

21

ECCLESIASTES

The vanity of life apart from God. Solomon shows that to fear God and keep His commandments is the only thing that really matters.

The alternative title of this Book is “The Preacher”, and the opening verse identifies the writer as “the Preacher, the son of David, king in Jerusalem”.

“All go unto one place”

King Solomon’s riches, wisdom and exploits were proverbial. Yet in this Book, the vanity of all life apart from God is underlined. Without His Word, and our response to it, all would be pointless. We would all end up, like animals, in the dust of death; for in the grave all life and consciousness ceases (Ecclesiastes 3:19,20; 9:4-6). This is the consistent teaching of all Scripture, but in Ecclesiastes it is repeated time after time, unmistakably.

“Remember now thy Creator”

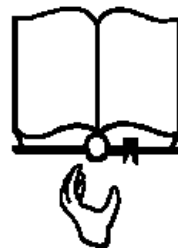
Old age brings its problems, as the various parts of the body are affected. Different parts of the body, as well as

various senses, may be referred to in the poetic language of ch 12 (see table). The Divine advice is to remember our Creator while we have life, vigour and opportunity (see 12:1).

The Only True Hope

The whole purpose of life is to glorify God (12:13). There is a day of judgement to come (v 14). In other parts of His Word, God offers us hope of eternal life in an eternal body, following resurrection and judgement at the return of Christ. This will enable us to live for ever on a renewed and perfect planet Earth.

This great promise rests on our belief and obedience *now* !



Some interesting links with other parts of the Bible

For example:

- a) Ecclesiastes 3:20
- b) Ecclesiastes 7:20
- c) Ecclesiastes 12:8

Compared with:

- a) Genesis 3:19; Romans 5:12
- b) Romans 3:23; 1 John 1:8
- c) Psalm 62:9; 1 Corinthians 15:14,58

A Picture of Mortal Man (ch 12)

“Keepers of the house tremble”	<i>Arms</i>
“Strong men shall bow themselves”	<i>Legs</i>
“The grinders cease”	<i>Teeth</i>
“Those that look out of the windows”	<i>Eyes</i>
“Doors shall be shut”	<i>Mouth?</i>
“Rise up at the voice of a bird”	<i>Light sleeper</i>
“Daughters of music brought low”	<i>Deafness sets in</i>
“Afraid of that which is high”	<i>Fear of heights</i>
“The almond tree shall blossom”	<i>White hair?</i>
“The grasshopper shall drag itself along” (RV margin)	<i>The burden of age</i>
“Desire (RV caperberry—a condiment) shall fail”	<i>Taste fades</i>
“The silver cord ... the golden bowl broken”	<i>Lamp of life extinguished</i>
“Pitcher broken at the fountain ... wheel broken at the cistern”	<i>Life (the supply of the water of life) fails</i>
“Dust returns to the earth”	<i>Death</i>

SONG OF SOLOMON

22



The Turtle Dove



This Book from God depicts His love for Israel, and looks ahead to the love of Christ for his Bride, to be fully realised when he returns to earth.

God's Love for Israel

This "Song of Songs" (see 1:1) has for its theme the quality of Divine love. This is illustrated in God's love for His people, whom he describes elsewhere as his "Bride" (see, for example, Isaiah 54:5,6).

Christ's Love for his Bride

The story is woven around the Shulamite, the shepherd and the king; but also involves groups of women, watchmen and other characters.

The love of the bridegroom for his bride, and her response, is beautifully portrayed in this tender allegory, pointing forward to the love of Christ for his true followers, and their devotion to him. The intimate relationship which will exist between them is likened in the Song to that between the dove and its mate, which is a lifelong partnership (2:14).

The Marriage Feast

The return of the Bridegroom (i.e. the return of Christ) will be followed by the perfecting of the Bride, when faithful followers of Christ will be made both sinless and immortal.

Thus the words of 4:7 will be made true: "You are all fair, my love; there is no flaw in you". The "marriage of the Lamb" to his Bride can take place, as foretold in Revelation 19:6-8. This means they will be united, both in immortality and in outlook, with Christ and also with God Himself (see John 17:21).

The Inheritance

Together, the Bridegroom and the Bride will inherit the Promised Land: this will extend to the whole Earth. Paradise will be restored and all creation will rejoice.



Some interesting links with other parts of the Bible

For example:

- a) Song 1:3,12
- b) Song 4:7
- c) Song 5:16

Compared with:

- a) John 12:3
- b) Ephesians 5:25-27
- c) Psalm 45:11; Isaiah 33:17; John 1:14

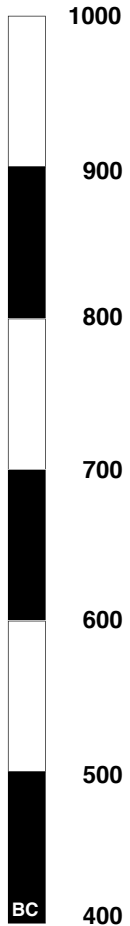
PROPHECY SECTION

*“Surely the Lord GOD will do nothing,
but he revealeth his secret unto his servants
the prophets.”* *(Amos 3:7)*

Books 23-39

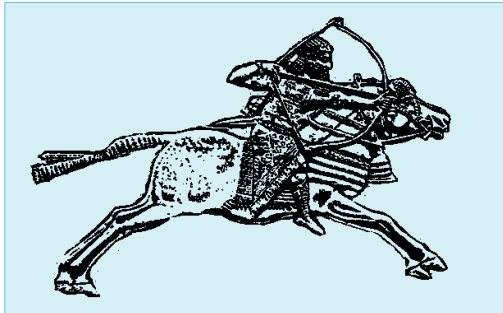
Time Chart of the Kings and Prophets

Times shown are approximate

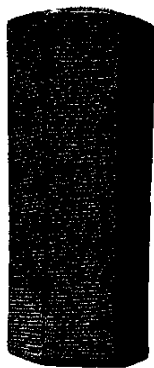


Prophets	Kings (and Leaders)	Other Empires and Kings
<i>The prophets who wrote books are in bold type</i>	David (who replaced Saul) Solomon	
	Israel Jeroboam I Nadab Baasha ... Omri	Judah Rehoboam Abijah Asa
Elijah Elisha	Ahab Ahaziah Joram Jehu Jehoahaz Jehoash	Assyria Shalmaneser III
Joel Jonah Amos Hosea Micah Isaiah	Jeroboam II Zechariah, Shallum Menahem Pekahiah Pekah Hoshea	Uzziah (Azariah) Tiglath-pileser III Shalmaneser V Sargon Sennacherib
Nahum Zephaniah Jeremiah Habakkuk	Fall of Samaria 722 BC	Esarhaddon Ashurbanipal
Obadiah Daniel Ezekiel		Babylon Nebuchadnezzar Nabonidus Belshazzar
Haggai		Persia Cyrus Darius
Zechariah Malachi		Xerxes I (Ahasuerus) Artaxerxes I
		70 years captivity in Babylon (586-516 BC)
		Decree of Cyrus, allowing return, 536 BC
		Fall of Jerusalem 586 BC
		(Zerubbabel)
		(Ezra)
		(Nehemiah)

“He was despised and rejected of men; a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief ... All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way; and the LORD hath laid on him the iniquity of us all” (53:3-6)



Ashurbanipal the Assyrian



A clay prism (now in the British Museum) recording the attempt by Sennacherib the Assyrian king to conquer Jerusalem (710 BC). Sennacherib failed—for the reasons recorded in ch 36

ISAIAH

23

In this lovely Book, we learn of the holiness of God and of His promise of a Saviour and King for all nations in the future age when Jerusalem will be His capital city.

God's Kingdom

The Book of Isaiah was written during the reigns of four kings of Judah, against the background of Assyrian attempts to overthrow God's Kingdom centred at Jerusalem. The early chapters pronounce doom—and hope—on Judah; but the prophet also has to deliver God's judgments (“burdens”) upon nearby nations (chs 13-23). The prophecy looks forward to the restoration of the Kingdom, “a new heavens and a new earth” (65:17), when Christ will rule Israel and the world.

