and the last three of Revelation (Jesus' return and eternity) take the most abuse, too. That is where Satan attacks. If he can discredit either of those the truth of the rest of the book is undermined.

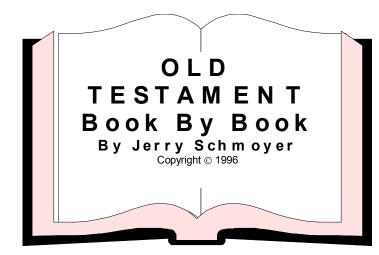
TWO BOOKS IN ONE Genesis is really two books in one. The first 11 chapters talk about the beginning of the universe and nations on earth. Chapters 12 - 50 deal with the nation Israel. In 11 short chapters 2,300 years of history are covered. Major events that have shaped our world are covered quickly: creation, fall, flood and Babel. The rest of the book covers only 300 years and focuses on four men: Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and Joseph. In the first 11 chapters God sets the stage for what He really wants to get to: Abraham and the start of Israel. It's like seeing a movie which starts with a panoramic view of the countryside with a village in the difference. The camera pans across it all, focusing in on the town until focusing on a man walking down the street. The camera then zooms in on him and follows him down the street and into a house. The story slows down and follows events in the man's life. That's how Genesis is. God isn't

trying to give all the details we'd like to have about creation and the fall. He just records it's happening then moves on.

HISTORY & SCIENCE Genesis contains a lot about science, and all it includes is true. However Genesis isn't a science book because it doesn't try to cover all areas of science or answer all questions that come up. The same is true of history. Genesis contains a lot about history, and all it includes is true. But it isn't a history book because it leaves out so much history. God's purpose isn't to give a detailed account of science or history, but to set the background for Abraham and Israel. The focus of the book of Genesis, like the whole Bible, is redemption. Genesis 1 - 11 show man's need of redemption, but 12 - 50 show the beginning of God's provision of redemption through Israel in the person of Jesus the Messiah.

IMPORTANCE OF GENESIS The opening chapter of any book is important for it sets the stage for what is to come. The background information is crucial to understand the rest of the book. To skip the first chapter and start elsewhere makes one always wonder what is missing, what has been revealed which the reader doesn't know. It's important to pay closer attention to the first chapter, then the rest of the book makes more sense. The same is true with the Bible. Genesis, the first 'chapter' in the book, is very important. Make sure you really understand the book of Genesis before going on to the rest of the book.

ROOTS By the way, where are YOUR roots? I don't mean physically, I mean spiritually. Are you rooted and grounded in Jesus? That's the only foundation that will last, that won't wash away. Make sure your roots are firmly embedded in Jesus!



EXODUS:REDEMPTION

TITLE: Greek for "Depart, Exit, Way Out"

AUTHOR: Moses

DATE of WRITING: About 1440 BC PLACE of WRITING: Desert wilderness TIME COVERED: 1875 BC to 1444 BC

RECIPIENTS: Jews

KEY VERSE: So I have come down to

rescue them from the hand of the Egyptians and to bring them up out of that land into a good and spacious land, a land flowing with milk and honey-- the home of the Canaanites, Hittites, Amorites, Perizzites, Hivites and Jebusites. Exodus 3:8

KEY WORD: "Redeem, Deliver" (10 times)

PURPOSE: To show how Israel got out of Egypt (fulfill Gen 15:12-16) and received God's law

THEME: Redemption of the believer pictured by the exodus

A few years ago a boy made a model sailboat out of wood. He worked hard at carving, sanding and painting it. He loved to sail it on a stream near his home. One day it got away from him, though, and was carried downstream. He tried to retrieve it but wasn't able. He went home very sad over the loss. Several days later, while walking through town, he saw his sailboat in a toy store window with a price attached to it. He quickly got some odd jobs and worked hard until he was able to save enough money to buy back his own boat. What that boy did is what the Bible word "redeem" refers to. It means to "buy back" something that was originally yours. The word was originally used of a slave owner who had to buy back his runaway slave. That is a perfect picture of what God has done for us. We are his by creation but rebelled and ran away in sin, so He had to pay the price (Jesus on the cross) to buy us back ("redeem" us).

GENESIS & EXODUS Genesis shows man's failure. Genesis starts with man walking and talking with God, but sin enters and by the end of the book man is in bondage to Pharaoh (a picture of Satan) in Egypt (a picture of the world system without God). In Exodus we see God coming to man's rescue, to bring him out of bondage, to "redeem" him. It is done by blood (Passover lamb) and power (Red Sea deliverance).

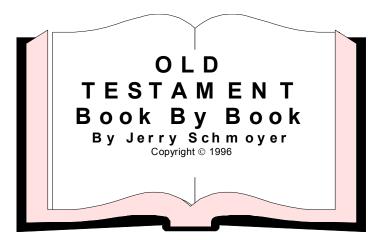
THE PASSOVER LAMB Just as Genesis 12 is the key chapter in the book of Genesis (telling about Abraham being chosen, leaving all to follow God, and listing God's eternal promises to him and his descendants), so Exodus 12 is the key chapter in the book of Exodus. It explains about the Passover lamb, the innocent blood shed to bring redemption. This is a beautiful picture of Jesus, the fulfillment of this picture (I Peter 1:18-19; John 1:29,36; I Cor. 5:7). The lamb had to be perfect and unblemished, a male in the prime of life. It died as a substitute for the people on the 14th of Nisan, about 3 in the afternoon (the exact day and time Jesus died on the cross). The blood was then applied to the doorpost of the homes of those who believed. The lamb's death didn't deliver unless it was personally accepted and applied. Those who were inside were safe from judgment. The blood on the doorposts, top of the frame, and sill (where the lamb was killed) was in the shape of a cross. Inside they ate the meat of the lamb (nourishment from Christ).

When the angel of death saw the blood he passed over for it was a picture that death had already come. The substitute died in the place of the guilty people. Thus they were "redeemed" by the blood of the lamb. God bought back with a price of infinite value that which was originally His by creation. In the early days of this country the pioneers were often destroyed by great prairie fires that would sweep across the plains miles across and destroy everything and everyone in its path. From the Indians they learned that when they realized such a fire was approaching they should set fire to all the grass around their homestead. Thus when the main fire came roaring through they were safe because, as the Indians said, "Where the fire has been the fire cannot come." That is true of God's judgment. When we accept Jesus as our Savior we are eternally safe from any judgment by God (Romans 8:1).

LEAVEN Because there wasn't time to let bread rise, they quickly cooked bread without leaven and ate it. Leaven is used as a picture of sin in the Bible (Mt. 6:6,11-12; I Cor. 5:6-8; Gal 5:9). For centuries the Jews have celebrated this deliverance from Egypt by drinking the juice of the grape (a picture of the blood of the lamb) and eating matzo (unleavened bread). This was a reminder of God's great deliverance of them, the key miracle in the Old Testament. Genesis 1 to Exodus 11 point to this and from Exodus 13 to the end of Malachi the Old Testament looks back to this event as the highlight of God's work for His people.

In the New Testament Jesus takes this juice from the grape and unleavened blood and says that it no longer stands for physical deliverance but for spiritual deliverance form sin and Satan. Jesus teaches that the real fulfillment of these was in His very own body and blood, and that we are to now celebrate this as the Lord's Supper, a reminder of God's greatest of all deliverances.

THE TABERNACLE The other great teaching tool in the book of Exodus is the Tabernacle. It, too, shows all about Jesus (see series of articles on "The Tabernacle" by Jerry Schmoyer).



LEVITICUS: HOLY LIVING

TITLE: Greek "Pertaining to the Levites"

AUTHOR: Moses

DATE of WRITING: 1444 BC PLACE of WRITING: Mt. Sinai

TIME COVERED: A few weeks in 1444 BC RECIPIENTS: Jews, especially the Levites

KEY VERSE: You are to be holy to me because I, the LORD, am holy, and I have set you apart from the nations to be my own. Lev. 20:26

KEY WORDS: Holy/Sanctify (131x); Sacrifice (300x); Clean/unclean (200x); Atonement (36x) PURPOSE: To instruct Israel in how to live a holy life but teaching the Levites how to serve.

THEME: A holy people worshipping a holy God in the spirit of holiness.

I have a cartoon that shows a boy looking seriously at the Bible, with a girl anxiously looking over her shoulder. Finally he says, "You can relax. There's not a thing in the entire book of Leviticus against wearing contact lenses!"

He's right -- but if any book would contain such restrictions the book of Leviticus would be it! Reading Leviticus is an awfully like reading the ordinances, building code, and laws of your local municipality. Sound exciting? Genesis is good reading, and Exodus starts off exciting, but by the time people get to Leviticus they often bog down and never finish reading the Bible. What a shame. Laws aren't exciting reading, but where would we be without them?

GENESIS, EXODUS AND LEVITICUS Genesis shows the problem: man is sinful and that separates him from God. Exodus shows the solution: God provides redemption by innocent blood being shed on his behalf. hen what? If the Bible ended after Exodus 12 we would assume, and correctly so, that salvation was the end of things. We accept Jesus as our Savior and that is all there is. However the Bible doesn't end there. There is MUCH more, and that is living a holy life for God. After man sees his need (Genesis) and accepts God's provision (Exodus) then he is to life a holy life for God (Leviticus). We are to worship and serve God in everything we do. The rest of the Bible gives instructions in how to do that. Leviticus taught the redeemed Jews how to live holy lives of godly service.

SACRIFICE The Old Testament sacrificial system was God's reminder that sin had to be paid for by innocent blood being shed. This is true of the once-for-all acceptance of salvation (applying the blood of the Lamb) and then the daily need for cleansing from acts of sin after salvation (sacrifices). These sacrifices also pictured Jesus in that they were innocent and perfect. One important truth to note: there was no provision of forgiveness for intentional, knowing, willful sin. The sacrifices were for sins of ignorance only. God would forgive other sin, but only by his mercy. Today we are guarenteed forgiveness (I Jn 1:9).

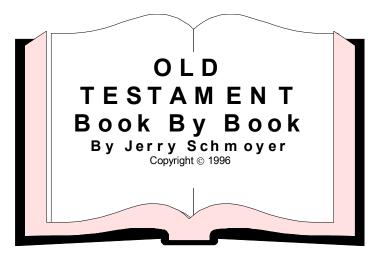
PRIESTHOOD The priest was a go-between for God and man (another picture of Jesus). All his garments and colors taught about Jesus, as did the Tabernacle. The duties and functions of the priests are detailed in Leviticus.

DAY OF ATONEMENT The Day of Atonement, Exodus 16, is the key chapter in the book. "Atonement" means to cover, take away, remove. On this day the sins of the nation were forgiven by God. Two goats were taken, one killed and its blood collected. Some of the blood

was taken into the Holy of Holies by the high priest, with a rope around his ankle so they could pull him out if God didn't accept the sacrifice and struck him dead. When we enter God's presence we enter with assurance He will hear and accept us because of what Jesus did on the cross (Hebrews 10:19). The rest of the blood was sprinkled on the second goat, which was sent away into the wilderness. This 'scape goat' pictured sins being carried away.

LAWS, LAWS AND MORE LAWS The book of Leviticus is fill of all kinds of laws to govern the people's relationships with each other and with God. Sexual regulations, capital punishment, cleanliness (sanitation and health concerns), and other laws are all for the benefit of the people themselves. Laws are for their protection and pleasure, not to make life harder and take away 'fun.'

Weekly and yearly feasts were also part of God's way of teaching His truths to His people. They all show how important it is to live holy, committed lives in obedience to God. We today live under grace, not the law, but God still requires holiness and obedience from His people.



NUMBERS: WALK BY FAITH

TITLE: From the Census (start & end of bk.)

AUTHOR: Moses

DATE of WRITING: About 1405 BC

PLACE of WRITING: Moab

TIME COVERED: 39 years (1440-1405)

RECIPIENTS: Jews

KEY VERSE: Num 10:29 Moses said to Hobab son of Reuel the Midianite, Moses' father-in-law, "We are setting out for the place about which the LORD said, 'I will give it to you.' Come with us and we will treat you well, for the LORD has promised good things to Israel."

KEY WORD: "Wilderness" (45 times)

PURPOSE: To record what happened when the Jews left Mt Sinai and how they died in the desert because of their unbelief.

THEME: God's faithfulness despite man's faithlessness. Man is to walk by faith.

Too often the Old Testament is viewed as just history -- a bunch of old stories that have no relevancy for today. That's not true. God kept the Old Testament as part of our Bible today because it is invaluable in many ways. For one thing, all the historical stories do relate to today and teach lessons to us. Paul himself said that the events in Exodus and Numbers were recorded as examples for us today to learn from (I Cor. 10:1-12, esp v 6 & 11). If we miss the lesson we are bound to make the same mistake ourselves.

I. THE FAITHFULNESS OF GOD (chap 1-12) Numbers

starts with a census of the people. The purpose is to see raise an army of fighting men. for warfare is coming. Genesis shows man's sin and helplessness (he can't fight sin). Exodus reveals God fighting for man to provide redemption (we can't attain our own salvation). Leviticus teaches how to live a holy life (preparation for the fight). Numbers shows the battle has begun. We are in a battle with sin. We are to go on as in "Onward Christian Soldiers."

God assigned responsibility to the people (chap 2-4). God is organized. Each one of God's people is given an assignment, and if they don't do their duty others suffer, too.

Then the people are cleansed (chap 5) and consecrated (chap 6 - 10), ready to leave. However on the way to the promised land they start complaining again (chap 11-12). God hated it (Psalm 95:10-11). How could anyone complain when rescued from slavery and given health, food and a promised home? We have it even better, how God must hate it when we complain! That just shows lack of appreciation, selfishness, self-centeredness and sin!

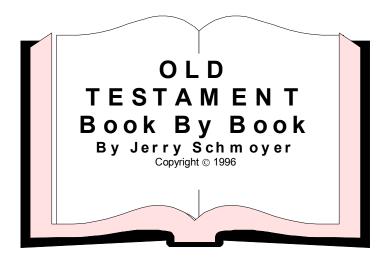
II. FAILURE OF MAN (chap 13-20:13) Not comes the big test - trust God to give them the land He has promised. Their fear of the giants (who certainly aren't bigger than God) keep them from trusting God and entering the land. What 'giants' in your life keep you from trusting and obeying God? Are they bigger than God?

The Jews feared, disobeyed, rebelled, tried to kill Moses & Aaron, and chose new leaders to take them back into the land. In his disgust, God said they'd not be able to enter the land. Actually, it was only God's mercy at Moses' pleading that kept Him from destroying the whole nation. They had to wonder aimlessly until all the adults (those over 40) who came out of

Egypt died off and the children grew up. God would then give them a chance to decide for themselves. It was a waste of 40 years and millions of lives, all because of disobedience!

Moses himself didn't fare much better. A life-long problem with anger culminated with him again acting in anger (chap 20) and not being able to enter the Promised Land, either. Anger that isn't controlled brings terrible consequences, as the life of Moses shows.

III. GOD'S PROVISION FOR MAN'S FAILURE Despite man's continual failure, God remained faithful. He defended the Jews from Edom, Arad, Shion and Og (chap 20-21). He protected them from unknown danger (Balaam - chap 22-26). After another census preparing the new generation for their turn at warfare (chap 26) and instructions in how to divide the land (chap 26, 31-34) Joshua is promoted to leadership, replacing Moses (chap 27). Moses will have some final sermons to this new generation, reviewing what has happened to the first and challenging them to not make the same mistakes. That is the book of Deuteronomy.



DEUTERO-NOMY: OBEDIENCE

TITLE: "Second Law" (Greek) AUTHOR: Moses (1:1-6)

DATE of WRITING: About 1405 BC

PLACE of WRITING: Moab

TIME COVERED: 2 months in 1405 BC

(Reviews last 39 years) RECIPIENTS: Israel

KEY VERSE: Deut 10:12-13 And now, O Israel, what does the LORD your God ask of you but to fear the LORD your God, to walk in all his ways, to love him, to serve the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul, and to observe the LORD's commands and decrees that I am giving you today for your own good?

KEY WORDS: "Hear" (50 times); "Do, Keep, Observe" (177 times); "Love" (21 times) PURPOSE: The old generation is gone. Moses will soon die. He instructs the new generation to remember God's faithfulness and learn from past failures so they will obey God in love. THEME: Obey God motivated by love because of His faithfulness in the past.

Which is your favorite book in the Bible? Usually we choose Psalms, Proverbs, John, Ephesians, Revelation or some such book. If you'd have asked Jesus, though, you might have gotten an entirely different answer. He may have said "Deuteronomy!" After all, He knew large portions of it by heart. When tempted by Satan He quoted from the book of Deuteronomy -- three times! When was the last time you quoted Deuteronomy to have victory over temptation?

MOSES' LAST WORDS Because of his sins of anger and disobedience, Moses cannot enter the promised land with the other Jews. Before he dies and they enter the land under Joshua, God gives Moses the opportunity to give a series of addresses to the people. Basically he tells them that, because God has always been faithful to them (even when they weren't faithful to Him), the Jews should obey Him in love. History can be a great teacher, with much wisdom to share, if we but listen and learn. That is what Moses wanted this generation to do. He encouraged them to learn from the mistakes of their parents and obey God. God's laws are for our own good. They are like signs pointing out mines in a mine-field. God knows what can damage and destroy, and warns His people to avoid these things.

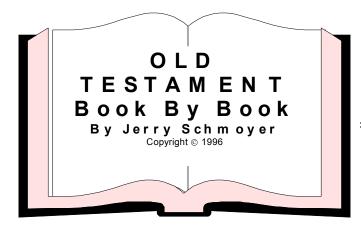
While obedience is for our own benefit and brings blessing instead of calamity, Moses wants the people to obey because of love for God (6:5). For a child to say he loves his parents is one thing, to show it by obedience is quite another. The same is true with God's children.

Moses reviews the law God gave on Mt. Sinai, for this generation has been living in disobedience to God for the last 39 years. The people agree to keep the law and obey God in love. They want to learn from the past and not make the same mistakes themselves.

Moses also gives some new laws covering situations and circumstances that have come up, which aren't addressed by other laws. He not only tells them what to do but why to do it. Then God takes Moses home to heaven with him. Satan tried to get his body (Jude 9) but Michael hid it. Perhaps Satan would let the Jews find it and worship Moses' body instead of

Moses' God. Moses appears to Jesus at the Transfiguration in his resurrection body, and that's how we'll see him when we join him in heaven.

What about your obedience to God? Do you learn from past mistakes of your own and others? Do you obey in love? Adam and Eve didn't always obey. Abel did. Cain didn't. Noah did. Abraham, Isaac and Jacob did and didn't. Joseph did. the Jews didn't. Aaron didn't. Miriam didn't. Joshua and Caleb did. What will God say about your life? It's up to you now. Make obedience based on love the main goal of you live and you can't go wrong!



JOSHUA: CONQUEST

TITLE: Named after author, main character

AUTHOR: Joshua

DATE of WRITING: About 1375 BC PLACE of WRITING: Canaan (Palestine)

TIME COVERED: About 30 years

RECIPIENTS: Jews, second generation of those who left Egypt

KEY VERSE: Josh 1:2-3 "Moses my servant is dead. Now then, you and all these people, get ready to cross the Jordan River into the land I am about to give to them-- to the Israelites. I will give you every place where you set your foot, as I promised Moses.

KEY WORDS: Possess/Possessions (22 times); Inherit/Inheritance (63 times)

PURPOSE: To show how God's promises were fulfilled ingiving Canaan to Israel (23:14) but how Israel failed to fully possess the land (18:3), setting groundwork for future troubles.

THEME: Conquest and division of Canaan.

Have you ever been in a position where you had to replace someone who did an outstanding job? Maybe it was at work, or even at church. You didn't seem to have the skills and natural ability your predecessor did, but now it was your responsibility. With God's help it all worked out fine. That is the position Joshua finds himself in. He was only average in ability, but above average in availability. He wasn't the gifted, natural leader Moses was, but he trusted God and God used him to lead the Jews into their Promised Land.

Joshua was born a slave in Egypt. He assisted

Moses and was trained by Moses since the Jews left Egypt.

He was the general who led the soldiers against the

Amalekites while Moses prayed (Exodus 17). Joshua and

Caleb were the only spies who trusted that God could defeat the giants and give them the land. Now he is a man of about 80 or 90, full of wisdom and confidence in God. Naturally he was a fearful man, but when he trusted in God he had courage and strength for his tasks (Joshua 1:6-9). Joshua in many ways is a picture (type) of Jesus. His name (Hebrew) and Jesus (Greek) both mean "the LORD is salvation." In the Old Testament Joshua leads the Jews to victory over physical enemies (Canaanites). In the New Testament it is Jesus who leads his people to victory over spiritual enemies (sin, Satan, the flesh and the world). Victory isn't given, it must be won. However behind Joshua/Jesus it CAN be won! If people follow Joshua/Jesus, God gives victory!

I. INTO THE LAND The first half of the book talks about the Jews claiming (chap. 1-5) and conquering (chap. 6-12) the land God had long ago promised them to Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and Joseph. After Joshua is commissioned (chap. 1), Jericho is canvassed (chap. 2). While Joshua knows to trust in God, he also knows his part is to use common sense and plan ahead. He trusted completely and planned completely, a good example to us today.

