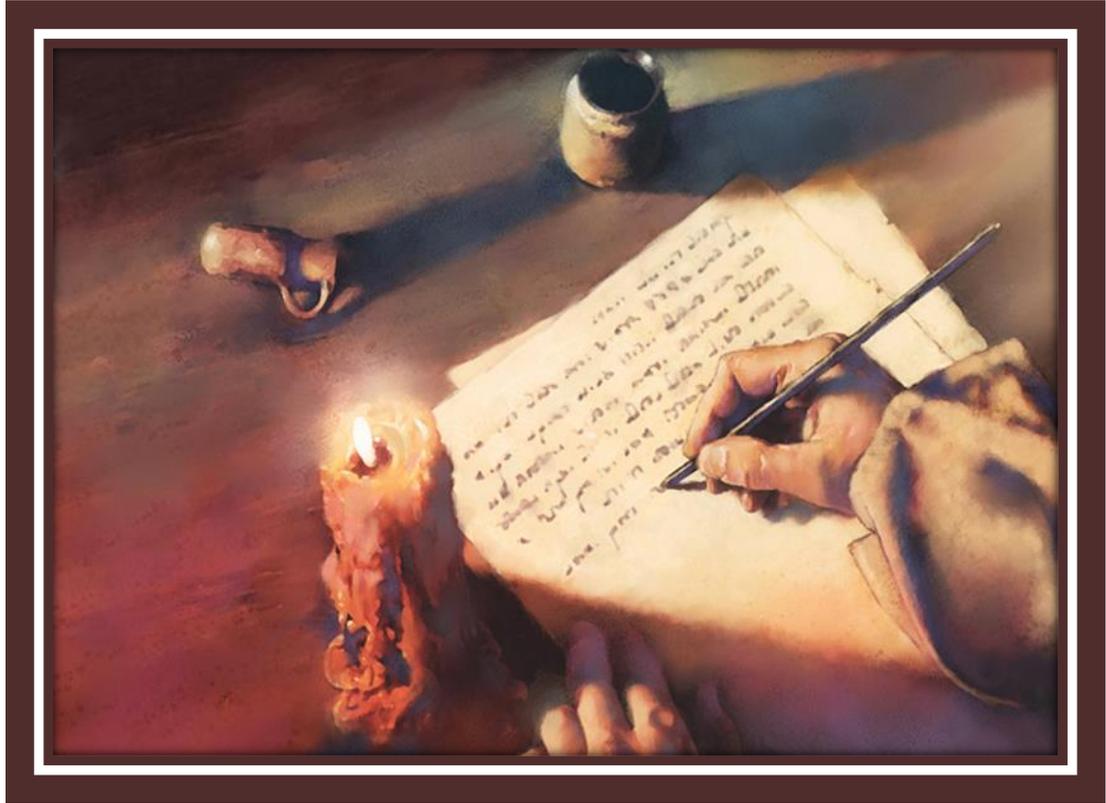


GREAT CHAPTERS FROM THE PROPHETS



"And the LORD has sent to you all His servants the prophets, rising early and sending them, but you have not listened nor inclined your ear to hear."

Jeremiah 25:4

Dowlen Road Church
Teacher – Max Dawson

Auditorium Bible Class
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GREAT CHAPTERS FROM THE PROPHETS

The Prophets

As we use the term “the prophets” in this study we mean the prophets of the Old Testament. And, in an even narrower sense, we are talking about the literary prophets—those men who wrote the books of the prophets in the Old Testament.

The Old Testament prophets were a special class of men, inspired by the Holy Spirit to reveal the will of God (2 Peter 1:20-21; 1 Peter 1:10-12). They could speak regarding the past, the present, or the future. They differed from the priest. The priest went to God on behalf of the people. The prophet went to the people on behalf of God. They were God’s ambassadors to men. They typically spoke to the nation of Israel—God’s chosen people in the Old Testament—though sometimes God sent His prophets to other nations. For example, Jonah and Nahum both prophesied concerning the nation of Assyria.

In the New Testament, the prophets were a class of men who were second only to the apostles (1 Corinthians 12:28). Like the prophets of old, they spoke by the Holy Spirit (1 Corinthians 12:7-11; 14:26-33). In Acts 13:1-3 several men were identified as prophets in the church at Antioch. While it is not our intent in this study to investigate New Testament prophets, it is important to note that such men did function in the early church during the age of inspiration.

The Old Testament prophets were special agents of God. They were raised up by Him and sent to the people to convict them of sin, and to call them to repentance. They were often sent to kings, not only to instruct them, but also to appeal to them to turn back to God. On some occasions, they went both to kings and to the people to encourage them in the face of their enemies (Isaiah 37:21-35). Their most typical message, however, was to denounce the sins of Israel and to pronounce the judgments of God upon that nation that was constantly turning from God (2 Kings 17:7-18; Jeremiah 25:4-12).

God used the prophets to promote righteousness and truth among the people. Those men were humble, faithful and fearless men. They were often persecuted, and sometimes even murdered by their own people (Matthew 5:11-12; 23:34-38; Hebrews 11:32-38; James 5:10-11). Some of them were called from the plow or from the herd, (Amos 7:14-16). At least one was ordained to be a prophet before his birth (Jeremiah 1:4-10).

They also served in preparing teachers in Israel. The Old Testament speaks of the “sons of the prophets” (2 Kings 2:3-5; 4:38). These were not the offspring of prophets, but rather those who were being trained by the prophets to be teachers in Israel. We might hear the term “school of the prophets.” This term would refer to those being schooled by the prophets. Some of these “sons of the prophets” became not only religious teachers, but actually became inspired prophets themselves. There are several female prophets mentioned in the Old Testament Scriptures—Miriam, Deborah, and Huldah, though none of these wrote any books of the Old Testament. Female prophets are also mentioned in the New Testament—Anna, Elisabeth, and Mary, and the four daughters of Philip (Acts 21:8).

Our focus in this study will be only on prophets from the Old Testament. And further, it will only be on literary prophets—that is, those prophets who wrote books of the Old Testament. These prophets are distinguished from the “oral prophets.” Prophets such as Nathan, Elijah and Elisha were strictly oral prophets. Their works and ministries were critical in the plan of God even though they wrote none of the books in the Old Testament.

The Old Testament Scripture contains the inspired writings of sixteen of the Hebrew prophets—these are the literary prophets. Four of these, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and Daniel are called the Major Prophets and the other twelve the Minor Prophets. The terms major and minor have not to do with the importance of their writings,

but rather with the size of their books. However, Zechariah, the largest of the minor books is nearly as large as the book of Daniel, one of the major books.

With regard to the proper chronological order of the prophets, there is some diversity of thought. It is easy to date most of the books and place them in proper order. With others, the dates are uncertain. Even though we may not be sure on some of the dates, the messages of the books remain unchanged. Below, I have given you the best dates that I know. You are certain to find other sources that may have some diversity in dating.

1. Jonah: written during the reign of Jeroboam II, king of Israel, which began around 825 BC.
2. Joel: possibly penned in the time of Uzziah, king of Judah, around 800 BC, likely before Amos.
3. Amos: written during King Uzziah's time, and while Jeroboam II was king of Israel. About 787 BC.
4. Hosea: written under Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah, kings of Judah, and under Jeroboam II and his successors, kings of Israel. From about 785 to 725 BC.
5. Isaiah: penned beginning near the death of Uzziah, king of Judah, and the beginning of the reign of Jotham (758 BC), extending to the reign of Manasseh (697 BC).
6. Micah: a prophet under Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah, kings of Judah. Jotham began to reign in about 758 BC, and Hezekiah died 697 BC. Thus, Micah was contemporary with Isaiah.
7. Nahum: was in the latter part of Hezekiah's reign, after the invasion by Sennacherib. Around 700 BC.
8. Zephaniah: a prophet in the reign of Josiah, before the destruction of Nineveh. About 630 BC.
9. Jeremiah: began his work in the thirteenth year of Josiah, king of Judah (628 BC). Jeremiah continued to prophesy under Shallum, Jehoiakim, Jeconiah, and Zedekiah, to the taking of Jerusalem by the Chaldeans (586 BC). He likely died two years afterward in Egypt. Lamentations was also written by Jeremiah. It was penned after the fall of Jerusalem in 586 BC. I have not listed it separately because it is from the same author.
10. Habakkuk: a prophet in Judah, near the beginning of the reign of Jehoiakim, about 610 BC; before the coming of Nebuchadnezzar. Would have been contemporary with part of Jeremiah's ministry.
11. Obadiah: prophesied near the fall and captivity of Jerusalem (586 BC), and before the desolation of Edom. Contemporary with the end of Jeremiah's ministry.
12. Ezekiel: a prophet during the captivity. Carried captive to Babylon with Jeconiah king of Judah, 596 BC. Was taken away in the second captivity. He began to prophesy about 590 BC; and continued, under Nebuchadnezzar, till fourteen years after the final capture of Jerusalem.
13. Daniel: was taken into Chaldea in the first siege of Jerusalem while he was very young (605 BC). It was the fourth year of Jehoiakim, king of Judah. He prophesied in Babylon to the end of the captivity and probably finished his work about 534 BC as a very old man. Though Daniel went into Babylonian captivity before Ezekiel did, Daniel's book extends to a much later time.
14. Haggai: evidently returned from the captivity around 536 BC, and prophesied in the second year of Darius, son of Hystaspes (520 BC).
15. Zechariah: prophesied in Judea at the same time as Haggai (520 BC), likely continued after him.
16. Malachi: the last of the prophets; finished his work by 400 BC. Would have been in the latter part of Nehemiah's governorship at Jerusalem.

