

# **GREAT MEN OF THE OLD TESTAMENT**

*A brief look into the lives of  
some of the key men of  
the Old Testament*

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*The following material is a part of my lecture notes  
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# **GREAT MEN OF THE OLD TESTAMENT**

The Old Testament is replete with names of men and women whose lives far surpass the adjective "*interesting.*" They are challenging in terms of character, exemplary in terms of personal faith, and inspirational in terms of obedience to God's will. The following are brief glimpses into the lives of twenty-one key men of the Old Testament, that hopefully will cast a tiny ray of light on their lives, and by this bring some insight into why they are important in the Scriptures. Not included in this list are the great patriarchs and leaders, such as Noah, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Moses, and Samuel. Their exclusion from this list is in no way an indication of being considered of less importance.

**Job**

**Solomon**

**David**

**Shammah**

**Beniah**

**Isaiah**

**Jeremiah**

**Ezekiel**

**Daniel**

**Hosea**

**Joel**

**Amos**

**Obadiah**

**Jonah**

**Micah**

**Nahum**

**Habakkuk**

**Zephaniah**

**Haggai**

**Zechariah**

**Malachi**

## -1- GREAT MEN OF THE OLD TESTAMENT

### JOB

The Book of Job is possibly the most profound exposition of the life of faith in God ever written. It is a powerful presentation of the meaning of being human. Some of life's greatest perplexing questions are the focus of the rhetoric of the Book of Job. In this Old Testament Book one finds some rich treasures of responses to many of life's most difficult questions. Questions such as *"Why do bad things happen to good people?"* or *"Is there a correspondence between sin and suffering, or between obedience and blessing?"* or *"If life seems to have no guarantees of good things, what is the purpose in serving God?"*

The Book of Job provides answers to these and many other questions relating to life. Crises of faith perplex some people who appear to be walking in obedience before God, while prosperity floods the lives of some who live a self-centered life of self-indulgence, immorality, and general wickedness. Therefore people strain to hear some answers to questions relevant to such perplexing issues.

Some Biblical scholars believe that the Book of Job was written earlier than any other Old Testament Book. The events recorded in the Book of Job do not antedate the events recorded in other Old Testament Books, such as the events in the Creation account in the early chapters of the Book of Genesis. The Book of Job provides very helpful teaching relating to the age-long conflict between God and Satan, good and evil, faith and self-centeredness. Living in the midst of great prosperity, Job was suddenly overwhelmed by a series of tragedies. Amid his suffering he maintained his integrity. He survived through some of life's greatest trials. In the end God visited him with the rich tokens of his personal faith, and gave to him even greater prosperity than he had enjoyed prior to the tragedies that befell him. It is the story of submissive patience under the severest of calamities.

Jewish tradition ascribes the inclusion of the Book of Job, including any editing that may have been done, to Moses. This ascription appears to be quite reasonable as Moses is regarded as the editor and original sponsor of the Book of Job rather than its original author. This presents the question: *"Who then, is the original author of the Book of Job?"* While that question may evade a definitive answer, there is a hint in the Book of Job itself that at least points to the notion that Job himself was the original author.

*"Oh, that my words were written! Oh, that they were inscribed in a book! That they were engraved on a rock with an iron pen and lead, forever." (Job 19:23-24)*

While no one really knows who wrote the Book of Job, it is possible that these words of Job are an affirmation that he was writing down his own memoirs following his restoration to health and prosperity. But if Moses had something to do with its inclusion into sacred writings, it is possible that he came into possession of Job's record during his forty-year exile from Egypt in the Land of Midian, not far from Job's home in the Land of Uz. Moses undoubtedly recognized the value and importance of this document, and possibly edited it some for the benefit of his contemporaries. This is in concert with how Moses may have compiled and organized the early records from which he has given to us the Books of the Pentateuch.

The Book of Job is a part of that body of sacred writing of immense value, as Paul wrote:

*"For whatever things were written before were written for our learning, that we through the patience and comfort of the Scriptures might have hope." (Romans 15:4)*

This is obviously the reason for the New Testament teaching on the need for patience in every trial:

*"We count them blessed who endure. You have heard of the perseverance of Job and seen the end intended by the Lord – that the Lord is very compassionate and merciful." (James 5:11)*

## -2- Great Men of the Old Testament

### SOLOMON

Solomon was the son of King David and Bathsheba. Though not the eldest son of David, he was destined to become the King of Israel. When David was elderly, and obviously incapable of caring for the affairs of the kingdom, his eldest son Adonijah declared himself to be the king. This being unknown to David, Nathan the prophet of God went to Bathsheba, and a plan was put in place whereby David would be informed of Adonijah's self-exaltation. Upon hearing this, David instructed his servants to bring Solomon to the Gihon spring where Zadok the priest and Nathan the prophet anointed him to be king. David's instructions included the words: *"For I have appointed him to be ruler over Israel and Judah."* (1 Kings 1:35)

Becoming ruler in approximately 967 BCE, King Solomon was known throughout the world for his wisdom, his wealth, and his writings. His reign was immediately faced with serious opposition. Two of David's closest advisors, Joab the son of Zeruiah and Abiathar the priest aligned their loyalty with Adonijah. Very soon after Solomon became king, Adonijah approached Bathsheba with the request that she ask King Solomon to give to him Abishag the Shunammite for his wife. Solomon saw through Adonijah's thinly veiled threat to take over the kingdom. He had Adonijah killed, along with Joab and Shimei, two of David's enemies. By this Solomon rid himself of the potential threats to the kingdom, and appointed some loyal friends to key positions throughout the kingdom.

King Solomon's wealth was enormous. He controlled a very large region west of the Euphrates River. He administered the kingdom through twelve governors whose responsibilities included providing food for the king and his household. (See 1 Kings 4:7ff) He owned 40,000 stalls of horses for his 1,400 chariots and these were manned by 12,000 horsemen. (1 Kings 4:26; 10:26) He attempted to strengthen his position through marital alliances. The Bible states that he had *"seven hundred wives, princesses, and three hundred concubines."* (1 Kings 11:3)

More important than all his amassed wealth was the wisdom granted to him from the LORD God of Israel subsequent to his request. The Biblical account is as follows:

*"At Gibeon the LORD appeared to Solomon in a dream by night; and God said, 'Ask! What shall I give you?' and Solomon said: 'You have shown great mercy to Your servant David my father, because he walked before You in truth, in righteousness, and in uprightness of heart with You. You have continued this great kindness for him, and You have given him a son to sit on his throne, as it is this day. Now, O LORD my God, You have made Your servant king instead of my father David, but I am a little child; I do not know how to go out or come in. And Your servant is in the midst of Your people whom You have chosen, a great people, too numerous to be numbered or counted. Therefore give to Your servant an understanding heart to judge Your people, that I may discern between good and evil. For who is able to judge this great people of Yours?'"*

(1 Kings 3:5-9)

People from surrounding nations came to hear the wisdom of Solomon. He composed 3,000 proverbs and 1,005 songs. (1 Kings 4:32) Most of the Book of Proverbs, the Book of Ecclesiastes, and the Song of Songs are attributed to King Solomon.

Undoubtedly the greatest physical accomplishment of King Solomon was the building of the great Temple in Jerusalem. The seven-year project was built of stone, cedar, carefully crafted, and overlaid with pure gold. When completed, Solomon dedicated the Temple in a public service of prayers and sacrifices. One of the truly great prayers is the prayer of dedication. (1 Kings 8:22-53) When the prayer was finished, *"fire came down from heaven and consumed the burnt offering and the sacrifices; and the glory of the LORD filled the temple."* (2 Chronicles 7:1) All that begins well does not necessarily end well. King Solomon died in Jerusalem after 40 years as ruler of Israel. Pride led to his downfall, his empire was lost and his kingdom divided into two parts, Israel and Judah. Whatever our accomplishments may be, let us guard our hearts against any evidence of pride.

### -3- Great Men of the Old Testament

#### DAVID

David is one of the best known and best loved people in all Scripture, and especially in the Old Testament. It isn't any wonder that his name means "*beloved*." From the Tribe of Judah, David is a direct physical ancestor of Jesus the Christ. (See Matthew 1:1-17)

David was born about 1040 BCE, the eighth and youngest son of Jesse of Bethlehem. Scripture says little about his parents, and there is no record of the name of David's mother. David was reared in a modest home depending on shepherding for the family income. Being a shepherd, David learned early the skills in defending the flocks from predatory animals including lions and bears. (See 1 Samuel 17:34-35) The Scriptures have little to say about David's physical appearance, other than "*he was ruddy, with bright eyes, and good-looking*." (1 Samuel 16:12; 17:42) It is obvious from the sacred record that during his youth he developed musical skills with the flute and harp, and quite obviously became adept at writing Hebrew poetry that he turned into song.

When God rejected the corrupt leadership of King Saul, He sent the prophet Samuel to Bethlehem to anoint David as the successor to Saul. (See 1 Samuel 16:1-13) At the moment of his anointing "*the Spirit of the LORD came upon David from that day forward*." (1 Samuel 16:13) David continued in his role of shepherding, but from time to time served King Saul as a musician and armor bearer. (1 Samuel 16:14-23) It appears from this that King Saul did not know at that time that the young court musician would soon take his place as the king over Israel. Had he known this, undoubtedly he would have attempted to kill David, something he tried again and again a little later.

