

SESSION EIGHTEEN

THE OLD TESTAMENT BACKGROUND FOR A STUDY OF THE PROPHETS

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 precede 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 entrance of the prophets onto the scene.

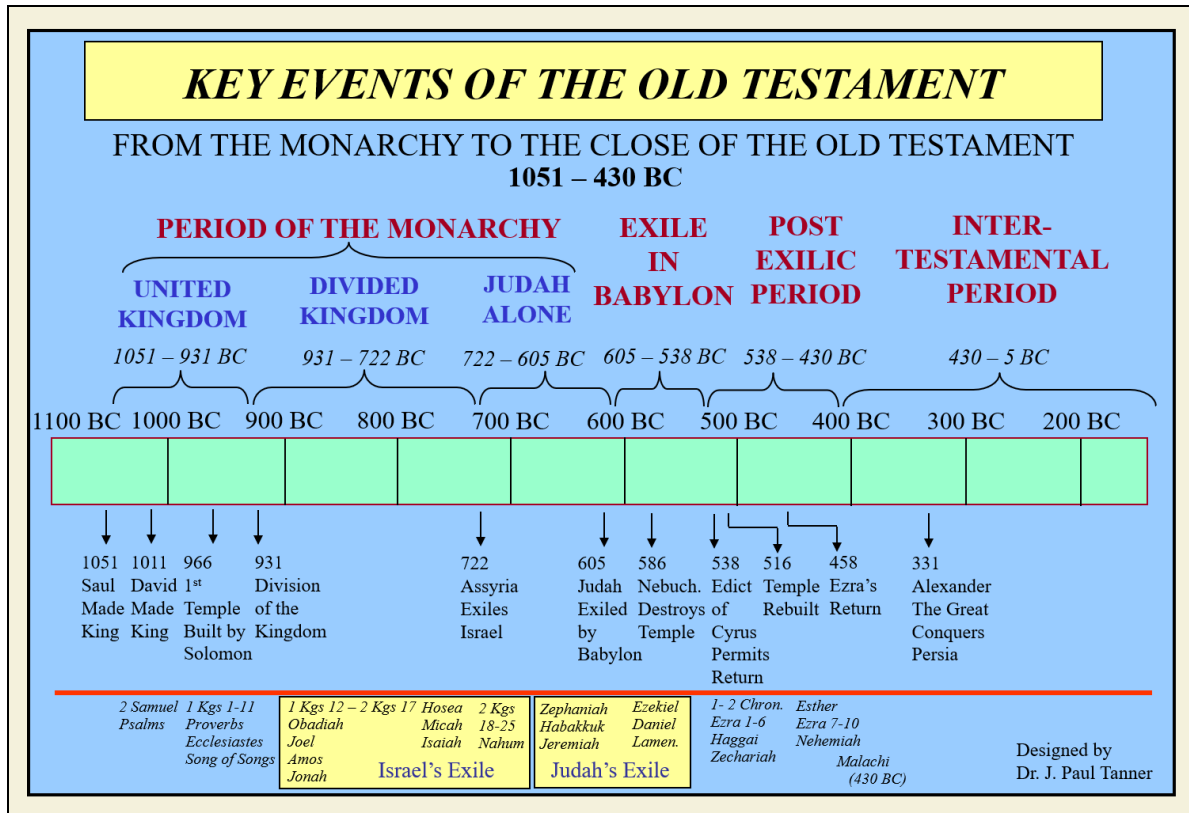
II. CHRONOLOGICAL ORIENTATION

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). Col 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, Gen 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. Eph 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 Gen 1–11 is essentially the sad story 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. Gen 12:1-3 become 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 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 this is the bedrock of missions 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 Abraham are ratified by covenant in Genesis 15. The focus in this chapter is on the *seed* and the *land*,

¹The gloom of these chapters is offset by God's promise in Gen 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.

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 keeping 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 being 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].

3. The Messianic Hope Through Judah

The nation's early history is marred from the beginning. Within two generations, Abraham's posterity finds 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 come must come from the tribe of Judah. Judah's preeminence over the other tribes is foretold in Gen 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 Gen 49:10 finds its fulfillment in Jesus Christ, who comes from the tribe of Judah.

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," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 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).

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 for us 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 was going 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 Deut 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 Deut 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 administered.

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 Deut 30:1-10. If they return to the LORD and obey Him, He will regather them from the nations where they had 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 would result 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 seem to 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 them (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 man after God's own heart (in some sense, 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 (966 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 Deut 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's multiplied wives 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).