Jericho was the key city in entering the land, for it was virtually impregnable. The outer walls were 30 by 6 foot. After a 15 foot space the inner wall was 30 by 12 foot. They were joined at the top and surrounded by a deep moat with a smooth, vertical surface. Arrows and swords could never conquer such a place. Without God's help it would be impossible. The spies sent were saved by a prostitute names Rahab, who gave her heart to God. She was a fine woman of faith (Heb 11:31; James 2:25) who was the great-grandmother of David (mother of Boaz), an ancestor of Jesus.

After crossing the Jordan (chap 3-4) by stepping into the water before it parted (unlike the Red Sea crossing where it separated first -- God expects more from our faith as we grow and mature in Him),

they recommitted themselves by circumcision (chap 5) which they neglected while wandering. God expects His people to be holy and 100% obedient to Him.

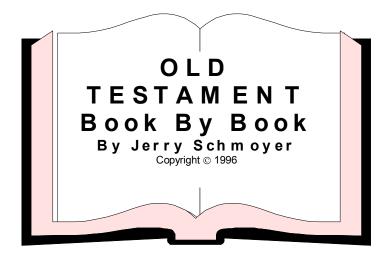
After defeating Jericho by a crazy, far-out battle plan from God (which actually worked - the large walls fell into the moat so it was smooth walking into town) (chap. 6), the Jews are defeated at Ai (chap 7) because of Achan's sin. The sin of one can affect a whole family, church or nation! God hates sin and judges it wherever it is. The Canaanites were being removed because of their awful sin, but the Jews, too, had to keep from all sin. How awful sin is can be seen by Jesus' crucifixion!

Joshua's campaign was to 'divide and conquer," separate the various tribes before they could unite. Moshe Dyan, in 1967, studied and followed Joshua's strategy in defeating the Arabs in 6 days despite being outnumbered 60 to 1!

The closest to recorded sin by Joshua is his omission of prayer about a treaty he signed with the Gibeonites (chap. 9-10). Assuming they were from far away, he promised to help them and soon found himself fighting other tribes defending them! God gave the victory by yet another miracle in the life of Joshua -- the sun stood still so darkness wouldn't aid the enemy.

After defeating the other Canaanite tribes, peace came. However the Jews didn't remove every Canaanite, and they would be a sword in their side from then on, leading them into intermarriage and idolatry until that caused the Jews to again be removed from Palestine. It is so very important to obey God 100% and remove every sin, no matter how 'small."

II. IN THE LAND The second half of the book deals with the colonizing of the land (chap. 13-21) and consecrating of the land (chap. 22-24). The land is divided among the 12 tribes. The highlight of this section is Caleb's faith in taking on the giants with just his family and defeating them! Despite his age and wasting 40 years of his life because of someone else's sin, and despite being passed over for leadership when Joshua was chosen, he always stayed faithful to God, even raising a faithful family who also served God (Judges 1:12-15).



JUDGES: DEFEAT & DELIVERANCE

TITLE: People God used to deliver Israel AUTHOR: Unknown (possibly Samuel) DATE of WRITING: About 1045 BC PLACE of WRITING: Canaan TIME COVERED: 1375 - 1049 BC

RECIPIENTS: Jews

KEY VERSE: Judg 2:11-19 They provoked the LORD to anger because they forsook him and served Baal and the Ashtoreths. ... The LORD handed them over to raiders who plundered them. ... They were in great distress. Then the LORD raised up judges, who saved them out of the hands of these raiders. Yet they would not listen to their judges but prostituted themselves to other gods and worshiped them. ... Whenever the LORD raised up a judge for them, he was with the judge and saved them out of the hands of their enemies as long as the judge lived; for the LORD had compassion on them as they groaned under those who oppressed and afflicted them. ... But when the judge died, the people returned to ways even more corrupt than those of their fathers, following other gods and serving and worshipping them. They refused to give up their evil practices and stubborn ways.

KEY WORDS: "did evil" (14 times); "judges" (22 times)

PURPOSE: To show the history of Israel from Joshua to Samuel and to show the sinfulness of man and what happens when people turn from God.

THEME: Failure Through Compromise

We all know the story of the prodigal son and how he was forgiven and restored when he returned. It is a heart-warming story with a good ending. What we don't know is what happened after he returned. Suppose we found out that a little later he again took what his father would give him and left, only to again fail and return. Then he did it again, and again, and again -- for the rest of his life! That would certainly change your opinion of the story and the son. That is exactly what the book of Judges is about. God is the father, and the nation Israel is the prodigal son.

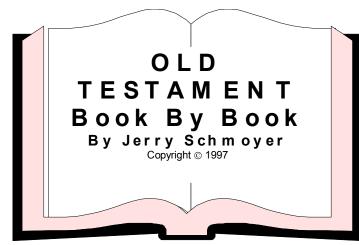
DOOM AND GLOOM While Joshua was a book of joy and victory, Judges is full of gloom and defeat. Joshua teaches that faithfulness brings freedom, but Judges shows that faithlessness brings servitude. The appendix at the end of the book (chapters 17-21) give two examples of how spiritually perverted and morally polluted God's people can get when they aren't living close to Him! Its a great book to read on a cold, rainy night when you are down and depressed -- the book will fit your mood perfectly!

SEVEN CYCLES OF SIN The book of judges is structured around seven cycles of sin, summarized in 2:11-19. The people disobey God and turn to false gods and idolatry. God withdraws His blessing and they end up in bondage to an enemy. When they hit bottom they have no place else to turn so they call out to God who hears them and provides a judge to lead them to deliverance. These judges are not like we think of judges, but more like patriotic evangelists (Joan of Arc types) who lead the people in repentance and then war against their oppressors. After a period of peace and rest they stop depending on God and start to drift into sin again, and the cycle repeats itself. Actually these are downward spirals, for they don't reach as high but do sink lower each time. This happens seven times in the book of Judges, as shown on the outline (chapters 3 - 16).

You might also recognize this pattern in your own life or in the lives of those around you. We all have a tendency to be closer to God when things are tough, then drift on our own when everything seems to be all right. God allows pressure to stay on us to keep us close to Him.

SEX: SATAN'S BEST TRAP BAIT Living in a sex-saturated society isn't anything new to us. Satan has used that repeatedly through the ages, and why not -- it produces the results he wants! The Jews were gradually lured from God by sexual compromises. It started off with their not killing all the Canaanites when they conquered the land under Joshua. Although few and used as slaves, the Canaanites increased in number and the Jews started intermarrying with them. The Canaanites brought their old gods to their family and taught their worship to their children. Frankly, it was much more appealing to the flesh than serving and submitting to God. Baal and Ashtoreth were worshipped in immorality, for they were fertility gods. Ashtoreth, the female consort of Baal, was worshipped by religious prostitution (in Europe the "A" changed to "E" and she was Eshtoreth, then Esther, symbolized by rabbits, eggs and other symbols of fertility). The Jews didn't jump right into this sin, but gradually slid in. Like land eroding at a river bank or curtains fading in a living room, a gradual change is harder to notice than a quick change. Notice the programs and talk on TV now compared to 20 years ago and you'll see just how this works.

Although specially chosen and gifted by God, Samson was destroyed by his preoccupation with sex. He had great physical strength, but no moral strength, a common description of many people today. Sexual temptation ruled his life and destroyed him, as it has done and continues to do with so many others today. It's natural that Satan would bait his trap with something that was created to be so fine and beautiful. Watch for his trap in your life!



RUTH: KINSMAN-REDEEMER

TITLE: Names after the heroine, Ruth

AUTHOR: Possibly Samuel

DATE of WRITING: During reign of David

PLACE of WRITING: Canaan

TIME COVERED: About 10 years during time of Judges. Ruth & Boaz married about

1120 BC

RECIPIENTS: Jews

KEY VERSE: Ruth 1:15-16 "Look," said Naomi, "your sister-in-law is going back to her people and her gods. Go back with her." But Ruth replied, "Don't urge me to leave you or to turn back from you. Where you go I will go, and where you stay I will stay. Your people will be my people and your God my God.

KEY WORDS: "Kinsman" (14 times); "Redeemer" (9 times)

PURPOSE: To show there is a faithful remnant during times of apostasy (Judges) as well as how a Moabite woman became the great-grandmother of David and an ancestor of Jesus THEME: Redemption illustrated by the example of the kinsman-redeemer.

Many great novels have a story within as story. Dr. Zivago, for example, has a tender love story within a setting of violence and brutality. The same is true of the story of Ruth. Set in the time of the judges (actually the last four chapters in the book of Judges in the Hebrew Bible), the book of Ruth shows a story of love and faithfulness in a time of sin and apostasy.

RUTH'S RESOLVE (chapter 1) Because of a famine in the land, Elimelech and Naomi took their sons, Mahlon and Chilion, and moved to the land of Moab. There the boys married Gentile girls, Orpah and Ruth. Both moving to Gentile land and marrying Gentile women were disobedient to God (Deut. 7:1-3). Because of this God removed the father first, then the sons. This was God's discipline of death because of their continuing in sin (I John 5:16-17; I Cor 9:11-30; Acts 5). Since the women have no way to support themselves and their resources have run out, Naomi decides to return home. This signifies an inner turning back to God, too (1:20-21). Orpah returns home, but Ruth commits herself to stay with Naomi. Her love and loyalty to Naomi as well as to God motivate her. She refers to God as YHWH, showing a personal relationship with Him (1:15-16). She decides to stay with God as well as Naomi.

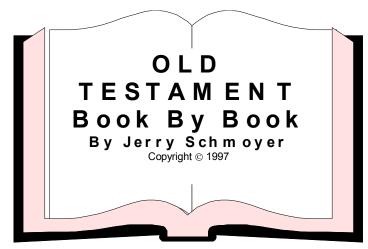
RUTH'S RIGHTS (chapter 2) God made provision for poor Jews to work for food by commanding landowners to leave some grain standing around the edges of their fields which could be gathered by the needy. In this time of apostasy and greed, very few Jews let any grain stand, but a godly man named Boaz did. Ruth ended up in his field, gathering left-over grain for Naomi and herself. Her sacrificial hard work so impressed Boaz that he made sure she was safe and her needs were met. Perhaps the fact that Boaz's mother was a Gentile, Rahab (Matthew 1:5), made him more sympathetic to Ruth's plight. Instead of running after a husband, Ruth took care of aged Naomi. Because she put others first, God took care of her.

RUTH'S REQUEST (chapter 3) Realizing they cannot continue on indefinitely in this manner, Naomi encourages Ruth to request Boaz to come to their aid and redeem their property which had been sold for money on which to live. God established the law of the kinsman-redeemer in

which a near relative could take the place of the one in need by paying the price to redeem that which was lost. "Redeem" means "to buy back" and is used of a slave owner who must purchase back a slave that was his but ran away. This is a picture of Jesus, who became one of us at the incarnation so He could do what we couldn't do -- free us from our debt to sin. We were His by creation, then we got into sin so He had to pay the price for us on the cross.

Why didn't Boaz voluntarily do this? Why did he have to be asked? He knew there was a closer relative, he didn't consider that a young woman like Ruth would be interested in marrying an older man like him, and the practice all but forgotten for it wasn't used much in those days.

RUTH'S REWARD (chapter 4) As it turned out, the closer relative was interested in getting the land for himself, but when he realized Ruth came with it and therefore any proceeds would go to her and any children she might have, he turned it down. Greed was his motive. Therefore Boaz was free to buy back Naomi's inheritance as well as marry Ruth and provide a home for her and Naomi. They had a son named Obed, who had a son named Jesse, who had a son named David. This made Naomi the great-grandmother of David and an ancestor of Jesus. This is a beautiful example of how God gives the best to those who leave the choice to Him! If Ruth had gotten bitter at God over the death of her husband or sought to meet her own needs by trying to catch a husband, it would not have turned out as nice for her. How much blessing do you and I miss by impatiently taking things into our hands and trying to meet our own needs?



I SAMUEL: LOOK INSIDE

TITLE: After Samuel ("I Kings" to Jews)
AUTHOR: Unknown (Gad or Nathan?)
DATE of WRITING: Time of Solomon

PLACE of WRITING: Israel

TIME COVERED: 56 years (1067-1011 BC)

RECIPIENTS: Jews

KEY VERSE: 1 Sam 16:7 But the LORD said to Samuel, "Do not consider his appearance

or his height, for I have rejected him. The LORD does not look at the things man looks at. Man looks at the outward appearance, but the LORD looks at the heart."

KEY WORDS: "Anoint" "Reject" (7 times each)

PURPOSE: Continue history of Israel after the judges and to show the origin of the Kingdom.

THEME: Contrast internal godliness with external worldliness.

The poinsettia is a popular flower, especially around Christmas time. However, most people don't realize that it is really a fake. Those are red leaves, not flowers. In fact, the real flower is insignificant and unattractive. It contains no nectar or useful fruit. Ingestion can make one ill. It looks great, but is really a fake! Many people are like that, too. We call them hypocrites. Outwardly they seem great, but inside they are empty, hollow, ungodly. In our day and age outer appearance is greatly emphasized, to the exclusion of inner beauty. Jesus says inner beauty is more important than outer, though (John 7:24; I Peter 3:3-4). Its what's inside that counts! I Samuel contains many good examples of this!

HANNAH Because she didn't have a son, Hannah poured out her heart to God in prayer. Eli, the high priest, was watching her pray. By her outer appearance he thought she was drunk and reprimanded her, but he was wrong! God saw her heart, answered her prayer, and gave her a fine son - Samuel. Samuel grew up in the tabernacle under the guidance of Eli.

ELI Although a fine man of God himself, Eli let his sons go through the outer motions of being priests while inside their hearts were full of greed, lust and rebellion against God. Because they were this way, and Eli didn't work to change them, they all lost their lives and ministries!

THE NATION Because there were no godly priests to lead them, the people asked God for a king. They wanted to be like everyone else, for all the nations around them had a king. They thought this looked impressive. Being concerned only with externals, they thought this was the end of their problems. God gave them a king, knowing that they would have to learn the hard way. They should have followed Him as their King but didn't.

SAUL Saul was tall, dark and handsome with an outgoing personality, so the Jews thought he was the man for the job of being king! Inside, though, he was self-centered, insecure, and prideful. He disobeyed God by offering sacrifices (13), giving a rash order 914) and not killing all the Amalekites (15). Then he tried to kill David. Eventually God removed him.

DAVID God's choice for a replacement king was a shepherd boy named David. Outwardly he wasn't striking as Saul was, but God passed over his good-looking big brothers in favor of

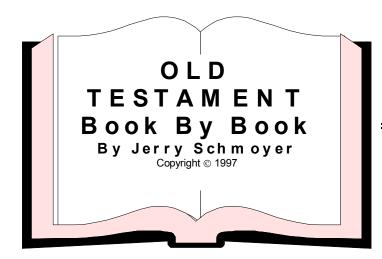
David's inner beauty (16:7). David relied on inner strength, not outer, in defeating Goliath. By all outer appearances, it wasn't even a close match -- but outer appearances can be deceiving!

JONATHAN David's faithful friend, Jonathan, gave up his own claim to the throne to help his friend David. The inner love and commitment they had for each other was very strong!

MICHAL & ABIGAIL David's first wife, Michal, was outwardly beautiful and a princess. Inside, though, she was selfish, narrow and unconcerned about godly things. Abigail, while beautiful, was known for her wisdom and humility. Her inner strength helped David through hard years of hiding from Saul, while Michal deserted him and took another husband.

REVIVAL! There was one brief period when the nation turned back to God, focusing on their inner relationship with Him. They had a real desire to be close to God (7:1-2), turned from their sin (7:3-4) and gathered together to worship God while learning the Bible (7:5). They were serious about having a deep inner, personal relationship with God (7:6). God used Samuel to lead this revival (7-8). God allowed their new faith to be tested by letting the Philistines attack them during this revival, but they passed the test by calling out to God for help (7:9). He gave them victory and blessed them (7:10-11) and they thanked and worshipped Him (7:12).

A young officer who was blinded during the war met and later married one of the nurses who took care of him in an army hospital. One day he overheard someone speaking about himself and his wife: "It was lucky for her that he was blind since he never would have married such a homely woman if he had sight!" He rose to his feet and walked toward the voices, saying, "I overheard what you said, and I thank God from the depths of my heart for blindness of eyes that might have kept me from seeing the marvelous worth of the soul of this woman who is my wife. She is the most noble character I have ever known; if the shape of her features is such that it might have masked her inward beauty to my soul, than I am the greater gainer by having lost my sight." Make sure you, too, focus on inner beauty and not outer beauty (Prov 31:30).



II SAMUEL: EFFECTS OF SIN

TITLE: Continuation of I Samuel AUTHOR: Unknown (Gad or Nathan) DATE of WRITING: Time of Solomon

PLACE of WRITING: Israel

TIME COVERED: 40 years (1011 - 971 BC)

RECIPIENTS: Jews

KEY VERSE: 2 Sam 11:27b But the thing David had done displeased the LORD.

KEY WORD: "David" 280 times

PURPOSE: To explain about David's reign (it's ups and downs) and to continue the history of

Israel from Saul to Solomon

THEME: Effects of sin

When Leonardo da Vinci was painting his masterpiece The Last Supper, he sought long for a model for his Christ. At last he located a chorister in one of the churches of Rome who was lovely in life and features, a young man named Pietro Bandinelli. Years passed, and the painting was still unfinished. All the disciples had been portrayed save one -- Judas Iscariot. Now he started to find a man whose face was hardened and distorted by sin -- and at last he found a beggar on the streets of Rome with a face so villainous; he shuddered when he looked at him. He hired the man to sit for him as he painted the face of Judas on his canvas. When he was about to dismiss the man, he said, "I have not yet found out your name." "I am Pietro Bandinelli," he replied, "I also sat for you as your model of Christ." What had happened? Sin happened. The consequences and effects of sin are awful. Man reaps what he sows (Gal 6:7; Col. 3:25; Job 4:8; Hosea 8:7). The life of David shows that same truth. Even a "man after God's own heart (Acts 13:22; I Sam 13:14; I Ki 15:3)" must suffer the consequences of sin. Il Samuel is a prime example of that.

TRIUMPH The first half of the book (chapters 1 - 10) shows David's triumph. He becomes ruler over the nation Israel and captures Jerusalem (still called the "City of David"), making it his capital. He expands the nation from 6,000 square miles to 60,000. He shows mercy to Mephibosheth. God blesses everything he does. He is greatly successful and prosperous. He is very rich, popular, and tremendously used by God. Unfortunately that sets him up for defeat, for it is when things are going well that we neglect our spiritual disciplines and Satan attacks.

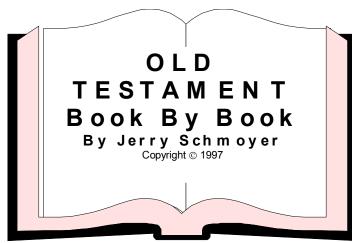
TRANSGRESSION Half way through his 40 year reign David decides to stay home from war because things are going so well for his army (1 Samuel 11:1). When we neglect our God-given duties and responsibilities we are sitting ducks for Satan's attacks. If David has been doing what he should have been doing, leading his army, his sin wouldn't have happened.

A late-night walk on the roof of the highest building in Jerusalem led to a chance glance at Bathsheba bathing herself in the privacy of her own home (v. 2). Instead of looking away and removing the picture from his mind, David fed the thought until it became an action (v. 3). While secure against his enemies without, David's greatest enemy was within. He couldn't help the first look, and temptation isn't sin (we don't have to confess being tempted, just when we give in to it mentally or physically). It was the lust that he let build from the look that was sin, as Jesus Himself said in Matthew 5:28. He should have fled, as Joseph did from Pharaoh's wife (Genesis 39:1-13). God always provides a way out (I Cor. 10:13) if we flee, but not a way through if we

keep going ahead. Satan baits his traps with something that appeals to us. With David it was a woman, a "beautiful" woman (to make it that much more tempting). Watch out!

Remember that this wasn't just a one-time sin on David's part. Satan had been building this trap for him for almost 30 years. David had a weakness for women, a lust for them, as evidenced in his several wives & concubines (I Sam 27:3; 30:5). This was magnified in his son Solomon who had almost 1000 wives and concubines (I Kings 11:3). David was a sensual person, Satan used that to set a trap for him. He tries that with everyone. It may be a lust or greed, or it may be a mental attitude sin like anger (which kept Moses out of the Promised Land), fear or bitterness. He doesn't care what sin it is as long as it works! Make sure you know what 'little' sin Satan is working on in your life. God's plan is for you to have peace and joy and to grow spiritually. Satan's plan is to keep those from you. He can't take away your salvation but he can take away your witness and peace.