Perhaps the most well known event in David's life was the slaying of the Philistine giant, Goliath in the valley of Elah, about 15 miles southwest of Bethlehem. David's victory put the Philistines to flight, and this single heroic act made David a favorite among the people of Israel. From that time forward King Saul made numerous attempts to kill David. (See 1 Samuel chapters 18-30)

After King Saul was killed in a battle against the Philistines near Mount Gilboa (See 1 Samuel 31:1-6), David went to Hebron where he was anointed King of Judah according to God's instructions. (2 Samuel 2:1-4) A 7½-year civil war ensued between David's loyal followers and those who supported Ish-bosheth, Saul's only surviving son, for the kingship of Israel. Eventually Ish-bosheth was assassinated and David anointed king over all Israel. (See 2 Samuel 4:1 – 5:5)

Significant in the reign of David was the return of Jerusalem to be the capital of the kingdom, and bringing the Ark of the Covenant back to Jerusalem from the house of Abinadab. (2 Samuel 6:3) During the trip to Jerusalem the LORD put Uzzah to death because he touched the Ark, when only the Levites were permitted to touch it. David feared having the Ark in Jerusalem, the City of David, so he left it in the house of Obed-Edom, a Philistine from Gath. (2 Samuel 6:9-11) The Ark remained in the house of Obed-Edom the Gittite for three months, and God blessed that home. When David heard that God had blessed the house of Obed-Edom he brought the Ark to the City of David. (2 Samuel 6:12)

One of the tragedies of David's reign was that he was too militarily and materially minded. Out of the corruption these brought, he committed adultery with Bathsheba, and had her husband Uriah the Hittite murdered to cover up the darkest hour of his life. But the life of David is also characterized by his genuine repentance and turning to God. After a reign of 40½ years (2 Samuel 5:5; 1 Chronicles 3:4) David "*rested with his fathers, and was buried in the City of David. The period that David reigned over Israel was forty years; seven years he reigned in Hebron, and in Jerusalem he reigned thirty-three years*." (1 Kings 2:10-11) David's importance in the history of Israel cannot be underestimated, and the fact that Jesus is of the lineage of David is firmly established in Scripture.

#### -4- Great Men of the Old Testament

### **SHAMMAH**

When casually reading through some of the Old Testament, one is prone to overlook some of the gems that are curiously tucked away in language. Reading genealogical lists, lists of various people, or attempting to try to pronounce a list of Old Testament persons may tend to discourage one from finding some rare nuggets of truth that when discovered prove to be invaluable.

When King David neared the end of his life he made a significant pronouncement. It is powerful, and merits a close look.

*"Now these are the last words of David. Thus says David, the son of Jesse; thus says the man raised up on high, the anointed of the God of Jacob, and the sweet psalmist of Israel: 'The Spirit of the LORD spoke by me, and His word was on my tongue. The God of Israel said, the Rock of Israel spoke to me: 'He who rules over men must be just, ruling in the fear of God. And he shall be like the light of the morning when the sun rises, a morning without clouds, like the tender grass springing out of the earth, by clear shining after rain.'"* (2 Samuel 23:1-4)

The passage continues as David rehearses God's covenant with him. That passage is one that will usually sustain interest in the one who reads it. However, what follows throughout the rest of the chapter is often neglected. It is often out of neglect that there emerges a nugget of great value. The passage, verses 8 through 39, is little more than a posting of some of the great military men who surrounded King David during his reign over Israel. He begins with a word of commendation for the three mighty men of his army.

*"These are the names of the mighty men whom David had: Josheb-Basshebeth the Tachmonite, chief among the captains. He was called Adino the Ezrite, because he had killed eight hundred men at one time. And after him was Eleazar the son of Dodo, the Ahohite, one of the three mighty men with David when they defied the Philistines who were gathered there for battle, and the men of Israel had retreated. He arose and attacked the Philistines until his hand was weary, and his hand stuck to the sword. The LORD brought about a great victory that day; and the people returned after him only to plunder. After him was Shammah the son of Agee the Hararite. The Philistines had gathered together into a troop where there was a piece of ground full of lentils. So the people fled from the Philistines. But he stationed himself in the middle of the field, defended it, and killed the Philistines. So the LORD brought about a great victory."*

(2 Samuel 23:8-12)

While the remaining verses of the chapter list other great men of David's army, there is something that jumps out of the text of verses 11-13. The focus is on one of the three greatest men of David's army. This man is Shammah of whom the sacred record states that he "*defended* (a field of lentils) *against the marauding army of the Philistines* (and) *the LORD brought about a great victory.*" How easily one passes over that small entry into God's record. On first reading, Shammah does not seem to merit being listed as one of the three greatest men in King David's army. But there is something curiously magnetic about that small entry. One of the great lessons of Scripture focuses on the importance of choosing one's battles; entering into the battle for what one feels is vitally important, and one that serious consequences if it is lost. Shammah is one such a person. Notice carefully what he did. For one thing, he did something *unexpected*. Who in the world would consider a little plot of lentils important enough to engage in battle? Shammah did! It did not belong to the Philistines. It belonged to Israel, Shammah's people! Shammah defended something seemingly *unimportant*. What significant value was there in a little field of tiny, rather ugly, brown lentils? To Shammah, that field of lentils was so valuable that he risked his life for it. Note also that Shammah together with God's people delighted in God, *undefeated*. For the LORD brought about a great victory. May God help us as His people to choose our battles wisely, focus on what is valuable, and then trust God.

## -5- Great Men of the Old Testament

### BENAIAH

There are some "*unsung heroes*" in the Old Testament that have never risen to the heights of human accolade as others. When thinking of the **Great Men of the Old Testament** it is easy to identify King David, King Solomon, Job, Moses, Samuel, Samson, and others. Each of these rose to prominence because God was with him, and/or he accomplished great feats that found their way into the eternal sacred record. But relatively few people have heard of some of the so-called "*lesser*" great men of the Old Testament. One such man is Benaiah. At first glance it seems little is known of Benaiah, but when looking more carefully in the Scriptures one finds considerable material that when put together lifts this unsung hero to new heights.

The name **Benaiah** is not all that uncommon in the Old Testament. A cursory review of the Old Testament identifies no fewer than 12 men bearing that name. The Scriptural account is careful to distinguish each of these 12 men, and usually does so by naming the father of each. However, one of the 12 stands out as a truly great man in the Old Testament. He is "*Benaiah, the son of Jehoiada the priest.*" (1 Chronicles 27:5) As the son of the priest, Benaiah was obviously of the Tribe of Levi. He was also a native of Kabzeel, one of the cities of the Tribe of Judah.

Benaiah rose in the ranks of the military and in his loyalty to King David to be listed among the mighty men of David's army. He remained faithful to King Solomon during Adonijah's attempt to wrest the kingdom from Solomon. (See 1 Kings 1:8, 10, 32, 38, 44) His loyalty to King Solomon earned him the powerful place of Commander in Chief over the whole army. (1 Kings 2:35)

But his exploits during the reign of King David lift him to a unique place of honor. These are recorded in the Sacred Record near the end of the life of David.

*"Benaiah was the son of Jehoiada, the son of a valiant man from Kabzeel, who had done many deeds. He had killed two lion-like heroes of Moab. He also had gone down and killed a lion in the midst of a pit on a snowy day. And he killed an Egyptian, a spectacular man. The Egyptian had a spear in his hand; so he went down to him with a staff, wrested the spear out of the Egyptian's hand, and killed him with his own spear. These things Benaiah the son of Jehoiada did, and won a name among three mighty men."* (2 Samuel 23:20-22)

Killing a lion in a pit during a snowstorm does not seem very spectacular in a day of highly advanced military technology. But in the time of King David such a feat in itself elevated the victor to a high level in the eyes and minds of leadership. When considering the simple entry in the Scriptural account as found in 2 Samuel 23:20, one's mind is captivated by the picturesque scene.

For one, the lion and the soldier were enemies. There would be *an inevitable encounter*. Either the soldier would kill the lion or the lion would have a special lunch! The venue for this encounter was formidable. It was a pit circumscribed by walls that made escape extremely difficult if not impossible. Therefore Benaiah was faced with *an inadequate escape route*. There is yet one more obstacle facing the soldier. The lion became *an indistinct enemy*. The blur of falling snowflakes made vision difficult. The falling snow easily hid the rippling muscles of the lion as he crouched, ready to spring on his victim. But the Scripture notes simply that "*he had gone down and killed a lion in the midst of a pit on a snowy day.*" To kill a lion on an open plain would be difficult. But the greater the difficulty the greater prominence given the victor. The secret is found earlier in the Sacred Text: "*The God of Israel said, the Rock of Israel spoke to me: 'He who rules over men must be just, ruling in the fear of God.'*" (2 Samuel 23:3) Benaiah had a twin-pronged advantage: (1) he trained as a soldier and knew how to protect himself and use his weapons of warfare, and (2) he trusted himself to God, for he knew the Biblical standard for leadership!

## -6- Great Men of the Old Testament

### ISAIAH

Isaiah was born during the reign of good King Uzziah, and it was in the final year of Uzziah's reign that Isaiah received the call from God to the prophetic office. When one considers the reign of King Uzziah it is usually with a positive affirmation of a man who showed a spirit of true piety and love for the things of God. A fatal flaw appears in his life due to a serious problem of personal pride. But during his reign the kingdom of Judah enjoyed times of prosperity, worship of the God of Israel was encouraged, but he lacked the ability to destroy of the high places of idolatrous worship.