THE HISTORICAL BACKGROUND OF THE PROPHETS

The times of the prophets listed above extends from about 800 BC to 400 BC. These were not good times for the people of God.

The Northern Kingdom of Israel was plunging headlong into idolatry. Before the kingdom had been divided, King Solomon allowed idolatry to come into Israel (1 Kings 11:1-13). After Solomon's death, Israel was divided. Rehoboam, Solomon's son, reigned in the Southern Kingdom of Judah (1 Kings 14:21ff). Jeroboam reigned over the ten tribes in the Northern Kingdom (1 Kings 12:1-33). It appears that Jeroboam immediately set up golden calves at Dan and Bethel. He argued that the people should not be burdened by having to go all the way to Jerusalem to worship; thus, these calves were set up for the sake of convenience. But it was still idolatry! Jeroboam began his reign in about 975 BC. In about 250 years from that time the Northern Kingdom of Israel would fall because of idolatry. Jeroboam put the nation into a downward spiral. God's judgment came upon the nation in 722 BC when He brought the Assyrians into Israel and crushed the army of the North. Many of the people were carried away as captives (2 Kings 17:5-18).

Amos is one of the prophets who spoke while the Northern Kingdom was still active (Amos 1:1). Jonah, Amos, and Hosea also prophesied before the Northern Kingdom fell. Beginning in Amos 2:6, the prophet makes a blistering rebuke of Israel's wickedness. In the final chapter of Amos, the prophet speaks of how the Northern Kingdom of Israel would be destroyed. It came to pass in 722 BC. Yet, at the very close of the book, Amos offers a future hope to Israel when the Messiah comes.

Following the captivity of the North by the Assyrians in 722 BC, Judah continued alone for more than 100 years. But the same thing that happened in the North was also happening in the Southern Kingdom of Judah—idolatry.

In the days of Jehoiakim, King of Judah, Nebuchadnezzar, King of Babylon, came against the Southern Kingdom of Judah. It was in 605 BC that this first siege of Jerusalem took place. This was a judgment of God against the people of Judah. The Lord was determined to bring the same kind of judgment on Judah as He had brought on the Northern Kingdom (2 Kings 23:27). The Babylonian captivity took place in three stages (605 BC, 597 BC, 586 BC). Those captivities are chronicled in 2 Kings 24 and 25.

The Babylonian captivity lasted for a total of 70 years, from 605-536 BC. Isaiah was a prophet who foretold of the coming captivity long before it began. He spoke of it more than 90 years before its beginning. Jeremiah, for a lengthy period of time, warned that the captivity was coming. For more than 20 years (from 628 BC) the prophet called upon the people to repent. They would not! See Jeremiah 6:16. Jeremiah was there in Jerusalem during all three stages of the captivity. His heart was broken as he sat in the ashes of Jerusalem following the final invasion by Nebuchadnezzar (Lamentations 1:1-3).

Four important dates to remember with respect to the captivity are:

605 BC: The first siege of Jerusalem by Babylon. Daniel was taken captive at this time.

597 BC: The second siege of Jerusalem by Nebuchadnezzar. Ezekiel was among the captives.

586 BC: The third and final siege. Jerusalem and the temple were plundered and burned.

536 BC: The return of captives to Jerusalem under Zerubbabel. More captives came home later.

The first order of business for those Jews who came back to Jerusalem was to rebuild the temple and the city—both of which they were slow to do. They were more concerned with their own houses. Haggai and Zechariah were prophets sent by God to provoke the people to rebuild. Even after the temple and the city were rebuilt,

the people of God fell into carelessness in serving God. The book of Malachi was God’s final message to a careless and disobedient people.

THE TEN CHAPTERS

For the purposes of our study I have chosen ten chapters from the books of the prophets. The choosing has been mine, and I will acknowledge that it has been somewhat arbitrary. I have chosen ten chapters that I believe are ten significant chapters—great chapters—from the prophets. I think you will agree that each chapter selected provides information and benefit to us. It will help us in understanding the plan of God and how it developed over the centuries.

I will introduce each chapter with a little bit of historical background and context. We will then look at the chapter and draw some lessons from it. I will give you a few questions to answer. Most of the time the answers will be found in the chapters we are studying.

I have attempted to put the chapters in the chronological order in which they were written historically. This will help us in following a historical narrative from the warnings of Joel and Hosea about coming judgment—all the way to the appeals of Malachi for the people to be faithful to God.

In some of the chapters we will find prophecies of the Messiah, the coming of Jesus Christ. Our study, however, is not primarily Messianic. In so many cases, as we study the prophets, we focus on the prophecies of the coming of Christ and may neglect the larger message of the prophets. In this study, we will see rich and significant messages from the prophets. Rather than our study being Messianic, it will focus more on the Babylonian captivity and the historical narrative of that time.

May God bless us as we begin these lessons.

Lesson One.....	Joel 2: “Blow The Trumpet In Zion”	Page 6
Lesson Two.....	Hosea 4: “Ephraim Is Joined To Idols”	Page 8
Lesson Three	Isaiah 44: “The Folly of Idolatry”	Page 10
Lesson Four	Habakkuk 1: “Look Among The Nations And Watch”	Page 12
Lesson Five	Jeremiah 25: “The Seventy Years Of Captivity”	Page 14
Lesson Six	Daniel 2: “God Rules In The Kingdom Of Men”	Page 16
Lesson Seven	Ezekiel 37: “The Valley Of Dry Bones”	Page 18
Lesson Eight	Haggai 1: “Consider Your Ways”	Page 20
Lesson Nine	Zechariah 13: “In That Day”	Page 22
Lesson Ten	Malachi 1: “You Have Despised My Name”	Page 24
Addendum	What About “The Ten Lost Tribes Of Israel?”	Page 26

There is no lesson on this page. This workbook is designed in such a way that when you go to a lesson you will be able to see the whole lesson at once when the book is laid open. See the example below. This should aid you in your study and preparation for the class.

