

Genesis 1-11

Approximate date of events: 4000-2200 BC

Why should we take the first eleven chapters of Genesis (including Adam and Eve, the Flood, and the Tower of Babel) literally?

- A miracle is the only reasonable explanation for the universe. How did all of the things in the universe come to exist? The First Law of Thermodynamics states that matter and energy are always conserved. From where did the matter and energy in the universe come? That is something for which there is no explanation that is in harmony with scientific principles -- unless God did it. Something does not come from nothing, life doesn't come from lifeless things, and order does not come from disorder; however, an atheistic universe requires all three of these impossibilities to have occurred. **Romans 1:18-22** tells us that all men have what they need to understand that God exists. Read Psalm 14:1 and Acts 14:17.
- The rest of the Bible assumes the Creation account is factual. **Exodus 20:9-11; 1 Corinthians 15:45; and 1 Timothy 2:13-14** are some of those passages. We cannot accept theories that require reading in extra things into the text. Many theories about how Creation happened do this. Some abuse **2 Peter 3:8** by saying that each day of creation an age in which certain things said to be created formed or evolved. Others claim there is a gap between 1:1 and 1:2. They try to put in words where Scripture has nothing. Denying a literal Creation will spread further into the Bible (Noah and the Flood) and it will not satisfy the Bible's critics.
- The rest of the Bible assumes the Flood account is factual. **Isaiah 54:8-9; 2 Peter 2:4-5; and 2 Peter 3:3-6** are examples. The Flood was a miracle. In 6:17 God told Noah that He would "destroy from under heaven all flesh" (also read 7:4). 7:19-20 shows that all of the mountains were submerged. There is no room in the account for a flood that covered part of the earth, and there is no way that this was a natural occurrence. Many geologists today assume that things like the Flood never happen (uniformitarianism) and then "prove" that it did not happen based on that assumption.

There are 1189 chapters in the Bible. Man and God started out in perfect fellowship. By the middle of the third chapter Man had destroyed the fellowship. The rest of the book is about God's bringing Man back.

In the Tower of Babel account we see men organized to oppose God's purposes. Compare 11:1-4 with 9:1. We learn a number of lessons about humanity. It frequently tries to exalt itself and oppose God, as Adam and Eve did. It often seeks to substitute its own plan for God's, as Adam and Eve did. The rebellion is doomed to failure from the start.

The Promise of Christ:

In the third chapter of Genesis (**3:15**), we see God's plan from rescuing all of mankind from the sin that had so recently entered the world. Also read **Galatians 4:4** and **1 John 3:8**.

The Practical Applications:

Our existence is due to the boundless love and miraculous power of God -- as is our salvation. All our attempts to find better ways than God's ways are sinful and will bring suffering. We need to trust God and do things His way even if the whole world is against us.

Job

Approximate date of events: probably before 1450 BC

Chapters 1-2 and 42 teach important lessons: Satan watches us on earth to accuse us; God limits what Satan can do to us; we can remain faithful in times of trouble; and God rewards faithfulness. There are also important lessons in the rest of the book. As Job and his friends argue about why men suffer, they touch on some of the deepest questions of life. A summary of the book of Job follows:

Satan's Challenges (1-2): Satan takes everything but Job's life, but Job stays faithful (1:22; 2:10).

Job's Statement of Suffering (3): Job wishes he were dead. He wonders why he suffers (3:20-23).

Eliphaz's First Speech (4-5): Eliphaz says the innocent do not suffer, implying that Job is guilty of something. Eliphaz suggests that Job should repent of whatever he has done (4:7-9; 5:8).

Job's Response (6-7): Job wishes God would cut off his life, but he still has faith (6:8-10).

Bildad's First Speech (8): Bildad says God simply punishes the evil and rewards the good (8:4-6).

Job's Response (9-10): Job says he knows that God is greater than he, and he wishes for someone to mediate between them. He wonders why it is good for God to do as He does (9:1-3,33; 10:1-3).

Zophar's First Speech (11): Zophar wishes God would speak against Job (11:5-6).

Job's Response (12-14): Job says that the wicked prosper and he wants to speak to God (12:6; 13:3).

Eliphaz's Second Speech (15): Eliphaz says no one is pure before God and that the wicked are always punished thoroughly (15:14-16).

Job's Response (16-17): Job says God has hunted him and he wonders about hope (16:9; 17:15-16).

Bildad's Second Speech (18): Bildad argues that the wicked are always quickly punished (18:5-6).

Job's Response (19): Job says that God has wronged him but he still believes in Him (19:5-6,25-27).

Zophar's Second Speech (20): Zophar maintains that the prosperity of the wicked is brief (20:4-7).

Job's Response (21): Job says the evil often prosper and he cannot see their punishment (21:7-9).

Eliphaz's Third Speech (22): Eliphaz viciously attacks Job for his supposed wickedness (22:3-10).

Job's Response (23-24): Job wants to go to God and present his case before Him (23:3-7).

Bildad's Third Speech (25): Bildad states than man cannot be just before God (25:4).

Job's Response and Final Statement (26-31): Job seems to blame God for his state, saying God has been cruel and boldly asking God to answer what he has asked him (27:1-5; 30:20-21; 31:35-40).

Elihu's Critique (32-37): Elihu says that Job should not question God and that God is just (33:10-13; 34:10-11; 37:23-24).

God's First Examination (38:1-40:5): God asks Job if he can explain the world around him (38:2-3).

God's Second Examination (40:6-42:6): God asks Job if he can be more just than God (40:7-13).

Job's Vindication (42:7-17): God accepts Job's confession and rebukes his three friends.

The Promise of Christ:

In 9:32-33, Job wished there was someone to intercede with God for him. What he did not know was that Jesus Christ was the fulfillment of that wish (Hebrews 7:24-28).

The Practical Applications:

We can hold fast our integrity no matter who or what opposes us.

We can rejoice because Jesus Christ is there to intercede for us.

Even though we do not always understand why we suffer, we can trust God to make things right.

Genesis 12-50

Approximate date of events: 2150-1800 BC

In this section we read of the patriarchs, particularly Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and Joseph. With great faith they were able to help establish God's chosen people and bring the Messiah into the world. We need to study their great examples (Romans 15:4).

Abraham - In Genesis 12:1-5, the LORD tells Abram to leave his family and travel to Caanan. Abram is promised a nation, a great name, and that all the earth would be blessed in him. The blessing will come through Jesus Christ (Galatians 3:16). In 14:13-16, after his nephew Lot is taken captive from Sodom, Abram leads his own army and defeats four kings. In 15:3-6, God promises that a nation would come from him. He is justified by his faith (Romans 4:2-3). In 22:15-18, Abraham prepares to offer Isaac before God prevents him from carrying out His order. He had enough faith to do what God said in any situation. Abraham trusted Him to fulfill His promises (Hebrews 11:17-19).

Joseph - In 37:23-28, Joseph suffers betrayal and enslavement at the hands of his family, but it does not make him bitter. In 39:8-9, Joseph refuses his master's wife's desire. Despite his troubles he is still loyal to God. In 45:4-7, Joseph has every chance to take his revenge on his brothers, but instead he is cheerful about his situation and sees the hand of God in it.

The patriarchs also made mistakes and the Bible honestly includes them (1 Corinthians 10:11).

Deceit - In 12:14-20, Abram has misrepresented his wife as his sister, fearing someone may kill him for her in Egypt. In 20:2-3, Abraham tries the same excuse in Gerar. He believes that God could give a man of 99 years and a barren woman of 89 years a son, but he fails when fear for his safety grips him. In 26:6-7, Isaac tries the same trick as his father did, also in Gerar. Where might Isaac have gotten the idea?

Partiality - In 25:27-28, Isaac and Rebekah play favorites with Esau and Jacob. This is one reason Jacob deceives Isaac to receive the blessing (27:1-40), resulting in a murder threat and Jacob's staying away for about 20 years. Jacob does not learn the lesson completely. In 29:30-33, Jacob's wives are rivals. In 37:3-4, Jacob's favoritism leads to the Joseph's brothers' selling him into slavery. We do not inherit sin (Ezekiel 18:20), but the effects of sin may hurt future generations.

Worldliness - In 13:8-12, Lot takes the better land when he is asked to choose, and starts moving toward Sodom. By 14:12 he is living there and by 19:1 he is sitting in the city gate. In 19:7, he calls the lewd trespassers "brothers", and soon offers them his two daughters. In 19:15-16, God has to push him out when he hesitates to leave. Despite all of his problems, 2 Peter 2:7-8 still calls him a righteous man. Lot suffers greatly for all that he did. His daughters probably learned the immoral behavior of 19:32-36 in Sodom. Lot paid a terrible price for his friendship with the world. Despite their flaws, the New Testament praises the patriarchs (Matthew 8:11; Hebrews 11:17-22).

The Promise of Christ:

The promise of all peoples' being blessed through one of their descendants is made to Abraham (12:3; 22:18), Isaac (26:4), and Jacob (28:14).

Jacob prophesies that Judah would rule until Shiloh would come (49:10), a reference to Christ.

The Practical Applications:

God may expect His people to make long journeys in a far from home, physically or spiritually. No distance is too far nor situation too bad for faith in God to overcome.

Our successes and our sins may have effects far beyond ourselves.

Exodus

Approximate date of events: 1550-1445 BC

After Jacob's family has come to Egypt, the Egyptians have enslaved the Israelites and begun to persecute them. Moses tried to help Israel one way before delivering them in God's way forty years later. There are many lessons that we can learn from God's deliverance of Israel from Egypt.

The Power of God - How could slaves led by a killer who fled the country hope to escape a powerful tyrant? It would have been impossible without God! Look at these examples of His power: In Exodus 6:6, God promises to bring the Israelites out of Egypt with great power.

In 7:14-17, God begins bringing plagues upon Egypt. In addition to the plague of water turning into blood, there were frogs, lice, flies, pestilence on animals, boils, hail, locusts, darkness, and the death of the firstborn (8:21-5). It is clear that God is supreme. Pharaoh's magicians, who would know what trickery could accomplish, know these things are from God (8:19).

In 14:13-14, God parts the Red Sea, and the Israelites walk through on dry land. The Egyptian army is drowned in the sea.

In 19:16-18, the physical manifestation of God's presence is powerful, and in 40:34-35, the manifestation of God's glory is closely connected with His power.

The Care of God - The power of God and the care of God for His people work together.

In 2:2-9, we see Moses' parents' faith in doing all that they could to protect him (Hebrews 11:23). When they can do no more, they put him on the river and God continues to take care of him.

In 3:7-9, God announces His care for His people, and says it is time to act (Genesis 15:13-16).

In 15:13, the people sing of God's care for them after Pharaoh's army is drowned in the Red Sea.

In 29:45-46, God reveals His presence with His people in His tabernacle according to His covenant.

In 33:12-17, the people have broken the covenant by worshipping a golden calf. Moses knows that the presence of God is essential and successfully pleads with God to be with them, with His grace.

Christ, the Passover, and the Exodus - 1 Corinthians 5:7-8 says Christ is our Passover, the feast that Israel celebrates before leaving Egypt. His crucifixion occurred at Passover (John 19:14). He is the Lamb of God (Exodus 12:3; John 1:29). He is without blemish (Exodus 12:5; 1 Peter 1:18-19).

None of his bones were broken (Exodus 12:46; John 19:36). There are more parts to the picture.

- Christ can rescue us from slavery to sin - Exodus 2:21-23; John 8:34-36; Romans 6:17-18
- Christ leads us to freedom through water - Exodus 14:21-22; 1 Corinthians 10:1-4
- Christ makes a covenant with His blood for us to be His People - Exodus 19:5; Exodus 24:7-8; 1 Corinthians 11:25; Hebrews 8:10-12
- We can rebel and break the covenant - Exodus 32:1-6; Hebrews 3:12-19
- But we can only have true forgiveness through Christ- Exodus 32:20-24; Hebrews 8:8-10

The Promise of Christ:

While Exodus does not explicitly foretell the coming of Christ, Christ is the fulfillment of several passages about the Passover Lamb (12:5-7,46) and water from the rock (17:6; 1 Corinthians 10:4).

The Practical Applications:

Anything is possible with the care and power of God.

Christ will deliver us from the slavery of sin if we follow God's covenant.

It is all too easy to forget the power of God and turn from following Him.

Leviticus

Approximate date of events: 1445 BC

Some people think of Leviticus as a long list of detailed rules and regulations, but that misses what the book has to offer. Two prominent features of the book are sacrifices and feasts.

Sacrifices: Atonement - In Leviticus 1 we see the burnt offering. Man had sinned against God, and an offering was required to make up for that. The blood of animals could not truly forgive (Hebrews 10:4), but these sacrifices were what God commanded to make things right. In 16:15-16 we read about the Day of Atonement, when the high priest would go before God to make atonement for the sins of the people. 17:11 tells Israel not to eat blood because it is the blood (life) that makes atonement. The New Testament uses the word *propitiation*. Hebrews 2:17 tells us that Christ is our High Priest. But He was acting not just as the High Priest: He was also the sacrifice.

Sacrifices: Substitution - Romans 3:25 shows that Christ is the propitiation for our sin. Imagine that you were under the Law of Moses and you needed to make an offering. Read Leviticus 1:3a. You would take one of your best animals. Read 1:3b. You would lead it to the tabernacle. Read 1:4. You would lay your hand on its head. It is because of what you did that this animal is dying. Read 1:5. Feel the animal jerk as the knife cuts. Smell the warm blood pouring out. Listen to the dying cries. See life ebb away. **Would you understand the seriousness of sin?** Romans 5:6-8 and 1 Peter 2:24 are two passages that show how Christ died for our sins.

Feasts: God's Care Past, Present, and Future - Passover and the Feast of Unleavened Bread (23:4-8) came in the spring and commemorated God's deliverance of Israel from the Egyptians (see the Exodus lesson). The Feast of Weeks, or Pentecost (23:15-21) celebrated God's gift of another harvest. The Feast of Booths (23:34-43) celebrated the end of the harvest, and the people lived in booths to commemorate how Israel lived while God delivered them from Egypt. We can also see some of God's future plans in the feasts. Christ is our Passover (1 Corinthians 5:7-8). Pentecost would see the beginning of the harvest of souls in the church 1475 years later (Acts 2).

