



Sample
Only!

The Prophets of Old Testament Israel

*Their Role, Messages, and
Contribution to Biblical Theology*

J. Paul Tanner

The prophets of the Old Testament were God's chosen spokesmen to the nation of Israel struggling to be faithful to the covenant handed down to her at Mt. Sinai. On the one hand, they rebuked the nation and her kings for covenant disobedience, while on the other hand pointing forward to an age in the distant future when Messiah would come to reign in righteousness over the entire world. As such, the prophets form an essential link for understanding the ministry of Jesus and the apostles of the New Testament, especially in regard to the fulfillment of the biblical covenants and the kingdom promises.



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This study of the prophets is
affectionately dedicated to my daughter

Brook

who has always been a source of joy and comfort to me
and whose life is marked by extraordinary kindness.

*“A woman named Lydia, from the city of Thyatira, a seller of purple fabrics,
a worshiper of God, was listening;
and the Lord opened her heart to respond to the things spoken by Paul.”*

Acts 16:14

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Acknowledgments

Writing a book such as this covering all the prophets of the Old Testament is not something that could ever have been done hastily. What the reader will find here is the result of my having taught the Old Testament at the seminary level over a period exceeding forty years. The first objective has been to provide an overview and synthesis of each prophet. A second objective has been to relate the contributions of each prophet to the developing theology of the Old Testament, in particular to the outworking of the major covenants: the Abrahamic Covenant, the Mosaic Covenant, the Davidic Covenant, and the New Covenant. Collectively, these covenants support the original promise to mankind of having dominion over God's creation and how this promise finds its ultimate realization in the messianic kingdom ruled by "one like a son of man" (Dan 7:13-14).

In authoring this book, I am mindful of a great many people that have invested in my life or encouraged me in some way. Naturally, I thank the Lord Jesus Christ for opening my eyes and saving me during my university years as an engineering student. Apart from what He did for me (and has continued to do), I would never have understood the writings of the prophets. Second, I thank my wife, Linda, for her companionship and unswerving support through the fifty-plus years of our marriage. I am also very grateful to the many seminary professors I had during my formative years at Dallas Seminary. In particular, I deeply appreciate Dr. Kenneth Barker, who as chairman of the Old Testament department at Dallas, served as my thesis advisor. [My thesis addressed the final oracle of the book of Zechariah (ch 12–14), and I benefited from the fact that Dr. Barker was engaged at that time in writing his commentary on Zechariah for the *Expositor's Bible Commentary*]. He was also kind enough to write a letter of recommendation for me at the time I applied and was accepted into the PhD program in Hebrew studies at the University of Texas.

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Abbreviations

Ant.	<i>Antiquities</i> by Josephus
BA	Biblical Archaeologist
BDB	The Hebrew lexicon, <i>Brown-Driver-Briggs</i>
BSac	Bibliotheca Sacra
GKC	Gesenius Kautzsch Cowley (Hebrew grammar)
HAR	Hebrew Annual Review
ISBE	The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia
JBL	Journal of Biblical Literature
JETS	Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society
Jub.	The book of Jubilees
LXX	The Greek Septuagint translation of the OT
MSS	Manuscripts
MT	Masoretic text
NT	New Testament
Or	Orientalia
OT	Old Testament
Sanhed	Sanhedrin
Syr	Syriac Peshitta
Tg	Targum
Vg	Latin Vulgate
VT	Vetus Testamentum
WBC	Word Biblical Commentary

Introduction

To write a book about the Old Testament prophets requires more than an understanding of each individual prophet. First, they must be understood in their own historical context. Second, they must be understood in light of previous biblical history and especially of God’s prior revelation. Chief among these concerns would be an understanding of the Mosaic Law, as well as its blessings for obedience and curses for disobedience foretold in Deuteronomy 28–29. Third, the prophets must be understood in light of the developing Old Testament theology. This starts with Genesis 1-2 that depicts God as Creator and sovereign over His creation—even over the elements of nature that pagans worship—as well as His plan to give mankind the privilege of co-ruling with Him (Gen 1:26). Old Testament theology also builds on the messianic prediction of a “seed of the woman” that will ultimately be victorious and especially on the promised *blessing* to come to all ethnic groups through the “seed of Abraham” that lies at the heart of the Abrahamic Covenant. The tabernacle/temple and sacrificial system serve to demonstrate that God is both holy and appeased by sacrifice. Failure to live up to the terms of the Mosaic Covenant demonstrate the ultimate need for a *new covenant* based on God’s grace and a better blood sacrifice—a hope extended by both the prophets Jeremiah (Jer 31:31-34) and Ezekiel (Ezek 36). This hope actually builds on the call for a “circumcised heart” found earlier in Deuteronomy. The culmination of Old Testament theology is nothing less than the full realization of the kingdom of God to be inaugurated by the coming of the Messiah in fulfillment of the many predictions by the prophets.

In addition to the above factors that must be taken into account, it is hard to provide an adequate treatment of the Old Testament prophets apart from a full discussion of the historical books associated with them (especially Kings, Chronicles, Ezra, and Nehemiah). In my classroom teaching, I integrate the prophets with the historical books. Unfortunately, space does not allow for that luxury in so short a work as this. Yet I do attempt to provide enough historical correlation to give clarity to each prophet’s situation and challenges. In order to capture the logical development of Israel’s history along with the ministry of the prophets, I will attempt to treat the prophets *chronologically*. This means that I will not discuss the prophets in their canonical order, but rather will attempt to discuss each one according to their chronological place in the nation’s history. Hence, the “units” in which I have arranged the chapters primarily correspond to the historical periods in which the prophets wrote. Following the first unit dealing with introductory matters relevant to all the prophets, the units will proceed like this:

Unit 2: The Early Prophets	Obadiah, Jonah, Joel, Amos
Unit 3: Prophets of the Assyrian Menace	Micah, Hosea, Isaiah
Unit 4: Prophets of the Seventh-Century BC	Nahum, Zephaniah, Habakkuk
Unit 5: Prophets of the Babylonian Exile	Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Daniel
Unit 6: Prophets of the Post-Exilic Period	Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi

Unit 7 will explore the more significant theological themes arising from the prophets (especially the covenants and kingdom promise) and show how these find fulfillment in a larger biblical theology involving the church and inauguration of the messianic kingdom. Finally, three appendices are provided treating some specialized studies important for understanding the outworking of Old Testament prophetic expectations.

UNIT 1: BACKGROUND TO THE OLD TESTAMENT PROPHETS

Outline

Ch. 1 – The Prophets in Their Old Testament Context

Ch. 2 – An Introduction to the Prophets and Their Ministry

Orientation

These first two chapters comprising Unit 1 are obviously meant to set the stage for the study of each prophet individually. What needs to be understood is that an Old Testament prophet was far more than one who *prophesied* the future. He was a spokesman for God with a multitude of responsibilities and functions. Furthermore, Israel was not alone in having prophets, for other civilizations also had men known as prophets (though obviously not prophets of the one true God of the Bible). These others were *false prophets* who served pagan deities, and even within Israel there would be a problem with false prophets.

Although Abraham (from the patriarchal period) and Moses (from the exodus period) were referred to as prophets on occasion, it is not really until we get to the time of the monarchy that we begin to see a developed school of the prophets, Samuel being the foremost example. Samuel is significant, for he helps bridge the transition of the nation from functioning as a *theocracy* to being governed by a *monarchy*. Samuel introduces the first king (Saul), warns the people of their demand for a king, and gives important revelation and direction from God at critical moments.

We also observe that although prophets are raised up by God from the time of Samuel (roughly 1070 BC) until Malachi, the last of the prophets at the close of the Old Testament (about 430 BC), they are primarily concentrated around the time of the two major exiles—the Assyrian exile in 722/21 BC and the Babylonian exile beginning in 605 BC. Lastly, we might mention that there were men that served as prophets for whom we have no corresponding writings. Chief among these were Elijah and Elisha. This book will focus on what can be termed the “writing prophets”—those whom God led to leave for us their writings (inspired by God) that became a part of Scripture.

1

1. THE PROPHETS IN THEIR OLD TESTAMENT CONTEXT

I. INTRODUCTION

To study the Old Testament prophets, one cannot simply jump right in and expect to make complete sense of the material. After all, the nation of Israel has over 1200 years of history that precedes the first of the writing prophets. History has not been wandering aimlessly during this time. Rather, God has been at work directing history according to a very carefully designed plan. Furthermore, at each step along the way, God has responded to man's sin and disruption of His purposes with very deliberate actions. Why does God raise up the writing prophets in the 9th century BC? To answer that question requires a careful review of the Old Testament prior to the prophets entering the scene.

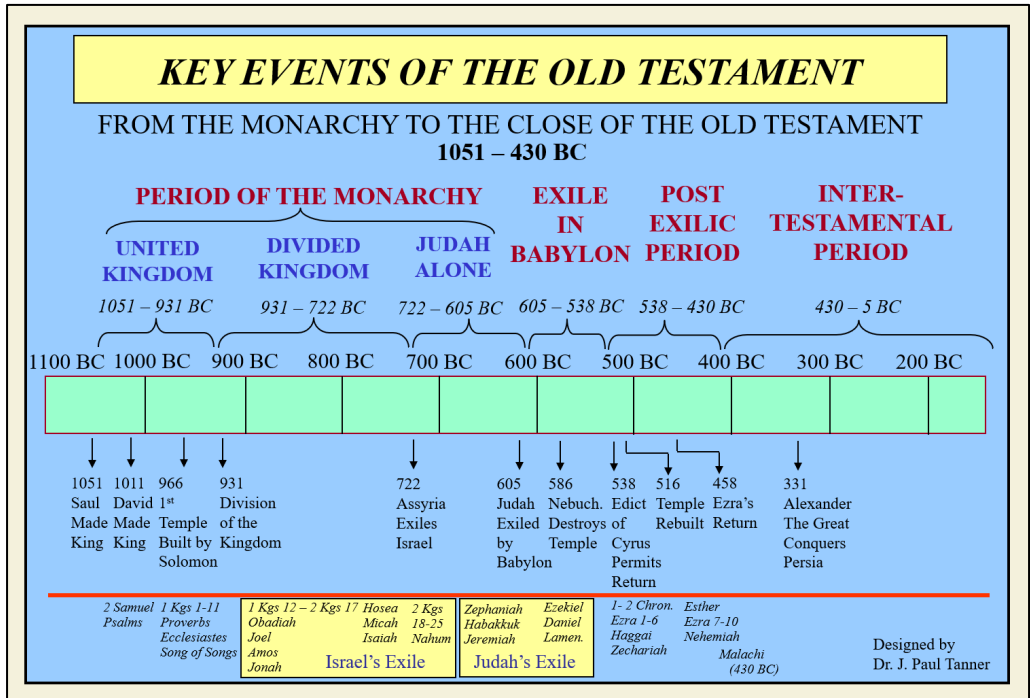
II. CHRONOLOGICAL ORIENTATION

The following chart will help to orient us to the major periods of OT history:

MAJOR PERIODS OF OT HISTORY

Age of the Patriarchs	2091-1805 BC
Sojourn in Egypt	1876-1446 BC
Wilderness Period	1446-1406 BC
Conquest & Theocracy	1406-1051 BC
Monarchy	<i>United Kingdom</i> 1051-931 BC
	<i>Divided Kingdom</i> 931-722 BC
	<i>Judah Alone</i> 722-605 BC
Exile in Babylon	605-538 BC
Post-Exilic Period	538-430 BC
Intertestamental Period	430-5 BC

Early history prior to Abraham merely sets the stage for God's call to Abraham in Genesis 12. That leaves us with roughly 2000 years from Abraham until the birth of Christ. The *writing prophets*, however, are not found uniformly dispersed across this period. Rather, they are concentrated in the latter part of OT history, from about 850 BC until 430 BC. The chart pictured below helps to visualize the prophets in relation to major historical events of this time.



Thus, out of the 2000 years between Abraham and Christ, the writing prophets are found in just over 400 years of this time. This observation should prompt us to ask "why?". Why are these prophets concentrated in this part of history? Reflecting on the chart "Key Events," we can see that there is a strong correlation between the *exile* of God's people from the land and the ministries of the prophets. The Northern Kingdom was the first to go into exile in 722 BC, and God raised up prophets to speak to His people both before and during the time of this exile. As the Southern Kingdom of Judah approached the time of her exile to Babylon in 587 BC, God once again raised up prophets to speak to His people. In this case, some prophets ministered before the Babylonian exile, some during it, and others in the post-exilic period which followed. The prophets served to confront the nation with her sin, warn the people that judgment was imminent, and explain how God's covenant program would be accomplished in relation to the future. Thus, we must understand God's discipline of His people by exile if we are to understand the ministries of the prophets.