The Suffering Servant

Isaiah also prophesied the first coming of

Jesus: he is referred to as Immanuel (7:14); the Son of God (9:6); the Suffering Servant (42:1-3; 52:13,14); the Lamb led to the slaughter (53:7), a Saviour who was to suffer and die, in order to conquer sin. The second half of the book (chs 40-66) opens with the words, “Comfort ye, comfort ye my people, saith your God” and brings hope of salvation not only to Jews but also Gentiles (42:6; 60:3 etc.). Ch 53 contains a moving description, written 800 years in advance, of the sufferings of the Messiah—a vivid prophecy of what actually happened to the Lord Jesus Christ.

The book concludes with descriptions of the glory of Jerusalem in the kingdom age (ch 62), and God's promise of a “new heavens and a new earth” (65:17; 66:22).



Some interesting links with other parts of the Bible

For example:

- a) Isaiah 2:3
- b) Isaiah 8:20
- c) Isaiah 53:5

Compared with:

- a) Zechariah 14:17; Matthew 5:35
- b) Luke 16:29
- c) Romans 5:6; 1 Peter 2:24

“For, behold, I create new heavens and a new earth: and the former shall not be remembered, nor come into mind ... The wolf and the lamb shall feed together, and the lion shall eat straw like the bullock; and dust shall be the serpent's meat. They shall not hurt nor destroy in all my holy mountain, saith the LORD. (65:17,25)

24

JEREMIAH

God foretells the punishment of the Jews and surrounding nations for their godlessness. Israel's eventual restoration is predicted.

The Prophet of Doom

Jeremiah was directly inspired by God, like all the Old Testament prophets (see 1:9; 20:9). Though at first reluctant to speak (1:6), he foretold the overthrow of Judah and surrounding nations.

He called on the Jews not to trust in Egypt, but to submit to the Babylonians, since this was for their good!

The Suffering Prophet

For preaching such a message, Jeremiah was cast into a muddy dungeon and left to die (38:6). He was rescued and lived to see some of the events he had predicted. His experiences pointed forward to the sufferings of Jesus Christ.



Some interesting links with other parts of the Bible

For example:

a) Jeremiah 14:8; 17:13

b) Jeremiah 17:8

c) Jeremiah 23:5,6; 33:15,16

Compared with:

a) Zechariah 9:12; Acts 28:20

b) Psalm 1:3; Ezekiel 47:12; Revelation 22:2

c) Zechariah 6:12; Revelation 3:12

The Prophet of Restoration

Jeremiah prophesied the Jews' return from Babylon after 70 years captivity (25:11,12). He also foretold their later return after centuries of scattering and persecution worldwide (see especially chs 31-33).

The Divine Potter

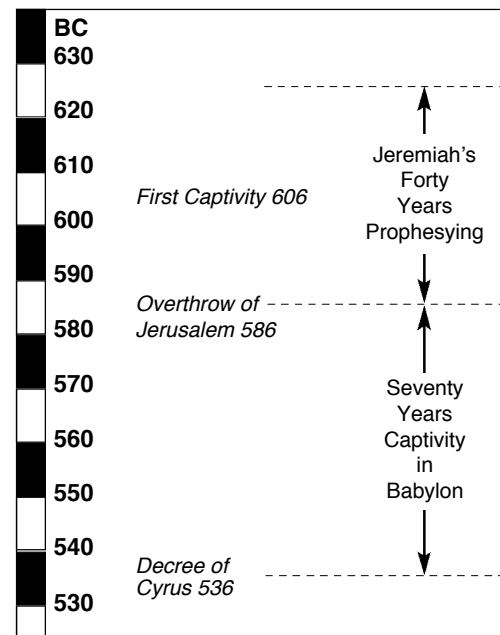
God speaks of Himself as being like a potter—with complete control over what He makes (18:6). He is able to mould His people into shape, if they will let Him. On the other hand, he will destroy those who become so hardened that they cannot be changed (19:11,15).

God's Prophecies Fulfilled

- After 70 years in Babylon some of the Jews returned as predicted (see Ezra 1:1; Daniel 9:2).
- In our own era, after centuries of scattering and persecution worldwide, the Jews have been returning to the Land of Israel, as was foretold.
- In 1917 the Balfour Declaration promised Palestine (then under Turkish rule) as a national homeland for the Jews.
- In 1948 the State of Israel was proclaimed; and in 1967 Jerusalem was unified as its capital city (see Luke 21:24).



TIME CHART OF THE PERIOD



*“Is it nothing to you, all ye that pass by? Behold, and see if there be any sorrow like unto my sorrow!”
(1:12)*

LAMENTATIONS



In this short Book, the Jews were told not to despise God’s chastisement. The sorrows of the nation also point forward to Christ’s own sufferings.

Try this Acrostic!

- My 1st were those that should be close (1:2)
- My 2nd, foes who were verbose (1:7)
- My 3rd were troubles every day (1:7)
- My 4th—those whose hand held sway (1:7)
- My 5th the Jews’ opponents viewed (1:8)
- My 6th were pleasant—changed for food (1:11)
- My 7th were just called roughly in (1:15)
- My 8th refers to personal sin (1:22)
- My 9th affliction sore doth know (3:1)
- My 10th is how my skin doth grow (3:4)
- My 11th speaks of mercies fresh (3:23)
- My 12th involves no sound from flesh (3:28)
- My 13th was a cry of old (3:55)
- My 14th was a kind of gold (4:2)
- My 15th was a gated city (4:12)
- My 16th showed the Jews no pity (4:21)
- My 17th asked for God to hear (5:1)
- My 18th was a nation near (5:6)
- My 19th Jewish females were (5:11)
- My 20th—a pronoun there! (5:18)
- My 21st means ‘like the last’ (5:21)
- My 22nd— ‘has’ (the past!) (5:22)

(The first letters of the answers make up the name of this Book—in three words)

The Desolate City

The Book of Lamentations contains a series of poems about the desolate state of the city of Jerusalem and the sufferings of the Jews. After the Babylonian invasion of 586 BC the city and the temple lay in ruins. The inspired writer (probably Jeremiah) knew that these troubles had been allowed by God because of the Jews’ refusal to respond to Him. More troubles were to follow.

Despised and Rejected

The words of ch 1 are a sad commentary on the plight of the Jews, who would be despised and rejected by the world, just as God had been despised and rejected by His people.

The Man of Sorrows

The lamentations about God and His people are reflected in the sorrows and sufferings of Jesus. He “bore the yoke in his youth” (3:27) and “gave his cheek to the smiters” (3:30) for the transgressions of others (see Isaiah 53:8).

Hebrew Acrostic

The Book of Lamentations was written in an acrostic form: three of the five chapters (chs 1, 2 and 4) have 22 stanzas corresponding to the number of the letters in the Hebrew alphabet; each verse commencing with a letter of the alphabet, in order, from aleph to tau. Ch 3 has 66 shorter verses, and groups of *three* verses start with the same letter. Ch 5, though it also has 22 verses, does not follow an alphabetical pattern.



Some interesting links with other parts of the Bible

<i>For example:</i>	<i>Compared with:</i>
a) Lamentations 1:12	a) Matthew 27:39; Luke 23:28
b) Lamentations 2:15	b) Psalms 48:2; 50:2
c) Lamentations 3:30	c) Isaiah 50:6; Matthew 26:67



The 22 letters of the Hebrew alphabet— from right to left (see also Psalm 119— section headings)

26

EZEKIEL

The obedient prophet Ezekiel is shown God’s glorious purpose with Israel and surrounding nations. He sees a vision of the future Temple.

“ And I will bring them out from the people, and gather them from the countries, and will bring them to their own land, and feed them upon the mountains of Israel ” (34:13)

Ezekiel and the Exile

Ezekiel was a priest who was taken with other Jewish captives into Babylonia about 597 BC. He was called to be God’s “watchman”, acting out parables and speaking “the word of the LORD” to warn God’s people of the coming troubles (3:17; 33:7-9 etc.). By a vision of winged figures called “cherubim”, Ezekiel was shown “the appearance of the likeness of the glory of the Lord” (1:28). He saw it “by the river of Chebar” (1:1); “in the plain” (3:23); and at Jerusalem (8:4); he saw it leaving the city (10:18; 11:23); and finally he saw the glory returning “by the way of the gate whose prospect is toward the east” (43:4).