TRIALS Everyone knows how the story of David and Bathsheba concluded (II Samuel 11 - 12). David resorts to lying and deceit to cover up his sin (11:5-7), even to drunkenness (v. 8-13). When none of that works he uses murder (14-17), thinking he has covered over his sin. But God knew (v. 27), and so did those in his household. Before long his enemies knew and it became a terrible testimony to them (12:14). Eventually David does repent (12:1-12; Psalm 51), after a year of misery (Psalm 32). Still, the consequences continue: the baby died, he who took another's wife has his wives taken, his children follow his example with lust, rape, murder, death and deception common in his family, and the whole nation weakened. Enemies begin to prosper against Israel. He was forgiven, but had to reap what he sowed. Watch out for Stan's traps in your lives. He has one going against each of us. Only be always staying close to Jesus and quickly fleeing every tempting thought that comes into our minds will be safe from such devastating consequences in our lives. Prov 28:13 says that "He who conceals his sins does not prosper, but whoever confesses and renounces them finds mercy."



I KINGS:

TITLE: After Israel's Kings (III Kings to Jews)

AUTHOR: Unknown (Jeremiah?)
DATE of WRITING: Over many years
PLACE of WRITING: Israel - Judah
TIME COVERED: 130 years (791-841 BC)

RECIPIENTS: Jews

KEY VERSE: I King 11:1-8 King Solomon ... had seven hundred wives of royal birth and three hundred concubines, and his wives led him astray.

KEY WORD: "King" 250 times; "Prophet" 43 times

PURPOSE: To show the history of Israel from David through the split

THEME: The results of turning from God to idolatry.

There used to be a TV commercial that began with a close-up of a man most didn't know. "You probably don't know me," he says. "I created the muppets." Then the background suddenly comes alive with fuzzy little creatures who say in unison, "Big deal!" The man continues, "Everyone knows them, but nobody knows me." That's why wherever I go I carry my American Express credit card." At that point "Jim Henson" is visually typed on the card.

What was true there is also true today. God created man and the whole world, yet He hardly gets the credit or recognition He deserves. We know the creation better than the creator. When the creation gets more recognition than the creator this is idolatry! Whatever we put before God becomes an idol: money, things, happiness, family, sex, popularity, food, education, music, love, etc. I Kings is a serious warning against this!

SOLOMON'S SUCCESS After his sin, David went downhill fast. Solomon replaced him as king of Israel when he was just 20. David advised Solomon to stay close to God. David had been very close to God and very far from God, and he certainly knew close was better! Unfortunately, man rarely takes advice from his parents. We don't seem to learn from the mistakes of the previous generation. Solomon didn't, either.

Solomon started off very well. When God told Solomon he could have anything he wanted Solomon didn't ask for money or popularity or power but wisdom to properly lead God's people. As a result God gave him riches and popularity along with the wisdom.

Solomon had the privilege of building the temple which David had designed. This was the highpoint of Israel spiritually. You know, it is naturally build into man to worship something or someone. Everyone worships something. We all have something we live for, put our trust in, turn to for satisfaction and meaning, and look to for solace and comfort. Unfortunately most people have replaced the Creator with what he has created. That is idolatry.

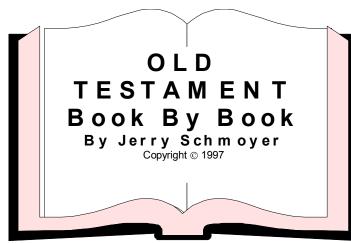
During Solomon's reign the nation of Israel got very rich. Trade with many parts of the world made them strong and prosperous. There weren't wars to enlarge Israel, but the armies kept all the territory David had conquered. This was a time of peace and prosperity such as Israel never had before or since. However, the seeds of destruction were being sowed. **SOLOMON'S SEDUCTION** Instead of trusting God to keep the peace with other nations Solomon resorted to the common treaty-making practices of the day where daughters were given as wives to others kings to assure peace. David accumulated 700 wives and 300

mistresses. David's appetite for women and having more than one wife set the groundwork for Solomon to take this to the extreme. Worst of all, these women weren't believers in Jehovah. They brought their foreign gods with them, continued their idolatrous worship, taught their children the same pagan practices, and slowly but surely influenced Solomon into idolatry and immorality (for that is the form their worship took).

SOLOMON'S SORROW By the time Solomon turned 60 (Saul, David and Solomon all ruled for 40 years) his life and kingdom was falling apart. The man who wrote the Song of Solomon about faithfully loving one wife when he was a young man has changed. The wisdom of Proverbs written in his mature years warned against idolatry and immorality, but he didn't take his own advice. Ecclesiastes, showing how empty life is without God, even if there is power and money, expressed what had happened to Solomon. What a sad end to a fine life! While Saul had no heart for God and David had a whole heart for God, Solomon only had a half heart.

CONSEQUENCES OF IDOLATRY After Solomon's death the nation of Israel split into two over greed for money and power -- idols which still destroy people today. The northern 10 tribes, Israel, went headlong into gross idolatry and immorality, building two golden calves to worship. The southern 2 tribes, Judah, had the temple but weren't much better. Despite a revival during the time of Elijah, the nation continued its downward slide from God, all because they put the creation before the creator.

What is first in YOUR life: the creator or some part of His creation? God's warning is clear, worship the Creator only, keep from idols (I John 5:21).



II KINGS: JUDGMENT

TITLE: About the Kings of Judah & Israel AUTHOR: Unknown (Jeremiah?)
DATE of WRITING: Over many years
PLACE of WRITING: In Judah and Israel
TIME COVERED: 267 years (853 - 586 BC)
RECIPIENTS: Jews

KEY VERSE: Il Ki 17:7-8, 18-23 All this took place because the Israelites had sinned against the LORD their God. They worshipped other gods and followed the practices of the nations the LORD had driven out before them, as well as the practices that the kings of Israel had introduced. So the LORD was very angry with Israel and removed them from his presence. Only the tribe of Judah was left, and even Judah did not keep the commands of the LORD their God. They followed the practices Israel had introduced.

KEY WORD: "King" 340 times; "Prophet" 31 times

PURPOSE: To show how and why Judah and Israel went into captivity.

THEME: God judges sin.

Every year thousands of taxpayers receive a letter beginning: "Dear taxpayer, in processing your return, we need more information about certain items." People think they won't get caught, so they can 'get away' with something. But some times their sins catch up with them. That's not how it is with God. There is no statute of limitations, and NO ONE gets away with sin. A person can get away with things from the IRS, but not from God!

TRAGEDY (chapters 1 - 17) Because of their sin, God warns his people of coming judgment and calls them to repentance. Elijah was one such man. He had ministered for 50 years and then was taken to heaven in a flaming chariot.

Elisha replaced Elijah as God's main messenger (chapter 2 - 8). He, too, performed many miracles (including bringing a dead boy back to life). Both Elijah and Elisha ministered to the northern kingdom, Israel. Of their 19 kings, none followed God. In the south, Judah, 8 or the 20 kings followed God for at least part of their reigns.

Jehu (chapter 9-10) started off all right, under Elisha's influence, and cleansed the land from Ahab's family and influence, but then fell into idolatry himself. Ahab's removal is another example that we all will "reap what we sow" (Gal 6:7). "Be sure your sins will find you out" (Num. 32:23) is exemplified by Ahab & Jezebel, who died an awful death (chapter 9).

Long ago there was a famous black smith who was put into a prison dungeon. He began to examine the chain that bound him looking for a flaw so he could escape. His hope was in vain for he found his own mark upon it -- he had made it and it had been his boast that none could break a chain that he had forged. Ahab had forged his own chains of sin and was caught in them. They, too, were unbreakable.

Under Joash Judah returned to God (chapter 11), but soon relapsed (chapter 12). Israel, meanwhile, turned further from God (chapter 13). Uzziah brought Judah back to God, but then fell to pride (chapter 14-16). Finally Israel was removed (chapter 17). The godly remnant from Israel had all moved to Judah, so the twelve tribes continued on in Judah.

TRAVAIL (chapters 18 - 25) Judah continued for abut 150 years after Israel fell. Between two of the worst kings was one of the best - Hezekiah (chapters 18 - 20). His son, Manasseh,

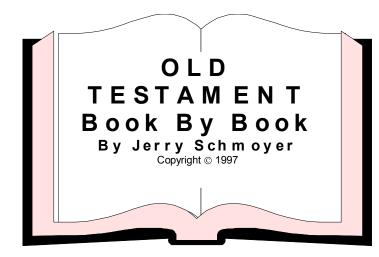
offered his children as sacrifices (chapter 21). Josiah, his son, was the opposite again, being one of the most godly kings (chapter 22), but the final kinds of Judah all did evil (chapter 24). Finally Judah, too, was removed, taken into captivity by Babylon (chapter 24 - 25).

Some years ago in the mountainous region of Europe an avalanche of snow came down from the mountain and damned up the river. Water couldn't flow so it formed a lake behind the snow, threatening to burst through snow and ice and ruin villages below. It held a long time, and people were lulled into false security. The longer wait, though, just meant more destruction when it did burst, and that is what happened. Sin works the same way.

TRUTH The Bible clearly says that God will judge sin. Gal 6:7-8 Do not be deceived: God cannot be mocked. A man reaps what he sows. The one who sows to please his sinful nature, from that nature will reap destruction; the one who sows to please the Spirit, from the Spirit will reap eternal life. Prov 1:31 they will eat the fruit of their ways and be filled with the fruit of their schemes. Prov 5:22-23 The evil deeds of a wicked man ensnare him; the cords of his sin hold him fast. He will die for lack of discipline, led astray by his own great folly. Prov 22:8 He who sows wickedness reaps trouble.

God's people especially must turn from sin. We are not exempt, instead we are more accountable (Matthew 3:9-10). "Judgment begins at the house of God" (I Peter 4:17). Luke 12:47-48 says "That servant who knows his master's will and does not get ready or does not do what his master wants will be beaten with many blows. But the one who does not know and does things deserving punishment will be beaten with few blows. From everyone who has been given much, much will be demanded; and from the one who has been entrusted with much, much more will be asked." We can't lose salvation (Rom 8:1), but that is no excuse to sin.

One day in Colorado a great stalwart tree fell down. It was four hundred years old. It was a sapling when Columbus landed at San Salvador. It had been struck by lightning fourteen times. It had braved undaunted the storms of four hundred years. It had defied earthquakes and hurricanes. It had laughed in scorn at the winter's blasts and blizzards that would have destroyed it. But in the end the tiny little beetles killed it. They bored under the bark, dug into its heart, ate away its mighty fiber and one day down came the mighty king of the forest.



CHRONICLES: FAITHFULNESS

TITLE: Latin Vulgate title (all 1 book to Jews) AUTHOR: Many, compiled by Ezra

DATE of WRITING: After return from Babylon

PLACE of WRITING: Judah

TIME COVERED: Adam to Cyrus (536 BC) RECIPIENTS: Jews back from Babylon KEY VERSE: 1 Chr 17:10 and have done ever since the time I appointed leaders over

my people Israel. I will also subdue all your enemies. "`I declare to you that the LORD ill build a house for you:

KEY WORD: David (180 times, Temple & House of God (148 times), priest (80 times)

PURPOSE: to show the history of Israel from a spiritual point of view, showing the importance

of the temple and of being faithful to God who has always been faithful to them.

THEME: Faithfulness of God

Faithfulness to others is not seen as an important virtue today. Everything teaches us to be loyal only to ourselves, to put our needs and wants first, to make selfishness and self-centeredness a virtue. Faithfulness to mate, family, job, country, favorite sports team, etc., only seems to last as long as it is profitable. When things get hard people seem to move on quickly. Fortunately God isn't that way. I & II Chronicles proves that.

Originally one book in the Hebrew canon, Chronicles covers basically the same information as I & II Samuel and I & II Kings, but from a different perspective. While they show the civil and political happenings from a human viewpoint, Chronicles shows it from God's view point. For example, I Samuel 31 tells of the death of Saul from man's viewpoint - how he died. I Chronicles 10 tells the same story, but from the divine perspective - how and why God removed him. I & II Samuel and I & II Kings shows how man is unfaithful, but I & II Chronicles shows how God is faithful, no matter how man is (similar to the theme of Deuteronomy).

CHRONOLOGY OF JUDAH'S KINGS (I Chron. 1 - 9) traces the genealogy from Adam to the Babylonian captivity. It shows the fulfillment of God's promise to send a Messiah from the seed of the woman (Gen. 3:14-15) as God promised. He sets the groundwork to prove that Jesus is that Messiah (Matthew 1, Luke 3). Especially this section shows the faithfulness of God to Abraham (many nations did come from him), to David (whose descendants did rule Judah) and to everyone, for God knows and remembers all by name.

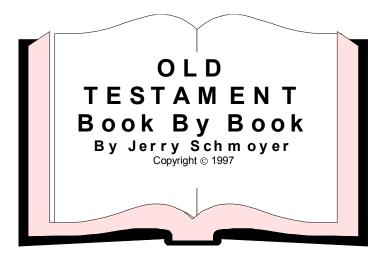
CHRONICLES OF JUDAH'S KINGS (I Chron 10 - II Chron 36) hits some highlights of the kings in David's line, especially the godly ones.

This section starts with David returning the ark to Jerusalem and all the praise and worship that came with it (I Chron 10-16). David's sin with Bathsheba isn't mentioned in Chronicles, it is forgiven and gone. The focus is on God's faithfulness, not man's unfaithfulness. God's promises are reaffirmed to David, stating that God would faithfully keep His promise to have David's descendants as the kingly line, right up to the Messiah (I Chron 17-21). David's preparations for the temple are elaborated, too (I Chron 22-27), and so is Solomon's building of the temple (II Chron 1-9). There is so much about the temple in these chapters because it is the people's link with God. It reminds them that all they have comes from God and it isn't anything

they earned or deserve. The temple calls man to be faithful to God in response to His faithfulness to man. It's not just a building, it's a way of life!

When the nation splits, Chronicles only follows the kings of the southern tribe, Judah. The unfaithful north is ignored. True believers from there moved down to the south, so the southern kingdom had the godly remnant, the representatives of all 12 tribes. God's faithfulness to Judah is seen in his enabling Abijah to defeat Jeroboam (II Chron 13), Asa defeat the Ethiopians (14), Jehosophat defeating the Moabites (20) and Hezekiah's deliverance form Sennacherib (31). The Jews response of revival (15) and repairing the temple and returning to God every time an evil king led them astray (23-24, 30, 35) shows their response of faithfulness to Him. Unfortunately their times of unfaithfulness were greater and eventually God let the Babylonians take them into captivity. Still God was faithful, preserving a remnant and giving promises of future deliverance and restoration.

"Old Faithful" is a famous geyser in Yellowstone National Park. It shoots 10 to 12 thousand gallons of boiling water 150 feet into the air. There are other geysers who send out more water, and send it higher. Why, then, is this one more famous and more visited? It's because of it's 'faithfulness' -- every 65.5 minutes it erupts. It can be counted on. No one knows when the others will erupt. God is like that -- totally dependable and consistent. We can always count on Him. He is the original "Old Faithful." God wants us to respond to His faithfulness to us by our being faithful to Him in return. Thank God for His faithfulness to you Be faithful to Him. "It is required that a man be found FAITHFUL" (I Cor 4:2).



EZRA: RETURN

TITLE: After the chief character, Ezra

AUTHOR: Ezra (priest)
DATE of WRITING: 456 BC
PLACE of WRITING: Jerusalem

TIME COVERED: 81 years (538 - 457 BC) RECIPIENTS: Jews after the captivity KEY VERSE: Ezra 7:6-10 This Ezra came up from Babylon. He was a teacher well versed in the Law of

Moses, which the LORD, the God of Israel, had given. The king had granted him everything he asked, for the hand of the LORD his God was on him. Some of the Israelites, including priests, Levites, singers, gatekeepers and temple servants, also came up to Jerusalem in the seventh year of King Artaxerxes. Ezra arrived in Jerusalem in the fifth month of the seventh year of the king. He had begun his journey from Babylon on the first day of the first month, and he arrived in Jerusalem on the first day of the fifth month, for the gracious hand of his God was on him. For Ezra had devoted himself to the study and observance of the Law of the LORD, and to teaching its decrees and laws in Israel.

KEY WORD: "Go Up/Went Up" "Jerusalem" (47 times)

PURPOSE: To show the history of Israel as they return from captivity and get re-established.

THEME: The importance of returning to God when away from Him.

King Richard III went out walking one night among his army. There he found a guard fast asleep at his post. Promptly he took a knife and stabbed him in the heart. He pinned a note to him which said,: I found him asleep and I left him so." It's a good thing our King doesn't do that to His subjects when they fall asleep spiritually! He tries to bring them back to alertness. The book of Ezra illustrates this spiritual truth.

RESTORATION The book opens with the Jews in captivity for their idolatry. Still God is faithfully working for them. This discipline has kept them from every returning to idolatry since then. God blessed them materially. Previous to this time they were farmers and shepherds, but in Babylon they learned to be business men and bankers, trades they still excel in. God was working in the hearts of godly leaders as well as in King Cyrus to allow them to return. Like the father of the prodigal son, He lovingly looks for their return. He is the 'God of the Second Chance'.

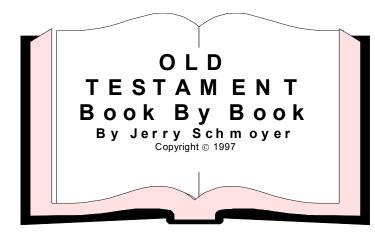
When Zerubbabel sent out a call to return to the land, only 50,000 Jews answered. This was a very small percentage of those in Babylon. The majority didn't want to leave their newly-found prosperity. It was God's will for His people to live in the land He gave them, but they chose staying in the world. Only a very committed godly minority returned. Out of all mankind, it is always only a small minority which accept Jesus' free gift of salvation. And it is only a small minority of that group that then go on to put Jesus first in daily life and live as a disciple of His.

Upon arriving back in the land, Zerubbabel started rebuilding the temple. The Samaritans opposed this, so the work stopped for 15 years. Haggai and Zechariah preached during this time. When the temple finally was rebuilt it was so inferior to Solomon's Temple that those who remembered the former wept.

ESTHER Between Ezra 6 and 7 is a gap of 58 years, during which the events in the book of Esther took place.

REFORMATION Eighty years after Zerubbabel, Ezra came on the scene. He lead a second group back to the land. Ezra was a priest and scribe (copied the Bible by hand). He reputedly knew the whole Old Testament by heard and was a very committed believer. He founded the Sanhedrin to decide cases and give guidance to the Jews worldwide. He instituted the synagogue system which held the Jews together while away from the temple. It was a place of teaching, worship, fellowship and community activities. The church today is based on the synagogue. Ezra also wrote I & II Chronicles, Ezra and Psalm 119. He edited the whole Old Testament, gathering the inspired books and forming them into the Old Testament as we have it today. He made sure all was perfect, in groups and order, edited and updated. In doing so he replaced the old Hebrew script with the newer, square Assyrian characters, which are still in use today. God chose Ezra because of His deep Bible knowledge. He studied, practiced and taught it (Ezra 7:10). The Bible is the key to returning to God, not emotional appeals, guilt, etc. When God's people no longer have an appetite for God's Word, it is a sign that revival is needed. Loss of appetite is a sign of sickness. Ezra fed himself and others a good, balanced diet of God's Word.

Only 1,514 able men volunteered to return with him. After 4 months of travel they arrived at Jerusalem, only to find the people had again turned from God. The sin of intermarrying unbelievers led the people from God. The unbelieving wives had to be sent home. Then the people turned back to God. Sin brings sorrow!



NEHEMIAH: RENEWAL

TITLE: After the main character

AUTHOR: Nehemiah

DATE of WRITING: About 420 BC PLACE of WRITING: Jerusalem

TIME COVERED: 30 years (445-415 BC)

RECIPIENTS: Returned Jews

KEY VERSE: 1:1-7 Hanani, one of my brothers, came from Judah with some other men, and I questioned them about the Jewish remnant that survived the exile, and also about Jerusalem. They said to me, "Those who survived the exile and are back in the province are in great trouble and disgrace. The wall of Jerusalem is broken down, and its gates have been burned with fire." When I heard these things, I sat down and wept. For some days I mourned and fasted and prayed before the God of heaven.

KEY WORD: Walls (32 times) Build (23 times)

PURPOSE: Tell how the walls of Jerusalem were rebuilt under Nehemiah

THEME: Steps to Renewal/revival

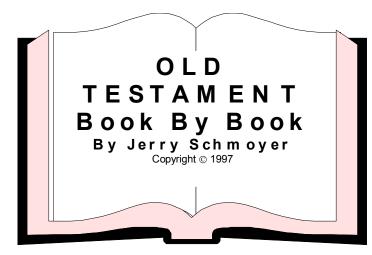
What comes to mind when someone uses the word "revival"? Do you think of a series of special meetings, of loud and emotional preaching? Websters says it is the stirring of religious faith among the indifferent characterized by public confession of sin and profession of renewed faith. Basically, revival means to bring back to life. "Re" means to do again, "vive" means life. It refers to bringing something BACK to life which had been alive. Therefore revival basically refers to bringing God's people who have drifted back to a fresh closeness to Him. It is different than evangelism which appeals to unbelievers to make a first-time commitment. Salvation can't be lost, but we can become cold and in need of renewing. Periodically through history God has sparked revivals which have brought His people back to Him. One was during the time of Nehemiah.