Following the death of King Uzziah his son Jothan came to the throne of Judah. He walked the ways of his father, the people were encouraged to worship the Lord God of Israel, but like his father, he did not destroy the places of idolatrous worship. Under his reign there was a growth of a spirit of luxury while at the same time a serious decline in spirituality. The disastrous reign of King Ahaz followed. Detailed carefully in 2 Kings 16 and 2 Chronicles 28, that with utter abandon King Ahaz gave himself to the overthrow of the worship of Jehovah, and broke the commandments of God in nearly every detail. He destroyed temple worship, and finally closed the doors of the house of God. In other words, he aspired in his heart to rid Judah of the very memory of the worship and service of the Lord of all Israel, the Redeemer and Holy One. He totally disregarded any prophetic rebuke.

Fortunately, he was succeeded by his son King Hezekiah, who very much unlike his father, set about reviving worship in the temple. He had a measure of success in removing idol worship and in delivering his people from foreign powers. It was into this setting that God sent His prophet Isaiah. Isaiah was treated with a high level of respect and favor. He was given opportunity to use his God-given power of spiritual discernment concerning the political, economic, and spiritual situation in Judah. In some sense, however, it was too late. Isaiah had foretold the overthrow of the nation, but the idolatrous reign of Ahaz had all but obliterated any hope of restoration. Yet his message is one of the most powerful in the Old Testament.

There is a Jewish tradition that suggests that Isaiah's father, Amoz, was a brother of King Amaziah. (For the reign of Amaziah, see 2 Chronicles 25.) If that tradition were true, it would mean that Isaiah and King Uzziah were cousins. While it impossible to prove that tradition, it does suggest that Isaiah enjoyed access to the royal house, thereby able to promote the worship of the Lord God of Israel.

Isaiah, meaning "*Jehovah is salvation*," set about to call Judah to a renewed faith in the Holy One of Israel who alone could save the land. In a day of crisis and disaster greater than any before in the history of Judah, Isaiah sounded out a message of inspiration and challenge to the hearts and minds of the leaders of Judah when all around them seemed hopeless.

Isaiah was obviously married to the one referred to as "*the prophetess*." (Isaiah 8:3) He had two children, one named Shear-Jashub (Isaiah 7:3) and Maher-Shalal-Hash-Baz (Isaiah 8:1-4) These names were given to them as prophecies of what was to come, and also to reinforce the Prophet's predictive messages. Apart from these Bible facts, little is known of Isaiah's personal history except some references in the Prophecy of Isaiah itself.

Isaiah's prophecy is the longest of all the Old Testament prophecies. It divides into two major parts: (1) chapters 1-39, and (2) chapters 40-66. Because of this clear division, some scholars in the past century have suggested that there are **two** Isaiahs. There is nothing conclusive that can stand up under scrutiny and prove that idea. Rather the Book of Isaiah stands monumentally as one of the greatest of the Old Testament Books to define the desperate condition of the nation of Judah, and the promise of God to send the Redeemer, the Holy One, the Messiah, the Lord Jesus Christ.

## -7- Great Men of the Old Testament

### JEREMIAH

The Prophet Jeremiah was active in Jerusalem during the tragic period of time when the armies of Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon were destroying the city and taking the captives into what has become known as the Babylonian Captivity. The Babylonian aggression came in several stages, and there were at least three deportations of Judah's people into Babylon. It is generally agreed by Biblical scholars that (1) Ezekiel and Daniel were among the captives during the first deportation, or approximately 606 BC, (2) that the final deportation was in 588 - 586 BC, and (3) that Jeremiah the Weeping Prophet was never deported, but remained in Judah.

Jeremiah was called to the prophetic office while still a young man. It was in the 13<sup>th</sup> year of the reign of King Josiah (628 BC). Jeremiah launched his prophetic mission in his native village of Anathoth, but was rejected by his own neighbors and friends. It is believed that he was perhaps a member of the priesthood and went to live in Jerusalem where he may well have assisted King Josiah in the work of reformation. It was during the most excellent reign of King Josiah that the renovation program of the Temple was launched. During that process the High Priest found a copy of the Old Testament Scriptures that had survived the purges of Josiah's father and grandfather. When the Book of God was read in his hearing, King Josiah tore his robes in grief at the revealed knowledge of the coming judgment of God on Judah because they had abandoned true worship and had become idolatrous. Because of this King Josiah launched a furious assault on idolatry in Judah, removing the idolatrous priesthood, and restore the worship of the Lord God of Israel. The Prophet Jeremiah wrote a Lamentation upon the death of King Josiah, and although it is not recorded in the Bible, Jewish oral tradition identifies it, and it is recited annually on Tisha B'va.

Jeremiah's message was powerful and indicting. He was what one may refer to by more recent terminology, *"a hell-fire and brimstone preacher."* He dared to castigate the people for forsaking the Lord God of their fathers, ignoring the teaching of the Torah, or the Law of God, and turning to idolatry. During the three months of the reign of King Jehoahaz there is no reference to the Prophet Jeremiah, but in the beginning of the reign of King Jehoiakim, the enmity of the people against Jeremiah was expressed with persecution. He was imprisoned, but held his position. He warned the king that disaster would surely come. Jeremiah believed in the inevitable disaster that would befall Judah because of their idolatry and total disregard for the Law of God. Knowing that this punishment was forthcoming, he himself fell into a spirit of self-denial. He was viewed as one with a defeatist stance, and such was rejected by his people and by the kings during whose reigns he prophesied. Finally he was looked upon as a traitor, and during the reign of King Zedekiah was placed in a dungeon-like prison until the destruction of the city of Jerusalem by the armies of Nebuchadnezzar. He saw the shattering of the final hope for the survivors of the carnage, the murder of Gedaliah whom the Babylonians had appointed to rule over Judah.

After the final deportation of the people of Judah into the Babylonian Captivity, Jeremiah remained in his own captive state. One of the most interesting accounts in the Prophecy of Jeremiah is found in the 29<sup>th</sup> chapter. Following the final deportation of the people of Judah to Babylon, Jeremiah sent a letter to the *"remainder of the elders who were carried away captive – to the priests, the prophets, and all the people whom Nebuchadnezzar had carried away captive from Jerusalem to Babylon....Build houses and dwell in them; plant gardens and eat their fruit. Take wives and beget sons and daughters; and take wives for your sons and give your daughters to husbands, so that they may bear sons and daughters – that you may be increased there, and not diminished. And seek the peace of the city where I have caused you to be carried away captive, and pray to the LORD for it; for in its peace you will have peace....After seventy years are completed at Babylon, I will visit you and perform My good word toward you, and cause you to return to this place. For I know the thoughts that I think toward you, says the LORD, thoughts of peace and not of evil, to give you a future and a hope."*

(Jeremiah 29:1, 5-7, 10-11).

## -8- Great Men of the Old Testament

### EZEKIEL

What may be learned about the Prophet Ezekiel comes primarily from the Old Testament Book that bears his name. He was the son of Buzi the priest (1:3). He lived during the Babylonian Exile and was among the Jews who had been taken captive by Nebuchadnezzar in the deportation that occurred about 605 BC, or later in 597 BC, 11 years before Jerusalem was completely destroyed. (See Ezekiel 33:21) Along with King Jehoiachin and other leaders in Judah, Ezekiel and his compatriots settled at Tel-Abib (*not to be confused with Tel-Aviv which is in Israel*). (See 2 Kings 24:10-16)

Ezekiel lived in his own house near the River Chebar where he obviously held a leading position among the exiles. His own account is informative:

*Now it came to pass in the thirtieth year, in the fourth month, on the fifth day of the month, as I was among the captives by the River Chebar, that the heavens were opened and I saw visions of God. On the fifth day of the month, which was in the fifth year of King Jehoiachin's captivity, the word of the LORD came expressly to Ezekiel the priest, the son of Buzi, in the land of the Chaldeans by the River Chebar; and the hand of the LORD was upon him there. (Ezekiel 1:1-3)*

Generally speaking captivity was reasonably tolerable. Unlike their ancestors who were enslaved and socially marginalized while in exile in Egypt, the Jews of Ezekiel's time were able to become a part of their society. The Babylonians allowed the exiles to settle in small groups, keep their religious and national identities, build homes, open businesses, and live somewhat peaceably. Many people would have been born during the time of the exile, and they would have no personal knowledge of their homeland. Therefore, it is this growing sense of comfort that explains in part, at least, why many did not return to their homeland, and later remained under the control of the Persian Empire.

The Book of Ezekiel is a record of the prophesying of Ezekiel who delivered these oracles and prophecies orally at first. It is believed by scholars having an evangelical view of Scripture that most of the Book of Ezekiel was written by Ezekiel himself. His writing is one of the most sophisticated of all the Old Testament Prophets. In all probability this feature stems from his training as a priest for the temple, as well as his personal experience in ministering to the elite members of the nation of Judah. The Book of Ezekiel is a powerful message from the heart of a powerful man of God.