Prophecy of Christ

God’s warnings, both to Israel and to the surrounding nations, are contained in chs 3-24. Judah’s last King, Zedekiah, was to be removed. There would be *no king in Israel* “until he come whose right it is” (21:27). That King will be Jesus Christ, the rightful King of the Jews!

Judgement and Restoration

Ch 37 contains a dramatic prophecy of the Valley of Dry Bones—the re-gathering of Israel, after their worldwide scattering. This

process has been happening in the last hundred years. But ch 38 speaks of an invasion of Israel by “Gog, the chief prince of Meshech and Tubal ... Persia, Libya and Ethiopia with them ... Gomer ... Togarmah of the north quarters” (38:2-6). Gog’s armies will be challenged by “Sheba, and Dedan, and the merchants of Tarshish” (38:13) and destroyed by God “upon the mountains of Israel” (39:4). Only the return of Christ will save Israel.

As a reassurance to the exiles, who had seen God’s temple destroyed by Nebuchadnezzar, Ezekiel is granted a vision of a future Temple, to be erected at Jerusalem, a focal point for worship in the Kingdom of God,



Some interesting links with other parts of the Bible

For example:

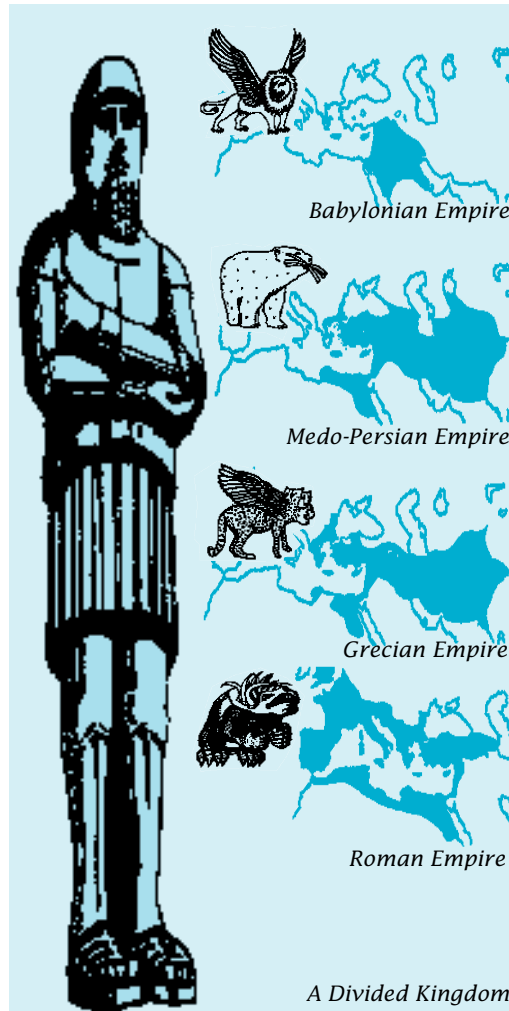
- a) Ezekiel 18:20
- b) Ezekiel 38:15-16
- c) Ezekiel 40-48

Compared with:

- a) Romans 6:23
- b) Daniel 11:40-45
- c) Haggai 2:7-9; Micah 4:1-4

DANIEL

Nebuchadnezzar's Image



Daniel, a captive Jew in Babylon, is given visions by God about world events affecting Israel, leading to the future Kingdom of God on earth.

Captives in Babylon

Daniel was a Jewish captive, taken to Babylon about 606 BC. He and his three friends, though only teenagers, displayed great courage in exile, holding to their beliefs, and worship of the true God (chs 1-3). In later years, when Daniel was about 80 years old, he faced being thrown into the lions' den, rather than give up his faith (ch 6). God delivered him; He had further work for him to perform, as His prophet.

A Book of Prophecy

The prophecies concern conflict between the kingdoms of men (particularly as they affect Israel) and the Kingdom of God.

Ch 2—*Nebuchadnezzar's Image*: the statue of a man whose parts, from head to feet, represented successive empires involved in God's purpose.

Ch 4—*Nebuchadnezzar's Dream of a Tree*: a vision concerning the future of Babylon, and the longer term Gentile period (2,520 years).

Ch 7—*Daniel's Dream of Four Beasts*, depicting the same four empires as the metals of the Image (ch 2).

Ch 8—*Daniel's Vision of the Ram and He-goat*: the future conflict of Medo-Persia

and Greece, and with a longer-term prophecy centred in the "little horn".

Ch 9—*Daniel's Vision of 70 Weeks*: the period up to Messiah's coming.

Chs 10-11—*Daniel's Vision of the Kings of the North and South*: from the time of the Persians to the time of the end.

The Overthrow of Mans' Rule

Ch 2, particularly, contains a dramatic forecast of the end of all human empires when a stone (Christ) topples the image and grows into God's Kingdom, centred in Israel (see 2:44). Ch 12 foretells the resurrection and judgement, and gives further time periods relevant to the last days.



Some interesting links with other parts of the Bible

For example:

- a) Daniel 2:44; 7:27
- b) Daniel 4:35
- c) Daniel 7:2-8

Compared with:

- a) Revelation 11:15
- b) Isaiah 45:9; Romans 9:20,21
- c) Revelation 13:1-5

28

HOSEA

A prophecy about God's love for His people, Israel. Despite her unfaithfulness, God promises to restore her and make her great.

Israel's Failure

Hosea had to warn Israel, especially the Northern Kingdom termed "Ephraim", that God would punish her, because of her disobedience.

In this Book, several symbols describe Israel's failure as God's "wife":

- Her goodness had disappeared—like a "morning cloud";
- Like a "silly dove", she had turned first to Assyria, then to Egypt, for help—instead of to God;
- She had once been like "grapes in the desert", when God first took her;
- Now she had become "like a barren fig tree" (compare Mark 11:13; Luke 21:29-31);
- She would have to plough a lone furrow, without God (see 10:11).

Israel's Future

Israel, instead of trusting in God, had tried to depend on alliances with other nations: "Ephraim hath mixed himself among the people ... strangers have devoured his strength ... they call to Egypt, they go to Assyria ... and they have not cried unto me with their heart" (7:8-14). Despite being like Hosea's own unfaithful wife (see chs 1-3), Israel would be taken back eventually (3:5; 13:14).

When God restored her, she would be like "a green fir (cypress) tree"—long lasting and upright. In that day she would bring forth fruit, to the glory of God (14:8).

"Come, and let us return unto the LORD: for he hath torn, and he will heal us; he hath smitten, and he will bind us up." (6:1)

Some interesting links with other parts of the Bible



For example:

- a) Hosea 1:11
- b) Hosea 11:1
- c) Hosea 13:14

Compared with:

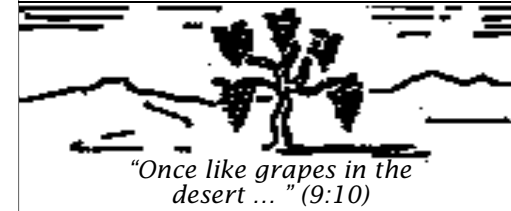
- a) Ezekiel 34:23,24
- b) Matthew 2:15
- c) 1 Corinthians 15:54,55



"Like a morning cloud ... " (6:4)



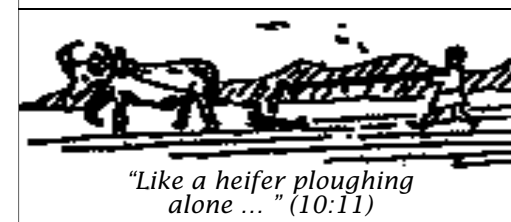
"Like a silly dove ... " (7:11)



"Once like grapes in the desert ... " (9:10)



"Now like a barren fig tree ... " (9:16)



"Like a heifer ploughing alone ... " (10:11)

JOEL

29



"Like the noise of chariots ... like the noise of a flame of fire ... the sun and the moon shall be dark, and the stars withdraw their shining" (2:5,10)



Some interesting links with other parts of the Bible

<i>For example:</i>	<i>Compared with:</i>
a) Joel 1:4; 2:25	a) Deuteronomy 28:38,42
b) Joel 2:27; 3:17	b) Ezekiel 37:26-28
c) Joel 3:2	c) Zechariah 14:2-4
d) Joel 3:13	d) Revelation 14:14-19

Forthcoming judgements in the Holy Land, including a final conflict involving all nations, when God will intervene dramatically!