III. SIGNIFICANT DEVELOPMENTS PRECEDING THE PROPHETS

If the role of the prophets is understood in light of their exile from the land, then we need to back up and attempt to understand the developments that led to exile, including God's plans and covenants that He had revealed.

A. *God's Original Plan*

God's original plan for mankind was expressed at the very beginning in the book of Genesis. Looking at the broad perspective of Genesis, we can easily see the primary emphasis of the book:

From Creation to Dispersion at Babel	Abraham and His Descendants
<i>Chapters 1–11</i>	<i>Chapters 12–50</i>

Obviously (on the basis of how the material is proportioned), the book of Genesis is primarily concerned with God's call of Abraham to begin a *new nation*. Chapters 1–11 serve to introduce the need for doing so. God had provided a perfect creation, but something had gone desperately wrong. First, however, let's summarize what God had provided for the man and woman in the original creation, and how each of these was affected by sin. In each case, restoration becomes possible through Jesus Christ. Four key provisions were given:

1. In God's Image

When God created the first couple, He created them in His own image. He did not do this for the animals, but for man alone. This probably involves several facets, but the "image of God" would certainly include man's moral and godly character (man was created morally perfect). Sin, on the other hand, corrupted man. In Christ, we are in the process of regaining this image. As long as we are on the earth, we will remain sinners (i.e., having a *sin nature*), but we are being changed (conformed to the image of Christ). Colossians 3:10 speaks of putting on "the new self who is being renewed to a true knowledge according to the image of the One who created him." This process will continue until the day we see Christ face to face and are completely changed: "We know that, when He appears, we shall be like Him, because we shall see Him just as He is" (1 Jn 3:2).

2. Fellowship with God

In the garden of Eden, the first couple enjoyed unspeakable joy in being able to fellowship with God. Although we do not have direct fellowship with God today, we can experience fellowship as we walk in harmony with Him. "Indeed our fellowship is with the Father, and with His Son Jesus Christ. . . . if we walk in the light as He Himself is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus His Son cleanses us from all sin." In the new creation, we will have unhindered direct fellowship with God ("they shall see His face" — Rev 22:4).

3. God's Blessing

After God created the first couple, Genesis 1:28 says "And God blessed them." From the very beginning, man was created to enjoy God's blessing. Sin, of course, brought a curse upon man and robbed him of blessing. Yet this matter of "blessing" becomes one of the primary themes of Scripture. From Genesis 3 onward, we see God working to get man back to the state of blessing. God's whole purpose in calling Abraham was to launch the program by which "blessing" could be regained. Though God's blessing extends to redeemed man throughout the ages, it is primarily realized in Christ. Ephesians 1:3 states, "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ."

4. Dominion

Since God alone is creator, He alone has the right to rule over His creation. Amazingly, however, he chose to involve man in the exercise of *ruling* and *having dominion* (Gen 1:26 — "let them rule"; cf. Ps 8). By sinning, man lost much of this privilege, and hence, we do not see all things presently subject to man (Heb 2:8). Nevertheless, man has the potential to regain this dominion, but only in Christ. Furthermore, this right will be given at the time of our Lord's return to those who have faithfully endured and served Him (2 Tim 2:12; Rev 2:25-27; cf. Rev 5:9-10; 20:4-6).

B. The Age of the Patriarchs (2091–1805 BC)

Following the original creation, the remainder of Genesis 1–11 is essentially the sad story of how sin disrupted God's plan.¹ As time passed, sin corrupted society. Despite a *new beginning* with Noah, by the time we arrive at Genesis 11, the nations of the world are hopelessly scattered across the face of the earth *missing the blessing of God*. Rather than worshipping the one true creator God, the nations have turned to rampant idolatry and the worship of false gods.

1. The Call of Abraham (Gen 12)

As long as the nations continue in idolatry and spiritual darkness, they will never "get back" to God's blessing. Thus, God's plan is to create a new nation that worships Him, and as a result is able to lead the other nations of the world back to the truth. This explains the significance of God's call of Abraham in Genesis 12 . . . it is God's endeavor to start a new nation. The promises of Genesis 12:1-3 are some of the most important words in all the Old Testament:

"Now the LORD said to Abram, 'Go forth from your country, and from your relatives and from your father's house, to the land which I will show you; and I will make you a great nation, and I will bless you, and make your name great; and so you shall be a blessing. And I will bless those who bless you, and the one

¹The gloom of these chapters is offset by God's promise in Genesis 3:15 that a "seed of the woman" will eventually triumph over Satan. This is a messianic promise that the Lord Jesus (born as a man from the lineage of Eve) will eventually defeat Satan who had drawn mankind into sin and curse.

who curses you I will curse, and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed."

Notice the emphasis upon "blessing" in these verses. This new nation exists for the purpose of helping all other "families" (people-groups) to regain God's blessing. It is extremely important to note that God's choice of Israel was not a matter of favoritism (as though this was the only nation that He cared about). From the very beginning, God is affirming that He cares and wants to bless every nation and "family" on earth. He is a *universal God*, and the bedrock of missions is right here in Genesis 12!

2. The Abrahamic Covenant (Gen 15)

Since God cannot lie, His promises always stand true. Nevertheless, for Abraham's sake, these promises to him are ratified by covenant in Genesis 15. The focus in this chapter is on the *seed* and the *land*, because (if Abram is ever to become a nation that will serve as the channel of God's blessing) he must have a posterity and a land in which the nation can function.² The covenant ceremony in Genesis 15 involves the splitting of animals, because (according to Ancient Near Eastern custom) two parties entering a covenant obligated themselves to the terms of the covenant by walking between the split carcasses. The significance of the dream in Genesis 15 is that Abraham is supernaturally *disabled* from walking between the carcasses. Instead, the LORD (symbolized here by the smoking oven and flaming torch) obligates Himself to keep the covenant. Thus, the responsibility for fulfilling the covenant rests upon God, not Abraham. God's promise of the land to Israel is conditioned upon the faithfulness of God, not Abraham or his descendants. We could speak of this as a unilateral unconditional covenant. Throughout her history, Israel may be disciplined for her disobedience, but God will never withdraw His *Abrahamic Covenant promises* to give her the land of promise and use Israel as His channel of blessing to the world.³ [Having *the promise to the land* does not necessarily mean that the nation always has the right to the land. When the nation is disobedient, she will be disciplined by God, and her right to the land can be removed or restricted . . . at least temporarily].

²In order to have a nation, at least three things are required: (1) a people to constitute the nation; (2) a land in which they may live; and (3) a constitution to bind them. The material in Genesis—Joshua will show us how each of these are fulfilled. By the time the nation emerges from its bondage in Egypt, they will have a sizeable people. When they come to Mt. Sinai (Ex 19), they will be given a constitution . . . the Mosaic Law (from God Himself). As they conquer the land under Joshua, they take possession of the promised land.

³Some have objected that God is no longer obligated to the land promise of the Abrahamic Covenant, either because He has already done so (see Josh 21:43; 23:14) or because Israel's unfaithfulness has nullified the covenant promises. For a helpful defense of the abiding nature of the land promises, see Jeffrey L. Townsend, "Fulfillment of the Land Promise in the Old Testament," *BSac* 142:568 (Oct-Dec 1985): 320-337. Despite the affirmations in Joshua that God was being faithful to His Word, Joshua 24:12 acknowledged that there were other nations that remained in the land among the people (cf. 11:16-17; 12:7; 13:1-6). Likewise, the statement in 1 Kgs 8:65 during the reign of Solomon does not imply a *complete fulfillment* of the land promise to Israel. Philistia does not appear to have been under direct Solomonic rule (note 1 Kgs 4:17-21; cf. 2 Chr 9:26). Take note that as the New Testament opens, God's Abrahamic promises are still anticipated (Lk 1:72-75).

3. The Messianic Hope Through Judah

The nation's early history is marred from the beginning. Within two generations, Abraham's posterity find themselves out of the land altogether and living in Egypt. If the land was so important, what are they doing in Egypt? This is actually the discipline of God upon them. They had dishonored His holy name: they intermarried with the Canaanites, they mercilessly killed in revenge, and rather than being unified, we find they could not even get along with themselves (brothers scheme against one another).

In contrast to the unfaithfulness of the nation, we can discern God's merciful hand at work. In Joseph, the nation learns that God can raise a Savior from their own midst. Though they are jealous of him and attempt to get rid of him, Joseph ironically becomes their great deliverer . . . a paradigm of what God will do through Christ. Furthermore, we can discern that God is narrowing the line of blessing: Noah Shem Abraham Isaac Jacob Judah. Ultimately, the "deliverer" and one through whom the *blessing* will be realized must come from the tribe of Judah. Judah's preeminence over the other tribes is foretold in Genesis 49:8-12. The NIV translates vs 10: "The scepter will not depart from Judah, nor the ruler's staff from between his feet, until he comes to whom it belongs, and the obedience of the nations is his." Someone from the tribe of Judah will not only arise as king one day, but he will even receive the submission of the other nations of the world. When this king comes, then all the nations will be blessed in keeping with the Abrahamic Covenant. This promise in Genesis 49:10 finds its fulfillment in Jesus Christ, who comes from the tribe of Judah.

C. The Wilderness Period (1446–1406 BC)

1. The Mosaic Covenant at Mt. Sinai (Ex 19)

Following the deliverance from the bondage of Egypt (they are now a redeemed people!), the Hebrews are brought to Mt. Sinai. This important scene is recorded in Exodus 19. Although they are still under the Abrahamic Covenant (God's channel of blessing), the LORD offers to make them *His unique nation* of priests:

"Now then, if you will indeed obey My voice and keep My covenant, then you shall be My own possession among all the peoples, for all the earth is mine; and you shall be to Me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation" (Ex 19:5-6).

This calling must be seen in contrast to the idolatrous nations of the world. The intention is that Israel will stand between God and the nations of the world in a *priestly capacity*. Israel was to be a holy nation . . . a "priest" as it were to the other nations. They were to teach the other nations who the true God was and about His ways. Though such an offer to Israel was a high privilege, the nation had to agree to keep God's covenant demands. This covenant at Sinai is a different covenant than the one made with Abraham; this is the Mosaic Covenant (also known as *the Law*). This includes not only the Ten Commandments but all the other laws revealed in Exodus and Leviticus. In contrast to the unconditional Abrahamic Covenant, this covenant is conditional, i.e., it was conditioned on the people's

obedience ("if you will indeed obey ... you shall be"). The people agreed to keep the Mosaic Covenant (Ex 19:8), though they seriously underestimated their ability to do so. Though the laws were good and righteous, the Mosaic Covenant provided no enablement for keeping the commandments. We should clarify, however, that the Mosaic Covenant did not replace the Abrahamic Covenant. The Mosaic was merely added alongside the already existing Abrahamic Covenant. Furthermore, the Mosaic Covenant would turn out to be a *temporary covenant*, whereas the Abrahamic Covenant would be eternal. The Mosaic Covenant was only in force until the time God would replace it with a better covenant (Jesus would do this!).

Even the day that was set aside for formally accepting the Covenant was an ominous one (see Ex 19:16-25). God descended on the mountain with thunder, lightning and thick cloud in such a way that all the people trembled. The uniqueness of the occasion signified that God was a holy God who would take His righteous demands seriously. This covenant (with its demand for obedience) was certainly not "warm and inviting." This highlighted the condemning nature of this covenant, thereby suggesting the need for a covenant made on the basis of grace and mercy (cf. Heb 12:18-24). As the Mosaic Covenant was ratified, blood had to be shed (Ex 24:1-8). Since this covenant was inaugurated by the blood of animals, it must be inferior to a covenant inaugurated by the blood of God's own Son (as later history would reveal).