There are three distinct sections in the Book of Ezekiel:

1. Chapters 1-24 - prophecies declaring judgment on Israel. In these prophecies Ezekiel makes a series of denunciations against his fellow Jews. He details his commission from God as a "*watchman*" in Judah. (Chapters 2-3) He speaks clearly of the siege of Jerusalem. (Chapters 4-7) His illustration by means of the parable of the two eagles is powerful. (Chapter 17) He issues a strong call to repentance, noting that "*the soul who sins shall die,*" (18:20) and follows that with God's call to repentance: "*Therefore I will judge you, O house of Israel, every one according to his ways,*" says the Lord GOD. *Repent and turn from all your transgressions, so that iniquity will not be your ruin. Cast away from you all the transgressions which you have committed, and get yourselves anew heart and a new spirit. For why should you die, O house of Israel? For I have no pleasure in the death of one who dies,*" says the Lord God. "*Therefore turn and live!*" (18:30-32) Israel's rebellious history is reviewed. (Chapters 20 - 21) The sins of Jerusalem are specifically mentioned and figurative language is strong. (Chapters 22 - 24)
2. Chapters 25-32 – prophecies against various neighboring nations. Attention is directed especially toward Ammon, Moab, Edom, Philistia, Tyre, Egypt, and he uses the Assyrian Empire as an example to Egypt.
3. Chapters 33-48 – prophecies delivered after the destruction of Jerusalem by Nebuchadnezzar. In these chapters there is significant eschatological teaching regarding God's plan for the ages.

## -9- Great Men of the Old Testament

### DANIEL

The name "*Daniel*" means "*God is my Judge.*" The Prophet Daniel (see Matthew 24:15) was from one of the noble families of Judah. (Daniel 1:3) He was born in Jerusalem about 620 BC. He was a part of the first deportation under the Babylonian invasion by the armies of Nebuchadnezzar. Daniel and three other noble young people were among the Jewish nobility carried away in that first deportation. Later they were evaluated and chosen for their intellect, obvious good looks, to be trained as Chaldeans who would constitute the group of advisors to the King of Babylon. Daniel and the other three young Jewish nobles would be obliged to serve the King of Babylon. As a part of the custom of the land of their exile they each received a Chaldean name. Daniel was given the name *Beltshazzar*. His friends, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah were given the names Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-Nego respectively.

The strength of Daniel's character emerges early in the Book that bears his name. He was a man with **a strong resolve**: "*But Daniel purposed in his heart that he would not defile himself with the portion of the king's delicacies, nor with the wine which he drank.*" (Daniel 1:8a) Further, he was a man with **a sensitive request**: "*He requested of the chief of the eunuchs that he might not defile himself.*" (Daniel 1:8b) But then too, he was a man with **a stabilizing reassurance**: "*Now God had brought Daniel into the favor and goodwill of the chief of the eunuchs.*" (Daniel 1:9) Finally, Daniel was a man with **a serious resourcefulness**: "*So Daniel said to the steward whom the chief of the eunuchs had set over Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah, 'Please test your servants for ten days, and let them give us vegetables to eat and water to drink. Then let our appearance be examined before you, and the appearance of the young men who eat the portions of the king's delicacies; and as you see fit, so deal with your servants.'* So he consented with them in this matter, and tested them ten days." (Daniel 1:11-14)

Having remained fiercely loyal to his Jewish heritage and cultural identity, Daniel's character came into serious conflict with the paganism around him, and soon he was exposed to persecution by jealous rivals within the King's administration. In spite of this, Daniel and his companions were distinguished in the "*wisdom*" of the day, and Daniel became known for his "*giftedness*" in interpreting dreams. He rose to a high rank in the administration of the Babylonian court. He reaped the wrath of his contemporaries who conspired to have him and his friends destroyed.

When King Nebuchadnezzar had a troubling dream of a great image, the interpretation of which escaped all the professional astrologers, Daniel provided the correct interpretation. King Nebuchadnezzar did not care for the interpretation, for the interpretation foretold the downfall of the Babylonian Empire. King Nebuchadnezzar had a very large image constructed. Daniel's enemies seized their opportunity and manipulated the king into agreeing that anyone who did not worship the image would be destroyed by being cast into a burning furnace. Daniel and his friends refused to worship the image, and were finally thrown into the burning furnace. But there was "*a fourth Man in the fire*" with them...the Son of God! Delivered! The King said: "*Blessed be the God of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-Nego, who sent His angel and delivered His servants who trusted in Him, and they have frustrated the king's word, and yielded their bodies, that they should not serve nor worship any god except their own God!*" (Daniel 3:28)

Later, when Darius, a Persian prince, was on the throne, Daniel was again tested. This time it was a test of Daniel's loyalty to the God of Israel. The strength of Daniel's character and the power of God delivered Daniel from the mouths of hungry lions, and Daniel continued in his prophetic office. A strong prophetic voice, Daniel prospered during the reign of Darius and was an obvious influence in the matter of the decree that put an end to the Jewish Captivity.

## -10- Great Men of the Old Testament

### HOSEA

The Book of Hosea is the first in the list of *"Minor Prophets."* Some Bible scholars believe that Hosea was a native of Samaria, based on a reference to Samaria being *"our king."* (Hosea 7:5) Whether or not that is true is uncertain. It appears that he may have been a member of a family with high social standing, since his father's name is mentioned in the beginning of the Book. (Hosea 1:1) It is very possible that his father, Beerai was of middle class stature, and perhaps a merchant of some renown.

Hosea was a man in touch with God, for he received spiritual revelations from God. He was able to understand the messages of God, and to see their importance in the light of Israel's tragic decline in spirituality. He saw that the kind of worship prevailing in his beloved nation was quite opposite from what God wanted from His people. Israel had fallen to the depths of serious idolatry, worshipping the brazen pagan deities of the Canaanites. In the context of Canaanite religion was unrestrained sexual perversions, great use of alcohol, mythology, and the practice of magical arts. Such practices were totally against the Sinai Covenant of Worship of which Hosea informed the people.

Hosea summed up the religious activities of his sinful people in the words *"whoredom"* (8 times), *"whoredoms"* (5 times), *"whores"* (1 time), and *"whoring"* (2 times). As a *"harlot"* Israel had prostituted herself before the false gods of the Canaanites. Idols had been set up and women served in the temples as cult prostitutes. God's evaluation of Israel is that *"My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge."* (Hosea 4:6a) But the people were responsible for that lack of knowledge. For God also said: *"Because you have rejected knowledge, I also will reject you from being priest for Me; Because you have forgotten the law of your God, I also will forget your children."* (Hosea 4:6b) Therefore culpability lay with the people rather than with any other source.

Hosea's primary responsibility was to bring to mind to the rebellious Israel its obligations under God's covenant made at Sinai. Hosea reminded the people that they had made an agreement with God for loyalty to Him, to surrender to Him, and to obey His commandments. But Israel forgot or laid aside their commitment and followed the idolatrous, sensuous practices of Canaanite religion. Hosea's powerful call is monumental: *"Sow for yourselves righteousness; reap in mercy; break up your fallow ground, for it is time to seek the LORD till He comes and rains righteousness on you."* (Hosea 10:12)

One of the most difficult issues with which to deal when looking at the life and ministry of Hosea is God's instructions to Hosea to *"Go, take yourself a wife of harlotry and children of harlotry, for the land has committed great harlotry by departing from the LORD."* (Hosea 1:2) Hosea obeyed the Lord and took Gomer for his wife. To Hosea and Gomer were born Jezreel – *"God sows,"* Loruhamah – *"Not pitied,"* and Loammi – *"Not My people."* Each of these names holds symbolic references to the unhappiness God had with Israel.

Bible scholars have struggled with how to interpret the instruction of the Lord to Hosea to marry a prostitute. Some have wondered if Hosea knew Gomer was a prostitute before the marriage, and it was God's way for Hosea to show how God would manifest patience and love to Israel. Others feel she became a prostitute later, because it is difficult to even imagine that God would command one of His prophets to step into wrongdoing. This would be a direct violation of God's commandment found in Scripture. (Deuteronomy 22:20-21) All the implications of this difficult issue cannot possibly be known. But if there are some truths to be gleaned that are very helpful, they are (1) God is Omnipotent, Righteous and Love, and is pictured as a loving husband and father, (2) the Beloved Nation of Israel being God's people, though terribly disappointing to God, will be redeemed, and (3) there is a fantastic portrait of the mercy, grace, and love of God shown to sinful people throughout time in and through the Lord Jesus Christ, His atoning sacrifice, call to repentance extended to all, even though there is not one person in this world's history deserving of His saving grace.

## -11- Great Men of the Old Testament

### JOEL

The Prophet Joel is in the minds of evangelical scholars, a prophet of the 9<sup>th</sup> century BCE. This dates the Old Testament Book of Joel somewhere from about 835 BCE forward. The events referred to in this three-chapter book point best to the time of the boy-king Joash whose rule is generally dated 835-796 BCE. The events of the reign of King Joash who was only seven years old when he became the king of Judah are best described in 2 Chronicles 24:1-26. His reign began well: "*Joash did what was right in the sight of the LORD all the days of Jehoiada the priest.*" (2 Chronicles 24:1) That single statement is vital for an understanding of the days of Joash, for when Jehoiada the priest was 130 years old he died. Then followed immediately a period of apostasy with an attempt by Zechariah, the son of Jehoiada to reverse the downfall. Joash resisted this attempt and had Zechariah stoned to death. The resulting judgment of God included a destructive invasion of Judah by Syria, a terrible defeat of the army of Joash, severe personal injury to the king, and finally his death at the hands of his own servants in revenge for killing the son of Jehoiada. (See 2 Chronicles 24:15-25)

Joel, meaning "*Yahweh is God*" lived and prophesied in the southern kingdom of Judah. He was probably a resident of the city of Jerusalem, for he makes frequent references to Judah and Jerusalem and their citizens and children. (See 1:9, 13-14, 16; 2:1, 15, 23, 32; 3:1, 2-8; 12, 14, 17-18, 20-21) He was obviously well acquainted with the Temple and its ministry. The references cited above also indicate he was knowledgeable regarding the geography and history of the land.

