

OLD TESTAMENT SURVEY

“The Later Prophets”

1. THE PRE-EXILIC PROPHETS (Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah, Obadiah, Jeremiah)

NAHUM

This book was written around 630-620 B.C. Nahum ministered during the revival that occurred during King Josiah's reign in Judah. Nahum prophesied against Ninevah 100 years after Jonah did. The reason was because while they repented during Jonah's time, their change of behavior was short lived. Assyria had a false sense of security because she believed she was so well fortified no one could defeat her. Although Ninevah repented after Jonah preached to them, there was no repentance after Nahum's preached, so Ninevah was destroyed.

HABAKKUK

This book was written somewhere between 625 and 605 B.C. since Habbakuk references Bablyon who had defeated the Assyrians in 2:5-20. Nebuchednezzar defeated Ninevah in 612 B.C. went on to defeat Egypt in 605 B.C. and then invaded Judah the same year. There were actually three Babylonian invasions of Judah. The first in 605 B.C. when Nebuchednezzar too Daniel and other leaders into captivity. 597 B.C. when he took 10,000 more including Ezekiel. And 587 B.C. when he destroyed Jerusalem and the temple and took more people captive.

Habakkuk's main message was not to warn the sinful, but to encourage the faithful Jews, the remnant. The two themes of this book are 1) God will judge all sinners in His time frame and 2) The righteous will live by faith. Habakkuk uses the phrase “How Long Oh Lord” to question how long God was going to allow wicked Judah to go unpunished, because Habakkuk can't take it any longer.

The context of the book is that Habbakuk is having doubts because he doesn't understand what's going on in his day and why God's not taking action, and why God would use Babylon to punish Judah. So in his frustration he decided to sit on the wall until God answers his questions. At the end of the day, what happens is God doesn't answer all his questions. However, Habbakuk decides that God is sovereign and can be trusted even when he doesn't understand (Habbakuk 3:2 & 17).

The application of Habbakuk is that Believers experience doubt and it's not a sign of lack of faith. Believers must place their trust in a Sovereign God and Believers must praise God in spite of doubts and questions.

ZEPHANIAH

This book was written around 630 B.C. the same time period as Jeremiah, Habbakuk and Nahum ministered. The theme of this book is The Day of the Lord. Nahum declares a series of oracles against Judah and the surrounding nations concerning judgment. But the book ends with a note of hope stating that the day of judgment will also bring with it healing and restoration.

OBADIAH

The majority of scholars believe this book was written around 587-586 B.C. which coincides with the destruction of Jerusalem. This one chapter book reveals God's anger against Edom for rejoicing over their brother's suffering. God hated the fact they were gloating. The practical lesson for us is not to gloat when bad things befall our enemies. We should have compassion.

JEREMIAH

The book of Jeremiah was transcribed by Baruch as Jeremiah dictated it to him. King Jehoiakim burned the first edition, so God instructed Jeremiah to have Baruch make a second and he did. This took place around 605 B.C. Baruch put the finishing touches on the book after Jeremiah's death somewhere between 585-580 B.C.

Jeremiah was the son of a priest. More is known about Jeremiah than any other prophet. When God first called him, Jeremiah tried to tell God he was too young. But God assured him he had placed his word in his mouth. He prophesied during that last 40 years of Judah's existence. In Jeremiah we get a transparent picture of what it's like to be in ministry.

Jeremiah's life was lonely and full of sorrow. Because of that he was nicknamed, "The Weeping Prophet." His preaching alienated him from the people he loved and brought persecution. He was beaten, put in a well full of mud and jailed twice. Eventually he was stoned to death for his preaching.

Jeremiah declared that Judah had committed two grave sins. First, they had turned away from God the spring of living water to dig their own wells. And second, they had replaced their worship of God with idols.

LAMENTATIONS

This is a book of laments or poems that convey deep sadness. Laments were usually read at funerals. The book's structure is that of a funeral dirge. The five laments in this book express sorrow over the destruction of Judah and Jerusalem.

Jeremiah witnessed three horrible things during the three invasions of the Babylonians. He saw the temple burned, intolerable cruelty and many murdered. The book is a series of acrostic poems. An acrostic poem uses sequential letters of the 22 letter Hebrew alphabet to begin each stanza. So Lamentations 1:1 begins with A, Lamentations 1:2 begins with B, etc.

2. THE EXILIC PROPHETS (Ezekiel, Daniel)

During this period of 70 years God raised up two voices that gave the exiles hope for their present and future. Both prophets were exiles themselves. Daniel was just seventeen when he was taken captive. Ezekiel was a 25 yr. old priest when he was taken captive.