2. The Principle of Blessings and Curses (Deuteronomy)

The Mosaic Covenant proved to be a difficult demand to live up to. Even the first generation that received it fell under severe discipline. Their rebellion at Kadesh-Barnea (Num 14) sealed their fate to die off in the wilderness. When a new generation had risen up, God permitted them to enter and conquer the land. Before doing so, however, certain clarifications were made.

a. The Certainty of Exile and Restoration (Deut 4:25-31)

Though God would give this second generation the opportunity to enter the land, they would be held accountable to His covenant demands. With some future generation, there would be severe failure followed by exile from the land. Yet, "in the latter days" they would return (repent) and seek the LORD. This would not come about, however, until they had gone through a time of great distress [by the way, this prophecy has not yet been fulfilled!]. Verse 31 affirms that God will remain committed to this nation (as undeserving as they are!), because of the Abrahamic Covenant. Though He disciplines them, He will not destroy them.

b. The Blessings and Curses (Deut 28-29)

One of the most important passages for understanding the prophets are found in Deuteronomy 28-30. Chapters 28-29 detail the principles by which God will deal with the people once they enter the land. The principle is simple: He will bless them if they obey (28:1-14), but He will send curses, i.e., discipline them, if they disobey (28:15ff.). The "curses" will also be proportionate to their disobedience. Mild curses will follow minor disobedience (e.g., withholding of rain, 28:23-24). Severe curses will follow severe or prolonged disobedience (e.g., foreign invasion and military defeat, 28:25). Failure to respond appropriately in repentance can even

result in removal from the land altogether (28:58-65). As Deuteronomy 29:14-15 clarifies, these principles would apply to future generations as well. This explains why the prophets frequently refer to these "curses" from God. They were meant to serve as a wake-up call to the nation before severe discipline like exile would be imposed.

c. *The Plan for Restoration (Deut 30)*

God, in His foreknowledge, could see that the nation would indeed have to experience exile from the land because of her idolatry and disobedience. Yet, in His compassion and commitment to the Abrahamic Covenant, He had a plan whereby the nation could be restored to Himself. This plan is spelled out in Deuteronomy 30:1-10. If they return to the LORD and obey Him, He will regather them from the nations where they have been exiled and restore their fortunes. Ultimately, He will even give them a "circumcised heart" to love and obey the Lord. This speaks of a true inner heart change . . . brought about by the Lord . . . that results in genuine obedience to God. This is something the Mosaic Covenant never provided, but a new and better covenant by Christ Jesus will bring this about.

D. **Conquest and Theocracy (1406–1051 BC)**

1. **A Good Start (Joshua)**

Upon entering the land and conquering the Canaanites, the people take the Mosaic Covenant seriously. Though Joshua warns them of inevitable failure, they insist that they will "serve the LORD" and obey His voice (Josh 24:19-24). Consequently, they make a covenant at Shechem reaffirming their commitment to the Law (Josh 24:25-28). A stone with the words of the Law is set up to remind the people of their obligation. This stone would stand as a testimony to future generations that this was a nation that had agreed to obey the Law (and suffer the consequences should they fail to do so). In Joshua's death notice, we are told that "Israel served the LORD all the days of Joshua and all the days of the elders who survived Joshua, and had known all the deeds of the LORD which He had done for Israel" (Josh 24:31).

2. **Repeated Failure (Judges)**

The generations following Joshua repeatedly fail; that is the message of the book of Judges. They go through one cycle after another of sinning, being disciplined (especially by foreign invaders), repenting, and being given a "judge" (i.e., a *deliverer*) by God. As time progresses, however, the "cracks" in the foundation of the nation take their toll. The latter "judges" are far from being moral examples to the nation (witness Samson!). As we reach the end of Judges, there is clearly a need for a change. Will the people seek a change from the Lord, or attempt to come up with their own solution? Unfortunately, they choose the latter.

E. **The Monarchy (1051–605 BC)**

This stage of Israel's history, in contrast to the preceding, is characterized by Israel having a human king. Previously, God alone was their king, and He would raise up leaders as the situation warranted. The period of the monarchy is divided into three parts: the period of

the United Kingdom, the period of the Divided Kingdom, and the period when Judah alone remains. Discussion will be limited to the first two phases, as it is the developments in these phases that account for God's judgment upon the nation (the destruction of their capitals and exile from the land).

1. The United Kingdom (1051–931 BC)

This period covers the history of the nation's first three kings. Upon the death of Solomon, the nation splits into two kingdoms.

a. *The Demand for Saul (1 Samuel 8)*

Samuel had served as one of God's blessings in the midst of an otherwise deteriorating situation with the nation (even the Ark had been confiscated in battle). As he grew old and it became apparent that he would not be able to provide leadership much longer, the people felt that the solution to their problems was to have a human king like other nations (actually, what they really needed was a changed heart!). This was a serious situation, as it amounted to a rejection of the LORD (1 Sam 8:4-8).

And the LORD said to Samuel, "Listen to the voice of the people in regard to all that they say to you, for they have not rejected you, but they have rejected Me from being king over them. Like all the deeds which they have done since the day that I brought them up from Egypt even to this day—in that they have forsaken Me and served other gods—so they are doing to you also" (vv 7-8).

God gave them what they deserved—He gave them a *Saul*! As they would soon find out, he was not a man after God's own heart. This scene in which they demand and receive a human king reflects how things were continuing to digress with the nation.

b. *The Davidic Covenant (2 Samuel 7)*

With David, the nation gets a taste of what it means to have a king who is a man after God's own heart (to some degree, David anticipates the perfect king to come, i.e., Jesus). One of the most significant developments to happen at this point in history is the covenant that God makes with David. We saw earlier (Gen 49:10) that the messianic hope resided with the tribe of Judah. This hope is extended further with David, who is from the tribe of Judah. With him, God makes a covenant in which a promise is given to David that one of his descendants will come to have an eternal throne-kingdom (2 Sam 7:8-17). In contrast to Saul (whom God removed), David's line will continue, and each *Davidic king* will be a "son" to God, i.e., he will stand in special relationship to God and be entrusted with the responsibility of ruling. The promise of the eternal throne-kingdom will be fulfilled in David's *greater Son*, the Lord Jesus Christ. This passage finds a *partial fulfillment* in David's immediate successor (Solomon), but the *complete fulfillment* must wait until the Messiah (the Lord Jesus Christ). For instance, God promises that David's son will build a house for the Lord. This finds a partial fulfillment when Solomon built the temple in Jerusalem (ca. 961 BC). Yet the complete fulfillment is found in Christ Jesus who builds a *spiritual temple* for the Lord. This spiritual temple is comprised of believers today who have trusted Christ as their

Savior (1 Pet 2:4-5). Other aspects of Solomon's reign prefigure the reign of Christ as well. Solomon was a king of wisdom; so Jesus will rule with great wisdom. Solomon's realm was characterized by peace; so Jesus will bring in a period of peace when He returns to rule on earth. As God grants this wonderful covenant with David promising an eternal throne-kingdom to one of his descendants, He also stipulates that each Davidic king in the interim will be held accountable to obey and enforce the Mosaic Law (2 Sam 7:14). Failure to do so will bring discipline.

c. *The Dedication of Solomon's Temple (1 Kings 8)*

In keeping with God's promise to David, Solomon does build a house for the LORD. The dedication ceremony is recorded in 1 Kings 8. As the sacrifices were being offered for the dedication of the temple, God's glory descended there (vv 10-11):

"And it came about when the priests came from the holy place, that the cloud filled the house of the LORD, so that the priests could not stand to minister because of the cloud, for the glory of the LORD filled the house of the LORD."

God had done the same thing when the Tabernacle had been dedicated (Ex 40:34-35). The significance of this divine act becomes apparent in the book of Ezekiel when God withdraws His glory from the temple, a prelude to His allowing the Babylonians to destroy it (Ezek 11:22-23). God also took the opportunity at the construction of the temple to warn Solomon how future disobedience could jeopardize this beautiful temple that had recently been constructed (1 Kgs 9:1-9). Obedience would result in God establishing the throne of the king, but disobedience to the Mosaic Covenant (particularly idolatry) could result in exile from the land and even the destruction of the marvelous temple that Solomon had built. This warning was an extension of the principle of "blessings and curses" given earlier in Deuteronomy 28–29.

2. The Divided Kingdom (931–722 BC)

a. *Reasons for the Division*

Unfortunately, the gift of wisdom to Solomon proved to be less an asset than having an undivided heart. Solomon multiplied wives which led him into idolatry (1 Kgs 11:1-8). The legacy of his reign was God's judgment upon the kingdom. This judgment would take the form of dividing the kingdom into two parts (1 Kgs 11:9-13). Even though the Davidic promise remained on the Davidic kings, they would have most of the kingdom taken away from them. Ten tribes to the north would break away to form the *Northern Kingdom* (now to be called Israel). Benjamin would join with the tribe of Judah to form the *Southern Kingdom* (now to be called Judah), and the Davidic promises would continue through them. Both kingdoms would still be responsible to the Mosaic Covenant. At the time of separation, God clarified this to Jeroboam, the first king of the Northern Kingdom (1 Kgs 11:34-40).

b. *The Relation of Both Kingdoms to the Covenant Promises*

The kings of the Southern Kingdom would operate under the Davidic Covenant, and though they would be disciplined for disobedience, their unfaithfulness would not nullify the promises of the Covenant. God would not take away the throne from the Davidic line of kings [He might temporarily deprive the nation of having a king, but

the right of kingship always belonged to the Davidic line]. In contrast, the kings of the Northern Kingdom were never guaranteed an unending dynasty. Jeroboam's line, for instance, was only assured as long as his descendants were faithful to the Mosaic Covenant:

"And I will take you, and you shall reign over whatever you desire, and you shall be king over Israel. Then it will be, that if you listen to all that I command you and walk in My ways, and do what is right in My sight by observing My statutes and My commandments, as My servant David did, then I will be with you and build you an enduring house as I built for David, and I will give Israel to you" (1 Kgs 11:37-38).

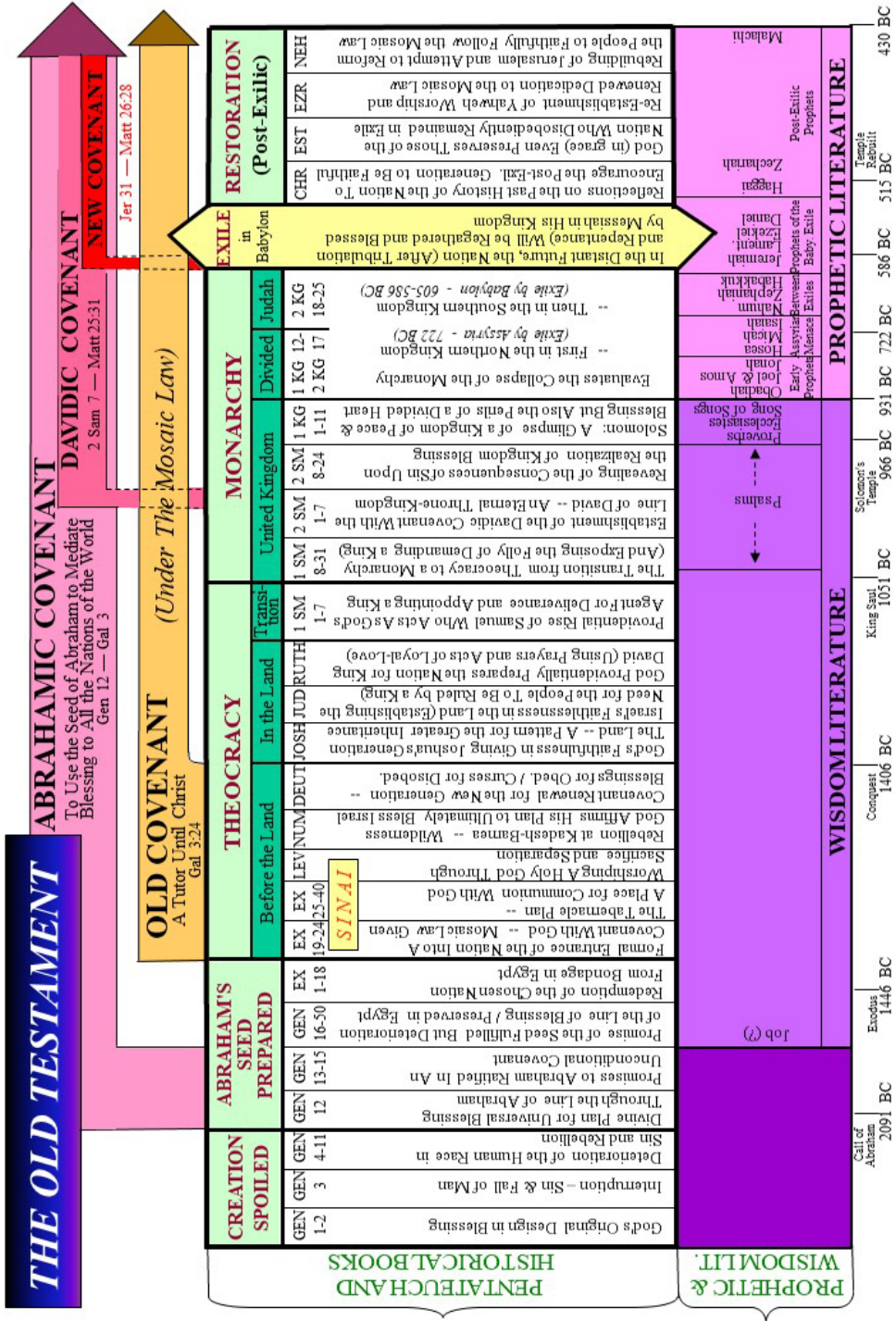
c. The Outcome for Both Kingdoms

Jeroboam, however, was unfaithful, and thus God removed his line from ruling over the Northern Kingdom. In fact, Israel in the north experienced a succession of different dynasties throughout her history. Nevertheless, the kings of the north are always compared back with Jeroboam, whereas the kings of the south are always compared with David.