BACKGROUND Ezra had led a small remnant of Jews back to their homeland, the majority preferring to stay in the opulence of Babylon. Fifteen years later word came to Nehemiah that things were still in bad shape in the land (Neh 1). It wasn't his fault, and there didn't seem to be anything he could do from 1500 miles away. Still...

- **1. Revival begins with one devoted believer.** Nehemiah turned to God in prayer and fasting and sincerely called upon the Lord. He confessed his sin and the sins of his people. He totally committed himself to God to be used in any way necessary. God worked in Artaxertes' heart to let him return and give him needed supplies. Nehemiah was allowed to return to Jerusalem.
- 2. Revival spreads to a few ready ones first. Any good fire needs two things: a hot spark and then some kindling ready to catch fire. Nehemiah was the spark, and the first thing he did in Jerusalem was to find a few good men who were open and ready for God to work. He surveyed the situation and gathered facts before acting, then spread his vision to a few he felt were ready. You can't expect all the green wood to catch right away, only wood that is dry and ready catches right away. It takes a good core group to start a revival, then the spark spreads. Pretty soon others caught the vision and before long they were rebuilding the walls.
- **3.** There must be unity among believers for revival to spread. Nehemiah organized the people to work on the walls, each one working near his own home. However, as is to be expected, enemies opposed. The people pulled together, though. Unity is important for a revival to spread. Disunity, unforgiveness, bitterness, jealousy, etc., can pour water on a revival fire before it really gets going.

- **4. Revival must be based on knowing God's Word.** Nehemiah got the people together and Ezra read and taught God's word all morning. They liked it so much they asked if he'd do that in the afternoon, too. As a result they humbled themselves and worshipped God. They wanted to come back the next day for more! An appetite for God's Word is a necessary sign for revival. Not only did they learn it, but they obeyed it, putting into practice what they learned.
- **5. Revival means confessing sins in prayer.** The people automatically prayed and confessed their sins (Neh. 9), acknowledging His majesty and past help for them. Prayer, starting with confession of sin, is a must for revival.
- **6. Revival leads to publicly showing a renewed commitment.** The people responded to Ezra's teaching by ratifying their covenant with God. They officially promised to follow God only. Publicly the Jews promised (Neh 10) to not marry unbelievers, worship God on the Sabbath, pay their tithes and help provide for the temple and its priests and Levites.
- **7. Revival results in changed lives.** As a result of this people moved back into Jerusalem and it as well as other cities thrived and prospered. The walls and city of Jerusalem were dedicated to God. Malachi ministered during this time, too.
- **8.** To be the real thing, the results must be lasting. For 12 years things continued well under Nehemiah and Ezra's leadership. Then Nehemiah had to return to Babylon and, when he returned a year later, the promises they made had been broken. They had married unbelieving wives and weren't properly caring for God's temple. Before long they again responded to Nehemiah's and Ezra's call to renewal and revival came again.

This ended Old Testament history. After 400 silent (no Bible books were written, but the Maccabees lived during this time) John the Baptist came on the scene, preparing the way for the Messiah. With that the New Testament began -- and another call to revival. Where do you stand? Are you in need of renewing? Is your spiritual life on fire and vibrant, or does it need to be revived? Follow the steps Nehemiah and, if God wills, you'll have revival beginning in those around you.



ESTHER: PROVIDENTIAL CARE

TITLE: After the main character

AUTHOR: Unknown (possibly Mordecai)

DATE of WRITING: About 473 BC

PLACE of WRITING: Shushan, Babylon TIME COVERED: 10 years (483 - 473 BC) RECIPIENTS: Jews dispersed in Persian

Empire.

KEY VERSE: 4:14 For if you remain silent at this time, relief and deliverance for the Jews will arise from another place, but you and your father's family will perish. And who knows but that you have come to royal position for such a time as this?"

KEY WORD: The Jews (51 times); also Jew and Feast

PURPOSE: To study how all the Jews were saved from extermination by Esther

THEME: God's providential care

One day a Christian man had an orchard of thousands of trees. His whole family depended on it for food. One morning he found half-grown apples being destroyed by strange worms. Every tree was affected. The family gathered and prayed, then spent the whole day picking off worms, but they multiplied far faster than they could be picked. Weary from working all day at top speed and desperate, they prayed and went to sleep. Early the next morning they started to see hundreds of strange birds landing on the trees. They stayed all day eating worms but never hurt the trees or apples. They spent three days there, then left. All the worms were gone and the crop was saved. Coincidence? No way. Our sovereign God was in control of the whole thing. He cares for and provides for His own. Unfortunately we forget about that. When we do, we should read the book of Esther!

DANGER TO GOD'S PEOPLE (Esther 1 - 3) A sordid story unfolds (Esther 1) in the first chapter of Esther. The scene is the great Persian city of Shushan. After a series of banquets (really great drunken orgies) King Ahasuerus (Xerxes in secular history) commands his queen, Vashti, to provide the entertainment for the grand finale. Because of her own standards of modesty, she refused and was banished from the kingdom forever. Therefore the king began a world-wide search for a new queen.

A Jew named Mordecai, who had a minor job at the palace, entered his cousin (who he was raising) in the contest and she won! Now it must be noted that the Jews were not to remain in Persia. They should have returned with Ezra or Nehemiah, but didn't want to leave the prosperity and fine living in Persia for the poverty and difficulties of Jerusalem. Thus they were out of God's will. As a result there is no mention of God's name, prayer or sacrifices in the book of Esther. Still, God keeps His promises to protect His people.

After Esther is made queen Mordecai overheard a plot to kill the king, told Esther, and she reported it (Est 3). The plot was stopped and the king saved. That's all part of God's plan.

The plot thickens when Haman, the prime minister and favorite of the king, pushes through legislation to have all the Jews in the kingdom killed. His hatred for Mordecai, who won't bow to him, makes him miserable. That sets the scene for God's deliverance. He uses Esther to save her race and influence her stepson Artaxerxes to allow Nehemiah to return to Jerusalem and rebuild the walls. **DELIVERANCE OF GOD'S PEOPLE** (Esther 4 - 10) When Mordecai hears about the plot to destroy all Jews he is really upset and sends word to Esther, asking her to intercede for her people, even though it may mean her death. To speak out to the king was forbidden, and to reveal that she was a Jew could also mean her death. However she courageously does so, inviting the king and Haman to a banquet she would have just for them (Esther 5).

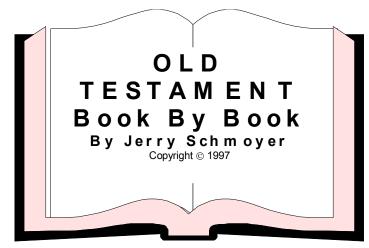
Meanwhile Haman is miserable because of his hatred of Mordecai. His wife says he will feel better if he builds a large scaffold and anticipates his killing of Mordecai, so he has it built.

One night the king had a hard time sleeping (one of those little things that God uses in a big way). He read from his histories and discovered Mordecai's work in saving his life, and the next day finds out that Mordecai was never rewarded for it. He determines to take care of this.

When prideful, self-centered Haman comes to work the next day the king asks he which he thinks the king should do to honor a man he deeply appreciates. Thinking the king is referring to him, Haman lays out his own prideful dreams of glory and honor, only to find out the king meant it for his enemy Mordecai -- and he had to be the one to honor Mordecai! Talk about a bad day at the office!

Later that day, when Haman showed up for the banquet with Esther and the king, she revealed his legislation to destroy all Jews. The king was furious at how he was tricked and left the room to get control of his anger. Haman fell upon Esther begging her for mercy, and when the king entered he thought Haman was attacking Esther. He had Haman killed immediately on his own gallows! Not only that, but the Jews were allowed to kill those who wanted to destroy them. In addition, Mordecai was elevated to Haman's job as top advisor to the king! Talk about a happy ending!

Even today the Jews celebrate this important deliverance as the Feast of Purim. They give gifts, eat together, and children reenact the events in the book of Esther (similar to the way we celebrate Christmas). Truly this is a wonderful reminder of God's sovereignty and His providential care of His people, even those who are out of His will. What a great God we have!



JOB: SUFFERING

TITLE: After the main character
AUTHOR: Job (19:23-34) or Moses
DATE: 2000 BC (time of Abraham)
DATE of WRITING: About 2000 BC
PLACE of WRITING: Uz (Middle East)
TIME COVERED: Later part of Job's life

RECIPIENTS: Unknown

KEY VERSE: 1:21 "Naked I came from my mother's womb, and naked I will depart. The

LORD gave and the LORD has taken away; may the name of the LORD be praised."

KEY WORDS: "Affliction" (11 times); "righteous" (21 times); "Answered and said" (32 times)

PURPOSE: To come to grips with the question: "Why do the righteous suffer?"

THEME: Reasons for and purposes of suffering.

I grew up with a sister (no brothers) who grew into a very special woman. She was a woman of faith in Jesus and was very friendly and loving. She did much good for all she knew. She had two little boys and a fine husband who needed her. But she got cancer and died when she was 33. Everyone kept asking: "Why Judy?" They tried to come up with an answer to help them better understand what God was doing, but there is no answer to the "Why?" question. Only God knows that answer -- and He keeps silent. Even asking the question can be wrong when we ask with accusation or rebellion in our attitude, as if challenging God and thinking He is wrong in what He does. Why do bad things happen to people? That's a universal question, and an old one. It's no surprise that the oldest book in the Bible, the first one written, deals with this question. Why DO good people suffer?

CONFLICTS OF JOB The story of this "Magnificent Man of Misery" begins with a thumb-nail sketch of Job as a very rich, well-known and respected, and godly man. He is pictured as the outstanding man of his day (Job 1:1-5). However Satan, who accuses God's people whenever he can find something to tattle about (Rev 12:10; root meaning of the name 'Devil'), accuses Job of only serving God because God is giving him such a pleasant and prosperous life (1:6-11). For the sake of His honor and glory, God allows Satan to attack Job (1:12), thus proving his love is sincere and not self-seeking. Note that Satan can't do anything to God's people without His approval. Every trial we face is "Father-filtered."

Anyway, Satan takes away all Job's riches and possessions (1:13-17) and even the lives of his children, whom he deeply loves and cares about (1:4-5, 18-19). Job realizes that everything he had came from God and that God has the right to take it all back without any explanation to Job (1:20-22). This is a stirring testimony to true faith and right perspective in life. Remember, Job had no idea WHY this was happening. He trusted and loved God as much when He gave blessings as when He took them away. I think the key for us here is to remember that what we have isn't ours but is God's instead.

Still Satan wasn't done, and accused Job of not really caring about those things because as long 'as long as you have your health you have everything' (2:1-5). Again God allowed Satan to test Job, this time causing physical pain in his life (2:6). Satan caused the most painful afflictions he could, so that poor Job just sat in ashes, scratching open his puss-pockets to gain some minor relief (2:7-8). Even his wife, who may have been left alive for just this purpose, encouraged him to curse God so God would kill him and put him out of his misery (2:9). Still, he stayed faithful in his love and devotion to God (2:10).

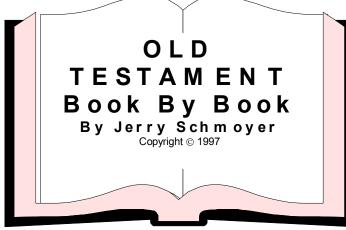
COUNSELORS OF JOB The majority of the book of Job, chapters 3-37, is poetical (which is why Job is placed with the other poetical books in the Bible). Three friends of Job's come and try to force him to admit that he wouldn't be suffering this way if he hadn't really sinned. Then a fourth comes and semi-defends him, but not entirely. This MUST be God's punishment of him, they insist. Imagine your home has just exploded, destroying every possession you have. Everyone in the family was killed but you and

you are in the hospital, wracked with pain, tubes coming out of you everywhere. The pastor and a couple friends show up and stay for several weeks trying to force you to admit God did this because you are such a rotten sinner. How much comfort would their visit bring you?

Job defends his innocence, knowing that God doesn't punish His people (Romans 8:1). Often today we, too, think that when we or someone we know is going through a hard time it is because God is punishing us. That is not true. God does discipline us when we won't turn from sin (Hebrews 12:5-11) but he also allows trials to come into our lives when we are faithful so that we will trust Him more and become even more faithful (John 15). He doesn't tell us why these things happen now but when we get to heaven we will see that He knew and did what was best and right (John 13:7). Now we must trust Him (Romans 8:28). As a young child doesn't know why a loving parent would allow a doctor to stick or cut him, so we don't know why God allows things to happen to us. Just because we don't know the reason doesn't mean there isn't one, though. We do know that God will abundantly bless and reward us for faithfully trusting Him through the valleys in life, though (II Cor 4:16-17; Rom 8:18). That may or may not happen in this life, but certainly will in heaven.

CONFIDENCE OF JOB It's so easy to get bogged down in the endless dialogue of Job and his three friends that we miss the stirring conclusion to the book. First, God interrupts and, in a voice dripping with sarcasm, shows them they have no business trying to second-guess Him (read Job 38-41 when you start wondering if God knows what He is doing, they will really help set you straight). God tells Job's counselors they have to come to Job and ask him to pray for them or they will feel the full fury of God's wrath (42:7-9). This must have really humbled them! Then God returned all Job's possessions, doubled (42:10-16). He even replaced his children. He didn't have to double them, for his other children were still living in heaven. Thus in effect he did have double the number of children, too.

Job never does know WHY God did this, and neither do we today. Perhaps bad things happen to good people to show Satan they love God for the right reasons, perhaps it is to learn to trust God more or depend on His grace more completely (as was the case with Paul's thorn in the flesh -- II Cor. 12:7), or for God's glory when we and others see His provision and deliverance, or maybe it's to make us more sensitive to others who suffer (II Cor 1:3-24). Whatever the reason might be, we know God is Sovereign and loves us deeply (Rom 8). All He does is for His glory and our benefit.



PSALMS:

TITLE: "Songs Sung to the Accompaniment of a Stringed Instrument"

AUTHOR: Various (see outline)

DATE of WRITING: From 1410 - 430 BC PLACE of WRITING: Mostly in Palestine TIME COVERED: From Creation to 430 BC

RECIPIENTS: Some Psalms to individuals, others to Israel nation, many to mankind in general KEY VERSE: 33:1-4 Sing joyfully to the LORD, you righteous; it is fitting for the upright to praise him. Praise the LORD with the harp; make music to him on the ten-stringed lyre.

Sing to him a new song; play skillfully, and shout for joy. For the word of the LORD is right and true; he is faithful in all he does.

KEY WORDS: "Praise" 176 times; "bless" 92 times

PURPOSE: Israel's inspired book of prayer & praise to God

THEME: Worshipping God

Why do you go to church? Honestly. Not why SHOULD you go, but why DO you go? What motivates you to go? What do you think about as you sit awaiting the start of church?

In all truthfulness, people go to church for many reasons. The best reason, though, is to go to worship God. He wants our minds occupied with Who and what He is. He wants our hearts full of love and thankfulness and praise.

Martin Luther said two things were needed to have a church service: a Bible and a hymn book. God speaks to us through His Word. We speak to Him in music and song. That's how we express our love and thankfulness and praise. The Bible and the hymn book.

The book of Psalms was the Jewish hymn book. Actually it was an accumulation of five hymn books put together. Most churches have favorite hymns they love and sing often. They also have some praise songs they like us use. In addition there may be some choruses or contemporary Christian music. We may come across another song book that had music in it we like and use. Take the best from all these sources and put them into one and you have an accumulation similar to the book of Psalms.

HEBREW POETRY In our music today most songs have words that rhyme. Jewish poetry never rhymed words (or it would be lost in translation into English) but rhymed thoughts. Some thing would be said and then repeated in different words to reinforce the thought (<u>Synonymous Parallelism</u>; 24:1-3). The opposite was sometimes done, with the second line being in in contrast to the first to emphasize the truth being stated (<u>Antithetic Parallelism</u>; 1:6; 37:9). Another form of poetry was to have the second line add to and explain the first line (<u>Synthetic Parallelism</u>; 19:7-9). To see what kind of poetry is being used, see how the second line relates to the first. This will help you interpret the Psalms better.

Actually this doesn't apply just to the psalms but to all Hebrew poetry. This includes Job, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Song of Solomon, Lamentations, and many parts of other Old Testament books. All in all nearly 50% of the Old Testament was written in poetic style, but much of that has been lost in translation to English.

TYPES OF PSALMS Praise singing is quite popular in many churches today, supplementing the standard hymns which are known mostly for teaching. Other songs are good for expressing our trials and sufferings in life. Psalms contains songs about all these subjects, too.

<u>Praise songs</u> are the most prevalent. Some are an individual praising God (18, 30, 34, 40, 106, 116, 138) while others are written for the whole nation to worship God together (33, 36, 105, 111, 113, 117, 135, 136, 146, 147). Each of these follow the same pattern: the reason for praising God is given then the praise itself.

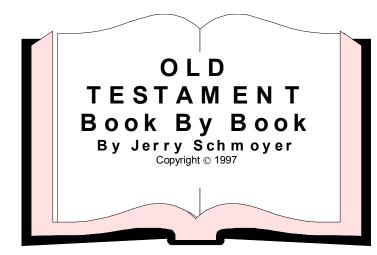
<u>Lament songs</u> are also quite common. The trial or problem is described followed by a profession of trust in God and a request for deliverance. Then comes a closing declaration of faith in God. These, too, are either by individuals (6, 12, 13, 26, 28, 52, 58, 59, 69, 109, 140, 142) or the nation as a whole (13, 44, 60, 74, 80, 83).

Psalms about the Messiah abound as well. Some are Messianic Psalms, about the Messiah's first coming, death, burial, resurrection and ascension (16, 22, 45, 69, 72, 89, 118, 132). Royal Psalms praise the Messiah as reigning over God's Kingdom (2, 4, 7, 8, 20, 21, 45, 47, 72, 89, 93, 96, 97, 98, 101, 110, 144).

There were other kinds of Psalms, too. <u>Confession of Sin</u> songs confessed sin and asked for forgiveness, then praised God for it and exhorted all to live a holy life (3, 6, 25, 32, 38,

39, 40, 51, 102, 130). <u>Pilgrim songs</u> were sung by the people walking to Jerusalem or home (120-134). <u>History songs</u> taught Jewish history with a challenge to praise & thank God for His faithfulness in the past (78, 80, 81, 105, 106, 135, 136).

As you read Hebrew poetry, especially the book of Psalms, look for the types of parallelism as well as the type of Psalm it is. Some may be hard to determine, but for the most part this will really help you enjoy and get more out of the book of Psalms. Read them as prayers, sing them in your heart as praise. Memorize them. Absorb yourself in them. I'll be you'll find yourself singing them in heaven -- so get familiar with them now!



PROVERBS: WISDOM

TITLE: "To be like, to represent" in Hebrew AUTHOR: Solomon & others (see chart) DATE of WRITING: 950-700 BC

PLACE of WRITING: Mostly in Judah

TIME COVERED: 950-700 BC

RECIPIENTS: Specifically Solomon's son (1:8; 2:1) but applies to all mankind (8:1-5)

KEY VERSE: 1:1-7 The proverbs of Solomon son of David, king of Israel: for attaining wisdom and discipline; for understanding words of insight; for acquiring a disciplined and prudent life, doing what is right and just and fair; for giving prudence to the simple, knowledge and discretion to the young-- let the wise listen and add to their learning, and let the discerning get guidance-- for understanding proverbs and parables, the sayings and riddles of the wise. The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge, but fools despise wisdom and discipline.

9:10 "The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom, and knowledge of the Holy One is understanding.

KEY WORDS: "my son" 22 times; "wise/wisdom" 119 times; "instruction" 26 times

PURPOSE: To give common sense wisdom expressed in short, crisp form

THEME: Principles from heaven for life on earth

What is wisdom? Do you have it? How do you know if someone is wise? Where can a person get wisdom? Although not valued in our time and culture as it should be, wisdom is of supreme importance. Having wisdom means being able to make a decision as God would, view a matter as God does, have the attitude God would have. It means having the mind of Christ, thinking and doing what Jesus would do where He here, what is best in the long run.

The book of Proverbs contains wisdom: short, wise sayings and principles drawn from experience and a godly perspective. They are true principles, but not promises.

WHAT IS WISDOM? In the first 7 verses, Solomon tells what real wisdom is.

First, he says it is knowledge of God (1:4). Having facts doesn't make one wise. Wisdom is the correct use of those facts. But the facts, the raw material, is necessary to become wise. This is especially true of knowledge of God. Knowing God and His Word gives a good base of facts and truth which and be formed into wisdom. Much wisdom can be learned from listening to others or from reading about people from the past (history). This is an excellent way of gaining knowledge of life which leads to wisdom.

Next, Solomon tells his son that <u>insight and understanding</u> (1:2b; 2:2; 14:33) are part of wisdom. The ability to discern between good and evil (Heb 5:14) in particular circumstances is wisdom. Actually it comes from God's Holy Spirit nudging and giving insight (James 1:5). We must be alert to God's Spirit as He directs. Being sensitive is more important than being smart.

