



UNIT 6 - LESSON 7

THE PROPHETS OF JUDAH

THE SIN OF JUDAH

While Judah's history was not one of complete apostasy, there were sufficient evil kings to lead the people away from the righteous paths which they were enjoined to follow by the Torah. In the 8th century, at about the time Amos and Hosea were prophesying in Israel, two great prophets arose in Judah to warn the people of the consequences of continued sin. Isaiah and Micah, the first prophets, were followed in the 7th and 6th centuries by five more: Jeremiah, Zephaniah, Nahum, Habakkuk and Ezekiel. Their prophetic ministry had as little effect as that of their counterparts in Israel. Judah continued in sin, and was condemned for failing to heed the warning of God's judgement upon Israel.

ISAIAH

Modern scholars generally see the book of Isaiah as falling into two or three major divisions, the first of which consists of chapters 1-39 and relates particularly to the 8th century historical situation. A detailed examination of the book is beyond our scope but some points about the book should be noted:

1. Isaiah was the son of Amoz (Isaiah 1:1) of whom we know nothing. He was married and the father of two sons (Isaiah 7:3; 8:3-4).
2. Isaiah's prophetic ministry extended through the reigns of Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz and Hezekiah and can be placed within the period 742-687 B.C.
3. The prophet's call came in the form of a vision which he describes (Isaiah chapter 6). This was in the year 742 B.C.
4. The period of Isaiah's ministry was critical for Judah. Assyria was at the height of its power and in 722 B.C. the Northern Kingdom, Israel, fell to Assyria. Judah also appeared threatened but part of Isaiah's ministry was to give reassurance to the nation that Yahweh would deliver it from Assyria.
5. The Messianic prophecies of Isaiah have attracted the attention of Bible students. Three of these should be studied, preferably with the help of a Bible commentary.
 - (a) Isaiah 7:14-17. The original reference was to an historical situation. A young woman (not 'virgin' in the Hebrew) was with child and before the child had grown, Judah would be delivered from its invaders.

Christians have given the prophecy an interpretation which goes beyond the historical situation in which the prophet wrote, seeing in Jesus Christ, the Immanuel ("God with us") a further and greater fulfilment of Isaiah's prophecy. Matthew's reference to a virgin (Matt.1:23) is based on the Greek translation of the Old Testament.

- (b) Isaiah 9:2-7. The original historical reference seems to have been the birth of a royal child, who was given names referring to God, probably to indicate the relationship existing between God and the king. Again, Christian interpretation has extended the



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prophet's original meaning to see Jesus Christ as a greater fulfilment of the prophet's words.

- (c) Chapter 11:1-9. This reference is to royalty. A new king will arise from Jesse's (i.e. the Davidic) line. This king is endowed by the Spirit of Yahweh and has the ideals so often lacking in Judah's kings. This prophecy is more directly Messianic than the preceding, looking to the ideal ruler who will be God's anointed (messiah).
6. Important themes of Isaiah's prophecy include:
- (a) His protest against religious corruption and social injustice.
 - (b) A denunciation of pride as the chief sin (Is.2:6ff).
 - (c) A call for faith in Yahweh.
 - (d) The future hope of God's people under the ideal king.

MICAH

Judah's other great prophet of the 8th century was Micah, whose ministry commenced about 722 B.C. He refers to Israel as well as to Judah in his preaching. The book is in 2 major divisions.

1. A condemnation of society (Micah Chapters 1-3).

Micah condemns social injustice (2:1-2) and the corrupt religious leaders (3:5-7), proclaiming that God's judgement will surely follow. (3:9-12).

2. The promise of restoration (Chapters 4-7).

God's new kingdom is to be established (Chapter 4) under a new king (Chapter 5). There is hope of physical renewal (7:8-12) and spiritual renewal (7:15-20).

JEREMIAH

By the time of Jeremiah, the kingdom of Israel had ceased to exist. His prophetic call came in 636 B.C., almost 100 years after Israel's fall. Before Jeremiah's death he had seen a similar fate befall Judah.