<div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 5px; margin-bottom: 10px;"> <p style="text-align: center;">JOEL: Chapter Two Lesson 1</p> <p style="text-align: center;">“Blow The Trumpet In Zion”</p> </div> <p>The book of Joel opens with a graphic description of a devastation caused by swarms of locusts. The plague of locusts was accompanied by a terrible drought. The locusts are believed by some to be invading armies, particularly the Assyrians or the Babylonians. I see no reason to conclude that they are anything other than locusts, and surely Joel is stripped of its grain and gashed with drought. The prophet calls the people to repentance. The plague has come upon them because of their sins, he encourages them by promising the removal of God's judgments and the return of prosperity to the land.</p> <p>I have chosen the second chapter of this book for two reasons:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The sounding of the alarm that calls the people to repentance. 2. The promise of better days ahead if the people will repent. <p>While the dating of Joel is uncertain, the contents appear to describe the time of Josiah, King of Judah. Joel speaks of the same judgments of locusts, and drought, and fire that Amos does. This seems to imply that both prophets appeared at about the same time. Amos is dated and Joel is Judah. Amos prophesied in the days of Jeroboam II (Amos 7:10; Jeroboam became king in 825 BC. At the same time, Josiah was king in Judah (639-608 BC). I date Joel prior to Amos because Joel speaks of the judgment of God by locusts that is coming. Whereas Amos denounces the fact that the judgment by locusts has come (Amos 4:9; 7:1). Thus, we conclude that Joel wrote prior to Amos—sometime around 800 BC.</p> <p>What do we know of the prophet? Only that he was the son of a man named Pethuel (1:1), and that he was a prophet in Judah (1:1, 2, 8, etc.). Also, the fact that Joel calls for a blowing of the trumpet as “Zion” is again indicative that he was a prophet in Judah. Zion is a name that often stands for Jerusalem.</p> <p>As the prophet speaks of judgment, he calls upon the people to repent (2:1-14; 2:12-14). If the people of Judah would repent, God would provide blessing for them (2:18-27). Judah would be restored to its former prosperity. While describing the return of plenty and prosperity, the prophet looks forward to a future that is far distant, and predicts the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, and the sign, wisdom and spiritual prosperity of the time of the Messiah (2:28-32).</p> <p style="text-align: center;">STUDY QUESTIONS FOR JOEL CHAPTER TWO</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The blowing of the trumpet served as an alarm to the people of Jerusalem. Can you find a place in the book of Amos where a trumpet was used as an alarm? 2. The “darkness” language of verse 2 is indicative of judgment. Can you find another place in any of the prophets where “darkness” language is used? 3. Have you ever seen or heard of such a destruction by locusts described in 2:1-11? 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 4. In verses 12-14 the Lord calls the people to repent. How is this repentance described? What figurative language does Joel use to describe it? 5. Why, in verses 15-17, does the prophet mention the ark and incense? What is indicated by this language? What is the point that the prophet wants to get across to God's people? 6. In verses 18-20, what promises does God make to His people if they would repent and turn back to Him? 7. Read verses 21-26. While the rains to come would be prosperous, what about the locusts that the people had experienced during the judgment? Could those be recovered? Explain your answer. 8. After looking at verses 27, what can you conclude about the kind of sin the people had engaged in? What sin had brought the judgment upon them? 9. The final section of this chapter (verses 28-32) is prophetic of the time of the Messiah. I am sure you know where this text is quoted in the book of Acts. 10. In verse 28, the text speaks of “all flesh.” What is indicated by this language? 11. In verses 29-32, “darkness” language is again used. This is judgment language. This judgment would take place “before” what day? 12. According to verse 32, what would be the result of the outpouring of God's Spirit on that day? <p style="text-align: center;">LESSONS LEARNED FROM JOEL CHAPTER TWO</p> <p>Write a brief summary of what you have learned from this chapter.</p>
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JOEL: Chapter Two

Lesson 1

“Blow The Trumpet In Zion”

The book of Joel opens with a graphic description of a devastation caused by swarms of locusts. The plague of locusts was accompanied by a terrible drought. The locusts are believed by some to be invading armies, particularly the Assyrians or the Babylonians. I see no reason to conclude that they are anything other than locusts. Joel portrays Judah as stripped of its greenery and parched with drought. The prophet calls the people to repentance. The plague has come upon them because of their sins. He encourages them by promising the removal of God’s judgments and the return of prosperity to the land.

I have chosen the second chapter of this book for two reasons:

1. The sounding of the alarm that calls the people to repentance.
2. The promise of better days ahead if the people will repent.

While the dating of Joel is uncertain, the contents appear to describe the time of Uzziah, King of Judah. Joel speaks of the same judgments of locusts, and drought, and fire that Amos does. This seems to imply that both prophets appeared at about the same time, Amos in Israel and Joel in Judah. Amos prophesied in the days of Jeroboam II (Amos 7:10). Jeroboam became king in 825 BC. At the same time, Uzziah was king in Judah (808-756 BC). I date Joel prior to Amos because Joel speaks of the judgment of God by locusts that is coming. Whereas Amos bemoans the fact that the judgment by locusts has come (Amos 4:9; 7:1). Thus, we conclude that Joel wrote prior to Amos—sometime around 800 BC.

What do we know of the prophet? Only that he was the son of a man named Pethuel (1:1), and that he was a prophet in Judah (3:1, 6, 8, etc.). Also, the fact that Joel calls for a blowing of the trumpet in “Zion” is again indicative that he was a prophet to Judah. Zion is a name that often stands for Jerusalem.

As the prophet speaks of judgment, he calls upon the people to repent (1:13-14; 2:12-14). If the people of Judah would repent, God would provide blessing for them (2:18-27). Judah would be restored to its former prosperity. While describing the return of plenty and prosperity, the prophet looks forward to a future that is far distant, and predicts the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, and the signs, wonders and spiritual prosperity of the time of the Messiah (2:28-32).

STUDY QUESTIONS FOR JOEL CHAPTER TWO

1. The blowing of the trumpet served as an alarm to the people of Jerusalem. Can you find a place in the book of Amos where a trumpet was used as an alarm?
2. The “darkness” language of verse 2 is indicative of judgment. Can you find another place in any of the prophets where “darkness” language is used?
3. Have you ever seen or heard of such a destruction by locusts described in 2:1-11?

4. In verses 12-14 the Lord calls the people to repent. How is this repentance described? What figurative language does Joel use to describe it?
5. Why, in verses 15-17, does the prophet mention the bride and bridegroom? What is indicated by this language? What is the point that the prophet wants to get across to God's people?
6. In verses 18-20, what promises does God make to His people if they would repent and turn back to Him?
7. Read verses 21-26. While the years to come would be prosperous, what about the losses that the people had experienced during the judgment? Could those be recovered? Explain your answer.
8. After looking at verse 27, what can you conclude about the kind of sin the people had engaged in? What sin had brought the judgment upon them?
9. The final section of this chapter (verses 28-32) is prophetic of the time of the Messiah. I am sure you know where this text is quoted in the book of Acts.
10. In verse 28, the text speaks of "all flesh." What is indicated by this language?
11. In verses 30-31, "darkness" language is again used. This is judgment language. This judgment would take place "before" what day?
12. According to verse 32, what would be the result of the outpouring of God's Spirit on that day?

LESSONS LEARNED FROM JOEL CHAPTER TWO

Write a brief summary of what you have learned from this chapter.

Hosea: Chapter Four

Lesson 2

“Ephraim Is Joined To Idols”

Hosea is the first of the twelve Minor Prophets, as arranged in our Bibles. He prophesied for about 60 years, from the time of Jeroboam II to Hoshea in the Northern Kingdom; and from the time of Uzziah to Hezekiah in the Southern Kingdom, from about 785-725 BC.

The book of Hosea can be divided into two parts. The first three chapters (1:1-3:5) contain a series of symbolic actions directed against the idolatries of Israel. In this section, the prophet is told to marry a harlot. It is a point of controversy and dispute whether or not the marriage of the prophet actually took place, or whether it was an allegorical vision. I see no reason to believe that it was anything other than actual. God often did dramatic things in Israel to make a powerful point. The marriage was designed to illustrate the relationship of God to His idolatrous, unfaithful wife, Israel.

The later section (4:1-14:9) bluntly addresses the idolatry of Israel, the Northern Kingdom. It especially denounces Samaria for the worship of idols, which prevailed there. Sometimes the term “Ephraim” is used as the prophets condemned the sin of Israel. Ephraim was a dominant tribe in the Northern Kingdom; thus it became a common term to describe the nation. Judah is also condemned by Hosea (6:4-11) for its idolatry.

While Hosea condemns Israel’s wickedness and gives numerous warnings, he also uses tender appeals to call the people back to God (11:1-9).

We know almost nothing about the prophet himself. The New Testament, however, often quoted the prophet Hosea (Matthew 9:13; Romans 9:25-26; 1Peter 2:10).

I chose Hosea chapter four as one of our great chapters because it well illustrates the problem that led to the Assyrian captivity of the Northern Kingdom and the Babylonian captivity of the Southern Kingdom. One word will describe the cause of the fall of both North and South—idolatry. There are few chapters in the Bible that describe idolatry and its effects like Hosea chapter four.

STUDY QUESTIONS FOR HOSEA CHAPTER FOUR

1. In verse 1, what does the prophet say is the problem in the land of Israel?
2. What verse, later in the chapter, states the same problem?
3. Verse 3 says they “break all restraint.” What should be present in our lives as a restraining influence?
4. The priests were ordained by God as teachers of the Law. Yet, according to verse 4, the people had become like those who contend with the priest. What is meant by this statement?