Some Bible scholars suggest that because of his references to and acquaintance with the Temple he may have been a priest or the son of a priest. (Note: he was the son of Pethuel, or Bethuel in the Septuagint) Joel was a faithful prophet of God, delivering God's message with integrity, vitality, and spiritual maturity. It is in this context that one finds the message of the Prophet Joel. The book divides into two major sections: (1) Repentance for Sin (1:2-2:17) and (2) Restoration and Spirituality (2:18-3:21)

The land of Judah had been devastated by a locust plague resulting in drought, famine, and fires. Every aspect of community life was affected. The economy of the land was nearly ruined. But Joel likened the locust plague to the pending plague of destructive armies that would come unless the people repented and enjoyed the spiritual blessings that God would bring.

The Prophecy of Joel has been called *The Prophecy of Pentecost* because of Joel's reference to spiritual blessings. It is not without acknowledging the New Testament references to the Prophecy of Joel that such reference has been made. For even though the Book of Joel is a very brief prophecy in the Old Testament it is very profound. Its emphasis on the *Day of the Lord* and the ultimate coming of God in judgment at the end of time is a part of the tie to the New Testament.

In the New Testament there are several references to the Prophet Joel:

- (1) In Acts 2:16 the Apostle Peter states that what was happening on the Day of Pentecost had been spoken of by the Prophet Joel. (Joel 2:28-29)
- (2) In Romans 10:11-13 the Apostle Paul refers to Joel 2:26b and 2:32.
- (3) In Mark 4:29 Jesus makes use of Joel 3:13.
- (4) In Acts 2:39 there seems to be a connection to Joel 2:28, 32.
- (5) In the Book of Revelation there are several references to Joel:
  - a. Revelation 6:12 to Joel 2:10, 31; 3:15.
  - b. Revelation 6:17 to Joel 2:11.
  - c. Revelation 9:7-9 to Joel 1:6; 2:4-5.
  - d. Revelation 14:15, 18 to Joel 3:13.

## -12- Great Men of the Old Testament

### AMOS

Amos, meaning "to lift or carry a burden," is generally considered the earliest of the writing prophets. He was a native of the Southern Kingdom of Judah, and from the town of Tekoa, about 12 miles south of Jerusalem and 18 miles west of the Dead Sea. Tekoa was noted as a center of a large sheep farming district. Like Hosea Amos prophesied (*that is, preached*) to the Northern Kingdom of Israel during the golden era of its history in the 8<sup>th</sup> century BCE. The king of Israel was Jeroboam II, and that places the prophecy of Amos somewhere around the date of 760 BCE.

Amos describes himself as a person with three different occupations:

- (1) A shepherd – *The words of Amos, who was among the sheepbreeders of Tekoa.* (Amos 1:1) The Hebrew word here is *noqed*, a word describing one who took care of a small, rugged, speckled variety of sheep called the *noqod*. These animals required little food and could survive in the desert, but produced a superior quality of wool.
- (2) A herdsman – *I was a herdsman...* (Amos 7:14) The Hebrew word here is *boqer* and refers to a person who raises or takes care of cattle. Some students of Scripture see no difference between the occupations listed in 1:1 and 7:14. However, there is a subtle difference, and in all probability should be maintained.
- (3) A Cultivator of Sycamore Figs – *I was a ... tender of sycamore fruit.* (Amos 7:14) Amos is noted for his care of the Sycamore Figs, a wild fig that grew at low altitudes... even lower than Tekoa, and possibly in the region of the Dead Sea. The tree produced a ball of sap that when cut off at the right time hardened into a sort of edible fruit that the financially less fortunate people could afford.

These occupations required Amos to do considerable traveling to the wool and cattle markets of Israel and Judah. In this capacity he learned much about the social, political, military, and spiritual condition of the people.

Amos was not a professional prophet. In his own words he makes this declaration:

*I was no prophet, nor was I a son of a prophet, ... then the LORD took me as I followed the flock, and the LORD said to me, 'Go, prophesy to My people Israel.' Now therefore, hear the word of the LORD.* (Amos 7:14, 15)

In this sense then, Amos had no training as a "prophet." He was not a graduate of the *School of the Prophets* (sometimes referred to as "bands" - 1 Samuel 10:5, 10, and "companies" - 1 Samuel 19:20, and "sons of the prophets" - 1 Kings 20:35.) Amos did not descend from nor was he related to any of the "professional prophets."

Amos was not even a citizen of Israel, but rather of Judah. However, God sent him to prophesy to and against the Northern Kingdom of Israel. He was not a man of wealth, but warned the wealthy. He was not a man of luxury, nor a man characterized by laziness. Yet, he was sent to warn both. The focus of the message of Amos is on the message of God to the people, and not on the man sent by the Lord to declare the message.

One of the great characteristics of the Prophecy of Amos is the statement: "*For the transgressions of \_\_\_\_\_, and for four,...*" and the blank is to be filled in by Damascus (1:3), Gaza (1:6), Tyre 1:9, Edom (1:11), Ammon (1:13), Moab (2:1), Judah (2:4), and Israel (2:6). His harsh words against the oppressive leaders to which he refers by such terms as "*you cows of Bashan, who are on the mountain of Samaria, who oppress the poor, who crush the needy, who say to your husbands, 'Bring wine, let us drink!'*" are preludes to a call from God Himself through Amos the Prophet, a powerful call that has been used by many preachers of Scripture: "*Prepare to meet your God!*" (Amos 4:12)

## -13- Great Men of the Old Testament

### OBADIAH

The Book of Obadiah is the shortest book in the Old Testament, consisting of only one chapter divided into 21 verses. Little is known about the Prophet Obadiah beyond the fact that his name means *"The LORD'S Servant."* Nothing is known about his life, background, or personality except what can be inferred from the prophecy that bears his name. In all probability he was a native of Judah. However, the Jewish *Talmud* states that he was not Jewish, but rather an Edomite proselyte God used to rebuke his own people, the Edomites. Be that as it may, it needs to be stated also that dating the Prophecy of Obadiah is extremely difficult. Scholars who attempt to date the prophecy of Obadiah focus on a time period from approximately 845 BCE to 585 BCE. The former seems to be the general consensus of evangelical scholars of the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. The Prophet Obadiah was used of God to speak against the people of Edom. The Edomites were descendants of Esau, whereas the Israelites were descendants of Jacob, the twin brother of Esau. (See Genesis 36:8-9) From the beginning of their lives there was a constant struggle and even enmity between Esau and Jacob. That struggle carried over into the nations that descended from them. Note the following *"struggles"* between these twin brothers:

- (1) They struggled in the womb of their mother Rebekah – (Genesis 25:22)
- (2) They struggled over the birthright issue – (Genesis 25:27-34; 27)
- (3) They struggled later when they met after a long separation – (Genesis 32 – 33)
- (4) They struggled as nations (*Edom and Israel*) at the time of the Exodus – (Numbers 20:14-21)
- (5) They struggled until the time King David subjugated Edom to Israel – (2 Samuel 8:14)
- (6) They struggled as nations during the reign of Jehoram, when Edom revolted (2 Kings 8:20-22; 2 Chronicles 21:8-10) when Edom set up their own king. It was during this time, about 845 BCE that Obadiah gave his prophecy to the people of Edom.

The Edomites seemed to have an irresolvable hatred for Israel. Even the Prophet Amos knew this, and stated: *"Edom...pursued his brother with the sword, and cast off all pity; his anger tore perpetually; and he kept his wrath forever. But I (The LORD God) will send a fire upon Teman, which shall devour the palaces of Bozrah (the capital of Edom)."* (Amos 1:11-12) It is no wonder then that the last Prophet in the Old Testament, Malachi, sets forth the word of the Lord as:

*"'I have loved you,' says the LORD. 'Yet you say, 'In what way have You loved us? Was not Esau Jacob's brother?'" says the LORD. 'Yet Jacob I have loved; but Esau I have hated, and laid waste his mountains and his heritage for the jackals of the wilderness.'"* (Malachi 1:2-3; see following verses also!)

During Edom's later history, the Nabatean Arabs took over their territory and drove them from their land. They settled south of the Dead Sea, and became known as the *Idumaeans*. Around 120 BCE they were conquered by John Hyrcanus of the Maccabees, who forced many of them to be circumcised and accept the Law of Moses. The battle between Esau and Jacob continued, and came to final moment in the trial of Jesus the Christ. The human Jesus was a descendant of Judah, the fourth son of Jacob, and He stood before King Herod, a descendant of Esau. By 100 CE the people of Edom had become lost to history. It seems that in some sense, the Edomites met their demise according to the prophecy of Obadiah: *"...they shall be as though they had never been."* (Obadiah 16)

It is to this arrogant people that God sent the Prophet Obadiah. The Prophecy of Obadiah brings some serious lessons to the sensitive Christian. For one, Obadiah's message stands starkly opposed to the person who is a part of wrong-doing. By standing *"aloof"* and not being the instigator, yet being in complicity, that person is guilty and will be punished. (See Obadiah 10-11) Further, there is the lesson that *"As you have done, it shall be done to you."* (Obadiah 15) Finally, there is the prevailing lesson that God's Kingdom will ultimately prevail: *"And the kingdom shall be the LORD'S."* (Obadiah 21)

## -14- Great Men of the Old Testament

### JONAH

Surely there is no Old Testament Prophet whose name is more familiar to readers of the Bible than that of Jonah. Stories and songs abound relating to this prophet who was called, commissioned, sent...but who suffered sorely because he disobeyed God. Even the end of the story is disheartening when one notes the attitude of Jonah when God withheld His judgment on Nineveh.