The Locust Plague (ch 1)

God had, from the earliest times, warned Israel that if they turned from His Word, great disasters would follow (Deuteronomy 28).

Literal plagues of locusts were sent to remind God's people of what He had said. When He appealed to the Jews through the prophet Joel, around 800 BC, God likened the forthcoming invasions of human armies to the cutting, swarming, hopping, destroying locusts, which they may already have experienced (1:4).

Invading Armies (ch 2)

Assyrian and Babylonian invasions of the land of Israel, foretold in this chapter, were followed centuries later by Greek, Roman and Mohammedan incursions. These left the Holy Land desolate until AD 1917, when the Jews were allowed to return.

Promise of Blessing (2:18-32)

The troubles which were to come on God's people had as their object the return of Israel to the true worship of God.

Great blessings are promised when this national repentance finally comes. Meanwhile, the greatest invasion of the

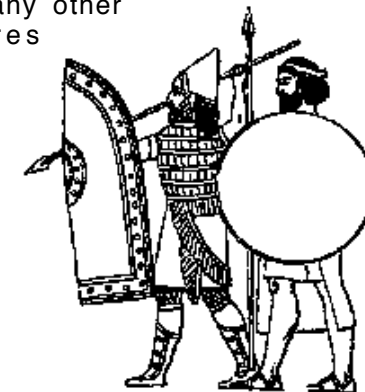
Holy Land has yet to take place!

Final Invasion (ch 3)

Details are given of an invasion by *all* nations, at a time when Israel are back in the land (3:1), as they are today.

The wickedness of all nations is now so great (v 12-13) that when North and South become involved in a great Middle East conflict, God's judgements will be seen on the earth. The time is ripe for the putting in of His "sickle" (v 13) and the cutting down of the wicked!

God will intervene dramatically by sending Jesus Christ to Jerusalem (v 16), as so many other Scriptures indicate.



"Prepare war, wake up the mighty men" (3:9)

30

AMOS

A prophecy of troubles to come on Israel because of idolatry and immorality. Nevertheless, restoration will eventually come.

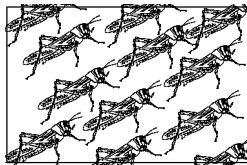
A Book of Symbols

Amos prophesied at a time (800 BC) when Israel was relatively prosperous—but when luxury and idolatry had turned the people away from their God and they were threatened by Assyrian and Babylonian invasions.

Judgements on the Nations

Amos predicted God’s judgements on Syria, Philistia, Tyre, Edom, Ammon and Moab. But the prophet was also used by God to foretell His judgements on His own people—first on Israel, then on Judah. A repetition of these events can be expected in the last days, when the Middle East is again invaded from the North (see Ezekiel 35-39).

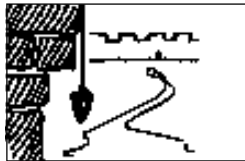
Various symbols are employed in this prophecy:



LOCUSTS (7:1-3): these symbolised the coming invasions by Assyria and Babylon (see Joel 1 & 2).



FIRE (7:4-6): indicated that the judgements would be severe—for the cleansing of Israel.



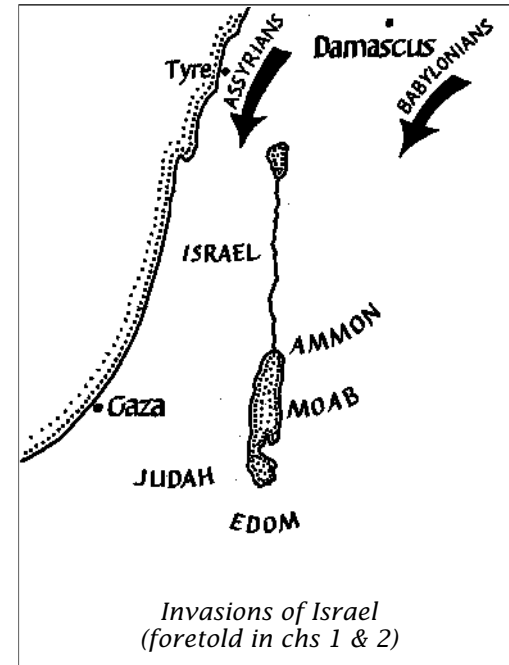
PLUMBLINE (7:7-9): Israel was not upright before God. A plumbline was needed—the Divine standard as shown later by Jesus Christ.



SUMMER FRUIT (ch 8): Just as the fruits in the basket were ripe, so Israel were ripe for judgement!

“And I will bring again the captivity of my people Israel, and they shall build the waste cities, and inhabit them; and they shall plant vineyards, and drink the wine thereof; they shall also make gardens, and eat the fruit of them. And I will plant them upon their land, and they shall no more be plucked up out of their land which I have given them, saith the LORD thy God.”

(9:14,15)



Some interesting links with other parts of the Bible

For example:

- a) Amos 1:2
- b) Amos 5:8
- c) Amos 9:14

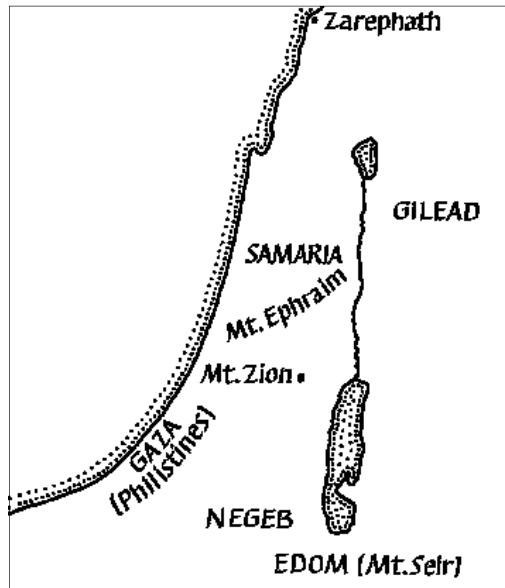
Compared with:

- a) Joel 3:16
- b) Job 38:31
- c) Jeremiah 30:3

OBADIAH

31

A short prophecy about Israel’s Arab neighbours, which applies particularly to our days—with an amazing outcome!



Sepharad: The only name which is not accounted for on the map is “Sepharad” (v 20). Jewish traditions associate this with the diaspora in either Sardis (Asia Minor) or Spain. It is significant that Sepharad became the Hebrew name for Spain and gave rise to the term “Sephardic Jews”—those of Spain who in 1492 were dispersed, mostly into Mediterranean lands.

Esau and Jacob

The name Obadiah is Hebrew, meaning ‘servant of Yahweh’, the God of Israel. Interestingly, this one-chapter prophecy is about both Israel and Arabs.

Those Arabs who descended from Esau (Edom) lived south and east of the Dead Sea (see map). They were always hostile to Israel, just as their ancestor Esau had been to Jacob, the ancestor of Israel (see Genesis 27:41).

When the Babylonians invaded Judah around 586 BC, the Edomites took the opportunity to stab the Jews in the back (v 11-14).


Mount Esau and Mount Zion

Mount Esau (v 8,9,19,21), sometimes called Mount Seir, is another name for the country of Edom. Today it is the southern part of the Kingdom of Jordan.

Mount Zion is at Jerusalem. Here was the capital of God’s ancient Kingdom. It is here too that Christ will reign as King when he comes again!

Israel will once again occupy all that territory described in Obadiah vv 19-20. All nations, including many of the Arab peoples, will benefit when, as v 21 says, “the kingdom is the LORD’s”. See Isaiah 2:1-4 for details.

“For the day of the LORD is near upon all the nations ... But upon mount Zion shall be deliverance, and there shall be holiness; and the house of Jacob shall possess their possessions” (verses 15,17)



Some interesting links with other parts of the Bible

For example:	Compared with:
a) Obadiah v 11-14	a) Psalm 137:7
b) Obadiah v 17	b) Joel 2:32
c) Obadiah v 21	c) Daniel 2:44; 7:27

32

JONAH

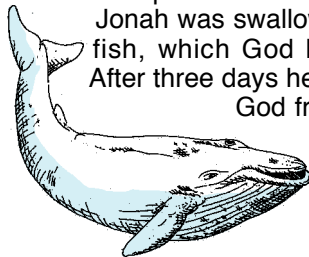
The account of how Jonah tried to escape from preaching God's word to Nineveh, and how God's Word prevailed!