A Tapestry of Holiness - There was much more to the laws of cleanliness than hygiene and diet. The point was to demonstrate what holiness was. Uncleanness did not equal sin -- there was nothing wrong with having children, but Chapter 12 prescribes periods of uncleanness for childbirth. God created a pattern of keeping clean in all parts of society that showed His people how they should take great care and be undefiled in every way before approaching God. Read 20:26 and 18:24-25. Even in the Old Testament, love was at the center. Read 19:18,34.

Following God's Rules Exactly - In **10:1-3,8-11** Nadab and Abihu offer "strange fire" and die. They did not properly regard God as holy. The point was clear: serve God exactly as He commands!

The Promise of Christ:

While Leviticus does not explicitly foretell the coming of Christ, Christ is the fulfillment of all of the Old Testament system (Colossians 2:16-17).

The Practical Applications:

Sin is a serious matter, and the forgiveness of sin requires a dear price.

We must have spiritual cleanliness in our lives if we want to be pleasing to God.

We must approach God in the exact way that He specifies.

Numbers

Approximate date of events: 1445-1407 BC

The Book of Numbers gets its name from the times the Israelites were counted (1:2 and 26:2). The two figures are very close, showing that God sustained His people in the wilderness and that He could use the same number of people, cleansed of rebellion, to take the Promised Land.

Murmuring - The Israelites seemed to be grumbling and complaining constantly. In 11:1-3, the people complain and God sends a fire. Then in 11:4-6, the people tire of manna and whine for meat. God sends quail and a plague. In 12:1-8, Miriam and Aaron complain against Moses, and Miriam gets leprosy. In 16:1-3, Korah and his allies stage a rebellion; the earth swallows the leaders and fire from the LORD claims many others. Then in 16:41-42, the people blame Moses and Aaron for the rebels' deaths, and God sends a plague. The accounts of the ten spies, water at Meribah, and fiery serpents, all of which involved murmuring, are mentioned elsewhere in this sheet.

The Spies - At God's direction, Moses sent twelve men as spies to the Canaan (13:17-20). Ten of them saw that God's promise was true, but doubted God's ability to help them conquer it (13:27-33). After their recent exodus, they should have believed. The people forgot God's grace and complained (14:1-3). God made them wander for forty years because they had seen His signs and yet had failed to trust and believe (14:22-23). The time of wandering would cleanse the people of the doubters and complainers and leave a more faithful generation to conquer the land.

Moses' Sin at Kadesh-Barnea - The people grumbled against Moses because of a lack of water (20:2-5). Moses struck a rock to bring water, instead of speaking to it as God had commanded (20:8-12). Moses was not allowed to lead the people into the Promised Land. God said Moses did not believe Him. Moses had faithfully followed God for a long time, but at that moment his faith failed. If we do not do exactly what God has asked us to do we also show unbelief (James 2:17).

The Bronze Serpent - In 21:4-9, after more complaining by the Israelites, the LORD sent snakes with a deadly bite. The cure was to look at the bronze serpent Moses had made. John 3:14-15 shows that we must look to Christ for our spiritual healing as the Israelites did to the bronze serpent.

Balaam - As Israel approached the Promised Land, the Moabites and Midianites tried to get rid of them. They tried to hire the prophet Balaam to come and curse Israel (22:4-14), but God told Balaam He did not want them cursed. Balaam was again asked to come. God had already told him what to do; he should have known not to go (22:18-22). Even his donkey's talking to him (22:30-34) did not impress Balaam with his mistake. In Chapters 23 and 24 Balaam went to the enemy but did not curse Israel; he should not have been there at all. In 25:1-3 we read that Israel got involved in idolatry and fornication. This was because Balaam had advised the enemy to do this (31:16). Balaam was killed in battle (31:8). A prophet had played with sin until it destroyed him.

The Promise of Christ:

Several things in Numbers point to Jesus Christ. The bronze serpent Moses made (21:9) was a type Christ (John 3:14-15). Balaam's prophecy in 24:15-19 may also speak of Christ.

The Practical Applications:

Trust God to sustain you in every situation.

Do not grumble against God or others.

Do not try to see how close you can come to sin; you will probably fall into it.

Deuteronomy

Approximate date of events: 1406 BC

If you had led a group of people for forty years and you were about to leave, what would you tell them? Moses was at the end of his life when he gave these speeches east of the Jordan River.

The Heart of the Law - Read Deuteronomy 6:4-9. What do we learn about true worship?

- Who God is: The LORD is the only true God and there is no other.
- How to serve Him: Only a full dedication of every part of the person is acceptable.
- How to pass it on: Put God at the center of everything. Take every opportunity to talk about Him. These principles apply to us today. We have Jesus Christ and we must tell others about Him.

Remember and Do Not Forget - Moses told the people either to remember or not to forget about 20 times in his speeches. He told them that after they had received God's blessings, they would be tempted to think only of themselves (6:10-12). Keeping every command would help them fight that temptation (8:11,18-19). In Chapters 27 and 28 we see the curses and blessings on Mount Ebal and Mount Gerizim. Moses was to teach Israel a song (31:21) that would keep them from forgetting God and His ways. In 32:7 the song called on them to remember and in 32:18 not to forget. How easy would it have been to forget God? From Moses' description of finding out about the Golden Calf, it seems that the mountain was still on fire with God's presence as the people were forsaking Him to worship idols (9:15-17).

Future Disobedience - In 17:14-17, God told them in advance that they would have a king though it was wrong to ask for one. 1 Samuel 8:5-8 shows that they did that and rejected God. That was one of a number of times the Israelites disobeyed. Moses must have been terribly disappointed to hear that despite his efforts, Israel would not stay faithful to God (31:15-20). Eventually the nation would fail to be faithful. The Old Testament accomplished its purpose in the plan of God, but it could not truly forgive sins. All men broke the covenant God had made. The Messiah would bring true forgiveness.

Moses Dies - Moses asked to go into the Promised Land but could not because of his sin striking the rock. Moses said God was angry at him on account of the people (1:37; 3:26; 4:21). Psalm 106:32-33 shows the people shared the blame in provoking Moses at that time. Moses saw the Promised Land from Mount Nebo, but he did not go across the Jordan (34:1-6). That is not the end of his story! When he died he prepared to go to the true Promised Land. He appeared with Elijah at the Transfiguration of Christ in Luke 9:28-31. John 1:17 and Hebrews 3:1-6 show that he had a very important role, but it was Jesus Christ who was most important. Moses served well (34:10) and has an eternal reward for doing so, but Christ is the one we worship.

The Promise of Christ:

In 18:15-19, Moses prophesied of a prophet like himself that would come. Acts 3:22 and 7:37 show that the prophecy was fulfilled by Jesus Christ.

The Practical Applications:

We must make God the center of everything we do.

We can forget God and His word very easily if we are not careful.

We must make every effort to be faithful until we die.

Joshua

Approximate date of events: 1406-1381 BC

Joshua is a book of tremendous spiritual success. Israel conquered the Promised Land in a short time. They had serious problems along the way, and the work was hard, but it was done.

Getting Up and Getting It Done - In Joshua 1:2-9, God told Joshua it was time to move into the Promised Land. God commanded Joshua to be strong, courageous, obedient, exact, devout, fearless, and confident. We need these traits as we seek to follow God and conquer the hearts of men today. In 7:7-13, after the defeat at Ai, Joshua went before the LORD. He had fallen on his face, but God told him twice to get up. Sin was in the camp and it needed to be removed. In 17:14-18, after many of the battles to subdue the land, Joseph's descendants asked for more land. When Joshua told them where to get it, they said that enemies with iron chariots lived there and they could not do it. No excuses! If we trust God we can do exactly what He wants us to do.

Defeating the Invincible - Jericho was strongly fortified when Israel invaded the land (6:1-2), but they could not be secure because they knew of the power of God and they knew it was with Israel (2:10-11,24). God said He had already given the city to Israel even though it seemed like an impenetrable fortress. In **6:16,20** we read how the walls fell down when the people shouted. The cause was God. Through Him what seemed invincible was thoroughly defeated.

Problems That Arose - After the big victory at Jericho (7:1-5), one man took some of the things that were under the ban. This caused a big loss at Ai. It is important to see that one man's sin affected the whole nation (7:24-26). Israel rooted out the sin and recovered (8:1-29). They still recognized this principle in the controversy over an altar in 22:16-18. After the victory over Ai, men from Gibeon, a city in the land, tricked the Israelites into making a covenant with them. Israel's failure was not consulting the LORD (9:3-6,12-15). In the church today, we can fail to ask God's counsel by not studying His book.

The Land Promise Fulfilled - Receiving the land God had promised is one of the main themes of Joshua. The land had been promised to Abraham centuries before (Genesis 15:18). In Joshua, that promise is said to be fulfilled (21:43-45; 23:14). Many believe that God is yet to fulfill the land promise, and that the nation of Israel is still God's covenant people. The Bible says that is not true.

Godly Leadership - True leaders encourage the people to live godly lives. That is what Joshua did in 24:14-16. In 24:29-31 we read of Joshua's death; he and those who led with him received high praise. The people stayed faithful after Joshua's death while that generation of leaders remained. We can see today that it is difficult to keep succeeding generations faithful.

Summary

The Promise of Christ:

While Joshua does not explicitly foretell the coming of Christ, Joshua is a type of Christ, who leads us into the Promised Land of Heaven (Hebrews 4:8-9). The name *Jesus* in Greek is related to *Joshua* in Hebrew (Matthew 1:21).

The Practical Applications:

God demands that we get up and get moving when we say we believe Him.

Faith in God makes what seems an impossibility into a reality.

One person's sin can affect many others, and God demands that the sin be removed.

Judges

Approximate date of events: 1380-1080 BC

Joshua is full of success. Judges is the opposite. How Israel could degenerate so quickly should be of interest to us. The judges were like commanders who rendered God's judgments in their actions.

Increasing Failure - As the Israelites prepared to completely conquer the land, there were many enemies to fight. What began strongly soon deteriorated. Watch the progression of events. In Judges 1:18-19, the tribe of Judah started strong, but ran into problems in the lowland. Reading through 1:34, we see that Benjamin, Manasseh, Ephraim, Zebulun, Asher, and Naphtali also failed to finish their work. Dan seemed to have very little success. In **2:1-4**, God revealed that they had not obeyed Him and He would not help them drive out their enemies. Those enemies would oppress them, share idolatry with them, and weaken their faith at least until the Babylonian exile (775 years).

Quickly Falling Away - Judges 2:7 and Joshua 24:31 show the influence of Joshua and his peers. Sadly, Israel's obedience did not continue after that generation died (2:10-12). Chapter 2 summarizes the book. Chapters 17-21 show horrible wickedness in Israel comparable to Sodom's (Genesis 19). According to 20:28 these things must have happened early in the time of the judges. It took a very short time for the people to go from spiritually successful to shockingly wicked.

Israel's Cycle - In Judges we see the same process happen repeatedly with the Israelites:

- Rebellion: the people do evil in the sight of the LORD
- Oppression: a foreign power controls the land
- Repentance: the people ask God for forgiveness and deliverance
- Redemption: God's chosen leader defeats the foreigners
- Rest: the land has peace

3:7-11 is an example. Each verse contains a different step in the cycle while Othniel was the judge.

Gideon: The Cycle Repeated - The Midianites and others oppressed Israel because of Israel's sin (6:1-4). The Angel of the LORD came to Gideon as he threshed his wheat in a winepress to hide it from the enemy and told the unlikely hero to deliver Israel (6:11-16). God reduced the army to 300 men (7:2-7) and gave Gideon an incredible victory (7:19-22). Gideon refused the offer to start a royal dynasty but used some of the gold they won to make an ephod, which became a temptation to false worship (**8:22-27,33**). After rescuing Israel, he unintentionally helped them return to evil.

"Right in His Own Eyes" - This phrase showed Israel's sad state (17:6; 21:25). The accounts between those verses show the idolatry, violence, and perversion that had flooded Israel. Moses had warned against each man doing right in his own eyes in the Promised Land (Deuteronomy 12:8-9) but they had not obeyed. Proverbs 12:15; 21:2 cautions us against such foolishness.

Summary

The Coming of Christ:

While the coming of Christ is not explicitly prophesied in Judges, the judges were types of Christ who leads us out of sin and oppression when we repent, wins the victory, and gives us rest.

The Practical Applications:

We must have faith in God when the situation we are in seems impossible.

We must train the generations that follow us to be faithful to God.

We must be on our guard to remain faithful especially in times of prosperity.

Ruth

Approximate date of events: 1310 BC

In the time of the judges we read of a woman whose devotion played a part in some of the most important events in Israel's history.

Why the Book of Ruth is Important:

- It tells us about the family of David (Ruth 4:21-22) and, therefore, Jesus Christ (Matthew 1:1,5).
- It tells us how relatives could redeem others in need (3:9-13; 4:3-10). The ultimate example of redemption is what Jesus Christ did for all mankind (Galatians 4:4-5; 1 Peter 1:18-19).
- It tells us a story of devotion and love: love of God, love of family, love of those in need, and romantic love. All of the different loves work together to show God's love for man.

Examples of Devotion in Ruth

After Naomi's husband and sons had died, she wanted to return from Moab to Bethlehem. Ruth was Naomi's daughter-in-law, and showed devotion to her by clinging to her (1:14) and accompanying her to Israel. Naomi encouraged her to go back to find a new husband and return to her old life, but Ruth had seen something better in the LORD. She promised to stay with Naomi all of her days, to treat her family as her own, and remain devoted to the LORD (1:16-17).

Once in Bethlehem, Ruth showed devotion by gleaning grain to support Naomi (2:2-3). Boaz was a relative of Naomi's husband. He showed love for God and his workers in the way he treated them (2:4). Boaz also showed that he cared for others by protecting Ruth (2:8-9). He did this because he knew about Ruth's care for Naomi (2:11-12). He made sure Ruth and Naomi had plenty (2:15-16). After Ruth brought home the grain, Naomi realized the care that God had shown for them (2:19-20). This seemed to reawaken Naomi's devotion to God.

Naomi wanted to make sure Ruth would have a home and family (3:1), so she suggested that Ruth go to Boaz. The way Ruth visited him at night seems strange to us; she was asking Boaz to take care of her (3:9). Boaz saw that Ruth loved what was right (3:10) because she was asking for the right thing. Boaz showed a love for his family and Ruth by wanting to help them (3:11) and providing more food for them (3:15), but he also showed a love for God by acting the right way (3:12-13); one other relative had the right to redeem Naomi's possessions (including marrying Ruth) first. Boaz spoke with the closer relative, who chose not to redeem Naomi's possessions. Boaz then redeemed Naomi's possessions, showing love for her (4:9), and married Ruth, showing love for her and his family (4:10). Boaz and Ruth also had a romantic love, and had a child (4:13). This child would one day take care of Naomi and the family (4:14-15) and have David as his descendant (4:17). Behind all of this was the love of the LORD, who had taken those who loved Him, even a temporarily bitter widow and a foreigner, and blessed them abundantly.