In light of these covenant expectations (i.e., both kingdoms remained accountable to the Mosaic Covenant), the prophets are frequently engaged in confronting the people with their failure to keep the Mosaic Covenant. They also frequently point out the *Deuteronomic curses* as evidence that the nation's problem is one of disobedience to God. The prophets could see that *exile* was nearing. In the course of time, both kingdoms did deteriorate, but the Southern Kingdom outlasted the Northern. In general, the South was blessed by kings who were relatively "better," and the Davidic Covenant promises (God's kingdom plan) were connected with the South. Though the people could expect eventual exile and judgment, this did not demand a sense of defeatism. Any given generation could be blessed for being faithful. They did not have to be the generation to be judged with exile.

The ministry of the prophets, however, was often to look beyond the discipline and judgment of exile. In light of the Davidic Covenant, the prophets frequently clarified how the present judgment related to God's ultimate covenant promises of blessing and kingdom. Through the Messiah to come, God would fulfill these promises. The "blessing" would be grounded in His redemptive work of bearing sin (Isa 53)—which, from our perspective, was accomplished in His first coming. The "kingdom" promise—though initiated in His first coming—would find its primary fulfillment in Christ's Second Coming (Isa 2; Dan 7; Zech 14).

An Overview of the Entire Old Testament



2. AN INTRODUCTION TO THE PROPHETS AND THEIR MINISTRY

I. THE ANCIENT NEAR EASTERN CONTEXT

Like virtually all the countries of the Ancient Near East, Israel had her prophets. Yet the origin of the prophetic function is shrouded in mystery. In fact, there is still no scholarly consensus as to the origin or correct etymological identification of the term (Heb. נְבִיא).⁴ There is early evidence of "prophetic activity" with Israel, and yet we have no way of knowing what relationship existed with the "prophetic activity" of other countries.

Prophetic activity is certainly attested elsewhere, especially in connection with temple rituals. Livingston, for example, has described the prophetic function in regard to the Akkadian priesthood and temple: "*baru* priests were diviners who were skilled in observing omens in nature, interpreting dreams and the art of astrology."⁵ He goes on to elaborate,

The term *baru* means "to see," and the task of the priests was to observe the action of oil and water in a cup, the way in which objects fall, the condition of the entrails of sacrificial animals, the relation of the various heavenly bodies to each other (astrology), the movements of animals and birds, and the symbols of dreams. Hence, the *baru* priests were highly skilled technicians, and the methods of their work were closely guarded secrets. They did record some of their knowledge on clay tablets, however, and some of these have been recovered. They believed their

⁴Over forty years ago, W. F. Albright suggested that the Hebrew word *nābîʾ* is a noun from a passive form of the Semitic root *nbʾ*, "to call." The implication was that the prophet was "one called" by a god (emphasizing the commissioning of the prophet for his or her mission). He based this primarily on comparison with the Akkadian verb *nabû*, "to name, invoke" (see Albright, *From the Stone Age to Christianity* [Baltimore: Johns Hopkins, 1940], 231-32). Others (e.g., T. J. Meek, *Hebrew Origins*, 147) opted for an active form coming from a common Akkadian root, not found in Hebrew, meaning "to speak," and thus a "speaker," or "proclaimer" (indicating proclamation of messages from God). More recently, Daniel E. Fleming has proposed that the etymological roots of the Hebrew *nābîʾ* originated in West Semitic cultures, citing evidence from Mari and Emar of 2nd millennium BC Syria (see "The Etymological Origins of the Hebrew *nābîʾ*: The One Who Invokes God," *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 55:2 [Apr 1993]: 217-24). He notes, "The Syrian *nabû* is best understood as one who invokes the gods, and the noun should be an active participle from the verb *nabû*, 'to name'" (218). This would have the idea to call on or to invoke the gods in prayer, blessing or divinatory/oracular inquiry. For the Hebrews, this would be "one who invokes" the name of Yahweh for power and guidance.

⁵G. Herbert Livingston, *The Pentateuch in Its Cultural Environment* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1974), 107.

deities spoke through such phenomena, and referred to the conclusions they reached about the nature of coming events as "the word of god."⁶

Despite such examples, there is no evidence to suggest that the Hebrew prophetic function derived from such pagan practices. Bullock has concluded,

The evidence is still insufficient to draw any confident conclusion regarding the origins of Hebrew prophecy. The one thing that can be said confidently is that prophecy, like temple and sacrifice, was a general phenomenon in the ancient world of the Bible. The attempt to trace its origins to any one culture outside of Israel is no more possible than it would be to trace Mari or Canaanite prophecy to its derivation.⁷

This does not mean, however, that Israel's prophets were no different than those outside Israel. Merrill has carefully pointed out the uniqueness of Israel's prophets in regard to the Ancient Near East:

- 1) They were conscious of the call of God and performed their ministry in the name of YHWH only. Any predictive word from them came to pass (or would come to pass) within the time frame and historical context suggested in the oracle itself.
- 2) Unlike the pagan diviners and practitioners of magic, they did not seek to manipulate their God to their own plans and purposes.
- 3) They were responsible to God alone for their ministry, and hence would not merchandise their services to the highest bidder. Consequently, they spoke objectively, and reached beyond the mere interpretation of signs and portents to deal with issues of morality, righteousness, and the kingdom of God.⁸

II. "PROPHETIC ACTIVITY" IN EARLY HEBREW HISTORY

The ministry of Samuel appears as a watershed in regard to prophetic activity for the nation of Israel. In this section, I will highlight a few of the early examples and point out the nature of prophetic activity.

A. *First Biblical Mention = Gen 20:7*

1. Context:

God's rebuke of Abimelech as he was about to take Sarah. God told him that Abraham was a *prophet* and would pray for him. This is enacted in 20:17-18, "And Abraham prayed to God; and God healed Abimelech and his wife and his maids, so that they bore children. For the LORD had closed fast all the wombs of the household of Abimelech because of Sarah, Abraham's wife."

⁶Ibid., 112.

⁷C. Hassell Bullock, *An Introduction to the Old Testament Prophetic Books* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1986), 14.

⁸Eugene H. Merrill, *Kingdom of Priests*, 379-80.

2. Observations:

Abraham acted as an *interceder*! His role was not predicting, and did not involve visions, etc. In some sense, this did involve confrontation with sin.

B. *Second Biblical Mention = Exodus 7:1*

1. Context:

Moses and Aaron against Pharaoh of Egypt. The LORD said to Moses, "See, I make you as God to Pharaoh, and your brother Aaron shall be your prophet."

2. Observations:

The point is that he functioned as an *intermediary* between Moses and Pharaoh! This did not involve "predicting" or receiving visions.

C. *Numbers 11:29*

1. Context:

The verb is used in vv 25-26, and the noun is used in vs 29. When Moses established the 70 elders, the Spirit came and rested upon them so that they prophesied. "But they did not do it again" (11:25).

2. Observation:

This suggests that the LORD was doing this to authenticate their authority for this office. Note the further context in which other men prophesied, but Moses did not rebuke them. He said, "Would that all the LORD's people were prophets, that the LORD would put His Spirit upon them." There seems to have been an added dimension here from what we have previously seen, in which the person was marked by a dramatic encounter with God's Spirit along with resulting utterances.

D. *Numbers 12:6*

1. Context:

Disgruntlement against Moses on the part of Miriam and Aaron. The LORD spoke, "Hear now My words: If there is a prophet among you, I the LORD shall make Myself known to him in a vision. I shall speak with him in a dream."

2. Observations:

There is a unique element in this situation, in which the prophet is seen as the recipient of unique revelation by means of visions/dreams. God speaks with him personally and privately.

E. *Deuteronomy 13:1-5*

1. Context:

Possible sources by which temptation to idolatry might come are listed for the covenant nation. False prophets could be one of the dangers, so there is the need for a test of a true prophet. The situation involves a prophet who would predict a certain sign or wonder, with the intention of lending authority to his counsel (such

that others would obey him). Verse two notes that the prediction of the false prophet might even come to pass. According to vs 5, the test is to see if his counsel incites rebellion against the LORD and violates the commandments revealed in God's Word.

2. Observations:

Miraculous signs are not necessarily a test of truth! Signs or human experience must always submit to the only true standard, i.e., God's Word! Thus, a prophet's counsel must be in line with Scripture.

F. Deuteronomy 18

1. Context:

The warning of detestable practices by the nations in the land. In vv 9-14, the people are warned of forbidden practices of magic and foretelling the future. In vv 15-19, the expectations of a true prophet are given. In vv 20-22, a false prophet is discussed.

a. True prophet

Vs 15 states, "The LORD your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among you, from your countrymen, you shall listen to him." Vs 18 adds, "... I will put My words in his mouth, and he shall speak to them all that I command him."

b. False prophet

In vs 22, we have the testing for a false prophet. If his pronouncements and predictions fail to come true, this reveals he is a false prophet.

2. Observations

Regarding the prediction of the true prophet of vs 15, this stands as a promise for a line of prophets following Moses, with Jesus being the ultimate fulfillment. According to John 1:19-21, the leaders of Judaism were even looking for this one in their day (cf. Acts 3:22-23).

The test of a true prophet in this passage must be correlated with the test of Deuteronomy 13. Hence, this synthesis:

a.	Prediction fails to come true.	→	a false prophet
b.	Prediction comes true, but his counsel is contrary to revealed truth in the Word.	→	a false prophet
c.	Prediction comes true, and his counsel does not contradict the Word of God.	→	a true prophet

III. SAMUEL AND THE RISE OF THE "PROPHETIC SCHOOLS"

With the rise of Samuel, a dramatic shift takes place in the level of prophetic activity and its importance in the life of the nation. Note the following verses:

1. I Sam 3:20 - "all Israel . . . knew that Samuel was confirmed as a prophet of the LORD."

Preceding context: God had revealed His will to Samuel by a vision concerning the judgment He was going to bring on Eli the priest.

2. I Sam 9:9 - "he who is called a prophet (נְבִיא) now was formerly called a seer (הַרְאָה)."

But see also vs 10, where he is also called "a man of God" (אִישׁ הָאֱלֹהִים).

3. I Sam 28:6 - "When Saul inquired (וַיִּשְׁאַל) of the LORD, the LORD did not answer him, either by dreams or by Urim or by prophets."

This verse reflects that at this stage, the primary role of a prophet was to reveal information from God, or to clarify the will of God.

One thing we observe, however, is that along with the rise of Samuel, there appears to be the rise of a "school of the prophets." This is seen, for example, in I Samuel 10:5. Samuel had told Saul that as he approached a certain city, he would meet a "group of prophets" (Heb. חֲבֵל נְבִאִים). They would be playing the harp, tambourine, flute and lyre, and would be prophesying. So, it seems that a "school of prophets" was established by Samuel. Merrill notes,

Whether that school remained intact as a cohesive, institutional body after Samuel's passing is not at all clear. In any case it served as the model for a similar movement under Elijah and Elisha, particularly the latter, in whose days it bore the name "sons of the prophets" (2 Kings 2:3, 5, 7; 4:1, 38; 5:22, KJV).⁹

Apparently, there was quite a continuity of such activity, and they became a sizeable group. We know from Scripture that they even lived in something of a communal arrangement (2 Kgs 6:1-2).