Jonah's Mission

The prophet Jonah was probably the one mentioned in 2 Kings 14:25, who preached in Israel during the reign of Jeroboam II.

Israel's enemy at the time was the great Assyrian power from the north-east, with its capital at Nineveh. When God told Jonah to go and warn the Ninevites of coming judgement, he tried to escape by boarding a ship at Joppa, to flee to the far west (1:3).

However, a storm at sea prevented his escape. Thrown into the deep, Jonah was swallowed by a great fish, which God had prepared. After three days he was saved by God from this watery grave (2:10).



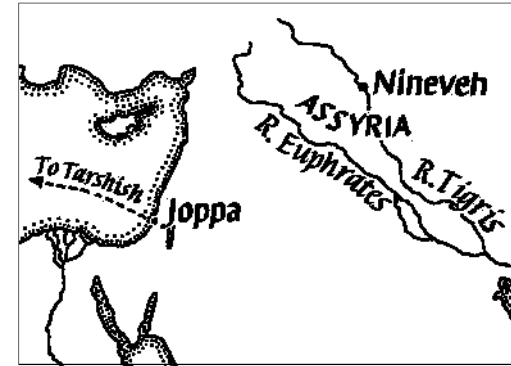
The Ninevites Repent

Jonah was again instructed to go and warn the Gentiles at Nineveh (3:2). The people of that great city (of 120,000 plus) repented when they heard the message from the 'risen' prophet. So God too 'repented' (ie altered His intention to punish Nineveh) (3:10).

Jonah's Reaction

The prophet's human reaction was to be displeased: he was angry that the people of Nineveh were to be spared, after all, for God had pity on them when they repented (4:11). An incident with a gourd plant, under which was shading Jonah from the sun, is used to show how God's pity for Nineveh contrasts with the prophet's impatience.

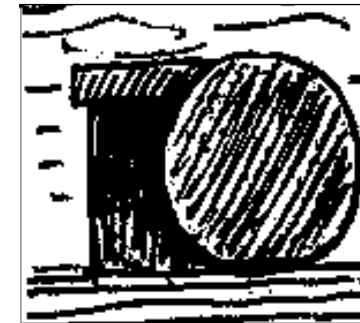
Jesus—Greater than Jonah




Some 800 years later, the one "greater than Jonah"—Jesus of Nazareth—preached to the people of Israel. But they put him to death!

Jesus had said, however, that just as Jonah was raised from his 'grave' after three days, so he too would be raised!

After his resurrection, the message Jesus had preached was to be extended to *all* nations (Mark 16:15,16). Those who would repent, believe and be baptized would be spared by God from eternal death. That message is still true for us



today, no matter in what part of the world we live!



Some interesting links with other parts of the Bible

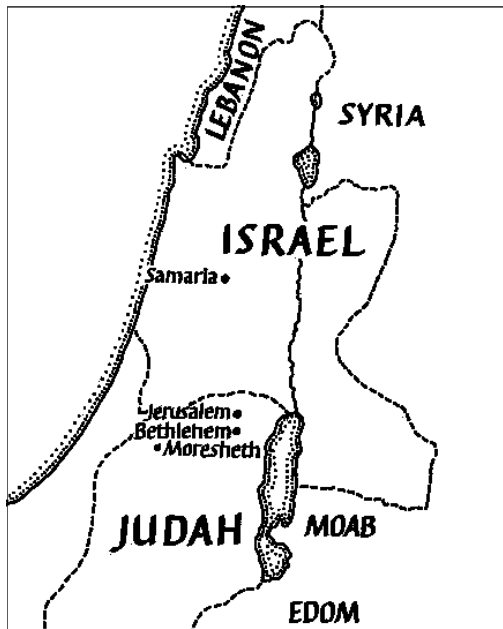
<p><i>For example:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) Jonah 1:3 b) Jonah 1:17 c) Jonah 3:10; 4:11 	<p><i>Compared with:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) Acts 10:32-43 b) Matthew 12:40,41 c) 2 Peter 3:9
---	--

“He hath shewed thee, O man, what is good; and what doth the LORD require of thee, but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God?”
(6:8)

MICAH

33

The prophet speaks of God’s care for His people, despite their failures; His promise of a King, to be born in Bethlehem, and of a future world-wide Kingdom.



Micah of Moreseth

Micah came from south-west Judah and prophesied to the Southern Kingdom. He prophesied (as did Isaiah) during the reigns of Jotham, Ahaz and Hezekiah, kings of Judah (1:1). He spoke against idolatry, cruelty and oppression in both Judah and Israel, and warned of coming judgements.

Yet, through him, God foretold the recovery of a remnant (2:12; 5:7,8), the coming of the Messiah and the ultimate restoration of the Kingdom of God.

Summary of the Prophecy

Ch 1-3: Judgements on Samaria, Judah and Jerusalem.


Chs 4-5: Ultimate restoration under God’s coming King, born in Bethlehem.

Chs 6-7: God’s desire for justice, kindness

and humility (6:8). He will fulfil His promise to Abraham and Jacob (7:20).

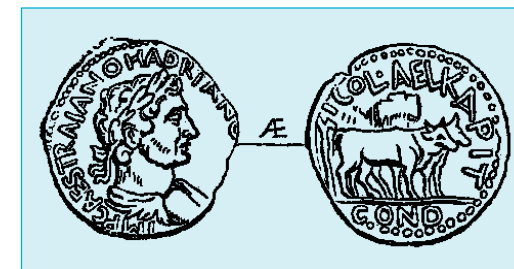
The Kingdom—Restored

The Messiah (Jesus Christ), born in David’s town of Bethlehem, will be King, not only of Judah, but of the united Kingdom of Israel (see 5:2). His capital will be Jerusalem and his dominion will be worldwide. There is a wonderful description of tomorrow’s world in 4:1-4 (also to be found in Isaiah 2:1-4): “Out of Zion shall go forth the law, and the word of the LORD from Jerusalem ...”



Some interesting links with other parts of the Bible

<p><i>For example:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) Micah 4:2,8 b) Micah 5:2 c) Micah 7:20 	<p><i>Compared with:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) Obadiah 17; Isaiah 65:17-25 b) Matthew 2:1-6; Luke 1:32,33 c) Genesis 13:14-16; 28:13; 35:12
--	--



A bronze coin of the Emperor Hadrian shows the ploughing of the temple area in Jerusalem by his armies, in AD 135. This event remarkably fulfilled the precise prophecy contained in Micah 3:12

34

NAHUM

The ultimate destruction of Nineveh and the Assyrian Empire is foretold, with dramatic details of the Babylonian attack which was to come.

Background to the Book

Nahum's prophecy was a "burden against Nineveh", which can be dated between 640 and 620 BC—120 or more years after Jonah prophesied against that Assyrian city. By now Nineveh had long forgotten its repentance and had attacked and spoiled Israel, and threatened Judah. The Assyrians' attempt to overthrow Jerusalem was thwarted by divine intervention (2 Kings 19).

The Comforter

The name Nahum (like Noah) means 'comfort'. God's message through him proclaimed comfort for the Jews. Nineveh, capital of Assyria, would be overthrown and the Assyrian threat would cease for ever. The Babylonian attack on Nineveh is vividly foretold in chs 2 and 3: it was fulfilled in 612 BC. The city was finally

sacked by the Medes and Persians and its ruins were only rediscovered in the 19th century.

Nineveh's Doom

Nineveh was "an exceeding great city" (Jonah 3:3). The Assyrians had conquered many nations, including Egypt: the capture of "No" (AV) or "No-Amon" (NKJV)—Thebes—on the River Nile is referred to in 3:8.

God—the Greatest!

God's words about Himself (ch 1) were right. He is in control of all nations and the judgement of Nineveh is a foreshadowing of God's final controversy with all human pride and power. Violence will not go unchecked. God will send peace to His people when Christ returns—to fulfil the words of ch 1:15.