EZEKIEL

Ezekiel was called the Prophet of Dramatic Acting because he acted out his prophetic messages. This book was probably completed around 570 B.C. shortly after his last prophecy. The name Ezekiel means "God strengthens." Ezekiel helped the Jews understand that God's judgment had to fall because of their disobedience, but that didn't mean God was finished with them. He encouraged the exiles with prophecies of the future glory of God's kingdom and that he was sovereignly in control of their future destiny. Ezekiel acted out God's messages in some strange ways.

The reason God used dramatic actions and language was to get the attention of people who had been desensitized by sin. One of the most amazing images in Ezekiel is the valley of dry bones that comes back to life.

DANIEL

The book of Daniel records events from the first invasion of Nebuchadnezzar in 605 B.C. to the third year of King Cyrus in 536 B.C. Daniel was one of the last OT prophets. Daniel faithfully served in the Royal Courts of his captors, first as counselor to Nebuchadnezzar and then as the right hand man to King Cyrus of Persia. Daniel is most known for the visions of the future God gave him. These occurred when he was quite elderly.

The book of Daniel, like Revelation is categorized as Apocalyptic literature. That word means "to unveil or reveal" something. This type of literature used symbols and visions to reveal hidden things. Daniel's book encourages the exiles that captivity would end and the future would be brighter. The main theme is Divine Sovereignty. That God rules over human kingdoms and governments. That His purpose will play out as he wishes.

The four beasts represented the four major kingdoms of the earth that would rise and fall...Babylon, Media-Persia, Greece and Rome. Babylon was the head of gold and the lion with the wings. Media-Persia was the chest of silver and the bear. Greece was the bronze of belly and the leopard with four wings. Rome was the iron/clay mix in the statue and the beast of Daniel 7.

3. THE POST-EXILIC PROPHETS (Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi)

HAGGAI

Haggai was an exile that responded to Cyrus's invitation to return to Jerusalem.

According to Ezra 3:8-10 the first wave of exiles laid the foundation for the Temple but that's as far as they got because of persecution. They then focused on building their own homes and making a life for themselves. In doing that they neglected God's house. When Haggai arrives no work had been done on the Temple for 16 years. Haggai's message was to inspire them to get back to work. His rebuke was that their homes were lavishly built and decorated, while God's house lay in ruins. They had become self-centered. Because of this nothing was going right in their lives, but it took Haggai to point out why to them. Within a month they began work again. Haggai then encouraged them that his presence would fill the new temple. The book was written around 520 B.C.

ZECHARIAH

The book was written around 520-518 B. C. Zechariah was born in Babylon and returned with the first wave of exiles. Like Haggai, he encouraged the rebuilding of the Temple, which is the focus of chapters 1-8. Beginning with chapter 9 his theme switches to the rebuilding of the nation or kingdom of God. In these chapters are two messianic prophecies. One related to Jesus' first coming and one yet to be fulfilled.

Zechariah speaks of how Israel's priests or shepherds hadn't taken care of the sheep, because they were too busy taking care of their own interests. Zechariah emphasized that God had not forgotten them and no matter what persecution came their way, He would always be with them.

MALACHI

Malachi means "my messenger." All we know about Malachi is that he lived in Jerusalem. We can't pin Malachi to a specific date, best guess is somewhere between 470 and 420 B.C.

Malachi speaks to the careless apathetic attitude the people had adopted after returning from exile. They were not giving God their best, either in their finances, marital relationships or worship practices. They had grown complacent. The theme of this book is a call back to spiritual vitality. He emphasized the importance of keeping the covenant and giving God your best.

Malachi's book centers around 10 questions raised by the people in response to God's charges against them. The questions were...How have you loved us? How have we shown contempt for your name? How have we defiled you? What does the Lord not pay attention to our offerings? How have we wearied God? Where is the God of justice? How are we to return? How are we robbing you? What have we said against you? What have we gained by carrying out your requirements?

The mental attitude of the people even though they were back in Jerusalem was bleak because of the opposition they had faced. So they had grown cynical. If this was how God was going to treat them, then why give him their best? So God assures them of his love and compassion for them. Still, he was displeased with their attitude. Some of the people were marrying outside the faith and being led into idolatry. Divorce became rampant during this time, and God was not pleased.

And of course God calls them into account because they are not bringing the tithe into the storehouse. They were using it for themselves. The book ends with the call to remember the Torah of Moses. For in it were the guidelines that led to a blessed life.