Jonah was the son of Amittai, of the tribe of Zebulun. (Joshua 19:13) Jonah is mentioned as being a prophet of God during the reign of King Jeroboam. (2 Kings 14:25) This would indicate his ministry to be during the period 793-753 BCE. While technically the Book of Jonah is anonymous, Jewish tradition suggests that Jonah himself was the human author. Some recent scholarship supports the idea that the Book is more **about** Jonah instead of being a collection of his personal writings. Yet some people believe the book is a nice fable, but not a true account of an historical event. Nonetheless, Biblical evidence stands to the contrary. The Old Testament notes that God had "*spoken through His servant Jonah the son of Amittai, the prophet who was from Gath Hepher.*" (2 Kings 14:23-25) Jonah is the only one of the Twelve (*the Minor Prophets*) mentioned by Jesus. He is the only Old Testament person Jesus Himself likens to Himself. (See Matthew 12:39-42; 16:34; Luke 11:29-32) Therefore it is correct to state that Jonah was indeed a true historical figure, and this gives credence to the book bearing his name.

The interpretation of the Book of Jonah has been a matter of debate for Biblical scholars. For example, note the following suggested interpretations:

- (1) It is allegorical. That is, it is only a story consisting of a series of incidents that are analogous to a parallel series of happenings they are intended to illustrate.
- (2) It is parabolic. That is, it is a short story with a didactic aim – something used to teach a certain lesson.
- (3) It is mythical. That is, it assumes the whole story is nothing more than a myth or legend based on some incident in the history of Israel's conflict with neighboring peoples.
- (4) It is historical. That is, it describes events that actually took place. Since Jesus accepted this view, it is incumbent on Christian scholars to adopt the same position.

There are some major lessons to be learned from the Prophet Jonah:

- (1) God loves and cares for people, and desires that they repent of sin and come to a personal relationship with Him; Jonah preached repentance to the people asking them to turn to God.
- (2) God is the ONLY God who lives and is almighty; Jonah preached to a monotheistic people, but a people who worshipped the god *Nebo*.
- (3) God's judgment can be averted by genuine repentance.
- (4) National sin demands national repentance.
- (5) God rebukes a narrow exclusiveness that sometimes tends to characterize legalistically minded people.
- (6) People cannot run away from God and try to hide.
- (7) God requires obedience, and disobedience results in God's judgment...at least God's punishment in what some may call strange ways.
- (8) God never holds a former attitude against His own when they obey Him.
- (9) Sometimes God uses familiar objects to instruct people regarding His will.
- (10) God is a God of compassion, caring about people, and calling them to repent and turn to Him. When the people of Nineveh "*believed God, proclaimed a fast, and put on sackcloth, from the greatest to the least of them,...then God saw their works that they turned from their evil way; and God relented from the disaster that He had said He would bring upon them, and He did not do it.*" (Jonah 3:5, 10)

## -15- Great Men of the Old Testament

### MICAH

Micah the Prophet was from the town of Moresheth, a town near Gath, and about 25 miles southwest of Jerusalem. Moresheth was an agricultural community near the border of Judah and Philistia. It became a "pathway" of sorts for armies and commercial caravans on their way to the Maritime Plain and to Egypt. All of this gave Micah the opportunity to learn much concerning the events of the world as it was known at that time. It would also provide for Micah a concern over the possibility of an invasion from a foreign nation.

When reading the Prophecy of Micah one is immediately caught up with the idea that he was a man of the country, much like Amos. He had a passion for justice. Like Hosea, he had a heart of love. Yet, his heart burned with indignation over the fact of the rich oppressing the poor peasants.

The contents of the Prophecy of Micah are hard to analyze, since there is no clearly discernible flow of thought. There are no specific references to historic events. At the same time, there are a number of themes that are identifiable. When these are combined, it is evident that Micah, a Prophet to both the Northern Kingdom of Israel and the Southern Kingdom of Judah, could envision the doom of both. The prophetic voice of Micah was heard over a rather lengthy period of time. He proclaimed the message of God during the reigns of King Jotham (750-731 BCE), King Ahaz (736-715 BCE), King Hezekiah (715-686 BCE). These were kings over the Southern Kingdom of Judah. It is Jeremiah the Prophet who helps one to understand that the warnings of Micah during the reign of King Hezekiah were taken seriously.

*Micah of Moresheth prophesied in the days of Hezekiah king of Judah, and spoke to all the people of Judah, saying, "Thus says the LORD of hosts: 'Zion shall be plowed like a field, Jerusalem shall become heaps of ruins, and the mountain of the temple like the bare hills of the forest.' Did Hezekiah the king of Judah and all Judah ever put him to death? Did he not fear the LORD and seek the LORD'S favor? And the LORD relented concerning the doom which He had pronounced against them." (Jeremiah 26:18-19)*

Great themes appear in the Prophecy of Micah. Three of them are as follows:

- 1. God's Required Lifestyle for His people:** *"He has shown you, O man, what is good; and what does the LORD require of you, but to do justly, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with your God?" (Micah 6:8)* This fits into the theme of the entire Prophecy of Micah, for the world will know when God's people are walking humbly with their God by the way they treat people. They will have the compassionate heart of God and His concern for justice being done in their society, and will have a deep and abiding concern to treat people lovingly and mercifully.
- 2. God's Redemptive Love for His people:** *"But you, Bethlehem Ephrathah, though you are little among the thousands of Judah, yet out of you shall come forth to Me the One to be Ruler in Israel, Whose goings forth are from of old, from everlasting." (Micah 5:2)* This verse is the first of a lengthy passage of prophecy concerning the entrance of the Messiah...the Deliverer...into this world. That the students of Holy Scripture knew of this is attested to by the wise men from the East as they came to Jerusalem and told Herod the king that Bethlehem would be the birthplace of the Messiah. (See Matthew 2:6)
- 3. God's Renewing Grace for His people:** *"Who is a God like You, pardoning iniquity and passing over the transgressions of the remnant of His heritage? He does not retain His anger forever, because He delights in mercy. He will again have compassion on us, and will subdue our iniquities." (Micah 7:18-19)* Micah affirms God's grace: *"Shepherd Your people with Your staff, the flock of your heritage...let them feed in Bashan and Gilead, as in days of old." (Micah 7:14)*

## -16- Great Men of the Old Testament

### NAHUM

The name Nahum is mentioned only one time in the Bible, and that in the first verse of the Prophecy bearing his name: *"The burdens against Nineveh. The book of the vision of Nahum the Elkoshite."* The name *NAHUM* means *"comfort," "consolation."* In a very real sense the name of the prophet is symbolical of the message of the book. Nahum intended to comfort and console the oppressed and afflicted people of Judah.

Jonah had prophesied in Nineveh about 758 BCE. That resulted in national repentance. However this change of heart was short-lived. The people of Nineveh were soon back on a course of world conquest and terrifying aggression. The following emperors were tyrannical in their quests.

Tiglath-pileser III (745 – 727 BCE) went on a world-conquering quest. He invaded the West and deported some of the inhabitants of Northern Israel, taking them to an area north of Nineveh. He extended his authority over Judah, extracting tribute or taxes from them. (See 2 Kings 15:29; 16:5-18; 1 Chronicles 5:6, 26; 2 Chronicles 18:16ff; 30:6)

Shalmaneser V (727-722 BCE) began the actual siege of Samaria, the capital of the northern Kingdom of Israel. He died shortly before the city fell into the hands of Assyria.

Sargon II (722-705 BCE) completed the siege of Samaria. The city fell in 722 BCE, thus bringing to an end the northern Kingdom of Israel. (See 2 Kings 17:3-6) Sargon II was murdered in 705 BCE.