Winged Human-headed Lion from the Palace of Nimrod at Nineveh

"Though I have afflicted thee, I will afflict thee no more. For now will I break his yoke from off thee, and will burst thy bonds in sunder" (1:12,13)



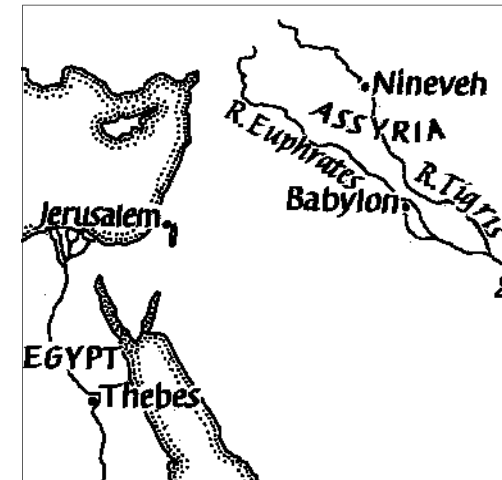
Some interesting links with other parts of the Bible

For example:

- a) Nahum 1:2
- b) Nahum 1:6
- c) Nahum 1:15

Compared with:

- a) Exodus 20:5; Joshua 24:19
- b) Malachi 3:2; Matthew 3:12
- c) Isaiah 52:7; Romans 10:15

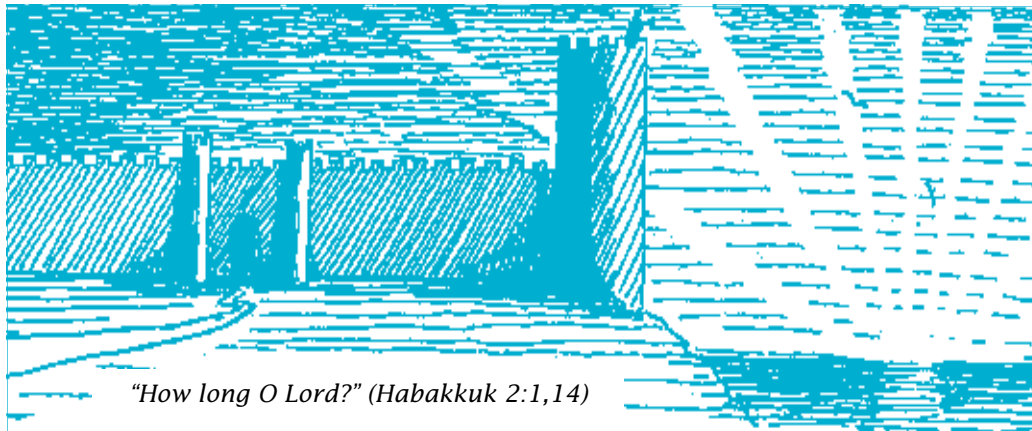


“Write the vision; make it plain upon tablets, so he may run who reads it. For still the vision awaits its time; it hastens to the end—it will not lie” (2:2,3, RSV)

God Answers a Question

Habakkuk was a prophet of God at about the time the Babylonians were attacking Judah, around 610 BC. The prophet was perplexed: Why did God appear to let wicked nations like Babylon prosper—and even be allowed to punish God’s people (1:3)?

God’s answer was to show him that, despite present appearances, His plan which will bring blessings for the righteous, will one day triumph: “I will work a work in your days, which ye will not believe ...” (1:5).



“How long O Lord?” (Habakkuk 2:1,14)

HABAKKUK

Habakkuk, concerned about Judah’s troubles and Babylon’s success, is allowed to see ahead to the Kingdom of God restored, when the faithful will be blessed.

From the watchtower on the walls of Jerusalem (2:1), the prophet was enabled to see across the centuries, to the time when the wicked will cease. Then, “The earth shall be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the LORD, as the waters cover the sea” (2:14).

A Prayer and a Song

Ch 3 contains a “prayer of Habakkuk”, in the form of a song. The prophet was inspired to recall God’s past triumphs, when Israel were saved from Egypt, and when they entered the Promised Land (see Deuteronomy 33:2).

Looking ahead, he saw that there will be a repeat of that victory when Christ comes, with his immortal followers, bringing fearful judgement on the wicked nations (3:16).

The Victory of Faith

Despite present troubles, those who have faith in God will be blessed when Christ returns. Those who are made “just” (or righteous) in Christ will “live” in that Day (2:4,14). So they can rejoice, even in trouble, knowing of the things in store when “he that shall come will come, and will not tarry” (2:3; Hebrews 10:37,38).

35



Some interesting links with other parts of the Bible

<i>For example:</i>	<i>Compared with:</i>
a) Habakkuk 1:4	a) Job 20:5; Psalm 94:3; Jeremiah 12:1
b) Habakkuk 2:3,4	b) Romans 1:17; Galatians 3:11; Hebrews 10:37,38
c) Habakkuk 3:3	c) Deuteronomy 33:2; Judges 5:4; Psalm 68:7

36

ZEPHANIAH

God warns of coming judgements on the Middle East, including the fall of Jerusalem. Nevertheless, salvation is promised for individuals who remain faithful.

Middle East Invasions

Zephaniah was a prophet of God during the reign of King Josiah over Judah, about 630 BC. Through this prophet, God warned that He would punish Israel's neighbours for their idolatry, false religion, violence and fraud (1:2,3). Judah too would be punished!

Scythians

First, God would send the Scythians. They would attack the Philistines, Moabites, the Ethiopians (Cush) and Assyrians (2:4-15) (see map).

Babylonians

Later, God would send the Babylonians against Assyria. Nineveh, its capital, would be overthrown. This was fulfilled in 612 BC. These events involving surrounding nations were to be a warning to Judah. Jerusalem itself would likewise be overthrown by the Babylonians.

Some 25 years later the Babylonian attacks on Judah began. Jerusalem was finally overthrown by Nebuchadnezzar in 586 BC and many Jews were taken into captivity.

Nevertheless, even in such troubled times, God promised ultimate salvation for the faithful.

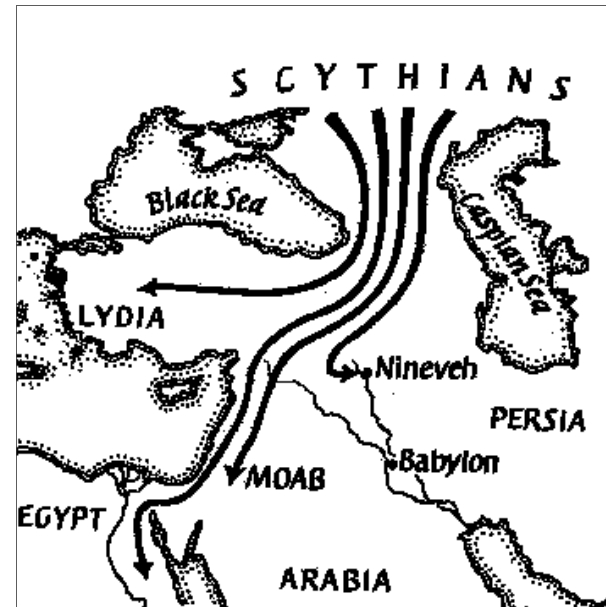
A Rebellious People

The Jews were to be punished by God for their rebellion against Him, despite His many appeals to them (see 3:1-7). They were proud and their rulers were corrupt (3:3-5).

But not only the Jews were like that: other nations too were wicked. All were to be punished by the coming events. It still applies, that God will punish all nations for their wickedness (see 3:8).

God's Hidden Ones

The name "Zephaniah" means 'hidden of God'. Just as the faithful in those days were saved out of the fiery judgements which came on the nations, so those who today are faithful believers will be 'hidden of God' in the Day of His wrath (see 2:3 and 3:12,13).