5. The prophets and priests had rejected knowledge and had forgotten God's Law. What would God do in return to such disobedient people?
6. According to verse 7, the more prosperous they became, the more they sinned. (There was great prosperity in the time of Jeroboam II). Do you think the same thing is true in our modern times?
7. According to verses 8-10, both the people and the priests were the same. What was their sin?
8. Verse 11 shows us the attraction of idolatry. It allowed people to do as they pleased—yet they were enslaved by the things they desired. What phrase back in verse 2 relates to this?
9. The people sought counsel from their idols (verse 12). The idolatrous priests pretended to speak for the wooden idols and gave the people permission to do the things in verse 11. What kind of spirit had possessed the people?
10. In verses 12-13 God said He would not punish their daughters or brides when they committed adultery. Why would God not punish them? Do you think He was letting them off the hook for their sins?
11. In verses 15-16 God makes a distinction between Israel and Judah. Judah had not gone into the depths of sin like Israel had. But God warns them not to go to Gilgal or Beth-Aven. Why this warning?
12. In verse 17, God identifies the Northern Kingdom as "Ephraim." Why does God say, "Let him alone"? Does this mean God had given up on trying to bring that nation back from idolatry?
13. In verses 18-19, God said the rulers of Israel dearly loved this kind of dishonorable conduct. But, then He says the wind has wrapped her up in his wings? What is meant by this unusual language?

LESSONS LEARNED FROM HOSEA CHAPTER FOUR

Write a brief summary of what you have learned from this chapter.

ISAIAH: Chapter Forty-Four

Lesson 3

“The Folly Of Idolatry”

The prophet Isaiah is identified as the son of Amoz. He is revered as one of the greatest of the Hebrew prophets. He began to prophesy at Jerusalem near the end of the reign of Uzziah, about the year 760 BC. He served as a prophet for approximately 60 years. He prophesied under the reigns of Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah (1:1). He was a prophet to Judah, even though for nearly four decades of his ministry the Northern Kingdom of Israel was yet extant.

The first twelve chapters of his prophecies refer to the kingdom of Judah. From chapters 13-23, he speaks of judgments on Gentile nations. The one exception in that section is chapter 22, which is a proclamation against Jerusalem. In chapters 24-35 he speaks of both judgment and salvation. He goes beyond the nations that surrounded Judah and speaks of judgment upon all the nations—including both the Northern and Southern Kingdoms. In chapters 36-39, Isaiah gives a historical account of the invasion of the Assyrian army under Sennacherib. It was at that time that God defeated the Assyrians by the power of the Angel of the Lord.

The remainder of the book of Isaiah (chapters 40-66) contains a series of oracles referring to the future times of the Babylonian captivity and deliverance of the people, bringing them back to Jerusalem. In that section, the prophet looks beyond the captivity and turns to the glorious time of the Messiah and the blessings He will bring to all the nations.

During the entire time of his ministry, Isaiah seems to have been at Jerusalem. A Jewish tradition holds that he was sawn in two during the reign of Manasseh. Early Christians thought perhaps Hebrews 11:37 applied to Isaiah.

Selecting just one chapter from the great book of Isaiah is an extremely difficult task. There are ten or fifteen chapters that could easily be chosen for this series. Chapter two is a prophecy of the beginning of the church. Chapters seven and nine both speak of the birth of the Christ. Chapter eleven is a prophecy of the New Covenant that would include both Jews and Gentiles. Chapter fifty-three is about the Messiah’s death and resurrection.

In spite of the value of those chapters, I chose chapter forty-four. This chapter, I believe, encapsulates the sinful condition the people of Judah were in. The nation was soon to go into captivity in Babylon. Why? It was because of the folly of idolatry. No chapter sets the historical context better than chapter forty-four. Not only does it show why Judah must be punished, but it looks to the future, to the return from captivity in Babylon.

STUDY QUESTIONS FOR ISAIAH CHAPTER FORTY-FOUR

1. The opening of the chapter (verses 1-5) promises future help and blessings to the people of Judah. Note that verse 3 speaks of God pouring out His Spirit. What text does that remind you of?
2. What is the point of verse 5 where so many different people want to be identified with God?
3. In verse 6, God says of Himself, “I am the First and I am the Last.” What other person in the Bible used similar language? When God declares “Beside Me there is no God,” does that mean Jesus is not God?

4. In verses 7-8, God declares that no one but Himself can declare things that are coming. Can any of the idols foretell the future?
5. Verses 9-11 are unusual. They speak of a time when idol makers would be ashamed? Why would that be?
6. Verses 12-15 show the absolute folly of idolatry. What does this man do that is so absurd?
7. In verses 18-20, what is it that the maker does not “understand” or “consider”? What chapter in the New Testament does this lack of knowledge remind you of?
8. In verses 21-23, the Lord again looks to a future time of blessing. He says, “...you will not be forgotten by Me.” Why would they think they were forgotten? Why do men think God has forgotten them today?
9. The final section (verses 24-28) speaks of the time of restoration after the Babylonian captivity. Yet, the Lord begins this section by talking about how He alone is God (in contrast to the idols). How would this relate to the return from the exile in Babylon?
10. When God speaks or gives His counsel by the prophets, what does He always do?
11. When God says to Jerusalem, “You shall be inhabited,” what does He have in mind?
12. How much do you know about “Cyrus” who is mentioned in verse 28? For help on this, read Ezra 1:1-4. When did the event recorded in Ezra take place? What year was it? This tells us that Isaiah was giving hope for the future long before the Babylonian captivity even took place.

LESSONS LEARNED FROM ISAIAH CHAPTER FORTY-FOUR

Write a brief summary of what you have learned from this chapter.

Habakkuk: Chapter One

Lesson 4

“Look Among The Nations And Watch”

It is clear that God was going to punish the people of Judah because of their idolatry. And, it was also clear that at the appointed time He would bring them back from the captivity and restore them to their land. But, wait! God was going to punish them by the hands of the Babylonians—a nation more wicked than Judah. That doesn't seem right does it? That's the very question that the prophet Habakkuk had. “The Babylonians are worse sinners than we are, but you are going to punish us by using them against us? How can You do that?”

We know very little about the prophet Habakkuk. He was a contemporary with Jeremiah and prophesied about 610 BC, shortly before Nebuchadnezzar's first invasion of Judah. The prophets had repeatedly called the people to repentance, but to no avail. The stubborn nation was now in its death throes. Habakkuk looks around and sees corruption everywhere in Judah. He cries out to God and asks “How long?” How long would it be before God does something about the wickedness of the people?

The Lord's reply to the prophet is shocking! He is going to use the Chaldeans (Babylonians) to bring judgment on Judah and Jerusalem. That plan brings even more anguish and distress to Habakkuk. How could God possibly use a nation that was even more wicked than Judah as His instrument of punishment? If you were posed with that question, how would you answer?

The book of Habakkuk consists of only three chapters. Because it is so small, it is almost a forgotten book. Yet it contains a message that was relevant for its time, and has truths in it that are relevant today. In the first chapter, God speaks of the terrible punishment that the Chaldeans would soon inflict upon the guilty nation. In chapter two, God predicts the future humiliation and overthrow of their conquerors. Chapter three is a prayer of Habakkuk. It contains some of the most beautiful language and one of the greatest proclamations of faith found anywhere in the Hebrew writings.

STUDY QUESTIONS FOR HABAKKUK CHAPTER ONE

1. In the opening verses (1-2) the prophet cries out to God, but he believes God is not hearing him. He says God would not save him from the sight of all the violence in Judah. Was it true that God did not hear him? Have we ever felt the same way with our prayers?
2. In verses 3-4, the prophet had seen nothing but trouble in Jerusalem. He declares that the Law of God is powerless. In what sense was it powerless?
3. Verse 5 contains the title for our lesson. The prophet wanted something to be done about the wickedness in Judah. Now God was going to act. But it was not what Habakkuk expected. This is one of those “be careful what you wish for” moments. Sometimes things come to us in a way we do not want. Do you believe God may judge America for its sins? Have you ever prayed that our nation would turn back to God? What if it took a judgment of God upon America to cause the nation to repent? Have you considered that?

4. The thing Habakkuk did not expect was that God would use the wicked Chaldeans to punish Judah. In verse 6, God identifies that nation. He says, "I am raising up the Chaldeans." What is the point of saying "I am..." doing this?
5. According to verses 6-10, the Chaldeans would be ruthless and terrifying, even though they were being used by God. How could God use someone that was so awful against His own people?
6. According to verse 11, even though God used Babylon, to whom would they give glory for their victory?
7. While Habakkuk has had his question answered about how long God would allow wickedness to continue in Judah, God's answer unsettles him even more. So, now in verses 12-14, he is perplexed by another question. "Why do you allow the wicked to devour a person more righteous than he?" How would you answer?
8. In verses 15-16, to whom or what would the Chaldeans sacrifice after their victory over Jerusalem?
9. It seems from Habakkuk's statement in verses 15-16 that he has the same question that people often ask today. "Why do evil people do bad things and seem to get away with it? They seem to prosper and have plenty, while others have little or nothing." Have you had questions like that? How do you answer?
10. In verse 17, Habakkuk wonders if the wicked will continue without restraint. The prophet knows that cannot be, but he doesn't understand how it will be dealt with. If you read 2:1, you will see that the prophet is ready to be corrected in his thinking. Do you find it difficult to be corrected in your thinking on things like this?
11. Of course God will not allow the wicked Chaldeans to just get away with what they are about to do. After He uses them, He will punish them (2:2-20). God announces five woes that will come on the Chaldeans. The prophet concludes his book with a prayer in praise of God. Note the final three verses (3:17-19). If judgment came upon America, would you be able to pray the same prayer?