Summary

The Coming of Christ:

While the coming of Christ is not explicitly prophesied in Ruth, the book tells us Christ's lineage (4:17; Matthew 1:5) and shows us more about what Jesus did in redeeming us (Galatians 4:4-5).

The Practical Applications:

We must be completely devoted to the truth, even if it means leaving what we have known.

Loving family and those in need is an important part of loving God.

God can use unlikely people and unlikely means to fulfill His eternal plan.

I Samuel

Approximate date of events: 1105-1010 BC

1 Samuel records the lives of the last judges of Israel and the first king, Saul. The story of Samuel and Saul is important because it shows two men who began faithfully but whose lives diverged.

Samuel's Example of Faith - Samuel came at a difficult time for Israel. Israel tried to use the ark of the covenant like a good luck charm in battle (4:3-4) and the Philistines captured it. Samuel rallied the people against sin and had them serve God (7:3-6). They showed repentance. When the Philistines came to attack, God routed them (7:13-14). God showed that He had held the power all along, but was waiting for the people to repent. Samuel was a model of faith (Jeremiah 15:1).

Saul's Promising Beginning - When Israel asked for a king in Chapter 8, God selected Saul. He hid when he was to be presented as the king (10:22). When some criticized him, he was quiet (10:27). After leading Israel to victory at Jabesh-gilead, he took no revenge on his doubters (11:12-13). He showed humility and discretion.

Saul's Sin - Saul's downfall began by presuming to do things in a way other than God's. The Philistines were about to attack and Saul's army was starting to desert. He offered the burnt offering that Samuel was supposed to offer, and Samuel said the kingship would be taken away from his family (13:11-14). When we are under pressure, do we do things our way or trust God? Saul's sin grew. He did not completely obey God's order to destroy the Amalekites. Samuel told him that God wanted full obedience (15:18-23). Do we worship God in our own way rather than His? Saul became murderously jealous of David, even trying to kill his son for defending David (20:33). Samuel and Saul were given incredible responsibilities by God. Samuel remained faithful. Saul did not. This is seen in 29:17-20, in which Saul visited the medium at En-dor.

Saul's Death - Saul started fighting Israel's enemies successfully (14:47-48), but by his final battle the Philistines had penetrated almost to the Jordan River (31:1-4,7). If only Saul had been as loyal to the LORD as the men of Jabesh-gilead were to him (11:1-11; 31:11-13).

David's Faith - It was David's faith that allowed him to slay Goliath (17:45-49). He saw what needed to be done and did it, trusting God completely. It was David's faith and faithful friendship with Jonathan that allowed him to survive Saul's murderous intent (21:41-42; 23:16). Faith is indispensable in serving God (Hebrews 11:6), but the encouragement of faithful friends is very helpful. David's trust in God and courage qualified him to be the king and the ancestor of Jesus Christ. Acts 13:22 describes David's great heart.

Summary

The Coming of Christ:

Hannah's prayer in 1 Samuel 2 reminds us of what we see in Christ. Verse 10 speaks of what the Lord will do for His anointed. Mary's song in Luke 1:46-55 is reminiscent of Hannah's prayer; compare Luke 1:46 with Verse 1, 1:52 with Verse 8, and 1:53 with Verse 5.

The Practical Applications:

We must trust God completely if we want to overcome evil.

We must do exactly what God has told us to do even when those around us falter.

A faithful friend can help us endure the trials of life.

David's Reign, Part I

Approximate date of events: 1010-990 BC

This lesson covers 2 Samuel 1-10 and 1 Chronicles 1-19.

David's Sorrow - When David heard that Saul had died, he did not rejoice over the death of his tormentor. He showed sorrow for him, Jonathan, and Israel (2 Samuel 1:11-12, 17-27). When Abner, Saul's commander, died, David also showed sorrow for him, again with song (2 Samuel 3:31-37). David's sorrow was not contrived; it was genuine. By showing sorrow others knew that David was not involved in evil. This is an important lesson for leaders.

Moving the Ark - David and many others went to take the ark of the covenant back where it belonged (2 Samuel 6:2-11). They put it on a cart instead of having the Levites carry it on their shoulders, as Moses had written (Numbers 4:4-15). When Uzzah touched the ark to steady it, he was struck dead. It seems Uzzah and the rest of the people were sincere and had good intentions, but they were wrong. When David made sure to move the ark the right way (1 Chronicles 15:11-13) God blessed his effort.

David's Joy - David had true joy in serving God. When the ark was brought back properly, he celebrated openly (2 Samuel 6:14-15), offered sacrifices (17-18), and gave generously (19). We need that kind of joy. This celebration angered his wife Michal (16, 20), but David continued to offer true spiritual worship. Will we let what others think keep us from our joy in worship?

David's Disappointment - To build a fine house for God seemed like a perfect idea to David and Nathan (2 Samuel 7:2-3), but God did not want David to build it (4-7; see 1 Chronicles 22:8). Even though God would not allow David's desire, He gave David something better. God told David that his line, kingdom, and throne would be established forever (12-16). David's reaction was not anger or sorrow, but thankfulness and praise (18-29). He also decided to help his son prepare to build the temple (1 Chronicles 18:8-11).

David's Success - At the end of Saul's reign, Israel was fighting to keep what they had. As seen below, David had success in every direction and had expanded the kingdom to approximately the borders God had promised for the land (Genesis 15:18-21; Joshua 1:4; the land promise had been fulfilled in Joshua 21:43-45; 23:14).

| | | |
|---------------------------------------|-----------|------------------|
| Genesis 15:21 - "the Jebusites" | Jerusalem | 2 Samuel 5:5-7 |
| Genesis 15:18 - "the river of Egypt" | Philistia | 2 Samuel 5:17-25 |
| Genesis 15:18 - "the River Euphrates" | Zobah | 2 Samuel 8:3-4 |

Note how God restored the land when the faith of the leader and people was being restored.

Summary

The Promise of Christ:

In 2 Samuel 7:12-16 and 1 Chronicles 17:11-14, God told David that his lineage would be established forever and that one of his descendants would rule forever. That promise was fulfilled in Jesus Christ (Luke 1:31-33).

The Practical Applications:

We must follow God's instructions exactly.

We should not be afraid to show true joy or sorrow.

We must rejoice in what God has given us even when we do not get all that we want.

David's Psalms

Approximate date of events: 1020-970 BC

We want to have the heart of David. Acts 13:22 calls him a man after God's own heart (1 Samuel 13:14). To get the most complete picture of his heart and to know how he could fight Goliath (1 Samuel 17), we need to study the Psalms. David probably wrote over 70 of the 150 psalms, but for this study we will examine seven specifically connected with him. These psalms contain history and prophecy, and they show us that we share many of David's feelings.

Psalm 2 - Acts 4:25-26 attributes this psalm to David. This psalm prophesies that Christ is the Son of the LORD (7-9). See Acts 13:33; Hebrews 1:5; 5:5; and Revelation 2:7. Also, in 10-12, we see that in worship we need to remember the fear of God. *A heart like David's is a heart that fears God.*

Psalm 95 - In Hebrews 4:6-9 the author attributes this psalm to David. This psalm goes back in history to Numbers 13-14, in which the spies reported and the people rebelled. In 7-11 we learn the importance of true worship and trust. In 1-6 we see that worship is joyful because of who God is. *A heart like David's is a heart that worships joyfully and hears God's voice.*

Psalm 16 - Peter attributes this psalm to David in Acts 2:25-28, calling it a prophecy of Christ's resurrection from the dead (9-11). Paul uses it in Acts 13:35. Throughout the psalm we see how David sought refuge in God. We can trust God to take care of us beyond death if we obey Him with a true heart. *A heart like David's is a heart that trusts God in this life and the next.*

Psalm 18 - 2 Samuel 22 is much like this psalm in many places. In Romans 15:8-9, verse 49 is taken as a prophecy of the Gentiles' being in Christ. In 1-6 we see that David would cry to God. In 20-21 we learn of his confidence in God. *A heart like David's is a heart that cries to God in confidence.*

Psalm 32 - Romans 4:6-8, which shows that we are justified by faith, attributes this psalm to David. We all sin, as Solomon said in 1 Kings 8:46. We all need forgiveness. This comes by confessing our sins to God (5; 1 John 1:9). *A heart like David's is a heart that is willing to confess sin to God.*

Psalm 69 - In Romans 11:9-10, Paul quotes this psalm and ascribes it to David. See also Matthew 27:34, 48; John 2:17; Acts 1:20; and Romans 15:3. We see David crying for help and we need to be willing to do the same. We must not be afraid to stand for what is right. *A heart like David's is a heart that will labor and suffer for Christ's sake* (1 Corinthians 4:10).

Psalm 110 - In Matthew 22:42-45, Jesus uses this passage to show that David's descendant would also be his Lord. See also Acts 2:34-35. This psalm goes back in history to Genesis 14:18-20. The prophecy in 4 comes from that account. Christ would be both king and priest, like Melchizedek (Hebrews 5:6, 10; 6:20; 7:17, 21). In 3 we see that God's people offer their help willingly as God rules. *A heart like David's is a heart that sees the power of God and offers itself willingly.*

The Promise of Christ:

Many prophecies are made about Christ in these passages: Psalms 2:1-12; 16:8-11; 18:49; 69:4-25; 110:1-5.

The Practical Applications:

We must fear God (2), listen to God (95), trust God (16), cry to God (18), confess to God (32), suffer for God (69), and offer ourselves to God (110).

David's Reign, Part 2

Approximate date of events: 990-970 BC

This lesson covers 2 Samuel 11-24 and 1 Chronicles 20-21.

David was a man after God's own heart (Acts 13:22; 1 Samuel 13:14), but he became involved in great sin. If David could sin like that, should any of us think we are immune to temptation?

David's Sin - First, David lusted after Bathsheba (2 Samuel 11:3). He then committed adultery (4). David then made Uriah the Hittite drunk to try to cover the sin (13). When that failed, David gave orders to have him killed in battle (15). Uriah was one of David's mighty men (23:8,39). When Nathan rebuked him (12:7-12), David showed he had the right heart again by repenting (12:13). 1 Kings 15:5 says that David had followed God's commands except in this matter.

Punishment and Fulfillment - Even though David repented, he would still be punished for his sin (12:14). Nathan spoke of four punishments.

| Punishment (2 Samuel 12) | Fulfillment |
|--|---|
| The sword would never leave his house (10) | Absalom's killing of Amnon (13:28-29) |
| Evil would come from his own household (11) | Absalom's rebellion (15:13-14) |
| Someone he knew would commit adultery with his wives in public view (11) | Absalom's public adultery with the concubines (16:22) |
| Bathsheba's child would die (14) | The death of the child (12:18) |

Other events might be added as fulfillment of his punishment.

Other Effects of the Sin - After his son Amnon violated his daughter Tamar (13:14), David seemed to do nothing. David's own fornication and subsequent sin may have made it difficult to respond appropriately. Absalom (Tamar's full brother) killed Amnon (28-29) two years later. David's lack of action against Amnon may have made it difficult for David to act against Absalom. Absalom fled to his grandfather (37) for three years, and it was two years after coming back that he was allowed to see his father (14:24,28,33). Absalom's anger festered for years before he openly rebelled against his father. David's sin probably hurt his ability to handle the prophesied problems with his family.

Trusting in the Promise - David's last words (perhaps his last song) in 23:1-7 show that he still trusted in the promises of God. He had been given great promises about his throne's being established forever through his descendant (7:12-16), referring to Jesus Christ. He had also sinned and suffered greatly. Through all of the turmoil, God's promises remained steadfast and David continued to believe.

The Promise of Christ:

Romans 15:8-9 teaches us that Jesus Christ's work in bringing the Gentiles to God was the fulfillment of what David had said in 2 Samuel 22:50 (see also Psalm 18:49).

The Practical Applications:

We must not think that we cannot sin in regard to a certain temptation.

Even though we repent, we may have to suffer consequences.

We can trust God to keep His promises.

Psalms in General

Approximate dates of composition: 1450-500 BC

The psalms do not just make beautiful poetry; they also are inspired statements about and to God. The psalms often repeat a thought using different words. This is called parallelism. Here are some examples from **Psalm 1**:

But his delight is in the law of the LORD,
And in His law he meditates day and night. (2) These two lines mean the same thing.
For the LORD knows the way of the righteous,
But the way of the ungodly shall perish. (6) These two lines are opposites.

There are different kinds of psalms for different purposes. Here are some different types of psalms and examples of them:

Praise - Psalm 148 (the last part of Psalms is an explosion of praise), *Song 2*

Praise the LORD!

Praise the LORD from the heavens; Praise Him in the heights!

Praise Him, all His angels; Praise Him, all His hosts! (1-2)

This psalm praises God primarily for His creation. There are many different reasons to praise.

Thanksgiving - Psalm 118, *Song 644*

I called on the LORD in distress; The LORD answered me and set me in a broad place.

You are my God, and I will praise You; You are my God, I will exalt You.

Oh, give thanks to the LORD, for He is good! For His mercy endures forever. (5,28-29)

Thanksgiving and praise may overlap because something praiseworthy makes us thankful.

Help - Psalm 25, *Song 607*

Turn Yourself to me, and have mercy on me, For I am desolate and afflicted.

The troubles of my heart have enlarged; Bring me out of my distresses!

Look on my affliction and my pain, And forgive all my sins. (16-18)

A cry for help often contains a request for judgment upon the wicked or for God to intercede.

Royal Celebration - Psalm 45, *Song 447*

My heart is overflowing with a good theme; I recite my composition concerning the King;

My tongue is the pen of a ready writer.

All Your garments are scented with myrrh and aloes and cassia,

Out of the ivory palaces, by which they have made You glad. (1,8)

Also note that the king had battles to fight and enemies to defeat.

Judgment - Some psalms contain severe calls for judgment (69, 109, 137). We need to examine ourselves (69:5) and make sure our lives will not be judged as displeasing to God. *Song 347*

The Promise of Christ:

There are many prophecies of Christ in the Psalms that are fulfilled in the New Testament in stunning detail. Here is a partial list: Psalm 8:4-6 (Hebrews 2:6-9); 22:1,8,16,18; 34:20 (John 19:36); 41:9 (John 13:18-26); 45:6-7 (Hebrews 1:8-9); 68:18 (Ephesians 4:7-12); 78:2 (Matthew 13:34-35); 102:27 (Hebrews 13:8); 118:22 (Acts 4:11); 132:11 (Acts 2:29-30).