Judgements from the North



Some interesting links with other parts of the Bible

For example:

- a) Zephaniah 1:15
- b) Zephaniah 2:3
- c) Zephaniah 3:20

Compared with:

- a) Jeremiah 30:7; Joel 2:31,32
- b) Isaiah 26:20; Amos 5:15
- c) Isaiah 11:12; Jeremiah 30:3; Ezekiel 37:21

"I will shake all nations, and the desire of all nations shall come: and I will fill this house with glory, saith the LORD of hosts." (2:7)

Haggai was sent by God to the Jews who had returned from captivity in Babylon. They had been led back by Zerubbabel (of royal descent) and Joshua (a High Priest). The foundations of the Temple had been laid in Jerusalem (about 535 BC), but then enthusiasm for the building waned, following opposition. Now, 18 years on, God's message through Haggai and Zechariah (see Ezra 5:1) was intended to stir the nation into action, so that He might bless them (1:1-7).

"Consider your ways!"

Not only were the returned people distracted by adversaries hindering the work, but they were becoming too comfortable: "Thus speaketh the LORD of hosts, saying,



Some interesting links with other parts of the Bible

<i>For example:</i>	<i>Compared with:</i>
a) Haggai 1:1	a) Ezra 4:24; 5:1; Zechariah 1:1
b) Haggai 1:4	b) 2 Samuel 7:2, 12-13; Psalm 132:1-5
c) Haggai 2:6,7	c) Joel 3:16-17; Hebrews 12:26-28

HAGGAI

37

Haggai, with Zechariah, prophesied to the returned exiles encouraging them to complete the rebuilding of the temple and place their faith in God.

This people say, The time is not come, the time that the LORD's house should be built ... Is it time for you, O ye, to dwell in your ceiled houses, and this house lies waste?" (1:2,4). They were warned about taking things easily, not being prepared to put any effort into the work of God, and being wasteful: "Ye have sown much, and bring in little; ye eat, but ye have not enough; ye drink, but ye are not filled with drink; ye clothe you, but there is none warm; and he that earneth wages earneth wages to put it into a bag with holes" (1:6).

They did respond: the Temple was finished in 516 BC.

Count your Blessings

When the Jews responded to God's Word through Haggai they were blessed (see Ezra 5:1-2; 7:27-28), were asked to count their blessings, and to put their faith in God's further promises.

Look Ahead!

God strengthened Zerubbabel and Joshua for the work, and helped His people. He told them to look ahead to the great King/Priest who would build an even greater "house" for God (2:6-9). This was a prophecy of the coming of Jesus Christ,

as High Priest for God's people and the future King of all nations.

The Future Temple

Haggai, and many of God's other prophets, foretold the building of a future temple at Jerusalem. It will be a focal point for the worship of the One God by all nations. See, for example, Isaiah 2:2-3; 56:7; Ezekiel 40-48; Zechariah 14:16-21.

The Royal Signet

Jesus Christ is a descendant of Zerubbabel (Luke 3:27) and is the one spoken of as God's chosen representative, having God's royal authority, appointed to rule as King of Israel and of the world (Matthew 28:18).



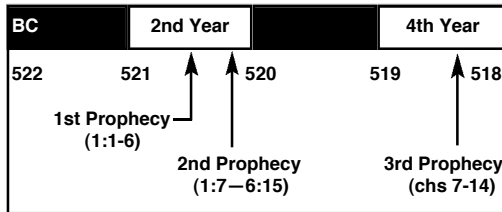
38

ZECHARIAH

At the time of Israel's return from captivity in Babylon, Zechariah is given visions relating to future events which will lead up to the Kingdom of God.

In the Reign of Darius

After the return of some of the Jews from exile in Babylon, Zechariah received prophecies from God about the future of Jerusalem and of God's people. These were given during the second and fourth years of the reign of Darius I of Persia.



The First Prophecy

Ch 1:1-6 is a call to God's people to return to Him and to the words of His former prophets. Then He will bless them.

The Second Prophecy

Eight visions were given to Zechariah looking ahead to God's dealings with Israel:

- 1 The ultimate time of rest (1:7-17).
- 2 Four Gentile powers (Babylon, Persia, Greece, Rome) will be cut off (1:18-21).
- 3 Jerusalem will be restored (ch 2).
- 4 Arab opposition ("Satan") will be

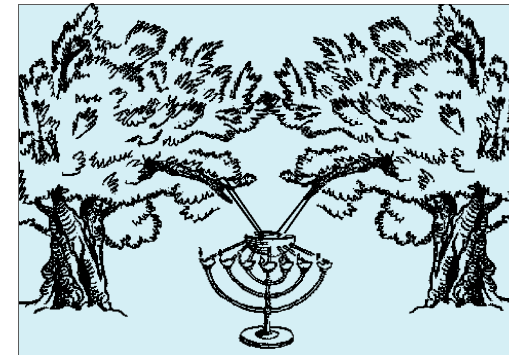
stopped (ch 3).

- 5 Divine Light for all nations (ch 4).
- 6,7 False worship will arise but will eventually be replaced (ch 5).
- 8 God will judge the nations when Christ rules as King/Priest (ch 6).

The Third Prophecy

Chs 7-14 fill out the message from "the LORD of hosts", whose armies fight for Israel:

- ch 7 God appeals to His people to hear Him.
- ch 8 He promises a future restoration (v 22,23).
- ch 9 The Greek invasions of Israel and the ultimate coming of Zion's King (v 9,10).
- ch 10 A second exodus of the Jews from Gentile lands is foretold.
- ch 11 The Roman invasion of Israel and the cutting off of God's "shepherd" (Jesus). The uprising of false religions.
- ch 12 The ultimate rescue of 'troublesome' Israel from the nations.
- ch 13 The repentance of one third of Israel when they see Christ. Their ultimate salvation (v 6-8).



The golden lampstand and two olive trees (ch 4)

- ch 14 The return of Christ to the Mount of Olives when "all nations are gathered against Jerusalem to battle" (v 1-4). He will rule the world (v 9). All nations will come year by year to Jerusalem to worship the LORD of hosts (v 16).



Some interesting links with other parts of the Bible

For example:	Compared with:
a) Zechariah 1:3,4	a) Jeremiah 25:4,5; Malachi 3:7; Luke 15:20,21
b) Zechariah 3:8	b) Isaiah 4:2; 11:1; Jeremiah 23:5; 33:15
c) Zechariah 14:4	c) Ezekiel 11:23; Luke 24:50,51; Acts 1:11,12

"The Lord, whom ye seek, shall suddenly come to his temple, even the messenger of the covenant, whom ye delight in ... But who may abide the day of his coming? and who shall stand when he appeareth?" (3:1,2)

The Divine Messenger

Malachi (whose name means ‘messenger of God’) was the last of God’s prophets in the Old Testament. He prophesied at about the time of Nehemiah, after the Jewish exile in Babylon. After his days “the sun went down on the prophets” for about 400 years—until the time of Jesus (see Micah 3:6).

The Message

Malachi was told to remind Israel that God had been good to them, but that priests and people alike had failed (1:2). Now their punishment must come and God would get a response from the Gentiles.

The Messenger of the Covenant

Phinehas (Numbers 25:11-13) had been a faithful priest and God had made a sure promise to him and those like him (2:5-7).



MALACHI

39

The old priesthood having failed, Malachi looks ahead to the coming of a better Priest who will come in judgement on the wicked, but with blessings for the faithful.

But a greater priest was to come—the Lord Jesus Christ, “the messenger of the covenant”. Through him God would make a New Covenant with believers, both Jews and Gentiles. Ch 3 foretells his coming in judgement—or blessing—depending how he is received. He is to be preceded by a forerunner who will “prepare the way of the LORD” (3:1).

The Forerunner

John the Baptist was this forerunner of Jesus, preparing Israel for the Saviour (Matthew 11:10). Malachi also foretold that Elijah the prophet would come to Israel at the time of Christ’s return to earth (4:5).

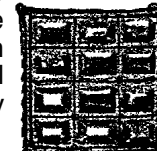
A Delightful Land

When the sons of Levi are purified (3:3), God will then bless Israel. The Land of Israel will become “delightful” (3:12) and all nations who respond will be blessed through Israel’s King. Now

Gentiles, too, can share in the Hope of Israel, through faith in God’s promises, centred in Jesus Christ. Those who now remember the LORD and think upon His name (3:16) will be remembered by Him on that day.