IV. THE MINISTRY OF PROPHETS IN THE MONARCHY

It is during the period of the monarchy that we observe the most activity of the Old Testament prophets, particularly in close relation to the two exiles (722 and 587 BC). During this time, the prophets were raised up by God as a kind of third order along with priest and king. Merrill notes, ". . . they were not viewed as opponents to the temple and state, but as spokesmen of God who were called to speak words of blessing, encouragement, advice, rebuke, or judgment to people, priest, and king as the need required."¹⁰

⁹Merrill, 380.

¹⁰Ibid., 379.

A. Theological Background for Prophetic Activity

To understand the ministry of most of the *writing prophets* (those who authored the prophetic books of the Old Testament), it is essential to see their ministry in relation to the progress of revelation and historical developments. The notable observation to make about the prophets is that their ministries focus primarily on three crucial periods:

1. The period around the downfall of the Northern Kingdom in the 8th century BC.
2. The period around the downfall of the Southern Kingdom in the 5th–6th centuries BC.
3. During the postexilic period when the nation was trying to reestablish the theocracy and rebuild the temple and the city of Jerusalem.

The key to understanding their purpose is to recognize God's principles of dealing with the nation in response to their obedience and disobedience. This is clearly spelled out in Deuteronomy 28—30. God has outlined the cycles of discipline which he would impose upon them for disobedience (cf. Lev 26). The curses for disobedience include failure of crops in the agricultural realm and the cessation of rainfall. Continued disobedience would even result in the invasion of the land by enemy nations, and most severely the removal of the covenant people from the land into exile and captivity.

In light of this, one of the main functions of the prophets was to bring an indictment against the nation for their disobedience. The prophets would point out the violations of the covenant, and call their attention to the curses falling on the nation. The curses were there for a reason: the nation was being unfaithful. Furthermore, they warned the nation that continued disobedience and failure to repent would bring on harsher forms of discipline, and ultimately the discipline of exile. The prophets center around the crucial periods of Israel's history when the worst was about to befall them. God obviously wanted to use the prophets to confront the nation, helping them to understand why things were working out the way they were. Invasion and exile were serious, and God did not initiate this apart from intense confrontation and warning.

The prophets go beyond this, however, in announcing that ultimate restoration will eventually come about. This is in keeping with the principles of Deuteronomy 30: to turn back to the LORD would bring restoration and blessing. The prophets clarify that God's initial intentions (primarily the Abrahamic promises) will not be cast aside. However, they will be left for another generation. The prophets confirm that the judgments by God do not mean an end to God's purposes and promises to the covenant nation. But they will come in God's timing, when the proper season comes. Many generations of Israelites will miss the full provision of divine blessing, but a future generation will experience their realization.

While ultimate restoration and blessing is affirmed by the prophets, hope for the present generation is offered by grace, if the people will turn from their ways back to the LORD.

B. The Ministry Activities of the Prophets (Oracles)¹¹

1. To rebuke the nation for departure from the Mosaic Covenant (indictment oracles). Sometimes this is expressed in legal terminology (lawsuit) as the people are charged with breach of covenant (e.g., Hos 4:1-19). "The full lawsuit form contains a summons, a charge, evidence, and a verdict, though these elements may sometimes be implied rather than explicit."¹²
2. To point out social injustices and abuse of power [conviction speech].¹³
3. To denounce those who opposed the Lord (e.g., false prophets) and show the worthlessness of their reasoning [disputation speech].¹⁴
4. To evaluate the religious activities of the people (their acceptability to God), or why God is not pleased with their religious activities such as sacrifices.
5. To call for true righteousness.
6. To counsel the people as to how they should conduct themselves [instruction oracles].
7. To plead for God's mercy on behalf of the nation (Jer 14:7-9) [intercession].
8. To announce the judgment that God would consequently bring on His people (or individuals). [judgment oracles]

One sub-type of judgment oracle is that known as a "war oracle" (e.g., Hosea 5:8-10), in which the prophet announces the judgment of God as carried out through battle. The elements of this form include (1) the call to alarm, (2) the description of attack, and (3) the prediction of defeat. Sometimes the prophet would predict imminent doom by use of the device known as a "woe." "Woe oracles contain, either explicitly or implicitly, three elements that uniquely characterize this form: an *announcement* of distress (the word 'woe,' for example), the *reason* for the distress, and a *prediction* of doom."¹⁵ See, e.g., Hab 2:6-8.

9. To clarify Israel's future (hope) in the face of judgment [salvation oracles].¹⁶ Here, the focus is upon a future generation of Israel with whom God will achieve His promised blessings (examples: Amos 9:11-15; Hos 2:16-20; 2:21-23; Isa 45:1-7; and Jer 31:1-9).
10. To be of service to the nation at critical transition points (e.g., anointing of a new king).

¹¹For further help in identifying *oracles* and their delimitations, see Fee & Stuart, *How To Read the Bible For All Its Worth*, 158-161.

¹²*Ibid.*, 160.

¹³ Cf. J. Carl Laney, "The Prophets and Social Concern," *BSac* 147:585 (Jan-Mar 1990): 32-43.

¹⁴ Cf. R. Patterson, "Old Testament Prophecy," in *A Complete Literary Guide to the Bible*, ed. Leland Ryken and Tremper Longman III (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1993), 303. He asserts that the "desired effect . . . in disputation speeches is to leave the opponent devoid of further argumentation and resigned to the divine decision."

¹⁵*Ibid.*

¹⁶These may also be referred to as "hope" or "promise" oracles.

11. To encourage the people to take specific action in keeping with God's will (e.g., to rebuild the temple).
12. To denounce Israel's enemies, and pronounce judgment oracles upon them.

V. PROPHETIC LITERATURE VERSUS APOCALYPTIC LITERATURE

It is somewhat difficult to always distinguish sharply between prophetic and apocalyptic literature. They share a general set of characteristics, and it may be helpful to think of a prophetic-apocalyptic continuum. Walton writes,

Elements that would position a section on the apocalyptic side of the continuum include rich symbolism (often mythological), visions, conversation with spiritual beings, and cosmic catastrophe leading to the establishment of the kingdom of God on earth. In general, apocalyptic literature can be characterized as simply using a slightly different medium for conveying the prophetic word of God.¹⁷

VI. PROPHECY IN THE NEW TESTAMENT AND TODAY

Many claim that God is giving prophecy today. Is this valid? Answering in the affirmative, see Jack Deere, *Surprised by the Power of the Spirit* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Pub. House, 1993). The negative position is articulated by F. David Farnell, "Is the Gift of Prophecy for Today?" in *BSac* 149:595 (Jul-Sep 1992) and the following three issues (no. 596-598). For a critique of Deere's works and theology, see Richard L. Mayhue, "Alarmed by the Voice of Jack Deere," *Master's Seminary Journal* 8:2 (Fall 1997): 151-61.

¹⁷Andrew Hill and John Walton, *A Survey of the Old Testament*, 312.

UNIT 2: THE EARLY PROPHETS

Outline

- Ch. 3 – The Book of Obadiah
- Ch. 4 – The Book of Jonah
- Ch. 5 – The Book of Joel
- Ch. 6 – The Book of Amos

Orientation

These four prophets have traditionally been considered the “early prophets” in the sense that they wrote after the death of Solomon (ca. 931 BC) and yet prior to the Assyrian exile (722-721 BC). That being said, it is also true that we do not really know the dates for the books of Obadiah and Joel, and many scholars would contend that these prophets lived and wrote at a much later date. Yet arguments can be made both ways for the dating of these books. Granting, then, that these two books may possibly have been written later, we will nevertheless discuss them here in our survey of the prophets.

Assuming for the moment that these are the four earliest prophets, we need to consider them in their historical context. This would be during the time that the Assyrian Empire was at its height, being the unrivaled military and political power of the Ancient Near East. The Assyrian Empire was known for its brutality and also for its encroachment upon the lands to the west of the Euphrates River. In particular, the pressure it asserted on Syria and Israel resulted in a fierce hatred of the Assyrians. Understandably, Jonah was reluctant to be sent on a ministry of grace for the Assyrians residing in their fabulous city of Nineveh.

The books of Joel and Amos bear witness to Israel’s inner struggles with idolatry and covenant unfaithfulness. As a result, the clouds of God’s judgment were gathering (an ominous *day of the Lord* was at hand). Amos even announced that the Northern Kingdom would go into exile on account of her sins and her refusal to repent. These experiences served to point to a more ultimate “day of the Lord” to be realized in the distant eschatological future. In both cases, however, the nation would undergo God’s judgment, and then be brought to a state of repentance followed by divine deliverance and restoration. The ultimate realization of this would usher in the promised messianic kingdom.

3

3. THE BOOK OF OBADIAH

I. INTRODUCTION

The name Obadiah means "servant [or worshipper] of YHWH." The book of Obadiah is the shortest of the OT books, and is certainly one of the most overlooked. Most of the contents involve a rebuke of Israel's neighbor, Edom, situated at the southeast of the Dead Sea. Some have slighted the book on the basis of its narrow nationalism and its propagation of hate. Although the book makes allusions to definite historical situations, these are difficult to pinpoint and date. Hence the historical background to the book is vague.

II. DATE AND AUTHORSHIP

Discussion of higher critical matters is complex, since the author does not reference the book with the reign of any certain king. Little, if anything, is known about Obadiah himself. The Babylonian Talmud identified him with a steward of King Ahab who reigned from 874-853 BC (*Sanhed.* 39b), but few scholars attach much importance to this comment.

The dating of the book has a wide divergence even among conservative scholars. Archer, Freeman, and Delitzsch have settled on a date about 854 BC during the reign of King Jehoram on the basis of 2 Kings 8:20 (cf. 2 Chr 21:16-17).¹⁸ Another possibility is during the reign of King Ahaz (732-715) on the basis of 2 Chronicles 28:17-18. Others who feel that verses 10-14 refer to the Babylonian invasion would date the book after 587 BC.¹⁹ R. K. Harrison (*Introduction to the Old Testament*, 902) as well as A.K. Helmbold in the *Zondervan Pictorial Encyclopedia of the Bible* hold to the late date. Harrison dates the book about 450 BC. Feinberg sees the book as a reference to the Babylonian invasion in which Edom participated, but holds to a pre-exilic date for the book: "Obadiah in pre-exilic days sees by the Spirit of God the culmination of Edom's hatred for Israel in his vicious conduct toward the distraught people in the day of their exile by Nebuchadnezzar."²⁰

¹⁸Robert B. Chisholm, Jr., however, argues against an early date in Jehoram's reign. He notes, "At least two objections may be raised against this position. First, while an Edomite revolt did occur during Jehoram's reign (2 Kings 8:20-22; 2 Chron 21:8-10), the Edomites are not mentioned as participating in the invasion of Judah at this time (cf. 2 Chron. 21:16). Second, while the royal palace was looted (2 Chron. 21:17), there is no indication that Jerusalem suffered to the degree reflected by Obadiah 10-14" (*Interpreting the Minor Prophets* [Zondervan, 1990], 109).

¹⁹Chisholm argues for a late date after 587 BC. He points out, "The language of the text, with its repeated emphasis on the extremely disastrous nature of the event and its reference to lots being cast over the city, strongly supports this interpretation. Psalms 137:7, Lamentations 4:21-22, and Ezekiel 25:12-14; 35:5, 12-15 specifically refer to Edomite involvement in this calamity" (*Ibid.*, 110).

²⁰Charles L. Feinberg, *The Minor Prophets* (Chicago: The Moody Press, n.d.), 130.