The Practical Applications:

We must praise God to live a spiritually complete life.

We should be willing to open our hearts to God in many different situations.

We should see the beauties in everything God has given us, including His laws.

Solomon and the Temple

Approximate date of events: 975-930 BC

This lesson covers 1 Kings 1-9, 1 Chronicles 22-29, and 2 Chronicles 1-9.

We are studying Solomon's life and his great achievement, building the temple. Solomon achieved great success because of God's blessings, but turned away from God despite having everything.

The Importance of Preparation - David was not allowed to build the temple to the LORD, but instead of getting angry, he prepared manpower and material for his son Solomon (1 Chronicles 22:5). David made extensive plans (1 Chronicles 28:11-13). Are we preparing to serve God better (1 Corinthians 3:16)? John the Baptist was successful because he prepared the way for Jesus (Luke 3:4-6). Christ Himself spoke of preparing places for Christians (John 14:2-3). The temple did not build itself and our lives of service will not improve without our preparation.

The Best We Have - Looking at the lists of material used in the temple in 1 Chronicles 22:14-16 and 29:2 shows that Israel wanted to give God the best that they had to give. That was what Solomon said in 2 Chronicles 2:4-5. God does not demand gold and silver if we have none (2 Corinthians 8:12), but He does want the best we have. What are we giving God of our time, money, and effort?

Still Not the True Sanctuary - Solomon knew that the temple would not contain God (2 Chronicles 6:18). Christ truly serves as our High Priest today and is in the presence of God (Hebrews 9:11-12, 24). Hebrews 9 shows us that the temple, beautiful as it was, and even the Old Law were shadows of the true way and true sanctuary. Jesus Christ came to give us the true way and enter the true Most Holy Place. Since Christ has done so much, let us serve God with confidence (Hebrews 10:19-22).

Solomon's Life - Solomon asked for wisdom and received it (1 Kings 3:5,9). God gave him the wisdom he requested as well as riches and honor. No one has ever had some of the advantages the Solomon had. Despite that, he turned away from God (1 Kings 11:3). Why? We see hints of this through his story. In 1 Kings 3:1-3 we see that he worshipped at the high places, unlike his father (Deuteronomy 12:1-2). We see him trading in horses with Egypt (Deuteronomy 17:16-17) in 2 Chronicles 1:14-17 and 1 Kings 10:28. 1 Kings 11:1-3 tells us how his many foreign wives got him involved in idolatry; he even built a high place for an idol! If greed and immorality pulled Solomon away from God, should we think ourselves immune? Read Nehemiah 13:26.

We can succeed where Solomon did not if we keep our hearts true to God and serve Him in the best way that we can.

The Coming of Christ:

Solomon was the first in the line of David's descendants that led to Jesus Christ (Matthew 1:6). God promised that Solomon would be His son (1 Chronicles 22:10); the promise reached its ultimate fulfillment in Christ.

The Practical Applications:

We must prepare ourselves to give spiritual service to God.

We must give God the best that we can.

We must obey all of God's laws if we want to remain pleasing to Him.

Song of Solomon

Approximate date of events: 960 BC

Romantic love is delightful, but it only stays that way when a man and a woman experience as God would have them to. The “Song of Songs” (1:1), or the best song, can teach us about this.

In the book we read of Solomon the king, the Shulamite woman, and the daughters of Jerusalem. The book requires some effort to determine who is speaking each part.

Part 1, 1:1-2:7 - Read 2:2-7. Here a man and a woman share their feelings with each other. They compliment each other, enjoy being together, and have deep emotional feelings. There is a right way and a wrong way to go about this. Love is not something that happens instantaneously. It needs time to grow.

Part 2, 2:8-3:5 - Read 2:10-16. There is growth in their relationship. This may be courtship. There is a note of warning. If either of them is driven by lust, what should be beautiful could become cheap and base. Again, love takes time to develop.

Part 3, 3:6-5:1 - Read 3:6-11. This is Solomon’s wedding day. The two show how important the occasion is as they pledge their love to each other. Solomon is loved by his people and this is an occasion to celebrate. In the following verses the expressions of love build.

Part 4, 5:2-8:4 - Read 5:2-6. Thoughtlessness can appear in unexpected times and places. We get too busy or tired and then we realize that we have hurt the one we love. After this the Shulamite describes why she loves her man. She finds him and he returns her praise and affection. This makes her feel as if she is on top of the world. He further praises her, and she responds with a mature love.

Part 5, 8:5-14 - Read 8:5-7. This is love for a lifetime. No amount of money can compare to true love. The Shulamite’s brothers compliment her purity. The Shulamite affirms that she is loving in a mature way and has given herself in love properly (8:10-12).

Is There a Third Main Character? - Some say there is a third man, another man the Shulamite really loves. Ultimately she refuses Solomon and goes back home to marry the young shepherd. There are valid reasons for that interpretation, but there are also serious problems with it:

- This man is never mentioned in the book.
- Finding this man involves reading things into speeches and dividing them in odd ways.
- The book is called Solomon’s (1:1), which would be odd if he were the loser in the courtship.
- The imagery in the middle of the book (3:11; 5:1) seems to indicate marriage is occurring.

Sadly, the writer of this song did not always use the knowledge from it (1 Kings 11:3).

The Coming of Christ:

Love is not just as strong as death (8:6); Christ’s love conquered death (Romans 8:35-39).

The Practical Applications:

Romantic love is a blessing from God.

We must act in wisdom in romantic love.

A mature and committed love is beautiful.

Proverbs

Approximate dates of writing: 960-700 BC

Proverbs, like Psalms, uses comparisons to show us truth in ways that are easy to understand. Some (probably most) of the comparisons are about opposites, like 11:1. Some are between two similar things, like 11:7. Some take one thing, and then show us how much more true something else is, like 11:31. There may be more than two parts to a proverb; sometimes there are up to six parts, as in Chapter 23.

In an overview, we cannot study most of the approximately 800 verses in the book; the key is to learn why its wisdom is important. If we learn why we need wisdom, we will study the book in the way we should.

The Purpose of the Book - All of us need wisdom! That is the theme of the book (Proverbs 1:2-6). If you work hard for wisdom, you will find the fear and knowledge of God (2:1-5). That promise is still there for us today (James 1:5). Our eternal destiny depends on it.

When God appeared to Solomon at Gibeon (1 Kings 3:5), Solomon, the main author of Proverbs, made wisdom what He requested from God, and God was pleased (1 Kings 3:11-13).

We Must Appreciate Wisdom in Order to Get Wisdom - Wisdom starts by fearing God (1:7-9). We need to realize that we are not the source of all wisdom. We need to recognize the true voice of wisdom (8:4-5). In 9:4, wisdom calls out. In 9:16, a woman who is the opposite of wisdom calls out. Their calls are very similar! A love for God and His truth will help us distinguish between the two.

We Must Not Be Simple - We read about a simple (or naive) man in several places in the book (14:18; 22:3; 27:12). Being simple can be deadly, as the experience of a young man enticed by a promiscuous woman shows in Chapter 7. It is hard to make good decisions without experience, but we do not have to make bad decisions to learn what the good ones would have been. We can avoid being simple by listening to God's word. (1:4; Psalm 19:7; 119:130; Romans 16:17-18).

We Must Not Be Fools - Foolishness is often connected with being simple (1:22,32; 7:22), but the fool may go beyond that and refuse to think about what is right. He may think his opinion is the only one worth having (12:15; 18:2). We need to avoid fools (17:12). We need to discipline our children to keep them from being fools (22:15).

We Must Treasure God's Word - Treasure is valuable. The greatest treasure is God's word (2:1, 4). We should treasure wisdom (7:1-3; 8:10, 21) In all of the Bible, the idea of God's word as a treasure is frequent (Job 23:12; Isaiah 33:6; Matthew 13:52).

The Coming of Christ:

The coming of the Messiah is not explicitly prophesied in Proverbs, but here we have a hint of who He is and how He would be the Son of God (30:4). Note how Christ taught the people in ways that were easy to understand, which was the goal of Proverbs as well.

The Practical Applications:

We must have enough wisdom to know we need wisdom.

We must avoid being simple or foolish.

We must treasure God's word and His ways.

Ecclesiastes

Approximate date of writing: 940 BC

This book was probably written at the end of Solomon's life. He had tried everything and was weary. He had all of the money, power, and toys anyone could ever have, and they did not make him happy. The world "under the sun" without God is hopeless. Solomon learned that he needed to obey God most of all while working the best he could.

In making this outline, I mostly follow the structure found in the commentary below¹. I have tried to summarize sections of the book; you might divide the book or name sections a bit differently.

Chapters 1-2 - Solomon begins by speaking of the vanity or emptiness of life. Nothing is truly new in the world. He is considering life without God's influence. No lasting good comes from work done without God (1:1-11). Nothing apart from God brings true enjoyment; physical gratification, accomplishments, possessions, and entertainment are empty (1:12-2:11). Also, nothing apart from God lasts forever. Wisdom is good, but all men die and their things go to others (2:12-23). Solomon concludes that enjoying life is a gift from God, though it is not the ultimate purpose (2:24-26).

Chapters 3-5 - There is a right time to do certain things in life, and we can learn about those things in God's word. God has made a plan, we should enjoy the good things God gives, but remember that God will judge our actions (3:1-15). Even though there is corruption, oppression, envy, and ingratitude in life, God's plan is still in effect. He will judge (3:16-4:16). Because there is a plan, we should act properly toward God and avoid being greedy. We can only enjoy the blessings God gives us through Him (5:1-20).

Chapters 6-8 - We do not know what is good for us apart from God. If we understand that God will judge man, it makes sense to listen to wisdom rather than entertain ourselves. Life is not always fair, but that does not disprove that God has a plan and will do justice (6:1-7:15). We need to live with the right attitude about ourselves and not become enraged when others sin against us. Wisdom is hard to find, and most men will do what they want instead of what God commands (7:16-29). Part of God's plan is to obey men's laws. Even though some rulers are evil and unjust, God is in control. Enjoying what God has given us in life is a gift from Him (8:1-17).

Chapters 9-12 - Solomon concludes that God is in control. While we are alive, we should enjoy what He has given us in the way He approves (9:1-9:9). We should work hard in the time we have, even though we might not always get what we deserve. We should walk and work wisely and be generous. Our attitude will show (9:10-11:6). We should enjoy youth but remember that it does not last and we will be judged. (11:7-12:8).

In conclusion, wisdom comes from God, though the search for wisdom is tiring. Our entire purpose is to keep God's commandments because every single act will be judged (12:9-14).

The Coming of Christ:

Though not explicitly prophesied, Christ provided the answer to many of the problems. Solomon did not know that there would be "a just man on earth who does good and does not sin" (7:20).

The Practical Applications:

Life apart from God has no purpose.

Enjoying what we have is a gift from God.

Fear God and keep His commandments.

¹ Walter C. Kaiser, Jr. Ecclesiastes: Total Life (Chicago: Moody Press, 1979).

The Divided Kingdom

Approximate date of events: 931-840 BC

This lesson covers 1 Kings 12-22 and 2 Kings 1-17. The northern kingdom (Israel) will be the main subject. We will learn much of the rest of their history through the books of the prophets.

A Foolish Decision Leads to Division - After Solomon's death, the people of Israel asked his son Rehoboam to lighten their burden (1 Kings 12:4). His father's advisors told him to act favorably (1 Kings 12:7), which agreed with Solomon's inspired wisdom (Proverbs 20:28). The young men with whom he had grown up suggested defying the people (1 Kings 12:10-11), ignoring inspired wisdom (Proverbs 15:1). In following bad advice, Rehoboam divided the kingdom (1 Kings 12:16,19-20). Divine wisdom's disapproval is seen here as well (Ecclesiastes 10:16; Proverbs 10:28).

A Foolish Decision Leads to Apostasy - Jeroboam, the new king of the northern kingdom, realized that not having the temple was a political disadvantage, so he made changes to keep his people at home. He encouraged people to worship two golden calves (1 Kings 12:26-28; compare Exodus 32:4 from 500 years before). He built high places and changed the priesthood and feasts. Those who cared about true worship moved to Judah (2 Chronicles 11:13-17). This idolatry gave Israel trouble until the end of its existence. Almost every king of Israel is said to have continued in Jeroboam's sin, and at the fall of Israel two hundred years later Jeroboam is blamed (2 Kings 17:22-23). Are Christians being led astray by those who introduce changes to God's plan today? Absolutely.

A Foolish Decision Brings Evil to Judah - The Bible teaches that evil friends corrupt (Proverbs 12:26; 1 Corinthians 15:33). A king of Judah named Jehoshaphat did many good things (2 Chronicles 17:3-6), but he also had ties with the northern kingdom, even having his son marry Ahab and Jezebel's daughter (2 Chronicles 18:1; 2 Kings 8:18). In 1 Kings 22 Jehoshaphat joined Ahab as an ally in fighting against Syria and was almost killed. Did Jehoshaphat learn? In 2 Chronicles 20:35-37 he made an alliance with Ahab's son to build ships. The ships were destroyed to show God's disapproval. Did he finally learn? In 2 Kings 3 he made an alliance with another son of Ahab to fight Moab; the whole army almost died of thirst. Jehoshaphat did many good things, but his errors led to an long-lasting infection of idolatry and the death of many of his descendants.

A Light from Faithful Prophets - Elijah was working at this time (1 Kings 17:1). Though evil ran rampant, God gave Israel a chance to turn from idolatry. The strength of the idolatry can be seen in 1 Kings 18, when Elijah faced 450 prophets of Baal on Mount Carmel. The LORD showed His power by sending fire upon Elijah's sacrifice, and Elijah used the opportunity to destroy the prophets of Baal. The people turned back to God, but only temporarily. With Elijah and Elisha God showed His power in an attempt to revive Israel before their sin caused their destruction. In 1 Kings 19, Jezebel swore to kill Elijah, and he ran became discouraged. God showed Him that he was not alone. It is important that we trust God in the same way when we have to take an unpopular stand.

The Coming of Christ:

1 Kings 15:1-5 shows how God preserved the royal line and kingdom of David, through whom Christ would come, despite the sin of his descendants.

The Practical Applications:

Reject selfishness in favor of true wisdom.