My Jewels

Just as the High Priest once carried the names of the twelve tribes of Israel close to his heart, through the jewels on his breastplate (Exodus 28:29), so we can be amongst God’s special treasure in the coming day (3:17)



Some interesting links with other parts of the Bible

<i>For example:</i>	<i>Compared with:</i>
a) Malachi 1:11 (see 1:5, RV)	a) Isaiah 49:6; 60:3; Romans 9:24-26
b) Malachi 3:16,17	b) Exodus 28:29; Deuteronomy 4:20; 1 Peter 2:9
c) Malachi 4:2	c) Luke 1:78,79; Ephesians 5:14; Revelation 1:16

Between the Old and New Testaments

Book
39

MALACHI

The Messenger of the Covenant

The word 'testament' means a covenant. Malachi, the last of the Old Testament prophets (about 430 BC) foretold the coming of another messenger. He described him as "the messenger of the covenant", who would be preceded by one who would act as a fore-runner (Malachi 3:1).

A Long Period of Waiting

Some 430 years elapsed, during which time there were no prophets of God in Israel and no further message from Him.

The Persian Empire was succeeded by that of Alexander the Great of Greece, just as foretold earlier in the book of Daniel (see page 39). After his death, the Greek Empire was split up. North and south of the land of Israel, the Seleucids and the Ptolemies respectively held sway. The wars between Syria in the north and Egypt in the south meant a period of turbulence for the Jews situated between these two powers. This had been foretold earlier in great detail in Daniel 11.

In the Fulness of Time

The Roman Empire began to emerge about 100 BC. In Israel, a degree of independence was obtained for a while under local heroes called the Maccabees.

By the time of John the baptiser, Rome was fully in control of God's land. Nevertheless the time was ripe for the birth of the Saviour, the "messenger" of the *new* covenant. In the New Testament we read:

"When the fulness of the time was come, God sent forth his Son, made of a woman, made under the law, to redeem them that were under the law ..." (Galatians 4:4).

Book
40

MATTHEW

400 300 200 100 BC 0 AD

The World between the Testaments



Empires rise and fall, and as the centuries pass the Jews find themselves surrounded by new neighbours. After the decline of the great empires of Egypt, Assyria, Babylon, Media and Persia, came the Greeks; then the division of Greek rule between the Seleucids and Ptolemies (with other fragments of the Greek Empire in Macedonia and Thracia); and after them the Romans. Beyond the boundaries of those empires were other migrating peoples, including Scythians, Slavs and Celts.

NEW TESTAMENT HISTORY SECTION

The Gospels and Acts

*“The word which God sent unto the children of Israel,
preaching good tidings of peace by Jesus Christ.”*

(Acts 10:36)

Books 40-44

Introduction to the GOSPELS

The Gospel writers—**Matthew, Mark, Luke** and **John**—present four views of the Lord Jesus Christ, not contradicting each other but emphasising different aspects of his life and work (see also paragraph 2 on page 58). Putting together the four records we can compile a full picture, of which the following is a very brief summary.

One or two key references are provided after each event; often the event will be found in two, three or even all four Gospels. Matthew, Mark and Luke follow a similar pattern and are sometimes called the “Synoptic Gospels”.

“And there are also many other things which Jesus did, the which, if they should be written every one, I suppose that even the world itself could not contain the books that should be written.”
(John 21:25)

Overview of the Life of Jesus

- The announcement of Jesus’ birth to Mary (Matthew 1; Luke 1)
- The birth of John to Zacharias and Elisabeth (Luke 1)
- Birth of Jesus; the shepherds (Luke 2); the wise men (Matthew 2)
- The genealogy of Jesus (Matthew 1; Luke 3)
- Mary and Joseph take Jesus into Egypt (Matthew 2)
- Jesus circumcised; the testimonies of Simeon and Anna (Luke 2)
- The 12-year-old Jesus in the Temple (Luke 2)
- John the Baptist (Luke 3; 7; John 1); the baptism of Jesus (Matthew 3)
- The temptations in the wilderness (Matthew 4; Luke 4)
- Galilee: the call of the disciples (Mark 1; 2; John 1)
- The Beatitudes; Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5-7)
- Healings and other miracles (Mark 1-11; John 2-11)
- Parables and other teachings (Matthew 13 etc.; John 2-16)
- Prayer; the Lord’s Prayer (Matthew 6)
- The mission of the twelve apostles (Luke 9); the seventy (Luke 10)
- The transfiguration of Christ (Matthew 17)
- The last journey to Jerusalem (Luke 9-18)
- Entry into Jerusalem on a colt (Matthew 21; John 12)
- The Mount Olivet prophecy (Matthew 24; Mark 13; Luke 21)
- The last supper; betrayal by Judas (Matthew 26; John 13)
- Jesus’ ‘high-priestly’ prayer (John 17)
- Gethsemane: Jesus arrested (Mark 14; John 18)
- The trial—Caiaphas, Pilate, Herod (Luke 22; 23; John 18; 19)
- Golgotha: the crucifixion (Luke 23; John 19)
- Death and burial—Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus (Luke 23; John 19)
- Resurrection and ascension (Luke 24; John 21)



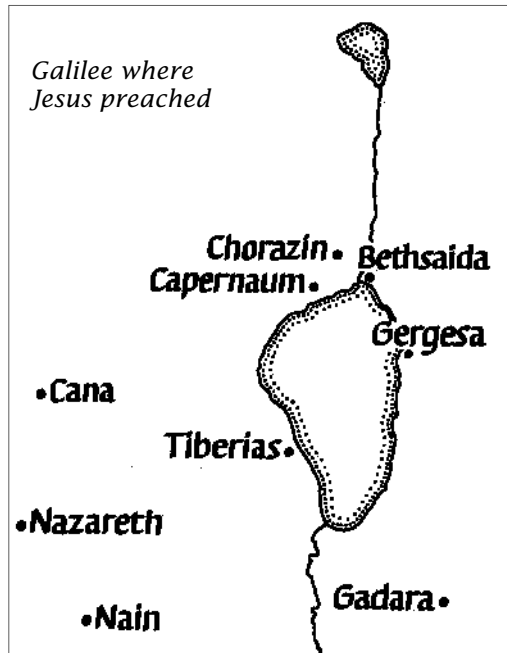
MATTHEW

40

The first Gospel is Matthew's account of the life of Jesus, with particular emphasis on Jesus being Israel's promised Messiah and coming King.

Matthew—Tax Collector

The writer of this Gospel record was Matthew (sometimes called Levi), a tax collector working for the Romans. Such men were hated by their fellow Jews, but Jesus saw in Matthew a potential follower and called him to his service (9:9).



Roman Occupation

When Jesus was born in Bethlehem, and throughout his 33 years on earth, the Romans were ruling the world. An Edomite (Arab) king, Herod, ruled as the puppet head of state in Israel under the Romans.

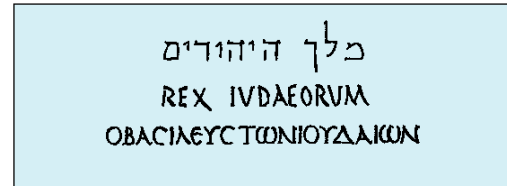
The Jews were allowed a measure of religious freedom. But they had to pay taxes to Rome and obey Roman rule (see 17:24-27; 22:17-21 for the teaching of Jesus about obeying rulers).

The Coming King

Matthew's record from God, concerning the life and teachings of Jesus, concentrates on God's appeal to the Jews. There are abundant references to the Old Testament. Jesus is proclaimed as the "Son of David" who is to be Israel's coming King.

It is this account which tells of the search of the wise men for "him that is

born King of the Jews" (2:2). It records the words of Jesus about his future Kingship (25:31). An inscription in Hebrew, Latin and Greek, "This is Jesus the King of the Jews", was placed above his head (27:37).



Parables of the Kingdom

The parables of Jesus are featured in this Book. These simple stories were intended to instruct the faithful and confound the hard-hearted (13:13-15). Most of the parables are about the Kingdom of God and the need for us to respond to God's Word if we are to enter that Kingdom.



Some interesting links with other parts of the Bible

For example:

- a) Matthew 1:1
- b) Matthew 5:35
- c) Matthew 16:27; 26:64

Compared with:

- a) 2 Samuel 7:12-16; Romans 1:3
- b) Psalm 48:2; 87:3; Isaiah 2:3
- c) Psalm 110:1; Daniel 7:13; Revelation 1:7