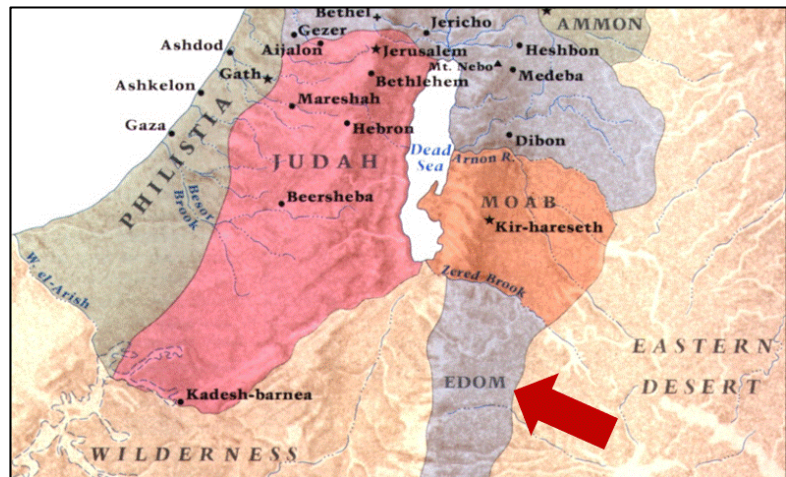
Arguments can be advanced for and against each position, but I would make a couple of personal observations and remarks. A plundering of Jerusalem is mentioned (vv 10-14), but there is no clear statement about the Jerusalem destruction and no mention about the Chaldeans or Nebuchadnezzar. Especially important is the absence of any reference to the temple. Granted, this is not hard evidence, but certainly a case could be made for an historic event prior to 587 BC. Furthermore, if Joel 2:32 is drawn from Obadiah 17, then the dating of Obadiah may have to await a verdict for the dating of Joel (which is still disputed). In any case, the Spirit of God did not see fit to provide the information, and the main teaching of the book is not hindered by the lack of dating.

Certainly, Edom evidenced this attitude on numerous occasions prior to 587, as well as on that monumental day of destruction. There may well be a future re-play of the hostilities.

III. HISTORICAL COMMENTS ABOUT EDMO

For a good historical sketch about Edom, one should read John D. W. Watts's small commentary.²¹ The reference in vs 10 about Edom being Jacob's brother alludes to the fact that the Edomites descended from Esau, who was indeed the twin brother of Jacob. The tension that existed between the historical brothers proved to be a foreshadowing of the relations that would continue through the centuries between their descendants. Consequently the OT Scriptures contain several indictments against Israel's hostile neighbor. For similar denunciations against Edom, one should consult Amos 1:11f; Isa 34; 63:1-6; Jer 49:7ff; Lam 4:21f; Ps 137:7; Ezek 25:12ff; 35:13ff; and Mal 1:2-5. Israelite tension with Edom surfaced on numerous occasions. The historical tensions between the brothers (Gen 25:23; 27:39f) gave way to Edom's refusal to cooperate with Israel on her way from Egypt to the promised land (Num 20:14-21; Deut 2:3-8). In spite of this, God

cautioned His people in the Torah, "You shall not detest an Edomite, for he is your brother" (Deut 23:7). Other clashes took place and are recorded in 2 Sam 8:13f; 1 Kg 11:14-17; 2 Kg 8:20 (cf. 2 Chr 21:16-17) 2 Kg 14:11; 16:5f; 2 Chr 28:17-18; Lam 4:21; and Ezek 25:12; 35:10.



The descendants of Esau became known as the Edomites, and eventually settled in the mountainous rugged terrain of the wilderness area southeast of the Dead Sea. Besides the

²¹John D. W. Watts, *Obadiah* (Winona Lake, IN: Alpha Publications, 1981). See pp 11-19.

names Edom or Esau, they are also referred to as Seir and Hor. Their northern boundary was usually considered to be the river Zered (modern-day *Wadi al-Hesa*).

The Edomites were subjected by David and Solomon, but achieved freedom during the reign of Jehoram about 845 BC. They were defeated in the days of Amaziah but revolted again in the time of Ahaz. The Nabatean Arabs eventually uprooted them. Archer comments,

... it may be fairly inferred from Malachi 1:3-5 that by Malachi's time (435 BC) the Edomites had already been driven from Sela and Mount Seir by the overwhelming forces of the Nabatean Arabs. Secular sources inform us that as early as the reign of Darius I (521-485), the Nabateans had pushed the Edomites out of their ancestral territory and driven them into the deserted regions of southern Judea.²²

They settled in southern Judea, which came to be called Idumea, and this transplanted people were called Idumeans. Herod the Great arose from them. For the most part, they were cut off by the fall of Jerusalem in AD 70.

The references to the clefts of the rock and lofty dwelling places (vv 3-4) is quite appropriate in light of the fact that the Edomites actually built their habitations in the sides of sheer cliff walls, often carving them out of solid rock. Freeman comments, "The rugged inaccessibility of their mountain fortress encouraged a false sense of security on the part of the Edomites and they considered themselves impregnable."²³ The principle cities were Sela, Teman, and Bozrah.



IV. LITERARY AFFINITIES

The book of Obadiah has several interesting literary affinities with other OT books. The relationship of Joel 2:32 and Obadiah 17 has already been mentioned. The most remarkable parallel is certainly with Jeremiah 49:7-22, in which there is clearly a "borrowing" of one from the other (although it may be debated as to who borrowed from whom). My inclination is that Jeremiah borrowed from Obadiah, possibly wishing to evidence that Edom's hostile attitudes did surface in the Babylonian invasion of 587 BC and thus making a denouncement of Edom all the more fitting. Affinities with Amos include Obadiah 14 with Amos 1:6, v 4 with 5: 2, and v 19 with 9:12. Affinities with Joel also abound:

²²Gleason Archer, *A Survey of Old Testament Introduction*, 303.

²³Hobart E. Freeman, *An Introduction to the Old Testament Prophets* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1968), 139.

Obadiah	Joel
10	3:19
11	3:3
15	1:15; 2:1; 3:4,7,14
17	2:32
18	3:8

V. STRUCTURE OF THE BOOK AND COMMENTS

A. *Condemnation of Edom's pride and announcement of the Lord's intention to humble Edom (vv 1-9)*

B. *Cause of Edom's judgment: her malice against Israel (vv 10-14)*

Edom's arrogance against Israel carried over into violent and hostile conduct. Edom took delight in seizing the opportune moment when Israel was under siege by enemy forces to plunder her and "gloat" over her misfortune.

If the book was written prior to 587 BC and the Babylonian invasion, it does seem to anticipate that historic occasion. However, it may include past events, anticipate the desolation of 587, and even be somewhat of a principle for other future occasions when Israel would experience a "day of distress." In some sense, the calamity of 587 BC would foreshadow an even greater day of calamity for Israel in her eschatological future (i.e., during the Great Tribulation). Whatever the occasion, the main point is this: God brings discipline on His covenant people, and Edom should not take advantage of these situations to further her own selfish interests. This is where Old Testament theology comes into play. The principles laid out in passages like Deuteronomy 28–30 clarify that misfortune does not come upon Israel without reason. For Israel, to be stormed by enemy forces and plundered is an indication of God's discipline upon them for covenant unfaithfulness. To undergo a "day of distress" is in keeping with Deuteronomy 28–30 (notice the repetition of thought in vv 10-14). It attests that God is holding them accountable to Him and the covenant between them.

Nevertheless, though God disciplines His people, He does not tolerate other nations taking undo advantage of them or going beyond the measure of harm He intended. That is precisely the point of this passage! Israel is not simply being abused by more powerful forces. They are experiencing God's discipline upon them, and Edom makes the mistake of trying to "cash in" on the opportunity. From God's viewpoint, He will discipline His covenant people and look out for them at the same time.

Furthermore, God established a principle in Genesis 12:1-3 as to how He would either grant favor or afflict the nations of the world: "The one who curses you, I will curse." Thus, God is bound by His own promises to deal with Edom in judgment. Those who accuse this little book of fostering a narrow nationalism and hate need to evaluate the book in light of the abiding principles of Genesis 12:1-3.

C. Judgment will be settled with "The Day of the Lord" (vv 15-21)

Although Israel awaits her "day of disaster" from the Lord, so do those nations who oppose God and cause undo harm to His covenant people. The "day of the Lord" will bring about a turn of events!

1. Reaffirmation of Edom's doom along with other nations (vv 15-16)

Edom is representative of many nations who have done similar acts of unjustified hostility against the covenant people of God. Nevertheless, God will bring full revenge upon all of them. What revenge is not meted out in history will certainly be finalized in the "day of the Lord."²⁴

Notice the imagery of Obadiah 16. The nations that plundered Jerusalem and staggered about in drunken delight and amusement in her conquest will one day stagger from drinking of God's judgment.

2. The glorious outcome for the Remnant of Israel (vv 17-21)

a. The Abrahamic promises to be fulfilled with the Remnant of Israel (v 17)

The expression "those who escape" is a reference to godly Israelites who make up the "remnant" of Israel. The doctrine of the "remnant" is dealt with extensively in the prophecies of Isaiah (note Isa 6:13; 10:20-23; 11:11—12:6; Joel 2:32; Rom 9:27). God must fulfill His Abrahamic promises with Israel. However, He does not have to fulfill the promises of blessing with every individual Israelite or with every generation. When we come to the book of Isaiah, we learn that Israel is brought into the courtroom and charged with covenant unfaithfulness. Rather than bringing complete judgment upon them at that time, God decides to postpone the final judgment. However, He does bring temporary judgment upon them by "hardening" the nation in unbelief. Isaiah's ministry is largely one of hardening the people, and this hardening will continue through the centuries—even through Messiah's earthly ministry—and even up until the moment of His return. That explains why Israel as a nation did not accept Jesus when He came the first time. But to ensure the fulfillment of His promises, God elected a "remnant" from within physical Israel with whom He would remove the hardening of unbelief. Those Jews who believed in Jesus while He was on earth were part of God's elect remnant, for whom the "hardening" had been removed (note Jn 6:44). When Messiah Jesus returns the second time, He will gather the believing remnant to participate in His kingdom on

²⁴The "day of the Lord" is a very common expression with the prophets (see especially Isa 13 and Joel 2–3). In essence, it is a specific time in history when God will bring judgment upon the world for its evil, culminate His discipline upon Israel, and establish Messiah's Kingdom upon earth. The apostle Paul emphatically insisted that "the day of the Lord" had not come in his day (2 Thess 2:2). The "day of the Lord" will include the events of the Great Tribulation, many details of which are reflected in the book of Revelation (note Rev 6:17).

earth (cf. Rom 11:25-29). Unbelieving Israelites will await the Great White Throne judgment to be cast into hell.

The remark in verse 17 about possessing "their possessions" is a reference to the Abrahamic promises of blessing, particularly the land (comp. vv 19-20 which emphasize the possessing of land and cities). John Watts comments, "It is clear that 'their' refers to Israel and that the 'possession' is defined in terms of the broad promises to Abraham (Gen 12:7; 13:14-17; 15:7; 21; 17:8), Israel (Exod 3:8; Deut 1:8; Josh, etc.), and David (II Sam 7:10)."²⁵ What Edom coveted for herself rightly belonged to Israel, and God will make sure she gets it. Watts remarks, ". . . Jahweh's sovereignty was also at stake in the fulfillment of his choice of David and Zion, and even further in his election of Israel and his gift to them in perpetuity of the land of Canaan. Justice would be empty if it did not lead to the accomplishment of God's positive purposes in history."²⁶

b. Complete destruction of Edom (v 18)

There will be a "remnant" among Israel, but in contrast there will be "no survivor" for the house of Esau.

c. Territory coveted by Edomites to be possessed by the Remnant of Israel (vv 19-20)

This is an expansion of the last line of verse 17.

d. The Remnant of Israel to govern with the Lord in the Millennial Kingdom (v 21)

The "deliverers" is a reference to those godly Israelites who put their faith in Messiah Jesus and were delivered from the wrath of the Great Tribulation, were spared of Messiah's judgment, and were allowed to enter the millennial kingdom (comp Joel 2:32). They will participate as "judges" in the kingdom, i.e., they will rule and govern with Messiah. Watts comments,

Hebrew judges were saviors for the people (cf. Judg 3:9, 15; 2 Kings 13:5; Isa 19:20; Neh 9:27), the orphan, the widow, and the oppressed. Those who are called to save Israel do so by exercising judgment, i.e., by creating justice. Such men judged injustice within Israel and led the people as military men against oppressors from without.²⁷

The book closes with the note that "the kingdom will be the LORD's" (21). In light of the preceding context with its emphasis upon the deliverance at Jerusalem and those who take possession of the land, this promise of the kingdom probably finds its fulfillment at the time of the Second Coming. The kingdom of the Lord is the millennial kingdom that follows the Great Tribulation. The inauguration of the Lord's kingdom will certainly settle the violence done by Edom to brother Jacob!

²⁵Watts, 62.

²⁶Ibid., 59.

²⁷Ibid., 65.

4. THE BOOK OF JONAH

I. DATING THE BOOK OF JONAH

Outside the book of Jonah itself, we know very little about the prophet Jonah. We do have the NT reference to Jonah in Matthew 12:41, in which Christ referred to these events as *historical*. This includes both the matter of Jonah being in the “fish” as well as Nineveh’s repentance.