LESSONS LEARNED FROM HABAKKUK CHAPTER ONE

Write a brief summary of what you have learned from this chapter.

JEREMIAH: Chapter Twenty-Five

Lesson 5

“The Seventy Years Of Captivity”

When we left Habakkuk, the invasion by the Babylonians was only a short time away. In fewer than five years people from the city of Jerusalem would be marched off to slavery in Babylon. Jeremiah, and other prophets, had been warning the people for decades that such a judgment was coming. But no one seemed to listen. In Jeremiah 6:16, the prophet called for the people to return to the good way God had given. The reply of the people was blunt and terse: “We will not!” The situation was hopeless. Judgment must come!

Jeremiah prophesied under Josiah, Jehoahaz, Jehoiakim, Jehoiachin and Zedekiah. He continued to prophesy after the third invasion by Babylon and the fall of Jerusalem. Jeremiah was born at Anathoth, of the priestly line. He was destined by God to be a prophet even before his birth (1:1, 5). He evidently began his work as a prophet in about 628 BC, in the thirteenth year of King Josiah. Even though Josiah was a good king and made many reforms—even aggressively opposing idolatry—the die was cast. The hearts of the people were set on evil. They failed to heed Jeremiah’s warnings.

For more than twenty years Jeremiah called the people back to God and told them that they would go captive into Babylon if they did not repent of their idolatry. Jeremiah met strong opposition, not only from the people, but also from false prophets who argued against Jeremiah’s proclamations. He was even opposed by kings. Jehoiakim threw Jeremiah’s prophetic roll into the fire (36:20-26); some even sought to take his life (38:16). Zedekiah was instructed by Jeremiah, and warned of the impending woes on the people, and of their seventy years’ captivity, but to no avail. Sometimes the prophet was so discouraged that he vowed that he would not preach anymore. But he could not hold back the message (20:7-9).

For forty-two years Jeremiah steadfastly maintained the cause of truth against rebellious Judah. Into captivity they must go. For seventy years. Seventy long years. Seventy years of slavery. Seventy years because of idolatry.

STUDY QUESTIONS FOR JEREMIAH CHAPTER TWENTY-FIVE

1. It was easy to choose this chapter, for in it the prophet tells how long the captivity would last. The captivity is dated from 605 BC. In verses 1-4 the prophet declares that he has warned the people for 23 years that such a time was coming. Who else had given such warnings? How did the people respond?
2. According to verses 5-7, what was the message of the many prophets who had warned the people? What promise did God make to the people if they would repent of their idolatry?
3. In verses 8-10, God declares that He would use Nebuchadnezzar and those nations allied with him, and bring them against the land of Judah. What does God call the Chaldean king in this text? When the Babylonians came into Judah, would the other nations around them be affected? For those who would remain in the land of Judah, what would be taken from them?

4. Reading verses 11-12, we find the first time that the seventy years of Babylonian captivity are mentioned. At about this same time, a false prophet rose up against Jeremiah and denied the seventy years of captivity (chapter 28). Who was the false prophet? For how long did he say the captivity would last? Which prophet was correct?
5. The captivity actually took place in three phases. The first group was carried off in 605 BC. Daniel was among those first captives (Daniel 1:1-6). The second group to go captive was in 597 BC. Ezekiel was among those carried away to Babylon (Ezekiel 1:1-3). The third phase of the captivity was in 586 BC. The reason for the second and third invasions by Nebuchadnezzar had to do with the people rebelling against Babylon. Computing from 605, when would we expect the captivity to end?
6. According to verses 13-14, would God actually carry out all He had promised regarding judgment?
7. In verses 15-29, we have a most unusual text. Jeremiah is more than a prophet to Judah. He is a prophet to all the surrounding nations. What transpires here is evidently intended to be a description of a vision the Lord showed Jeremiah. The prophet is told to take the wine cup of God's fury and require that all the listed nations drink of it. Some of the nations might refuse the cup. But Jeremiah must insist that they drink it. This indicates that none of them would escape God's judgment. What is the logic that God uses in verse 29 as justification for judgment upon all these nations?
8. Verses 30-32 is a declaration against the nations. Jeremiah says the Lord would give a mighty roar. By what means would He give this roar?
9. In verse 33, the slain would be from one end of the earth to the other. What is meant by this figure of speech?
10. Verses 34-38 condemns one particular class of people in Judah—and in all the nations. What is the class of people, and who would it include?

LESSONS LEARNED FROM JEREMIAH CHAPTER TWENTY-FIVE

Write a brief summary of what you have learned from this chapter.

DANIEL: Chapter Two

Lesson 6

“God Rules In The Kingdom Of Men”

We have already mentioned that Daniel was among those who were first deported to Babylon in 605 BC (Daniel 1:1-6). He was called Belteshazzar by the Chaldeans. He was descended from the royal family of David. Daniel was chosen, along with three of his companions, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah, to reside at Nebuchadnezzar's court. He demonstrated his faith early in his story by refusing the king's food (1:8-16); these things would have been unclean or defiled by idolatry. Daniel stayed in Babylon for the entire seventy years of the captivity (1:21).

Throughout this period, he had the favor of the reigning monarchs—with one exception. In Daniel 6:1-23, some of the other officers of King Darius plotted against Daniel. As a result, he was cast into the den of lions. God saved Daniel's life, and those envious men were cast into the den and devoured by those beasts.

The book of Daniel can be broken into two parts. The first part is six chapters in length (1-6). It chronicles the life and times of Daniel and covers the seventy years that he served in Babylon. The second part is also six chapters in length (7-12). It addresses a series of prophetic visions that Daniel had and the language used, for the most part, is apocalyptic in nature. There are many similarities in this section with the book of Revelation.

Daniel is not identified as a prophet in the opening chapter. In that sense, he differs from Isaiah and Jeremiah and other prophets. It is not until chapter two that we begin to see his work as God's prophet. I have chosen chapter two as one of the great chapters from the prophets. It is the account of Nebuchadnezzar's dream.

You probably already know the story found in chapter two. For now, I will only say that Daniel could reveal and interpret the dream that the king had. None of the other wise men in Babylon could do that.

Daniel gave glory to God for this power. The dream was of an image that consisted of four kinds of metals. The four metals represented four kingdoms. Daniel said that in the days of the fourth kingdom, the God of heaven would set up His kingdom (2:44). This is one of the great chapters in all the Bible as it sets forth the destiny of nations and prophecies of Christ's kingdom. This chapter is one that illustrates that “the Most High rules in the kingdom of men” (Daniel 4:17).

STUDY QUESTIONS FOR DANIEL CHAPTER TWO

1. In verses 1-8, why could not the wise men and magicians interpret the king's dream?
2. After reading verse 9, do you think these men are different than modern-day fortune tellers?
3. What do you think of the statements of the wise men in verses 10-11? Is there any truth in what they said?
4. According to verses 12-13, what did the king decide to do with these men?

5. In verses 14-18, Daniel asked for time to tell the interpretation. What did he do next?
6. In verses 19-23, the thing was revealed to Daniel. To whom did he give credit? Note particularly verse 21. What is meant by “He removes kings and raises up kings”?
7. Verses 24-28 catch our attention when Daniel says that the soothsayers cannot declare the dream. What does he say about the one who can reveal it? What does this tell us about the original source of the dream?
8. In verses 29-30, what does Daniel say about why God had revealed the dream to him?
9. Verses 31-35 show us the dream. It was of an image made of four kinds of metal. What are the four metals and what happened to the image?
10. In verses 36-43, the first part of the dream is interpreted by Daniel. What do the four parts (metals) of the image represent? Do you know the historical name of each?
11. The point of the dream is found in verses 44-45. This is one of the grandest and most magnificent statements made in any prophecy in the Old Testament. When was this kingdom to be established? The question now is this: Did it happen or not? How would you prove your answer?
12. Reading verses 46-49, what did Nebuchadnezzar do in response to Daniel’s interpretation of the dream?
13. Why is this chapter so important in God’s plan?

LESSONS LEARNED FROM DANIEL CHAPTER TWO

Write a brief summary of what you have learned from this chapter.