The prophet's call is recorded (Jeremiah 1:4-19) and should be studied. Throughout his very long ministry Jeremiah had an unswerving conviction that he was a prophet by God's call, but along with this there was a feeling that his mission to Judah had failed, as he saw the nation continue in sin and



finally fall to the might of Babylonia. The apparent failure of his mission drove him to greater trust in God. What other resource could he have? His book, reflecting his experiences of frustration and rejection, emphasises the inner reality of religion as contrasted with a formal external observance. He denounces the trust that Jerusalem has in the temple (Jeremiah 7:1ff) and the sacrificial system (Jeremiah 7:21ff). Sin is personal (Jeremiah 17:9), 31:30) leading to God's judgement. He sees the failure of the old covenant between God and Israel, based on the law, and sees hope in a new covenant which God will make (Jeremiah 31:31-34), involving individual knowledge of God and obedience to a law written on man's heart rather than to external ritual.

Jeremiah remained in Judah when the Exile began but, after a plot involving the assassination of the governor Gedaliah, the Jewish leaders forcibly took him to Egypt when they fled. In Egypt he continued his prophetic ministry, denouncing the idolatry of Egyptian Jews (Jeremiah chapters 40-44). It is probable that Jeremiah died in Egypt.

ZEPHANIAH

Zephaniah prophesied during the reign of Josiah (640-609 B.C.) and it appears that his prophecies preceded Josiah's reformation of 622 B.C.

The prophet's message is threefold:

Zephaniah	Chapter 1:1-23	Judgement on Judah
Zephaniah	Chapter 2:4-15	Judgement on the nations
Zephaniah	Chapter 3	Promise of restoration

NAHUM

Nothing is known of the prophet. The reference to Thebes' downfall at the hands of Assyrians (Nahum 3:8-10), which occurred 663 B.C., and the prediction of Nineveh's downfall (Nahum 3:11ff) which occurred in 612 B.C., place the book between those dates, probably about 620 B.C.

NAHUM (cont'd)

The prophet, in portraying the downfall of Nineveh is showing the fate of all God's enemies, and thus declaring God's justice.

HABAKKUK

Nothing is known of the prophet. The reference to rising Chaldean (i.e. Babylonian) power suggests the period c. 726-700 B.C. The prophet cries out against the injustice of those who do evil without being punished. The Lord's reply is that justice will be done and God's enemies will be judged. The people are pointed to trust in God as the answer to their questions (Habakkuk 2:4, 3:17-19).

EZEKIEL

Ezekiel was a Jerusalemite priest, married and probably of noble birth. In 592 B.C. he was deported to Babylonia along with Jehoiachin and many of the notables of Judah. It was there his prophetic ministry was carried out.

The book of Ezekiel divides easily into two parts:



1. Chapters 1-24 records the prophet's call (chapters 1-3) and prophecies of judgement on Judah (chapters 4-24).
2. Chapters 25-48 give a promise of restoration:
 - (a) The foreign nations judged (chapters 25-32)
 - (b) Israel's restoration (chapters 33-39)
 - (c) The temple and the land in the new age (chapters 40-48)

The chronological references (Ezekiel 1:1; 3:16; 8:1; 20:1; 24:1; 29:1; 29:17; 30:20; 31:1; 32:17; 33:21; 40:1;) place Ezekiel's ministry in the period 593-571 B.C.

The book is too large for detailed analysis here, but among the themes developed are:

1. The holiness and majesty of God
2. A denunciation of Judah's sins.
3. The imminence of God's judgement (Ezekiel Chapter 12)
4. The individual's responsibility before God (Chapter 18).
5. The promise of future restoration, including spiritual renewal (Ezekiel 36:24-28, cf. Jeremiah 34:31-34).

Chapters 38 and 39 of Ezekiel have caused much controversy in interpretation. The Scofield Bible typifies a school of interpretation which attempts to identify the names mentioned as references to Russia and sees the reference to warfare as being the Battle of Armageddon at the end of the "kingdom-age".

EZEKIEL

The chapters may be safely interpreted as a picture of the forces of darkness opposing God and His people. In the ensuing battle God overcomes the forces of darkness. No historical interpretation is necessary.

QUESTION 1

Of what attribute of God was Isaiah most aware during his call in Isaiah Chapter 6? How did he respond.

QUESTION 2

In Micah Chapter 6 what is the Lord's case against the people of Judah (as reported by Micah) and what does God require of them?

QUESTION 3

What was Jeremiah frightened of when God called him and how was he reassured? (Jeremiah 1:4-19).

QUESTION 4

Compare Zephaniah's prophecy of the Day of the Lord (Zeph. 1) with Amos 5:18-20



QUESTION 5

According to Ezekiel Chapter 18 how does God view the individual and his sin?

GROUP STUDY QUESTION

Habakkuk had a problem (Chapter 1:12-17). How did he go about finding a solution (2:1). What was the response? Do these verses have any application to you?