Also a prophet named Jonah is referred to in 2 Kings 14:25, “. . . according to the word of the LORD, . . . , which He spoke through His servant Jonah the son of Amittai, the prophet, who was of Gath-hepher.”²⁸ Since we have no knowledge of any other prophet of this same name, we can safely presume that this is the prophet Jonah who is mentioned in the book of Jonah.

The same paragraph in 2 Kings links this Jonah with the reign of Jeroboam II the son of Joash, king of Israel, who reigned for 41 years.²⁹ According to Leslie McFall, Jeroboam II became coregent in Apr of 793 BC and served as king from Spr 782/Apr 781 to Aug/Sept 753. Of course Jonah’s years of ministry could have begun before Jeroboam’s reign or continued afterwards (or both). If we assume that Jonah had a lengthy period of ministry (say 50 years), then we could estimate that his ministry must have fallen sometime in the general period between 843-703 BC (i.e., 50 years on either side of Jeroboam’s reign). But since the Assyrians deported Israel in 722 BC, we could revise this to 843-722 BC, though it is more likely that the events recorded in the book of Jonah were during Jeroboam’s reign, i.e., during 793-753 BC. During this period, there was increasing pressure being put upon Israel (and other western lands) by the mighty kingdom of Assyria.

Archer thinks the time of composition of the book is around 760 BC (p 289), though liberal critics often date the composition around 430 BC “on the supposition that it was composed as an allegory of a piece of quasi-historical fiction to oppose the ‘narrow nationalism’ of Jewish leaders like Ezra and Nehemiah, at a time when the Samaritans were being excluded from all participation in the worship of Yahweh at Jerusalem, and all the foreign wives were being divorced under the pressure of bigoted exclusivism.”³⁰

²⁸ According to W. C. Williams (“Jonah” in *ISBE*, 2:1112), Gath-hepher was located in the territory of Zebulun (Josh 19:13). It is commonly identified with Khirbet ez-Zurrâ’, near Mashhad, about 5 km NE of Nazareth.

²⁹ Joash became coregent in Apr 799, and reigned Spr 798/Apr 797 until Spr 782/Apr 781.

³⁰ Gleason L. Archer, *A Survey of Old Testament Introduction*, rev. ed. (Moody, 2007), 289.

II. ASSYRIAN PRESSURE UPON ISRAEL

Although Assyria is not mentioned in the records of 2 Kings until the reign of Tiglath-Pileser III (745-727 BC), we do have information from extra-biblical sources that documents a build-up of conflict and confrontation between Israel and Assyria from as early as 853 BC.

As early as the reign of Shalmaneser III (859-824 BC), we see Assyria beginning to assert itself against the western lands, especially in Syria (Aram) to the north of Israel. “Thirty-one years were spent in campaigning to extend Assyrian rule to Cilicia, Palestine, and the Persian Gulf. His first three campaigns were directed to the capture of Carchemish (857). . . .”³¹ Following this, Shalmaneser III returned to the west in 853, though the alarmed Syrian states were ready to oppose his return. Wiseman writes,

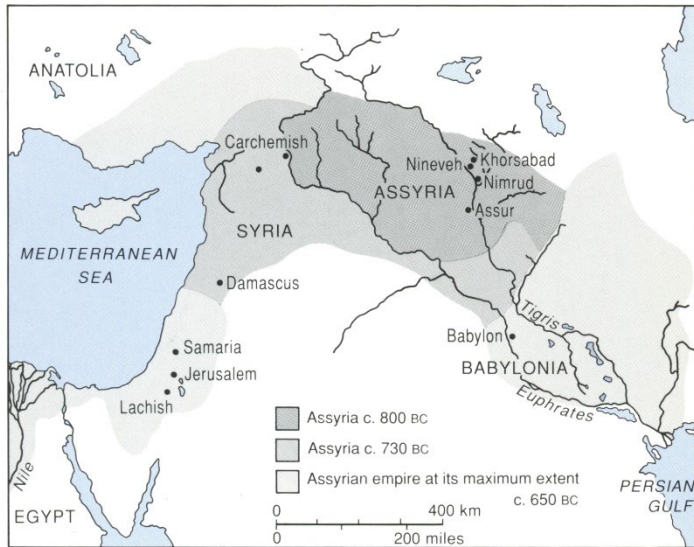
Irḫuleni of Hamath and Adad-ʾidri (Hadadezer, possibly the Ben-hadad II of 1 K. 20) massed a coalition of ‘twelve kings of the sea-coast’ with 62,900 infantry, 1,900 cavalry, 3,900 chariots, and 1,200 Arabian fighting camels at Karkara (Qarqar). ‘Ahab the Israelite’ (Akk. A-ḫa-ab-bu māat-Sir-ʾi-la-a-a) supplied 10,000 men and 2,000 chariots according to the first reference to Israel in Assyrian annals (see *ANET*, pp. 278f.). The clash was so fierce that the Assyrians did not return for three years (1 K. 16:29; 20:20; 22:1).

Obviously Israel felt threatened enough by Assyria that they willingly joined the coalition to oppose them. Though the Assyrians may not have been victorious in this encounter, their incursions westward were beginning to seriously threaten these lands and put the dread of Assyria in them.

So from at least as early as 842 BC, we do have evidence of Israel

having to pay tribute to Assyria, an act which would surely have infuriated the people of Israel and caused them to hate the Assyrians. Following 842 BC, the fighting continued. Wiseman goes on to explain,

When Hadadezer was assassinated (842), Shalmaneser took the opportunity to march against his successor Hazael, ‘the son of a nobody’ (i.e., a usurper), whose army was routed at Mt. Senir (Hermon). While claiming the defeat of Hazael, the Assyrians failed



³¹ D. J. Wiseman, “Assyria,” in *ISBE*, 1:334.

to capture either him or Damascus, where he had taken refuge. They ravaged the surrounding countryside, plundered the rich Hauran plain, and marched to the Mediterranean coast at Carmel (Ba'li-ra'si), where tribute was received from Tyre, Sidon, and 'Jehu son of Omri' (Yaua mār Humri); the event is not recorded in the OT but was perhaps induced by Israel's need of support against Hazael's raids into their territory (2 K. 10:32). If this was Jehu's plan, it was unsuccessful. The submission of the Israelite is depicted on the Black Obelisk (British Museum). JEHU, or his ambassador, is portrayed kneeling before Shalmaneser while porters bring 'silver, gold, golden bowls, vases, cups, buckets' and other objects as tribute."³²



Panel of the Black Obelisk from Nimrūd showing Jehu (or his emissary) bowing before Shalmaneser III (859–824 BC). This is the only contemporary representation of an Israelite king (Trustees of the British Museum).

Pictured below are Israelites bringing Jehu's tribute.



Shalmaneser III's reign was followed by three Assyrian kings, all of whom overlapped the reign of Israel's Jeroboam II:

- Adadnirari III (810-783 BC)
- Shalmaneser IV (782-772 BC)
- Aššur-dân III (771-754 BC)

Gleason Archer believes Jonah's mission occurred during the reign of Adadnirari III.³³ We do have evidence of Adadnirari III's hostility against Israel and the western lands:

In 806 B.C. the young king undertook an expedition to north Syria, reaching the Mediterranean (Arpad), and another the following year, when he took Hazazu and broke up the powerful coalition developing between Damascus and states as far afield as Malatya. In 804 he struck further southwest to Tyre and Sidon. Joash of Israel, anxious to annul the burdensome treaty imposed on him by Hazael, seems to have taken this opportunity, as had Jehu before him, to obtain Assyrian help. The evidence for this is a

³² Ibid.

³³ Gleason L. Archer, *A Survey of Old Testament Introduction*, 291.

royal stele (from Tell ar Rimah, Iraq) in which Adadnirari lists tribute from ‘Joash of Samaria’ (*Yu’asu* ^{māt}*Samerinā*) before that of Tyre and Sidon.³⁴

There is little recorded activity of the kings Shalmaneser IV and Aššur-dân III (both sons of Adadnirari III) in regard to Israel. We do know, however, that Aššur-dân III “campaigns unsuccessfully in Syria, the event being marked by the ominous sign of a solar eclipse on June 15, 763 B.C.”³⁵ What makes for an interesting question is whether or not this solar eclipse might have had any bearing on Jonah’s preaching at Nineveh. The timing of the event in 763 BC is certainly appropriate. There were also distressful events back home in Assyria, both a plague and revolt in the cities of Asshur, Gozan, and Arrapha.

With the coming to the throne of the Assyrian king Pul, also known as Tiglath-Pileser III (745-727 BC), the conflict between Assyria and Israel significantly increased. This was after the days of Jeroboam II, but conceivably still in the days of Jonah. The first mention we have of him in the Bible (and the first reference to Assyria in 2 Kings) is in 2 Kings 15:19-20. Verse 19 says, “Pul, king of Assyria, came against the land, and Menahem gave Pul a thousand talents of silver.” [Menahem was coregent in late Apr of 752 and died in the Spr 742/Apr 741]. The text goes on to say, “Then Menahem exacted the money from Israel, even from all the mighty men of wealth, from each man fifty shekels of silver to pay the king of Assyria. So the king of Assyria returned and did not remain there in the land.”

The second mention of Tiglath-Pileser III is in 2 Kings 15:29 in regard to his campaign of ca. 740 BC: “In the days of Pekah king of Israel [*coregent late Apr 752; king Sp 740/Apr 739 – Sp 732/Apr 731*], Tiglath-Pileser king of Assyria came and captured Ijon and Abel-beth-maacah and Janoah and Kedesh and Hazor and Gilead and Galilee, all the land of Naphtali; and he carried them captive to Assyria.” Assyria’s incursions into Israel increased from this point onward, until finally Samaria was destroyed and the nation deported in 722 BC.

III. THE CITY OF NINEVEH

The city of Nineveh was certainly one of the most significant cities of the ANE, mentioned as early as Genesis 10:11 as a city of Nimrod. It was finally sacked in 612 BC by the combined forces of the Babylonians, Medes, and Scythians.

The ruins of ancient Nineveh are located opposite the modern city of Mosul in northern Iraq. The outline of the city walls are about 12-13 km. (8 mi.) in circumference and enclose an area of 730 ha. (1800 acres). The two primary mounds are Kuyunjik (which was excavated on numerous occasions between 1842 and 1932) and Tell Nebi Yûnus. “The exploration of the site of Nineveh began in 1820 with C. J. Rich, Resident of the British East India Company at Baghdad.”³⁶ “A. H. Layard, the English archaeologist and ‘father of Assyriology,’ discovered the great palace of Sennacherib king of Assyria (705-681 B.C.) in the southern corner of Kuyunjik in 1847.”³⁷ Then in 1853, H. Rassam

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 1:335.

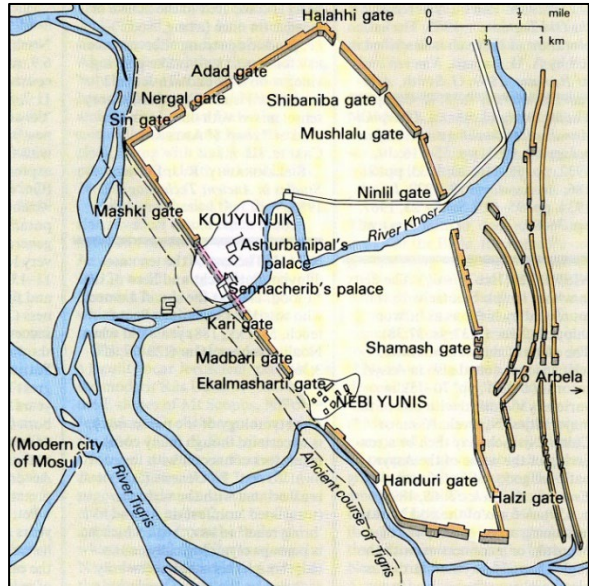
³⁵ *Ibid.*

³⁶ C. T. Fritsch, “Nineveh,” in *ISBE*, 3:538.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 3:539.

(Christian of Mosul) uncovered another great palace in the northern part of the tell that belonged to the Assyrian king Ashurbanipal (669-633 B.C.) This discovery was to yield the Royal Library with thousands of clay tablets.