Third, <u>self-discipline</u> (1:2) is necessary for wisdom. It takes self control to resist the easiest path which the flesh screams out for. It takes self control to learn to think and not just respond by emotions, to ask questions, to patiently await insight, to be totally objective and honest, to stick with a wise decision and not change it, to admit the need for wisdom and ask others for help. Self-discipline is an important ingredient of wisdom.

<u>Common sense</u> is also part of wisdom (1:3a). Wisdom is not some far away, unapproachable, deep truth. It is common sense. Proverbs as well as Jesus' teachings are just common sense statements when you really think about them.

HOW CAN WE GET WISDOM? Although we are the best-education nation ever, we lack wisdom. We don't seek it, we don't even know how to get it is we want it. Proverbs tells us:

Ask God for it is the basic advise given (2:6). He wants us to have wisdom (Lk 21:15). When given his choice of asking God for anything at all, Solomon asked for wisdom. Job, the oldest book in the Bible, asks this question (20:12,20), concluding that man doesn't naturally possess wisdom (20:13) and it can't be bought (20:14-19) but only comes from God. Instead of always just asking God for certain direction, ask Him to make you more like Jesus, to have the mind of Christ (Prov 1:7). The better you know someone the more likely you are to know what they will think about a certain thing. The same is true with Jesus.

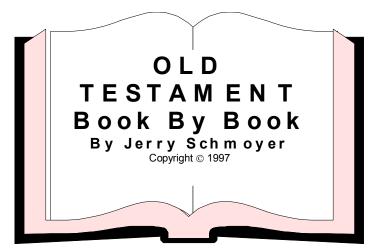
In order to receive wisdom you must be <u>humble</u> (James 3:13-18). It takes the open attitude of a child to receive advice from others and from God.

Of course, we must always <u>rely</u> on the <u>Holy Spirit</u> as said earlier (I Cor 12:8) and be sensitive to His leading and impulses within.

<u>Learning from the past</u> is important as well. Wisdom doesn't just 'happen' overnight. Keep a record of things God is teaching you so you can apply them as time goes on.

Also, <u>learn from others</u>. Woodrow Wilson said "I use not only all the brains I have but all I can borrow." Anyone who thinks he doesn't need others opinions is really a food (Job 8:8-10; Prov 19:20). Solomon gives great wisdom in the book of Proverbs -- avail yourself of it!

Finally, always remember to <u>view everything in light of eternity</u>. Instead of thinking what is easiest or best for now, as yourself what you will wish you had done when you look back in 20 years, or 50 year, or 100 years! That will help keep things in perspective.



ECCLESIASTES: LIFE WITHOUT GOD IS EMPTY

TITLE: "Preacher" (Greek) AUTHOR: Solomon (aged)

DATE of WRITING: about 935 BC PLACE of WRITING: Judah

TIME COVERED: Solomon's later years RECIPIENTS: Solomon's sons (12:12)

KEY VERSE: 1:12-14 I, the Teacher, was king over Israel in Jerusalem.

I devoted myself to study and to explore by wisdom all that is done under heaven. What a heavy burden God has laid on men! I have seen all the things that are done under the sun; all of them are meaningless, a chasing after the wind. ... 2:11 Yet when I surveyed all that my hands had done and what I had toiled to achieve, everything was meaningless, a chasing after the wind; nothing was gained under the sun.

KEY WORD: "wise/wisdom" 49 times; "vanity/empty/meaningless" 37x; "under the sun" 31x

PURPOSE: to show that nothing in this world can satisfy, only God THEME: The emptiness of life and everything in it without God

Why are you alive? What is the purpose of your existence? What is life all about, anyway? Is there any reason or purpose to it? Shakespeare said life is a "tale told by an idiot, full of sound and fury, signifying nothing." Benjamin Disraeli said, "Youth is a mistake, manhood a struggle and old age a regret." Other have said: "Man is a sick fly, taking a dizzy ride on a gigantic wheel." "Man's life has no more meaning than that of the humblest insect, crawling from one annihilation to another." "Men are but tiny lumps of carbon and water who crawl about for a few years until they are dissolved again into the elements of which they are composed." Without the reality of God as an anchor and guidepost, life is empty and meaningless, temporary and fragile. Solomon himself, the wisest man who ever lived, said that life is "meaningless" (1:12-14; 2:11). He was referring to life without God, without any spiritual element ("under the sun" 2:11). The word translated "meaningless" (sometimes translated "empty" or "void") refers to vapor, our breath that comes out on a cold day and immediately disappears. What a picture of life!

If life without God is so empty, how can people without Him go on living? The answer is simple: substitutes. None of the substitutes replace Him or satisfy, but they do give temporary hope. When one is found to not work, there are many others to choose from.

WORLD'S WAY (SUBSTITUTES) In the first half of the book Solomon lists 7 substitutes that don't work. Worldly wisdom says that this is what life is all about, this is what brings meaning and satisfaction. These include fun (sensuality 2:1-11), work (human labor 2:18-23; 4:4-6), ego (man his own god 2:24 - 3:27), poverty (asceticism 4:1-3), riches (materialism 4:7-12; 5:10-20; 6:1-12), social status (popularity 4:13-16) and going through the motions of religion (5:1-7).

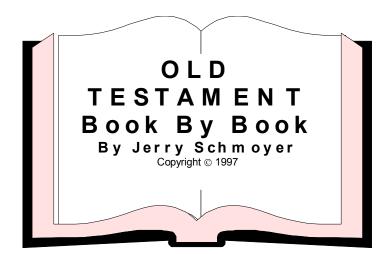
GOD'S WAY (REALTHING) Solomon concludes with what He has learned through his life: only God satisfies! These 7 upward steps are more narrow and harder to climb while the world's way is broad and easy going (downhill to emptiness). Only God's upper path leads to victory, though. These steps are humility (taking advice from the wise 7:5-7), patience in trials (7:8-10), self-discipline (fruit of Holy Spirit to overcome world, flesh, Satan 7:19-22), submission to God in all



things (8:1 - 9:12), faith in God (10:1-20), helping others (not self-centered but other centered 11:1-8) and joy (from God's inner peace 11:9 - 12:7).

In effect what we have here is God's world view vrs other world views. The Biblical world view says there is a reason and purpose for everything, including life itself. We are here to serve God and others. This life isn't all there is. God's Word is true and gives us final absolutes on moral and ethical areas. In contrast the world's 'world view' is that man is the final authority in all things, this life is all there is, truth is different for each person, and each one is on his own to find some pleasure in any way he chooses. No wonder this is called 'empty.'

How do you view life? What do you live for? What motivates you? What do you turn to to find meaning and purpose in life? There are basically two ways to view life: by God's wisdom or by the world's wisdom. Which are you following?



SONG OF SOLOMON: MARRIED LOVE

TITLE: A song of love by Solomon AUTHOR: Solomon, when young DATE of WRITING: about 970 BC PLACE of WRITING: Jerusalem (?)

TIME COVERED: Several years of Solomon's marriage to Shulamith RECIPIENTS: Not specifically stated, but to young lovers of their day

KEY VERSE: 2:16 My lover is mine and I am his; he browses among the lilies

KEY WORDS: "Beloved" 32 times; also "love," fair," "come"

PURPOSE: To glorify marriage and wedded love (emotional and physical)

THEME: The tender love of the husband and wife for each other is pleasing

necessary for a good marriage

Throughout the centuries men and women have used various means of expressing their love for one another. One of the most common is writing a song or poem for the one you love. When in love it is natural to want to write of ones love in a private, personal way which is meant only for the eyes of the loved one. Suppose, though, your personal love notes and reflections were found and printed for the whole world to read? That is exactly what the Song of Solomon is: a love story written by the husband but using the woman's memories. It reminisces about their courtship, wedding and early struggles. It's private and personal, but God included it in the Bible for us to study.

A LOVE STORY The Song of Solomon is a lyric idyll, actually 14 short love songs that trace the development of their married love. They aren't all in chronological order, though. The book is more like a movie with flashbacks filling in spaces. It's hard to technically analyze a love poem, it must be viewed as poetry. What can make this harder to understand is that the language is foreign to us today. Each couple develops their own 'love language,' incorporating terms from their culture and coining phrases unique to them. Medical terms to express sex are cold, clinical and lacking in love. Cultural slang is usually crude, dirty and impersonal. Thus much is missed when just quickly reading through this book.

Remember that God created sex before sin. He inspired this book and included it in the Bible. Sex between two married people of the opposite sex is wonderful and beautiful in His sight. Our culture today has taken our innocence and purity in this area that it is hard to think of a couple entering marriage with only positive, clean, wholesome thoughts about sex. Because

sex is God's wedding gift to a marriage man and woman, and because it so beautifully exemplifies God's union with His church, Satan has worked hard at tarnishing and staining our thoughts of it. We don't talk or pray about this issue at church. It is unacceptable and embarrassing. For Solomon and his bride, Shulamith, this was not so. We must read the book, looking at sex from their virtuous and pure eyes, and ask God to restore that innocence to us.

WEDDED LOVE (1:1-5:1) The first half of the book talks about their



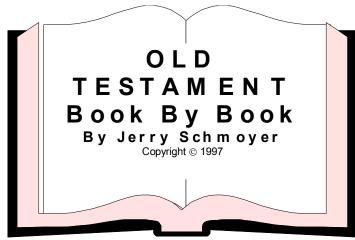
to God and

wedding day and night. Solomon evidently met Shulamith when he went north to Galilee to take care of business interests. She was different from the big-city, high-society girls who were so available to him in Jerusalem. Her freshness and open honesty won his heart and he came to see here whenever they could. They used this time to work through problems (defeat the "little foxes") and strengthen their relationship for when they would wed. Clearly they abstained from sex before marriage, in fact three times the reader is warned that no physical desires must be even aroused before marriage (2:7; 3:5; 8:4). Where does God draw the line before marriage? Nothing can be done or said to in any way start what should ultimately lead to sex. How far to go? God says don't even start anything at all! That's the way Solomon and Shulamith were.

Thus when the wedding night came it was a time of joy and beauty. The wedding itself was not their main focus (as it has become today). Instead everything pointed to their first night together. What they said, how they felt and all they did is explained in detail (1:15-2:7; 4:12-5:1). It is beautiful and loving. In fact, God Himself encourages them to really completely enjoy each other as He watches them and gives His 100% approval of all they are doing (last sentence in 5:1).

MARRIED LIFE (5:2-8:14) As in all relationships, things aren't always perfect. She was homesick, he was gone a lot, and they neglected each other. This affected their sex life. They had to learn to remember why they married the person and make sure they had realistic expectations. That had to return to focusing on meeting their mate's needs instead of thinking how their needs should be met by their mate. They rekindled their wedding night love. What a tremendous book this is for our sex-sick culture and time, a real 'cure for what ails us.'

(For detailed information about Song of Sol, see my paper: "Love, Marriage and Sex in the Song of Solomon")



ISAIAH: GOD IS SALVATION

TITLE: After prophet who wrote it

AUTHOR: Isaiah "Salvation is of Jehovah"

DATE of WRITING: 722-681 BC PLACE of WRITING: Judah

TIME COVERED: From Isaiah's time to eternity future (messages cover reign of 5

kings)

RECIPIENTS: Southern kingdom, Judah

KEY VERSE: 6:1-3 In the year that King Uzziah died, I saw the Lord seated on a throne, high and exalted, and the train of his robe filled the temple. Above him were seraphs, each with six wings: With two wings they covered their faces, with two they covered their feet, and with two they were flying. And they were calling to one another: "Holy, holy, holy is the LORD Almighty; the whole earth is full of his glory."

KEY WORDS: "Holy One of Israel" 25 times, "judge/judgment" 52 times, "comfort" 18 times PURPOSE: Outward religious activity without an inner heart attitude of love and submission to God brings judgment

THEME: God is holy and man is not, therefore unless is confess and removed judgment comes

The Old Testament is divided into three main sections: History (Genesis - Esther), Poetry (Job-Ecclesiastes) and the Prophets (Isaiah - Malachi). The largest prophetic books come first (Major Prophets - Isaiah - Daniel) followed by the smaller books. Isaiah is the first prophetic book we come to, not because he was the first chronologically but because his book is the largest of all the prophets. Even more than being foremost in quantity, it is also foremost in quality. Having 66 chapters, like the Bible has 66 books, it has been called the Bible in miniature. Isaiah uses the term 'salvation' 26 times while all the other prophets only use it 7 times combined. It shows much about Jesus and salvation. The first 39 chapters show man's condemnation, his need of salvation, just as the first 39 books in the Bible, the Old Testament, show the same thing. The final 27 chapters of Isaiah, and books of the Bible (the New Testament) show God's consolation, His provision for man's need. Truly this is a special book!

CONDEMNATION (1-39) The book opens foretelling that God's judgment is to come onto <u>Judah</u>, the southern kingdom (1 - 12). Their rebellion and sins are detailed. In contrast to man's sinfulness we see God's holiness. God revealed His glory to Isaiah (6) and this became the motive for as well as the content of Isaiah's whole message.

Isaiah doesn't just foretell judgment and destruction, though. Every time God sends a message of judgment He also includes words of hope and restoration in the future. Isaiah is full of prophecies about the Messiah to come. He is to be born of a virgin (7:14) and come from the line of David (11:1), called 'Immanuel' (7:14), be a stumbling block to Israel (8:14) and a light to the nations (9:2). He is to be called wonderful, counselor, mighty God, prince of peace (9:6).

Next judgment is seen as coming on the Gentiles, too (13-27). Babylon, Moab, Damascus, Ethiopia, Egypt and Arabia will also fall to God because of their unconfessed sin. Any who turn against God, then or in the future, will suffer the same fate.

Judgment will come on the whole world (28-35) as well. One future day the Messiah will return and judge all who oppose Him while rewarding those who have remained faithful to Him. Assyrian will especially be punished for its cruel treatment of God's northern kingdom (36-39).

The second section of Isaiah turns from the dismal present to a time of hope in the future. Even the names of Isaiah's two sons reflect this two-fold message that God spoke through Him. "Hasten the Spoil, Rush the Prey," the first son, spoke of the coming judgment for sin. "A Remnant Shall Return," the second son, talked about the coming hope of the time when the Messiah would rule in perfect peace and righteousness. What names! Every time the boys were called into the house for supper the neighbors heard a sermon preached!

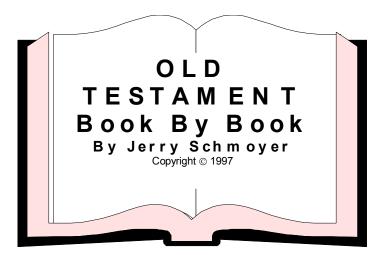
CONSOLATION (40-66) God is still faithful, even when His people are unfaithful. He will keep His promises to Abraham and his descendants. A time of comfort will come when the Messiah will rule and reign forever (40-48). All God's enemies will be judged and removed.

Sin and rebellion will then be removed and all will be perfect righteousness forever (49-57). This Messiah is called the "Suffering Servant" for those two words describe Him and His mission. Chapter 53 is especially clear about this, sounding like something one would read in one of the Gospels. No wonder Isaiah is quoted and referred to in the New Testament more than any other Old Testament book. Isaiah 53 alone has almost 60 quotes or allusions in the New Testament! It is a book and chapter that must be understood before the New Testament can be really understood.

Isaiah closes with thoughts about the time when redemption will be finally and totally realized (58-66). God's people will be restored and God's glory recognized and worshipped everywhere. It will take the tribulation for the Jews to turn back to God, but it will happen.

Thus though the present seems bleak for the Jews, the future looks great because God is in charge of it all. There is hope because God is in control and God keeps His promises!

Isaiah's painful warning of the consequences of taking sin lightly applies to us today, too. God is still holy, and we are not. Sin not covered by the blood of Jesus cries out for judgment, and a righteous and holy God will ultimately judge sin. The Suffering Servant is still the best answer, in fact the only answer. Have you confessed your sin and asked for His mercy in covering and removing it? That's the only way to have a future in this sin-sick world.



JEREMIAH: FINAL CHANCE:

TITLE: After Prophet Who Wrote It AUTHOR: Jeremiah, prophet for 66 years

DATE of WRITING: About 650 BC

PLACE of WRITING: Judah and then Egypt

TIME COVERED: 626 - 560 BC

RECIPIENTS: Jews in Judah & Jerusalem KEY VERSE: 21:7. 14 After that, declares the

LORD, I will hand over Zedekiah king of Judah, his officials and the people in this city who survive the plague, sword and famine, to Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon and to their enemies who seek their lives. He will put them to the sword; he will show them no mercy or pity or compassion.' ... I will punish you as your deeds deserve, declares the LORD. I will kindle a fire in your forests that will consume everything around you."

KEY WORDS: "Iniquity/sin/transgression" 53 times, "captive" 51, "scatter" 14, "evil" 81

PURPOSE: To show that the sin of Judah brings Babylonian captivity.

THEME: Last appeal for Judah to avoid judgment by repenting and turning from sin.

Gravity is one of the unbreakable laws God has built into his universe. What goes up must come down. Slip on ice and you'll go down. The law can't be broken without consequences. God has other laws with consequences, too. They all aren't in nature. Many are spiritual laws. One of the most firm of these is that sin brings judgment. Break this principle by sinning and there will be consequences. Unfortunately we learn about these laws the hard way: falling on ice or suffering the consequences of our sin. The Jews living in Judah after the split learned this the hard way, too. God sent Jeremiah to warn them but they refused to listen until it was too late.

JEREMIAH was called to be a prophet when he was quite young. God forbid him to marry because of the terrible times. He ministered for 66 years, during the reigns of the last five kings of Judah. His message broke his heart, and he often cried as he spoke. That's why he is called the "weeping prophet." His words hurt him so much that he wanted to stop preaching but God wouldn't let him. Despite his long faithfulness, he never had one convert. He was rejected, hated, beaten, put in stocks and prison, and charged with treason. After Jerusalem was captured by the Babylonians he was forced to go to Egypt by a group of Jews who fled there for freedom. Jeremiah died at an old age in Egypt, perhaps being stoned to death.

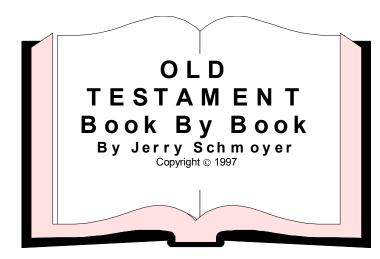
LAST CHANCE FOR THE JEWS (chapters 1-45) God, through Jeremiah, warns the Jews of coming destruction. They have been too evil too long. It is too late for national repentance but individuals can still repent and find salvation. None do. They have lost sight of the seriousness of sin. No one but Jeremiah and perhaps a small faithful remnant will call sin sin and call for repentance. God's people were hypocritical, prideful, arrogant and indifferent to God. Outwardly they were living in a time of great success and prosperity, but inwardly they were corrupt and empty. Jeremiah tried to show the people the sinfulness of their ways by his words and actions. He didn't marry, go to parties or feasts, and used object lessons to illustrate God's truth. He smashed a clay pot to show God's sovereignty over the nation He had formed. At another time he wore a wooden yoke to show the people they would soon be in bondage.

Still, there is a ray of hope among the judgment. They will be allowed to return to Jerusalem after 70 years in captivity, and there is a future time of deliverance coming when God Himself will rule forever on David's throne. In anticipation of this and to show hope, Jeremiah purchases land just before the city falls when everything seems hopeless.

As the people became aware of their danger and that destruction by Babylon seemed certain and soon, they still would not repent. They were too hard and prideful by this time. Even after Babylon came and destroyed the city and killed or enslaved most of the people, they still wouldn't turn to God. God's law that sin must be judged cannot be broken.

LAST CHANCE FOR GENTILES (chapters 46-51) This principle of reaping what you sow doesn't just apply to Jews, but to ALL the nations, and all who don't repent will also be judged. God judges sin, first among His people (I Peter 4:17) but ultimately among everyone.

GOD STILL JUDGES SIN TODAY Lest anyone think God has changed this principle, look at the cross. That is ultimate proof of what God thinks of sin. If He would be willing to judge it on His only beloved Son, how can we think He won't judge it on us? In fact, our only escape from His wrath is found at the cross. By accepting what Jesus did for us in accepting God's judgment on our sin, we have forgiveness and eternal life. Jesus took our consequences, we must freely accept His gift of salvation. If not, our sins will be judged. A holy God cannot over look sin, He wouldn't be God if He did and we couldn't love and respect a God like that. One day, sooner or later, He will judge the sins of this country and world because man today, like in Jeremiah's time, refuses to believe the principle that God judges sin. Still, we can have eternal salvation in Him no matter what this life brings by accepting His payment for our sins. What a God of grace and mercy He is! Make sure all your sins are covered by the blood of Jesus!



LAMEN-TATIONS: SIN BRINGS SORROW

TITLE: From Septuagint, Jeremiah's 'Cry'

AUTHOR: Jeremiah

DATE of WRITING: About 586 BC PLACE of WRITING: Jerusalem

TIME COVERED: Fall of Jerusalem - 586 BC

RECIPIENTS: Judah & Jerusalem as well as all who

observed fall of Jerusalem

KEY VERSE: 1:1 How deserted lies the city, once so full of people! How like a widow is she, who once was great among the nations! She who was queen among the provinces has now become a slave.