EZEKIEL: Chapter Thirty-Seven

Lesson 7

“The Valley Of Dry Bones”

Ezekiel was both a priest and prophet (1:3). He is identified in that same verse as the “son of Buzi,” about whom we know nothing. Ezekiel was carried captive to Babylon by Nebuchadnezzar, along with Jehoiachin, king of Judah, in 597 BC. Ezekiel dates his first vision by the river Chebar (a canal that connected to the Euphrates) from this event (1:2). The dating then would put this first vision at about 593 BC. For some reason the prophet appears to give his age when this first vision came; he was apparently 30 years old (1:1). Though he was a captive in Babylon, along with a multitude of other Jews, the elders of Israel looked to him for direction and guidance (8:1; 14:1; 20:1). He prophesied for at least twenty years, until at least 573 or 572 BC, the fourteenth year after the final captivity of Jerusalem (40:1). During the first eight years of his captivity he was contemporary with Jeremiah. The prophet Daniel also lived at the same time (Ezekiel 14:14-16; 28:3).

The book of Ezekiel opens with a dramatic vision that is said to depict the glory of God (1:4, 28). Like this first vision, much of the book is written with highly dramatic figures, often using apocalyptic language.

The prophet has much to say about the rebellious spirit that Israel had against God. He powerfully condemns the abominations of their idolatry in the first major section of the book (1:1-24:27). It also contains similar denunciations against Tyre and other hostile nations (25:1-32:32). The latter part of the book contains prophecies regarding the return and restoration of the people of God after the captivity (33:1-48:35).

I have chosen Ezekiel chapter thirty-seven as one of the great chapters from the prophets. When this chapter was written the people of Judah were deep into the captivity. Years had passed. They were also in deep despair. They wondered if there was any hope for their exiled nation. They might have known the prophecies of Jeremiah about the return after seventy years, but they may have felt so low that they wondered if those prophetic words would come to pass. Psalm 137:1 begins with a lament for Jerusalem. A sad, dejected people—the people of God—wondered if they could ever be a nation again. Our great chapter answers that question. In the early part of the chapter it assures that Israel would be a nation again. In the latter part, it is heavily Messianic.

STUDY QUESTIONS FOR EZEKIEL CHAPTER THIRTY-SEVEN

1. In verse 1 Ezekiel is brought by the Spirit of the Lord into a valley full of dry bones. Are we to understand that this is a literal valley, or is this part of a vision? How would you answer?
2. Reading verses 2-4, we see that God asked Ezekiel if these bones could live. Ezekiel doesn't seem to know, but is sure that God knows. Then he is told to prophesy to the bones. Do you have any idea why?
3. In verses 5-10, as Ezekiel prophesies, the bones come together; sinew and flesh come upon them; breath comes into them and they come to life. They stood up and became a great army. What do these dry bones that come to life represent? Read on further in the text.

4. The Jews felt as though their nation was dead. They believed all hope was lost. But God was going to bring about a spiritual resurrection, the raising of a nation from the dead. God would perform this, just as He had promised in Jeremiah and Isaiah. As you read verses 11-14, note particularly the language of verse 11. Did the bones represent only the house of Judah? Why is this important?
5. Now, Ezekiel is told to do another strange thing. In verses 15-18, he is to take two sticks—one for Judah, and the other Joseph, the stick of Ephraim, and for all the house of Israel—and join them together as one stick in his hand. He was evidently told to do this in front of the people who were with him. They would wonder what it meant—and so do we! If you haven't yet read ahead, what do you think it means?
6. In verses 19-22, it becomes very plain what the two sticks mean. God is going to make Judah and Israel into one nation again. Does this mean that those from the Northern Kingdom who were taken away in the Assyrian captivity will be allowed to go back home—along with the people of Judah who were taken away in the Babylonian captivity? Can you prove your answer to be correct?
7. At some point in the text Ezekiel shifts from the present time in which he was writing and looks forward to the time of the Messiah. That is apparent from what he writes in verses 23-28. But, look carefully at verses 24-25; will it literally be King David who is king over them? Explain your answer.
8. In verse 26, God speaks of making a covenant with His people. What is the nature of this covenant?
9. In verses 26-27, God speaks of a sanctuary and a tabernacle in their midst. Is this a reference to setting up again the Old Testament tabernacle—but now under the Messiah? If not that, then what?
10. According to verse 28, what will result from God's sanctuary being in the midst of His people?

LESSONS LEARNED FROM EZEKIEL CHAPTER THIRTY-SEVEN

Write a brief summary of what you have learned from this chapter.

HAGGAI: Chapter One

Lesson 8

“Consider Your Ways”

THE EXILE ENDED

At long last the seventy years of Babylonian captivity came to an end. It was time for the people to go back home to Jerusalem. But how would that happen? Do you remember the man whose name was at the end of Isaiah 44? This man, Cyrus, was identified by Isaiah in about 700 BC. He was born 100 years later in 599 BC. He came to power in Persia in 559 BC. Cyrus was a great military leader and was determined on universal conquest. Babylon fell before his army in 538 BC on the night of Belshazzar's feast (Daniel 5:30).

Prior to this time the Gentile kings had only oppressed the Jews. But Cyrus was to the Jews as a "shepherd" (Isaiah 44:28; 45:1). God used him to benefit the Jews. We do not know how much knowledge he had of their religion, but he looked upon the Jews with favor. It was Cyrus who issued the decree found in Ezra 1:1-4.

Now in the first year of Cyrus king of Persia, that the word of the LORD by the mouth of Jeremiah might be fulfilled, the LORD stirred up the spirit of Cyrus king of Persia, so that he made a proclamation throughout all his kingdom, and also put it in writing, saying,

“Thus says Cyrus king of Persia: All the kingdoms of the earth the LORD God of heaven has given me. And He has commanded me to build Him a house at Jerusalem which is in Judah. Who is among you of all His people? May his God be with him, and let him go up to Jerusalem which is in Judah, and build the house of the LORD God of Israel (He is God), which is in Jerusalem. And whoever is left in any place where he dwells, let the men of his place help him with silver and gold, with goods and livestock, besides the freewill offerings for the house of God which is in Jerusalem.”

This decree formally ended the captivity for the Jews. Note that it not only released the people, but also provided for the building of the temple. The first group of exiles returned under Zerubbabel in 536 BC (Ezra 2:1-2).

HAGGAI CHAPTER ONE

It has been 16 years since the decree of Cyrus. Many Jews have indeed returned to Jerusalem. But the house of God—the temple—has not been built. That's where the prophet Haggai comes in. His primary message is simple and always appropriate: “Consider your ways” (1:5, 7). Why had God's people not rebuilt the temple?

Haggai is the first of three prophets who belong to the post-captivity period of Jewish history. Zechariah and Malachi are the other two. Haggai and Zechariah are contemporaries; Malachi about one hundred years later.

Little is known of the personal history of Haggai. Like so many, He may have been one of the captives taken to Babylon by Nebuchadnezzar. He began his ministry about sixteen years after the return. The work of rebuilding the temple had been hindered by outside interference and by the Jews own complacency. After having been suspended for fifteen years, the temple work was resumed through the efforts of Haggai and Zechariah (Ezra 6:14). These two prophets, by their urging, roused the people from their lethargy, and encouraged them to build.

The Jews had been more concerned with their own houses than the house of God. Additionally, the new Persian king, Smerdis (522-521 BC), had forbidden them to rebuild (Ezra 4:17-22). But now, during the time of Haggai, conditions in Persia have changed. Darius II has come to power; he held a favorable disposition toward the Jews. He issued a new decree that gave the Jews full liberty to build the temple.

STUDY QUESTIONS FOR HAGGAI CHAPTER ONE

1. According to verse 1, what roles did Zerubbabel and Joshua play following the return from Babylon?
2. Reading verse 2, what were the people saying about the time to build the temple? Why, do you suppose, were they saying that?
3. What would you identify as the problem the people had as expressed by God in verse 4?
4. Reading verses 5-7, what does it mean to “Consider your ways”? Because they were being disobedient to God, what was He withholding from them? (Or what were they denying to themselves?)
5. According to verse 8, for whose glory was this house to be built? Looking at Haggai 2:7-9, how could this smaller, less ornate temple possibly have greater glory than the magnificent temple Solomon had built?
6. Once again, in verses 9-11, God speaks of the consequence of their disobedience. Do you think God could do something like this today?
7. Reading verse 11, what leadership qualities do you see in Zerubbabel and Joshua?
8. In verse 13, God proclaims “I am with you.” We use similar language when we pray that “the Lord be with us”. What does that phrase mean to us?
9. Read verse 14. Doesn’t it say the same thing as verse 12? If not, what is the difference?