Never change the way God has said to do things in order to suit yourself.

Never compromise God's word to associate with evil people.

Obadiah and Jonah

Approximate date of events: 850-785 BC

Two prophets each have a lesson to teach us about God's attitude toward the Gentiles.

Obadiah - We do not know for certain when Obadiah wrote, but a good possibility is 848 BC. Obadiah wrote against Edom, the nation descended from Jacob's brother Esau. They were proud and thought themselves secure against attack. God would defeat them and make them small (1-4). Edom would be thoroughly destroyed and plundered, even by those they thought they could trust (5-7). Their wise men would not be able to help them (8-9). The cause for this judgment was their violence against the people of Judah, their relatives (10-11; see also Joel 3:19). Taking vengeance, seizing plunder, and attacking refugees was offensive to God (12-14). The Edomites would suffer what they had inflicted on others (15-16). On Zion in Judah there would be deliverance (17, 21). Edom would be destroyed and God's people would triumph (18-20). History has shown that Obadiah's prophecy was fulfilled.

The Edomites were Gentiles, but they still answered to God for their behavior.

Jonah - Jonah is mentioned in 2 Kings 14:25 for his prophecy that the second King Jeroboam of Israel would conquer much land.

His Message and His Enemy - The LORD told Jonah to preach in Nineveh, the great Assyrian city (1:2). The Assyrians were enemies of Israel (see 2 Kings 17:6 for what they would do to Israel later) and they were often very cruel. Jonah did not want them to be blessed. He ran away, taking a boat far away (1:3). Though a prophet, Jonah refused to do God's will. God sent a storm to the boat, and Jonah knew he was responsible (1:9-12). The sailors threw him in the sea and a large fish swallowed him (1:15-17).

His Repentance and Their Repentance - Faced with death inside the fish, Jonah repented (2:2-4). He resolved to do what God had said (2:9). God brought him out of the fish (2:10). Jonah went to Nineveh and preached about the destruction that God would send (3:4). The people responded by repenting (3:5-9). God decided not to destroy them (3:10).

His Anger and God's Response - Something strange happened. Jonah was angered by the success of his message (4:1). He said he believed in God's mercy (4:2), but it displeased him to see it accepted by these people. Inside the fish he wished for life; seeing Nineveh's repentance, he wanted to die (4:3). All around him people had turned to God (see also 1:14-16), but Jonah himself seemed to forget his repentance. Jonah waited underneath a shelter to see what would happen to Nineveh (4:5). God made a plant grow for shade, but then took it away (4:6-7). God pointed out that Jonah loved a plant but not over 120,000 souls (4:10-11).

The Ninevites were Gentiles, but God still loved them and wanted their repentance.

The Promise of Christ:

Obadiah 17, 21 speak of deliverance on Zion. The ultimate fulfillment was in Jesus Christ. Jonah was used as a type of Christ's resurrection after three days' burial in the earth (Matthew 12:39-41; 16:4; Luke 11:29-32).

The Practical Applications:

God holds all people accountable for what they do.

We cannot run away from our duty to keep God's commandments.

God cares for all people and wants them to repent and follow Him.

Amos

Approximate date of writing: 760-755 BC

Amos was a sheepbreeder from Judah (1:2) who prophesied about Israel. Israel was prosperous but sinful, and judgment was coming. Amos stood up to a corrupt leader and spoke the message God wanted the people to hear (7:10-15). He felt the need to do what God had commanded (3:8).

Judgment To Come - Amos started his prophecy by speaking against Damascus, Gaza, Tyre, Edom, Ammon, and Moab (1:3-2:3). They were condemned for cruelty. Then he spoke against Judah (2:4-5). They would be judged for not following God's word. After that, Amos spoke against the nation he was visiting, Israel. Times were good for Israel, but their acts were evil. Starting in 2:6, Amos condemned them for worshipping falsely and taking advantage of the poor. They would go from being powerful to nonexistent in less than forty years. There would be no escape.

Why the Judgment Would Happen: A Long History of Sin - God had given Israel a great privilege, so their rejection of Him brought great punishment (3:1-2). They would be devoured by their enemies (3:11-12). Amos prophesied Israel's destruction; this was fulfilled by the Assyrians in 2 Kings 17. The people were busy doing religious things, but not the right things (4:4-5). Many times they had refused to return to God after He had punished them. Since they would not return to God, they needed to prepare for His judgment upon them (4:12). God wanted justice and righteousness instead of elaborate worship and unfeeling hearts (5:21-24). Their idolatry went back to the time of the Exodus (5:25-27). God would judge them all the way from the north to the south, reversing the gains prophesied in 1 Kings 14:25 by Jonah.

How Judgment Was Inevitable - In 7:1-6 God showed Amos two punishments that could come upon Israel, but God promised that they would not happen after Amos pled for Israel. After that, God used the image of a plumb line to show Amos that judgment would come (7:7-9). Even when people obeyed God's laws externally, their hearts were often corrupt (8:4-6). God said that judgment was inevitable for those who would not repent (9:9-10).

Hope After Judgment - In 9:11-12 God promised to raise up the tent of David again. He said that David's people would include many Gentiles. There would also be a time of great blessing when God's people would no longer be held captive (9:13-14). Israel would be able to come home never to leave again (9:15); this would have been an especially important long-term promise when the short term held destruction. This prophecy was not fulfilled by physical Israel but by the church. Christ came from David's family and through Him this prophecy has been fulfilled. In Acts 15:15-17 James used this passage to show that the Gentiles could be Christians without being under the law of Moses.

The Promise of Christ

Amos 9:11-15 shows that someone from David's family would gather Israel and the nations and put them where they could never be removed. That was fulfilled by Jesus Christ with His church.

The Practical Applications

God will judge all nations and individuals.

God's judgment cannot be avoided.

God is angry with people who exploit those less fortunate.

Hosea

Approximate date of writing: 755-725 BC

Like Amos, Hosea wrote about the judgment that was coming to the northern kingdom of Israel.

A Wandering Wife - The LORD told Hosea that the woman he married would not be faithful to him and would represent the way in which Israel had not been faithful to God (1:2-3). It may be that Hosea's wife was not an immoral woman when he married her but that she would become one. This alone shows us the tremendous sacrifice that God called upon Hosea to make. Hosea named his first son after a place where bloodshed occurred (1:4-5). Hosea's wife had a daughter, and Hosea named her "No Mercy" (1:6-7). Hosea's wife had a son, and Hosea named him "Not My People" (1:8-9). These were depressing names and indicated that Israel would be conquered. In the distant future, there was hope for Israel to be God's people once again (1:10-2:1). In 2:2-13 God made clear that Israel had rejected Him and He would take away her blessings. After that, God would give her another chance to be truly His (2:14-23). God then told Hosea to buy or redeem a woman (probably his wandering wife who had gone into servitude) to show how God regarded Israel: they were supposed to be His, but they kept worshipping other gods (3:1-5).

It is hard to think of anyone other than Christ who was asked to make a greater sacrifice than Hosea did in his family life. It teaches an important lesson about God's powerful love and the pain our sin brings Him.

What God Really Wanted - In 4:6 Hosea lamented the lack of knowledge that was destroying the people. God had given them everything they needed to serve Him faithfully, but they refused to obey what He had said. Will our fate be any different if we neglect God's word today? In 6:1-6 Hosea pleaded with the people to return to God and be healed. God really wanted the hearts of the people more than the sacrifices, but Israel refused to obey the covenant.

The Fate of Israel - Hosea taught that Israel was as useful as a cake cooked on one side, and though Israel thought itself strong and vital, it was really feeble (7:8-9). The attack of the Assyrians would prove Hosea right in a short time. The prophecy that God would take Israel out of its land and make its people wander without a home (9:17) would be fulfilled shortly. The words Hosea used to describe the reaction to the wrath of God (10:8) would be used by Christ in Luke 23:30 and John in Revelation 6:16 about future judgments.

Hope for the Future - In Chapter 14, Hosea called on Israel to return to God and ask Him to take away their sin. If they would stop relying on worshipping idols and making alliances with foreign powers, God would give them a glorious future as His own people

The Promise of Christ

Hosea 1:10; 2:23 are used by Paul to show that the Gentiles, who were not God's people, could become God's people (Romans 9:25-26). Peter used similar words to show that Christians were truly God's people (1 Peter 2:10). Hosea 13:14 is also used in 1 Corinthians 15:55.

The Practical Applications

Sin is spiritual adultery against God and it hurts Him deeply.

God really wants people to be loyal to Him and to know Him.

God will take away our sin when we are truly dedicated to Him.

The Divided Kingdom and Judah Alone

Approximate date of events: 931-586 BC

This lesson covers 2 Kings 18-25; 2 Chronicles 10-36. Passages are from 2 Chronicles unless noted. Below is a list of the kings of Judah. The good kings are in **bold**. Christians today can learn important lessons about remaining faithful until death by examining the lives of the kings.

Rehoboam - In 11:16-17 his kingdom became strong because many people who loved the LORD moved there, but overall he was judged to be evil (12:1,14).

Abijah - In 13:1-21 he showed his trust in God, but 1 Kings 15:3 says that his acts were largely evil.

Asa - Asa was faithful to God, actively fighting idolatry (14:2-5). He moved the nation to repentance (15:10-15). In the end, he depended on alliances and doctors instead of God (16:2-12).

Jehoshaphat - Jehoshaphat's life has been studied in the lesson on the northern kingdom. He loved God, but he kept getting involved with the northern kingdom against God's will.

Jehoram - Evil (21:4-6, 20)

Ahaziah - Evil (22:3-4)

Athaliah - Evil (22:10)

Joash - He did well while Jehoiada was alive (24:2-6). After Jehoiada had died, he became evil, allowing idolatry and even killing Jehoiada's son (24:17-22).

Amaziah - He started out doing well, but his heart was not completely right (25:2). Later he worshipped the idols of a nation he had *defeated* (25:14). He was judged to be evil (25:27).

Uzziah - He was strong in the LORD for a time (26:4-5), but was made arrogant by his success. He tried to burn incense in the temple and was struck with leprosy (26:16-21).

Jotham - Jotham was faithful, but the people kept worshipping at the high places (27:2,6).

Ahaz - Evil (28:1-5)

Hezekiah - Hezekiah strongly stood for what was right (29:2; 31:21). He trusted the LORD even when all seemed lost (32:15). He was made proud by success and sinned in showing the Babylonians his wealth (32:25,31).

Manasseh - Manasseh started out terribly evil (33:2,9). He was specifically blamed for the exile of Judah (2 Kings 21:11-16). However, after he was taken captive, he repented (33:11-16).

Amon - Evil (33:22; 2 Kings 21:20-21)

Josiah - Josiah was very faithful to the LORD (34:2; 2 Kings 23:25). He reestablished the Passover (35:16-18). He unwisely decided to fight Egypt against God's will, and was killed (35:20-24).

Jehoahaz - Evil (2 Kings 23:32)

Jehoiakim - Evil (36:5; 2 Kings 23:37)

Jehoiachin - Evil (36:9; 2 Kings 24:9)

Zedekiah - Evil (36:12; 2 Kings 24:19)

The Promise of Christ

The kings of Judah were the ones through whom Christ would come, whether they as individuals were good or evil (2 Samuel 7). We see God's providence in protecting that royal line, even when it was hanging by a thread in the days of Jehoram (21:4), Ahaziah (22:1), and Joash (22:8-11).

The Practical Applications

Good men (such as Asa and Joash) can forsake God.

Good leaders (such as Jehoshaphat and Josiah) can make mistakes with terrible consequences.

Evil men (such as Manasseh) can repent.

Joel

Approximate date of writing: 840-830 BC

Joel wrote to the southern kingdom of Judah. He urges people to repent before judgment.

A Plague of Locusts - The occasion for Joel's prophecy was a severe plague of locusts (1:4). It was the worst in recent memory and would be remembered for generations (1:2-3). Many different people would wail as the produce of the land disappeared (1:5-12). This was a time for people to reflect on their service to God (1:13-14). Judgment, the day of the LORD, was near (1:15). As the land and animals suffered, Joel cried to God (1:16-20). Locusts were bad, but there was also a threat from something much worse.

A Plague of War - Joel spoke again of the day of the LORD in 2:1. This time, enemy soldiers relentlessly advancing across the land were described as moving in the way a locust swarm did (2:2-9). The scene's terror was underscored by the descriptions of the earth's quaking and the heavenly bodies' dimming (2:10).

The Need for Repentance - The LORD then encouraged the people to repent (2:12). He wanted genuine sorrow so that He turn from judgment and bless them (2:13-14). If everyone were to come and truly seek God (2:15-17), He would bless the people and remove their enemies (2:18-20). God was able to bless them abundantly (2:21-27).

A Promise for the Future - God promised to pour out His Spirit upon mankind (2:28-29). He promised great signs, as in 2:10, before the great day of the LORD would come (2:30-31). He also promised deliverance to all who called upon the name of, or obeyed, the LORD (2:32). In Acts 2:16-21, Peter told his listeners at Pentecost that they were seeing what Joel had prophesied in this passage. The miracles of tongues from the Holy Spirit fulfilled Joel's words in 2:28-29. Ananias used the same words as 2:32 in Acts 22:16 to describe how baptism washed away sins.

Jehovah Judges the Nations - 3:1 connects this section in time to the promises of 2:28-32. God promised that the captives of Judah would be brought back and that He would judge those who had taken away His people (3:2-3). "Jehoshaphat" means "Jehovah judges". He would avenge His people against their persecutors (3:4-8). God promised to bring a judgment against the nations; instead of beating their swords into plowshares (Isaiah 2:4; Micah 4:3), God told them to do the opposite (3:9-10). God would reap the harvest wickedness had brought (3:11-13; Revelation 14:18-20). As in 2:10-11 and 2:29-31, there would be amazing signs connected with the day of the LORD (3:15-17).

Blessings to Come - Like Amos and Hosea, Joel ended on a note of hope. Great blessings would come upon Judah (3:18; compare Amos 9:13) and their enemies would be punished (3:19). Judah (meaning the church) would be inhabited forever and God would dwell with them (3:20-21).

The Coming of Christ

In 2:28-32 Joel prophesied some of the signs of Christ's kingdom, as Peter made clear in Acts 2:16-21.

The Practical Applications

We need to turn to God before the time of judgment.

Repenting from the heart can rescue us from destruction.

All men will be called into judgment for their actions.