Sennacherib (705-681 BCE) succeeded to the throne of Assyria. Because King Hezekiah of Judah abandoned the policy of support to Assyria, (See 2 Kings 18:7, 19-20) Sennacherib invaded Judah in 701 BCE. He conquered the fortified cities of Judah and surrounded Jerusalem. He boasted that none of the gods of the nations had ever delivered any people from the hand of Sennacherib. But King Hezekiah sought the Lord,

*"It came to pass on a certain night that the angel of the LORD went out and killed in the camp of the Assyrians one hundred and eighty-five thousand; and when people arose early in the morning, there were the corpses – all dead. So Sennacherib king of Assyria departed and went away, returned home and remained at Nineveh."* (2 Kings 19:35-36)

Various kings reigned in Assyria, but there were stirrings in other parts of the world. Nabopolassar (625 – 605 BCE) had established himself as the king of Babylon and began capturing Assyrian holdings. Later an alliance was formed between the Medes and the Babylonians and the Scythians, and the siege of Nineveh began. The siege lasted 3 months, and ended when floodwaters breached the walls allowing the soldiers to enter the city. This was according to the earlier prophecy of Nahum: *"But with an overflowing flood He will make an utter end of its place, and darkness will pursue His enemies."* (Nahum 1:8) The Tigris River had overflowed its banks and the floodwaters had eaten away at the walls of Nineveh. Some Assyrians tried to hold out against the invading armies, but to no avail. They were defeated in 606 BCE by the armies of King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon. The destruction of Nineveh was so complete that about 200 years later when Xenophon the Athenian and *"the Ten Thousand"* backing out of their entanglement in Persia, passed by the site they said there was no evidence a city had ever been there. Nahum had prophesied: *"You will be hidden;...and the place where they are is not known."* (Nahum 7:11, 17b)

The message of Nahum is clear: **God will have the final word!** In a word, the people of Nineveh, against whom Nahum prophesied so clearly, had in reality **repented of their repentance**, and had returned to even greater depths of iniquity. Nahum's cry is the cry of faith in the sovereign rule of God and the tragic ending of any who walk against the light of divine truth. For a nation to survive it must be established on and directed by the principles of righteousness and truth.

## -17- Great Men of the Old Testament

### HABAKKUK

Little is known of the Prophet Habakkuk other than what is found in the bearing his name. What may be known about him with accuracy must be learned from the content of the Prophecy of Habakkuk. He is identified as *"the prophet"* in the first verse of the book. There is no reference to Habakkuk having any kind of secular profession. The closing statement of the book suggests that he may have been a part of the Temple worship choir, or at least a Levite connected with Temple worship, and this would indicate also that he may have resided in Jerusalem:

*"To the Chief Musician. With my stringed instruments."* (Habakkuk 3:19b)

Dating the Prophecy of Habakkuk is quite difficult. There is only one explicit reference that may be of help. Habakkuk questioned God:

*"O LORD, how long shall I cry, and You will not hear? Even cry out to You, 'Violence!' And You will not save. Why do You show me iniquity, and cause me to see trouble? For plundering and violence are before me; there is strife, and contention arises. Therefore the law is powerless, and justice never goes forth. For the wicked surround the righteous; therefore perverse judgment proceeds."* (Habakkuk 1:2-4)

God's answer to Habakkuk is enlightening and provides a tiny light into the matter of the date of the prophecy of Habakkuk:

*"Look among the nations and watch – be utterly astounded! For I will work a work in your days which you would not believe, though it were told you. **For indeed I am raising up the Chaldeans, a bitter and hasty nation which marches through the breadth of the earth.**"*  
(Habakkuk 1:5-6)

God's reference to raising up the Chaldeans implies a time **prior** to their rise in power in 605 BCE when Nabopolassar (625 – 605 BCE) established himself as the king of the Babylonian Empire. Therefore God told Habakkuk that He would raise up the Chaldeans according to His own timetable. Because of that statement in God's answer it is probably best to date the preaching of Habakkuk shortly before 606 BCE, but after the beginning of Babylon's westward move for world conquest. This would date the Prophecy of Habakkuk in about 607 BCE.

There is something *"priestly"* about the Prophecy of Habakkuk. Most of the books of prophecy are primarily God's message through the prophet to the people. But instead of taking God's message directly to the people, Habakkuk takes the complaint of the people to God. In other words, he is their representative to the LORD God. He seems to be a person perplexed by the events that surround him, and finds it difficult to understand why God is allowing evil to play out in the lives of his people.

The problem in the heart and mind of Habakkuk appears to be: *"How can a person justify the reality of life with its suffering, death, and destruction with an all-powerful God Who seems to be passive and inactive in history?"* To Habakkuk, God seemed to be inactive. But at the same time, Habakkuk is a man of faith, and does not make the mistake of ruling God out of the picture. He had doubts and distresses, but brought them to God. The conclusion of Habakkuk is that we must always allow God to be God, and to carry out His plans according to His timing and means. In the meanwhile, the word of the Lord to and through Habakkuk is clear: **"The just shall live by faith!"** (Habakkuk 2:4b) Thus, the prophet does not lose faith, but holds tenaciously to the truth that *"Though the fig tree may not blossom, nor fruit be on the vines; though the labor of the olive may fail, and the fields yield no food; though the flock may be cut off from the fold, and there be no herd in the stalls – yet I will rejoice in the LORD, I will joy in the God of my salvation. The LORD God is my strength; He will make my feet like the deer's feet, and He will make me walk on my high hills."* (Habakkuk 3:17-19a)

## -18- Great Men of the Old Testament

### ZEPHANIAH

The Prophet Zephaniah provides more biographical insight into his personal history than any other Old Testament prophet. He opens his book with the following:

*"The word of the LORD which came to Zephaniah the son of Cushi, the son of Gedaliah, the son of Amariah, the son of Hezekiah, in the days of Josiah the son of Amon, king of Judah."* (Zephaniah 1:1)

By this means he traces four generations, and indicates that he is the great-great-grandson of a man named **Hezekiah**, who many scholars believe to be good King Hezekiah. This suggests that the Prophet Zephaniah was one of royal blood. Some scholars disagree, but perhaps it is only fair to suggest that neither can the contrary be proved! References in the Prophecy of Zephaniah places him in Judah, and specifically in Jerusalem. (Note Zephaniah 1:4) His genealogical reference to *"in the days of Josiah"* places his prophecy during the days of King Josiah (640-609 BCE). However, his consistent references to the moral decadence in Judah implies that he wrote prior to the great reforms under King Josiah's reign. Therefore it is safe to date Zephaniah in about 630 – 625 BCE.

One of the chief characteristics of the Prophecy of Zephaniah is his stern denunciation of the sins of the people, with his impassioned cry for repentance. For this, he has sometimes been referred to as *"the puritan prophet."* Chief among his powerful teachings is a frequent reference to **"the day of the LORD."**

*"For the day of the LORD is at hand."* (Zephaniah 1:7)

*"In the day of the LORD'S sacrifice I will punish the princes and the king's children..."* (Zephaniah 1:8)

*"In the same day I will punish all those who leap over the threshold....."* (1:9)

*"And there shall be on that day...the sound of a mournful cry..."* (1:10)

*"The great day of the LORD is near; it is near and hastens quickly."* (Zephaniah 1:14)

*"That day is a day of wrath, a day of trouble and distress..."* (Zephaniah 1:15; see all of vv 15-16)

*"In the day of the LORD'S wrath..."* (Zephaniah 1:18)

*"Before the day of the LORD'S anger comes upon you!"* (Zephaniah 2:2)

*"In the day of the LORD'S anger."* (Zephaniah 2:3)

*"Therefore wait for Me', says the LORD, 'until the day I rise up for plunder.'" (Zephaniah 3:8)*

*"In that day you shall not be shamed for any of your deeds..."* (Zephaniah 3:11)

*"In that day it shall be said to Jerusalem, 'Do not fear...'"* (Zephaniah 3:16)

*"Behold, at that time I will deal with all who afflict you..."* (Zephaniah 3:19)

*"At that time I will bring you back, even at the time I gather you..."* (Zephaniah 3:20)

*"The Day of the LORD"* seems to be the major message of the Prophecy of Zephaniah. It is viewed as a day of judgment, of terror, and as imminent. Zephaniah views the coming *Day of the LORD* as one that will fall on all creation as a judgment against sin. It is a dark picture, but the end is that out of the darkness of destruction God will bring forth a remnant of His people. Therefore, while the very concept of *"The Day of the LORD"* may bring terror to the heart of the ungodly and be *"The Day of Destruction for the Unfaithful,"* it will be in reality *"The Day of Deliverance for the Faithful"*. The bright picture that one would like to see in reading the Holy Scriptures is found only in the promise of God that there is coming *"The Day of the LORD...a Day of Deliverance."* May the message of the Prophet Zephaniah be sounded out to the nations of the world in every generation!

## -19- Great Men of the Old Testament

### HAGGAI

The Prophecy of Haggai is the first of what Biblical scholars refer to as "*The Post-Exilic Prophets.*" That is, the message of Haggai deals with issues subsequent to the Babylonian Captivity. It is assumed that he was born during the exile in Babylon, grew up there, but may have been one who returned to Jerusalem with the first group of people led by Zerubbabel in 526 BCE. It may have been during this time that Haggai engaged in writing some Psalms. The Septuagint, the Greek translation of the Old Testament, credits Haggai with being the human author or co-author of several of the Psalms, notably, Psalm 138, and Psalms 146-149. (*Zechariah is considered co-author of some of these Psalms.*)

The ministry of the Prophet Haggai was obviously brief, but very powerful. It came as the first prophecy to the people who had returned to Jerusalem following the Babylonian Captivity. The work on reconstructing the great Temple in Jerusalem had begun, but lagged behind. The situation seemed grave indeed. The whole city and the houses of the people, along with the Temple, lay in ruins. Everything had been neglected from the time of the final deportation of the Jews to Babylon in 586 BCE until the first return in 536 BCE. Fifty years had passed into history, and little was being done except out of discouragement the people gave themselves to rebuilding their own houses and neglecting the House of God. They had become apathetic toward rebuilding the Temple in Jerusalem.

Haggai was a man with a paramount concern: "***Build the Temple of God.***" He had a strong desire to see the Temple reconstructed and true worship of God reinstated. His message was, then: "*Get your priorities right! Put God first! He will care for your needs!*" His message was well received, and in just a matter of three weeks after his first address to the people, work began on the Temple again. The Temple was completed in 516 BCE, just **seventy years** after the final deportation of the Jews to Babylon.