KEY WORDS: Zion (Jerusalem, 15 times), Jerusalem (7 times), desolate (7 times)

PURPOSE: To show Jeremiah's sorrow over Jerusalem's destruction for sin

THEME: A lament over the destruction of Jerusalem

Put yourself in this unsavory situation for a moment: someone has been trying to hurt you for some time. They stop at nothing to embarrass and criticize you. They tell your friends lies about you and have even tried to harm you physically. As time goes on this just gets worse. Then you hear they have had an accident and got hurt -- not seriously but painfully. What would your inner response be? How would you feel inside? Would you cry out loud in misery for them? Jeremiah was in a similar situation, with people who tortured and tried to kill him. When they suffered he cried long and hard. Thus he is known as the "weeping prophet."

LAMENTATION "To lament" means "to cry out in grief, to mourn aloud." The book of Lamentations is 5 funeral dirges, a eulogy in a graveyard." It's the saddest book in the Bible. It was written about the fall of the nation Israel in 586 BC. The Jews never really ruled their own land again until 1946 AD.

Suppose China invaded this country from California and worked its way across the land, destroying all buildings and crops and either killing or enslaving all the people. Here in the east famine would have gotten so bad that people would eat anything to live, even their own babies. Towns are destroyed, people are killed. Dead bodies bloat and pop under the hot sun. What few survivors remain are marched off to slavery. That is what happened to Judah and Jerusalem. Jeremiah knew it was coming and, for 40 years, warned the people to repent but not one did. As he saw the destruction all around him he wrote his feelings down in 5 melancholy poems, each of 22 verses (except the middle one which is three times as long -- 66 verses). The first four are acrostic to make memory easier. Each poem ends in prayer to God.

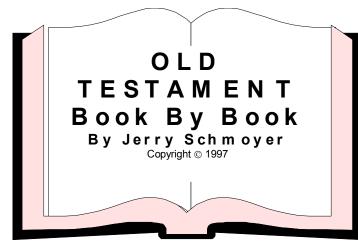
Jerusalem is destitute (chapter 1). Jerusalem is pictured as a solitary widow, sitting and mourning in lonely sorrow. She is pictures as crying and wailing, asking for sympathy and mercy but getting none. In her pride and self-centeredness she has been humbled. Her grief is described in chapter 1. In chapter 2 **Jehovah is angry** because of the people's sin. That is

why they are suffering. Sin brings sorrow. Unbelievably bad things are happening to them because of their refusal to repent of their sin and obey God. Still, God is a God of mercy who forgives and restores so chapter 3 (the long poem) talks about how **Jeremiah is hopeful**. His words throb with pain as he identifies himself with his suffering people. The Jews are learning the hard way that sin brings sorrow. It seems that everyone needs to learn that lesson for themselves, the hard way. There are no exceptions to that principle, even the innocent suffer for the sins of the others. Jeremiah puts his hope in God, though.

Again the misery is described as chapter 4 again tells how **Jerusalem is defeated**. Contrasts are shown between how she was and how she now is. Their riches and glory have been replaced by famine and misery. It's too late. All this is because of the sins of the people and leaders. They didn't believe it would really happen to them, even though it saw it happen to their sister country in the north, Israel, 150 years ago. The leaders who weren't killed were rejected like lepers by the surviving people.

The final chapter, 5, shows that **Joy is absent** among the people. They appeal to Jeremiah for help and tell him of their distress and misery. In this final brief but forceful poem they pray to God to restore them. They recognize God's sovereignty. The book closes on a word of distress: "unless you have utterly rejected us and are angry with us beyond measure".

The message of the book is obvious: sin brings sorrow. It started in Eden and has been happening ever since. If we sin he won't force us to repent, but we will suffer the consequences of our sin. Remember, sin does bring sorrow!



EZEKIEL: GOD'S GLORY

TITLE: After prophet who wrote it AUTHOR: Ezekiel ("God will Strengthen") DATE of WRITING: 592 to 570 BC PLACE of WRITING: Judea & Babylon TIME COVERED: 592 to 570 BC - 22 years RECIPIENTS: Jews, esp those in Babylon

KEY VERSE: 36:17-19, 24-28 "Son of man, when the people of Israel were living in their own land, they defiled it by their conduct and their actions. Their conduct was like a woman's monthly uncleanness in my sight. So I poured out my wrath on them because they had shed blood in the land and because they had defiled it with their idols. I dispersed them among the nations, and they were scattered through the countries; I judged them according to their conduct and their actions. ... "For I will take you out of the nations; I will gather you from all the countries and bring you back into your own land. I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you will be clean; I will cleanse you from all your impurities and from all your idols. I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you; I will remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh. And I will put my Spirit in you and move you to follow my decrees and be careful to keep my laws. You will live in the land I gave your forefathers; you will be my people, and I will be your God.

KEY WORDS: "You shall know I am the Lord" (70 times); "Son of Man" (79 times) PURPOSE: to show God judges sin but will one day restore Israel and fill them with His glory THEME: the Glory of God is gone, but will one day return

God has revealed His glory in the vast complexities of the universe and the minute complexities of cells, atoms and DNA. All this is to help us wee what a great God He is (Psalm 19:1; Rev. 4:11) so we will better trust and praise Him (Psalm 8;1). Everything He does reveals His glory. Even having His people being defeated and taken into captivity shows His glory. If His people don't show His greatness by their serving Him, they will show it by their being disciplined by Him. The purpose of their capture by Babylon was to show them the seriousness of their sin and have them turn their hearts back to Him, the same purpose as the tribulation. Through Ezekiel, God looks beyond the current misery to the new closeness between God and His people that will one day result. It often takes pain and suffering for us to turn to God and see His misery. It's better for us to see it before that, for it is clearly seen throughout nature and life, but often we have to come to that point to see it. That's the message of Ezekiel.

GOD'S GLORY SEEN BY JUDAH'S FALL (before the siege of Jerusalem, 595-587 BC - chapters 1-24) God reveals glimpses of His glory in the book of Ezekiel similar to what is in Revelation and what Ezekiel's contemporary Daniel saw. There are elaborate visions full of exotic creatures and scenes of angels assigned to guard God's holiness. All this is to reflect God's sovereign majesty and holiness. Through words and actions, Ezekiel was to warn the people that a holy God would judge their sin. If they didn't recognize and reflect His glory in their obedience to Him, they would in their discipline by Him.

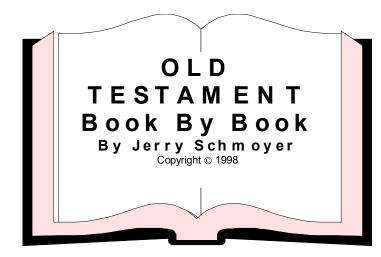
GOD'S GLORY SEEN BY JUDAH'S FOES (during the siege of Jerusalem, 586 BC - chapters 25-32) God not only judges His people, He judges all who do not glorify Him. Judgment starts with God's people first (I Peter 4:17). However it doesn't end there. The Ammonites, Moabites

and Edomites are judged for taking pleasure in seeing Judah fall, and for their refusal to serve God. Tyre, Sidon and Egypt are also to be judged.

GOD'S GLORY SEEN BY JUDAH'S FUTURE (after the siege of Jerusalem, 585-570 BC - chapters 33-48) Now that Jerusalem has fallen, it is time to look to the future and to better times ahead. God always offers hope during times of darkness. Sin has consequences, but God's glory is always there to see us through it. Through Ezekiel God points to the time when the Jews will be restored to the land (33:1-14), a prophecy being fulfilled during our lifetime. Then will come a time of spiritual revival and renewal, of rebuilding the Temple and worshipping God in spirit and in truth. These are future for us, taking place during the coming tribulation time. Then in the millennium which will follow the tribulation all will worship God and give Him the glory due Him, the glory which His people should have given Him throughout history. There is a day coming when the whole earth will recognize God's glory and He Himself will again dwell with His people on earth.

GOD'S GLORY SEEN BY YOU AND ME We, today, are to bring glory to God by all we do (I Cor 6:20; Rom 9:23). That is the reason God created us (Psalm 96:7-8; II Chron 16:28-29). Man today glorifies man instead of God (Romans 1:25).

How are we to glorify God? By appreciating all He has done for us and recognizing our own insufficiency and unworthiness (I Cor 1:29-31)., by living a holy life in obedience to Him (John 15:8; I Cor 10:31) and by worshipping and praising Him (Psalm 50:23; 89:12; 91:1) we bring glory to Him. He is worthy of all glory (Rom 11:36; 16:27; Gal 1:5; I Tim 1:17; Eph 3:21).



DANIEL: SOVEREIGNTY

TITLE: "Daniel" = "God is my Judge"

AUTHOR: Daniel

DATE of WRITING: 605 - 525 BC PLACE of WRITING: Babylon

TIME COVERED: 80 yrs (605-525 BC)

RECIPIENTS: Jews in Babylon

KEY VERSE: 7:13-18 "In my vision at night I

looked, and there before me was one like a son of man,

coming with the clouds of heaven. He approached the Ancient of Days and was led into his presence. He was given authority, glory and sovereign power; all peoples, nations and men of every language worshipped him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion that will not pass away, and his kingdom is one that will never be destroyed. "I, Daniel, was troubled in spirit, and the visions that passed through my mind disturbed me. I approached one of those standing there and asked him the true meaning of all this. "So he told me and gave me the interpretation of these things: 'The four great beasts are four kingdoms that will rise from the earth. But the saints of the Most High will receive the kingdom and will possess it forever-- yes, for ever and ever.'

KEY WORDS: "king" 183 times; "kingdom" 55 times; "Daniel" 74 times

PURPOSE: To show God's greatness and plan for the future

THEME: God's sovereignty over nations and peoples

Picture yourself as a teenager and an enemy nation has swooped down on your country inflicting enormous destruction and death. You city is a smoking ruin, your church lies in rubble, your possessions have been destroyed, and your family has all been killed or taken into slavery. All you have left is your faith in God. Would that be enough to get you through?

For us that is an academic exercise, but for Daniel it was the chilling reality of life. As has been said, "I never knew Jesus was all I needed until Jesus was all I had." Daniel found this to be true in his life. Below is a short outline of his life in chronological order.

Age 15: THE FAITHFUL FEW (Daniel 1) Daniel and 3 teenage friends were taken captive to Babylon where they had the privilege of being chosen for government service. They had to trust God to help them when they followed God by refusing to eat food God forbade.

Age 18: THE FANTASTIC FIGURE (Daniel 2) Daniel reveals a dream and its meaning which outline world history from his times until when Jesus returns to set up his kingdom. 4

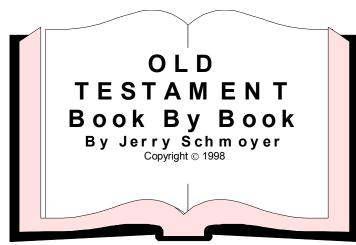
Age 20: THE FIERY FURNACE (Daniel 3) With Daniel away, his three friends take a stand for God despite being thrown into a hot furnace. Jesus is with them and protects them through it.

Age 53: THE FRIGHTENING FAUNA (Daniel 7) Daniel received more detailed information about the four major world empires that will rule from his day until God's kingdom comes.

Age 54: THE FATED FOES (Daniel 8) Two of the four coming kingdoms are focused on for more details, with lots of prophecies about Alexander the Great and Antiochus Epiphanes.

Age 76: THE FALLEN FIEND (Daniel 4) Nebuchadnezzar's pride is broken when God allows him to act as an animal until he humble recognizes God's sovereignty. He then told the whole nation what God had done and many turned to Him.

- **Age 86: THE FORECASTING FINGERS** (Daniel 5) Belshazzar, who replaced Nebuchadnezzar, was also too proud to recognize God. When using cups from the temple in mockery, God's finger wrote on his wall declaring their coming destruction.
- **Age 93: THE FINAGLING FOES** (Daniel 6) Trapped into disobeying the new King's orders to pray to no one but him, Daniel is thrown into the lions den but preserved by God.
- **Age 94: THE FUTURE FRAMEWORK** (Daniel 9) In this vision God gives Daniel the time frame of the coming of the Messiah and the tribulation. Seventy seven-year periods are revealed. Much is revealed about Daniel prayer life in this chapter, too.
- **Age 95: THE FINAL FEATURES** (Daniel 10-12) In answer to prayer and fasting, God gives more details about the ends times, especially the Antichrist and the battle of Armageddon, showing conclusively that God wins!



HOSEA: LOYAL LOVE

TITLE: After prophet who wrote it

AUTHOR: Hosea = "Jehovah is Salvation"

DATE of WRITING: 785-725 BC
PLACE of WRITING: North (Israel)
TIME COVERED: 785-725 BC
RECIPIENTS: North (Israel)

KEY VERSE: 3:1 The LORD said to me, "Go, show your love to your wife again, though she is loved by another and is an adulteress. Love her as the LORD loves the Israelites, though they turn to other gods and love the sacred raisin cakes."

KEY WORDS: "Love," "whoredom/spiritual adultery" (14 times)

PURPOSE: to announce that God will chasten His unfaithful "wife" but

will restore her to a place of blessing.

THEME: Loyal love of God for His own despite sin and unfaithfulness.

ADULTEROUS WIFE & FAITHFUL HUSBAND (Hosea 1-3) The book of Hosea starts with a very sad love story. Hosea, God's prophet, actually lives out God's message. He is a walking audio-visual to communicate God's truth to the people.

God tells him to marry a woman named Gomer. He is loyal and faithful to her and God, but she is disloyal to him. She is sexually unfaithful and the children born to her are not his. As her immoral lifestyle continues she finds her self taken in slavery and on the auction block, being sold as a slave. Hosea shows up and pays the price to buy her back, restoring her as his wife. It is a sad, moving story. The Jews couldn't have missed the meaning of it, though.

ADULTEROUS NATION & FAITHFUL GOD (Hosea 4-14)

In Hosea 4-7 we see that **God is Holy - He Hates Sin**. The parallel between Gomer and Israel (the northern 10 tribes) is here elaborate don. Israel is the spiritual wife of God as Gomer is the physical wife of Hosea. As she became physical unfaithful so Israel has been spiritually unfaithful to God, willfully rejecting their sacred relationship and putting idols first. The Jews worshipped Baal by sacred prostitution and child sacrifice. God remained faithful to them, but they were unfaithful to Him, abandoning His love. As Gomer, they were unfaithful, unthankful and unworthy. They gave themselves to others and as a result their health and reputation were ruined. They only cared about material things, but those 'things' didn't satisfy and they ended up deserted and abandoned by their 'lovers.' Israel, like Gomer, was unable to help herself. Deliverance could only come by Someone greater coming to their aid.

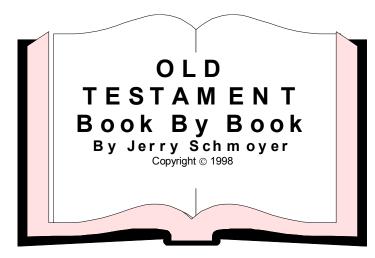
In Hosea 8-10 we see that **God is Just - He Judges Sin**. Again visual aids are used to show God's message: a dying man shows there is no future, a flaming fire shows all will be devoured, a half-baked cake shows the tastelessness of the Jews 'religion,' a deceitful bow shows they can't be trusted, a pleasureless vessel shows God has no joy in His people and a forgetful servant shows the Jews are of no service to God. All these show Israel is guilty before God. Still, God is patient and in His mercy puts off judgment to give time to repent. However God is also just, and the time to settle accounts will soon arrive. Barrenness and bondage are

coming. While it may be too late for the nation as a whole, individuals can still turn to God in repentance and receive forgiveness and mercy.

Finally, in Hosea 11-14 we see that **God is Live - He Has Mercy on Sinners**. Hosea, like all the prophets, ends his message on a note of hope. Consolation will follow chastening. A time of peace and deliverance is coming in the future.

The book concludes with Hosea pleading one last time for the people to repent and turn to God. God will forgive and restore, as Hosea did Gomer. "Hosea" means "God is Salvation," the same as "Joshua." It's written differently in English to be able to tell them apart, but they are the same in Hebrew. Hosea is a picture of loyal love. He redeemed Gomer by paying a price to buy back what was already his. God did the same with us. Each loved their 'brides' in spite of their sin and were faithful despite being shown unfaithfulness. They didn't set their loved ones aside but suffered personal agony because they cared more about the other than their own ease and comfort. They were willing to pay the price to buy back what was really theirs, to forgive and restore. Each looked forward to enjoying an intimate relationship with his loved one after restoration: Hosea with Gomer and God with His people in the millennium. That is the future hope, the consolation which will eventually come.

One day a little boy wandered into the woods on his way home and got lost. Finally he found his way home but hid in the barn all night long. He was afraid because he was late. His parents were up all night searching the woods for him because the loved and missed him. Had he understood their concern he could have spent the night in his bed with his family. The same is true of us and God. He is anxious and willing to have us back, it is our choice to stay away.



JOEL: DAY of the LORD

TITLE: After prophet who wrote it

AUTHOR: "Joel" "Jehovah is God/Elohim" DATE of WRITING: About 838 - 756 BC

PLACE of WRITING: Judah

TIME COVERED: Joel's' day to Millennium

RECIPIENTS: Judah (south)

KEY VERSE: 2:28-32 'And afterward, I will

pour out my Spirit on all people. Your

sons and daughters will prophesy, your old men will dream dreams, your young men will see visions. Even on my servants, both men and women, I will pour out my Spirit in those days. I will show wonders in the heavens and on the earth, blood and fire and billows of smoke. The sun will be turned to darkness and the moon to blood before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the LORD. And everyone who calls on the name of the LORD will be saved; for on Mount Zion and in Jerusalem there will be deliverance, as the LORD has said, among the survivors whom the LORD calls.

KEY WORD: "Day of the Lord" (5 times)

PURPOSE: Present locust plague is a picture of worse judgment to come if no repentance.

THEME: Christ will return and rule the world, bringing peace.

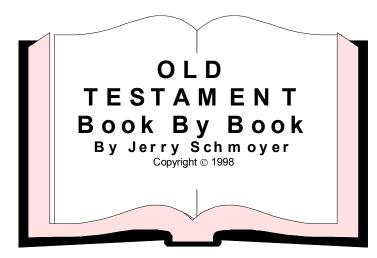
It's the middle of the night and you are awakened from sleep by the raucous ringing of your smoke alarm. Are you pleased or perturbed? A red light on your dashboard glows menacingly, informing you the oil level in your car is dangerously low. Do you resent the interruption or are you relieved to discover the problem?

In Joel's day God used locusts to wake up His people and alert them to the condition of their nation so they could turn back to God before even worse things happened. Instead of responding with gratitude and repentance, though, the people complained and blamed God.

DESOLATION IN THE DAY OF THE LORD (1:1 - 2:17) Locust plagues are devastating. Locusts collect 5" thick on the ground and eat their own weight each day, devouring everything but rocks and tree trunks. They can cover over 400 square miles and travel across oceans. Devastation and famine always follow in their wake. God sent these locusts to get the Jews attention, so they'd repent and turn to Him before the next hoard came through. The army of Assyrians would bring worse destruction than the locusts brought. All this points to a future time of devastation even worse. It is when the Antichrist's army comes through and brings worse death and destruction than the locusts or even the Assyrians. The only way to be free from any of these three plagues is by repentance and confession of sin. Unfortunately the Jews don't repent from any of them, and suffer miserable consequences. Following the final one, though, there will come deliverance. Thus Joel's attention turns from the present oppression to that which will come in the Day of the Lord.

DELIVERANCE BY THE DAY OF THE LORD (2:18 - 3:21) The Day of the Lord is that time which starts in the middle of the tribulation and continues through the Millennium and on into eternity. It will take the awful suffering of the tribulation to do what the locusts and the Assyrians haven't been able to do -- turn the Jews back to God. Then, however, there is a time of peace

and prosperity promised, such as the world has never known. That is the Millennial Kingdom which then goes on for all eternity. What a blessed hope that was for oppressed people! As our world today drifts further and further from God this blessed promise of future deliverance and restoration becomes our hope, too.



AMOS: ACCOUNTABILITY

TITLE: Amos

AUTHOR: "Amos" = "Burden Bearer" DATE of WRITING: 810 - 785 BC PLACE of WRITING: Israel (North)

TIME COVERED: Amos' day to eternity future

RECIPIENTS: Israel (North)

KEY VERSE: 4:11-12 "I overthrew some of you as I overthrew Sodom and Gomorrah.

You were like a burning stick snatched from the fire, yet you have not returned to me," declares the LORD. "Therefore this is what I will do to you, Israel, and because I will do this to you, prepare to meet your God, O Israel."

KEY WORD: "Transgression" = 12 times; "I will not turn away your punishment" = 8 times PURPOSE: to warn Israel (North) to repent from their many sins or face severe judgment. THEME: The inevitable judgment of God on sin.

How often do we think "that will never happen to me"? When I was a young boy I always assumed house fires always happened to others and would never happen to me. Then my room caught fire, and I've never said that again. At least I haven't said it about fire. I still assume that about a lot of other things, I'm afraid.