Isaiah 1-39

Approximate date of writing: 740-700 BC

Isaiah lived in a difficult time for Israel, spiritually and politically. While he prophesied, the northern kingdom was carried off permanently by the Assyrians. Judah was not doing much better.

Spiritually Sick - In Chapter 1 Isaiah describes Israel's spiritual condition. They did not realize they were dependent on God and they were forsaking Him (2-4). They were sick in almost every way imaginable (5-7). God was sick of their inadequate worship (11-13). God wanted them to act with justice and return to Him so that He could forgive them (16-18).

The LORD is Different - Judah had relied on foreign alliances, but that was against God's will (30:1-2). The Assyrians were close to destroying them as they had the northern kingdom, as Isaiah had prophesied before (36:1; 8:7-8). Fortunately, Hezekiah, one of the best kings, changed the policy and trusted God. The Assyrian official who threatened the people did not understand how that could work (36:7). The Assyrian thought the LORD was a god like the false gods of the nations (36:19-20). Upon hearing this, Hezekiah sent word to Isaiah (37:1-4), who responded with a prophecy about the Assyrians' withdrawal (37:6-7). The angel of the LORD killed 185,000 soldiers, and the Assyrians left (37:36-38). There is a difference between the LORD and false gods. He is real!

Isaiah's Call - When God called, Isaiah answered (6:8). It was not going to be an easy message to give (6:9-11). This verse is often quoted in the New Testament. Are we ready to go when called, like Isaiah? It may be to a neighbor instead of a nation, but it is still what we need to do.

The Mountain of the LORD - In 2:2-4, Isaiah prophesied about the mountain of the LORD. What is it? It would be for all nations, it would teach many, it would come out of Jerusalem, and it would bring peace. In 25:6-10 Isaiah said the mountain of the LORD would bring true knowledge, would outlast death, and would bring salvation. He also spoke of it in 11:1-10; that verse is quoted in Romans 15:12. In Romans 15:8-12 Paul shows us that 11:10 was fulfilled when the Gentiles were converted to Christ. The mountain of the LORD means the church! Some people read these passages and think of a fantastic future time, but these passages were speaking of the time of the church.

Prophecies of Christ - There are many more prophecies than are listed here. In 7:14-16, Isaiah spoke of a virgin having a son. Matthew 1:20-23 shows us this was fulfilled in the virgin birth of Christ. 9:1-7 speaks of a light in Galilee. Matthew 4:12-16 shows us it was fulfilled in Jesus' teaching in Galilee. 11:1-10 is another passage that describes Christ. 28:16 speaks of a foundation stone in Zion. 1 Peter 2:1-8 shows that this refers to Christ as the foundation of the church.

The Promise of Christ

Some of the important prophecies about Christ are in 7:14-16 (Matthew 1:20-23), 9:1-7 (Matthew 4:12-16), 11:1-10 (Romans 15:12), and 28:16 (1 Peter 2:1-8). There are more prophecies, including many about the church, which could be listed as well.

The Practical Applications

We must be ready to go when God calls.

We must have trust in God even when our situation looks hopeless.

We should rejoice in the glorious church God has created.

Isaiah 40-66

Approximate date of writing: 700-680 BC

The first thirty-nine chapters of Isaiah mostly dealt with his own times. The last twenty-seven mostly look toward the times of the Messiah. John 12:37-41 shows that the inspired New Testament writers believed the same man wrote both parts of the book (Isaiah 53:10 and 6:10 are quoted).

A Beacon of Hope - After Chapter 39 ended with the prophecy of Babylonian captivity, Chapter 40 was like a burst of light. God wanted them to know they will receive comfort and all flesh would see the LORD's glory (40:1-5; see John 1:22-23). God wanted Israel to understand He would come in power and gentleness (40:9-11), a prophecy of Christ.

The Servant's Identity (Chapters 40-48) - Isaiah spoke of a Servant of God, particularly in four "Servant Songs" (they are in Chapters 42, 49, 50, and 52-53). He used the term "servant" in three different ways. God spoke of Israel in 42:18-20. Israel was to be His servant or messenger to spread His word. In 43:10-12 God spoke of the faithful Israelites as His Servant. In 42:1-7 God spoke of the Messiah as His Servant. This Servant would bring the gospel to the Gentiles, be gentle, and not be out to glorify Himself (Matthew 12:16-21). The context determines which servant Isaiah meant.

The Servant's Suffering (Chapters 49-59) - The first Servant Song was in 42:1-7. The second is in 49:1-6. The Servant, Christ, would restore Israel and be a light to the Gentiles. Paul and Barnabas refer to this passage in Acts 13:46-47. The third Servant Song is in 50:4-9. The abuse that Christ endured in the events leading to His crucifixion in Matthew 26:67 is one example of the prophecy's fulfillment. The fourth Servant Song is in 52:13-53:12, which predicted Christ's persecution, His teaching, His intercession, and His suffering for mankind.

The Servant's Kingdom (Chapters 60-66) - In the last few chapters of Isaiah we learn several things about the kingdom that the Servant would rule. Jesus quoted part of 61:1-3 in Luke 4:17-21 to show He was fulfilling the passage by helping those in need. The things Isaiah mentioned are those that are typical of Christ's kingdom. In 66:1-3 God said through Isaiah that there would be a time in which a physical building that was dedicated to Him would not be important and animal sacrifices would not be required; what would be necessary was a humble heart. That kingdom is the church. In 66:18-22 Isaiah prophesied that people from all nations could be part of the kingdom, even leaders in the kingdom, and that the kingdom would last forever. We should be thankful that we can be part of this kingdom, Christ's church.

The Promise of Christ:

In 42:1-7 Isaiah prophesied how Christ would teach (Matthew 12:16-21). In 49:1-7 he prophesied how Christ would bring salvation to all men (Acts 13:46-47). In 50:4-10 he prophesied how Jesus would be persecuted on earth. In 52:13-53:12 Isaiah prophesied how Jesus would be rejected and how He would suffer for man. In 59:15-20 he prophesied how Christ would be a Redeemer (Romans 11:26), and in 61:1-2 he prophesied how Jesus would preach good news (Luke 4:17-21).

The Practical Applications:

God's servants must be faithful in all of their actions.

God's servants are often rejected.

God's servants must value being a part of His glorious kingdom.

Micah

Approximate date of writing: 737-700 BC

Micah and Isaiah were working at about the same time and had similar messages. Micah spoke of judgment for present sins and also hope in the future time of the Messiah, much the same way Isaiah did.

Bad News for the Present (Chapters 1-3) - God was coming in judgment against both the northern and southern kingdoms (1:2-5). Micah's dramatic language underscored His power. The northern kingdom would be completely destroyed shortly (1:6-7). Micah's grief over this showed in his strong reaction (1:8). He described many of the cities affected, using the sound of their names to declare what would happen (1:9-16).

The cause of the judgment was the scheming of evil men who wanted all of the land for themselves (2:1-2; Isaiah 5:8). God graphically described the cruelty of such men in 3:1-3, where He compared it to chopping people up and cooking them. Ironically, much of the land would be taken from the owner in the coming destruction (2:3-5). Also, many people listened to prophets who would tell them what they wanted to hear instead of the truth (2:11; Isaiah 30:10). Prophets were easily bought (3:5), and corruption was prevalent in other offices (3:11-12; see Jeremiah 26:18).

In the future, God would lead Israel in safety (2:12-13).

Good News for the Future (Chapters 4-5) - In 4:1-3, Micah described God's kingdom, the church, as the "mountain of the house of the LORD", like Isaiah 2:2-4. What Isaiah and Micah prophesied is a reality for us today! However, Judah needed to be punished for her sins before then. Micah prophesied that they would be taken captive to Babylon and return (4:9-10). Micah prophesied that the Messiah would be born in Bethlehem (5:2-5). Matthew 2:3-6 and John 7:42-43 show that this was considered a Messianic prophecy by the Jews. Micah also prophesied the changes God would bring at the time of the new covenant (5:12-15).

The Change Needing To Be Made (Chapters 6-7) - The beginning of Chapter 6 is like a courtroom scene. In 1-5, God told Israel to plead its case. He had cared for them but they had not obeyed Him. The Israelites asked what they should do. God prescribed justice, kindness, and humility (6:6-8). That is what God has always wanted. See also Isaiah 1:17.

Fraud and dishonesty ruled in Micah's day, and God would bring judgment (6:10-14). Honest men were almost impossible to find (7:1-4). Those things had to change if the Israelites were going to be the people God wanted them to be. Through it all, Micah maintained faith in God and waited upon Him (7:7-9). Israel needed to wait upon, or trust, God to turn the evil present into the glorious future (Isaiah 8:17). Micah exulted in God's forgiveness and knew he could trust God to forgive sins (7:18-20). We can also exult in those things through Jesus Christ, whose coming Micah prophesied.

The Promise of Christ

In 5:2 Micah prophesied that the Christ would come from Bethlehem and that He would have existed before man as God had (see Matthew 2:6; John 7:42).

The Practical Applications

Those who proclaim God's word must proclaim all of it.

God knows the future to the smallest detail.

God wants true obedience from a pure heart.

Nahum and Zephaniah

Approximate dates of writing: 655-615 BC

Nahum was written to show God's power in the judgment to come upon Assyria. Zephaniah complemented Nahum by showing God's judgment upon unrepentant men, Jew or Gentile.

Nahum - Nahum preached against the great Assyrian empire.

In Chapter 1, Nahum spoke of how the Almighty God came against Assyria. 1:2-3 showed that God was an avenger, but still good and merciful. God can both punish and bless. As in Micah 1:3-4, Nahum showed the awesome power of God (1:4-6). All of nature and humanity trembled at His presence. Nahum spoke of the destruction of the wicked (see 1:10; Malachi 4:1). Assyria would bear the brunt of God's wrath, but Judah was also admonished to truly obey God (1:12-15).

In Chapter 2, Nahum described the complete conquest of Assyria in powerful and exciting language. He painted a picture of Nineveh, Assyria's most prominent city, preparing for the attack (2:1-4). Despite the preparations, the outcome was inevitable because God had decreed it. God has always been in control! Assyria had been at the hilt end of the victor's sword, but they would soon be at the point (2:11-13). God was against them and they were no match for Him.

In Chapter 3, Nahum showed how Assyria's destruction was for just cause. The Assyrians' taste for violence had caught up to them (3:1-4). Assyria had destroyed nations and families for gain. Judgment was deserved and inevitable (3:19). Similar language is used of Jerusalem in Micah 1:9. As we consider that this kind of judgment could apply to God's people as well as the Gentiles, we turn to the Book of Zephaniah.

Zephaniah - Zephaniah prophesied in the time of Josiah (1:1). Though he was a good king, the people did not repent enough to avoid the destructive judgment that would come from Babylon. Though Zephaniah prophesied Judah's destruction, there was hope for individuals. Judgment would come upon Judah because of their idolatry (1:2-6). Zephaniah spoke of the day of the LORD (1:7-8), like Isaiah, Joel, Amos, Obadiah, and others. The silence in God's presence is in Habakkuk 2:20. Many believed that God would not do anything to answer their sins (1:12). That invited judgment. Jerusalem was going to be destroyed and its people removed (1:14-18; see Joel 2:2). There was still hope, at least for individuals (2:1-3). God had been merciful and would continue to be, but justice required Him to act against the majority.

Zephaniah also spoke against other nations. Philistia, Moab, Ammon, and Ethiopia would be affected (2:4-12). As in Nahum, Assyria would also be judged (2:13-15).

Even in a bleak present situation, Zephaniah spoke of a future hope. The present Jerusalem was corrupt (3:1-4; see Micah 3:9-11). A future people in God's holy mountain would be just (3:8-13). That was a prophecy of the church. Zephaniah prophesied that the captivity of Judah would be returned, including the lame and outcast (3:18-20; see Micah 4:6-7).

The Coming of Christ

In 3:15, Zephaniah prophesied that the LORD would be in Israel's midst; Christ's work on earth ultimately fulfilled the prophecy. Earlier verses (3:8-13) prophesied Christ's kingdom, the church.

The Practical Applications

God has control over the ungodly people of the world.

God will punish His people if they sin against Him.

God will preserve those who are truly following Him.

Habakkuk

Approximate date of writing: 630-610 BC

This book is in the form of a dialogue between a faithful but perplexed prophet named Habakkuk and God. Follow each part and see the book's structure.

Habakkuk's First Question: *When will God act against the evil in the land?* - 1:1 - 1:4

Habakkuk believed in God, but he did not understand why God had waited so long to punish violence in Judah. He saw destruction, injustice, and the dominance of the wicked.

The LORD's First Response: *Punishment will come through the Babylonians* - 1:5 - 1:11

God would raise up the Babylonians (Chaldeans) to destroy the land of Judah. The Babylonians were powerful and arrogant. They gave the glory to themselves. They seemed unstoppable.

Habakkuk's Second Question: *Why use the evil Babylonians?* - 1:12 - 2:1

Habakkuk wondered why the fairly wicked Judeans were to be punished by the very wicked Babylonians. It did not agree with what Habakkuk had expected of God. Habakkuk waited to see how God would answer, trusting Him even before receiving the answer.

The LORD's Second Response: *The just shall live by his faith* - 2:2 - 2:5

God told Habakkuk that the time of judgment mentioned in His first answer was coming. The answer to his question was that the just, or righteous, would live by his faith. What does that mean? God partly answered the question in speaking of the fate of all evil people. He could use them as tools, but after their use they would face their own judgment. God told Habakkuk what he needed to know to spiritually survive the difficult days ahead: God is righteous and the wicked will be punished eventually, but you hold fast and live by faith until that happens.

This verse is used in the New Testament three times: Romans 1:16-17 (the gospel tells us how to be just); Galatians 3:11-12 (Faith is the basis of Christian living); and Hebrews 10:38 (We can live by holding on to our confidence during persecution).

Habakkuk's Song: *Woe to an evil oppressor*: 2:6 - 2:20

Habakkuk had enough confidence in God's judgment to rejoice over the fall of the evil Babylonians before it happened. His song had five woes to certain groups of wicked people: those who oppressed others (6-8); those who were greedy (9-11); those who were violent (12-14); those who debased others (15-17); and those who worshipped idols (18-20). God would come in judgment against those who had done those things.

Habakkuk's Psalm: *Absolute trust in God* - 3:1 - 3:19

Habakkuk spoke of God's coming against all those who disobeyed but His saving those who obeyed. Even though Habakkuk faced a terrible situation in the conquest of Judah by Babylon, he spoke of his trust in God with complete confidence. He would exult in God.