Some of the basic themes in the Prophecy of Haggai are as follows:

***"The PLAN of God is to work...the time is NOW – not later!"*** Haggai contains at least **eleven** references to time in his short, two-chapter prophecy. (See 1:1, 2, 4, 15; 2:1, 10, 15, 18, 19, 20, and 23)

***"The PLEA of God is to listen to the message God has delivered to you!"*** Four times Haggai sounds out the message of God to "*Consider your ways.*" (See 1:5, 7; 2:15, 18) In other words, "*give some serious thought to where you are in the work of God...your relationship to Him...and His will for your lives.*"

***"The PROMISE of God is to be with His people!"*** God carefully reminded the people through His Prophet Haggai, that He is with the people, and as they gather the materials and expend the energy to rebuilt His House, He is always with them. (See 1:13; 2:4, 5)

***"The PLEDGE of God is in stating what He WILL do!"*** (See 2:7, 9, 19, 21, 22, 22, 23, 23) God is always Sovereign over all His universe, and He **WILL** perform His will! He has a plan that will survive every attempt to subvert it...with or without His people!

***The POWER of God's message is the motivating factor of Haggai's message!"*** There are at least 24 key references to Haggai having receive a message from the LORD God of Israel, and noting that the passion of his message is found in "*Thus says the LORD!*" (See 1:2, 3, 5,5 7, 8, 9, 12, 13; 2:1, 4, 4, 6, 7, 8, 9, 9, 10, 11, 14, 17, 20, 23, 23, 23)

It is this latter characteristic of the Prophecy of Haggai that makes the Book one of great power and authority. Haggai teaches strongly that faithfulness and material blessings are directly connected, and that when a good work is awaiting its accomplishment, the time to do it is **NOW!**

## -20- Great Men of the Old Testament

### ZECHARIAH

Everything that is known about the Prophet Zechariah is found in the book that bears his name. There are several people in the Old Testament...and the New Testament...that have the same name, but the Prophet Zechariah is the focus of this vignette. In fact there are nearly 30 different men with this name mentioned in the Holy Scriptures. Zechariah is the second of what Biblical scholars refer to as "*The Post-Exilic Prophets.*" God spoke to Zechariah "*in the eighth month of the second year of Darius*" the King of the Medo-Persian Empire. From the opening statements in the Prophecy of Zechariah it is evident that he was in the prophetic order. He was

*"...the son of Berechiah, the son of Iddo the prophet."* (Zechariah 1:1)

However, the Bible declares that Iddo was one of the priests who returned to Jerusalem in the group led by Zerubbabel. (See Nehemiah 12:16) The reference in Nehemiah also indicates that Zechariah was a young man at the time, already in the priesthood, and in all probability had been born in Babylon. Jesus noted the following concerning Zechariah:

*"Therefore, indeed, I send you prophets, wise men, and scribes: some of them you will kill and crucify, and some of them you will scourge in your synagogues and persecute from city to city, that on you may come all the righteous blood shed on the earth, from the blood of righteous Abel to the blood of **Zechariah**, son of Berechiah, whom you murdered between the temple and the altar."* (Matthew 23:34-35; see also Luke 11:51 for a similar account.)

Some scholars contend that Jesus, or a scribe making the copy of the Scriptures confused this Zechariah with another Zechariah, the son of Jehoiada, of whom it is recorded: "*So they conspired against him, (Zechariah, the son of Jehoiada the priest – see v 20) and at the command of the king they stoned him with stones in the court of the house of the LORD.*" (2 Chronicles 24:21) But to charge Jesus the Christ with confusion is blasphemous, and cannot be tolerated. Therefore, the record of Holy Writ stands as it is stated...and true! Zechariah is the longest of the so-called "*Minor Prophets.*" It is also the clearest in terms of the Messianic message. It is the most apocalyptic and eschatological of the Minor Prophets. The Prophet Zechariah predicted more about the coming Messiah than any other Old Testament Prophet except Isaiah. The Messianic hope is a chief message of the Prophecy of Zechariah.

Zechariah began to prophesy two months after his contemporary Haggai began his work. (Compare Haggai 1:1 with Zechariah 1:1) Due to internal evidence, it is reliable to state that Zechariah prophesied for at least two more years. It is quite likely that the Prophecy of Zechariah came after the dedication of the Temple in Jerusalem. There are some scholars who believe that Chapters 9-14 were written either by another person, or at a different time in Zechariah's life. Spending a lot of time on that speculation is probably worthless. The importance of Zechariah is the message he proclaimed.

The primary concern in the message of Zechariah is that people establish spiritual priorities. God would pour out His blessings on His people only as the result of the submission, repentance, and clean hearts. This could happen only by God's grace and power. For Zechariah heard God say distinctly: "*Not by might nor by power, but by My Spirit, says the LORD of hosts.*" (Zechariah 4:6) In this light the major concern of the Prophecy of Zechariah is Messianic. In the Prophecy of Zechariah there are found prophecies concerning the First Coming of the Messiah. (See 3:8; 6:12-13; 9:9, 16; 11:11-13; 12:10; 13:1, 6-7) Also there are prophecies predicting the Second Coming of the Messiah. (See Chapter 14) Explicit anticipations of Christ abound: *The Angel of the LORD* – (1:11, 12; 3:1, 2, 3, 5, 6), *The Righteous Branch* – (3:8; 5:12, 13), *The King/Priest* – (6:13), *The Good Shepherd rejected and sold for 30 shekels of silver, the price of a slave* – (11:4-13), *The Pierced One* – (12:10), *The Cleansing Fountain* – (13:1), *The Smitten Shepherd* – (13:7), *The Coming Judge and Righteous King* – (Chapter 14).

## **MALACHI**

The name "*Malachi*" is usually translated by the English words "*My Messenger*." It may be an abbreviation of the Hebrew word *Malakhiyah*, meaning "*Messenger of Jehovah*." There has been considerable debate as to whether "*Malachi*" is a proper name of a "*prophet*" of God, or just a "*common noun*" expressing a theological thought. If the latter, then the Prophecy of Malachi was written by an anonymous author referred to as "*My Messenger*." However, when the scholarship has been surveyed, there appears to be no reason to doubt that the name "*Malachi*" does indeed refer to a real person used by the LORD God of Israel in a prophetic ministry.

Dating the Prophecy of Malachi is difficult. Upon examination of the internal evidence, only a general time frame can be suggested. Malachi uses the term "*governor*" in 1:8, suggesting by this Persian term that the book was written during the Persian domination of Israel, or 539 – 333 BCE. It can be narrowed more precisely however, when one considers the references to internal conditions in Palestine. The Temple was completed, sacrifices were being offered, but the priests were corrupt and tithes and offerings were neglected. There was severe intermarriage with pagans, and a devastating divorce rate prevailed. When comparing the Prophecy of Malachi with the Book of Nehemiah, one is taken with the notion that they were active about the same time. This provides the Biblical scholar with the idea that Malachi is a post-exilic prophet.

The style of writing found in the Prophecy of Malachi is somewhat unique. It is known as the *Didactic-Dialectic* style of speaking or writing. That is, there is **an assertion** or charge, **an objection** raised, followed by **a refutation** or **rebuttal**. This method of teaching became popular, and is found in the New Testament as well. A good example of this type of presentation is:

*"I have loved you," says the LORD. Yet you say, 'In what way have You loved us?' Was not Esau Jacob's brother?' says the LORD. 'Yet Jacob I have loved; but Esau I have hated, and laid waste his mountains and his heritage for the jackals of the wilderness.'" (Malachi 1:2-3)*

This format or type of writing is seen throughout the Prophecy of Malachi. (See Malachi 1:4-8) The whole Book of Malachi is written like a running debate between the LORD God and a people who simply had not focused on spiritual reality. Guilty of broken covenants (Malachi 2:1-16), and robbing God of tithes and offerings (Malachi 3:8-12) are examples of the burden of the heart of Malachi. (*How many stewardship or tithing sermons have come from Malachi 3:8-10? Probably more than can be counted!*)

The Prophecy of Malachi does not lack for Messianic truth. The third chapter presents God's answer for human sin:

*"Behold, I send My messenger, and he will prepare the way before Me. And the Lord whom you seek, will suddenly come to His temple, even the Messenger of the covenant, in whom you delight. Behold, He is coming," says the LORD of hosts."* (Malachi 3:1)

The prophetic language builds its descriptive proclamation until God announces to the people: "*For I am the LORD, I do not change; therefore you are not consumed, O sons of Jacob...return to Me, and I will return to you.*" (Malachi 3:6, 7b) But God is always moving redemptively toward His people. One of the most beautiful passages demonstrating this truth is in the 4<sup>th</sup> chapter of Malachi:

*"But for you who revere My name, the Sun of Righteousness will rise with healing in His wings; and you will go out and frolic like calves of the stall."* (Malachi 4:2) (Personal translation)

Here is God's Invitation to **Power** – "*healing*," **Pilgrimage** – "*go out*," **Progress** – "*frolic*," and **Protection** – "*calves of the stall*." This is a magnificent closing to the Old Testament. And may this benedictory to the Old Testament launch us into the dynamic truth found in the fulfillment of the prophetic message, "*And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us!*" (John 1:14)