LESSONS LEARNED FROM HAGGAI CHAPTER ONE

Write a brief summary of what you have learned from this chapter.

ZECHARIAH: Chapter Thirteen

Lesson 9

“In That Day”

As previously noted, Zechariah and Haggai were contemporaries. Both prophesied in 520 BC as post-captivity prophets. Like Ezekiel, Zechariah was of the priestly line. He describes himself as "the son of Berechiah, the son of Iddo the prophet" (1:1). It was sixteen years after the return of the first group from exile that the word of the Lord came to Zechariah. It was during the reign of Darius II.

Like Haggai, this book encourages rebuilding of the temple. However, Zechariah is radically different in content from Haggai. It is a much larger book, consisting of fourteen chapters. Haggai is but three chapters.

The book of Zechariah consists of two distinct parts. The first part, consisting of the first eight chapters contains a number of visions that were given to the prophet in just one night (chapters 1-6). The visions are dramatic and are presented in apocalyptic style. Each vision, in some way, is designed to encourage the people and prepare for better things in the future. This first section closes by reminding the people of what caused the captivity in the first place; then it gives a picture of a prosperous Jerusalem once again (chapters 7-8).

The second part of the book (chapters 9-14) presents two “burdens” against nations. This term is often used in the prophets when predicting judgment. The first burden (chapters 9-11) opens with words of judgment against Gentile nations; then it promises future blessing to Israel with the coming of the great King. God would save His people; but He would not save those among His people who corrupt and reject His will.

The second burden (chapters 12-14) points to the glories of the Messiah, His covenant and His kingdom. While there have been Messianic overtones throughout the book, and there have even been some direct prophecies of the Messiah in earlier chapters, at this point the remainder of the book is clearly prophetic of the Messiah and His time. Yet the “burden” section begins with nations gathered against Jerusalem. But everyone who attacks Jerusalem will be destroyed. In this section the Messiah’s death is prophesied; the source of salvation is revealed, and even the end of prophecy is spoken of. It closes with all nations worshipping the King.

It is in this last burden (chapters 12-14) that our great chapter is found. Chapter thirteen is among the shortest in all the prophets—only nine verses in length. Yet, it is loaded with powerful and weighty issues that demand our attention. It begins with the phrase “In that day...” (13:1). This refers, not to a single day, but to the “day” of the Messiah—including His time on earth, His death, the establishment of His kingdom, and likely encompasses the entire first century period with the growth of the church. The phrase “in that day” is found at least twenty times in Zechariah; seventeen of those times are found in the last three chapters of the book. From this, you can see that the book is heavily influenced by the anticipation of the Messiah’s day. These things are written to encourage the Jews by showing that God’s faithful people have a glorious future.

STUDY QUESTIONS FOR ZECHARIAH CHAPTER THIRTEEN

1. Chapter twelve (verses 10-14) closed with the mourning of those who killed the Messiah. Chapter thirteen (verse 1) opens with a consequence of His death. What is it that is opened, and for whom is it opened?
2. Verse 2 shows that something would be finally cut off from the people of God. What was that something?

3. What else is found in verse 2 that would come to an end “in that day”? What about “the unclean spirit”? Can you find a case in the Old Testament where an “unclean spirit” (demon possession) is found?
4. Verses 3-6 give further explanation of verse 2. According to verse 3, what would be the reaction of the parents to a son who claimed he could prophesy?
5. In verses 4-5, Zechariah speaks of the defense the prophet would make when it was revealed that his prophecy was faulty. What would he claim?
6. Verse 6 carries the thought further. What does he intend by his claim that he was wounded by his friends? (This passage, by the way, is not a prophecy of Jesus—though the next three verses (7-9) do speak of Jesus.)
7. Looking again at what verses 2-6 say about the gift of prophecy, what verse(s) in the New Testament does this remind you of?
8. Verse 7 does indeed apply to Jesus. Do you know where part of this verse is quoted in the New Testament?
9. The final two verses (8-9) are most unusual. They speak of two-thirds of the people dying? Who are these people? Who are the one-third that would survive?
10. Verse 9 speaks of these as being “as silver” and being tested “as gold.” This might remind you of a text in the New Testament. Can you recall a New Testament text that speaks of something like this?
11. Can you see how all the “in that day” passages in this chapter (and those around it) would apply generally to the time of Jesus’ first coming and the immediate aftermath of His coming?

LESSONS LEARNED FROM ZECHARIAH CHAPTER THIRTEEN

Write a brief summary of what you have learned from this chapter.

MALACHI: Chapter One

Lesson 10

“You Have Despised My Name”

We now come to our final great chapter and to the last book of the Old Testament. Nothing is known of the person Malachi. His name appears nowhere else in the Bible, though his prophecies are quoted in the New Testament. The name Malachi signifies "my messenger." It is worthy of note that the word "messenger" appears in 2:7, where it refers to the priest as a teacher of God's Law; it is found twice in 3:1, where it applies first to a prophecy of John the Baptist, and then applies to Jesus.

Opinions vary as to the exact date of the book. But all agree that it was the last of the Old Testament books to be written. Some date the book as early as 450 BC, and some as late as 400 BC. Malachi probably lived and worked during the times of Ezra and Nehemiah. Serious abuses had crept into Jewish life; the priests had become lax and degenerate; defective and inferior sacrifices were allowed to be offered upon the temple altar; the people were neglecting their tithes; divorce was common and God's covenant was forgotten and ignored. Similar abuses are found in the book of Nehemiah and appear to be common in this time. The abuses which Malachi attacked correspond exactly with those which Nehemiah found on his second visit to Jerusalem in 432 BC (Nehemiah 13). This may indicate that it was written at about this time. Following the book of Malachi there were no more books written to add to the Old Testament. The evidence indicates that for the next 400+ years there would be no more prophets or messages from heaven.

The book contains two main sections. The first is an argument against the priests (1:6-2:9). The second is against the people (2:10-4:3). The book opens with an affirmation that God loves Israel (1:1-5), though it appears that the people doubted God's love. The book closes with an exhortation to remember Moses' Law and gives a prophecy that was fulfilled in John the Baptist (Mal 4:4-6).

Malachi's message has a permanent value for us, as well as an immediate value for his own time. His primary aim was to correct a disobedient people and to remind them of their responsibilities to obey God's Law. He shows that a cheap religion that just goes through the motions is of no value. Sacrifice to God that is made grudgingly does not please God. It would be better to close the temple than to have such corrupt worship there. Malachi also points out that divorce and intermarriage with heathen idolaters subverts God's purpose in preserving the godly seed of Abraham.

I chose chapter one for our study because it encapsulates the disobedience of Malachi's time and shows that God's people can become detached from Him.

STUDY QUESTIONS FOR MALACHI CHAPTER ONE

1. Verse 1 opens the book by using the word "burden." What did we learn earlier about this word?
2. In the opening verses (1-5) God declares, "Jacob have I loved, but Esau I have hated." Jacob and Esau were brothers. Was it literally true that God loved one of these boys and hated the other? Explain your answer.
3. How had God demonstrated His love for Jacob and hatred for Esau?

4. Why (in verse 2) did the people seem to doubt God's love?
5. The Jews had no reason to doubt God's love, but God had plenty of reason to doubt their love. According to verses 5-10, what were the priests doing that showed lack of love for God?
6. In verses 6-7, they seem surprised that God has a charge to make against them. Why would they be surprised by this?
7. According to verse 8, the sacrifice they offered was evil. Malachi suggests that they make such an offering to the governor. Would he accept it? What would be a modern-day illustration that might be comparable to this?
8. According to verse 9, if they would entreat God's favor, they would be accepted by Him. What would they need to do to entreat His favor?
9. What would have been the reaction if someone had literally tried to close the doors (verse 10)?
10. What is being prophesied in verse 11? To what time does this apply? Could it apply even to our time? If so, are we making the kinds of sacrifices that cause God's name to be regarded as great?
11. In verses 12-13, the priests and people were engaging in a number of sins relative to their sacrifices. See how many you can list.
12. The last words of verse 14 give a clue to what the real problem was in Jerusalem. How would you express that problem?

LESSONS LEARNED FROM MALACHI CHAPTER ONE

Write a brief summary of what you have learned from this chapter.

ADDENDUM

What About “The Ten Lost Tribes Of Israel”?

The ten tribes of the Northern Kingdom of Israel were taken away in captivity. It was the Assyrians in 722 BC who took them from their land. They were never heard from again. Of these three statements, the first two are true. The third is false. Yet, many religious people believe there is a great mystery about the ten “lost tribes” of Israel. They believe they were never heard from again as far as the Bible goes.