The primary temple of Nineveh seems to have been a temple of Ishtar, first erected at least by the middle of the 2nd century B.C. This was rebuilt and renovated many times over the years. Nineveh was not always the capital of the empire. During the Middle Assyrian Kingdom of the 14th-12th centuries BC, Nineveh served as the palace-city of several kings. Nineveh, along with Asshur, Nimrûd (Calah) and Khorsabad, served as one of the royal cities of the empire, But it was not until the days of Sennacherib (705-681 BC) that Nineveh became the capital of the land. Thus it was not necessarily the capital at the time of Jonah’s visitation. Finally Nineveh was destroyed in 612 BC in an attack by the combined forces of the Babylonians led by Nabopolassar and the Medes under Cyaxares.



Source: *Illustrated Bible Dict*, 2:1091 [IVP]

One of the curious statements about Nineveh is that found in Jonah 3:3 describing Nineveh as “an exceedingly great city, a three days’ walk.” There are two possible solutions to this: (1) Archer regards this remark as indicating his preaching activities. To stop and preach repentance from time to time would have taken possibly this long. (2) A second solution is that it “may refer to the larger environs of the city known as the ‘Assyrian Triangle,’ which stretched from Khorsabad, about 23 km. (14 mi.) NE of Nineveh, to Nimrûd, about 37 km. (23 mi.) SE of Nineveh.”³⁸



Looking west along the restored northern outer wall of Nineveh toward the Nergal Gate in the distance. The circuit of the walls of Nineveh is about 12 km. [source: *Cultural Atlas of Mesopotamia* by Michael Roaf].

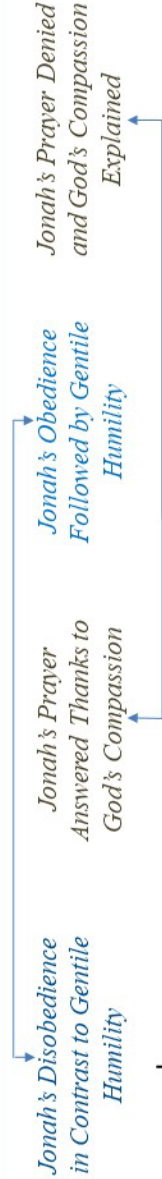
³⁸ C. T. Fritsch, “Nineveh,” in *ISBE*, 3:538.

IV. BOOK CHART OF JONAH

The Book of Jonah

Theme: How God effectively worked in Jonah's life, disciplining him to obey God's commission to preach to the despised Assyrians and then teaching him about God's compassion for the lost.
Purpose: That all God's people might have compassion on the lost and thus sense their obligation to bear witness to them.

<p>Jonah's Unfaithfulness: Runs from Nineveh</p> <p>1-3 Jonah's disobedience to go to Nineveh</p> <p>4-6 Gentile captain preaches to Jonah in light of God's calamity</p> <p>7-16 Sailors humbly respond and call on God</p> <p>7-9 Sailors cast lots to determine Jonah's guilt</p> <p>10-13 Sailors vainly attempt to row to shore</p> <p>14-16 Sailors cast Jonah overboard and call on God</p>	<p>Jonah's Lesson in the Fish</p> <p>1:17 LORD's appointment of a "great fish" to swallow Jonah</p> <p>1-9 Jonah's Prayer for life</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Introduction (1) · Summary Report (2) · Reflection on Time of Need (3-6) · Report of Deliverance (7) · Vow of Praise (8-9) <p>10 LORD's command for the fish to vomit up Jonah</p>	<p>Jonah's Faithfulness: Preaches at Nineveh</p> <p>1-3 Jonah's obedience to go to Nineveh</p> <p>4 Jonah preaches to the Gentiles about God's calamity</p> <p>5-9 Nineveh repents and calls on God</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> · People's Response (5) · King's Response (6-9) · King's repentance (6) · King's proclamation (7-9) <p>10 God relents of the calamity</p>	<p>Jonah's Lesson With the Plant</p> <p>1-3 Jonah's anger and prayer for death</p> <p>4-11 God's Lesson for Jonah</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> · God's 1st question (4) · God's appointment of a plant and worm (5-8) · God's 2nd question (9) · God's compassion declared (10-11)
<p>Chapter 1</p> <p><i>Jonah's Disobedience in Contrast to Gentile Humility</i></p>	<p>Chapter 2</p> <p><i>Jonah's Prayer Answered Thanks to God's Compassion</i></p>	<p>Chapter 3</p> <p><i>Jonah's Obedience Followed by Gentile Humility</i></p>	<p>Chapter 4</p> <p><i>Jonah's Prayer Denied and God's Compassion Explained</i></p>



† Prayer cast in the form of a Declarative Praise Psalm

by Dr. J. Paul Tanner
 March 25, 2008

V. THE THEME OF THE BOOK OF JONAH

Archer has expressed the theme this way:

The theme . . . is that God's mercy and compassion extend even to the heathen nations on condition of their repentance. It is therefore Israel's obligation to bear witness to them of the true faith; and a neglect of this task may bring the nation, like Jonah himself, to the deep waters of affliction and chastisement.³⁹

VI. REFLECTIONS ON JONAH CHAPTER FOUR

God delights to give opportunity for repentance . . . He is the God of mercy. But what about Jonah? Is he zealous to see others experience God's mercy, or is he stingy about God's mercy? The repentance of Nineveh is not the climax of the book. Yes, the evangelistic campaign was accomplished and the statistics were reported, but there is a greater climax to the book yet coming. The book which began with Jonah and God has now returned to Jonah and God. Nineveh must fade out of the picture—indeed, the repentance of Nineveh in Jonah's day gave a very lengthy extension of life to this Assyrian stronghold. In fact, Nineveh would last well over a hundred years, for it was not until 612 BC that Nineveh finally fell. For the meantime, the business at Nineveh was finished . . . but not God's work in His prophet!

A. *Jonah's Displeasure over God's Mercy (4:1-4)*

As we come to Jonah chapter four, we may be shocked to find that the mighty prophet of old is still very human. Now his true feelings come out: "But it greatly displeased Jonah and he became angry" (vs 2). The Hebrew text says something like "and it was hot to him" which I suppose is their way of saying that Jonah became a little bit hot under the collar. Does this seem strange to you that this man in the ministry of our Lord was actually repulsed by the results of Nineveh? Why would this be? The answer is seen in Jonah's prayer in vv 2-3:

² He prayed to the Lord and said, "Please Lord, was not this what I said while I was still in my own country? Therefore in order to forestall this I fled to Tarshish, for I knew that You are a gracious and compassionate God, slow to anger and abundant in lovingkindness, and one who relents concerning calamity. ³ "Therefore now, O Lord, please take my life from me, for death is better to me than life."

Listen to these revealing words: he knows that this God is gracious and compassionate, but this knowledge of his has not yet been absorbed by his own heart. Frank Gaebelien once said, "he had not yet learned to look beyond the horizon of his own people to the wideness of God's mercy."

Applicational Thoughts

Yes, there is a wideness in God's mercy. It extends beyond ourselves, beyond our families, beyond our own race . . . beyond our own countrymen. There is a wider brotherhood of men on earth that not all have eyes to see. God's mercy must not be bounded. There is a statement in the apocryphal book of Ecclesiasticus that certainly is a

³⁹ Gleason L. Archer, *A Survey of Old Testament Introduction*, 289.

truth: "As is His majesty, so is His mercy!" All of creation testifies to the majesty of God, but He is just as merciful as He is majestic! God's mercy is for all, and when we come "just as we are" to the cross and find forgiveness in Jesus we become part of God's family to which none are barred. With our new life, we find that our citizenship is in heaven. Who I am by birth is now secondary to the fact that I am first and foremost a Christian.

There is a wideness in God's mercy that binds us one in Him. Our stinginess of God's mercy must give way to His unbounded compassion for the lost! This stinginess can run very deep; it certainly did for Jonah, for it even brought him to a point of wanting God to take his life rather than having to yield to the way God Himself was. This is not a very pretty picture of Jonah but at least he took his complaint to God and God heard that prayer. Notice carefully how God answers: "Do you have good reason to be angry? (vs 4). God is saying to Jonah, "I hear your prayer, but is your complaint really legitimate?" Notice that God does not grant his request for death. Many are the foolish prayers of the saints of God which we are fortunate God in His grace does not answer! God knows us so well . . . every thought and motive of the heart is intimately known by Him. God is not fooled by Jonah's haphazard request to die. God knows that is just a cover-up for Jonah's real problem (anger), and thus God puts His finger ever so gently on Jonah's sin: "Jonah, be honest now, do you really have a reasonable ground for this 'anger' of yours?"

B. *God's Object Lesson for Jonah (4:5-8)*

Verses 1-4 revealed that Jonah did not know God's compassion. Now, verses 5-8 demonstrate Jonah's selfishness.

God responded to Jonah's prayer, but notice that Jonah did not answer God's question. God was right: there was no legitimate or reasonable grounds for Jonah to be angry. But this friend Jonah of ours is a stubborn fellow. He builds himself a shelter to protect himself from the sun and then crawls off to see whether Nineveh will yet receive God's judgment.

Perhaps Jonah was waiting to see how long Nineveh could keep up this change of behavior. Jonah reminds us of someone else that God's Word has introduced us to: the elder brother of the prodigal son. In the parable of the prodigal son, we are given a picture of the heart of God who always rejoices in the return of a son to Himself. But strangely, there is this elder brother who was not big enough to rejoice in the forgiveness of this returning brother. Jonah is just like that—he finds no joy in the repentance of the Ninevites . . . he is unsympathetic. This problem in his attitude displeases the Lord, and God conceives a little object lesson to shake Jonah out of this. God causes a plant to grow up to give Jonah shade, but then allows it to wither away on account of a worm. Dejected, Jonah again begs to die: "Death is better to me than life" (vs 8). One might think that Jonah had deep psychological problems, for he seems to be suicide prone. He wants to die when he sees the Ninevites repenting, and he wants to die when his little shade tree withers, thus removing his protection from the blistering hot sun.

We also notice that Jonah is never late for God's appointments: God appointed a great fish, God appointed a plant, God appointed a worm, and God appointed a scorching east wind. Of the four, Jonah liked only one—Jonah really appreciated that plant. In fact, Jonah is more happy over that plant than he is over the repentance of the 120,000

Ninevites. That plant is his comfort . . . with it he had protection. Without it, he was miserable. But the reason he has it is because God was compassionate towards him. Jonah didn't deserve the tree . . . he didn't work for the tree . . . he didn't take care of the tree. But God had compassion on Jonah by giving him this shade tree. God was under no obligation to give Jonah this shade tree, and God was just as righteous when He took the shade tree anyway. But it sure upset ole Jonah when God withdrew His compassion on Jonah. Jonah, we see, is stingy. He likes God's compassion, but he doesn't care that others also receive God's compassion. He is stingy . . . he is selfish. One of my professors used to say, "A life that is wrapped up in itself makes a very small package."

C. The Final Dialogue (4:9-11)

Once again, God heard Jonah's prayer . . . his begging for death, and so God comes closer (so to speak) for a little talk with Jonah. God says to him, "You had compassion on that plant." But Jonah did not create the plant . . . he did not nourish it . . . and furthermore, the plant had no eternal value. Jonah only cared for the plant as long as there was some benefit in it for him.

Oh that we would look long and hard at those little words in vs 11: "Should I not have compassion?" God says. This is the real message of the whole book! Listen, and you can sense the heart-throb of God Himself: "Jonah, I would like to say something to you. You didn't create that plant, but I created all these people in Nineveh. You didn't nourish that plant, but day after day I give life to them and care for them. And Jonah, there is one thing more: You felt a sense of loss over that plant which is only a temporary, inanimate object. And how do you think I feel as the Creator over 120,000 individuals who are headed to an eternity without Christ?"

"Should I not have compassion? Should I not have pity?" Those words come thundering from the very heart of God . . . a loving God who desperately wants to pour out His compassion to those who are lost. Yes, this is the heart of the book. In fact, it is the heart of missions . . . God who has compassion and pity on those dead in sin. But it also reveals the heart of a servant of God whose heart was not touched with the passion of God in missions.

I think God would have said something more to Jonah also. "Jonah, furthermore, you said you wished to die. I'm not going to take your life. But there will come a time when I will take a life . . . it will be the life of My own Son. You felt the loss of a plant. But Jonah, I shall have the pain of the loss of My Son, because of the way I love these whom you have had no compassion for." Here, then, is what we need to take away from this book:

Our stinginess of God's mercy must give way to His unbounded compassion for the lost!