The Coming of Christ

Romans 1:16-17 explains how Christ's gospel enables us to be saved, using the quotation, "The just shall live by faith" (2:4).

The Practical Applications

God can use evil people without approving of the evil things they do.

All men will be punished for evil if they do not repent.

We can rejoice in difficult times (3:17-19) if we live by faith (2:4).

Jeremiah 1-29

Approximate date of writing: 627-587 BC

Jeremiah prophesied before, during, and after the Babylonian conquest of Judah. The “weeping prophet” was given a painful message to preach to a rebellious people.

God’s Call - Jeremiah was a young man when God called him. God told Jeremiah that He would help him as he prophesied (1:5-10). Jeremiah’s message was that Judah was going to be punished for its sins (1:16). God promised to strengthen Jeremiah to deliver the message (1:18).

Rebuking the People - What Judah was doing made no sense. They had been given a special relationship with the true God but turned to idols instead (2:11-13). They traded good for bad and paid for the privilege. God could not find a righteous man in Jerusalem (5:1). The people loved to worship falsely and have lies told to them (5:30-31). They had forgotten what shame was (6:15). They should have respected God’s long-established ways (6:16) instead of using their own opinions as the standard for right and wrong (10:23). They were like a filthy belt that no one would want to wear (13:1-11). Their idolatry was deeply ingrained (17:1-2).

God had the right to use Judah as He saw fit (18:3-6), even shattering them for their disobedience (19:10-11). Jeremiah prophesied that the Babylonians would conquer Judah and Judah would go into exile (25:8-11). Jeremiah told the early groups of exiles to settle in their homes because the exile would last seventy years (29:5-10; see also 2 Chronicles 36:20-21).

Jeremiah’s Heart - Jeremiah’s book shows us the heart of a man who loved God enough to preach His word in the midst of opposition, even though it pained him terribly.

Persecuted - Jeremiah ran squarely into persecution many times. In 15:15, he asked for vengeance on his persecutors. In 18:18-23, we read about those who devised plots against him. In 20:1-6, he was beaten and put in stocks. In 26:7-9, some people were ready to lynch him until some better men spoke. In 28:10-13, a false prophet broke the yoke Jeremiah had to wear as part of his prophecy (see 27:2).

Passionate - Many times Jeremiah spoke of his pain (4:19; 23:9-11). He was told not to pray for the people (7:16; 11:14), not because he was not supposed to care but because they deserved the punishment that was coming. He wished he could weep day and night (9:1-2; 14:17). He had sorrow over the coming captivity (13:17). He was told not to have a family because of the imminent punishment (16:2-4).

Struggling - Jeremiah’s personal struggle is shown in his book. Holding in the message of God’s wrath wearied him (6:10-11). He asked for assurance from God (15:18). The word was a fire in his heart and his bones (20:9); he loved God too much not to tell others the message, though it hurt him. He was victorious in his struggles through God’s power.

The Promise of Christ

Compare 23:5-6 with 22:28-30. Jesus Christ would be “The LORD Our Righteousness”, but He would not reign on the throne in Jerusalem. We can see that Christ would be a spiritual king.

The Practical Applications

We must try to lead holy lives if we want God to accept us.

We must be willing to stand in the face of persecution.

We must love God’s truth more than anything else.

Jeremiah 30-52 and Lamentations

Approximate date of writing: 610-575 BC

Jeremiah's message had been mostly negative in the early part of his book. Though his current situation remained bleak, He spoke of a better time in the future. The Book of Lamentations is a lament over the fall of Jerusalem to the Babylonians.

Better Times in the Near and Distant Future (Jeremiah 30-33) - God promised to bring back the people to the land of Israel (30:3). He promised to bring a new covenant, or testament, that would be written on the hearts of His people (31:31-34). God told Jeremiah to redeem a piece of land though he was in prison and the city was under siege because one day people would live in the land again (32:6-15). God also promised that David's son would reign over Israel again (33:14-17; see 22:28-30; 23:5-6).

Prophesying Until Jerusalem's Fall (Jeremiah 34-39) - Jeremiah and Baruch wrote down God's words of judgment on a scroll but King Jehoiakim burned it, angering God (36:23-24). Jeremiah was falsely accused, imprisoned, and beaten (37:14-15). He was also thrown into a cistern and rescued -- both with the approval of King Zedekiah (38:1-13)! Eventually, Jerusalem was captured, but Jeremiah was spared by the Babylonians (39:11-14).

Treachery and Rebellion after Jerusalem's Fall (Jeremiah 40-44) - Jeremiah chose to stay in the land after Jerusalem was captured (40:2-6). The Babylonians appointed a governor over the land; he was killed, and the assassin tried to take the people left in the land to the Ammonites (41:1-10). Brave men rescued the people (41:11-18). The people asked Jeremiah whether they should stay in the land or go down to Egypt, promising to do whatever God wanted (42:1-6). After Jeremiah told them to stay, they called him a liar and went to Egypt anyway (43:1-7). God told Jeremiah that the Babylonians would conquer Egypt (43:9-13) and that the people of Judah who had gone there would be punished (44:26-29).

Prophesying Against Other Nations (Jeremiah 46-51) - Jeremiah's prophecy included messages about Egypt (Chapter 46), Philistia (47), Moab (48), Babylon (50-51), and other nations (49). Jeremiah even prophesied that the Medes would defeat Babylon decades in advance (51:11).

Lamentations - Lamentations contains many expressions of grief over Jerusalem after the Babylonians had destroyed the city and the temple. Four of the five chapters are acrostics in which the first letters of the verses follow the order of the Hebrew alphabet. The writer speaks of the people's sin, their suffering, and God's anger. The last chapter asks God to restore His people.

The Promise of Christ

Jeremiah prophesied of the new covenant that Christ would bring (31:31-34). He also prophesied that the Branch of David (Jesus Christ) would reign over Israel (33:14-17). Also, 52:31-34 shows how David's line, from which the Messiah would come, was preserved even in captivity.

The Practical Applications

We must live righteously under the great new covenant that God has given us.

We must obey God completely and unflinchingly (35:13-16).

We can have hope even in the midst of sorrow and pain.

Daniel

Approximate date of events: 605-535 BC

The first six chapters of Daniel are mostly history and the last six are mostly prophecy. From the first section we see examples of courage, and from the second we see the God's power in prophecy.

Daniel and His Friends (Chapters 1-6) - In all of these stories we see that although Judah had been defeated, God had not. **God was in control** as He showed in every incident:

- Daniel and his friends were faithful to God even though they were far from home (1:3-5). They would not eat the king's food, which it would have been wrong for them to eat (1:8). God rewarded them by making them the healthiest and wisest of the young men (1:18-20).
- Daniel was able to tell Nebuchadnezzar his dream and the interpretation, giving the glory to God (2:27-30). With divine power displayed before him, the king prostrated himself and acknowledged the true God (2:46-47).
- Nebuchadnezzar set up a gold image and demanded that all bow before it. Daniel's three friends would not. They would trust God even if it cost them their lives (3:13-18). Nebuchadnezzar again acknowledged the true God when He preserved the three in the furnace (3:28-29).
- When Nebuchadnezzar thought his power alone had built Babylon, his dream was fulfilled (4:13-17). He began acting like an animal. Eventually, the king acknowledged God again.
- Belshazzar used the temple treasures for drinking cups. A hand wrote a message on the wall. Daniel interpreted the writing as a notice of God's giving the empire to the Persians (5:24-28).
- Other rulers in the Persian Empire were jealous of Daniel. The only way they could discredit him was to outlaw his faith (6:5-7). Daniel prayed to God anyway (6:10-11). He was put in the lions' den, but God protected him (6:22-23).

World Kingdoms and God's Kingdom (Chapters 7-12) - God allowed Daniel to correctly predict six centuries of the future in great detail. **God was in control** as seen in these prophecies:

- Daniel had a vision of four world empires (7:2-7). The Babylonian, Medo-Persian, Greek, and Roman Empires were described. They corresponded to the parts of the statue in 2:37-43. The son of man and the eternal kingdom represented Christ and His church (7:13-14).
- Daniel had a vision of a ram and a goat, representing Medo-Persia and Greece (8:20-25). Part of the prophecy was that a king from the former Greek Empire would afflict Judah.
- Daniel received a message that the king mentioned in the previous point would hurt the temple, but some would stand up against him (11:29-35). A king named Antiochus IV defiled the altar and tried to destroy the true worship of God, but some faithful Jews stood against him.
- Daniel was told that seventy weeks remained for Israel (9:24-27). Parts of the prophecy correctly predicted the suffering of Christ and the destruction of Jerusalem and the temple.

The Promise of Christ

Daniel predicted that Christ's kingdom would come in the time of the fourth (Roman) Empire in 2:44-45. Jesus' coming as a man to set up an eternal kingdom that would defeat the kingdoms of men was prophesied in 7:13-14. His death (being "cut off") was prophesied in 9:26.

The Practical Applications

God is superior to even the world's most powerful men.

God's purpose in bringing Christ into the world did not fail in the smallest detail.

We must have the courage to stand for truth in the worst situations if we want to please God.

Ezekiel

Approximate date of writing: 593-571 BC

Ezekiel was in exile (1:2-3) when he was called to prophesy. While Jeremiah warned the people in Judah, and Daniel worked for the Babylonian government, Ezekiel spoke to his fellow exiles.

Judgment on Judah (Chapters 1-24) - Ezekiel was allowed to have a vision of the glory of the LORD (1:26-28). God told him he had a difficult message to deliver. Ezekiel was to tell his fellow exiles that their judgment was not over. Two deportations by the Babylonians had not convinced them. God gave him a vision of an idol in the temple in Jerusalem (8:3-6), followed by more abominations. God had the faithful marked and the rest destroyed in Chapter 9. Then in Chapter 10-11, the glory of God left the temple. Judah had already left God, so He was leaving them.

Judgment on Other Nations (Chapters 25-32) - Not only Judah but also other nations had lived in an ungodly way and were bringing destruction upon themselves. One prominent example was the wealthy island city of Tyre. Ezekiel prophesied Tyre's destruction in 26:3-6. Not just Judah, and not just Tyre, but Egypt and other nations would be destroyed by the Babylonians.

Prophecies of Hope (Chapters 33-48) - As word of Jerusalem's fall came (33:21), God was changing Ezekiel's message from destruction to hope. The false hopes were gone and Ezekiel had been vindicated; now the true hope was proclaimed. Ezekiel prophesied that God would make David Israel's king again in 34:23-27. That was a prophecy of Jesus Christ (John 10:11). They would live in peace and be blessed. They would know God was the LORD as He delivered them from slavery. As in Isaiah 2 and Micah 4, the prophet spoke of the church.

Ezekiel spoke of God's giving His people His Spirit in 36:24-28. He would give them a new heart (2 Corinthians 3:3) and He would bring Israel back to its land. God would cleanse His people (Hebrews 10:22). The ultimate fulfillment of all of these promises is also in Christ and His church. Ezekiel again prophesied that David would be king over Israel in 37:22-26. God would give His people an everlasting covenant and dwell with them forever. Even after Judah returned from the exile, they never had a legitimate physical king and the rebuilt temple was destroyed; this prophecy also referred to the church and God's dwelling forever with them. Jesus has an endless kingdom (Luke 1:32-33).

Ezekiel had a vision of a temple in Chapters 40-48. In 43:1-5, he saw the glory of the LORD return to the temple. That was the happy counterpart to God's leaving the temple in Chapters 10-11. No physical temple matched the one in Ezekiel's vision. God will be with the church forever, and that was the point of Ezekiel's vision.

With all these great promises, how should we live? Our lives should show a deep appreciation for all Christ has done and all of the blessings in His eternal kingdom, the church.

The Promise of Christ

Ezekiel deals extensively with Christ and His kingdom, the church. Jesus is prophesied to be David, the shepherd and prince, in 34:23-24. He is also David, the king of spiritual Israel, in 37:24-25.

The Practical Applications

We must care deeply about sin and speak against it if we want to avoid judgment (9:4).

We all are responsible for our sins before God, no matter our nationality.

We must live in a way that reflects the glory of what Jesus has done for us.

Haggai

Approximate date of writing: 520 BC

Haggai is a short, simple book with practical lessons. It is also an encouraging book because God spoke, and His people listened and obeyed. Haggai can be divided into four messages.

Priorities (1:1-15) - Haggai and Zechariah urged the Jews who had returned from exile to finish rebuilding the temple (Ezra 5:1). Haggai chastised the people for building nice houses for themselves and leaving the temple in ruins (1:2-6). Fifteen years had gone by with little, if any, progress. God was withholding blessings from them because their priorities were wrong (see also Zechariah 8:9-12; Malachi 3:8-11). The leaders and the people repented and started working on the temple again in less than a month (1:12-15; see also Ezra 5:2). We should consider Haggai's words today. We may have the wrong priorities in using our money, time, or effort. With God's help we can overcome these problems and be what He wants us to be.

The Glory of the New Temple (2:1-9) - The new temple building did not look as richly adorned as the one Solomon had built (2:3). Haggai prophesied that the glory of God's house would be greater than it had been before (2:9). Even though Herod would make the same building beautiful with his renovations 500-550 years later (John 2:20), what would be most glorious was the rule of Christ in God's spiritual house forever.

The other part of the prophecy was that God would shake all nations (2:6-7). The New Testament showed us what Haggai meant in Hebrews 12:25-29. The author told his readers not to turn away from Jesus because His kingdom would never be shaken, though other powers would be destroyed. The temple built in Haggai's day would fall and the Hebrews were warned against putting their trust in that building or the Old Testament system associated with it.

Cleanliness (2:10-19) - Haggai pointed out that uncleanness spread to everything around it more than holiness did under the Law (2:10-13). He used this point to show that the sin of the people of Judah in some areas of their lives was making the rest of their lives unclean; they were not acceptable to God (2:14). They had suffered famine because of their sin (2:16-17). They were repenting, though, and God would bless them (2:19). Like Haggai's listeners, we must not pretend that we can remove only some of the sin from our lives and still be acceptable to God overall.

God's Approval of Zerubbabel (2:20-23) - Zerubbabel was King Jehoiachin's grandson. Because Zerubbabel had obeyed God's commands, God approved of him. God would make him like a signet ring (2:23), which was the opposite of the way God had felt about his grandfather (Jeremiah 22:24-25). The Messiah would come through Zerubbabel's line (Matthew 1:12-16; Luke 3:23-27). God also encouraged Zerubbabel in his temple-building work in Zechariah 4:6-10.