Mormonism is built on the faulty premise that the ten tribes came to America, and that the American Indians are their descendants. The Worldwide Church of God holds that the ten tribes were taken to Britain, and that the Saxons (Britons and Americans) are their descendants. Additionally, there seems to be a move in Christendom that claims a connection to the “lost tribes.” It is not uncommon to come across those who claim to be “true Israelites;” they claim the ten tribes were taken to Africa and that their descendants eventually came to America. Even among those who reject these fanciful theories we still find the disposition of the ten tribes to be a mystery. “Nobody knows where they went or what happened to them.” This is a common belief.

But careful Bible students know better.

We know where they went and what happened to them.

1. When Samaria fell (722 BC), Israelites were carried away to Halah, Habor, Hara, and the river of Gozan in Assyria; some were taken to cities of the Medes (2 Kings 17:5-6; 1 Chronicles 5:26). They were still there “to this day,” that is, when 1 Chronicles 5:26 was written—after the Babylonian captivity was ended (1 Chronicles 9:1). The Bible record tells us where they went. To argue that “no one knows where they went or what happened to them” is wrong.
2. Jews from the Northern Kingdom were found in Israel following the Assyrian captivity (that is, after 722 BC). Hezekiah invited them to come to Jerusalem to keep the Passover (2 Chronicles 30:1-27). Some of these may never have been taken captive. Others had escaped from the Assyrians (verse 6). About 100 years after the Assyrian captivity (*ca.* 620 BC), in the time of Josiah, the Bible speaks of those who were left in Israel (2 Chronicles 34:21). All the people of the north were not taken away. They were not lost.
3. Among the first inhabitants to return to the land following the Babylonian captivity were those of the tribes of Ephraim and Manasseh (2 Chronicles 9:1-3). These are tribes from the Northern Kingdom. While the Northern Kingdom never existed as a nation again after the captivities, people from the North did return. To say “no one knows what happened to them” is false.

Prophecies foretold the return of both Israel and Judah.

1. God foretold that captives would return. Understanding the prophetic background of the captivities is helpful. See Deuteronomy 30:1-5. The promise was that Israelites would be gathered back from captivity, no matter how far away they had been taken.
2. Isaiah 10:20 speaks of the returning remnant of Israel. The remnant from Israel would never again rely on the one who struck them. It was the Assyrians who struck Israel. Isaiah prophesies of the return of those who were struck by Assyria—the Northern people of the Northern Kingdom!
3. Jeremiah 3:18. Jeremiah spoke of the return of Israel from captivity. Those of Israel and Judah would again walk together; they would come out of the land of the north.
4. Jeremiah foretold the return of both Israel and Judah (Jeremiah 30:1-24). See particularly verse 3.

5. Jeremiah 33:1-8. Just as God had brought captivity, so would He bring the return. See verse 7.
6. Jeremiah 50:4-5. The children of Israel and of Judah would come back with faces toward Zion.
7. Jeremiah 51:1-8. The prophet speaks of the destruction of Babylon. He tells God's people to come out of her midst. In verse 6, the prophet specifically identifies Israel and Judah as those who must flee from Babylon. "Israel is not forsaken, nor Judah, by His God."
8. Ezekiel recorded God's promise of restoration to the land (Ezekiel 11:14-17). In Ezekiel 36:8-10, the prophet speaks of "all the house of Israel, all of it" being restored to the land (verse 10). The use of "all" would indicate people from every tribe. The prophet speaks of "whole house of Israel" being restored to their land in Ezekiel 39:25-29.
9. Ezekiel was told to take two sticks and join them as one—illustrating that the two nations would be one in the land again (Ezekiel 37:15-23). Mormons argue that these sticks are two books (the Bible and Book of Mormon) that are joined together. Ezekiel says they are two nations becoming one (verse 22).
10. Ezekiel 47-48 were prophetic chapters concerning the return of God's people to their land. Note particularly 47:13ff. It identifies the twelve tribes as receiving their inheritance. In chapter 48 there are found two lists concerning the land given to the tribes of Israel. Every tribe is mentioned. In 48:19, the prophet speaks of workers of the city, from all the tribes of Israel.
11. Hosea 11:9-11. It is clear from this text that Ephraim (Israel—the Northern Kingdom) would return "like a dove from the land of Assyria."
12. Amos 9:14-15. God promised to bring back the captives of Israel and plant them in their land.
13. Obadiah 17-21. The Israelites who had been captive would possess the land of the Canaanites.
14. Micah 2:12-13. God would gather the remnant of Israel—and would restore them.

Concluding thought to these prophecies: It may be claimed that some of these prophecies are Messianic. If indeed they are, the argument is not weakened. Because it is clear that God was not finished with the people of the Northern Kingdom. They were included in His plans for the future. Those tribes were not lost, missing or abandoned by God.

History shows the prophecies of return were fulfilled.

1. The proclamation of Cyrus, King of Persia, was inclusive of "all His people" (2 Chronicles 36:22-23; Ezra 1:1-4). He put no restriction upon who could return. Jews from both Israel and Judah could go back to the land, it was inclusive of "whoever is left in any place where he dwells" (Ezra 1:4). It was the practice of Cyrus and the Persians to restore captive peoples to their lands. This would accommodate descendants of those taken in the Assyrian captivity as well as those taken in the Babylonian captivity.
2. The book of Ezra shows that people from both the Northern Kingdom and the Southern Kingdom returned to the land.
 - a. Ezra 2:70 declares that "all Israel" dwelt "in their cities."
 - b. Ezra 3:1 speaks of "the children of Israel in the cities."
 - c. Ezra 6:17 ordered provision for sacrifices be made "...for Israel male goats, according to the number of the tribes of Israel." Why offer sacrifice for all twelve tribes if ten of them no longer existed?
 - d. Ezra 6:21 includes not only those who had come back from the exile, but also those left behind who now separated themselves from the local people. There was always a remnant of Israel.

- e. Ezra 7:7 speaks of “some of the children of Israel” who came with Ezra.
 - f. Ezra 7:28 speaks of “leading men of Israel” who were working with Ezra.
 - g. Ezra 8:35 shows that when they came home from the captivity, twelve bulls were offered “for all Israel” and twelve male goats were offered as a sin offering. Twelve bulls and twelve goats were offered because people from twelve tribes were allowed to go home.
3. The book of Nehemiah shows that Jews from both Israel and Judah were allowed to return to the land.
 - a. Nehemiah 7:73 says that “all Israel dwelt in their cities.”
 - b. Nehemiah 12:44-47 makes a distinction between Judah (verse 44) and “all Israel” (verse 47).
 4. Other books of the prophets show the return of Jews from both North and South.
 - a. Zechariah 9:11-17 constitutes a call to the captives of both Judah (Southern Kingdom) and Ephraim (Northern Kingdom) to come home. See particularly verse 13.
 - b. Zechariah 10:1-12 continues the call from God to the captives. In verse 6, God says He is bringing back the house of Judah, as well as the house of Joseph (Northern Kingdom). In verse 10, as God continues the call to come home, He speaks of gathering “them from Assyria.” It was Assyria who took the Northern Kingdom of Israel captive.

New Testament passages show the existence of twelve tribes.

1. Luke 2:36. Anna is the daughter of Phanuel, of the tribe of Asher. Asher was one of the ten Northern tribes of Israel that was taken captive by Assyria.
2. Acts 26:7. In this court scene Paul spoke of the “twelve tribes” that were “earnestly serving God night and day.” How could he speak of the twelve tribes if ten no longer existed? Paul was acquainted with twelve tribes and their service unto God.

Someone might ask: “Why are there so few New Testament texts that give evidence that both Israel and Judah returned from the captivities? Wouldn’t we expect there to be more texts proving that point?”

The only other specific mention of tribes of Israel in the New Testament are of Levi (Luke 1:5), Benjamin (Romans 11:1; Philippians 3:5), and of course, Judah (Matthew 1:3; Luke 3:23-26; Hebrews 7:14). There is also Revelation 7, which may be a figurative reference to the tribes.

But, no, we should not expect there to be more evidence in the New Testament of the return of both kingdoms. Why not? Because this was not an issue in the time of Jesus or the apostles. It is in modern times that men have come up with this theory that “the ten tribes were lost.” If such a theory would have come up in New Testament days, Jesus and the apostles, being familiar with the prophets, would have pointed to the Old Testament references that show the return of all Israel.

Conclusion:

Let us never again entertain the idea that there was ever anything biblically called “The Ten Lost Tribes of Israel.” Such a theory exists only in the minds of men, not in the Bible. While it is true, that more of those who returned to the land were of the tribe of Judah, rest assured that there were people from the northern tribes of Israel who also participated in the restoration following the captivities.