The nation Israel (northern 10 tribes) felt the same way about God's judgment on their nation. They were 'God's people,' went through all the motions of worship, were economically prosperous, filled their lives with pleasure, and had a strong army. What could happen?

AMOS the prophet came from near Jerusalem, and was sent by God to warn the northern kingdom of coming judgment. A country boy who picked figs and did some shepherding, he was hardly the man we would expect to be sent on such a mission. He was faithful, though, and did what God asked. **ASSYRIA** was on the horizon, warlike and very aggressive. They were very harsh and cruel, and their goal was to rule the world. **ISRAEL** (the northern kingdom) was in great economical prosperity but was spiritually bankrupt. They were idolatrous, worshipping golden calves instead of Jehovah. **GOD** was very angry with the people: "The Lord roars from Zion" (1:1). God is like an angry lion about to bring destruction.

- **I. VIGILANCE of the PROPHET** (1-2) Imagine you are in a courtroom. The trial beings with the formal arraignment. God's accusations against the nations was because of their repeated acts of sin. God found each guilty and passed sentences of judgment on them: Damascus, Gaza, Tyre, Edom, Ammon and Moab. All this sounded great to Israel, for these nations were their enemies. However when he started saying what God would do to them because of their sins they weren't nearly as happy!
- II. VOICE of the PROPHET (3-6) Amos' second sermon (chapter 3) continues the courtroom imagery. This time the case against Israel is presented. They broke their covenant with God. They made promises to be faithful to God, to love and obey Him and Him alone. Witnesses are called to show Israel's guilt, nations that were better witnesses for God than His own people (Ashdod and Egypt). Israel was found guilty and sentence passed: their strong military would be defeated and most of the people would be killed.

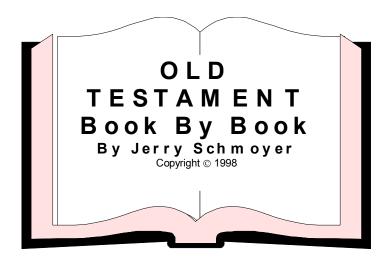
The third sermon (chapter 4) goes into more detail about the sins they are charged with. The women overindulged themselves and thought life was only for one pleasure after another. "Fat cows" God calls them. Everyone still outwardly went through the motions of worshipping God, but they were just going through the motions. They had no place in their lives for God.

God tried to warn the people many times but they were too stubborn to listen. He sent food shortages, droughts, crop failures and military defeats to get their attention and have them return to Him but they never did. They still insisted in trusting in themselves only.

Sermon number four (5-6) is like a funeral lament. Amos is so sure of Israel's destruction it was like it already happened, like they were already dead. Forgiveness and restoration was still available for individuals who repented, but for the nation as a whole it was too late. Judgment was sure to come.

III. VISIONS of the PROPHET (7-9) The sermons are now over. Next come illustrations of what the judgment will be like. God says He will send a plague of grasshoppers to destroy everything but Amos asks for mercy and God relents. The same happens with a great devouring fire. Still, God says He will destroy the nation. The Jews don't want to hear Amos' preaching any more so they tell him to stop and go home. They are like over-ripe fruit (8), good for nothing but destruction. Outside they look fine but inside they are rotten. God the righteous judge has declared it so and so it will be.

Still, like all the prophets, God doesn't end on a note of despair. There is always hope. God has Amos remind the Jews about their glorious future when all will worship Him in peace and righteousness. The Messiah will reign on David's throne and everything will be perfect. But until then . . .



OBADIAH: RETRIBUTION

TITLE: After prophet who wrote it

AUTHOR: Obadiah ("Worshipper of God")

DATE of WRITING: 586 - 585 BC PLACE of WRITING: Canaan

TIME COVERED: Obadiah's day to future

RECIPIENTS: Edom (Arabs)

KEY VERSE: 1:15 "The day of the LORD is

near for all nations. As you have done, it will be done to you; your deeds will return upon your own head.

KEY WORDS: "Edom" (9 times) "cut off" (3 times)

PURPOSE: Warn Edom of judgment because of their pride and

malicious treatment of Judah when Judah was having troubles

THEME: Retribution for Edom

Some of the most severe words in the whole Bible are addressed to the proud, be they believers or unbelievers. Proverbs especially has much to say about the dangers of pride (3:34; 6:16-17; 8:13; 10:17; 11:2,12; 12:9,15; 13:10; 14:21; 15:5,10,12,25,32; 16:5,18-19; 17:19; 18:11-12; 20:6; 21:4, 24; 25:14, 27; 26:5, 12, 16; 27:2; 28:11, 25; 29:8, 23; 30:12-13). Pride is to bad because it is the root of all sin. Pride is self-centeredness, and all sin can be traced back to that. In fact, pride was the reason Lucifer rebelled and was cast out of heaven (Isaiah 14; Ezekiel 28). All pride brings judgment. Many times we don't think we are 'proud' because we only define pride as thinking we are better than everyone else. Basically, though, pride is thinking of ourselves before God. Charlie Brown is a proud person, not because he thinks he's better than others but because he is self-centered. Everything in life is viewed in light of how it will affect him. Thinking we are inferior to others is a prideful and untrue as thinking we are superior to others. They are two sides of the same coin. Any self-centeredness or self-sufficiency is pride and therefore sin.

OBADIAH is a book about the judgment that comes to those who are proud. It's the shortest book in the Old Testament as well as the first of the prophets in chronological order. Obadiah's name means "servant/worshipper of God." Nothing else is known about him. He is the most obscure of all the prophets. We do know that he lived about 100 years after the split of the nation into north and south. He is the first prophet to write down his message.

EDOM is the nation that Obadiah preached to. Although he was a Jew, he was sent to his Gentile neighbors to warn them of God's coming judgment, much as in the case of Jonah. The Edomites were harsh enemies of the Jews. The enmity started in Rebekah's womb, where Jacob and Esau struggled against each other (Gen. 25:20-23). This rivalry was revealed at birth (Gen. 25:24-26). They fought over the birthright and then blessing. They were in conflict their whole lives. This antagonism continued in the following generations. The Edomites wouldn't let Moses and the Jews walk through their land. Saul fought them. David conquered them. They joined Ammon and Moab in fighting the Jews. One of the reason Herod was so disliked by the Jews was that he was an Edomite. Today they are part of the Arab people. Always, though,

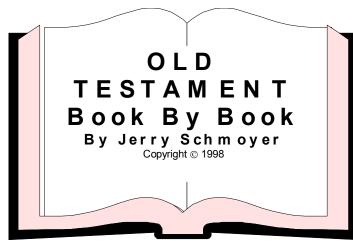
they have been characterized by self-centeredness (pride). Obadiah was sent to warn them that this would bring God's judgment.

THE DOOM OF SINNERS is shown first (verses 1-9). In their pride the Edomites thought they were impregnable because of their rock-like fortresses in the land east of the Jordan. It is easy today, too, to put our faith in our government and military, thinking they will protect us. However God resists the proud but gives grace to the humble (James 4:6; I Peter 5:5). Edom took advantage of others in their times of weakness, so God would have them reap what they sow. The same would happen to them. Edom was famous for great statesmen, counselors and government officials. They took pride in this. God would have these men become like fools, for they would have no real understanding of their present dangerous situation. Their brave soldiers would become cowardly. Now that he has their attention, Obadiah tells them why this will happen.

THE DESCRIPTION OF SIN is given next (10-14). The Edomites are violent and belligerent, especially to the Jews (God's people). In their self-sufficiency they feel indifferent, apathetic, even aloof from those who are in need. Finally, they are greedy. Like vultures, they are quick to plunder weaker, vulnerable and defeated neighbors. In their pride they thought only of themselves.

THE DAY OF JUDGMENT concludes the book (15-21). The coming judgment on Edom will be bad, but the future judgment will be worse. In the Day of the Lord (specifically the battle of Armageddon) it will be much worse for they will be totally annihilated. Despite all this there is a time of coming restoration for those who turn to God for mercy and forgiveness. This will be the Millennium. The Jews as a nation then will be restored and enjoy peace and prosperity like never before. All they lost will be returned. Opposing God's people just wasn't/isn't wise!

The message from this book is clear: we will reap what we sow if we only sow in sin and unrighteousness. Those who never turn to God for salvation but instead live in selfishness and self-centeredness WILL BE JUDGED!



JONAH: OBEDIENCE

TITLE: After prophet who wrote it AUTHOR: "Jonah" means "dove" DATE of WRITING: About 810 BC PLACE of WRITING: Nineveh

TIME COVERED: A few months in 810 BC

RECIPIENTS: Nineveh, Assyria

KEY VERSE: 3:10 When God saw what they did and how they turned from their evil ways, he had compassion and did not bring upon them the destruction he had threatened.

KEY WORD: "prepared" 4 (God prepares a wind 1:4, storm 1:4, fish 1:17, gourd 4:6, worm 4:7, east wind 4:8 PURPOSE: to show God's love for Gentiles and how He deals with His disobedient servants THEME: God's resurrection power conquers all

Have you ever had to learn something the hard way? I'm sure all of us have. Jonah certainly did! Sometimes the most familiar stories loose their impact because we've known them so well for so long. There's a good reason that they are the ones we teach children and remember so well. They are very special in their meaning and significance. Pretend you don't know the story of Jonah. Look at it with fresh eyes. It'll mean a lot more to you.

JONAH FLEEING (chapter 1) Jonah came from Israel and God called him to go to Nineveh. Nineveh was the capital of Assyria, one of the cruelest, most brutal nations to ever exist. They were conquering everyone in the near east in Jonah's day and were about to destroy Jonah's nation: Israel. As a boy his hometown was destroyed by the Assyrians. Friends, relatives, perhaps even parents were killed. For these reasons when God asked him to go warn them of coming judgment he went the opposite way instead. In his bitterness and unforgiveness he disobeyed God. He wanted revenge, not one chance of mercy. He became so hardened in his conscience he could sleep right through a storm. He knew God was disciplining (not punishing) him. When the sailors reluctantly threw him into the water the storm stopped. They gave the glory to God. Jonah had never witnessed to them, but God got His glory from it anyway.

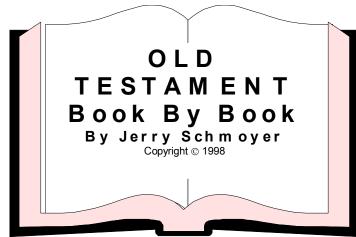
JONAH PRAYING (chapter 2) When Jonah hit the water he started praying. The Hebrew of Jonah 2:1-6 make it clear Jonah knew he was dying. When the large fish swallowed him he was still alive, perhaps even with his head above water. He knew it was all over then, though. Before going unconscious, as the whale (?) was swallowing him, he prayed and confessed his sin. Then he died. Three days later the fish spit him u on dry land and God brought him back to life. Jesus used this as a picture of His own death and resurrection (Mt. 12:39-40). When he came back to life he praised God and committed himself to follow God -- even going to Nineveh. God gave him another chance.

JONAH PREACHING (chapter 3) After walking 500 miles (about a month) with plenty of time to think, he arrived at Nineveh. It was a large city, taking 3 days to just walk around the outside of it! The city was very proud, wicked, hard and stubborn. Jonah's message was not one of repentance. He offered no mercy. He simply proclaimed "40 days and Nineveh will be destroyed." The next day it was "39 days...." Still, people repented immediately. Perhaps

seeing him contributed to that. He was probably hairless and had his skin splotched from the stomach acids of the fish. He was a living picture of how God judged sin yet restored those who repented. His message spread like wildfire. Even the king repented, ordering all people and animals to fast and show their repentance. It was the greatest revival ever!

JONAH LEARNING (chapter 4) Jonah, however, didn't give up hope that God would still destroy the city and people in it. He was angry that they repented, fearing God might show mercy. He sat on a hill awaiting the end of the 40 days. It was hot, but a vine grew to give him heat. Then a worm ate the vine and the shade was gone. Jonah was so upset at the loss of his shade he wanted to die! This was just God's way of showing him how selfish he was. He didn't care about all of Nineveh but did care about his own comfort! What an end to the story. Everything obeyed God but Jonah. The storm, dice used by the sailors, the sailors, fish, Ninevehites, gourd, work and east wind. Everything but Jonah, the one who claimed to "fear" God (1:9), obeyed Him.

I think the story ended well for Jonah, though. I think he repented and grew through his selfishness. The fact that he wrote and distributed this account of his experiences after leaving Nineveh leads me to this conclusion. Unfortunately the story didn't end so well for Nineveh. They went on to conquer Israel, although they weren't the cruel nation they used to be. God's timing is seen in this for He wanted Israel disciplined, not unreasonably punished. A little over a hundred years after Jonah went to Nineveh, God sent Nahum with the same message. This time there was no repentance and God used the Babylonians to destroy Nineveh.



MICAH: HOPE

TITLE: After prophet who wrote it

AUTHOR: Micah

DATE of WRITING: 749 - 697 BC PLACE of WRITING: Judah TIME COVERED: 749 BC - eternity

RECIPIENTS: Judah & Israel

KEY VERSES: 4:1-4 In the last days the mountain of the LORD's temple will be established as chief among the mountains; it will be raised above the

hills, and peoples will stream to it. Many nations will come and say, "Come, let us go up to the mountain of the LORD, to the house of the God of Jacob. He will teach us his ways, so that we may walk in his paths.". They will beat their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning hooks. Nation will not take up sword against nation, nor will they train for war anymore.

KEY WORDS: 'Hear" 9 times; 'desolation' 4 times; 'gather' 9 times PURPOSE: Judgment is coming, but eventually Israel will be restored.

THEME: Despite coming judgment, there is hope in the future.

Scientists once did an experiment where they took a number of pigs and put them in deep water. The pigs struggled for 24 hours and then drowned. Next they took another group and put them in deep water, just like the first group. However after 12 hours they allowed them to get out for 30 minutes. Then they put them back in. This group lasted 40 hours before drowning. Why did the second group last almost twice as long as the first? It was because they had the hope of being rescued again. Hope made all the difference.

HOPELESSNESS We live in a world today that is full of hopelessness. Music, art, movies and other areas of our culture clearly show this. The large numbers of people who suffer from addictions or psychological problems also point to this as a time of hopelessness. AIDS, nuclear warfare, financial pressures, breakdown of interpersonal relationships and pressures in the work bring fear and emptiness. With no stable anchor to hold onto and nothing sure in the future, all people have is today. And when that goes sour there seems to be nothing left. Satan, the Prince of this World, promotes hopelessness for it causes people to think that death is their best alternative. As the kingdom of darkness grows, so does the suicide rate. All of this is because man has no hope.

GODS 'HOPE' The definition of the word 'hope' today refers to a wish, a possibility, something we'd like to happen. Often when all else fails and disaster seems certain people say, "All we can do is hope for the best." This isn't what the Bible is talking about when it uses the word 'hope.' When the Bible uses the word 'hope' it is referring to 'confident assurance.' It means something is 100% certain, its as sure as if it already happened. It is a guarantee of God's promises being fulfilled. Our confident assurance is that all things work together for good, God is in charge of everything that happens and it is all for our maturity and His glory, that Jesus may return for us at any moment, that when we die we will spend eternity with Jesus, and that we can never lose our salvation. Our hope is not in something we wish for but something we are assured of. Because of this great hope of ours we have nothing to fear.

MICAH'S HOPE While each of the prophets offers hope after giving God's message of impending judgment, Micah especially focuses on that. Each prophet concluded his message by talking about the future time of deliverance which God would provide for His faithful people, Micah goes into extra detail about this. Micah himself lived and ministered during the time of Isaiah. While Isaiah was a well-known prophet who ministered to rich, city people, Micah was an unknown who preached to poor country people. Both ministered during the time the Northern Kingdom was falling to Assyria.

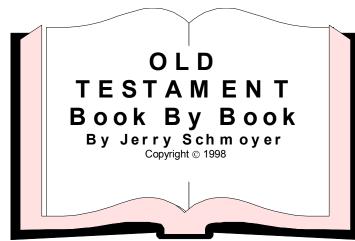
PROPHECY OF RETRIBUTION (1-3) Although it will several more generations until the Southern Kingdom actually falls, the final countdown has begun. It is too late to turn for they are too committed to

their sinful path. Judgment is approaching. Their wound is incurable. Sin is rampant. The family unit has broken down. Materialism, stealing and scheming are common. People take advantage of the poor. The leaders are selfish and self-centered. They hate good and love evil. False prophets abound and false truths are accepted as truth. Even the priests have turned from God, just teaching what will bring in the greatest offering. While there is no hope for the nation, there is still hope for the individual. Mercy is still available for each person who turns to God for salvation and forgiveness. They won't escape the consequences of Judah's sin in this life, but they will escape eternal consequences of hell.

PROMISE OF RESTORATION (4-5) Using almost the same words that Isaiah used, Micah writes about the hope the faithful Jews still have. He talks in detail about the millennium when the temple will be rebuilt and people will worship God once again. The Messiah will rule and reign, bringing peace to all. All will return to garden of Eden conditions. What a glorious hope that is for Israel! Micah says that the King who will rule over this kingdom will be born in Bethlehem (5:2).

PLEA FOR REPENTANCE (6-7) Because of this Micah pleas with the people to repent from their halfhearted worship, empty ritual, persistent rebellion, deception, hypocrisy, corruption, greed and idolatry. Judgment will come because of that, but there is a glorious future for Israel when their borders will be expanded and all nations will come to Jerusalem to worship and serve the Messiah King. What a glorious hope that is for them all!

OUR BLESSED HOPE We have a hope even greater than the Jews had. We have a far distant hope of spending eternity with God, too. We have a near future hope of the rapture or, if we die first, being immediately with God in heaven. We have a present hope as well. All things DO work together, there IS a plan and purpose for all that happens, God IS sovereign and does all because He loves us. Where would we be without that hope? When the roman Empire started falling apart many turned to Jesus because of the hope they saw displayed in the lives of God's people. Our times are similar to those of the early church as well as Israel before judgment came. We, too, can shine out light of hope in a dark and hopeless world. Remember, the hope of the world is Jesus!



NAHUM: JUSTICE

TITLE: After Writer

AUTHOR: Nahum ("Comforter")
DATE of WRITING: 661 - 612 BC
PLACE of WRITING: Israel
TIME COVERED: About 50 years

RECIPIENTS: Nineveh

KEY VERSE: 3:5-7 "I am against you," declares the LORD Almighty. "I will lift your skirts over your face. I will show the nations your nakedness and the kingdoms your shame. I will pelt you with filth, I will treat you with contempt and make you a spectacle. All who see you will flee from you and say, 'Nineveh is in ruins-- who will mourn for her?' Where can I find anyone to comfort you?"

KEY WORD: "Vengeance/Revenge" 3 times

PURPOSE: About 150 years after Jonah's revival, Nineveh is deep in sin so God announces their destruction because of sin.

THEME: The justice of God in destroying Nineveh

Suppose someone invited you our to lunch and took you to a nice restaurant. They ordered expensive food for both of you, enjoyed the meal, then got up and walked out without waiting for the check. When you asked them why they didn't pay they were surprised, saying they didn't know they had to pay and weren't prepared to pay. They just wanted a nice meal is all! Sound unbelievable? Everyone knows you must pay for what you do. Or do they? Often people sin assuming they'll never have to pay for it. God holds each one accountable for their sin. Unless it is put under the blood of Jesus, it remains on the account of the one who committed the sin.

Nineveh is a prime example of this. Founded by Nimrod, who also founded Babel, it was a large, virtually impregnable city. The walls were 100 feet high and wide enough for 3 chariots to ride side by side. In addition there were 1,500 towers which were 200 feet high. A moat 60 feet deep and 140 feet wide surrounded the whole city. The walls were 60 miles long, making the city about 350 square miles. The Tigris River flowed along one side and the Khoser River came through the town. This provided valuable water as well as further protection. Suburbs and fields surrounded the city. At least 1 million people lived there. These were cruel, heartless people. They had a mania for blood and savagery, comparable to the worst in Nazi Germany. They didn't just defeat other nations, they enjoyed bringing the worst suffering and misery possible. Jonah's revival of 150 years earlier had completely faded and their evil was worse than ever.

DOOM DECLARED (1) I don't know what kind of speaker Nahum was, but he was a tremendously gifted writer. The book is a beautiful literary masterpiece. He uses special Hebrew words to describe God. He points out God is very angry at Nineveh for its sin. God has been patient but even God's patience has limits -- and His limits are almost here. God is all powerful, and withholding judgment so far wasn't done because He was weak but to give more time for repentance. Actually God isn't being cruel in destroying Nineveh, He has been very

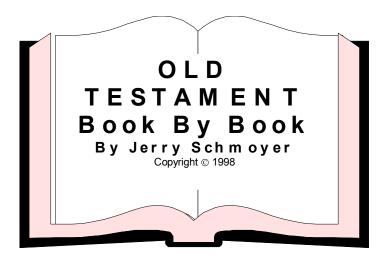
patient with them. Judging them brings justice to the world and glorifies Him. It just gives them what they chose anyway.