The people were successful because they obeyed the God's word. The temple was rebuilt in about four years (Ezra 6:14-15).

The Coming of Christ

Jesus Christ was the descendant of Zerubbabel, who was the governor in Haggai's time (2:21-23; Matthew 1:12-16). Jesus was also connected with the temple's greater glory in 2:6-9.

The Practical Applications

We must not put our own desires above the needs of God's work.

We must not allow sin in a part of our lives because it will defile the whole.

We must work hard for God if we want to be spiritually successful.

Zechariah

Approximate date of writing: 520-480 BC

Zechariah prophesied with Haggai about the need to rebuild the temple (Ezra 5:1; 6:14). He also prophesied many important things about Jesus Christ. Some consider this book the most difficult in the Old Testament, but the main point of each vision in the book is usually not difficult.

Building the Temple (Chapters 1-8) - Zechariah's first message to the people was to repent (1:2-6). They were not to have the same attitude their fathers did. God knew what was happening on the earth, and He would cause the temple to be rebuilt and cause Jerusalem to grow (1:7-17). God would defeat those who had scattered His people (1:18-21). God would protect Jerusalem (2:1-5), and He warned His people to leave foreign lands and come to where He would dwell with them (2:6-13).

Joshua the high priest was given a clean garment and admonished to follow God in Zechariah's vision (3:1-7). Zerubbabel the governor was promised help and success if he worked to rebuild the temple (4:1-14). God would punish everyone who stole and swore falsely in the land (5:1-4). Wickedness would be thrown out of God's land (5:5-11). God's purposes would be accomplished in the earth (6:1-10).

God wanted His people to be just and kind; He did not want people to perform rituals that had lost their meaning while their hearts were hard (7:1-14). God would truly bless Jerusalem when the people practiced truth and righteousness (8:1-12). Fasting would be turned to joy when people truly sought Him (8:13-23).

A Future Deliverer (Chapters 9-14) - Other nations of the world would be punished, but God would protect His people from oppression (9:1-8). His people would be a weapon in His hand (9:11-17). Israel and Judah would live together as He brought back His people from faraway lands (10:1-12). Zechariah had a vision in which he tried to take care of a flock of sheep doomed to slaughter; despite his efforts, his work was unappreciated, and the flock was left to its fate (11:1-17). That was a prediction of the rejection of Jesus Christ.

God would defend Jerusalem against attack with the house of David prominent among them (12:1-14). At that time, false prophets would be ashamed of their work (13:1-6). Many would die after God's true shepherd had been struck, but the ones who remained would truly be God's people (13:7-9). Many would try to attack God's people, but God would intervene for His people (14:1-8). God would be king over all the earth, punishing the disobedient and making His people holy (14:9-21).

The Promise of Christ

God promised to bring His servant the Branch (3:8). This Branch would be a king and a priest (6:11-15). This king would come in peace and have a worldwide reign (9:9-10; John 12:14-15). He would be a shepherd whose worth was counted as thirty pieces of silver (11:12-13; Matthew 27:3-10), and who was struck (13:7; Matthew 26:31; Mark 14:27). This man would be pierced and many would look on him (12:10; John 19:37). Zechariah was prophesying Jesus Christ.

The Practical Applications

We must be faithful to God if we want Him to protect us.

We must always depend on God to accomplish the work He would have us to do.

We must worship God with a whole heart instead of mindlessly following rituals.

Esther

Approximate date of events: 483-474 BC

The Book of Esther is more than the story of how the Jews began celebrating Purim; it shows how God's providence combined with faithful men's courage accomplished God's purpose in history.

The Jews had been allowed to return to their land by Cyrus about 55 years before, but not all had gone back. Some had stayed in the lands under Persia's control. Ahasuerus, probably the king called Xerxes by historians, was on the throne. Ahasuerus called on his queen, Vashti, to display her beauty at his feast, but she refused (1:10-12), so he removed her as queen (1:19-21). Ahasuerus selected Esther to be the new queen (2:17), although he did not know that she was a Jew (2:10, 20). A high-ranking official named Haman asked Ahasuerus for permission to kill all of the Jews (3:8-11); he did this because Esther's relative, Mordecai, would not bow down to him (3:2-4). Mordecai asked Esther to go to the king and ask the life of the Jews (4:7-8). Even though Esther could be executed for going to the king without being asked (4:11), Mordecai told her that she needed to do it anyway (4:13-14). When she approached the king, he showed his favor by extending his scepter (5:2). Esther asked the king and Haman to come to banquets she had prepared (5:4-8). Haman decided to build a gallows on which to hang Mordecai (5:14), but when he was about to ask for Mordecai's life, the king decided to honor Mordecai for discovering a plot against him (2:21-23; 6:10-11). Haman had to praise Mordecai before the people instead of hanging him (6:11). At the second banquet, Esther exposed Haman's evil plans (7:3-6). Ahasuerus had him hanged (7:7-10). Ahasuerus allowed another decree to be made which let the Jews defend themselves (8:7-11). After the Jews had defeated their enemies, they started to keep the days of rest after their victory as a holiday (9:17-23, 26-28).

Providence - God was working so that all of these events would fit together. Esther's selection as queen put her in the right place at the right time. Mordecai's discovery of the plot against the king was providential in its timing because of what happened when the king wanted to reward him in Chapter 6. Ahasuerus' extending the golden scepter (5:2) when he could have ordered Esther's execution showed God's providence, as was his granting her requests for banquets. Ahasuerus also extended the scepter to Esther a second time (8:4), which allowed the Jews to defend themselves. Divine providence also helped the Jews be successful in battle (9:15-16).

Courage - Mordecai showed courage by not bowing before Haman, even though the king had commanded it. Esther showed courage in risking her life to go before the king unbidden. It also took courage to expose Haman as the one who threatened the Jews. She went before the king a second time when she implored him to protect the Jews (8:5-6). The Jewish people showed courage in fighting their enemies, because the threat against them was not over when Haman was hanged.

The Coming of Christ

While Esther does not explicitly foretell the coming of Christ, Esther's and Mordecai's actions helped the Jews survive in order to bring the Messiah into the world.

The Practical Applications

We must stand for the truth even if it costs us our lives.
God can take any person and use him or her in His plan.
We must trust God enough to do what needs to be done.

Ezra

Approximate date of events: 539-457 BC

God has never promised His people a life free of problems (2 Timothy 3:12). As the Jews returned from the exile they faced difficulties when they physically rebuilt the temple (Chapters 1-6) and later when Ezra worked to spiritually rebuild the people in teaching the Law (Chapters 7-10). How they handled these problems can provide lessons for us.

Difficulties in Building the Temple - At the laying of the foundation of the temple in 3:12-13, a potential problem emerged. Those who had seen the first temple wept. Haggai 2:1-9 says that the new temple seemed as nothing in their eyes. Sometimes there is a *danger from those who remember the past* and unintentionally discourage others from rebuilding in the present. Haggai reminded the people that God's Spirit was still with them and God was in control.

The next problem was the possibility of *compromise with false religion* (4:1-3). Many churches fail in this today. "Don't we all worship the same God?" some ask. No, not if that worship is being offered the wrong way. The Jews rightly refused the offer from their enemies.

The Jews then suffered *harassment from their enemies* as they tried to build (4:4-24). The enemies succeeded through deceit in getting the Persian king to order a halt to construction. The Jews let this obstacle prevent them from working on the temple for about sixteen years.

Haggai and Zechariah rose to tell the people that they needed to stop obeying men and start obeying God (5:1-2). When they started doing what was right, *opposition rose again* (5:3). This time the Jews made the right response; when the original decree allowing them to build was found, King Darius gave orders to others not to interfere (6:6-7). The temple was completed in about four years (6:15). Because the Jews obeyed in spite of difficulties, God blessed them with success.

Difficulties in Teaching the Law - Ezra wanted to teach God's word in Israel (7:10). God helped him by giving him favor before the king (7:6). *Ezra did not defeat himself before he started*. He could have given up without trying, but he tried and succeeded because God was with him. King Artaxerxes' letter (7:11-26) showed the incredible privileges and responsibility Ezra was given. Ezra encountered a few problems as he started on the journey. There were no Levites; *he needed more help* (8:15), so he sent for some Levites (8:16-20). Ezra also *faced a long and dangerous trip*, but he depended on God instead of a military escort. His faith was rewarded (8:21-23,31).

Ezra had accomplished so much, but perhaps the deadliest hazard was lurking nearby. *Morality was being disregarded*; the people, including the leaders, were marrying foreigners (9:1-2). That practice had helped send them into exile in the first place. Today, instances of fornication or other sin can demoralize a congregation. Ezra began with public mourning and a prayer for the group (9:3-15). Another man rose up and said that they had sinned, but they had hope if they would make it right (10:2-4). The people responded to public rebuke and agreed to do what was right (10:10-12).

The Coming of Christ

While Ezra does not explicitly foretell the coming of Christ, Ezra's stand against intermarriage helped to prevent idolatry and make Judah ready to bring the Messiah into the world.

The Practical Applications

We must obey God, even when men threaten us for doing His work.

We must show by our actions that we trust God.

We must rebuke and correct sin, even at great cost.

Nehemiah

Approximate date of events: 446-430 BC

Nehemiah's work in governing the returned exiles overlapped Ezra's work teaching them. As we read of how he led Israel in rebuilding the walls of Jerusalem, we can see how Nehemiah's faith was tested, how he demonstrated his faith, and how he prayed frequently.

Faith Tested - Nehemiah was constantly under threat as he led the people in rebuilding the walls. As soon as he arrived to lead Israel in rebuilding the walls of Jerusalem, influential Gentiles laughed at him and lied about his motives (2:19-20). These enemies insulted the exiles' work on the walls (4:1-3) until they saw how well the work was going; they then switched to conspiring to attack them (4:8-9). The enemies tried to make Nehemiah come out where they could harm him (6:2-4), but when he refused, they accused him of trying to make himself king (6:6-8). They hired other Israelites to try to trap him (6:10-12). Beyond that, some Israelites tried to discourage Nehemiah's stand against the enemies (6:17-19).

Faith Demonstrated - Nehemiah demonstrated faith by having the boldness to ask King Artaxerxes to have the responsibility of rebuilding (2:2-4). He did the same in encouraging the people to rebuild the walls (2:17-18). When some Jews had taken advantage of those in need, Nehemiah stood up against them (5:6-8). He showed his faith in another way by encouraging the people after they had heard the Law (8:1-10). He also led the people to reaffirm their covenant with God (9:38-10:1). Nehemiah also helped to organize the public worship described in 12:31-43.

Prayer - When Nehemiah heard of the condition of Jerusalem, he confessed his sin and Israel's in prayer (1:3-11). While that prayer was part of days of fasting and mourning, his prayer in 2:4 may have been very brief as he stood before Artaxerxes. Nehemiah prayed when he and his people were persecuted and despised (4:4-5). He prayed when the enemies were conspiring to attack him (4:9). He asked God to remember the good things he was doing (5:19). He prayed for strength when his enemies were falsely accusing him of treason (6:9). Nehemiah prayed for the defeat of those who were trying to trap him (6:14). His prayers were constant and heartfelt.

Standing Firm - Nehemiah left Jerusalem to return to the king's service for a while (13:6). When he entered Jerusalem again, he found that a priest had given one of their Gentile enemies an apartment in the temple storerooms (13:4-5)! That was just part of the sin the Israelites had committed in quickly violating almost every provision of the covenant they had made in 10:30-39. They were not supporting the Levites (13:10-12), observing the Sabbath (13:17-19), or avoiding intermarriage (13:25-27). Nehemiah responded to this test of his faith by correcting these problems. The frequency of his prayers in this chapter (14, 22, 29, 31) shows how much he relied upon God's strength in difficult times. People can forget their promises and turn from the right way shockingly quickly, and every age needs men like Nehemiah who will stand up to sin and correct it.

The Promise of Christ

While Nehemiah does not explicitly foretell the coming of Christ, Nehemiah's efforts in rebuilding the walls and reforming the people helped the Jews prepare to bring the Messiah into the world.

The Practical Applications

We can accomplish great things if we trust God and work together.

We must stand firm against those who are opposed to God's will.

We must guard ourselves vigilantly against sin because it often reappears quickly.

Malachi

Approximate date of writing: 430 BC

In Malachi, understanding the format of the book is key. Several times, God or His prophet made a statement. Malachi pictured the people as asking how or why the statement is true, and then God or His prophet gave them a more complete answer.

God: I have loved you (1:2). Israel: How (1:2)?
God: Look at those I have not loved as I have loved you (1:2-5).

Could we doubt God's love for us while assuming our love for Him is adequate? Israel did.

God: You priests have despised My name (1:6). Israel: How (1:6)?
God: You have offered defiled food (1:7). Israel: How have we defiled You (1:7)?

Could we serve God halfheartedly and wonder why we are not getting much out of it? Israel did.

Malachi: God does not accept your offerings (2:13). Israel: Why (2:14)?
Malachi: You have not been faithful to your wives (2:14-16).

Could we treat others shamefully and wonder why God is not treating us better? Israel did.

Malachi: You have wearied God (2:17). Israel: How (2:17)?
Malachi: By questioning God's justice (2:17).

Could we pray with doubt and blame God for not answering our prayers (James 1:5-8)? Israel did.

God: Return to Me and I will return to you (3:7). Israel: How (3:7)?
God: You have robbed Me (3:8). Israel: How (3:8)?
God: You have not given Me all that you I asked you to give (3:8-12).

Could we fail to give God all that He has asked and wonder why He is not blessing us? Israel did.

God: You have spoken harshly against Me (3:13). Israel: What have we spoken (3:13)?
God: You have said that serving Me is useless and that I am not just (3:14-15).

Could we give up on God and wonder why it seems He has given up on us? Many in Israel did.

Some listeners did repent, and God was pleased with them (3:16-18). Judgment was coming (4:1). The last word of the book (and our Old Testament) is "curse" (4:6). This is appropriate because all who failed to keep the Law perfectly were cursed. Christ saved us from that (Galatians 3:10-14).

The Promise of Christ

In 3:1-3, Malachi prophesied that a messenger (John the Baptist) would come before Christ (Matthew 11:13-14) and that Christ would come to the temple. In 4:5-6, Malachi also prophesied that a man like Elijah (John) would cause many people to repent (Luke 1:16-17).

The Practical Applications

We must never blame God for not blessing us if we are not making an effort to serve Him.

We must never divorce our personal lives from our service to God.

We must trust God to administer justice in His time.