Ironically, God used the rivers and walls they used for protection to destroy them. That was His show of justice on them.

DOOM DESCRIBED (2) Nehemiah not only tells WHAT will happen (chapter 1) but also HOW it will happen (chapter 2). Babylon will use the rivers to flood the city and easily destroy it. Inside the nobles and people will be so overconfident that they will party and be drunk, not believing Nineveh could fall. They will be wrong! History records the fall of Nineveh just exactly as God predicted!

DOOM DESERVED (3) In chapter 3 the WHY of the destruction is detailed. The people are evil, cruel and bloody. They are guilty of idolatrous practices, witchcraft and destruction. They will reap what they owed. They showed no one mercy, and none will be shown to them. The city will be so thoroughly destroyed no one will even remember its location. That is what happened. For almost 3,000 years its very location was unknown, not until 1842. The city literally sinned itself to death. It didn't even try to change or think of repenting. It died. Somehow they thought God would judge lesser nations for lesser sin, but they would escape. Not so. Unfortunately there are many parallels with America. I remember hearing Billy Graham say that if God doesn't judge America He will have to apologize to Sodom and Gomorrah! Well, God isn't going to apologize. There is a price to pay for sin.

No one would think of going into a restaurant and not having to pay for the food they eat, but many today think they won't have to pay for their sin. This applies to nations and individuals both. Aren't you glad that Jesus paid for your sins on the cross and, because you accepted His free gift of salvation, you don't have to worry about that any more? Take some time now and thank Him for what He has done for you and what He will do for you.



HABAKKUK: PATIENCE

TITLE: After prophet who wrote it AUTHOR: Habakkuk ("embrace") DATE of WRITING: 610 - 599 BC PLACE of WRITING: Judah

TIME COVERED: Conquest by Babylon RECIPIENTS: Judah, just before conquest KEY VERSE: 2:4 "See, he is puffed up; his

desires are not upright-- but the righteous will live by his faith--

KEY WORDS: "Why" "Woe" (5 times)

PURPOSE: Habakkuk is concerned over God's apparent lack of concern about Judah's sin.

God says He will discipline them through Babylon, then judge Babylon.

THEME: God's patience in dealing with man

What do you do when you find yourself in a world ruled by evil, when people around you flout the will of God yet God does nothing about it? That is the problem Habakkuk faced. Month after month, year after year he saw his nation falling apart because of flagrant sin. "Do something, God!" he cries out. Then God starts doing something - He disciplines His people with the Babylonians! "But they are worse then we are!" Habakkuk cries. "I know," God says, I'll judge them before long, too."

Habakkuk is 3 short, pointed chapters. It consists of dialogue between Habakkuk and God about what's happening and about how to accept God's dealings when we don't understand them. It applies to us today individually when things happen that we don't understand. It applies to us as a nation for we, too, have turned far from God.

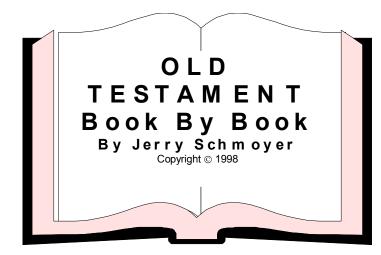
PROBLEMS (1) Why does God allow His people to live in sin? Why do the wicked prosper? Why does God allow His people to live in sin, oppressing and taking advantage of the minority who try to remain faithful to Him?

People today ask the same thing: why doesn't God stop war? Why do good people suffer? Why do unfair things happen? How can God let abortion continue? The answer that He gives to Habakkuk is that He is patient. We must be patient to await His making wrong right. After all, if He weren't patient with us where would we be? If He would have judged this world before we were born where would we be? Patience is an important virtue in those who would be like Jesus. It is very lacking today. Everything must happen fast and efficiently. Our very lives are full of trying to cram more and more into them. God tells us to patiently wait for Him (Psalm 27:14; 40:1). God is never late, but He's never early either. There is no way of trying to rush God, He works at His pace, and He is a patient God.

Before long, though, God tells Habakkuk, He will discipline the people's sin with the Babylonians. He isn't indifferent to sin, He has a plan which is unfolding. That brings up another question to Habakkuk, though. The Babylonians were worse than the Jews! Has God changed His standards? No, the Jews were more accountable. Will God forsake His people entirely? If so, what about His promises to Abraham? How will having His special people destroyed bring glory to God?

POWER (2) God answers these questions of Habakkuk's by reassuring Him that He is righteous -- He will judge Babylon, too. Those who are righteous will be spared the eternal consequences of sin, but not the temporal. "The just shall live by faith" (2:4) is quoted three times in the New Testament (Rom 1:17; Gal 3:11; Heb 10:38). This verse was the what God used to motivate Martin Luther to start the Reformation. God says the ungodly, whether Jew or Babylonian, will perish and the godly, whoever they are, will have eternal life. God says He is not indifferent to sin, He will judge it (Gal 6:7). "Be patient, Habakkuk," God is saying, "I know what I'm doing here!" But patience is hard to learn. It doesn't come naturally or easily. It takes suffering and difficulties to stretch us and teach us patience (Rom 5:3; Job 1:21; James 5:11). We only see how great God is when we patiently wait for Him to act.

PRAISE (3) As Habakkuk realized God's sovereign power and that all creation was the work of His hands and under control. God is in control of the forces of nature as well as the nations of the world. Even though it seemed things were out of control, God was (and is) still in control. He closes with a tremendous affirmation of God's sovereign control and recommitment of Himself to praise and trust God no matter what. Though the fig tree does not bud and there are no grapes on the vines, though the olive crop fails and the fields produce no food, though there are no sheep in the pen and no cattle in the stalls, yet I will rejoice in the LORD, I will be joyful in God my Savior. The Sovereign LORD is my strength; he makes my feet like the feet of a deer, he enables me to go on the heights.



ZEPHANIAH: DAY of the LORD

TITLE: After the prophet who wrote it AUTHOR: "Zephaniah" means "He Whom

God Has Hidden"

DATE of WRITING: About 630 BC

PLACE of WRITING: Judah (Jerusalem?) TIME COVERED: 630 BC to eternity future

RECIPIENTS: Judah and Jerusalem

KEY VERSE: 1:7, 12 Be silent before the

Sovereign LORD, for the day of the LORD is near.

The LORD has prepared a sacrifice; he has consecrated those he has invited. ... At that time I will search Jerusalem with lamps and punish those who are complacent, who are like wine left on its dregs, who think, 'The LORD will do nothing, either good or bad.'

KEY WORD: "Day of the Lord" (20 times), "desolation" (7 times), "remnant" (4 times)

PURPOSE: to warn of coming judgment and to comfort the faithful remnant

THEME: Day of the Lord as prefigured by the Babylonian invasion

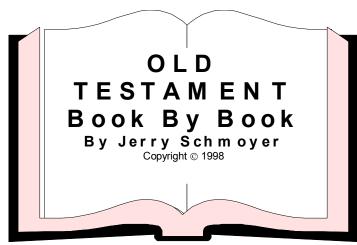
Everyone would like to know the future. People are hoping to find some answers to what lies ahead. Unfortunately they assume the future will be better than the present. That's what they base their hope on. But what about when the future gets worse? Then what? That's was God's message through Zephaniah to the people of his day, and it is God's message to people today, too. The only hope God could offer to them then was in the distant future -- the Day of the Lord.

JUDGMENT IN THE DAY OF THE LORD (1:1 - 3:8) Zephaniah ministered at the same time as Jeremiah, when Jerusalem fell to Babylon. While Jeremiah was tender in wooing the people to God, Zephaniah hammered hard at the nation's conscience. His message in contained in just 53 verses but it contains some of the strongest statements of judgment in the whole Old Testament. God is the God of the universe. He is holy and righteous and expects people to live in accordance with his will. Sin and rebellion MUST be punished. The Jews have gotten so far from God that it's too late to stop the coming judgment. Sins of idolatry, indifference, conformity and irresponsibility have gone too far for too long. Judgment is coming for sure. The only hope is the coming Day of the Lord (see JOEL for a chart and more information).

This future judgment will include not only Israel but all the Gentile nations, too. It will culminate with the battle of Armageddon.

SALVATION IN THE DAY OF THE LORD (3:9-20) Then will come Israel's rejoicing at the Millennium comes. The Jews will repent and turn back to God and the Messiah will rule on David's throne forever. Unfortunately it will take the tribulation for them to repent.

Their problem then, like so often is also the case today, is complacency. Complacency has been called the 'curse of Christendom." It opens God's people to compromise. It's more deadly than outright rebellion because it is harder to recognize and change. Lukewarmness is something God hates (Rev. 3:15-16). Complacency is like a malignancy: lethal when ignored but conquerable when confronted. Ask God to point out any complacency that has slipped into your life. Repent and turn to God for His forgiveness and restoration.



HAGGAI: PRIORITIES

TITLE: After prophet who wrote it AUTHOR: Haggai ("My Feast") DATE of WRITING: Aug-Dec, 520 BC PLACE of WRITING: Jerusalem TIME COVERED: Aug-Dec, 520 BC RECIPIENTS: Returned from captivity

KEY VERSE: 1:4 "Is it a time for you yourselves to be living in your paneled houses, while this house remains a ruin?"

2:9 'The glory of this present house will be greater than the glory of the former house,' says the LORD Almighty. 'And in this place I will grant peace,' declares the LORD Almighty."

KEY WORD: "The Lord's House" (8 times) "Consider" (5 times)

PURPOSE: to encourage the people to rebuild the temple

THEME: God must be our number one priority

Have you ever started something you didn't finish? That happens to everyone. What causes it? We may loose interest or motivation or just not have enough time, but I think there is a reason behind these. I think its because we change our priorities. We no longer see it as important as we once did. Unfortunately many good things in life don't get done for this very reason. They may be important in our mind, but unless we make them a top priority in our time commitments they won't get accomplished. Knowing the importance of learning the Bible means nothing unless we make spending time reading and studying it a priority.

ENTER HAGGAI Haggai found this same thing true of the Jews after they returned from captivity. Haggai lived during the time of Ezra, 14 years after the Jews started returning the Palestine from Babylon. They had started rebuilding the temple by laying its foundations, but never finished it. Haggai calls the people to finish what they started for God.

CALL TO REBUILD (1) The people were making excuses as to why they hadn't finished the building. The people made excuses: too busy and no time for God's house. Their priorities were wrong. Their lives were showing the results of wrong priorities: dissatisfaction and frustration. They worked hard but found no real joy. Zerubbabel (the governor) and Joshua (the high priest) led the people in repentance and the work on the temple was resumed..

CALL TO BEHOLD (2:1-9) Seven weeks later, when the temple was almost completed, the older people started becoming discouraged because it was so grossly inferior to Solomon's temple which they still remembered (but which the Babylonians had destroyed). Haggai says they are not to live in the past (it won't return) and not to compare what they have with what God has given others. God's people aren't in competition with each other -- a good messages for churches today. Outer appearances don't tell the whole story by any means. God looks at man's heart, not the size of his buildings. God focus' on eternal values, not earthly things.

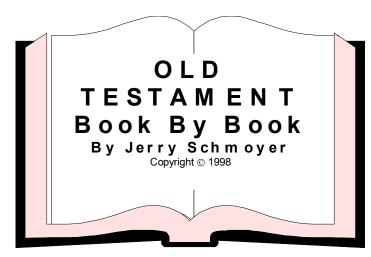
CALL TO BEHAVE (2:10-19) Two months after the second sermon Haggai gave a third sermon, warning the people about focusing on the outer functions and rituals of their faith while their hearts stayed hard and far from God. They were just going through the motions of playing

'church.' Haggai challenges them to learn from the past, for this hypocrisy is what caused them to go into captivity in the first place. Again they repented and put God first.

CALL TO BELIEVE (2:20-23) Later that same day Haggai's fourth recorded sermon was given. He encouraged them to keep their gaze on the future and live each day in light of it. That is the only way to have correct priorities today. He talked about when the Messiah will come to rule and reign in Israel. Keeping our eyes on eternal things is the only way to have right priorities today.

How do you determine your priorities? What are your lifetime goals (what do you want to be or do during your lifetime)? In order to accomplish them, what must you do in the next year? Now, what must you be doing each day in order to accomplish those goals?

GOAL AREA	WHAT I WANT TO BE OR ACCOMPLISH DURING MY LIFE	WHAT I NEED TO DO NOW IN ORDER TO MEET THIS GOAL
SPIRITUAL	1.	1.
	2.	2.
	1.	1.
ACADEMIC &		
CAREER	2.	2.
	1.	1.
RELATION-		
SHIPS	2.	2.



ZECHARIAH: HISTORY

TITLE: After prophet who wrote it

AUTHOR: Zechariah ("God Remembers")

DATE of WRITING: 520-518 BC PLACE of WRITING: Jerusalem

TIME COVERED: 520 BC to eternity future RECIPIENTS: Returned from captivity

KEY VERSE: 9:9-10 Rejoice greatly, O Daughter of Zion! Shout, Daughter of Jerusalem! See, your king comes to you, righteous and having salvation, gentle and riding on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey. I will take away the chariots from Ephraim and the warhorses from Jerusalem, and the battle bow will be broken. He will proclaim peace to the nations. His rule will extend from sea to sea and from the River to the ends of the earth.

KEY WORD: "Word of the Lord" (14 times); "Lord of Hosts" (52 times)

PURPOSE: to encourage the people to rebuild the temple as well as reveal future events.

THEME: God is in control of history.

There used to be a children's book titled "The Chance World." It described a world in which everything happened by chance. The sun might rise or it might not, or it might appear at any hour, or the moon might come up instead. When children were born they might have one head or a dozen heads, and those heads might not be on their shoulders -- there might be no shoulders -- but arranged about the limbs. If one jumped up in the air it was impossible to predict whether he would ever come down again. That he came an hour ago was no guarantee that he would do it the next time. For every day, antecedence and consequence varied, and gravitation and everything else changed from hour to hour. What a world that would be!

Fortunately God didn't make the world that way. He has consistent laws that stay in effect. We live in a world where there is obviously a Power behind everything, controlling and keeping it all going. This doesn't only apply to nature, it also applies to time. God is also in charge of history. Nothing there, either, happens by chance. It is all as God plans and controls it. He is in control of everything. That should bring great comfort to us!

ENTER, ZECHARIAH Zechariah was both a priest and a prophet. His grandfather returned from Babylon with Zerubabble and he was a young man when he began prophesying. Haggai was also preaching at this same time and place. Also at this time Esther was going through her conflict for the lives of all the Jews in the world. That, too, shows how God is in control of all.

Zechariah's book is the largest of the minor prophets. It is similar to Revelation in the New Testament: at the end of the testament, mostly about future prophecy and written to encourage God's people as they go through hard times. Both show that truly history is "Hisstory."

THE GOAL OF HISTORY I (8 visions). The first section of the book consists of 8 visions showing that God is in charge of history and brining it all to the point where He Himself will rule and reign in Jerusalem. Like salmon instinctively return home to spawn, God has built it into man to return to Him. Unlike salmon, however, man has a free will and often goes in the opposite direction. Still, God uses man's rebellion for His glory. He used Augustus' census to get Mary and Joseph to Bethlehem so Jesus would be born there and fulfill prophecy (Micah

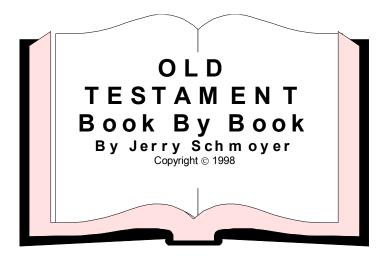
5:2). He used Domitian's exiling John to Patmos to give John the vision that resulted in the book of Revelation. God is truly in charge of history.

He used a wind to destroy the Spanish Armada and leave Protestant England free to spread the gospel. He used little snowflakes to defeat proud Napoleon and save Europe. He stopped the sun in its progression so the Jews could defeat their enemies in Joshua's time.

LESSONS FROM HISTORY (4 messages). Then Zechariah preached 4 sermons to the people. He encouraged them to learn from their past failures -- learn from history! But who ever does? They went into captivity because they just went through the motions of fasting and serving God. Now they are doing the same thing. They are 'playing church,' but God isn't first in their hearts. Zechariah tells them a time is coming when they will be fully restored and in God's presence, so they should prepare for that time by living for Him now.

THE GOAL OF HISTORY II (2 burdens). Zechariah then writes about the coming King. In his first coming (chapters 9-11) he will be rejected and crucified. Many details are given: betrayed for 30 pieces of silver, riding a cold into town, hands pierced, dying to save others, etc. He is called Servant (3:8), Branch (3:8), Priest (6:13), King (6:13), Betrayed One (11:12-13), Pierced One (12:10), Fountain (13:1), Shepherd (13:7), god (13:7-9) and Lord over all (14:5,9).

The second burden (chapter 12-14) is about the second coming of the Messiah, when the kingdom will be established on earth and Jerusalem will be the center of worship for the Messiah-King. Just as everything Zechariah said about the first coming of the Messiah



MALACHI: REPENTANCE

TITLE: After prophet who wrote it

AUTHOR: Malachi ("Messenger of God")

DATE of WRITING: 445 - 397 BC PLACE of WRITING: Judah

TIME COVERED: Between 445 and 397 BC RECIPIENTS: Israel after return from Bab. KEY VERSE: 3:9-10 You are under a

curse-- the whole nation of you-- because you are robbing me. Bring the whole tithe into the storehouse, that there may be food in my house. Test me in this," says the LORD Almighty, "and see if I will not throw open the floodgates of heaven and pour out so much blessing that you will not have room enough for it.

KEY WORDS: "You say" (11 times), "wherein" (6), "cursed" (7)

PURPOSE: Reproof for neglect of the temple & worship

THEME: Repent and turn back to God

Once upon a time there was a young man who was 'in love' with a young lady -- at least that's what he told her. Once a week, on his day off, he called on the young lady -- that is if he didn't have other company, feel tired, or have somewhere else to go. She loved good music and great literature but he had no interest in either. Actually, he was restless and fidgety when around her. "Why couldn't he stay longer or come more often?" she wondered.

The reason was that the young man still cared for an old sweetheart. Though he had agreed to make a break, he was still spending several hours a week with her. It seemed they still had so much in common: they loved the same things, the same people and the same amusements. Yet to the young lady to whom he had recently declared his love, he would admit to no other loyalty.

What is the analogy I'm trying to make? Unfortunately it is too obvious: that's the way God's people then, the Jews, were toward God. It happens today, too. Vows and promises are made, but the pull of the world interferes. Words say one thing, but actions another.

BATTER UP! It's the bottom of the ninth, two out, and you're behind 50-0. It looks kind of bleak! Malachi is the last man to step to bat, trying to win the game for God by bringing the home team back to spiritual faithfulness. Can he do it?

Malachi lived and ministered during the time of Nehemiah, who was the leader. Malachi was the prophet who preached to the people. Almost 90% of the book was spoken directly by God. The book concludes with a call to repentance. This book is a link, a bridge between the Old and New Testaments.

COMPASSION (1:1-5) The book opens with God clearly declaring His love for His people, but they doubted His love. "How can you love us?" they asked in their doubt and self-pity. God answers by saying His actions in the past prove His love. No matter what they did or didn't do, God still loved them. He wants His people to feel loved and secure and to respond to that love by loving Him in return.

COMPLAINT (1:6 - 3:15) God expects and deserves the total honor and devotion of His people, but often He doesn't receive that. In Malachi's day the leaders were leading the people astray because of their unfaithfulness. While outwardly claiming to follow God, they married unbelieving Gentiles and let them bring their heathen idols into Israel. Throughout the nation the family was breaking down and divorce was common. Because God hadn't judged their life styles they said God approved of what they were doing! They didn't support God's work and workers financially as they were commanded to do.

They were prideful and arrogant. They needed to repent, to "change their mind" and reverse their direction. They needed to do a U-turn, an about-face, in attitude and action. If they don't there will be judgment from God.

CONDEMNATION (3:16 - 4:6) There is a faithful minority in Israel and God promises to remember them even though they will suffer the consequences the whole nation faces. The majority, though, need to repent or suffer judgment. Unfortunately they didn't repent when Malachi preached or even later. The book ends with a promise of coming judgment unless God's messenger's message of repentance is accepted. *Mal 4:5-6 "See, I will send you the prophet Elijah before that great and dreadful day of the LORD comes. He will turn the hearts of the fathers to their children, and the hearts of the children to their fathers; or else I will come and strike the land with a curse."*

This prophet is to be like Elijah. He will preach a message of repentance like Malachi did. If the people repent, they will be forgiven and restored. God so deeply desires this that He will soon send His Messiah, but first He will send this messenger to prepare the way for Him (3:1-6). With this call to repentance and promise of a coming messenger the Old Testament closes. Four hundred years later the New Testament opens with John, who fulfilled Malachi's prophecies, coming preaching the same message of repentance.

God's message of repentance is still being delivered today. He wants and deserves our whole being, not just some parts some times. Anything less must be repented of and changed. God still loves His people and welcomes them home. The longer we put off repentance the more we will have to repent of and the less time to repent in! Don't be like the young man in the story whose actions didn't match his profession of love.